



Spending time: The impact of hours worked on work–family conflict

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 July 2011

Available online 1 October 2011

Keywords:

Work–family conflict

Family–work conflict

Work hours

ABSTRACT

Scholars have long assumed that as workers spend more time at work fewer hours are available for their non-work lives leading to negative effects in both domains, and most studies examining the impact of work hours on work and life domains have supported this viewpoint. However, the majority of these studies have used one-dimensional measures of work–family conflict (WFC) and family–work conflict (FWC) on homogenous samples which included primarily married managers and professionals with children. Further, despite calls to examine non-linear relationships between work hours and WFC and FWC, few studies have done so. This study uses multi-dimensional measures to examine the linear and non-linear (quadratic) effects of work hours on WFC and FWC in a heterogeneous sample and examines the moderating effects of several work and family characteristics on these relationships. The findings indicate that whereas work hours have a linear relationship with WFC, the relationship between work hours and FWC is curvilinear. Managerial support was found to moderate the relationship between work hours and one dimension of FWC. Number of children moderated the relationships between work hours and WFC and another dimension of FWC.

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“Time is a fixed income and, as with any income, the real problem facing most of us is how to live successfully within our daily allotment.”

Margaret B. Johnstone (1960)

As the opening epigraph illustrates, time is a limited quantity and the more time that is expended on work, the less that is available for home and family. For the most part, many Americans are thought to suffer from a “time bind”, whereby the hours that workers spend at work have a negative impact on their non-work lives (Hochschild, 1997). Many researchers have long held that as the number of hours an individual spends on work increases, conflict between the individual's work and home lives increases as well, and that these negative effects extend to other work and life outcomes. This is in keeping with the scarcity hypothesis which suggests that the more roles one occupies, and the more one's time is divided between those roles, the less that will be available for any specific role (Barnett & Gareis, 2000). Logically, as time spent on work increases and time available for home and family decreases, work–family conflict (WFC) will increase. Further, as DiRenzo, Greenhaus, and Weer (2011) noted, increased working hours may also result in increasing interference between work and family responsibilities, thus resulting in family–work conflict (FWC).

Previous empirical investigations into the relationship between hours worked and outcomes, including WFC and FWC, have generally found a positive relationship between hours worked and WFC (e.g. Barnett, 1998; Byron, 2005; Eby, Casper, Lockwood,

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Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Ganster & Bates, 2003). For example, Major, Klein, and Ehrhart (2002) found that work time was significantly and positively related to WFC and that WFC mediated the relationship between the number of hours spent on work and psychological distress. Fu and Shaffer (2001) also found that hours spent on paid work amplified WFC. Although previous studies have examined the relationship between hours worked and WFC, many studies of WFC in general, and by extension, studies of the relationship between work hours and WFC have often used samples of managerial and professional employees (Byron, 2005; DiRenzo et al., 2011; Eby et al., 2005), thus not examining the effect of long work hours (and other correlates of WFC and FWC) in samples of hourly workers. Earlier samples also tended to focus primarily on married employees with children, thus overlooking single employees and single parents. Similarly, a variety of measures of WFC have been used, but many have been one-dimensional, even including single-item measures. While some studies have also examined the relationship between hours and FWC, again, one-dimensional measures of FWC have been used. Despite Barnett's (1998) call to examine non-linear relationships between work hours and WFC/FWC, few studies have done so. Nor have they examined work and non-work variables that are potential moderators of the relationship between hours of work and WFC and FWC.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine the relationship between hours worked and work–family and dimensions of family–work conflict, using a heterogeneous sample of employees in seven work organizations. The employees in our sample worked in jobs ranging from production and clerical to managerial and professional jobs. We examine both linear and nonlinear relationships between hours worked and WFC and FWC in conjunction with family and job variables which may affect these relationships. We do this using a sample of workers doing a wide variety of jobs across multiple organizations, who represent a variety of family structures. We use a more molecular measure of work–family and family–work conflict so that we can examine the relationship between hours worked and specific family roles including the roles associated with being a spouse or partner, the parental role, homecare role and leisure role. This approach to tapping WFC answers the call to examine WFC at a more molecular level, including the various roles that individuals play in their lives (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Lambert, 1990). This method should help us more fully understand not only if the number of hours worked contributes to WFC and FWC, but also which roles are affected and how, thus examining predictions consistent with role theory.

Theory and hypotheses

Two theoretical perspectives which may be used to address the relationship between hours worked and outcomes are role theory and the conservation of resources model. Role theory would suggest that individuals play multiple roles, and since time is a finite resource, when hours spent in one role increase, there is potential for inter-role conflict due to fewer hours left to allocate to other roles (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Fulfilling the demands associated with one role necessarily reduces the number of hours available to allocate to other roles; thus, according to role theory, fulfillment of one role inevitably leads to fewer available hours for others, and plausibly results in greater conflict. Even if multiple roles are fulfilled simultaneously, such as by bringing work home to be with one's family, the often inconsistent expectations of the work and family roles would lead to less energy and attention for each role. Time may in such instances be maximized to accommodate multiple roles; however, conflict would still be likely.

The conservation of resources (COR) model (Hobfoll, 1989) is another theoretical perspective that is useful in studies of WFC (e.g. Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). The COR model theorizes that individuals attempt to get and keep resources. Resources are defined as “those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects” (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). Resources, including social support, autonomy, established behavior–outcome (i.e., reward) contingencies, and so on (Hobfoll, 1989; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Wright & Hobfoll, 2004), may be used in problem solving and coping (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Stress may result when an individual perceives a potential loss of resources, when there is an actual loss of resources, or when an expected resource gain does not materialize.

The COR model suggests that conflict between employees' home and work lives may deplete resources, or fuel perceptions of depleted resources, and thus lead to negative outcomes which may include work–family and family–work conflict. Anything that serves to replenish these resources should lead to lower WFC/FWC and positive outcomes, while factors that serve to deplete these resources should lead to higher WFC/FWC and negative outcomes.

Valcour (2007), in a study of telephone call center representatives, found that the relationship between work hours and satisfaction with work–family balance was moderated by control over work time. There was no relationship between work hours and satisfaction with work–family balance for workers with a high degree of control over their work time, and a negative relationship between work hours and satisfaction with work–family balance for workers with little control over their work time. Valcour's measure of satisfaction with work–family balance incorporates what she refers to as the “two most critical personal resources for meeting work and family demands, time and attention (energy)” (Valcour, 2007, p. 1517). She suggests that an individual's satisfaction with work–life balance is due, in part, to how he/she parcels his/her time and other resources to various life roles. In other words, affective responses to work–life issues depend on how well the individual utilizes resources. Her conceptualization of satisfaction with work–life balance is consistent with both role and COR theories, i.e., work and family role demands compete for an individual's time and other resources leading to conflict potential. How well the individual allocates resources impacts their affective responses to work–life issues. Whereas effective resource use leads to satisfactory work–life balance, when these resources are depleted or not well allocated, WFC and/or FWC may result. Greenhaus, Bedeian, and Mossholder (1987), in a study of accountants, found that work hours were associated with WFC. Similarly, Grzywacz and Marks (2000), using data from the 1995 National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States found a relationship between hours of work and work–family spillover. In her meta-analysis of WFC and its antecedents, Byron (2005) found

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