Level of Evidence: Research on work/family issues includes both the impact of the workplace on home responsibilities and the impact of personal lives in the workplace. Researcher use a number of related concepts to measure this impact including work-family conflict (WFC), family-work conflict (FWC), life work fit and work-life balance. The studies reported below are all correlational.

Definitions: Work-family conflict has been defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible. This definition implies a bidirectional relation. Work-family conflict (WFC) occurs when work related demands interfere with home responsibilities and Family-work conflict (FWC) arises when family responsibilities impede work activities. Both types of conflict (WFC and FWC) have been negatively related to employees’ satisfaction (Neteyer et al., 1996). Life-work fit is defined as workers’ perception that the job is balanced with home life they feel safe doing the work and that they have flexibility to attend to work and home duties. Work-life balance also reflects fit between personal life and work life.

Current Best Evidence

- Workers who perceived more organizational support for work-life balance were more likely to remain employed in child welfare (Smith, 2005). Employees who perceive more supportive organizational work-family cultures will be more likely to utilize work-family benefits than employees who perceive less supportive organizational work-family cultures (Thompson et al., 1999). In other words, the culture in the organization is crucial for determining not only whether people will use the benefits, but also their general attitudes toward the organization (Thompson et al., 1999).
- Supportive work-family culture (helpful organizational environment for balancing work and family) has significant effects on family satisfaction, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Organizational support for work-family issues is an important factor in reducing WFC (Gordon et al., 2007; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Holliday et al., 2004; Thompson et al., 1999).
- Supervisor support reduces WFC and it is particularly beneficial for those who spend a great deal of time on work and work-related activities (Fox & Dwyer, 1999). Support from a spouse/significant other is found to buffer the impact of work/family conflict on intention to leave (Nissly et al., 2004).
- Employees in organizations that provide more work-family benefits will report greater organizational attachment and less work-family conflict than employees in organizations with fewer work-family benefits (Thompson et al., 1999).
Who is most likely to experience work/family issues?

- Job burnout, job tension, role conflict, role ambiguity, intention-to-leave an organization, and search-for-another-job impact both WFC and FWC (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Stressors associated with work role are more likely to increase feelings of WFC than FWC. Likewise, stressors associated with family role are more likely to impact feelings of FWC than WFC (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005).
- In particular, three work stressors – quantity of workload, work variability, and frequency of stressful events – are significantly related to the presence of WFC. Three family stressors – marital tension, no spouse help, and lack of child care – link with FWC (Fox & Dwyer, 1999).
- The effects of organizational stress (defined as work relationships, conflict, politics, resources, autonomy and opportunity to use skills) and work/family conflict are not additive (in other words, workers experiencing both types of stress are not more likely to intend to leave. When the two types of stress are considered together, organizational stress completely overshadows the impact of work-family conflict (Nissly et al., 2004).
- Life-work fit was a significant factor related to intention to leave in rural and urban, but not suburban, child welfare agencies (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2008). In a study comparing high and low turnover child welfare systems, life-work fit was the only factor that significantly predicted intention to leave across all types of systems (Strolin-Goltzman, 2008).
- Some studies suggest that the sex of worker plays a significant role in WFC and FWC. Kossek and Ozeki (1998) found a much stronger relation between WFC and job satisfaction for females than for males.
- Older working women experience more WFC than FWC. In general sense, older working women have developed strategies or altered their responsibilities in ways that enhance their family lives and vice versa (Gordon et al., 2007).
- Employees who are female, married or have children living with them will be more likely to utilize work-family benefits than employees who are male, unmarried, or childless (Thompson et al., 1999). In particular, significant correlations of WFC and FWC have been found with the number of children living at home. Persons with more children have much difficulty adjusting their demands, time, and emotions between work and home setting (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

Practice Implications

- Managers can provide a supportive environment that permits flexibility in schedules, telecommuting options, personal time off, onsite child care, and other family-focused programs to positively impact work performance and reduce the stress and conflict between work and home. Likewise, programs that facilitate psychological detachment such as leisure activities, workshops about time management and relaxation can help employees dealing with potential work and family conflicts (Moreno et al., 2009; Fox & Dwyer, 1999, Thompson et al., 1999).
Practice Implications, Continued

- Administrators need to create a climate where employees do not fear bringing up a family conflict (Lamber et al., 2006; Gordon et al., 2007). Creating a climate that employees perceive as supportive should facilitate use of work-family benefits (Smith, 2005).
- Administrators should differentiate between WFC and FWC as each type of conflict may require a unique intervention (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005).
- Supervisors should pay attention to the effects of quantity of workload, work variability, and frequency of stressful events on workers. These have been found to predict WFC (Nissly et al. 20045)

Creative but Untested Work-Family Conflict Ideas

- Flexible schedules including flex hours (adjusting start/end of day), flex/compressed work weeks, flex locations (working from home or satellite office), flex summers, (short-term flex hours policy), flex careers (extended time off for personal reasons, agency maintains connection through mentor or benefits). See customfitworkplace.org.
- Wellness/Career scorecard as a discussion tool for supervisors/workers
- Internal social network (forum, blog, mentor, coaches) for working parents
- Wellness/resource room (for meditation, prayer, back-up child care, recycled maternity clothes)