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## Subjectively perceived negative consequences of work-family interface among employed parents

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### ABSTRACT

The field of work-family interface research is focused mainly on the issue of role conflict that results from active participation in both, work and family area. Conflict between work and family is defined as a negative interference in the direction from work domain to the family domain (work interferes with family) and in the opposite direction (family interferes with work) and results from 1. (lack of) time, 2. strain, 3. (inadequate) behavior patterns. The current research included 45 couples, which were married or in a relationship where both, the male and female are employed and nurturing at least one child in age between three and twelve years. Subjectively perceived negative aspects of linking work and family roles were examined through structured interviews. As content analysis of responses indicates, the most perceived negative consequence of work-family interface is time-based conflict. Employed parents also perceive the transfer of strain and negative affects between domains.

### KEY WORDS

work role, family role, negative aspects of work/family interface, work/family conflict

JEL Code: J00, J29, M12, M50

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The field of work-family interface research is concentrated mainly on the issue of role conflict (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Given the fact that each individual fulfils different roles, he or she could be simultaneously exposed to competitive expectations; role conflict arises when expectations of one role interfere with the ability to adequately fulfill the duties of another role. Stressors experienced in one domain are the primary source of tension; they are linked to a decrease in other domains performance (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1997) and the research consistently identified them as antecedents of work/family conflict (Hargis et al., 2011).

## 2 WORK/FAMILY CONFLICT

Based on the theory of roles Greenhaus and Beutell (1985:77) define work/family conflict as “a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect”; and three possible sources of conflict: 1. time-based conflict (time spent on activities within a role cannot be devoted to demands of another role), strain-based conflict (strain in one role affects one's performance in another role), 3. behavior-based conflict (specific patterns of role behavior may be incompatible with expectations regarding behavior in another role).

Work/family is defined as bidirectional (work interference with family and family interference with work), the existence of two dimensions of the conflict has been empirically verified, for example, through meta-analysis carried out by Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran (2005). Further studies (Frone, 2003; Sobotková, Reiterová & Hurníková, 2011; Fedáková, 2012) consistently demonstrate that among working parents work-family conflict is higher than family-work conflict. The latest, a multidimensional model of work/family conflict combined the existence of two directions (Gutek, Searles & Klepa, 1991) and the three sources of the conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Thus, there are six types of work/family conflict (Carlson, Kacmar & Williams, 2000): 1. time-based work interference with family; 2. strain-based work interference with family; 3. behavior-based work interference with family; 4. time-

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based family interference with work; 5. strain-based family interference with work; 6. behavior-based family interference with work.

## 2.1 Work/Family Conflict Consequences

Bruck, Allen and Spector (2002) have shown not only negative relations of work/family conflict to job satisfaction in general, but also the specific relationship of the various conflict forms (based on time, strain and behavior) to a particular aspects of satisfaction. With regard to the consequences for the work domain, work-family conflict can be considered as predictor of job satisfaction, as well as turnover and absenteeism (Kossek & Nichol, 1992; Thomas & Ganster, 1995), and plans to leave work (Chelariu & Stump, 2011). Furthermore, among individuals experiencing work/family conflict increased amount of medical complications and inadequate performance in job roles has been identified. Work/family conflict is generally associated with subjective reduced quality of health (Geurts, Rutte & Peeters, 1999; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Schieman & Glavin, 2011).

Frone, Russell and Cooper (1997) in a longitudinal study carried out on a sample of 267 employed parents examined work/family conflict in relation to negative health effects. Their findings demonstrate the relationship of two types of conflict (work-family and family-work) to different outcomes. In particular, family to work conflict correlated with the occurrence of depressive symptomatology and the deterioration of physical health and work to family conflict leads to increased consumption of alcohol and medication. Using the National Comorbidity Study (N = 2,700) data, correlations between work/family conflict and negative affectivity, anxiety and substance abuse were confirmed (Frone, 2000).

Bedeian et al. (1988, In Hennessy, 2007) investigated the process of work stress and family demands interaction and their subsequent consequences for job, partner and overall life satisfaction. 432 men and 335 women parents employed full-time, assessed the level of work stress, parental role demands, work/family conflict, job satisfaction, partner satisfaction and life satisfaction. Results showed a relationship between work/family conflict and satisfaction in specific domains, as well as between conflict and life satisfaction. A similar conclusion reached Grant-Vallone and Donaldson (2001), who realized a longitudinal study to investigate consequences of the work/family conflict to overall life satisfaction, data were obtained from 342 employed parents. Based on the research results, authors consider work/family conflict as a significant predictor of well-being and overall life satisfaction.

## 3 RESEARCH DATA AND METHOD

### 3.1 Sample

Qualitative research, which aims to identify subjectively perceived negative aspects of linking work and family life, was conducted on a sample of 45 married couples or partners; employed parents with at least one child aged 3-12 years. Participants were obtained using snowball technique. Research sample couples raise either one (19 pairs) or two (21 pairs) children. The average age of men is 37.7 years (range from 23 to 58 years) and average age of women is 35.4 years (range from 23 to 48 years).

In compliance with the requirement of participant inclusion into the research, both parents work full-time, men reported to work an average of 50 hours and women reported 41.5 hours per week. Participants employments are different - from low-skilled positions (as manual workers, manufacturing sector), through administrative positions (correspondents, administrative staff) to highly skilled professions requiring university education (economists, managers, teachers), business sector is present as well. Therefore, subjective effects of work and family interface, and subsequently elected coping strategies can significantly reflect the characteristics of a particular employment.

### 3.2 Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interview which is focused on several areas of work and family interface. Negative aspects of relation between work and family environment was inquired by six questions, namely:

1. Is it difficult to work full-time and to have a family as well?
2. Do you have a feeling of being conflicted between work and family obligations?
3. Do you sometimes feel that work and family requirements are not compatible? In which situations?
4. What kind of conflicts do you experience as an employed parent? Do you have problems which occur as difficult to solve?
5. Does it happen that the requirements of your employment affect negatively your family life?
6. Does it happen that your family obligations make your ability to undepreciated work more difficult?

Questions observing negative work-family interface aspects are based on the theory of roles (Kahn et al., 1964, In Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and scarcity hypothesis (Goode, 1960, In Dyson-Washington, 2006). The questions aim to identify potential experience of conflict between work and family areas. They were chosen with regards to the direction of the conflict (work interferes with family, family interferes with work) and to the definition by Gutek, Searles and Klepa (1991).

## 4 RESULTS

In the first phase, the particular interview questions answers were analyzed qualitatively to identify perceived negative aspects of work and family interface. Consequently, conflicts were identified in the second phase of analysis and were assigned to the dimensions according to multidimensional theory of conflict (Carlson, Kacmar & Williams, 2000).

Subjective evaluation of the work-family interface negative aspects are presented in terms of; 1. perceived claims arising from engagement in work and family areas, and 2. identified categories of negative consequences.

### 4.1 Demands of Work and Family Roles

Work and family environment are possible to accord

17 men perceive the possibility of balancing work and family responsibilities, to be an employed parents, as not very (7), or even not at all (10) demanding: *"It is not so difficult. It is a normal thing."* (Male, 38 y., IT technician); A similar view has less women, precisely 11 women: *"Personally, I do not consider it difficult, nowadays there are many families with children, which parents built a pretty decent career."* (Female, 39 y., Head of the economic section).

Success in balancing work and family responsibilities is referred by the parents to good organization of time; regardless of whether the joint participation in work and family is considered to be difficult or not. The necessity of organizing their duties well is emphasized by 14 men and 13 women: *"It's very difficult, but I can arrange the time so that I pursue both."* (Male, 36 y., sales representative); *"It's just a matter of organization."* (Female, 45 y., economist).

There is an interesting observation of some women who point out that work and family can nowadays be more or less easily balancing, but only in the case of not seeking further education and career development by the woman, *"I cope up with work and family as well. But if I would like to continue educating myself, I could have not keep up."* (Woman, 46, businesswoman).

To be an employed parent is difficult

21 men answered **definitely yes** to the questions about difficulties of balancing the joint employment and family area requirements, *"Yes, I work until the evening, the family fades into the background, only pressing issues are being resolved."* (man, 44 yrs., businessman); 7 other men admit that work and family interface brings sometimes complications, *"Yes, sometimes it is difficult to dedicate myself fully to work and to children."* (man, 39 yrs., technician).

The work, however, is perceived by men as a necessity, especially with respect to material support to their families, which some of them emphasize that its duty: *"It is challenging, but there is no other way. It is my responsibility to financially secure my family."* (man, 33 yrs., manager).

Balancing between work and family is evaluated as very difficult by more women than men, namely 26 women: *"Sometimes I do not know where to jump first. If I could compare, family and situations at home are the same as to have a second job."* (woman, 36 yrs., accountant) and another 8 women experience occasional difficulties or complications, which are considered to be manageable if they are provided aid from surroundings *"It is difficult, but grandmothers help."* (woman, 27 yrs., social worker), which is fact they just need to get used to and adapt to it: *"It's not easy, but we got used to it."* (woman, 35yrs., bank clerk). The need to work by reason of the family material security is perceived by women as well: *"I had to quickly return to work because of finances. I was anxious, and therefore it is difficult to concentrate on the job."* (woman, 32 yrs., teacher).

Some participants in considering the demands laying on working parents emphasize its gender aspect. They point out that an employed mother has more responsibilities than an employed father, mainly due to greater care of home and children done by women, *"Yes, but for women it is even more difficult than for a man."* (woman, 39 yrs., assistant); *"It's more difficult for my wife, since in addition to work and family, she takes care of the household as well."* (man, 35 yrs., businessman).

## Experiencing the conflict between work and family

28 men admit the difficulty of the joint participation in the work and family areas, or that the situation of a working parent brings complications. Smaller group, namely 12 males, find themselves in the conflict between work and family responsibilities. They point to the strong pressure of incompatible requirements, which often cause intrapsychic or interpersonal conflict as well: *"Personally, for me, these roles are still incompatible."* (man, 44 yrs., businessman). *"I'm at work from morning to evening, deadlines are close, my wife is waiting for the moment when I come home ... and I feel the pressure of expectations from all sides."* (man, 39 yrs., airline company developer).

However, 13 men admit relatively easily solvable conflict of responsibilities. These can happen in case of unexpected situations at work or family environment: *"Sometimes, when professional obligations invade private life."* (man, 35 yrs., businessman); *"When I have a job to do and my wife wants something..."* (man, 35 yrs., Chairman). Several men mention a solution in the conflict situation by setting priorities, which is family to them: *"Sometimes it can be difficult, but if possible, I prefer my family."* (man, 39 yrs., technician); *"My work should never take precedence over family."* (man, 36 yrs., elementary school teacher).

For 20 men of the research sample the work-family interface doesn't mean experiencing a conflict: *"Honestly, I see no reason why these two roles could not be merged. One can handle both."* (man, 47 yrs., sales representative); *"No. I am a businessman and I can organize my time according to the needs of the family."* (man, 36 yrs., businessman); half of the men accredits this fact to a good organization of time and/or their female partner who takes over many responsibilities. There are also opinions that conflict is a too strong statement in the situation of working parents: *"I don't experience conflict, it may be a certain limitation."* (man, 42 yrs., electrician).

Compared to men, the same amounts of women (12) perceive a conflict between work and family responsibilities and frequently experience such conflict. Almost all these conflicts are caused by work duties appearing in the time that should have already been devoted to family responsibilities (10): *"It happens, obviously, that I still have a lot of work to accomplish, but I need to go and pick up my daughter from school"* (woman, 36 yrs., bookkeeper); or by improper working time organization: *"I work on three shifts, so sometimes I have difficulties where to leave my kids."* (woman, 36 yrs., works in a factory). Another problems are caused by overtimes linked with late arrivals back home, and thus a limited time for home duties. Moreover, in addition to demands for time, a too much work responsibilities can produce negative emotions influencing also the family climate *"Sometimes I'm bringing the bad mood from my work also to our home."* (woman, 26 yrs., municipal police officer).

Other situations perceived as a conflict appears when it is necessary to arrange the care for sick children, which is rarely understood and accepted at work. *"Yes, especially when they refuse to allow me to leave the work and take my children to doctor, they use to be ill frequently."* (woman, 33 yrs., teacher).

On the other hand, sixteen women report that they do not perceive any conflict between work and family responsibilities. The ability to successfully handle both work and family requirements is contributed mainly to the attributes of their work (4): *"No, I do not have that demanding job"* (woman, 34 yrs., administrative clerk); to support in work and/or family environment (5): *"No, I have a great support from my colleagues. Also we help each other with my husband. When one of us cannot go, the other one accompanies our daughter to her free time activities."* (woman, 32 yrs., elementary school teacher); and to good organization (5). Two women emphasize the necessity to separate work and family sphere, which can help to prevent a conflict related to negative emotions transfer, especially from work to family: *"I do not feel any conflicts, I separate my work from my privacy"* (woman, 28 yrs., pharmacist).

## 4.2 Categories of Negative Consequences of Work-Family Balance

The particular categories of perceived negative consequences were investigated by questions 3 to 6, described in the research method characteristics.

### Family misses the time devoted to work

Nineteen men and sixteen women consider the lack of time as the biggest problem in simultaneous fulfillment of family and work roles requirements. This problem is contributed to the work organization as such (long working time, work on shifts, overtime), as well as to the overlap between work responsibilities and family activities.

Majority of the parents included in our research sample expressed an opinion that their work responsibilities frequently demand for the time that should have been devoted to family: *"I feel that I am not devoting enough time to my children"* (man, 39 yrs., technician); *"Because of my work I have little time for my son's activities and our household."* (woman, 30 yrs., cook). In some cases, the lack of time is not perceived only as a situational complication, but rather as a constant problem that is difficult (or even impossible) to handle, despite understanding the incurred losses: *"(the problem is) my company - I have to earn money for our family. I have no time for my son, I'm missing how he is growing up."* (man, 44 yrs., business owner); *"It is impossible to merge, I cannot leave my work earlier."* (woman, 36 yrs., shop assistant).

Having a time-demanding occupation can also result to interpersonal conflicts between partners: *“Problems are caused by overtimes, I have no time for my kids, my wife is annoyed and we argue..”* (man, 35 yrs., manager); *“When I have to stay longer at work, it is not always possible to align it...sometimes my partner does not tolerate it”* (woman, 33 yrs., nurse), or even to children’s difficulties, e.g. at school: *“Because of long working time we do not work with our children, which resulted to worse results at school”* (woman, 46 yrs., business owner).

#### Family obligations limit the time for work

Rather rare are opinions that the time requirements from the family negatively influence the work performance (3 women, 1 man): *“My **preparation for work suffers** due to my family obligations...”* (woman, 33 yrs., elementary school teacher); *“The problem is, when I have to leave from work immediately to take care of my child when no one else can or when it is ill”* (man, 39 yrs., technician); or limit the potential career growth or own business development: *“I manage to handle my family duties, but I often neglect the work responsibilities, **I am not fully devoted to my career.**”* (woman, 46 yrs., business owner).

The above mentioned statements can be also complemented by significantly more frequently mentioned statements (especially by women) on negative influence of family on the work performance, that have mostly the situational character. Four men and 14 women reports the illness of their child as a serious problem that complicates their situation at work: *“For example, I cannot leave my work when our kids need to go to see the doctor.”* (man, 37 yrs., works in a factory); *“When my **son is ill** and I need to **stay at home** with him, I often have a **conflict with my superior.**”* (woman, 26 yrs., municipal police officer).

#### Family problems influence the work performance

Health problems of the children do not only result to time requirements. Realizing that a child is not healthy can bother the parents to the extent that negatively influences their work performance. Two men and five women report that illness of their children results not only to problems with organizing the time, but it also leads to decrease in their performance at work: *“My parents take care of my **ill children**, and I **cannot concentrate** at work, because I **keep thinking of it.**”* (woman, 48 yrs., clerk); *“When our **child was ill**, it negatively influenced my **performance**”* (man, 35 yrs., business owner).

The work performance can be also negatively influenced by family requirements in general - 6 men and 8 women frequently deals with organizational problems related to taking care of the children (not only when it is ill), accompanying it to free time activities, morning preparations and even conflicts with children. Such situations are accompanied with stress and negative emotions that disturb the work performance: *“**Arguments about waking up, dressing or eating happen every day, and I feel sorry** when I leave my kid without coping with the argument. Then it **takes me longer** until I can **concentrate** to my work.”* (woman, 37 yrs., director of a kindergarten).

Finally, conflicts and tension in relationship between the partners are particularly problematic with regard to fulfilling the work requirements. Eleven participants (8 men and 3 women) indicate that negative emotions associated to partnership conflicts are transferred to their work and negatively affect the ability to concentrate on work duties and the adequate work performance: *“**Conflicts with my wife** have **significant impact** on my **performance.**”* (man, 47 yrs., service technician); *“It’s difficult to **concentrate on your work** when there is a **tension and stress at home.**”* (woman, 35 yrs., bank clerk).

#### Work requirements affect family environment

The negative influence of work requirements on active participation in the family sphere also occurs in the interviews. It is contributed mainly to fatigue and emotional exhaustion, conflicts at work, and tension that is being transferred from work to family relationships (15 men, 12 women): *“I have problems to separate work and family, my **irritation** is then **transferred** to my **wife and children.**”* (man, 38 yrs., IT technician); *“**Conflicts at work** negatively influences the family.”* (woman, 46 yrs., doctor).

Rather rare examples of interference between work and family are the inadequate means or forms of behavior, that are required at work but disturbing in the family environment: *“At work I have to adapt my **communication** to our clients and decrease to their level to be clear and understandable. Not intentionally, but I frequently **use this language at home** - my husband reminds me that I speak like at work.”* (woman, 35 yrs., labor office clerk).

## 5 DISCUSSION

The participants of our study generally report that it is difficult to fulfill the expectations put on the parents who are employed. Especially, their reactions confirm the findings consistently provided by number of qualitative studies, that the greatest problem in balancing the work and family requirements is the lack of time (e.g. Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1997). The main role with respect to the working time is played by its flexibility and particular organization; most significant complications were reported by parents with fixed organization of work and frequent overtimes. In contrast, parents that perceived less conflict in the connection of their work and family spheres, attributed their opinions to possibility to adjust (at least to certain extent) the working time and requirements to their own needs. These findings support the results of a longitudinal study, that confirmed the decrease of employees' conflict and increase of their job satisfaction with greater control of their work schedule organization (Kelly, Moen & Tranby, 2011). Further, our study indicates that, in addition to workload in terms of objective number of working hours, an employee's subjective perception of his/her overload plays a significant role in relation to the perceived conflict (Ilies et al., 2007).

Despite the fact that work and family are frequently perceived as separate domains, they influence each other (Clark, 2000). This statement is supported by our finding, suggesting that the second most frequent constraint perceived by respondents, after the requirements resulting from the working time, is the negative influence between work and family due to transfer of stress and negative emotions between these domains. Also, the load resulting from contradictory requirements put on the individual represents another area of negative work-family interconnection consequences. Many participants realize and sensitively react to competitive requirements of work and family environment, usually represented by superiors at work and partners in the private life. As stated by Clark (2000), the authorities or reference persons in the particular domain (border keepers) significantly affect individual perception of work and family requirements conflict, as well as individual's decision process related to selection of activities. Participants in our study indicate that, if possible, they prefer family activities. However, considering the reality of an employee life, it is no surprise that this option is relatively scarce. Therefore, employed parents frequently experience the conflict between work and family roles. Inclination to following the work requirements at the expense of family frequently results to interpersonal (partner's dissatisfaction, arguments) or intrapersonal conflict followed by feeling of guilt. Long lasting negative experience and long-term work-family conflict have considerable consequences. Findings of previous research especially emphasize the relationship between work-life conflict and decreasing life satisfaction (Allen et al., 2000; Boles, Howard & Donofrio, 2001; Boyar & Mosley, 2007).

The decision to incline to and comply with the particular role is not fully explained by the pressure from an external authority. It is important (in accordance with the theory of social identity) to consider the level of importance of the particular role for an individual, and his/her consequent engagement in work and/or family domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Frone, 2003). Moreover, the influence of the role importance on the decision making process depends on the relative pressure generated by the expectations within that domain. In case the family pressures are more intensive (situational context, child illness), an individual will probably prefer the family activity - without regard on a subjective importance of the other role. Greenhaus and Powell (2000) assume that the expectation of conflict and feelings of guilt could explain why individuals, when having to prefer certain activities, choose activities related to family, even though they might want to devote their time to work. However, the process of deciding between work and family activity is more complicated and requires considerable further investigation, not only from the perspective of personal preferences, but also from the perspective of situational characteristics and external pressures, that create specific conditions for realization of an individual choice.

The qualitative approach enables us not only to identify the particular negative aspects of work-family interconnections, but also, which is even more important, to set our findings into their broader context. The finding that the process of work and family requirements balancing is generally difficult seems to be quite obvious. However, this finding gains a completely new meaning in the context, that particular individuals subjectively do not perceive these requirements as conflicting and do not consider them as unmanageable, for example thanks to good work organizations or support systems. In contrast, the additions expressing the perception of the negative state as constant and impossible to change even further underline the work-family conflict. Thus, it is necessary to devote considerable attention to this issue, and not only from the research perspective. The work-family conflict does not need to be conceptualized as an inter-role conflict, but also as a problem of individual continuous decision-making, resulting from a personality, values and situational factors (Poelmans, 2001).

At the same time, the work-family conflict can be studied also as a problem of adaptation and negotiations between the partners. Or, after connecting the mentioned conceptualizations, as a decision-making process, in which an individual is forced to take into account not only his/her individual preferences, but also the position of the partner and other involved persons. In this context, Sobotková, Reiterová and Hurníková (2011) propose a combined research using the qualitative approach that would enable to reconsider for example also the context of family functionality.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The advantage of qualitative approach is a to identify the particular negative aspects of work-family interconnections and set it in a broader context. The greatest problem of working parents in balancing the work and family requirements is the lack of time, especially if working in fixed organization of work and loaded with overtime. From this point of view, the possibility to manage (at least to some extent) one's work time seems to be an important key to the reduction the time-based work/family conflict. Further, the negative influence between work and family due to transfer of stress and negative emotions is reported as second most frequent consequence. Conflict resulting from negative affectivity, e.g. experience of stress, tension and irritability, that arises in one domain, negatively affects another domain and vice versa. To reduce this type of negative consequence, emotional as well as organizational support could be crucial.

Mainly, participants indicate their preference is towards family activities. However, possibility to prefer family is relatively scarce. On the other hand, inclination to following the work requirements at the expense of family can result in interpersonal or intrapersonal conflict followed by feeling of guilt. Long-lasting conflict can result in significant consequences to family stability.

According to the theory of social identity, importance of an individual person's role leads to his/her engagement in work and/or family domain. Deciding between work and family depends on the role importance and on the relative pressure generated by the expectations within that domain. In times of intensive family pressure (e.g. child illness) it is probable, the parent will prefer the family activity without regard on a subjective importance of the other role. Based on identified experiences of employed parents, we consider it necessary to devote attention of researchers and counselling professionals to support mothers and fathers in balancing competitive demands of work and family domains.

The main limitations of our study are connected with its methodology. It is difficult to apply the qualitative research with larger samples. Its findings bring a deeper understanding of the analyzed topics, but they do not enable to generalize and formulate specific conclusions in terms of identification of relationships between different areas. At the same time, our sample was rather heterogeneous. All participants fulfilled the main requirements of being employed and growing up a children in a partnership relation, but they considerably differed especially with their job characteristics (sometimes they were very specific), as well as systems of support that help them to deal with requirements mainly connected to taking care of their children. In this field we see the potential for qualitative studies that can bring comprehensive information on specific aspects of work-family requirements balancing. However, the samples of research participants should be precisely selected and rather homogeneous.

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