

Research of Work-Family Balance Based on Family Life Cycle

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How to cite this paper: Yan, S.M. and Zhou, Y.W. (2016) Research of Work-Family Balance Based on Family Life Cycle. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 4, 218-224. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/jss.2016.411018>

Received: November 14, 2016

Accepted: November 23, 2016

Published: November 30, 2016

Abstract

This study examined the effect of different stages of Chinese family life cycle on work-family balance and the moderating effect of gender by using a sample of 352 employees in China. Reference to scholars in the division of the family life cycle, the study of the family life cycle is divided into six stages. We predicted and found that the family life cycle is significantly different in the effect of work-family enrichment and conflict.

Keywords

Family Life Cycle, Work-Family Conflict, Work-Family Enrichment

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, China has entered the high-speed industrialization, marketization and urbanization era. Huge change in people's values occurred in the last three decades that people work for realization of personal values and for the improvement of life quality. Intense competition due to market economy makes employees face greater stress. In addition, due to traditional gender ideas in China that females pay more attention to family than males do, which leads to female employees have a disadvantage at the workplace. In today's China where traditional sexual view is being shocked, the study of gender in work-family field is very meaningful.

2. Review and Development of Hypotheses

2.1. Family Life Cycle

Family life cycle theory originated from the family development theory of Evelyn Duvall (1957) [1] that families can grow and go through various stages, like people. In every stage of family life cycle, due to the particular task and requirements in each

stage of the family, family factors such as population composition, age, and family burden make the difference. These tasks not only show the growth of family life cycle stage, but also deeply influence the pressure and demands of individuals in the family.

2.2. Work-Family Balance

There are two main perspectives and views in organizational behavior: one is focused on the negative role between work and family that is the study of work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) [2]; another one is focused on the positive role, work-family enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) [3].

Both conflict and enrichment have bidirectional sense, which means that work can positively or negatively affect to family and vice versa (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000) [4]. In addition, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) [2] thought work-family conflict can be analyzed through three dimensions: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behavior-based conflict. Carlson (2006) [5] structured a work-family enrichment model with six dimensions: bidirectional developmental resources, emotional resources and physical resources.

2.3. The Influence of Family Factors on Work-Family Balance

Byron (2005) [6] found that compared to other variables of family filed, family role stress and family role conflict affect work-family conflict most intensely. Shaffer (2001) [7] found married families have more family role stress and conflict than unmarried. One of the reasons is parenting stress. The greater the parenting load, the stronger work-family conflict perceived will be (Aryee, 1999) [8]. Netemeyer (1996) [9] and Rondono (2003) [10] found that the number of children is one of the significant factors that influence work-family conflict. The bigger number of children is, the more work-family conflict individual perceives. Research also suggested that the age of children is a significant variable that affects work-family conflict (Higgins & Duxbury, 1994) [11]. Grzywacz (2002) [12] found that married individual perceives more work-family enrichment than the unmarried, and individual without children perceives more work-family enrichment.

Different stages of family life cycle are corresponding to these characteristics. At different stages of family life cycle, the family's demand and couples' roles in the family will change, and individual's psychological and physiological condition will shift accordingly.

3. Method

We adopted a quantitative method for data collection. We sampled employees in several companies based in first-tier cities, like Shanghai and Beijing in China. We received questionnaire number is 412 and the size of effective sample is 352.

Measures used in this study have been adapted from previous research. A brief description of each measure is provided below:

Family life cycle. When measuring family life cycle, we mainly reference from models of Gilly & Enis (1982) [13] and HongyanYu (2007) [14]. Schaningen and Danko (1993) [15] found that the model of Gilly & Enis is superior to the others, and contains 99.5% families in America. Combining Chinese national conditions, we choose the minimum age of family members as a classification standard, which is in line with the status quo of Chinese families that see children as the center. The age of the youngest child is classified into “0 to 6”, “7 to 17”, “over 18”. Due to the purpose of this study, we remove the older family stage. Finally, we divide family life cycle into six stages like **Table 1**.

Work-family conflict. We applied the scale developed by Carlson (2006) [5], containing 18 items, 6 dimensions: time-based work-family conflict (WFTC); strain-based work-family conflict (WFSC); behavior-based work-family conflict (WFBC); time-based family-work conflict (FWTC); strain-based family-work conflict (FWSC); behavior-based family-work conflict (FWBC).

Work-family enrichment. We applied the scale developed by Hanying Tang & HongyuMa (2009) [16], which is recognized for fitting the situation in China. It contains 14 items, 4 dimensions: work-family instrumental enrichment (WFIE); work-family psychological enrichment (WFPE); family-work instrumental enrichment (FWIE); family-work psychological enrichment (FWPE).

All the scale are Likert five point scored. The coefficients of Cronbach α of work-family conflict is 0.904 and of work-family enrichment is 0.898, showing that both of the scales have good reliability consistency; The coefficients of KMO are both over 0.7, Bartlett sphere inspection results Sig are less than 0.01, showing high validity.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 suggests the distribution of six different stages of family life cycle. The male to female ratio is 0.98. Respondents’ age is mainly distributed between 20 - 45 years old, accounted for 89.5%. Looking the marital status, unmarried is accounted for 34.9%. Most of respondents have college degree or above.

4.2. ANOVA

Table 3 and **Table 4** provide supportive results testing the influence of family life cycle

Table 1. Division of family life cycle.

unmarried
Young couple without child
Growing period (the age of the youngest child is 0 to 6)
Educating children period (the age of the youngest child is 7 to 17)
Mature period (the age of the youngest child is over 18)
Launching children Stage

Table 2. Sample characteristics.

	Total No.	Percentage of Total (%)
unmarried	172	48.9
Young couple	31	8.8
Growing period	71	20.2
Educating children period	41	11.6
Mature period	26	7.4
Launching children Stage	11	3.1
Total	352	100.0

Table 3. Analysis of variance of work-family conflict.

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
WFTC	Between Groups	18.427	11	1.675	2.716	0.003
	Within Groups	133.829	217	0.617		
	Total	152.256	228			
FWTC	Between Groups	11.393	11	1.036	1.988	0.031
	Within Groups	113.08	217	0.521		
	Total	124.473	228			
WFSC	Between Groups	28.924	11	2.629	5.047	0
	Within Groups	113.053	217	0.521		
	Total	141.977	228			
FWSC	Between Groups	29.967	11	2.724	6.398	0
	Within Groups	92.393	217	0.426		
	Total	122.36	228			
WFBC	Between Groups	21.746	11	1.977	3.829	0
	Within Groups	112.041	217	0.516		
	Total	133.787	228			
FWBC	Between Groups	12.021	11	1.093	3.028	0.001
	Within Groups	78.313	217	0.361		
	Total	90.335	228			

Table 4. Analysis of variance of work-family enrichment.

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
WFIE	Between Groups	16.79	11	1.526	6.777	0
	Within Groups	48.878	217	0.225		
	Total	65.668	228			
WFPE	Between Groups	21.969	11	1.997	5.278	0
	Within Groups	82.107	217	0.378		
	Total	104.076	228			
FWIE	Between Groups	39.18	11	3.562	11.581	0
	Within Groups	66.739	217	0.308		
	Total	105.918	228			
FWPE	Between Groups	27.208	11	2.473	8.011	0
	Within Groups	67	217	0.309		
	Total	94.208	228			

on work-family enrichment ($p < 0.05$). Family life cycle has significant influence on the dimensions of work-family conflict and work-family enrichment. **Figure 1** shows the work-family conflict and enrichment in different stages of Family life cycle.

Combining the results of work-family enrichment and work-family conflict, we found the degree of work-family enrichment of growing period is not obvious, while the degree of work-family conflict is the strongest, thus employees in growing period face more imbalance of work and family. On the contrary, the degree of work-family enrichment of single individuals is quite obvious and the degree of work-family conflict is pretty slight, thus it is easier for unmarried employees to obtain the work-family balance.

In terms of marriage, try to rule out other factors (such as: children), only considering the influence of marriage on work-family balance, so we choose to compare the unmarried and young couples family. Marriage in fact does not significantly affect work-family enrichment, while marriage has significant influence on work-family conflict, and married family perceived more work-family conflict than single person.

In terms of children, we find that children's growth process has significant influence on work-family enrichment. When Children are 7 - 17 years old, the couples perceive the most obvious work-family enrichment. Children's growth process also has significant influence on work-family conflict. When children are very young, the couples perceive the most obvious work-family conflict, related with the stress of raising children and family role conflict when family faces huge pressure to parenting, for preschool children need parents to pay much time and energy, and certainly cause huge economic pressure to household spending.

5. Limitations of the Present Study and Recommendations for Future Research

The present study provided a number of insights into the relation between gender, family life cycle and work-family balance. The results of this study suggest that different stages of family life cycle make an important difference to employees' perceived work-family balance. Through studying the moderating effect of gender, the results overturn the traditional idea that female employees face more work-family imbalance.

Nevertheless, the research had several limitations. One limitation of this study is that

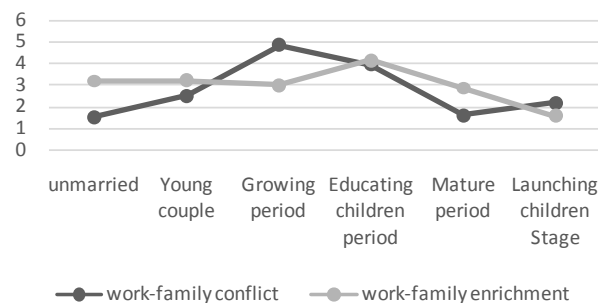


Figure 1. Statistical significance of work-family conflict and enrichment.

the sample we selected is in first-tier cities in China. There may be different results for the samples in other cities or towns. A second limitation could be the family life cycle model we choose. We missed the discussion of situation of divorce and single parent. Future research could develop more comprehensive family life cycle and explore the relationship between family factors and work-family balance.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge with thanks the financial support given to this work by Humanities and social science interdisciplinary projects of Tongji University, study on work-family balance based on two-child policy (1200219330).

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