

## Do workers who experience conflict between the work and family domains hit a “glass ceiling?”: A meta-analytic examination

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### ABSTRACT

Based in Conservation of Resources (COR; Hobfoll, 1989) and self-verification (Swann, 1987) theories, we argue that when workers experience conflict between the work and family domains, this should have implications for evaluations of their work performance and ultimately affect more “objective” career outcomes such as salary and hierarchical level attained, as well as the attitudinal outcome of career satisfaction. Our meta-analysis of 96 studies, for a combined sample size of 32,783, found that both work-to-family conflict (WFC) as well as family-to-work conflict (FWC) negatively impacted self-rated as well as manager-rated work performance. And our structural equation model found that WFC and FWC were negatively related to career satisfaction and hierarchical level attained. But while WFC was negatively related to salary, FWC was positively related to salary.

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### Introduction

The term the glass ceiling was coined in the 1980s to characterize women and ethnic minorities' stifled career progress in organizations (Hymowitz, & Schellhardt, 1986). It signifies that invisible barriers truncate minority group members' achievement in organizations. Research has supported the existence of glass ceiling-type discrimination for many reasons including the prevalence of organizational cultures which place greater value on masculine, majority member characteristics and contributions (e.g., Acker, 1990, 1992), a lack of mentorship (e.g., Ragins & Cotton, 1991), a lack of accumulated human capital (Fernandez, 1998), and ethnic discrimination (Foley, Kidder, & Powell, 2002). The term the glass ceiling has traditionally been used to describe organizational career barriers for women and ethnic minorities. However, recent research has uncovered a glass ceiling effect for those workers who are perceived to have conflict between the family and work domains. Specifically, Hoobler, Wayne, and Lemmon (2009) found a “family–work conflict bias” such that when supervisors perceived their subordinates as higher in family–work conflict (FWC; perceptions that family roles—e.g., parent, eldercare-giver, spouse/partner—spill over to affect the fulfillment of work roles), supervisors perceived those subordinates to be lower performers, and the subordinates ultimately received fewer promotions—a new way of understanding the glass ceiling. In this study, we conduct a meta-analysis to bring the sum of existing research to bear on this question of whether there are glass ceiling career effects for all workers who experience conflict between the work and family domains. While the glass ceiling has traditionally referred to barriers to the corporate suite, our meta-analysis includes respondents from multiple hierarchical levels, taking a broader definition of the glass ceiling consistent with Hoobler and colleagues' (2009) conceptualization.

We propose that FWC and WFC (work–family conflict: the perception that work roles and family roles are incompatible in some respect and participation in the family role is made more difficult due to spillover from work responsibilities—Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) are detrimental to a variety of career outcomes. Today's view of the “ideal worker” is one who is available to come in

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early, stay late, and drop everything for the company if necessary. What has been called the “24/7 economy,” that is, our new technological/information society, has created a great deal of complexity and uncertainty for workers, and the integration of work and nonwork demands is one of the most critical challenges for organizations, families, and individuals today (Kossek & Lambert, 2005). Empirical evidence is mounting that the boundaries between work life and family life are now blurred. “The behavioral and attitudinal norms of the workplace encroach on nonwork life and relationships, contributing to conflicts between the demands of work and family roles” (Hammer, Saksvik, Nytrø, Torvatn, & Bayazit, 2004, p. 85). As Crooker, Smith, and Tabak (2002) relate, forces outside the individual such as work hours, schedule flexibility, on-call requirements, career changes, family demographics (e.g., number of children, elder care responsibilities), and varying degrees and types of social support contribute to individuals’ sense of balance or imbalance between the work and home spheres.

Our study takes a necessary look at the accumulated empirical evidence to answer a simple yet important question: do conflicts between work and family affect workers’ career progress? When workers cannot meet the expectations of today’s jobs due to family responsibilities, and vice versa, we test whether this has implications for evaluations of their work performance and ultimately affects more “objective” career outcomes such as salary and hierarchical level attained, as well as attitudinal outcomes such as career satisfaction. We contribute to theory building in this area by calling on Conservation of Resources (COR; Hobfoll, 1989) and self-verification (Swann, 1987) theories to underpin our hypotheses. Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, and Brinley (2005) have called for model testing, as we do in this study, to move the work and family literature toward new theorizing. Ninety-six studies and a combined sample size of 32,783 are utilized to test our hypotheses. Fig. 1 shows our hypothesized model.

## Theory and hypotheses

### *Conflict between the work and family domains and work performance*

Work–family conflict and to a lesser extent family–work conflict, have been vigorous areas of research activity in recent decades. This is due to many factors including women’s increased labor force participation and the preponderance of dual earner parenting, escalating employer interest in improving workers’ quality of life and in smoothing the work–life balance, and the “24/7 economy’s” blurring of work and family time (Eby et al., 2005). Greenhaus and Beutell’s (1985) review specified three major sources of conflict between both domains: time-based conflict (e.g., a meeting runs late and a parent is tardy picking up a child from daycare), strain-based conflict (e.g., a morning fight with a spouse/partner affects the quality of a salesperson’s presentation that day), and behavior-based conflict (e.g., where a supervisor’s style of directing his factory workers is not appropriately applied to directing his wife on a home improvement project). To this typology, Ezzedeen and Swiercz (2007) recently added a fourth:

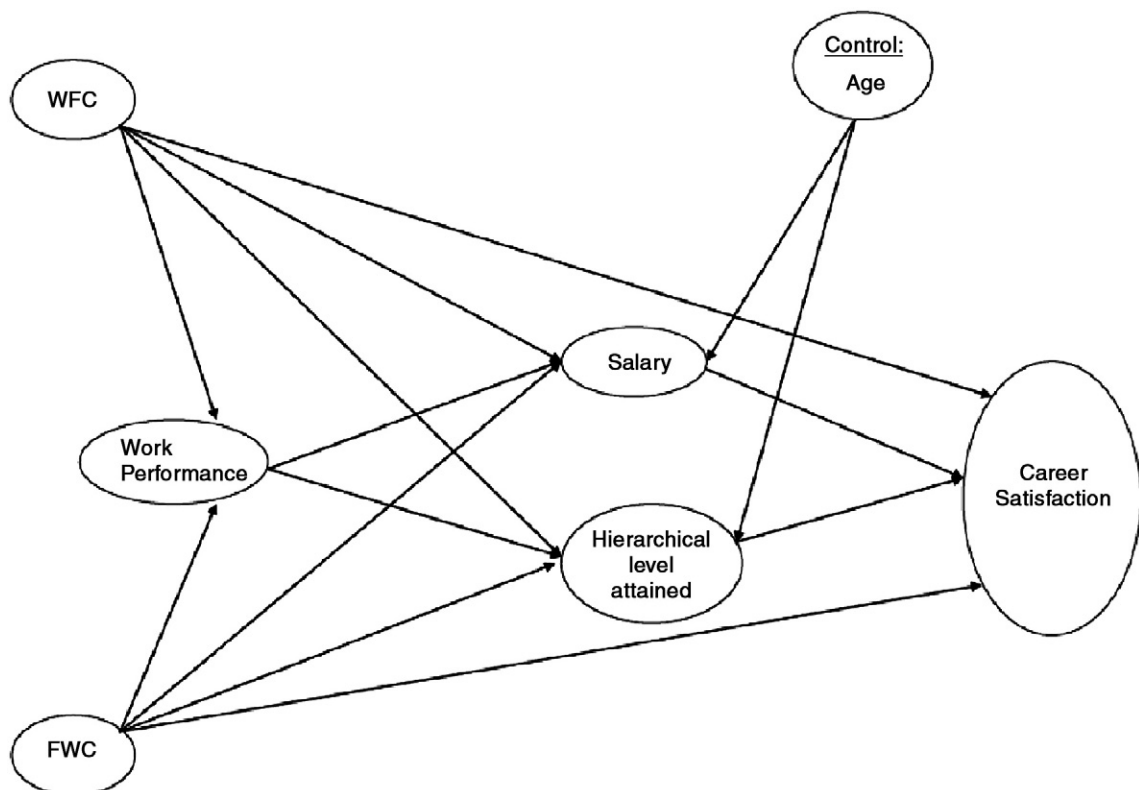


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model.

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