

Work and Family: Factors that influence perceptions of stress, health and wellbeing

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Abstract:

The demands of balancing work and family life can be a major cause of stress in an individual's life, leading to a decrease in satisfaction for both domains and harmful effects on one's health and wellbeing (Frone, Russell, & Barnes, 2003). The aim of this study was to explore the factors associated with individuals work and family environments that influence both job and overall life satisfaction. It also accounted for the role of individual characteristics and attitudes. Data for the analysis was from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA). The overall sample included 2719 respondents who indicated that they were in paid work and had children at home. In the end it was satisfaction with the work itself and with the flexibility provided to balance work and non-work commitments which were the most powerful predictors of job satisfaction. While, overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with one's partner were the most powerful predictors of life satisfaction.

Background:

The demands of balancing work and family life can be a major cause of stress in an individual's life, leading to a decrease in satisfaction for both domains and harmful effects on one's health and wellbeing (Frone, et al., 2003). Stress is a part of everyone's daily life, however, excessive amounts of stress have been linked to diminished performance in a number of areas including home, work life and relationships as well as the physical and psychological health of the individual (Casey, 2011). For many there are two important aspects to life; work and family. Due to the increase in the number of dual income and single parent families and an increase in the number of hours spent at work, many find they are now juggling dual roles with work and family as responsibilities are no longer confined to typical gender roles (Byron, 2005). This has lead to the phenomena of work-family conflict and has generated increased interest in the research surrounding this topic (Karimi, Karimi, & Nouri, 2011).

Work-family conflict is commonly defined as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985:77). Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark & Baltes(2011) state that there are two primary aspects of work-life conflict; the role pressures that are directional and produce negative effects from one domain to the other and work-family conflict which is generally categorised as time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based. Time-based conflict occurs when restraints in one domain interfere with roles in the other domain (eg. work schedules). Strain-based conflict occurs when one has increased tension (eg. role overload) in one domain that hinders performance in the other. Behaviour-based conflict is when behaviours in one domain (eg. behavioural habits) are transferred to the other domain and hinder performance in that domain(Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002; Frone, Yardley, & Market, 1997). This conflict between work and life causes damaging effects on essential individual outcomes (eg. depression, hypertension, substance abuse, family relations) and organisational outcomes (eg. absenteeism, commitment, turnover, job satisfaction) (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Karimi, et al., 2011; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). Carlson, Kacmar and Williams (2000) extended the research on work-life conflict by developing a six dimensional model incorporating the three forms of conflict with the two directions of conflict (work family conflict WFC and family work conflict FWC) overcoming the limitations of previous studies by considering both the nature and direction of conflict (Karimi, et al., 2011). While there has been a significant increase in the literature

investigating the relationship between work and family over the last few years (Michel, et al., 2011), it is argued that the simple presence of work family arrangements is not enough to facilitate a work/family balance due to the fact that many employees don't seem to use such arrangements (Kinnunen, Mauno, Geurts, & Dikkers, 2005). Results from recent meta-analyses have categorized the antecedents of work-family interference into work/family environment factors (eg. characteristic of the workplace and family), individual difference variables (eg. self-esteem, hardiness) and demographic characteristics such as gender, income and being a parent (Byron, 2005; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). The aim of this study is to explore the factors associated with individuals work and family environments that influence both job and overall life satisfaction. It will also take into account the role of individual characteristics and attitudes.

Methodology and Measures

This study utilises data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) survey. The HILDA Survey is a broad social and economic longitudinal survey, with particular attention paid to family and household formation, income and work. The survey began in 2001 with a large national probability sample of Australian households occupying private dwellings. All members of the household providing at least one interview in wave 1 form the basis of the panel to be pursued each subsequent wave. The sample has been gradually extended to include any new household members resulting from changes in the composition of the original households. This data for this study comes from the 8th wave of data only, which was collected in 2009. For the purposes of this analysis, the overall sample was reduced to the 2719 respondents who indicated that they were in paid work and had children at home. The use of an existing data set constrained the variables used in this study to those questions which were included in the HILDA survey, and in particular to those available for wave 8 respondents. The variables used focus on demographic characteristics: family-related information such as satisfaction with family relationships and share of household duties and perceptions of parenting; respondents attitudes regarding gender roles and work, perceptions of work-life balance were also included. Work-related variables included; job entitlements, perceptions of various job characteristics and satisfaction with aspects of respondents' jobs.

In preparation for hierarchical regression analyses, 3 factor analyses were conducted. Firstly the 21 disagree-agree statements regarding respondents perceptions of various characteristics

of their jobs were factor analysed to produce 5 dimensions explaining 66% of variance. Two statements – my job is complex and difficult and I get paid fairly for the things that I do in my job – were removed due to cross loadings. Of the remaining 19 statements, six loaded on the first factor which has been labelled *job control and autonomy* and included statements such as; ‘I have a lot of freedom to decide when I work’ and ‘I have a lot of choice in deciding what I do at work’. Factor 2 contained 5 statements, such as ‘my job provides me with a variety of interesting things to do’, and was labelled *job skill and variety*. *Job stress* is reflected in Factor 3, which contained three statements, including ‘I feel that the amount of stress in my job will make me physically ill’. Three statements relating to *job security* such as ‘I have a secure future in my job’, loaded on Factor 4. Finally, 2 statements loaded on factor 5 – ‘I have to work fast in my job’ and ‘I have to work very intensely in my job’, which has been labelled *job intensity*.

Attitudes toward work-family balance were measured using 14 statements which, were reduced to 3 dimensions, explaining 59% of variance. Factor 1 consisted of 8 items reflecting the importance to the individual of both work and family – such as ‘work makes me a more rounded person’ and ‘working makes me feel good about myself, which is good for the children’ – and has therefore been labelled *work-family balance*. The 4 items loading on factor 2 reflected the perception that work interferes with family, for example ‘because of the requirements of my job I miss out on home or family activities that are important to me’, and has been labelled *work-family conflict*. In contrast, the 4 items on factor 3, such as ‘because of my family responsibilities I have to turn down work activities or opportunities that I would prefer to take on’, reflect *family-work conflict*.

Finally, more general attitudes regarding gender roles and work were measured using 16 statements. After removing one statement due to low and cross loadings – ‘mothers who don’t really need the money shouldn’t work’, 5 factors were identified that explained 67% of variance. The first factor reflected broadly *negative attitudes to women in work* and included six statements such as ‘it is not good for the relationship if the woman earns more than the man’ and ‘it is better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman looks after the children’. Three items reflecting *positive attitudes to women in work* loaded on factor 2, such as ‘a working mother can establish just as good a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work for pay’. Factor 3 consisted of two items; ‘whatever career a man may have, his most important role is still that of being a father’ and ‘whatever career a woman may have, her most important role is still that of being a mother’, reflecting the

importance of being a *parent first*. Finally, 3 items reflecting the attitude that *children often suffer* due to parents' work commitment included statements such as 'many working fathers seem to care more about being successful at work than being a good father'.

An additional 'perceptions of parenting' measure was created by computing an average *perception of parentingindex* score for respondents on the following four statements; being a parent is harder than I thought it would be, I often feel tired, worn out or exhausted meeting the needs of my children, I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent and I find taking care of my child/children is much more work than pleasure measured on a 7 point scale (where 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Finally two highly correlated statements – satisfaction with division of childcare tasks between partners and satisfaction with division of household duties were summed and averaged to create a single 'satisfaction with household division of labour' measure.

After checking for multicollinearity of all input variables, two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine the factors influencing the twodependent variables - overall job and overall life satisfaction.Missing responses were excluded listwise, resulting in 1130 respondents being included in the regression analyses. The variables were entered in 4 steps; step 1 included the demographic variables of age, gender(0=male, 1=female), and relationship status (0=single, 1=a couple). In the second stage the following home and job environment-related factors were entered: satisfaction (1=completely dissatisfied to 10=completely satisfied) with; relationship with partner, relationship with children and the division of household tasks, perception of parenting score, perceptions of share of looking after children (1=do much more than fair share to 5=do much less than fair share), and whether or not (0=no, 1=yes) their job offers; paid maternity leave, unpaid maternity leave, parental leave, carer's leave, permanent part time work, ability to work from home, flexible start and finish times and child care facilities or subsidised expenses. In the third step the factors scores for the five job characteristics, three work-family balance and five gender roles and work dimensions were entered. In the final stage satisfaction (0=totally dissatisfied to 10=totally satisfied) with total pay, job security, the work itself, the hours worked and flexibility to balance work and non-work commitments was entered.

As presented in Table 1, in prediction of overall job satisfaction, the first step of the regression was significant, with gender ($\beta=.102$, $p<.01$) significantly predicting overall job satisfaction. The second step of the regression was also significant, with, in addition to

gender, satisfaction with relationship with children ($\beta=.114$, $p<.001$), satisfaction with division of household tasks between partners ($\beta=.100$, $p<.01$) and flexible start/finish times at work ($\beta=.111$, $p<.01$) positively related to job satisfaction. Negative perceptions of parenting ($\beta=-.127$, $p<.000$) was negatively related to job satisfaction. The third step of the regression was also significant, with the addition of job autonomy ($\beta=.213$, $p<.05$), job skill/variety ($\beta=.166$, $p<.01$), and job security ($\beta=.211$, $p<.05$) as being positively related to job satisfaction, while job stress ($\beta=-.193$, $p<.000$) was negatively related to job satisfaction. All three work-family balance factors were significantly related to job satisfaction: positive work-family balance ($\beta=.079$, $p<.01$), work-family conflict ($\beta=-.169$, $p<.01$) and family-work conflict ($\beta=-.081$, $p<.05$). The only gender-work roles factor that was significantly related to job satisfaction was negative attitudes towards women in work ($\beta=.070$, $p<.05$). Finally, when the component job satisfaction ratings were entered into the regression, step 4, there was significant change, with the variance explained increasing from 31.1% to 69.8%, and none of the variables introduced in step 1 or 2 remaining significant, however, whether or not their workplace provides carer's leave did become significant ($\beta=.053$, $p<.05$). Not surprisingly, the five component job satisfaction variables were significantly and positively associated with job satisfaction; total pay ($\beta=.196$, $p<.000$), job security ($\beta=.120$, $p<.000$), the work itself ($\beta=.446$, $p<.000$), the hours worked ($\beta=.145$, $p<.000$), and flexibility ($\beta=.215$, $p<.000$). The job stress factor ($\beta=-.046$, $p<.05$) remained as negatively related to job satisfaction.

Insert Table 1 here

Table 2 presents the results of the second hierarchical analysis, which focused on the predictors of overall life satisfaction and followed the same procedure as the first, with the only difference being the inclusion of overall work satisfaction along with the component job satisfaction scores in step 4. The first step of the model was not significant, with none of the demographic variables significant predictors of overall life satisfaction. The second step was significant, with satisfaction with partner ($\beta=.258$, $p<.000$), satisfaction with children ($\beta=.132$, $p<.000$), satisfaction with the way household tasks are divided between partners ($\beta=.153$, $p<.000$), and opportunities to work from home ($\beta=.060$, $p<.05$), positively related to life satisfaction. Negative perceptions of parenting was significantly and negatively related to life satisfaction ($\beta=-.134$, $p<.000$). When the factor scores were introduced in step 3, only the significance of home-based work was lost, with the addition of four of the job characteristics factors as significant; autonomy ($\beta=.090$, $p<.01$), skill/variety ($\beta=.077$, $p<.01$),

stress ($\beta=-.149$, $p<.000$), and security ($\beta=.095$, $p<.01$). Finally the component and overall job satisfaction scores were entered in step 4 and did not result in such a dramatic increase in variance explained as was the case in the first regression analyses (R^2 change of .049 from .303 to .390). In the full model, the variables which were significant and positively related to overall life satisfaction were; satisfaction with partner ($\beta=.230$, $p<.000$), satisfaction with children ($\beta=.082$, $p<.01$), satisfaction with the way household tasks are divided between partners ($\beta=.104$, $p<.01$), total pay satisfaction ($\beta=.078$, $p<.01$), satisfaction with amount of hours worked ($\beta=.131$, $p<.000$), and overall job satisfaction ($\beta=.245$, $p<.000$). Those that were significant and negatively related to overall life satisfaction were negative perceptions of parenting ($\beta=-.075$, $p<.05$) and perceptions of job stress ($\beta=-.071$, $p<.05$).

Insert Table 2 here

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the factors associated with individuals work and family environments that influence both job and overall life satisfaction. It also took into account the role of individual characteristics and attitudes. The results provide evidence that, while there is some commonality in the factors which influence both job and life satisfaction, there are key differences as well. In the full model predicting job satisfaction, the provision of carer's leave, perceptions of job stress and satisfaction with key components of one's job were significant predictors of overall job satisfaction. The influence of perceptions of work-family balance and conflict, and of all the job characteristic domains, not just stress, is evidenced in step 3 and no doubt were key determinants of the component job satisfaction scores in step 4. Results from previous studies have shown that work interfering with family is a source of conflict in the work domain (Byron, 2005; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and that family interference with work can be a cause for conflict in the home domain (Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003; Byron, 2005; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992), this was further emphasised by the results from this paper. In the end it was satisfaction with the work itself and with the flexibility provided to balance work and non-work commitments which were the most powerful predictors of job satisfaction. In contrast, family-related variables had more influence in the prediction of overall life satisfaction, with satisfaction of partner and child relationships and division of household tasks all significant predictors, along with the negative influence of perceptions of parenting as being difficult. Perceptions of job stress remained as a negative influence on life satisfaction, with pay, hours worked and overall job

satisfaction the remaining significant predictors. It is important to note that stressors in the workplace have been linked to a number of mental health outcomes such as psychological distress, emotional exhaustion and burnout (Bourbonnais, Comeau, & Vezina, 1999; Butterworth, Carson, Jeacock, White, & Clements, 1999; Steinhardt, Dolbier, Gottlieb, & McCalister, 2003) as well as job dissatisfaction (Decker & Borgen, 1993). In the end overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with one's partner were the most powerful predictors of life satisfaction. Although contrary demands between work and family may lead to tension, the level of support from one's partner, as well as support and autonomy at work, may act as a mediator and influence the work attitudes and mental health of employees (Karimi, et al., 2011). The findings from this paper are consistent with other studies in demonstrating that work and family domains are intertwined and both have important effects on employees' overall wellbeing and happiness. Importantly, while the first model explained 69.8% of variance in overall job satisfaction, the second model explained only 39% of variance in life satisfaction. This would indicate that future investigations of this data set should incorporate additional variables related to other aspects of respondents' lives, such as health and social capital.

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Table 1: Hierarchical Multiple Regression with Job Satisfaction as Dependent Variable

Variables	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β	Step 4 β
relationship status	.011	.010	.014	.039
gender	.102**	.109**	.086**	.030
Age	-.004	.013	-.006	.011
Satisfaction with relationship with Partner		.050	.002	-.022
Satisfaction with relationship with Children		.124**	.070*	.039
Satisfaction with household task division between partners		.100**	.062*	.033
Negative attitudes toward parenting		-.127***	.012	-.008
Doing fair share of looking after children		-.049	-.019	-.034
paid maternity leave provided		-.016	.035	.000
unpaid maternity leave provided		.003	-.013	.013
parental leave provided		-.009	-.049	.051
carers leave provided		.046	.041	.053*
permanent part time provided		.016	.018	-.018
home based work provided		.017	-.022	-.023
Flexible start/finish times provided		.111**	.004	.003
childcare provision or subsidy provided		.005	-.002	-.002
Negative attitudes towards women in work			.070*	.012
Positive attitudes towards women in work			-.009	-.016
Belief that parenting is most important job			-.005	-.026
Belief that some people put work first			.034	-.014
Belief that children tend to suffer because of parents' work			.009	.029
Positive work-family balance benefits			.079**	.032
Work-family conflict beliefs			-.168***	-.018
Family-work conflict beliefs			-.081**	-.005
Job autonomy perceptions			.213***	.021
Job skill/variety perceptions			.166***	.012
Job stress perceptions			-.193***	-.046*
Job security perceptions			.214***	.022
Job intensity perceptions			-.003	.013
Total pay satisfaction				.196***
Job security satisfaction				.120***
The work itself satisfaction				.446***
The hours you work satisfaction				.145***
Flexibility to balance work and non-work commitments satisfaction				.215***
Total % unique variance				
R	.102	.328	.558	.836
R ²	.010	.108	.311	.698
ΔR^2	.010	.097	.203	.387
F	3.985**	8.385***	17.108***	74.537***

* p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 2: Hierarchical Multiple Regression with Life Satisfaction as Dependent Variable

Variables	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β	Step 4 β
relationship status	.022	.019	.021	.014
gender	-.003	.043	.031	.005
Age	-.024	.018	.014	.013
Satisfaction with relationship with Partner		.258***	.233***	.230***
Satisfaction with relationship with Children		.132***	.110**	.082**
Satisfaction with household task division between partners		.153***	.135***	.104**
Negative attitudes toward parenting		-.134***	-.064*	-.073*
Doing fair share of looking after children		-.053	-.040	-.034
paid maternity leave provided		-.025	.000	-.017
unpaid maternity leave provided		.040	.027	.029
parental leave provided		.025	.007	.010
carers leave provided		.098	.065	.052
permanent part time provided		-.023	-.022	-.027
home based work provided		.060*	.040	.042
Flexible start/finish times provided		.011	-.027	-.025
childcare provision or subsidy provided		.017	.016	.012
Negative attitudes towards women in work			.003	-.017
Positive attitudes towards women in work			-.017	-.021
Belief that parenting is most important job			.008	.010
Belief that some people put work first			.019	.005
Belief that children tend to suffer because of parents' work			.004	.002
Positive work-family balance benefits			.043	.015
Work-family conflict beliefs			-.018	.054
Family-work conflict beliefs			-.030	-.003
Job autonomy perceptions			.090**	.018
Job skill/variety perceptions			.077**	.046
Job stress perceptions			-.149***	-.071*
Job security perceptions			.095**	.027
Job intensity perceptions			-.022	-.002
Total pay satisfaction				.078**
Job security satisfaction				.005
The work itself satisfaction				-.044
The hours you work satisfaction				.131***
Flexibility to balance work and non-work commitments satisfaction				.009
Overall job satisfaction				.245***
Total % unique variance				
R	.033	.504	.551	.625
R ²	.001	.254	.303	.390
ΔR^2	.001	.253	.049	.087
F	.401	23.698***	16.502***	20.025***

* p <.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001