ABSTRACT

This study tested for gender differences with regards to the four dimensions of work-family balance proposed by Frone (2003). The sample comprised of 228 married Malaysian entrepreneurs of which 126 were males and 102 were females. Results of the independent sample t-tests revealed no significant gender disparities. It appears that experiences of conflict and facilitation did not conform to the traditional gender role perspective as hypothesized. In other words, the levels of conflict and facilitation encountered by the male and female Malaysian entrepreneurs sampled in this study tend to be similar. Our findings seem to suggest the existence of changing cultural values concerning work and family responsibilities in Malaysia. Limitations of the findings and recommendations for future research are also highlighted.

Keywords: Work-family conflict, work-family facilitation, gender, entrepreneurs, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, interest in work-family balance has continued to grow in importance. This interest has been sparked by the realization that unbalanced work-family relationships can result in reduced health and performance outcomes for individuals, families, and organizations (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Besides, striking changes in the nature of the workforce and families, such as the rising trend in the entry of women, dual-earner couples, single parents, and greater caregiving needs of an aging population (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001), have further increased the household and work responsibilities likely to be experienced by
employees of both genders. Given the need for a balanced life, understanding how work and family roles can be integrated becomes imperative.

Traditionally, much of research has concentrated on work-family conflict, its causes, and consequences (see Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). Conflict has been the dominant paradigm due to the application of the scarcity theory which assumes that an individual’s personal resources relating to time, energy, and attention are finite (Van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijart, 2007). As a result, devotion to one role (e.g. work) implies that lower resources can be spent on another role (e.g. family) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). However, there has been a growing recognition that the focus on conflict represents not only a partial view of an individual’s experiences in negotiating work and family demands (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005) but has resulted in a negative view of the work-family interface (Voydanoff, 2004).

Indeed, a review of recent literatures have demonstrated that work and family experiences may enrich the lives of individuals (Butler, Grzywacz, Bass, & Linney, 2005; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Voydanoff, 2004; Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007). In other words, individuals may actually derive social psychological benefits and an increase in the quality of life by simultaneous participation in their work and family roles (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This new construct relating to the positive side of the work-family interchange is referred to as work-family facilitation.

In their review of the “work-balance” construct, Kalliath and Brough (2008) argued that despite being discussed in the literature, a formal definition of this term remains elusive. Nevertheless, Frone (2003) viewed work-family balance as reflecting an absence of conflict and a presence of facilitation. According to Frone (2003), work-family balance can be tested by assessing the dimensions associated with the conflict and facilitation constructs. Work-family conflict is a form of inter-role conflict that occurs as a result of incompatible role pressures from the work and family domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict is posited to be bidirectional, such that work can interfere with family (work-to-family interference, WFI) and family can interfere with work (family-to-work-interference, FWI) (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). On the other hand, Voydanoff (2004) used the term work-family facilitation to characterize positive spillover, whereby participation in one role (e.g. work) creates resources that make easier participation in the other role (e.g. family). Again, work-family facilitation can occur in two directions, meaning that work can provide gains that enhance the functioning of the family domain or family can provide gains that enhance the functioning of the work domain (Wayne et al., 2007).

Research on work-family has predominantly focused on the negative side of combining multiple roles. These studies concerning work-family conflict were overwhelmingly confined to Western settings using organizationally-employed individuals as subjects (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Carnicer, Sanchez, Perez, & Jimenez, 2004; Cinamon, 2006; Elloy & Smith, 2003; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Collins, 2001; Wallace, 2005). This body of literature has explored the prevalence, antecedents, and outcomes of conflict emanating from work-to-family and family-to-work. Similarly, researchers have
begun to give greater attention to the positive side of the work-family interface (Beutell, 2010; Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006; Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006; Stoddard & Madsen, 2007). Given the growing realization that people desire a balanced life, there is a need to explore the work-family interface by including both components of conflict and facilitation as suggested by Frone (2003). Despite its potential as an acceptable conceptual measure of work-family balance, research using Frone’s (2003) four-fold taxonomy is relatively sparse (Aryee et al., 2005).

In Malaysia, despite the importance of balance for the health and wellbeing of individuals and families (Eby et al., 2005), no known research has explored the occurrence of work-family balance using Frone’s (2003) four-fold perspective. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing knowledge base in two ways. First, by drawing on a sample of Malaysian entrepreneurs, this study addresses the glaring underrepresentation of samples from developing economies in the literature on work-family issues. Second, this study is considered timely judging from the fact that entrepreneurship has become an increasingly attractive career option in a work context dominated by widespread organizational restructuring and downsizing (Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996). This claim is further supported by the rising trend in the number of people who are self-employed (Parslow, Jorm, Christensen, Rodgers, Strazdins, & D’Souza, 2004; Prottas & Thompson, 2006; Tuttle & Garr, 2009; Volery & Pullich, 2010). This trend is also prevalent in Malaysia since small and medium-scale enterprises (hereafter labeled as SMEs) are initiated and run by entrepreneurs and these firms constitute 99.2 percent of business establishments and contribute 56.4 percent to total employment in Malaysia (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2010). Given the myriad of difficulties faced by Malaysian entrepreneurs in areas such as securing financial assistance, access to information, exposure to good management practices, heavy regulations, and poor command of information technology (Abd. Samad, Abdullah, Jusoff, Mohamad, & Nair, 2010), an understanding of their work-family balance would be helpful to policy-makers in designing more effective programs. Consistent with the literature and evidences gathered from previous studies concerning conflict (e.g. Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Duxbury & Higgins, 1991; Eagle et al., 1998; Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Hill, Martinson, Hawkins, & Ferris, 2003; Hill, 2005) and facilitation (e.g. Beutell, 2010; Van Steenbergen et al., 2007) in the work-family interface, it would be expected that such experiences would be different for men and women. Against this backdrop, and given that very little attention has been directed towards those who are self-employed (Beutell, 2007), the purpose of this study is to test for gender differences in terms of conflict and facilitation experiences emanating from work and family domains among a sample of Malaysian entrepreneurs.

1.1. Work-Family Conflict and Work-Family Facilitation

Work-family conflict is a type of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures associated with work and family roles are incompatible in some way such that participation in one role (e.g. work) becomes more difficult by virtue of participation in the other role (e.g. family) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The scarcity of resources theory has been used to explain work-family conflict. This theory advocates that the demands of work or family life are bound to deplete personal resources, such as time and physical or mental energy, leaving the individual...
with inadequate resources to carry out activities in other domains (Goode, 1960). Under these circumstances, individuals are likely to experience role strains, resulting in conflict between the work (family) and family (work) domains. As previously noted, conflict between work and family is posited to be bidirectional. That is, work may interfere with the family domain and family can interfere with the work domain. Work-family conflict results in a variety of negative outcomes for the individual such as diminished satisfaction (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Thomas & Ganster, 1995, Zhang, Griffeth, & Fried, 2012), lower level of mental health (Frone, 2000; Frone et al., 1992; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003), as well as lower level of physical health (Allen & Armstrong, 2006; Demerouti, Geurts, & Kompier, 2004; Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002; Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

Work-family facilitation refers to a form of synergy whereby resources gain from involvement in one domain (e.g. work) can positively enhance one’s involvement in the other domain (e.g. family) (Voydanoff, 2004). Greenhaus and Powell (2006) conceptualized the facilitation construct as the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role. This perspective relied on the role expansion-enhancement theory whereby participation in multiple roles (such as work and family) does not deplete one’s physiological and psychological resources (Aryee et al., 2005; Karatepe & Bektishi, 2008). Instead, since human energy is assumed to be abundant and expandable, participation in one role can have a positive effect on other role performances. Consistent with the role enhancement perspective, Wayne et al. (2007) defined work-family facilitation as the extent to which an individual’s engagement in one life domain (i.e. work/family) provides gains (i.e. developmental, affective, capital, or efficiency) which contribute to increased functioning of another life domain (i.e. family/work). According to Wayne et al. (2007), facilitation can occur in two directions meaning that work can provide gains that enrich the functioning of the family domain (work-to-family facilitation, WFF) or family can provide gains that enrich the functioning of the work domain (family-to-work facilitation, FWF). Work-family facilitation has been shown to be related to positive work outcomes such job performance (Karatepe & Bektishi, 2008), satisfaction (Hill, 2005), and commitment (Gordon, Whelan-Berry, & Hamilton, 2007).

1.2. Gender Differences in Work-Family Conflict and Work-Family Facilitation

The traditional division of labor is gender-based, with the wife responsible for the family and the husband assuming the role of a breadwinner (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1994). According to Gutek, Searle, and Klepa (1991), domestic responsibilities have been a large part of the female domain whereby women are expected to provide a stable home to their families. In response to this differential role demands, women are more likely to allow family demands to intrude into their work domain. In addition, women tend to spend more hours than men on family and household chores (Nieva & Gutek, 1981). If the number of hours spent in an activity translates directly into perceived conflict as argued by Gutek et al. (1991), women should report more of family-to-work interference than men. Despite the fact that women are now more educated, participate more in the workforce, and have more equal employment opportunities, evidence continues to suggest that women still carry the primary responsibility for family chores (Voydanoff, 1988; Wiersma, 1994; Eagle, Icenogle, Maes, & Miles, 1998; Fu & Shaffer 2001). According to Hochschild (1989), among dual-earner couples, women seem to bear the burden of adapting to work and family demands. Evidence has shown that married
women continue to bear a heavier burden of housework and childcare than their male partners (Voydanoff, 1988, Wiersma, 1994). Thus, under such circumstances, one would expect women to experience greater family-to-work interference than men.

On the other hand, working long hours in a demanding job is part of the “good provider role” (Bernard, 1981). Hence, since men spend more hours in paid employment than the average employed women (Pleck, 1985), they should report greater work-to-family interference than their female counterparts. Several researchers found proofs of significant gender differences when examining work-family conflict. For instance, the findings by Aycan and Eskin (2005) on a sample of dual-earner families in Turkey lend partial support to the gender role hypothesis. Although both men and women allowed greater interference from work-to-family than from family-to-work, their findings also revealed that women experienced more work-to-family conflict than did men. Duxbury and Higgins (1991) noted the existence of significant differences in 11 out of 17 comparisons made between married male and female professionals across several antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict. Similarly, Hill et al. (2003) and Hill (2005) found that working fathers reported lower levels of family-work conflict than working mothers. Kinnunnen and Mauno (1998), however, proved otherwise. They reported no gender differences in the levels of work-to-family interference and family-to-work interference on a sample of employed men and women in Finland. In a recent study, Beutell (2010) concluded that there was no significant difference in the two forms of work-family conflict for working mothers and fathers. Accordingly, we proposed the following:

\[ H1a: \text{The level of work-to-family interference will be greater for men than women.} \]
\[ H1b: \text{The level of family-to-work interference will be greater for women than men.} \]

In a similar vein, the internalization of gender role ideology suggests differences in facilitation between men and women. Since the average employed woman spend more time on family work and home maintenance than the average employed man, it is likely that the positive experiences she gains from spending her time with the family can help promote the functioning of her work activities. In contrast, since men are often expected to provide financial security for the family, they tend to spend more time in their paid work. Under such circumstances, men stand to experience greater positive spillover from the work domain than their wives, resulting in higher levels of work-to-family facilitation. However, despite the increasing number of studies on the positive interactions between work and family, empirical evidences remain scarce and divided. For instance, Van Steenbergen et al. (2007) found that women experienced higher levels of facilitation than men. Similarly, Beutell (2010) reported that men scored higher on both types of work-family facilitation as opposed to women. Their t-test results indicated that family-to-work facilitation was statistically significant. Conversely, a study by Grzywacz and Marks (2000) discovered no meaningful differences in the levels of work-family facilitation and family-work facilitation across gender. Given the paucity of research on gender differences concerning the facilitation construct, such examination within the framework of work-family balance seems to be in order. Therefore, our second hypothesis is:

\[ H2a: \text{The level of work-to-family facilitation will be greater for men than women.} \]
\[ H2b: \text{The level of family-to-work facilitation will be greater for women than men.} \]
2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Subjects, Sampling, Measures, and Method of Analysis

Data for the study were collected from married entrepreneurs of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) located in three states within the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia. We used the definitions of SMEs relating to the number of full-time employees provided by the Small and Medium Enterprises Corporation (SME Corp.) of Malaysia to identify appropriate businesses for inclusion in the present study. For small-sized manufacturing enterprises, the number of full-time employees ranges between 5 and 50 whereas those businesses with 51 to 150 are categorized as “medium-sized” (SME Corp., 2010). On the other hand, the number of full-time employees for small-sized service firms should be between 5 and 19 whereas medium-sized ones are those businesses that employed between 20 to 50 people on a full-time basis (SME Corp., 2010). Given the lack of a proper sampling frame, we conveniently distributed 550 questionnaires with the help of officials attached to Penang Invest, various chambers of commerce, non-governmental agencies, legal firms, and banks that have dealings with SME entrepreneurs in the three states. Respondents were requested to fill out the questionnaires in a self-administered manner within a period of three weeks. To ensure higher responses, several follow-up phone calls were made to the officers in the respective institutions. Our study variables comprised of the four dimensions of work-family balance: work-family conflict, family-work conflict, work-family facilitation, and family-work facilitation. We computed an index for each dimension by averaging the sum of the four items associated with it. These items were adopted from Wayne, Musisca, and Fleeson (2004). Responses to these items were made on a five-point response format (“1= never” to “5= all the time”). Independent sample t-tests were performed to test our hypotheses.

3. RESULTS

After the cut-off date for data collection, a total of 228 usable questionnaires were retrieved, yielding a response rate of 41.5%. Of the sample, 126 (55.3%) were males and 102 (44.7%) were females. Frequencies, percentages, and descriptive statistics for selected demographic variables according to gender are reported in Table 1.

| Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Sample According to Gender |
|---|---|---|---|
| Variables | Men (N=126) | Women (N=102) |
| Ethnicity | | | |
| Frequencies | % | Frequencies | % |
| Malay | 61 | 48.4 | 48 | 47.1 |
| Chinese | 56 | 44.4 | 49 | 48.0 |
| Indians & Others | 9 | 7.2 | 5 | 4.9 |
| Education | | | |
| Frequencies | % | Frequencies | % |
| Higher School Certificate and lower | 45 | 35.8 | 39 | 38.1 |
| Diploma | 30 | 23.8 | 27 | 26.5 |
| Bachelors degree and above | 51 | 40.5 | 36 | 35.3 |
As shown in Table 1, the male and female entrepreneurs were well represented in terms of the three ethnic groups in Malaysia: Malays, Chinese, and Indians and others. Regarding education, in both groups of respondents, a majority of them have a diploma or higher qualification. Similarly, a majority of the sampled male and female entrepreneurs have between one to three children. More than two-thirds of the respondents from the two groups hailed from the service sector. A comparison of the monthly income for the sample revealed that a majority (64.5%) of the sampled male entrepreneurs have a monthly income of above RM5000 per month whereas the income size for the female group was below RM5000 per month. In terms of enterprise size, a majority of the sampled entrepreneurs from the two groups were owners of businesses with employees ranging from five to ten people. On the average, the age for male entrepreneurs (mean=43.38 years; SD=7.87) was higher than that for the female entrepreneurs (Mean=40.31 years; SD=9.63). Likewise, on the average, male respondents have more experience as entrepreneurs (mean=13.10 years; SD=8.23) than those female respondents (Mean=10.73 years; SD=7.72). In addition, on the average, the number of hours spent at work for both male respondents (Mean=9.46 hours; SD=2.22) were about the same as female (Mean=9.34 hours; SD=2.97). However, male entrepreneurs spent lesser
time in family activities (Mean= 3.95 hours; SD=2.36) as opposed to female entrepreneurs (Mean=4.77; SD=3.06).

We computed the means and standard deviations for the study variables. Reliabilities of the measures were also examined. Furthermore, we conducted tests of differences across the four variables according to gender. Our results are portrayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and T-values of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Men (N=126)</th>
<th>Women (N=102)</th>
<th>Reliabilities</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-to-Family Interference (WIF)</td>
<td>2.66 0.84</td>
<td>2.55 0.81</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-to-Work Interference (FIW)</td>
<td>2.32 0.83</td>
<td>2.30 0.86</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-to-Family Facilitation (WFF)</td>
<td>3.00 0.73</td>
<td>2.89 0.82</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-to-Work Facilitation (FWF)</td>
<td>3.42 0.81</td>
<td>3.35 0.84</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As depicted in Table 2, our measures demonstrated satisfactory reliabilities since the alpha values computed exceeded Sekaran and Bougie’s (2010) suggested minimum acceptable level of 0.60. The mean values for work-to-family conflict and work-to-family facilitation for men (WIF=2.66; WFF=3.00) were found to be higher than women (WIF=2.55; WFF=2.89). However, the t-test results indicate that these differences were not statistically significant. Contrary to our expectations, the mean values for family-to-work conflict and family-to-work facilitation for men (FIW=2.32; FWF=3.42) were found to be higher than women (WIF=2.30; FWW=3.35). Nevertheless, these differences were statistically insignificant as well. Since none of the t-values were significant across the four dimensions of work-family balance (work-to-family interference, family-to-work interference, work-to-family facilitation, and family-to-work facilitation), it can be surmised that no meaningful gender differences were observed in the present study. Thus, our two hypotheses were unsupported.

4. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

In this study, we examined whether the four dimensions of work-family balance proposed by Frone (2003) were significantly different for men and women. We tested our hypotheses using a sample of married Malaysian SME entrepreneurs. It was discovered that the level of conflict and facilitation arising from the work and family domains experienced by Malaysian entrepreneurs were not significantly different in terms of gender. Although the mean values for work-to-family conflict and work-to-family facilitation for men was found to be higher than women, the t-test results indicate that these differences were not statistically meaningful. Our findings on the lack of gender differences in work-to-family interference and family-to-work interference are consistent with that of earlier findings by previous researchers (e.g. Beutell, 2010; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). Contrary to our expectations, the level of family-to-work conflict and family-to-work facilitation seemed to be slightly higher for men than women. However, these differences were statistically insignificant. In the present study, no gender differences were detected for the facilitation construct arising from the work and family domains. This finding lends credence to the discovery made by Grzywacz and Marks (2000).
Overall, our results showed no gender differences between male and female entrepreneurs in managing their work-family balance. These findings are in tandem with those by Loscocco and Leicht (1993) who demonstrated gender similarity among male and female small business owners in their processes to achieve business success. According to Cromie (1987), as business owners, women like their male counterparts share a desire for personal and economic achievement. Because of women’s disadvantageous position in the labor market (Coverman, 1983), women are more likely to fend for themselves in trying to establish a better work situation. In addition, as noted by Prottas and Thompson (2006), entrepreneurs, regardless of gender, have to perform an array of work responsibilities including administering payroll, hiring employees, negotiating with customers, and others. This is consistent with the “universalist” position that views entrepreneurs as a homogeneous group unified by their role rather than their culture (Baum, Olian, Erez, Schnell, Smith, Sims, Scully, & Smith, 1993; Mitchell, Smith, Seawright, & Morse, 2000). In the case of Malaysia, since entrepreneurs are typically owners of SMEs, their work burden is likely to be further aggravated by other problems (such as difficulties in securing financial assistance, inability to access timely information, lack of sufficient exposure to good management practices, heavy regulations, and inability to utilize information technology) as previously highlighted by Abd. Samad et al. (2010). Besides, as Koshal, Gupta, and Koshal (1998) pointed out, the Malaysian society is undergoing rapid transformation from its strong traditional religious and cultural norms to more contemporary values about women. Furthermore, entrepreneurship has been identified as one of the pathways for women to contribute to the country’s economic transformation (Sum, 2012). Under such circumstances, gender role ideology may not be salient among entrepreneurs in Malaysia resulting in no significant differences in their experiences of conflict and facilitation from the work-family interface.

This research has its own limitations. First, our sample consisted of entrepreneurs alone. Thus, the findings obtained may not be generalized to other career professionals. Second, the sample size was relatively small. Greater statistical conclusion validity can be achieved with a larger sample. Third, we only investigated gender differences between the four dimensions of work-family balance. Future research should be expanded to allow a more comprehensive examination by examining gender differences in terms of the antecedents and consequences of the work-family balance construct.

5. CONCLUSION

Although the experiences associated with work-family issues have been hypothesized to be different for married male and female entrepreneurs within the Malaysian context, our results showed no dissimilarities. Given the salient role of self-employment in driving the nation’s economic growth and the rise of women participation in entrepreneurial ventures, it becomes imperative for policy-makers to understand how male and female entrepreneurs view their work and family balance.

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