

Work-Family Conflict and Family and Job Resources among Women: The Role of Negotiation

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Abstract : Work-family conflict (WFC) is a significant source of stress for contemporary employees, with research indicating its heightened severity for women. The conservation of resources theory argues that individuals experience stress when their resources fall short of demands, and attempt to reach balance by obtaining resources. Presumably then, to achieve work-family balance women would need to negotiate for resources such as spouse support, employer support and work flexibility. The current research tested the hypotheses that competent negotiation at home and at work associated with increased family and job resources and with decreased WFC, as well as with higher work, marital and life satisfaction. In the first study, 113 employed mothers, married or cohabiting, reported to what extent they conducted satisfactory negotiation with spouse over division of housework, and their actual housework load compared to spouse. They answered a WFC questionnaire, measuring how much work interferes with family (WIF) and how much family interferes with work (FIW), and finally, measurements of satisfaction. In the second study, 94 employed mothers, married or cohabiting reported to what extent they conducted satisfactory negotiation with their boss over balancing work demands with family needs. They reported the levels of three job resources: flexibility, control and family-friendly organizational culture. Finally, they answered the same WFC and satisfaction measurements from study 1. Statistical analyses –t-tests, correlations, and hierarchical linear regressions- showed that in both studies, women reported higher WIF than FIW. Negotiations associated with increased resources: support from spouse, work flexibility and control and a family-friendly culture; negotiation with spouse associated also with satisfaction measurements. However, negotiations or resources (except family-friendly culture) did not associate with reduced conflict. The studies demonstrate the role of negotiation in obtaining family and job resources. Causation cannot be determined, but the fact is that employed mothers who enjoyed more support (at both home and work), flexibility and control, were more likely to keep active interactions to increase them. This finding has theoretical and practical implications, especially in view of research on female avoidance of negotiation. It is intriguing that negotiations and resources generally did not associate with reduced WFC. This finding might reflect the severity of the conflict, especially of work interfering with family, which characterizes many contemporary jobs. It might also suggest that employed mothers have high expectations from themselves, and even under supportive circumstances, experience the challenge of balancing two significant and demanding roles. The research contributes to the fields of negotiation, gender, and work-life balance. It calls for further studies, to test its model in additional populations and validate the role employees have in actively negotiating for the balance that they need. It also calls for further research to understand the contributions of job and family resources to reducing work-family conflict, and the circumstances under which they contribute.

Keywords : work-family conflict, work-life balance, negotiation, gender, job resources, family resources

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