MATCHING CAREER AND FAMILY RELATED FACTORS FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Ausra Rutkiene, Elena Trepule

Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

Abstract

Work-family conflict is a complex, multi-dimensional construct. When families decide to continue their professional career, work and family role matching demands efforts and causes strain. Results of a qualitative research show that having and taking care of pre-school and primary-school age children is one of main conflict reasons. Child-care arrangements have an important impact on parents' experiences of work and their career paths. Job tenure and involvement into work-team are lower stressors for men. Family life-cycle stage also has effect on matching career and family life. Data analysis was performed presenting results through the focal points of family life changes. It was noticed that young families usually experience inner conflict and feeling of guilt for not being able to devote sufficient time for children and for work.

Key words: *work-family conflict, career, families with children*

INTRODUCTION

Human is a social being and gives importance to different life spheres: professional, social and personal. There is no straightforward answer which of these is the most important for people, however, their reconciliation may secure self-fulfilment and satisfaction. Life of a young person, who is building a family, is subject to considerable changes as he/she has to get used to a new personal life sphere as well as undergo sufficient changes in their social sphere. This is especially to be said when a family starts having children. Professional sphere is usually related to work, whereas after the birth of children, families are faced with new challenges.

According to Madsen & Hammond (2005, p.9) „although some authors have used role conflict theory and role theory as seemingly interchangeable frameworks, there are definite differences between them. The role conflict theory outlines a deeper and more specific framework that provides a richer understanding of various work-family conflict forms, directions, and dimensions". According to Dahrendorf (1998), conflict and social change happens due to relations of domination and subordination that cause confrontation of different interests. Conflict is not necessarily destructive to the family relations as it may also generate social change. When conflict between groups or personalities is very strong it may cause substantial changes that may create new relations of domination and subordination.

Family conflicts are usually generated with the appearance of children, when parents have to reconcile family and professional responsibilities. In the beginning when a baby is born it is usually being solved easier as legal and social environment usually allows staying at home for one or both parents. However later, one of the parents, usually a mother has to combine family and professional responsibilities. Division or failure to divide responsibilities in the family may cause strain. An important factor is also related to the fact whether people who start a family have already established themselves in the professional field or are just starting their professional activity. When situation in the professional sphere is stable, includes experience and a gained position, temporary withdrawal from the job is less painful, and in this case it is usually shorter as parents are interested in retaining their professional achievements and return to continue building their careers. Yet according to Frone *et al*, „the demands of balancing work and family life can be a major cause of stress in an individual's life, leading to a decrease in satisfaction for both domains and harmful effects on one's health and wellbeing" (Frone *et al*. 2003).

The goal of this article is to reveal family related factors in the families that raise children under 12. Research methods – scientific literature analysis and qualitative research method – the narrative. Interview narratives with 14 families in Lithuania were conducted in January – April 2015.

Family related factors

Number of children in the family

Many authors discussing family related factors highlight the number of children in the first place. Authors (Ahmad 2008; Mjoli *et al*. 2013; Malone 2011, etc.) indicate that after the appearance of a child, a family undergoes a shift of balance: if before having children the main role used to be the one of a professional, an employee, then the redistribution of roles after the birth of a child may sometimes cause dissatisfaction. The research results of Mjoli *et al.* (2013) demonstrate that the number of children in the family is directly correlated to the work – family conflict ($r = 0.32$, $p= 0.01$). This means that bigger the number of children in the family the higher the strain in the family. Other researchers (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson 2001; Milkie & Peltola 1999) also indicated that the number of children in the family is a factor of stress and tension in the family. However, other researchers discuss this and disagree. Anafartal & Kuruüzüml (2012) indicate that a number of children in the family „do not have an impact on work-family conflict and family-work conflict of males and females" (p. 152). Zick, Bryant, & Osterbacka (2001) indicate that a bigger number of children in the family is related to additional help in house chores and is, on the contrary, decreasing stress and strain in the family. Maume (2006) indicates that mothers with more children are better planning and this is helping them to avoid the unexpected. Dilworth (2004) maintains that older children help to take care of the younger siblings thus decreasing the conflict. Therefore, the theoretical analysis does not give background to forthright indication that the number of children in the family has a direct influence on the depth of the conflict.

Children age. Age of the youngest child

Most of the researchers indicate that the highest pressure is on the families with pre-school children (under 6 years). Besides, this has the major impact on the conflict for mothers. The research results by Mjoli *et al.* (2013, p. 41) indicate, that "the age of youngest child is significantly positively related to work-family conflict ($r= 0.27$, $p =0.01$)". The same article suggests that families with children under the age of six are experiencing the major work-family conflict, which moderately decreases when children get to the age of school, however, this decrease in conflict is not to be compared to the situation of families without children. According to Anafartal & Kuruüzüml (2012, p. 152) children age „has an impact on family-work conflict of females. Odds of family-work conflict of females with children both at pre-school and school age is 5.4 times higher than that of females with children at post-school age." According to Lu *et al.* (2006) age of the youngest child was negatively correlated with both work-to-family conflict and family-to-work family. Researchers explain this by the fact that young children require more parental especially motherly attention, besides, there are dominating attitudes in the society that only mothers may provide it. Therefore, the conflict for mothers with young children and career may be very deep. Researchers are more divided in terms of children of school age: some researchers indicate that school-aged children are not causing work-family conflict, whereas Lareau (2002) indicates that routines of school-aged children are very intensive and mothers may need to drive them to after-school activities of non-formal education as well as to their friends, and that is a stressor factor as well.

Child care arrangements and positive parenting

It is not in all cases that children in the family cause stress-related situation, yet children are a very important factor in dual-earner families. If child-care arrangements are not sufficiently planned this may have considerable impact on how parents perform with their direct tasks at work and endure pressure inside the family (Ahmad 2008). According to Greenberger & O'Neal (1990), for dual-earner families woman's care for the children, especially the quality of the care provided, is one of the most

significant stressors. The research results by Ahmad (2007) demonstrate that work-family conflict of women working in manufacturing companies has a negative correlation to their satisfaction for the child-care arrangements.

Malone (2011) is discussing a work-family conflict within positive parenting. Positive parenting is defined as a qualitative time with the children, which according to Snyder (2007) is specified as "structured-planning parent", "child-centered parent" attitude and "time-intensive" activity. Demo (1992) refers to positive parenting as "engagement" (one-on-one time), "accessibility" (parents are nearby and available), and "responsibility" (being responsible for the child's care and needs). Malone (2011) in his work explains that some mothers try to spend as much time with their children and provide their all needs and tend to forget their own needs what increases the strain even to the higher extend. Whereas other women understand that they have to be good mothers and also maintain their successful careers as this secures for the given moment and for the future the welfare of the child. However, work-family conflict may have no influence or even have a negative influence if providing for material welfare and personal career satisfaction is understood as part of positive parenting.

Life-cycle stage

According to different scientists (Ahmad 2007; Lu *at al.* 2006), reconciliation of work and family responsibilities depends on the stage of personal development and on the family development stage as well. This report is about young people under 34 who are still undergoing identity crisis based on a desire to comprehend who they are and who they would like to be (Ericson 1968). When this identity is not fully resolved at the moment of getting a child, an additional strain appears due to the lack of clarity what is the most important and how to reconcile all of these: work, family life and child-care.

Family life stage is also very important: if a child is unplanned, this may cause stress as it requires rethinking the existing situation, modifying future plans, foreseeing who will take care of the child. When the child is planned and expected, the challenges that may appear are anticipated with the necessary arrangements foreseen to minimize the family-work conflict.

Family involvement

Work division in the family very much depends on both partners, but very often closer family members offer help. This is very crucial in minimizing work-family conflict. According to Ahmad (2008, p. 61), "family involvement, which refers to the degree to which individuals identify with their family, the relative importance of the family to individuals' self-image and self-concept, and individuals' commitment to their family, is related to work-family conflict". In case of child sickness, unexpected incidents parents (especially mothers) are finding it difficult to concentrate on the work tasks. Family support, even knowing that there is support if necessary, is decreasing strain and increasing quality of work and family life.

Care for parents

Several sources also mention older parent care. This factor is not mentioned as significant for men, but it is important for women. Anafartal & Kuruüzüml (2012, p. 152) refer to the research data that demonstrate that "woman who has to take care of her mother or father is 2.393 times more likely to experience family-work conflict compared to a woman who does not have to do so".

Job tenure

Job tenure is not outlined in the scientific sources as an important stressor that causes tension. Mjoli (2013, p. 41) mentions, that age "is significantly positively correlated with work-family conflict ($r= 0{,}38$, $p= 0.001 < 0.05$)". Anafartal & Kuruüzüml (2012) identify stress for men with job tenure of 5

years or more is higher than for those with job tenure under 5 years. Job tenure of women does not have significant influence.

Research background

The research was implemented in January – April 2015 with 14 families with 1 or more children under age of 12. Research participants were selected according to the following criterions: 1) a young family of parents under age 35; 2) a family has young child/children; 3) both partners have experience in the professional realm. The research data is based on the analysis of the narrative – story telling (Søderberg 2006), i.e., a reconstruction of a life story related to bringing children, maternity or paternity leave, possibilities for work and family reconciliation as well as career changes. The main inner factors of young families were outlined on a theoretical level when trying to generalize the group of young families with children. Paradigm-based data analysis method is related to search of common topics or searching possibilities for conceptual grouping in the whole text of the narrative (Virgilaite-Meckauskaite & Mazeikiene 2012). ***Research is funded by Research Council of Lithuania, Agreement No. MIP-075/2014.***

Research findings

In the process of data analysis, first-hand, experiences were recreated in a chronological in all narratives. In this stage several focal family life points emerged, when families had experienced major changes and attempted to reconcile their family and career: *child birth ->maternity/paternity leave (1-2 years)-> mother‘s/father‘s return to work -> child‘s start to the kindergarten -> child‘s start to school.* The further presented research data resemble these particular stages.

First, it was noted that all families who participated in the research are dual-earner, where women are taking care of the children and family needs, seeking to reconcile family and career requirements, but also to contribute to the family budget. There is a high probability that this was the main reason for mentioning the distribution of tasks, responsibilities and activities inside the family, when discussing the inner family and career reconciliation factors. In the initial child-birth stage **child-care arrangements** become exclusive, when parents make decisions about duties and responsibilities of baby-care. Most of the research participants when recollecting the moment when the first child was born emphasized the rearrangement of priorities. For some – the arrival of a baby associated with re-planning and re-arrangement of the existing works and responsibilities or partial refusal of personal life:

„I have refused my leisure-time for two years for sure<...>. Time spent with the family is also a kind of recreation, but there is less socializing with the others,<...> priorities changed, we focused on a child and leisure time kind of shrunk, there are less friends.“ (T7).

„when you get children, automatically you start lacking time for almost everything, for yourself in the first place. <...> we had to resize our own needs automatically, if after work you were used going to the gym, to have your own leisure time, all time was yours, so now the whole time after work is given to the children. You as a person disappear and become a father, a mother...“ (T6)

However, there was also evident a challenge to combine different family responsibilities, when parents seek not only to find the most acceptable decisions about how long a mother or a father will stay with the child at home, but also how child-raising responsibilities will be shared in the family, how equally both parents will engage themselves and in some cases who of the parents will get priority for his career. These decisions are usually based on the aspects of material welfare.

„...we decided that <...> for a child it is better to stay with a mother to the age of 3, this was my goal <...> so I stayed this time with the child.“ (T7).

"His career <...> is more important in our family. I had a possibility to get a new job and move with the family abroad, <...> but I refused it, because he would not have a career there...<...> he would not realize himself at all. In such a case you settle, it is not a question of ambitions." (T2).

„I also wanted to contribute to the raising of a daughter and I am happy that there is a possibility for parents to rotate on a paternal leave during those 2 years." (T11).

„<...> it is simple as that – if it was better for my husband with the work, I had to sacrifice and my career suffered, whereas when it was the time of my upgrading and I had a chance to achieve something, he had to." (T12).

Data analysis has confirmed a tendency that it is a mother who is taking a maternity leave in the first years of a baby. However, it is also noticed that starting from the second year situation is becoming more varied. Some mothers return to work while the father takes a paternity leave, or both parents return to work, whereas child care is being entrusted to a family member or a nanny. This decision depends on the family goals as well as mother's/father's career goals and expectations.

„<...> there were more reflections regarding the second year. <...> My husband realized that if I go on a maternity leave for longer than a year, it may so happen that after return I may have more difficulties to reintegrate to my work and have it full time". (T8).

„since I am a bit different, I would not use a word workaholic, but I like my job, I appreciate it and I am happy at work, <...> so my understanding was that if I stay only at home with the kids, I may feel less happy myself". (T6)

„<...> I am such a person that I may not sit still, and by no means I would not be able to stay at home for such a long time" (T12)

„I started taking my son to the nursery since he was 11 months as I had to return to work. <...> It was a difficult time as my son was very little. However all the grandparents and close family are working and we could not afford a nanny, this was our single decision."(T9).

„My husband is perfect. He is mature and we are sharing responsibility for our child. We have division of tasks among ourselves." (T2).

It is important to notice that in the life period of a young family when it is necessary to return to work, leaving child care to a spouse, family member or other carer, there comes out a factor that is seldom mentioned in the sources of theory – **a factor of inner conflict (a feeling of guilt or sorrow)**. These inner conflicts are more typical to women who have deeper attachment to their children and are willing to retain their self-image of a perfect mother. Therefore, a decision to entrust their child-care to another person is very often painful emotionally and psychologically.

„<...> adaptation after a maternity leave of 2 or 1 year is extremely complicated as you leave your baby at home and you keep thinking all the time if he is alright, yet you have to do the job and this is complicated." (T7).

„there is this inner conflict that may be you have to refuse it all and stay only with the child. On the other hand, may be it is the same for any woman who is seeking career, I don't believe there are those who would not think about that." (T2)

„Sometimes you have so little time for yourself or practically no time at all, then<...> you simply start thinking what is that you live for – your family or your work, o may be you should live for yourself." (T6).

„<...> you really feel inside that may be you should really pay more attention, you compare yourself to those mothers who do not work or study and devote those 2 years for a baby<...> I felt jealous for them." (T2).

„<...> It was really hard for me, I felt guilty that I had to take them to kindergarten so young." (T9).

Analysing narratives related to **age of children** factor, the fact that the major family conflict is experienced when raising children under 6. It is noticed that the major challenges are met when

children start kindergarten, as according to the interviewees children start getting sick very often. And when children get sick parents very often face work-family conflict, because depending on the employer‘s attitude towards young parents and type of work, parents do not always have a possibility to take a sickness leave, despite the fact that it is legally possible. A research also confirms that raising children of school age may also cause strain and family conflicts especially when it comes to adjusting responsibilities of taking children to/from school and after-school activities. In this case a geographical aspect comes out when making decisions about school choices close-by or arranging alternatives to transportation. In this period it is necessary not only to carefully plan activities for both parents but also plan work and time and also often to get other people support as well.

„ she [daughter] started kindergarten and the problems started as well, <...> she got sick very often. And then I never took a sickness leave and was proud about that, however now I think that I was such a fool.“ (T2).

„Every little person has his own activities for each of his age periods, so if there would be some help who would take the kids safely to and from school and after-school activities, then you could devote yourself to work and would not have to think that at 12 am I have to go to take my child back from school.“ (T12).

„the major difficulties are due to sickness as my daughter is very allergic and I had to spend quite many days on a sickness leave.“ (T10).

„This work and child-care conflict is always there despite of child‘s age. <...> you constantly try to do your best, but you always feel guilty that you should do more. At the same time you also wish to perform well at work and in the family, but this is a bit of a mission impossible.“ (T2).

A factor of family involvement came out in the majority of narratives. Involvement of family members into the process of child-bringing reflects another important change in the lives of young parents. It is usually most evident when a mother/father returns back to work or a child starts kindergarten. The analysis of the narratives demonstrate that for some families it is very important to have support from family, especially their own parents, when taking care of a baby since the very beginning, when they help a young mother to get to know her baby and take care of it, thus allowing the father to concentrate on the work without fussing around and feeling secure that his wife is not alone. Whereas other families, on the contrary, tried to take care of everything themselves, thus reconciling their works and family activities, and asking for help only in times of emergency. However, it is also felt that family help and support in bringing a child is a considerable contribution that benefits the quality of a couple‘s relationship, is relieving stress as well as decreasing family-work conflict.

„We were happy that we had also partial support, our mothers could help and this allowed us doing what we wanted, what we liked, and not on the cost of children, because they had close people with them, and this is still going on until now.“ (T6)

„<...> when I had to go to work my father from another city used to come to stay with the child.“ (T2).

„When I knew that there are my in-laws at home that help my wife I could feel calm at work. I did not have to fuss thinking if she is ok.“ (T10).

„It is so good that there are grandparents that may help us, and at this moment it is such a big help as children do not attend kindergarten but stay with their grandparents – the ones and the others; it would be hard without them.“ (T7).

It is also noticed that the **number of children** did not relate to considerable differences. Parents with more than one child of children care, family and career reconciliation treated in a more flexible way, with less strain took advantage of state and employer mandatory relief, mothers experienced less inner conflict, these parents were more precise in defining their goals and aspirations. Some interviewees indicated that with age they tend to take everything differently, gain experience that allow caring for a

second child with less strain and more pleasure. Keeping in mind that the participants of the research were young families under 35, the **factor of life-cycle stage** was mentioned rather seldom. In most of the families children were planned. Families had been getting ready, making decisions and considerations regarding the further family and career planning and reconciliation. It is also important to mention that it is not confirmed that younger parents have higher tendency to return to the professional life more quickly. Desire to return to work was more based on the lack of self-realization or fear of becoming not needed. Several aspects were expressed in the narratives that were related to life-cycle stage: (1) several mothers indicated that when being young they felt being more exploited in the job, and now they would be more assertive in defending their rights and possibilities, (2) this life-period is very important for career, therefore, this is causing problems, when it comes to reconciling work and children care, (3) fear of "dropping out" from the working activity and the team, is forcing to look for possibilities to return to work earlier. These career attempts are also very much related to the planning of family financial welfare. It was emphasized in all narratives that family responsibilities were divided following the financial side seeking to assure financial stability. This was also related to search of additional side jobs during maternity leave, changing jobs, more attentive financial planning and saving.

Therefore, it may be noticed that inner factors, allowing reconciling family and career vary depending on the life stage of child-bringing. Seeking for sustainability child-care arrangements in terms of sharing responsibilities and roles become rather crucial. When parents have agreements regarding career development and taking care of family matters, family strain is decreasing and conditions for the development of positive parenting are increasing thus allowing avoiding deep personal inner conflicts.

CONCLUSIONS

Work-family and family-work conflict is inevitable when parents return to their professional activity and entrust their further child-care and raising to their family members, carers (nannies) or public care institutions (kindergartens, schools). The given research data confirmed the importance of a theory-based child-care arrangement factor that is closely related to the family involvement factor. One of the major stressors when a child is born is a change of family rhythm when young parents have to refuse their earlier hobbies, have to learn planning their time in a different way adjusting to the day rhythm of a new family member and rearrange priorities. For a certain period of time until family discovers it's new life rhythm acceptable to children and parents, returning to work of further career development have to be set aside. Research results demonstrate that family especially grandparents involvement and support in child-care is very significant and stress relieving as well as decreasing family-work conflict. The importance of family support is emphasized when children start kindergarten or school, when parents have to adjust school time, returning home and time after school. The factor of a number of children in the family is less significant while the children age factor is very significant, as children under age of 12 may not always care for themselves or each other, lack self-reliance and need more parental and family support.

Despite the fact that this research is oriented on the parenting experiences of both parents it is noticed that the major conflicts are experienced by women. This is no surprise due to the fact that mother-child physiological relation is stronger. The research data has revealed that family-work conflict is exceptionally expressed through the factor of inner conflict that is most evident for women who experience feelings of guilt and sorrow that they may not devote sufficient attention to their child or are leaving him to other carers while returning to their professional life themselves.

REFERENCES

Ahmad, A 2007, 'Work-family conflict, life-cycle stage, social support, and coping strategies among women employees', *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*, vol. 3, no.1, pp. 70-79.

Ahmad, A 2008, *Job, Family and Individual Factors as Predictors of Work - Family Conflict,* The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 57-65.

Anafartal, N & Kuruüzüml, A 2012, 'Demographic Predictors of Work-Family Conflict for Men and Women: Turkish Case', *International Journal of Business and Management*, vol. 7, no. 13, pp. 145-158.

Dahrendorf, R 1988, *The Modern Social Conflict*, University *of* California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Demo, DH 1992, 'Parent-Child Relations: Assessing Recent Changes', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 54, no. 1, pp. 104-117.

Dilworth Long, J.E 2004, 'Predictors of Negative Spillover from Family to Work', *Journal of Family Issues* 25, pp. 241-261.

Erikson, EH 1968, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: Norton.

Frone, M, Russell, M & Barnes, G 2003, 'Work-family balance'. In J. Quick & L. Tetrick (Eds.), *Handbook of occupational psychology*, Washington: American Psychological Association, pp. 143-162.

Grant-Vallone, EJ & Donaldson, SI 2001, 'Consequences of Work-Family Conflict on Employee Well-being Over Time', *Work & Stress*, vol.15, no. 3, pp. 214-226.

Greenberger, E & O'Neil, R 1990, 'Parents'concerns about their child's development: Implications for fathers' and mothers' well being and attitudes toward work', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 52, pp. 621-635.

Kathleen AM 2011, 'Mother's perceptions of work-family conflict and the relationship to positive parenting, and parental satisfaction', *Graduate Theses and Dissertations.* Paper 10167.

Lareau, A 2002, Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 67, pp. 747-776.

Lu, L, Gilmour, R, Kao, SF & Huang MT 2006, 'A cross-cultural study of work/family demands, work/family conflict and wellbeing: the Taiwanese vs British', *Career Development International*, 11, 1; ABI/INFORM Global

Madsen, SR & Hammond, SC 2005, 'The Complexification of Work-Family Conflict Theory: A Critical Analysis', *TAMARAJOURNAL* Vol 4 Issue 4.2

Maume, DJ 2006, 'Gender Differences in Restricting Work Efforts Because of Family Responsibilities', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 68, pp. 859-869.

Milkie, MA & Peltola, P 1999, 'Playing All the Roles: Gender the Work-Family Balancing Act', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 61, no. 2, pp. 476-490.

Mjoli, T, Dywili, M & Dodd, N 2013 'Demographic Determinants of Work – Family Conflict among Female actory Workers in South Africa', *Journal of Economics, Business and Management*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 30-41.

Snyder, KA 2007, 'A Vocabulary of Motives: Understanding How Parents Define Quality Time', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 69, pp. 320-340.

Søderberg, AM 2006, 'Narrative interviewing and narrative analysis in a study of a cross-border merger', *August Management International Review*, Springer, vol. 46, pp. 397-416.

Virgilaite-Meckauskaite, E & Mazeikiene, N 2012, 'Biografinio tyrimo galimybės tiriant magistrantų tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos ugdymąsi socializacijos procese', *Kokybiniai edukaciniai tyrimai: Teorijos, duomenų rinkimas ir analizė.* Šiauliai: VŠĮ Šiaulių universiteto leidykla, pp. 208-227.

Zick, CD, Keith Bryan, W & Osterbacka, E 2001, 'Mothers' Employment, Parental Involvement, and the Implications for Intermediate Child Outcomes', *Social Science Research*, vol. *30*, pp. 25-49.