

# Work Family Conflict: A Neglected Cultural Perspective

Kengatharan, N.<sup>1</sup>, Edwards, C.<sup>2</sup>, Zhang, C.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kingston University Business School, UK & University of Jaffna

<sup>2</sup>Kingston University Business School, UK

[kenga@jfn.ac.lk](mailto:kenga@jfn.ac.lk)

The majority of work family conflict (WFC) studies have been conducted in nations with individualist cultures and the resultant conceptualisations and models mostly reflect such cultural contexts. The few studies in collectivist cultures have applied these conceptualisations and models without question. This study therefore focused on Sri Lanka as a microcosm of collectivist cultural nations. Its aims were to investigate the prevalent forms of WFC and to construct a model relevant to collectivist culture.

The research was conducted in banking, a higher status occupation. Main data sources were: exploratory qualitative interviews with employees and managers ( $N=15$ ); a survey of employees ( $N=569$ ) using a questionnaire adapted from Carlson, Kacmar and Williams' scale of WFC and incorporating a new psychological dimension.

High levels of time based and strain based work to family conflict and family to work conflict are typically found in individualistic cultures, but there is no evidence of behavioural based WFC. The existence of psychological based work family conflict was confirmed: findings are consistent with the differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures noted in the literature. Therefore, the Carlson, Kacmar and Williams' WFC model was revised for use in collective cultures by replacing the behavioural with the new psychological dimension. Multivariate analysis revealed that work to family conflict was determined by work demand, and work demand predicted by working hours, tenure, gender, income, formal work life policies and supervisory status. Work support acts as a moderator between work demand and work to family conflict. Family to work conflict was determined by family demand, and family demand predicted by hours spent on household chores, childcare and dependents; formal and informal work life policies, and gender. Family support acts as a moderator between family demand and family to work conflict. Gender role ideology moderated the relationship between family demand and family to work conflict: the relationship was stronger for women who supported "traditional" gender roles. Overall, this scholarship extends the theoretical understanding of work/family

border theory, social role theory and status characteristics, and makes methodological, parametric and geographical contributions. The needs for the future research on capturing sui generis concept of work family conflict in nations with collectivist cultures are discussed.

**Key words:** *Family Demand; Family to Work Conflict; Gender Role Ideology; Work Demand; Work to Family Conflict.*

NCAS Symposium Proceedings  
2015