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Committing to your work, spouse, and children: Implications for work–family conflict ☆

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Abstract

When trying to balance work and family responsibilities, many workers experience conflict between these two roles. Although role commitment has been viewed both as contributing to and alleviating conflict, this relationship has not been fully tested. Using a sample of female nurses and police officers, we examined the direct and indirect relationship of role commitment with work–spouse and work–parent conflict. Increased work–spouse conflict was associated with *decreased* spouse commitment. Increased work–parent conflict was associated with *increased* parent commitment but with *decreased* spouse and job commitment. Job commitment moderated the relationships between irregular work schedules and work–spouse conflict and between job control and work–spouse conflict. Parent commitment moderated the relationship between irregular work schedules and work–parent conflict. These results suggest that, depending on the role, commitment may either alleviate or exacerbate conflict.

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1. Introduction

Juggling work and family responsibilities is a common experience for many employees (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993; Lee & Duxbury, 1998). Although engaging in both work and family roles can have positive effects for individuals (e.g., Rothbard, 2001), if workers are unable to balance the responsibilities associated with both roles, the potential for conflict between roles increases (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996).

WFC may be exacerbated when individuals face pressures to have both a successful career and a successful home life (Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Lundberg & Frankenhaeuser, 1999). An underlying assumption is that being strongly committed to a variety of roles has negative effects on individual well-being. However, some researchers have suggested that there are benefits to being committed to multiple roles (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2003). Therefore, we examined whether role commitment is *directly* related to WFC, even after controlling for job stressors, and whether commitment moderates the relationships between job stressors and WFC.

One approach to understanding WFC involves a social-roles perspective. Using this perspective, we can view WFC in terms of types of inter-role conflict among specific social roles, such as worker, parent, and spouse (Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). Inter-role conflict occurs when pressures from two roles interfere with successful performance in each role. Kopelman et al. (1983) noted that there are at least two reasons why roles may be incompatible: (1) the requirements of one role may compete for a person's time, which results in less time for another role; and (2) the strain in one role may affect a person's performance in another role. Using this approach to define WFC, we will examine both time demands and job role strain as potential contributors to conflict between specific roles (i.e., work–spouse and work–parent).

1.1. Time-based demands

It has been well established in the literature that time-based demands can create conflict between work and family roles. Not surprisingly, incompatible time pressures are a major source of WFC (Fox & Dwyer, 1999). Increased number of hours worked, including overtime, tends to be associated with higher levels of WFC (e.g., Burke, Weir, & Duwors, 1980; Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994; Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980). The amount of time spent on house- and child-care tasks is also associated with increased conflict (Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981).

1.2. Job stressors

It is also interesting to examine whether non-time related role stressors are related to WFC, beyond what can be explained by these time demands. For example, in addition to the *number* of work hours, the *scheduling* of work may impact on WFC. Frone et al. (1992) found that, in comparison to shift work, regular schedules were

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