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Perceived Workplace Culture as an Antecedent of Job Stress: The Mediating Role of Work-Family Conflict

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Abstract: Problem statement: Few studies have tested the mediating effect of work-family conflict on the relationship between workplace culture and job stress. **Approach:** This study tested a mediation model consisting of job stress as the dependent variable, perceived family-supportive work culture as the independent variable and work-family conflict as the mediator. Data were gathered from 693 employees from private service organizations in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, using self-administered questionnaires. The data were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression analyses. **Results:** Results of correlation analysis revealed that perceived family-supportive work culture was related to work-family conflict and job stress and work-family conflict was related to job stress. Results of a series of multiple regression analyses indicated that work-family conflict partially mediates the relationship between perceived family-supportive work culture and job stress. **Conclusion/Recommendations:** Employees who perceive that their organizations are family-supportive seem to experience less stress at the workplace and less work-family conflict. Employers should take into consideration employees' perceptions of how supportive the organization is of their family needs as a factor that could reduce the experience of work-family conflict and job stress. Employers should also look into the possibility of developing programmes to assist employees in managing work-family roles.

Key words: Family-supportive work culture, work-family conflict, job stress

INTRODUCTION

Workplace culture is critical for balancing work and family life and for the past decade family-supportive work culture has been given more attention by researchers. Thompson *et al*. (1999) introduced the concept of work-family culture which refers to the shared assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports and values the work-family integration of employees. This concept includes three dimensions namely, managerial support for work-family balance, career consequences associated with utilizing work-family benefits and organizational time expectations that may interfere with family responsibilities. Another similar concept, organizational family support, refers to the organization's interest in helping employees achieve work-life balance and it encompasses work-family policies and practices offered by an organization (Allen, 2001). However, simply offering work-life programs does not necessarily mean that employees find the organization supportive of their work-life needs (Thompson *et al*., 1999; Allen and Russell, 1999). It is important to examine employee perceptions of organizational support. To examine organizational support for work-family integration, Allen (2001) investigated the role of perceptions of both family-supportive supervisors and family-supportive organizations, which is referred to as family-supportive organization perceptions. Besides these researchers, Jahn *et al*. (2003) have provided a conceptual definition of perceived organizational family support which measures employees' perceptions of how supportive the organization is of their work-life needs. As described in Jahn *et al*. (2003), perceived organizational family support is comprised of two dimensions of support: (1) tangible support, which taps perceptions of instrumental and informational support and (2) intangible support, which taps perceptions of emotional support. Organizational support has been associated with negative outcomes including job stress and work-family conflict (Zeytinoglu *et al*., 2007; Dikkers *et al*., 2007).

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Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of workplace culture and studies examining employees' perceptions towards family-supportive culture, there is still a need to examine the role of perceived workplace culture in reducing negative outcomes such as work-family conflict and job stress.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of family-supportive work culture in reducing job stress and the mediating role of work-family conflict. The present study is grounded in the theory of Conservation Of Resources (COR) Hobfoll (1989) which offers a theoretical guide to understanding the outcomes of organizational family support. The COR theory proposes that individuals seek to acquire and maintain resources to reduce stress. Stress is a reaction to an environment in which there is the threat of a loss of resources, an actual loss in resources, or lack of an expected gain in resources. Resources include objects, conditions, personal characteristics and energies. Family-supportive work culture is a resource and the loss of this resource, or the threat of such a loss, may cause the experience of stress such as job stress. The supportive culture could also reduce work-family conflict which in turn could lead to job stress because resources are lost in the process of juggling both work and family roles.

Perceived family-supportive work culture and job stress: Perceived organizational support refers to employees' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger *et al*., 1986). Thompson and Prottas (2005) analyzed data from the 2002 National study of the changing workforce (N = 3,504) to investigate relationships among availability of formal organizational family support (family benefits and alternative schedules), informal organizational support (work-family culture, supervisor support and coworker support) and employee well-being. The researchers found that the availability of informal organizational support was associated with reduced job stress. Although research specifically on the relationship between perceived organizational support and job stress is limited, there are a number of researches that have been conducted on perceived social support and stress.

Bozo *et al*. (2009) examined the effects of perceived social support on the level of depression among elderly Turkish people. The researchers hypothesized that a higher level of perceived social support would predict a lower level of depression. The results indicated that higher perceived social support predicted lower depression. Hauck *et al*. (2008) investigated the role of social support as a potential means of reducing job stress. The provision of social support decreased job stress significantly. A study on the association between organizational support and stress which focused on nurses in three teaching hospitals in Ontario was conducted by Zeytinoglu *et al*. (2007). The results showed that the nurses felt their work had intensified since the health sector reform of the 1990sand work intensification contributed to increased stress and that organizational support decreased job stress. Since empirical evidence seems to support the relationship between organizational support and stress, the following hypothesis was tested:

H1: There is a significant correlation between perceived family-supportive work culture and work-family conflict

Perceived family-supportive work culture and work-family conflict: Previous findings have indicated that employees working in an environment perceived as more family-friendly reported less work-family conflict (Allen, 2001; Dikkers *et al*., 2007; Thompson *et al*., 2004; Grandey *et al*., 2007; Lapierre *et al*., 2008). This supports the view that perceptions of the study environment play a unique role in explaining work-family conflict. This reinforced the idea that work environments viewed as more family-supportive could reduce employees' fear that devoting time and energy to their family could hurt their career. In testing her instrument, Allen (2001), examined employee perceptions regarding the extent to which their work organization is family-supportive. Data gathered from employees in a variety of occupations and organizations indicated that family-supportive organization perceptions related significantly to work-family conflict. Meanwhile, Thompson *et al*. (2004) using multilevel, longitudinal research design examined employees' perceived family support from their supervisors and organization and the results indicated that the more support they perceived the less work-family conflict they experienced.

Dikkers *et al*. (2007) examined the associations of work-home culture with work-family conflict, among 1,179 employees from one public and two private organizations. They concluded that if employers want to minimize the conflict, to optimize positive study-home interaction and to boost the use of work-home arrangements, they should create a work-home culture that is characterized by high support and low hindrance. Lapierre *et al.* (2008) in their study using samples of managers drawn from five Western countries, tested a theoretical model linking employees' perceptions of

their work environment's family-supportiveness to 6 different dimensions of work-family conflict. They found that employees working in an environment viewed as more family-supportive experience lower levels of conflict.

Grandey *et al*. (2007) examined whether organizational perceptions of family supportiveness predict work-family conflict for a typical sample of male hourly workers in a manufacturing organization and whether those relationships depend on work (number of work hours) and family (number of family roles) demands. They found that family-supportive organization perceptions were strongly related to work-family conflict. An interaction was found such that those working long hours in the family-supportive work environment had lower work-family conflict than those working long hours in an unsupportive environment. Hence, family-supportive organization perceptions may be an important indicator of whether employees' work environment is instrumental in reducing work-family conflict and the following hypothesis was tested:

H2: There is a significant correlation between perceived family-supportive work culture and work-family conflict

Work-family conflict and job stress: Several studies have examined the relationship between work-family conflict and job stress. Vinokur *et al*. (1999) examined the effects of work and family stressors and conflict on Air Force women's mental health and functioning. They analyzed data from a 1993 survey of Air Force women from the active duty reserve and guard forces. The finding demonstrated that job stress had direct effects on work-family conflict. Meanwhile, Judge and Colquitt (2004) examined the relationship between work-family conflict and job stress among faculty members employed in 23 US universities. The results revealed that work-family conflict had a strong relationship with job stress.

Kreiner (2006) demonstrated how the interaction between an individual's work-home segmentation preference and the perceived segmentation provided by the workplace affects work-home conflict and job stress. Using a person-environment fit theoretical base and data from employees in a wide variety of occupations and organizations, the results show that work-home conflict was significantly related to job stress. Since work-family conflict could be an indicator of whether employees' experience job stress, the following hypothesis was tested:

H3: There is a significant correlation between work-family conflict and job stress

Work-family conflict as a mediator: Besides examining the magnitude of the perceived family-supportive work culture and job stress linkage, this present study also examined the mediating role played by work-family conflict in this relationship. Based on the literature review as has been discussed earlier, perceived family-supportive work culture is related to work-family conflict and the latter is also related to job stress. According to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), one could argue that changes in the level of perceived family-supportive work culture could lead to changes in the levels of work-family conflict which in turn could lead to changes in the levels of job stress. Based on previous findings and the COR theory, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Work-family conflict mediates the relationship between perceived family-supportive work culture and job stress

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample: A total of 693 employees from private service organizations in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, participated in this study. Only organizations with a minimum of 100 employees were included in this study since larger organizations are more likely to provide family-friendly policies such as flexible work and child care arrangements than smaller organizations, while smaller organizations will adhere to basic requirements such as leave arrangement and medical coverage (Wood *et al*., 2003; Tomlinson, 2007). According to Poelmans *et al*. (2003), the adoption of these policies depends on several factors including organizational size. Forty employees from three categories, namely (1) managerial and executive, (2) supervisory and technical and 93) clerical and other support staff, were randomly selected from each organization, 10 from the first category, 10 from the second category and 20 from the third category.

Measurement:

Family-supportive work culture: Family-supportive work culture was measured using 18 items from the work-family culture scale developed by Thompson *et al*. (1999). Three dimensions of work-family culture were measured, namely managerial support, career consequences and organizational time demand. For each support scale, items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree; scores were reverse coded so that high scores represented more managerial support, career consequences and organizational time demand.

Examples of items are: "In general, managers in this organization are quite accommodating of family-related needs" and "In this organization, employees are encouraged to strike a balance between their work and family lives". The reliability coefficient of the scale was (92).

Job stress: Job stress refers to harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker (Sauter et al., 1999). Job stress was measured using 10 items from Addae and Wang (2006). The scale consists of two dimensions, namely time pressure and anxiety. The employees were requested to respond using five-point scaled response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Examples of items include "I spend so much time at work, I can't even take a simple walk to relax" and "Sometimes when I think about my job I get a tight feeling in my chest". The reliability coefficient of the scale was (92).

Work-family conflict: Work-family conflict refers to Kahn *et al*. (1964), work-family conflict is a type of interrole conflict in which pressures in the work role are incompatible with pressures in the family role. Work-family conflict was measured using 4 items from the instrument developed by Kopelman *et al*. (1983). The employees were requested to respond using five-point scaled response options ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Examples of items are: "My work takes up time that I'd like to spend with my family" and "My family dislikes how often I am preoccupied with my work while I'm at home". The reliability coefficient of the scale was (81).

Statistical analysis: Descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the main characteristic of the subjects. Correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among family-supportive work culture, work-family conflict and job stress. A series of regression analyses was employed to test the hypotheses of the study. Baron and Kenny (1986) recommended the use of a series of regression models to test meditational hypotheses. First, regressing the mediator on the independent variable; second, regressing the dependent variable on the mediator; third, regressing the independent variables on the dependent variables and fourth, regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and the mediator.

The following are the four conditions for establishing mediation: (1) The independent variable significantly affects the dependent variable; (2) The independent variable significantly affects the mediator; (3) The mediator significantly affects the dependent variable; (4) The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable shrinks upon the addition of the mediator to the model. If the independent variable does not affect the dependent variable upon regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and the mediator, then full mediation is established. If otherwise, the test supports partial mediation.

RESULTS

The respondents' age ranged from 18-57 years (M = 32.35, SD = 8.56) with almost half (47.7) of them aged between 26-35. There were about equal proportions of females (50.5%) and males (49.5%). Non-executives constituted 49.9% of the total respondents, the executives 23.2%, supervisors 16.2% and managerial staff 8.9% (Table 1). The mean score for perceived family-supportive work culture was 3.25 (SD = .43), job stress 2.52 (SD = 0.81), work-family conflict 2.70 (SD = 0.76) (Table 2)

Correlational analysis results revealed that there were significant correlations between perceived family-supportive work culture and work-family conflict ($r = -0.50$, $p<0.01$) and job stress ($r = -0.43$, $p<0.01$) (Table 2). Work-family conflict was significantly related to job stress ($r = 0.63$, $p<0.01$) (Table 2).

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Age (years) (n = 680)			32.35	8.563
≤25 years old	154	22.6		
26-35 years old	324	47.7		
36-45 years old	132	19.4		
46-55 years old	67	9.9		
≥ 55 years old	3	0.4		
Gender (n = 693)				
Male	343	49.5		
Female	350	50.5		
Job category (n = 684)				
Managerial and executive	220	32.1		
Supervisory and technical	111	16.2		
Clerical and other support staff	353	51.7		

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the variables

Variable	1	2	3	Mean	SD
Job stress	1.00			2.52	0.81
Work-family conflict	0.63**	10.00	2.70	0.76	
Perceived family-supportive work culture	-0.43**	-0.50**	1.00	3.25	0.43

**: <0.01

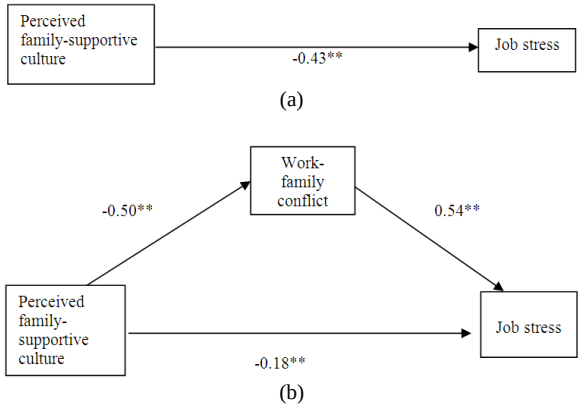

Fig. 1: Regression analysis results (N = 793). (a) Portrays the simple model of perceived family-supportive work culture and job stress; (b) Depicts the full model that includes work-family conflict as the mediator

The results show that an increase in employees' scores of perceived family-supportive work culture leads to a decrease in work-family conflict as well as job stress. A decrease in work-family conflict leads to a decrease in job stress. These results support H1-H3.

Figure 1 portrays the results of the regression analyses testing whether the relationship between perceived family-supportive work culture and job stress is mediated by work-family conflict:

Step 1: The effect of perceived supportive culture and job stress (Fig.1a) is statistically significant (β = -0.43, p<.01), satisfying step 1 of Baron and Kenny's method

Step 2: The statistically significant effect of perceived supportive culture on work-family conflict (β = -0.50, p<0.01) (Fig. 1b), meets the stipulation of this step

Step 3: The effect of work-family conflict on job stress is statistically significant (β = 0.63, p<0.01). This relationship is independent of the association between perceived supportive culture and job stress

Step 4: The effect of perceived supportive culture on job stress shrinks upon the addition of work-family (the mediator) to the model (bottom of Fig. 1b), (β = -0.18, p<0.01) and this is consistent with mediation. Since the perceived supportive culture does affect the job stress upon regressing the job stress on both perceived supportive culture and on work-family conflict, then partial mediation is established. Hence, the results support H4

The regression analysis between perceived supportive culture and job stress has an R^2 of 0.19. Adding work-family conflict to the model increases the value of R^2 to 0.41. Thus the change in R^2 associated with adding work-family conflict is 0.22. The inclusion of work-family conflict in the model accounts for an additional 22% of the variance in job stress.

DISCUSSION

The findings that perceived family-supportive work culture is a significant and positive predictor of job stress has also been reported by Thompson and Prottas (2005) and the social support-stress relationship has also been reported by other researchers (Zeytinoglu *et al*., 2007; Dikkers *et al*., 2007; Bozo *et al*., 2009; Hauck *et al*., 2008). The findings of this study show that the employees who perceive that if their organizations are supportive of employees' family needs experience lower levels of job stress. With regard to perceived family-supportive work culture and its association with work-family conflict, this study found that an increase in perceived support by managers or organizations led to a decrease in work-family conflict. These findings are consistent with the findings of Dikkers *et al*. (2007) and Grandey *et al*. (2007). Similar findings have also been reported by Thompson *et al*. (2004). In other words, employees who perceive that their managers and organizations are more sensitive to employees' family needs seem to experience less work-family conflict. In addition, employees who perceive that there will be less likelihood of negative career consequences associated with utilizing work-family benefits and that organizational time expectations may not interfere with family responsibilities tend to experience reduced intensity of conflict.

The significant relationship between work-family conflict and job stress is consistent with the results reported by Judge and Colquitt (2004) whereby individuals who reported higher intensities of work-

family conflict tended to experience higher levels of job stress. Similar findings have also been reported by Kreiner (2006).

With regard to the mediating effect of work-family conflict in the relationship between perceived family-supportive work culture and job stress, the results show that employees with more positive perceptions of organizational support tend to experience lower intensity of conflict and this would in turn decrease their levels of job stress. Theoretically, the findings have shown that the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) could help explain the model whereby family-supportive work culture is a resource and the loss of this resource, or the threat of such a loss, may cause the experience of stress such as job stress. The supportive culture could also reduce work-family conflict which in turn could lead to job stress because resources are lost in the process of juggling both work and family roles. The results support the belief that perceived organizational support is a significant resource associated with improved work-family balance and reduced stress.

The findings of this study have important implications for organizations. The findings demonstrate that employees' perception of organizations' family-supportive culture is an important factor that is related to employees' experiences of work-family conflict and job stress. Given that job stress has been found to have adverse effects such as poor mental health (LaMontagne *et al*., 2008), coronary heart disease (Lee *et al*., 2002) and negative work behavior (Mojoyinola, 2008), identifying factors that that can explain sources of job stress is an important attempt. Employers should also look into the possibility of developing family-friendly practices that are sensitive to employee family needs to assist employees in managing work and family roles such that employees will not be hesitant in associating themselves with such practices since there will be no negative career consequences. Employers should not pressure employees to work long hours and link the latter to career prospects, as this may promote more supportive perceptions and improve work-family balance.

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, a significant limitation of the present investigation is the sample size that was utilized. The results reported here may only be generalized to employees working in private service organizations located in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Caution must be exercised in generalizing the findings from this sample to employees in other organizations such as manufacturing organizations. There is also a need for future researchers to examine the work culture perceptions and its effects on employees' work-family interface and psychological well-being in other industries such as the manufacturing industry which is another important industry in Malaysia. Second, the inferences drawn from this study are limited by self-report data and cross-sectional characteristics of the data.

CONCLUSION

We could conclude that perceptions of family-supportive work culture is an important antecedent of job stress and work-family conflict is a mediator in this supportive culture-stress relationship. An employee who perceives that there exists family-supportive culture in an organization, characterized by high responsiveness to work-family issues, seems to experience less job stress and improved work-family balance.

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