



The dyadic context of safety: An examination of safety motivation, behavior, and life satisfaction among farm couples



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ABSTRACT

The current study sought to address two gaps within the safety literature by (1) examining the dyadic context of safety motivation and safety behavior and (2) focusing on a psychological outcome of safety behavior – life satisfaction. Crossover theory was used as a framework to examine direct and mediated relationships among a sample of 217 married farm couples. Specifically, husbands' and wives' safety motivation were tested as predictors of husband safety behavior. Furthermore, husband safety behavior and wives' perception of husbands' safety behavior were examined as predictors of life satisfaction. Results indicated that wives' safety motivation contributed to husbands' safety behavior indirectly via husbands' own safety motivation. Additionally, husband safety behavior significantly predicted personal life satisfaction and also contributed to spousal life satisfaction indirectly via wives' perceptions. Overall, findings suggest the importance of considering both partners' attitudes when examining antecedents and outcomes related to safety behavior among closely related individuals. Implications of these findings, as well as directions for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Farming has long been recognized as a fundamentally hazardous occupation due to the inherent safety risks associated with the profession. Although extensive research has examined the physical hazards and individual factors that influence safe practices among farmers (e.g., Colémont and Van den Broucke, 2008; Elkind, 1993; Glasscock et al., 2006), the unique social and psychological environment in which farmers are immersed is often overlooked within occupational health research. Given that family farms typically involve spouses working together for a common purpose (Gasson, 1992), and paired with the fact that the work and family domains are intimately connected among farm families (Gregoire, 2002), this represents an important omission within the farm safety literature. The current study addresses this gap by examining the *dyadic* relationship between safety motivation and safety behavior among farm couples,¹ focusing on how wives' safety motivation may impact husband safety behavior.

Furthermore, previous safety research has focused primarily on work outcomes (i.e., accidents, behaviors) and physical health consequences associated with safety hazards rather than potential psychological outcomes related to safety behavior. The current study focuses on the impact that safety behavior has on individual and spousal life satisfaction, as work, life, and leisure are often interwoven in the farming profession (Trussell and Shaw, 2007; Vanclay, 2011). Due to the important implications of engaging in safe behavior for farmers and their families, we believe that safety behavior will have a substantial influence on life satisfaction for both husbands and wives. Moreover, we believe that spousal *perceptions* of husbands' safety behavior will mediate the relation between actual safety behavior and life satisfaction (see Fig. 1 for our proposed model). Therefore, the current study advances the safety literature by (1) examining the dyadic nature of safety motivation and behavior in a unique occupational context, and (2) focusing on life satisfaction – a psychological outcome – as a potential consequence of safety behavior.

1.1. Theoretical background

Crossover theory provides a framework for exploring the dyadic nature of safety motivation, safety behavior, and life satisfaction among farm couples. The basic premise of crossover theory is that individuals in relationships are influenced by their partners, and

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¹ Due to the farming demographic, the current study examined male farmers with female spouses, as this represents the majority of farming couples in the area in which data were collected.

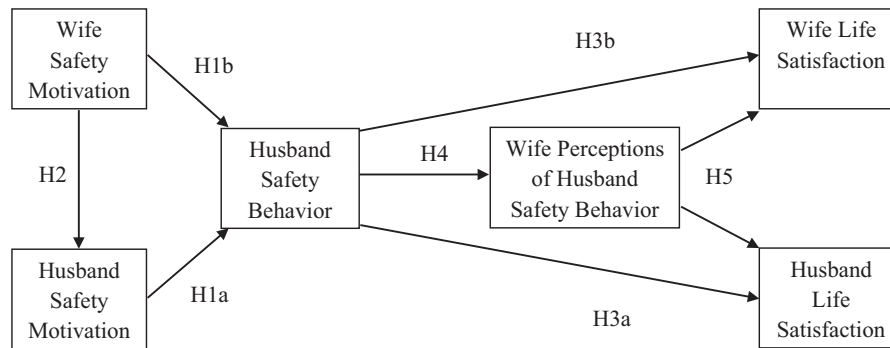


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

therefore the behaviors and attitudes of one person within a relationship cannot be fully understood without considering the behaviors and attitudes of the other partner (Westman, 2001; Westman et al., 2009). For example, an individual's experience of stress in the work domain may transfer to his/her partner in the family domain, thereby influencing the partner's attitudes and general experiences within the family domain. Although this theory is primarily utilized within work-family research to examine attitudes and outcomes related to work and family experiences, it is highly relevant to the safety literature. Taking into account the unique occupational structure and the integrated work-family lifestyle of farmers and their families, safety concerns are especially likely to transfer between spouses in the farming population. Accordingly, employing crossover theory helps to expand the safety literature by incorporating attitudes from both spouses in order to examine individual and dyadic effects related to safety behavior among closely related individuals.

1.2. Safety motivation, subjective norms, and safety behaviors

According to Neal and Griffin (2006), safety motivation includes the willingness to put forth effort to behave safely and the value placed on safety behaviors. Generally speaking, safety motivation can be thought of as an overall attitude toward safety. Given that the theory of planned behavior proposes attitudes as a primary antecedent to behavioral intent (Ajzen, 1991), safety motivation has received considerable attention in the safety literature regarding its role in predicting safety behavior. Further justification for the link between safety motivation and behavior lies in basic theories of performance which outline knowledge, skill, and motivation as three determinants of individual performance behavior (Campbell et al., 1996). Safety behavior, therefore, is determined by safety specific knowledge, skill, and motivation (Griffin and Neal, 2000). Consequently, it is well established in the area of occupational safety research that safety motivation predicts safety behavior. This relationship has been empirically supported concurrently (e.g., Griffin and Neal, 2000), longitudinally (e.g., Neal and Griffin, 2006), and meta-analytically (e.g., Christian et al., 2009). Research on farmers, specifically, has also found that farmers' perceived importance of safety is related to safety behaviors (Colémont and Van den Broucke, 2008). As such, the current study sought to replicate the finding that safety motivation predicts safety behavior among farmers.

Hypothesis 1a. Farmers' safety motivation will be positively related to safety behavior.

Social norms regarding a behavior's importance may also influence the likelihood that a behavior is enacted. Theoretical justification for the importance of subjective norms also stems from the

theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen posits that an individual's perception of what other people think about a particular behavior (i.e., subjective norms) can play a large role in determining one's intent to engage in that behavior, as well as actual subsequent behavior. Therefore, when significant people in an individual's life believe a behavior is important, this will often motivate the individual to perform that behavior.

Empirical evidence has demonstrated the importance of subjective norms in a variety of life domains. For example, perceived norms have been shown to contribute to several everyday health and safety behaviors, including sunscreen application, helmet use, speeding, and food handling procedures, to name a few (McEachan et al., 2011; Mullan and Wong, 2009). Furthermore, occupational research has provided both qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrating that perceived coworker and supervisor safety behavior (i.e., perceived norms) are significantly related to employees' compliance with safety behaviors (Fugas et al., 2011; Mullen, 2004). Although subjective norms as a whole are certainly important, an area that has been relatively neglected in occupational research is how normative information stemming from one's spouse may contribute to safety behavior. Based on the tenets of crossover theory, investigating the effect of spousal perceptions independently represents an interesting and important area of investigation within the safety literature, especially among farming couples where the spouse is likely the main source of normative information.

Congruent with the propositions of crossover theory, the attitudes of one spouse – in the context of the current study, attitudes regarding safety motivation – are likely to have a direct impact on one's partner. Westman (2001) proposes that crossover effects occur more frequently when one partner has a high-stress occupation and encourages the examination of crossover effects within these populations. Farming consistently ranks among the most stressful and hazardous occupations in the U.S., and therefore represents an appropriate population to examine crossover effects related to safety (c.f. Ramesh and Madhavi, 2009; Swisher et al., 1998). Furthermore, farming entails a unique environment in that family members, typically residing and working on the farm, are also at risk of exposure to hazardous conditions (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, 2013). As such, safe behavior is a necessity for daily work on the farm for both the individual farmer and the family as a whole, thus increasing the likelihood of spousal crossover regarding safety attitudes. To date, however, no study has focused on spousal perceptions regarding safety motivation and their impact on subsequent safety behavior.

The family business literature also lends support to the idea that family influence may contribute to health and safety behaviors of closely related couples. Rothausen (2009) states that leaders of family businesses – often the husband and wife in farm families – are in an opportune position to determine the extent to which

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