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The Influence of Support at Work and Home on Work-Family Conflict: Does Gender Make a Difference?

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ABSTRACT

Although work-family conflict has been identified and analysed by numerous behavioural researchers, attempts to examine this issue across cultures are generally lacking. In view of this gap in the literature, this study sought to examine the influence of support at work (managerial support) and at home (spousal support) in predicting work-family conflict on a sample of 185 married accountants in Malaysia. The moderating role of gender in these relationships was also investigated. Consistent with the hypotheses, the results revealed that managerial support and spousal support have negative effects on work-family conflict. In addition, gender was found to moderate the relationships between both forms of support and work-family conflict. Implications of the findings to human resource management policies and practices are presented. Variability in the effects of social support from the work and home domains on work-family conflict for men and women suggests the need for customised attention. Limitations of the study and future suggestions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Work represents a key component of the lives of men, with the accepted domain of women being at home and family. This scenario has changed dramatically due to the profound changes in the demographic make up of the workforce such as the entry of women, dual earner couples, and single parents (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson 2001), and the changing nature of the work demands. Yet, for many employees, balancing the dual demands and responsibilities of work and family can become overwhelming and result in work-family conflict. A review of the literature indicates that work-family conflict has adverse consequences for both individuals and organisations. Individuals who experience work-family conflict may incur elevated job stress (Frone, Russell & Cooper 1992), depression (Thomas & Ganster 1995), and reduced job, marital, as well as life satisfaction (Bedeian, Burke & Moffett 1988, Higgins & Duxbury 1992, Burke & Greenglass 1999). On the other hand, organisational level repercussions from workfamily conflict include increased absenteeism (Thomas & Ganster 1995), higher turnover, and lower productivity (Fernandez 1986).

Over the last two decades, there has been a substantial increase in research on work-family conflict

(for example, Bedeian, et al. 1988, Voydanoff 1988, Frone, et al. 1992, Thomas & Ganster 1995, Adams, King & King 1996, Kinnunen & Mauno 1998, Carlson & Perrewe 1999, Carlson & Kacmar 2000, Grant-Vallone & Donaldson 2001, Anderson, Coffey & Byerly 2002, Boyar, Maertz, Pearson & Keough 2003, Carnicer, Sanchez, Perez & Jimenez 2004, Wallace 2005, Pasewark & Viator 2006, Cinamon, Rich & Westman 2007). Unfortunately, most empirical work on this topic makes use of samples from developed Western economies particularly the United States. These studies have been devoted to examining either its antecedents, consequences, or both. In the study on the antecedents of work-family conflict, researchers have classified these variables into two major categories: work domain variables and family domain variables (Frone, Yardley & Markel 1997). A major limitation of prior research on the predictors of work-family conflict is that it has given greater emphasis on the effect of one domain at a time (Carlson & Perrewe 1999).

Despite having calls to expand research on work-family conflict across national cultures (Aryee, Fields & Luk 1999, Yang, Chen, Choi & Zou 2000, Poelmans 2003, Hill, Yang, Hawkins & Ferris 2004), to date, relatively few studies have been done within the non Western context (for instance, Aryee, et al. 1999, Fu & Shaffer 2001, Kim & Ling 2001, Lo 2003, Skitmore & Ahmad 2003, Luk & Shaffer 2005). The countries involved were Hong Kong and Singapore. In the case of Malaysia, some empirical studies investigating the phenomenon of work-family conflict in Malaysia have been reported (see Ahmad 1996, Noor 2002, Komarraju 2006). Nevertheless, these studies focused on the consequences of work-family conflict instead of their antecedents. As such, it remains unclear whether the findings on the antecedents of work-family conflict abroad are applicable to Malaysia.

Given the salient role played by women in the economic and social development of Malaysia, the problem of balancing work and family obligations is a critical issue to address. According to the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010, the female labour force participation rate has risen from 44.7 per cent in 2000 to 45.7 per cent in 2005 (The Economic Planning Unit 2006). The increasing entry of women in paid employment implies changing role expectations. The emphasis on education by the Malaysian government has contributed to the changes in women's perceptions, values, and attitudes toward work. Similarly, women's entry into high paying occupations is not surprising given their higher educational achievements and talents, women would have developed strong career aspirations and ready to make strong work commitment (Nasurdin & Ahmad 2001). Recent statistics derived from the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010 indicate the increase in tertiary education among women in Malaysia. For example, female enrolment in public universities rose from 61 per cent in 2000 to 63.4 per cent in 2005 (The Economic Planning Unit 2006). These changes support the contentions of Koshal, Gupta and Koshal (1998) that the Malaysian society is undergoing rapid transformation from its strong traditional religious and cultural norms to more modern values about women. Hence, empirically testing a model linking work-family conflict to its antecedents from both work and family domains within the Malaysian context would be of theoretical interest and practical value.

Prior studies have identified an array of factors within the work domain and family domain as antecedents to work-family conflict. Of these, supportive relationships at work and at home have been identified as having an important bearing on the extent to which multiple roles may have a negative impact on an individual's well being (Kirrane & Buckley 2004). Anderson, et al. (2002) also noted the role of social support as a key resource or coping mechanism that helps individuals reduce the effects of stressors. Work related social support, especially from managers, may enable employees to better integrate work and family roles. Non work related support, particularly from spouses, makes one's situation less stressful by providing emotional support, instrumental aid, or perhaps providing greater flexibility or control over one's situation. Both forms of support are likely to stave off the onset of stress and subsequent work-family conflict. Hence, the first aim of the study is to examine the negative effects of managerial support and spousal support on work-family conflict. And given that the expectations associated with gender roles have led to differences in work-family conflict as opined by Frone, et al. (1992), the second aim of the study is to test whether gender moderates the relationships between the antecedent variables and work-

family conflict.

The initial part of this paper provides an overview of the employment patterns in Malaysia and the relevant literature pertaining to the effects of the study variables (managerial support, spousal support, and gender) on work-family conflict. Four hypotheses were developed. The methodology section features the subjects, site, sampling procedure, measurements, and data analysis techniques. Subsequent discussion focuses on the results of the statistical analysis. Finally, the paper concludes with implications for human resource management practitioners.

MALAYSIA AND ITS EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

Malaysia, a country located in the heart of South East Asia, consists of two distinct geographical segments separated by the South China Sea, which are the 1) Peninsular (or West) Malaysia, and 2) East Malaysia (Swee-Hock 2007). The nation is made up of thirteen states, eleven of which are in Peninsular Malaysia with the remaining two (Sabah and Sarawak) in East Malaysia. The country has a total land area covering 330,250 square kilometres (Swee-Hock 2007), and it had a total population of 26.75 million people in 2005, a figure that is expected to increase to 28.96 million in 2010 (The Economic Planning Unit 2006). In 2005, Malays and other indigenous groups made up 65.9 per cent of the total population of the country followed by the Chinese (25.3%), Indians (7.5%), and others (1.3%) (The Economic Planning Unit 2006). Because of the diversity in its racial and ethnic composition, Malaysia has often been described as a "...minefield of multicultural sensitivities..." (Abdullah, 1992: 2). Although the multiracial population of the country abides to various religious faiths, Islam is the official religion.

Information gleaned from the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) indicated that 9.3 million people were employed in various sectors of the Malaysian economy in 2000 (The Economic Planning Unit 2006). Of this figure, six million were males with the remaining 3.3 million being females. Although the number of working women was relatively lower than that of men, the proportion of women employed as professionals, which includes accountants, auditors, teaching specialists, computer designers and analysts was higher (7.2 per cent) than men (5.1 per cent). In 2005, the labour force expanded to 11 million people, of which seven million were males with four million being females. Again, the proportion of women professionals was higher (7.5 per cent) compared to men (5.5 per cent). This upward occupational status shift for women is due to their tertiary educational attainments as previously intimated. In terms of occupational patterns by ethnic groups, based on the 2004 data reported by Swee-Hock (2007), one interesting feature that can be observed is that the proportion of Chinese employed as professionals was highest (6.3 per cent) compared to other major races such as the Malays (5.3 per cent) and Indians (4.5 per cent).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict refers to a type of inter role conflict in which involvement in work roles interfere with involvement in family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985). Past researchers have used various terms, such as inter role conflict (Kopelman, Greenhaus & Connolly 1983), workfamily inter role conflict (Eagle, Icenogle, Maes & Miles 1998), work-home conflict (Jones & McKenna 2002), and negative work-home interaction (Demerouti, Geurts & Kompier 2004) interchangeably with work-family conflict. In general, work-family conflict has negative outcomes that are work related and stress related. Work related consequences include job dissatisfaction, job burnout, and turnover (Burke 1988, Frone, et al. 1992, Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Collins 2001, Howard, Donofrio & Boles 2004). Stress related outcomes include psychological distress, life disorders and marital dissatisfaction (Frone, et al. 1992, Higgins & Duxbury 1992, Adams, et al. 1996, Kinnunen & Mauno 1998, Aryee, et al. 1999). Many scholars agree that the general demands of a role, the time devoted to a given role, and the strain produced by a given role, are the domain elements of work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985, Voydanoff 1988, Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrian

Although work-family conflict has traditionally been viewed as an unidirectional construct, many researchers have now come to recognise that the nature of work-family conflict is bidirectional: work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW). Each type of work-family conflict has its own unique domain specific antecedents. The specific antecedents of the work interfering with family conflict (WIF) lie in the work domain. They are comprised of stressors such as the number of hours devoted to paid work (Fu & Shaffer 2001), work schedule inflexibility (Eagle, et al. 1998), low supervisory support (Goff, Mount & Jamison 1990, Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper & O'Brien 2001), role conflict and role overload (Fu & Shaffer 2001, Boyar, et al. 2003), and job insecurity and poor leadership relations (Kinnunen & Mauno 1998). Likewise, the domain specific antecedents of the family interfering with work conflict (FIW) lie within the family domain and include stressors such as low spousal support (Erdwins, et al. 2001), the number of hours devoted to household work, and parental demands (Fu & Shaffer 2001). Past findings, however, have consistently provided evidence that work interfering with family surpasses family interfering with work among working adults with families (Frone 2003). As argued by Cinnamon (2006), work usually has a more deleterious impact on family life than vice versa. Thus, the present research focused on the work interfering with family (WIF) component of work-family conflict.

Managerial Support and Work-Family Conflict

Managerial support is important in dealing with work-family issues (Bernas & Major 2000). The willingness of managers to adjust job tasks, work schedules, and provide assistance (through two way communication, training, and recognition programmes) can help employees to manage their work and family demands better (Thomas & Ganster 1995, Wilson 1997). According to Regan (1994), managerial support acts as a catalyst in helping employees who have to juggle multiple roles both at work and at home, thereby promoting work-family equilibrium. Examples of managers' supportive behaviours include allowing employees to bring their child to the workplace, taking phone calls from home, willingness to adjust employees' schedule to meet changes in the school demands, and permitting employees to take time off early to send their elders to care (Thomas & Ganster 1995, Carlson & Perrew 1999, Erdwins, et al. 2001). According to Beehr (1995), social support from work related sources, such as the manager, figures more importantly in the occupational stress process than does support from non work related sources. Past studies provided empirical evidence for the negative influence of a manager's support on work-family conflict (Goff, et al. 1990, Thomas & Ganster 1995, Erdwins, et al. 2001, Anderson, et al. 2002). These theoretical and empirical imperatives provide the basis for the accompanying hypothesis.

H₁: Managerial support will be negatively related to work-family conflict.

Spousal Support and Work-Family Conflict

Spousal support is an important factor in reducing conflict between work and family life (Kirrane & Buckley 2004). Spousal support can be emotional or instrumental (Lee & Choo 2001, Kirrane & Buckley 2004). Emotional support refers to sympathetic, loving, and caring behaviours (e.g., showing concern on spouse's work, willingness to listen, and giving advice or guidance) (Lee & Choo 2001). Instrumental support, on the other hand, refers to the actual assistance or facilitation in task accomplishment (e.g., helping in household chores and childcare, providing financial assistance) (Lee & Choo 2001). Actions representing spousal support include care given during the time of illness, emotional support, counselling, and advice, all of which are able to minimise fatigue and irritation (Bernas & Major 2000). According to Bernas and Major (2000), stress can be prevented through social resources which an individual has created with his or her spouse. Individuals who have spouses that are able to provide information and cognitive guidance, tangible resources and aid, and emotional sustenance in times of need will be less likely to experience stress and subsequent work-family conflict. Prior findings have illustrated that a spouse's support can negate work-family conflict (Erdwins, et al. 2001, Lee & Choo 2001, Kirrane & Buckley 2004). Based on these preceding arguments, the second hypothesis is presented.

H₂: Spousal support will be negatively related to work-family conflict.

Gender Relationships in Work-Family Conflict

Traditionally, the division of labour has been gender based, with the wife responsible for the family and the husband assuming the role of 'breadwinner' (Higgins, Duxbury & Lee 1994). In other words, work is for men whilst family responsibility and home maintenance is for women (Guttek, Searle & Klepa 1991). The expectations associated with gender roles have led to differences in experiencing work-family conflict (Guttek, et al. 1991, Frone, et al. 1992). Recently, it has been recognised that supportive relationships at work or home are particularly influential in reducing work-family conflict (Kirrane & Buckley 2004). According to Etzion (1984), stress associated with work-family conflict can be buffered by work sources of support for men and family sources of support for women.

Gender Relationship and Managerial Support and Work-Family Conflict

For men, working many hours to provide a stable income for the family is part of the 'good provider' role (Bernard 1981, Wallace 1999). Men see their paid work as a major contribution to their families despite the fact that their paid work may take time away from their families (Guttek, et al. 1991). According to Osherson and Dill (1983), men derive job satisfaction from salaries and prestige received, thereby, enabling them to fulfil their role as 'breadwinners' for the family. Thus, one may expect men to devote a greater amount of their time and energy to their work role and less time on their family life. Social support at work has a positive association with increased general health and well being (Thomas & Ganster 1995, Eagle, et al. 1998, O'Driscoll, Brough & Kalliath, 2004). It appears that the support of the individual responsible for the maintenance of one's psychological contract facilitates an employee's job satisfaction, which in turn, would have a positive effect on the experience of well being. Since men spend more time at work and given the positive impact of support at work particularly by the immediate superior, it would be logical to assume that managerial support would help reduce their work-family conflict. This line of thought is consistent with findings made by other researchers (Burke 1988, Goff, et al. 1990, Thomas & Ganster 1995, Anderson, et al. 2002). These underpinnings lead to the formulation of the third hypothesis.

H₃: The negative relationship between managerial support and work-family conflict will be stronger for men than women.

Gender and Spousal Support and Work-Family Conflict

Domestic responsibilities have been a large part of the female domain (Guttek, et al. 1991). According to Guttek, et al. (1991), women are expected to provide a stable home rather than financial security to their families. 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, et al. 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), and since women spent more time within the non work domain, spousal support would help buffer their work-family conflict. This line of thought is consistent with Arnott's (1972) findings that the support given by the husband is crucial in determining if the wife's employment had negative repercussions on the family. Coupled with this contention Bernas and Major (2000) argued that women who have spouses that offer support and nurturance will be less likely to experience stress in the family domain, leading to lower work-family conflict. In addition, past studies (Beutell & Greenhaus 1982, Berkowitz & Perkins 1984, Aryee 1992, Kim & Ling 2001, Anderson, et al. 2002) have demonstrated that a husband's support of his wife's career would be able to reduce her work-family conflict. From these theoretical and empirical foundations the following relationship is posited.

H₄: The negative relationship between spousal support and work-family conflict will be stronger for women than men.

These four hypotheses were evaluated with data from 185 married accountants who worked in Malaysia. The study design is described, next.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects and Site

Participants in the study comprised accountants. Accountants were selected on the premise that this profession entails high customer/client contact and are more likely to be vulnerable to work-family conflict as argued by Pasewark and Viator (2006). The non probability purposive sampling (Sekaran 2003) was chosen as the sampling design because the accountants had to fulfil certain criteria in order to qualify as respondents. These requirements included: (a) being married, (b) had at least one child, and (c) worked under the supervision of a manager. These accountants were derived from one particular state in northern Malaysia.

Procedure

Data in this study were collected via the use of mail questionnaires. In order to obtain the list of respondents for the study, an official letter accompanied by a brief proposal explaining the objectives of the study was initially sent to the head office of the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA) located in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Accountants in Malaysia have to register with this institution. After the application to conduct the research had been approved, a total of 500 questionnaires, cover letters, and self addressed stamped envelopes were personally delivered by the researcher to the officer in charge at the Institute. Distribution of the questionnaires to the respondents was subsequently made by mail from the Institution's head office. Respondents were given three weeks to answer the questionnaires as stated in the cover letter. Additionally, respondents were advised that all responses would be treated confidentially. After the stipulated period, a total of 185 useable questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 37 per cent.

Measurement

The predictor variables used in this study relate to managerial support and spousal support. Managerial support was gauged using six items adopted from Anderson, et al. (2002). Five items were utilised to measure spousal support of which four items were adopted from Phillips- Miller, Campbell, and Morrison (2000) while the remaining item was adopted from Erdwins, et al. (2001). Responses to the items were made on a five point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The criterion variable relates to work-family conflict measured using five items derived from Netemeyer, et al. (1996). Similarly, responses to these items were made on a five point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Analysis

Following the findings from earlier studies (Voydanoff 1988, Thomas & Ganster 1995, Eagle, et al. 1998, Kinnunen & Mauno 1998, Carnicer, et al. 2004) that work-family conflict can be influenced by personal factors such as age, education level, monthly income, job tenure, and organisational tenure, these variables were controlled in the statistical analyses. Hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression (Cohen & Cohen 1975).

RESULTS

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 illustrates the demographic profile of the sample. Of the 185 accountants surveyed, almost 65 per cent were females. In terms of age, 78.4 per cent of them were 36 years and above. Chinese accountants formed the majority (61.1 per cent) as compared to the other two major ethnic groups, Malays (29.7 per cent) and Indians (9.2 per cent). Almost 66 per cent of them were undergraduate degree holders. A majority of the respondents (57.3 per cent) earned RM 4,000 and above per month. About 61 per cent of the respondents have been working as accountants for 10 years and above. In terms of organisational tenure, 56.2 per cent of them have been in their current organisation between 4 to 6 years. About 54 per cent of the sample served in manufacturing companies. The dominance of female accountants is consistent with the occupational structure for Malaysian professionals as highlighted in the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010 (The Economic Planning Unit 2006). In addition, the findings concerning age, education, and working experience of Malaysian accountants surveyed are similar with those discovered by Ahmadi, Helms and Nodoushani (1995) on American accountants. In terms of racial composition, the dominance of Chinese as accountants may be reflective of their ethnic values associated with money and thrift as identified by Abdullah (1992). The 2004 data reported by Swee-Hock (2007) provided further support on the fact that a relatively high proportion of the employed Chinese were working as professionals including accountants as opposed to the Malays and Indians.

Table 1
Profile of the Sample % (N = 185)

Demographic Variables	Categories	%
Gender	Male	35.1
	Female	64.9
Age	26-35 years	35.1
	36-45 years	44.9
	46 years and above	33.5
Race	Malay	29.7
	Chinese	61.1
	Indian	9.2
Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	65.9
	Master's Degree	30.9
	PhD or equivalent	3.2
Monthly Income	RM 2000-2999	10.3
	RM 3,000-3,999	32.4
	RM 4,000-4,999	21.1
	RM 5,000-5,999	25.4
Job Tenure	RM 6,000 and above	10.8
	4-6 years	4.3
	7-9 years	34.6
Organisation Tenure	10 years and above	61.1
	3 years and below	22.7
	4-6 years	56.2
Type of Industry	7-9 years	5.4
	10 years and above	15.7
	Manufacturing	53.5
Employment Status of Spouse	Service	46.5
	Working	87.6
	Non Working	12.4

To enrich the categorical data pertaining to the demographic profile of the sample, cross tabulations were obtained. Table 2 portrays the results of the Chi-Square tests. Table 2 indicates that the major differences between the male and female groups were in terms of age, working spouse, and job tenure. Specifically, the female accountants sampled were older (36 years and above) as opposed to male accountants ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, there were more female accountants with working spouses as compared to male accountants ($p < 0.01$). In addition, there were more females who have served 10 years and above in comparison to males ($p < 0.05$). There were no significant differences between the male and female groups in terms of education, monthly income, and organisational tenure.

Table 2
Percentage Distribution of Sample by Gender Versus Other Selected Demographics

Variable Category	Frequency (%)												
	Age		Education		Monthly Income		Job Tenure		Organisational Tenure		Working Spouse		
	Young	Old	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	No	Yes	
Gender	Male (n = 65)	24 (36.9)	41 (63.1)	47 (72.3)	18 (27.7)	31 (47.7)	34 (52.3)	32 (49.2)	33 (50.8)	54 (83.1)	11 (16.9)	17 (26.2)	48 (73.8)
	Female (n = 120)	16 (13.3)	104 (86.7)	75 (62.5)	45 (37.5)	48 (40.0)	72 (60.0)	40 (33.3)	80 (66.7)	102 (85.0)	18 (15.0)	6 (5.0)	114 (95.0)
	χ^2	13.845**		1.806		1.020		4.482*		0.118		17.330**	

Notes:

a. For the sake of simplicity, the categorical demographic variables were recoded into two categories as follows: Age- Young (Less than 36 years), Education-Low (Bachelor's degree), Monthly income-Low (Less than RM 4,000), Job Tenure-Low (Less than 10 years), Organisation Tenure-Low (Less than 10 years), Working Spouse-No (Spouse not working).

b. ** $p < 0.01$, and * $p < 0.05$.

Factor Analyses of Study Variables

Principal component factor analyses using the varimax rotation option were used to examine the dimensionality of the study variables. Following Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998), factors with eigenvalues greater than one were selected. In addition, suggestion by Igbaria, Iivari and Maragahh (1995) were employed when interpreting the factors. Factor loadings of 0.50 or greater on one factor and 0.35 or lower on the other factors were adopted.

The factor analysis on the independent variables (managerial support and spousal support) is presented as Table 3. A two factor solution emerged explaining 76.99 per cent of the total variance in managerial support and spousal support. All items loaded on the appropriate factors. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.89 indicating sufficient intercorrelations while the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (Chi square = 1775.44, $p < 0.01$).

Table 3
Rotated Factors and Factor Loadings for the Manager Support and Spousal Support

Items	Factor	
	1	2
Managerial Support		
1. My manager is supportive when I have a work problem.	0.865	0.182
2. My manager is fair and does not show favouritism in responding to all employees' personal or family needs.	0.875	0.272
3. My manager accommodates me when I have family or personal business to take of (e.g., medical appointments, meeting with my child's teacher).	0.774	0.328

4.	My manager understands when I talk about my personal or family issues that affect my work.	0.824	0.105
5.	I feel comfortable bringing up personal or family issues with my manager.	0.842	0.077
6.	My manager really cares about the effects that my work demands have on my personal and family life.	0.808	0.180
Spousal Support			
7.	My spouse will always take the time to talk over my problems and give me the emotional support.	0.208	0.916
8.	My spouse will always give me the financial support.	0.180	0.828
9.	My spouse will always help in taking care of our children.	0.154	0.882
10.	My spouse will always help me in household tasks.	0.232	0.838
11.	I feel close to my spouse.	0.157	0.933
Eigenvalue		5.999	2.470
Percentage of variance		76.991	
KMO		0.894	
Approximate χ^2		1,775.443**	

Note: ** p < 0.01.

The result of the analysis on the dependent variable (work-family conflict) is shown as Table 4. All items loaded on to one factor where the total variance explained was 67.71 per cent. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.81 indicating sufficient inter-correlations while the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (Chi square = 531.38, p < 0.01).

Table 4
Factor Loadings for Work-Family Conflict

Items	Factor	
	Work-Family Conflict	
1. The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life.	0.885	
2. The amount of time my job takes up make it difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities.	0.841	
3. Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my jobs puts on me.	0.636	
4. My job produces strain that makes it difficult for me to fulfil my family duties.	0.864	
5. Due to work related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for my family activities.	0.863	
Eigenvalue		3.385
Percentage of variance		67.705
KMO		0.809
Approximate χ^2		531.378**

Note: **p < 0.01.

Table 5 depicts the descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities of the study variables. The mean values for managerial support, spousal support, and work-family conflict were 2.22, 2.27, and 4.02; respectively. And the standard deviation values for managerial support, spousal support, and work-family conflict were 0.71, 0.87, and 0.72; respectively. On the one hand this finding suggests that work-family conflict for the sample was high. On the other hand, respondents perceived managerial support and spousal support to be low. The Pearson's correlations between

the study variables ranges were significant, none of the values exceeded 0.80, which is the criterion for multicollinearity as recommended by Cooper and Schindler (2006). Both forms of support at work and home have negative correlations with work-family conflict, which supports the relationships that were predicted by H1 and H2. But support for H3 and H4 is only indicative despite the correlation coefficients for spousal support ($r = -0.607$, $p < 0.01$), and managerial support ($r = -0.590$, $p < 0.01$), which were from a sample that was predominantly female. The reliability coefficients for work-family conflict, managerial support and spousal support were 0.88, 0.92, and 0.94; respectively, which exceed Nunnally's (1978) recommended threshold of 0.70. Hence, the contention the instruments used in this survey were both reliable, and valid as demonstrated by the factor analyses results.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities of the
Study Variables (N = 185)

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3
1. Managerial Support	2.218	0.713	(0.923)		
2. Spousal Support	2.274	0.873	0.415**	(0.941)	
3. Work-Family Conflict	4.017	0.723	-0.590**	-0.607**	(0.876)

Notes:

a. S.D. = Standard deviations of the means.

b. Values in parentheses are the reliabilities.

c. ** $p < 0.01$.

Hierarchical regression analyses more vigorously tested the hypotheses, and Table 6 shows the results. From the first equation, control variables were able to explain 24.7 per cent of workfamily conflict ($R^2 = 0.247$). Job tenure alone was significantly and negatively related to workfamily conflict whereby individuals with longer job tenure (10 years and above) experienced higher work-family conflict. By adding the two independent variables in the second equation, R^2 increased to 61.8 per cent. This R^2 change (0.371) is significant. This result implies that an additional 37.1 per cent of the variation in work-family conflict was being explained by the two forms of support (managerial and spousal). Managerial support ($\beta = -0.396$) and spousal support ($\beta = -0.370$) were significantly and negatively related to work-family conflict ($p < 0.01$). These results provided support for H1 and H2. However, the negative impact of managerial support on work-family conflict was greater than that of spousal support.

Table 6
Regression Results

Independent Variables	Work-Family Conflict			
	Std Beta (Model 1)	Std Beta (Model 2)	Std Beta (Model 3)	Std Beta (Model 4)
Control Variables				
Age (1 = Less than 36 years)	-0.155	-0.164**	-0.150*	-0.167**
Highest Education Level (1 = Master's degree and PhD or equivalent)	0.080	-0.016	-0.016	0.053
Monthly Income (1 = Less than RM 4,000)	0.030	-0.029	-0.025	0.045
Job Tenure (1 = Less than 10 years)	-0.390**	-0.214**	-0.221**	-0.228**
Organisational Tenure (1 = Less than 10 years)	0.038	-0.065	-0.062	-0.036
Model Variables				
Managerial Support		-0.396**	-0.382**	0.038
Spousal Support		-0.370**	-0.348**	-0.081
Moderating Variable				

			-0.057	1.596**
Interaction Terms				
Managerial Support x Gender				-1.455**
Spousal Support x Gender				-0.628**
R ²	0.247	0.618	0.620	0.794
Adj. R ²	0.226	0.602	0.602	0.782
R ² Change	0.247	0.370	0.002	0.174
F Change	0.000	0.000	0.322	0.000

Note: ** p < 0.01, and * p < 0.05.

In the third step of the analyses, gender coded into two categories (0 = male; 1 = female) was entered into the equation in order to gauge its impact as an independent predictor. The R² increased from 61.8 per cent to 62 per cent indicating a change of 0.2 per cent. This change, however, was non significant. To test the moderating effects of gender interaction terms were created by multiplying each of the support variables by gender. These interaction terms were added into the fourth regression model. As shown in Table 6, the additional variance explained by the interaction terms (17.4 per cent) was significant (p < 0.01) indicating the presence of moderation effects. Both interaction terms (Managerial Support x Gender and Spousal Support x Gender) were significant (p < 0.01).

Moderating Effects of Gender

To portray the interactions between gender and each facet of support more clearly, graphs were drawn. The support facets (managerial and spousal) were recorded into three categories (Low, Moderate, and High). This was done by dividing the respondents into three approximately equal group using percentile (0 - 33 per cent = Low, 33.1 - 66 per cent = Medium, and 66.1 - 100 per cent = High). The results of the significant interactions are shown as in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1

Moderating Effect of Gender on the Relationship between Managerial Support and Work-Family Conflict

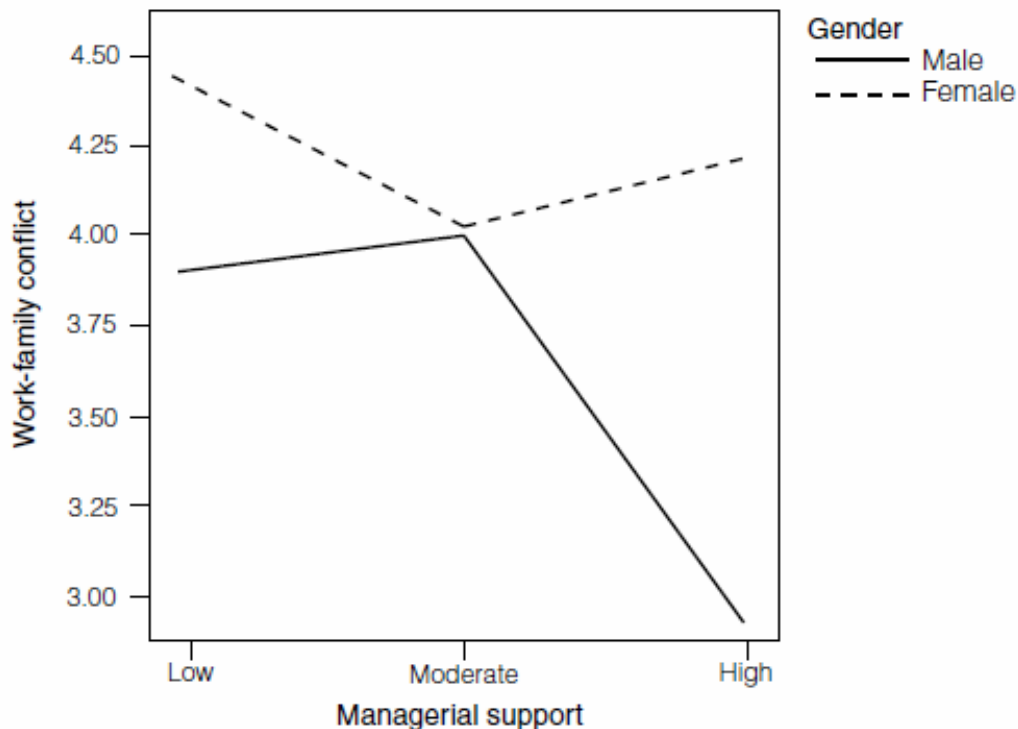


Figure 1 illustrates work-family conflict experienced by men shows a slight increasing trend when the managerial support level is low to moderate and a drastic decreasing one when the managerial

support level moves from moderate to high. For women, work-family conflict decreases with low to moderate managerial support. There is no significant difference in their work-family conflict level as managerial support moves from moderate to high, thereby, providing support for H_3 .

Figure 2

Moderating Effect of Gender on the Relationship between Spousal Support and Work-Family Conflict

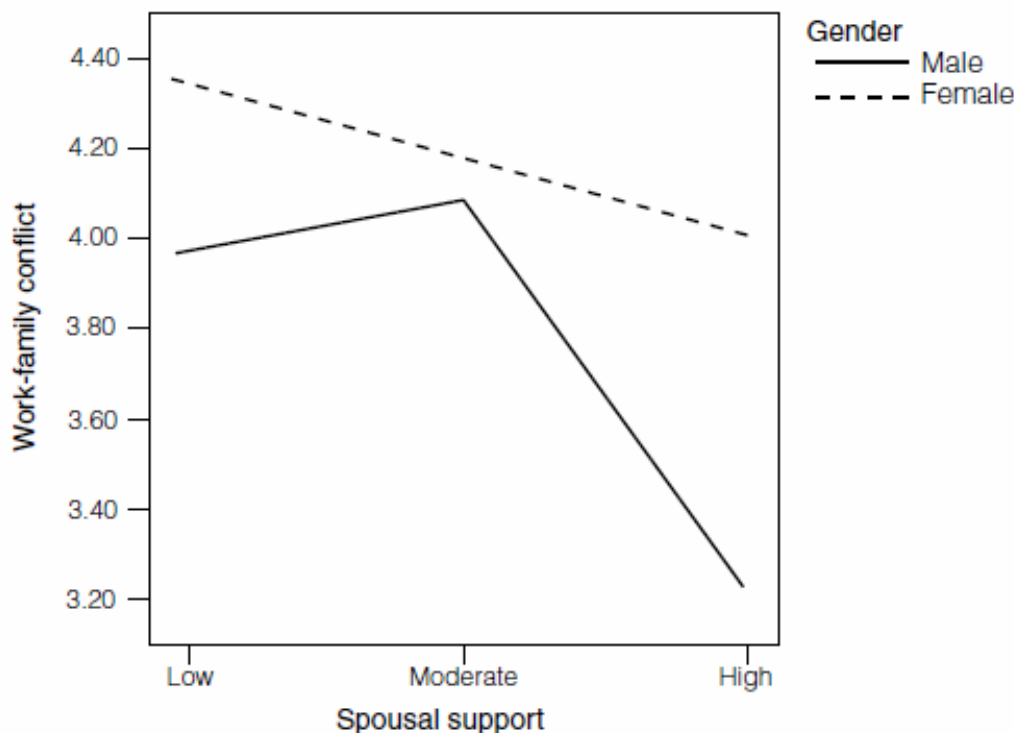


Figure 2 shows work-family conflict experienced by men shows a slight increasing trend when the spousal support level ranges from low to moderate, but decreases sharply when the spousal support level moves from moderate high. For women, work-family conflict decreases gradually as the spousal support level moves from low to high. These results do not support H_4 .

DISCUSSION

The profile of the accountants sampled indicates that there were more females than males despite a tradition of the accounting profession being male dominated. This interesting feature suggests that societal norms in Malaysia are changing where traditional values about women are being replaced with more contemporary ones as noted by Koshal, et al. (1998). Until the 1960s, a commonly held belief was that women are ideally suited as housewives, and when educated, they should work as teachers, nurses, or in other similar ‘feminine’ occupations (Koshal, et al. 1998). After 1970, there was a positive movement in women’s involvement in paid employment. Several factors have contributed to this shift. First, with the launching of the new economic policy in 1970, when Malaysia embarked on a programme of rapid economic development, whereby rural women were allowed to make a transition from the rural, agrarian economy to modern sector paid employment (Mansor 1994). Second, rapid industrialisation in the 1970s has encouraged foreign investments and the establishment of manufacturing companies, thereby, creating new job opportunities for women, particularly in labour intensive industries (Mansor 1994). Third, easy and equal access to education at every level (primary, secondary, and tertiary), has resulted in more women obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in the labour force (Mansor 1994). Today, with changing role expectations, higher educational achievements, coupled with other supportive governmental policies, it is not surprising that the proportion of employed women, particularly professionals, exceeded men in the study sample.

With regards to the first study objective the results indicate that both managerial support and spousal support have negative relationships with work-family conflict. The finding of a negative relationship between managerial support and work-family conflict was consistent with previous

researchers (Goff, et al. 1990, Thomas & Ganster 1995, Erdwins, et al. 2001). In other words, the more employees perceived a lack of managerial support at the workplace, the more likely they experienced work-family conflict. Supportive and understanding managers will make work situations less stressful. For many married employees, managerial support is essential in reducing the negative spillover effect from work to home life. Thus, managers who are willing to accommodate employees' work and family demands (e.g., reduce work overtime, approve emergency family leave, and responsive in dealing with employees' family issues) has potential to help reduce the occurrences of employees' work-family conflict.

Spousal support was found to be negatively related to work-family conflict. This finding was similar with prior studies (Erdwins, et al. 2001, Lee & Choo 2001, Kirrane & Buckley 2004). Work-family conflict is likely to be decreased for an individual whose spouse is able to provide financial support, helps in the household chores, and engages in child care activities in the family. Getting a spouse's support will reduce the negative spillover effect from family to work. Subsequently, work-family conflict will be lowered.

The second aim of the study was to test whether gender moderates the relationship between the antecedent variables and work-family conflict. The findings indicate that gender moderated the relationship between managerial support and work-family conflict. For men, when the managerial support level is low to moderate, their work-family conflict level showed an increasing trend. In contrast, a rapid decreasing pattern emerged when managerial support level moves from moderate to high. The need for greater managerial support in decreasing work-family conflict for male accountants may be due to their 'good provider' role, and in their bid to take care of their family, these individuals have to progress in their careers. As such, they may need to spend more time and energy at work and be more involved in their job. Hence, various forms of support accorded by their immediate superiors (managers) would be able to reduce the spillover of work demands into their family life, thus, lowering work-family conflict. For women, work-family conflict decreases with low to moderate managerial support level. However, there was a non significant difference in work-family conflict as the managerial support level moves from moderate to high. This finding suggests that there is a limit to the effect of managerial support in reducing work-family conflict for women. In this study, the female accountants were relatively older than males. More matured female professionals may have developed better coping strategies in handling their work-family situation. Thus, even though managerial support serves to mitigate work-family conflict, the effect of this variable may not be salient.

Gender also served as a moderator in the relationship between spousal support and work-family conflict. Work-family conflict experienced by men showed an increasing trend when spousal support ranged from low to moderate. The study results revealed a drastic reduction in work-family conflict when the level of spousal support moved from moderate to high. The need for greater spousal support in minimising work-family conflict for men may be related to the attributes of the sample. The male accountants surveyed were relatively young, and many have non-working spouses. For these individuals, in their effort to fulfil their role as 'breadwinner' for the family, the need for material wealth may supersede other needs. Hence, emotional support (example, nurturance) and behavioural support (example, doing household chores) may be deemed as insufficient. Additional support, in the form of financial assistance, that is likely to be provided by working spouses, could be viewed as more instrumental in achieving their life goals. For women, work-family conflict decreases gradually as the spousal support level moves from low to high. This finding suggests that spousal support has a mitigating effect on the level of work-conflict experienced by women regardless of level. This is understandable given that a majority of the female accountants surveyed have working spouses as opposed to male accountants. Past scholars (Voydanoff 1988, Parasuraman, Greenhaus & Granrose 1992, Wallace 1999) have shown that dual career couples are more prone to experience stress and strain because both partners are simultaneously trying to balance the demands of two careers with those of their family. Hence, the need for additional social support is likely to become greater.

From the practical standpoint the findings from this research suggest that social support, which

consists of managerial support (at the workplace) and spousal support (at home) is vital in improving work-family integration and subsequently reducing work-family conflict. It is evident from the findings that organisational authorities concerned with lowering work-family conflict need to provide supportive leadership. Specifically, managers who are supportive, sympathetic, and considerate are influential in reducing strain associated with work-family problems. For example, a manager's willingness to permit even limited flexibility in the time employees begin and end their workday can reduce their stress level. In addition, managers that adopt supportive attitudes about work-family issues are likely to encourage employees to participate in family-friendly policies and programmes offered by their employer. Since the presence of supportive managers has been associated with a variety of positive work outcomes (such as increased job satisfaction, increased commitment, and reduced turnover intentions), human resource practitioners are wise to train managers to be aware of and able to implement a family supportive work environment.

The finding from this study suggests that spousal support is most essential in reducing work-family conflict among professionals, especially males. There is an expectation that a spouse should be able to provide financial support (e.g., paying household bills, children's school fees, and other family financial matters), instrumental support (e.g., childcare activities, shopping for household necessities, household chores, and household maintenance), and emotional support (e.g., giving advice, counselling, and caring about partner's career path) in running a family. For dual career couples, supportive relationships in the form of effective communication as well as mutual understanding between husband and wife are important in minimising work-family conflict.

Findings concerning the role of gender in moderating the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable provide additional insights into how the effects of support (at work and at home) on work-family conflict varies according to gender. Generally, supportive work environment (in the form of managerial support) and supportive home environment (in the form of spousal support) are necessary in diminishing work-family conflict among married professional employees. This is even more so for men.

Boundary Conditions

The current study has boundary conditions. First, even though the focus on accountants allowed for controlling homogeneity, the generalisability of the reported results may be equivocal, because accountants may be different from other career professionals. For this reason, further research is advocated in other employment settings. Second, this study makes use of cross sectional data, which constrains the ability to make definitive statements about the possible causal effects of the chosen independent variables on work-family conflict. Hence, future researchers are encouraged to consider longitudinal studies. As argued by O'Driscoll, et al. (2004), the use of a longitudinal approach would essentially be able to determine whether the effects of the predictor variables persist over time. Third, only the support variables arising from the work and family domains were investigated in this study. Although the R^2 values reported in this study were quite robust, existing research indicates that other variables arising from the work domain (such as, time commitment to work and work role expectations) as well as those arising from the family domain (such as time commitment to family and family role expectation), may be equally important in predicting work-family conflict. Hence, future researchers may want to explore these variables in order to increase the proportion of unexplained variance in work-family conflict.

CONCLUSION

This study represents a relatively modest attempt to investigate the effects of support from two important life domains ('work' and 'home') on work-family conflict within the Malaysian context. The results of this study illustrated that supportive work environment (in the form of managerial support) and supportive home environment (in the form of spousal support) were inversely associated with work-family conflict. In addition, it was found that the effects of these forms of

support differ according to gender. For men, greater managerial support was able to reduce their workfamily conflict. For women, the negative impact of managerial support on work-family conflict was somewhat equivocal. The role of spousal support in decreasing work-family conflict was greater for men than women. Despite its limitations, it has been able to contribute to the literature on workfamily conflict. Using a non Western sample to test the study hypotheses, it has been possible to expand the applicability of findings made in Western societies (Goff, et al. 1990, Thomas & Ganster 1995, Erdwins, et al. 2001, Lee & Choo 2001, Anderson, et al. 2002, Kirrane & Buckley 2004) as the Malaysian context is more aligned to an Eastern oriented culture.

There are potentially important human resource implications from the findings of this research. Primarily, to alleviate the problem of conflict arising from the work-family interface, firms in Malaysia and elsewhere, and particularly those in the accounting profession, are encouraged to seek to establish a workplace climate that helps their employees succeed in balancing their career aspirations with family obligations. The issue of balancing commitment to work and family will continue to become more intense with the increasing number of women joining the professional labour force. In this regard, managers as agents of the organisation have the responsible function of playing a more active role in providing emotional and instrumental support to their subordinates. This activity can be achieved through increased empathy and flexibility on the part of the manager in handling employees' work-family matters. In terms of organisational actions, it is likely that training will make managers more aware of the benefits associated with reducing work-family conflict. Moreover, understanding how men and women differ in their experiences of work-family conflict may equip human resource practitioners with the knowledge base to develop more effective workplace family friendly policies and practices. In fact, the kind of support offered by these firms will have a strategic edge in attracting more qualified candidate to the profession.

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