

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN IN LOW-INCOME DUAL-CAREER FAMILIES

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Introduction

Most of the existing research on the interface of work and family roles has been conducted in Western societies. However, as more women in non-Western societies join the work force, understanding the conflict between work and family roles experienced by working women become increasingly important. This study examined: (1) the intensity of conflict between work and family roles experienced by employed women; (2) the social support received by the women; (3) the relationship between work-family conflict and social support; (4) the relationship between work-family conflict and satisfaction with child care arrangements; and (5) the intention to continue working upon having another child.

Materials and Methods

Subjects in this study included women in dual-career families with income of less than or equal to RM1500 per family. The women were selected based on the following criteria: (a) married and living with their husbands; (b) had at least one child; and (c) were full-time workers. Industrial areas in the states of Selangor and Negeri Sembilan were selected. The areas included Shah Alam, Petaling Jaya, Bandar Baru Bangi, Serdang and Balakong in the state of Selangor, and Nilai in the state of Negeri Sembilan. Work-family conflict was measured using the interrole conflict scale developed by Pleck et al. (1980). Social support was measured using items developed by Caplan et al. (1975). The scale developed by Greenberger and O'Neal (1990) was used to measure satisfaction with child care arrangement. Data were gathered from 239 women production operators through face-to-face interviews using structured interview schedules with the assistance of five trained interviewers for each study area. The industries in which the women worked were characterised as light manufacturing industries, producing consumer goods, ranging from food, beverages and textiles to chemicals, drugs, plastics, furniture and electronic and electrical goods. A majority of the women (76%) worked in factories producing electronic and electrical goods.

Results and Discussion

The women production operators in this study averaged 30 years of age. Each family had an average of two to three children and two children living at home. Almost half of the women completed upper secondary education 48.5% and 38.5% completed lower secondary education.

They earned an average of RM524 per month, excluding over-time allowances. This study found that about two-thirds of the women operators experienced moderate to high intensities of conflict between work and family roles. The findings of this study and other studies conducted on women researchers (Aminah Ahmad, 1996a), and women secretaries (Aminah Ahmad, 1996b) show that married working in Malaysia irrespective of their occupational positions, experience work-family conflict. The women received the least social support from their supervisors despite the fact that the role conflict that they experienced was negatively related to satisfaction with childcare arrangements. Only one-third of the operators indicated that they intended to continue working upon having another child considering the rising cost of childcare services. Since childcare cost is an important factor that could deter women in low-income families from working, it is pertinent that employers pay special attention to the establishment of affordable quality day-care centres. The government should look into the possibility of giving tax exemption to working mothers on the amount they spend for child care services as it takes a substantial portion of their salary. Supervisors should provide social support to workers so that stressors inherent at the work place and problems in trying to balance the demands of work and family roles can be reduced.

Conclusion

Married working women in low-income dual-career family experience work-family conflict in trying to meet the expectations of work and family roles. The findings imply that work or non-family life domain could interface with family life domain and that there is a need for social support at the work place and outside the work place. There is also a need for family-friendly policy to ease work-family conflict.

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