



## The Effects of Work Stressors, Perceived Organizational Support, and Gender on Work-Family Conflict in Hong Kong

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**Abstract.** This study examined the direct and moderating effects of perceived organizational support (POS) and gender on the relationship between work stressors and work-family conflict for a sample of Hong Kong Chinese employees. As predicted, we found that POS is negatively related to both FWC (family-to-work conflict) and WFC (work-to-family conflict), and that work stressors (including role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload) are positively related to FWC and WFC. Additionally, the positive relationship between role overload and WFC was found to be weaker when POS was high, suggesting that POS can offset the adverse impact of role overload.

**Keywords:** work-family conflict, work stressors, perceived organizational support, gender differences, Hong Kong

Work-family conflict has been the subject of much research in the past two decades (see Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999 for a review). Work-family conflict is a form of interrole conflict in which participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Conflict between work and family can originate in either domain such that work can interfere with family needs or family can interfere with work responsibilities. Substantial research has found that work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC) are related but distinct constructs (Casper, Martin, Buffardi, & Erdwins, 2002; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992a). WFC, the main concept, has been associated with an array of negative outcomes such as poor job attitudes, ineffective work performance, dissatisfaction within the family domain, diminished psychological well-being, and physical and behavioral symptoms of distress (Frone, 2003; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). Therefore, research has sought to understand the factors that influence WFC.

Perceived organizational support (POS) is defined as employees' global beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). This construct has been examined in several work-family studies (Casper et al., 2002; Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper, & O'Brien,

2001; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001). Researchers found support for a main effect of POS on WFC. For example, POS was negatively related to employees' WFC, but not FWC, and there was no support for the buffering effect of POS on the relationship between work-family conflict and mental well-being (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001). Erdwins et al. (2001) found that the impact of POS on work-family conflict for a sample of married employed mothers was mediated by job self-efficacy. In addition, POS appears to weaken the negative effect of WFC and FWC on continuance commitment, but only under conditions in which both types of work-family conflict are high (Casper et al., 2002).

The purpose of this study was to address three gaps in the literature. First we explore the moderating role of POS in the relationship between work stressors and work-family conflict. Research has shown that work stressors and POS are important antecedents of work-family conflict. However, no study has examined their possible interaction effect. We argue that POS plays a buffering role and hence moderates the positive relationship between work stressors and work-family conflict. Secondly, we also expect a similar moderating effect of gender in the above relationship. As men and women take up different roles in the family and workplace, their perceptions of work-family conflict are likely to be different. Arguably, the impact of work stressors on work-family conflict may also differ for men and women. To our knowledge, no study has tested this. Lastly, our study replicates the previous research on the main antecedents of WFC and FWC, but we use an Asian sample. Our respondents are Protestant clergy employed in Hong Kong. Since cultures may differ in gender role expectations as well as the extent to which work and family are perceived as distinct domains (Aryee, Luk, Leung, & Lo, 1999), it is critical to examine WFC and FWC in non-Western societies. The present study thus contributes to the growing cross-cultural literature on work-family conflict.

## **1. Research setting**

Hong Kong was selected as a research site for several reasons. First, there is a high level of female labor force participation in Hong Kong (i.e., 51.6% in 2001), which is comparable to some Western countries (Census and Statistics Department, 2002). In particular, for the age groups of 25–34 and 35–44, the rates were 80 and 64% respectively in 2001, thus the balance of work and family life is clearly an issue for working women. Second, subject to the influence of Chinese culture, women tend to occupy subordinate roles in the family and in the workplace (Ngo, 1992). The conservative gender ideology and the domestic division of labor in Hong Kong are unfavorable for working women, particularly for those with young children. Lastly, employers in Hong Kong provide little family support for their employees such as family-friendly programs (Chiu & Ng, 1999). It is interesting to explore what role POS plays in reducing work-family conflict in the local context.

Our sample of Protestant clergy in Hong Kong is especially vulnerable to the interference of work into family life. Clergy have an irregular work schedule that often includes overtime. In their daily work, a high level of emotional involvement is required since they deal with the personal problems of congregation members. Similar to social workers, they offer emotional support, provide advice, and offer counseling to others. Clergy work is "people intensive"

and emotionally demanding and may leave the individual feeling drained and exhausted. In addition, clergy perform a range of tasks including preaching, administrative work, and teaching. All in all, their work is stressful due to their heavy workload, and the ambiguity and conflict they encounter at work. The conflict between work and family life is likely to occur under such circumstance. Social support from their colleagues and organizational support from the church may alleviate their stress and strains at work. Thus, the complex relationships among work stressors, POS, and work-family conflict for the clergy are worthy of study.

## 2. Literature review

Work stressors such as role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity have been found to increase levels of work-family conflict (Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Kopelman, Greenhaus & Connolly, 1983; Voydanoff, 1989). Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1994) proposed that there are two dominant forms of work-family conflict: time-based conflict and strain-based conflict. Time-based conflict is experienced when the time devoted to one role makes it difficult to fulfill the requirements of the other role. Strain-based conflict is experienced when the strain produced in one role spills over or intrudes into the other role. Work stressors lead to both forms of work-family conflict.

Perceived organizational support (POS) is distinct from other types of support available in the work-family conflict domain. Support generally consists of family-supportive policies developed by organizations, and family-supportive supervisors who provide help and understanding based on their interpersonal relationships with subordinates (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). These other forms of support have been found to be negatively related to WFC, but this research has mainly been conducted using a Western sample. In our conceptual model, POS has “cross-domain” effects in that we predict it will affect conflict from both the work and family domains. POS is a “work-family crossroad” (Howard, 1992: 75) or a “linking mechanism” (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000: 178) in that POS connects the work and family domains by its role in, for example, lending support to an individual’s career in the work domain, and facilitating family maintenance in the family domain. As well as being defined as a general concern for the well-being of employees, POS also includes increased corporate awareness and support of work and family issues (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001). Two recent studies examined the relationship between family supportive organizational cultures and employees’ affect and their efforts to balance work and family (Allen, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Thompson et al. (1999) found that employees who perceived more supportive work-family cultures were more likely to use work-family benefits, reported higher organizational commitment, and had lower WFC and turnover intentions than were those who perceived less supportive cultures. Allen (2001) found that employees who perceived their organization as more family supportive made greater use of available work-family benefits, experienced less WFC, greater job satisfaction, greater organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions than did employees who perceived the organization as less family supportive.

In our model, POS acts as both an antecedent of work-family conflict and also as a moderator of the effect of work stressors on work-family conflict. According to the differential

exposure perspective, some individuals are more vulnerable to situational stresses than others in that the impact of a given level of stress on outcomes may be more severe for them (Kessler, 1979; Stoeva, Chiu, & Greenhaus, 2002). In our model, work stressors would be more strongly related to work-family conflict for low-POS individuals than for high-POS individuals. In other words, we suggest that low-POS individuals are more vulnerable to stressful environments than high-POS individuals.

We included gender as a variable in our study so that gender similarities and differences in family-career relationships could be identified and explained (Singh, Greenhaus, & Parasuraman, 2002). Including gender in the study of work-family conflict is important because work and family roles are based on gender role expectations. For example, masculine family roles (i.e., provider) and the role of ideal worker (e.g., being constantly available to the employer) are interdependent and complementary; whereas feminine family roles (i.e., available nurturer) and the role of ideal worker are independent and conflicting (Simon, 1995). Women often experience roles that are incompatible, which increases the stress of pursuing work and family roles for them (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991; Simon, 1995; Sirianni & Negrey, 2000; Williams, 2000). Some studies using Western samples have found no gender differences in experiencing family-work conflict, although women report interference from work to family more than men (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992b; Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991).

In our study, we replicate in an Asian setting the effect of gender on work-family conflict. Based on differential exposure perspective, we also examine whether gender, an individual-difference variable, moderates the effects of work stressors on both WFC and FWC. This contributes to the growing amount of research that has been conducted on gender and work-family conflict in Asian countries. This body of research has found, for example, that the source of stress or conflict is different for men and women (Fu & Shaffer, 2001). Choi and Chen (2003) found that while family demands had a stronger effect on life stress for Chinese women than for men, work demands had a greater impact on life stress for Chinese men than for women. It has been suggested that family relations in India are characterized by a coexistence of traditional and modern gender role expectations that will result in similarities and differences in men's and women's experiences of the work-family interface (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, forthcoming). In countries where gender ideology is likely to be strongly internalized (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, and India), we may expect to see the moderating role of gender (Choi & Chen, 2003; Westman, 2005). In Hong Kong, with its own mix of traditional and modern gender role expectations, we may also expect gender differences in the work-family interface.

### 3. Hypotheses

In our conceptual model in figure 1, we expect two different types of forces to operate, one increases conflict (i.e., work stressors increase work-family conflict), while the other reduces conflict (i.e., POS reduces work-family conflict). We assume in our model that an individual's FWC and WFC can be simultaneously raised or lowered, rather than assuming an increase in one construct is associated with a decrease in the other construct.

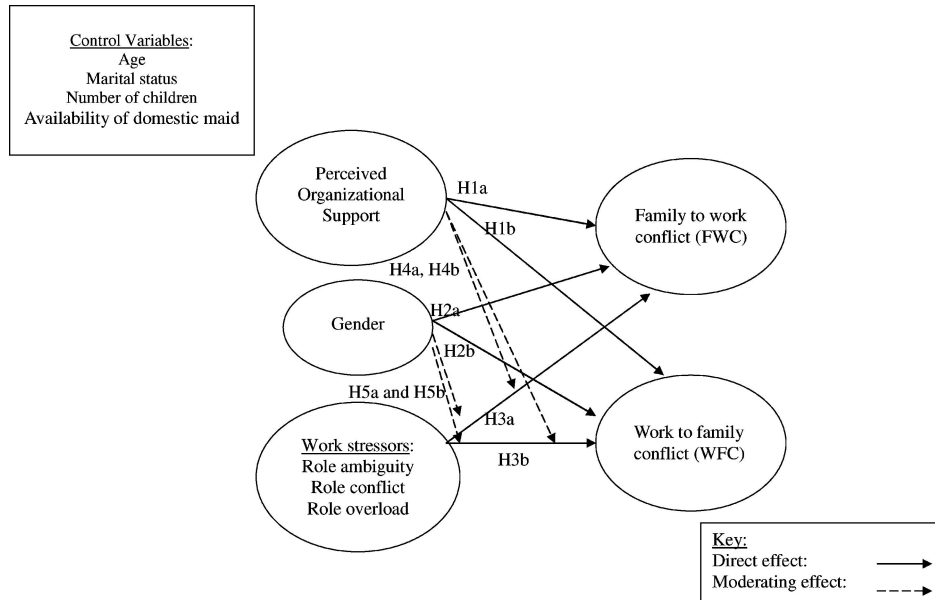


Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model.

### 3.1. Direct effects

Individuals who perceived high levels of POS are less likely to report high levels of WFC (Casper et al., 2002; Erdwins et al., 2001; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001). When individuals perceive POS, they tend to experience less WFC since their supportive organization may offer family-friendly policies or flexible work arrangements to better balance work and family. Their organization is also likely to sympathize with their personal and family problems. We propose that POS will also have a main effect on FWC in that employees who work for supportive organizations experience lower felt conflict when family interferes with work. For example, if an employee missed work due to child-care issues in a supportive organization, the reduced stress over the situation may result in greater emotional attachment to the organization (Casper et al., 2002). In Hong Kong, where there is normally little involvement of employers in work-family issues (Lo, Stone, & Ng, 2003; Ng & Chiu, 1997), when the organization is perceived as supportive, the employees should feel lower levels of FWC and WFC.

*H1a:* POS is negatively related to family to work conflict (FWC). Specifically, the more an individual perceives organizational support, the lower the FWC.

*H1b:* POS is negatively related to work to family conflict (WFC). Specifically, the more an individual perceives organizational support, the lower the WFC.

As men and women are different in their domestic roles and work roles, their levels of work-family conflict are likely to be different. In one study, the majority of wives felt that employment prevented them from fulfilling their primary responsibility to nurture their children and husband, roles to which females have historically been highly committed (Simon, 1995). The tendency to work long hours and the relative absence of organizational family-responsive policies combine to create conflict between work and family responsibilities in Hong Kong (Aryee et al., 1999). In addition, traditional cultural values regarding gender roles suggest that husbands have limited participation in child-care and household chores, and wives, even when they are employed, still have primarily responsibility for domestic work (Ngo, 1992). Female married professionals in Hong Kong seem to accept their traditional social roles in terms of family life despite their labor market participation (Aryee et al., 1999; Lo, Wright, & Wright, 2003), and the major role of women in Hong Kong is still as a mother at the center of her family (deLeon & Ho, 1994). Therefore, we predict that women feel a higher level of FWC than men.

*H2a:* Compared to men, women experience higher levels of family to work conflict (FWC).

Several studies conducted in the West have found no gender differences in the experience of WFC (Frone et al., 1992a; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). We propose that women and men will experience similar levels of WFC in Hong Kong since social changes and economic development have offered many educational and employment opportunities for women in the past few decades. Women's rising educational level and the greater awareness of sex-role equality are factors that have influenced the participation of women in the Hong Kong workforce. Local research has found that, similar to their male colleagues, women have high career aspirations and strong work commitment (Ngo & Lau, 1998; Ngo & Tsang, 1998). In Hong Kong's business-driven society, there are long working hours and high-stress working conditions that affect both genders (Lo, 2003; Lo, Stone, & Ng, 2003; Lo, Wright, & Wright, 2003).

*H2b:* Women and men experience similar levels of work to family conflict (WFC).

Research has consistently shown a positive relationship between work role stressors (e.g., role ambiguity, role conflict and role overload) and WFC (Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Jones & Butler, 1980; Kopelman et al., 1983; Voydanoff, 1989). In addition to WFC, we hypothesize a positive relationship between work role stressors and FWC, therefore, work role stressors are mechanisms that link the work and family domains. Stressors originating in the work domain may impinge on the family (Fu & Shaffer, 2001), therefore, stressors experienced in one role (e.g., work stressors) may produce negative experiences and outcomes in the other role.

*H3a:* Work role stressors (e.g., role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload) are positively related to family to work conflict (FWC).

*H3b:* Work role stressors (e.g., role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload) are positively related to work to family conflict (WFC).

### 3.2. *Moderating effects*

While perceived organizational support (POS) is not restricted to just the work–family domain, and research more strongly supports main effects, it makes theoretical sense for POS to buffer the effects of work stressors on FWC and WFC. We expect POS to reduce or alleviate the conflict that individual may feel when they experience work stressors by indicating the availability of assistance and emotional support from the organization. The buffering perspective asserts that support enhances coping skills that are responsive to a particular stressful situation (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). POS may not only help eliminate a certain amount of role stress experienced by the individual, but also may buffer the negative effects of role stress that cannot be removed due to the nature of job tasks (Stamper & Johlke, 2003). In a buffering model, support interacts with stressors such that a stressful situation has less of a negative impact for those who receive high levels of support because of better resources or information to help them cope with problems (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001).

*H4a:* POS moderates the effects of work role stressors on family to work conflict (FWC). Specifically, the positive effects of work stressors on FWC are reduced as the level of POS is increased.

*H4b:* POS moderates the effects of work role stressors on work to family conflict (WFC). Specifically, the positive effects of work stressors on WFC are reduced as the level of POS is increased.

The gender role socialization literature shows that men are socialized to give priority to the breadwinner role, whereas women are socialized to give priority to the homemaker and motherhood roles (Major, 1994). Women today are still mainly responsible for the family role, even in a dual-career situation, and for women the combination of the work and family role results in negative self-evaluations and feelings of inadequacy as parents and spouses (Simon, 1995). The work-family conflict of Hong Kong professional women arises in part from spending much time coaching their children and taking care of their elderly parents (Lo, Stone, & Ng, 2003). Identity theory posits that both work and family roles represent core components of adult identity (Frone, 2000). Work stressors may represent an impediment to a person's ability to construct and maintain a positive family-related and work-related self-image. Work stressors are likely to cause work to impinge on family (i.e., WFC) and compared to men, females will be more conflicted about this impingement due to their alignment with the home role. Women have more responsibility at home compared to men, therefore the stress that women experience at work is more likely to increase FWC. Taken together, identity theory and research on gender role socialization suggest that when comparing men and women, women are more adversely affected when work stressors increase FWC and WFC.

*H5a:* Gender moderates the effects of work role stressors on family to work conflict (FWC). Specifically, the positive effects of work stressors on FWC are stronger for women than for men.

*H5b:* Gender moderates the effects of work role stressors on work to family conflict (WFC). Specifically, the positive effects of work stressors on WFC are stronger for women than for men.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Sample and procedure

Data were obtained from a survey mailed to 2,600 Protestant church workers on a mailing list provided by a Christian association in Hong Kong. A self-administered questionnaire in Chinese was sent to each target respondent, together with a cover letter that explained the purpose of the survey and invited them to participate voluntarily. All respondents were assured of anonymity and were asked to send back the completed questionnaire to a research center affiliated with a local university. To increase the response rate, a follow-up phone call was made to remind the respondents to fill in the questionnaire three to four weeks after the initial mailing. A total of 877 surveys were finally returned, representing a response rate of 33.7%.

The questionnaires were administered in Chinese using scales developed in the West. Since the items for these scales were originally developed in English, we translated them into Chinese to fit our research setting. To ensure the quality of the translation, a back-translation was also done (Brislin, 1970). Of the respondents, 52.5% were males and 47.5% were females. The majority of them (85.1%) were aged 30–49. In terms of marital status, 67.6% of the respondents were married, and 64.5% of the married respondents had children. Their average organizational tenure was 5.57 years.

### 4.2. Measures

Respondents used six-point Likert-type scales (1 = 'strongly disagree', 6 = 'strongly agree') to respond to the items in the following measures, except gender and the control variables.

**Work-family conflict.** This was measured with four items modified from Frone et al. (1992a), tapping the interference of the two life domains with respect to role performance and time allocation. The measure had been employed in previous local research with proven validity and reliability (Ngo & Lau, 1998). Two items were used to assess family to work conflict (FWC): 'My family life frequently interferes with my job duties' and 'My family life frequently affects the time I spend on my job'. The other two items were used to assess work to family conflict (WFC): 'My job frequently interferes with my family responsibilities' and 'My job frequently affects the time I spend with my family'. In this study, the alpha coefficients for these two sub-scales were 0.91 and 0.87, respectively.

**Perceived organizational support.** This was measured with five items selected from Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) scale. Sample items include: 'The organization cares about my well-being' and 'Help is available from the organization when I have a problem'. Alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.90 in this study.



**Gender.** A dummy variable was coded 0 if the respondent is male and coded 1 if the respondent is female.

**Role ambiguity.** Six items, adopted from Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970), were used to measure role ambiguity. A sample item is 'I know what my responsibilities are'. The scale had a high alpha coefficient of 0.90 in this study.

**Role conflict.** We used the eight-item Rizzo et al. (1970) scale to measure role conflict. A sample item is 'I have to do things that should be done differently'. The scale's alpha coefficient in this study was 0.83.

**Role overload.** This variable was measured with a three-item scale developed by Beehr, Walsh, & Taber (1976). The three items are: 'I am given enough time to do what is expected of me on my job' (reverse scoring), 'It often seems like I have too much work for one person to do', and 'The performance standard on my job is too high'. This scale had an alpha reliability of 0.67 in this study.

**Control variables.** Several family role characteristics were included in the analysis as controls. These include *age groups* (two dummy variables indicating whether the age of the respondent is within 30–39 and 40–49), *marital status* (a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is single or married), *number of children* (the total number of children living in the respondent's home), and *availability of domestic maid* (a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent hires a maid to assist in the household work). In 2001, approximately twelve percent of total Hong Kong households employed domestic helpers.

#### 4.3. Analytical strategy

To test the hypotheses, hierarchical regression analysis was employed. We separated the analysis for family to work conflict (FWC) and work to family conflict (WFC). All the control variables, including age groups, marital status, number of children, and availability of domestic maid were entered in the regression model in Step 1. In Step 2, gender and perceived organizational support were entered. The three work role stressors were then entered as a block in Step 3. Finally, the six interaction terms (i.e., gender and perceived organizational support with role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload respectively) were entered. Such a step-wise design was recommended to test the moderating effects (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The hypotheses were tested by examining the change in model  $R^2$  and beta coefficients from steps in the analyses. For the moderator hypotheses, we applied a less stringent significant level (i.e., 0.10) because measurement error and share variances make type II errors likely. Significant interactions were plotted to show the exact moderating effect.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. The respondents reported a relatively high level of perceived organizational support (POS), a moderate level of role conflict, role overload, and work to family conflict (WFC), and a relatively low level of role ambiguity and family to work conflict (FWC). The two types of work-family conflict were positively correlated ( $r = 0.41, p < 0.01$ ). In addition, both types of conflict were negatively correlated with POS and positively correlated with all three types of work role stressors. FWC had significant correlations with all the control variables and gender. Moreover, the t-tests revealed that male and female respondents were not different in their levels of WFC, but female respondents had a higher level of FWC than male respondents ( $t = 2.97, p < 0.01$ ). It is worth noting that the effects of age groups, marital status, number of children, and availability of domestic maid have not been considered in this simple and preliminary analysis of gender differences.

### 5.2. Regression analysis

Table 2 gives the results of moderated regression analysis of FWC. In Model 1, all the control variables except age group of 40–49 were found to be significant, and they together accounted for 6% of the variance in FWC. When gender and perceived organizational support were added to Model 2, the change in  $R^2$  was significant ( $R^2 = 0.01, F = 5.41, p < 0.01$ ). Specifically, perceived organizational support ( $\beta = -0.11, p < 0.01$ ) exhibited a negative relationship with FWC. This provides support for hypothesis 1a. However, the coefficient for gender was insignificant in the model and thus hypothesis 2a was not supported. When the three work role stressors were entered in Model 3, they accounted for an additional 9% of the total variance ( $F = 28.33, p < 0.01$ ). Both role ambiguity ( $\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$ ) and role conflict ( $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$ ) had significant effects on FWC in the predicted direction, but the effect of role overload did not ( $\beta = 0.06, ns$ ). Hypothesis 3a has thus gained partial support. Hypotheses 4a and 5a posit that perceived organizational support and gender would moderate the relationship between work role stressors and FWC. To test the hypotheses, six interaction terms were entered in Model 4 and they slightly increased the explained variance by 2% ( $F = 2.95, p < 0.01$ ). Only one interaction term, POS with RA, was found to be significant ( $\beta = 0.57, p < 0.01$ ). As shown in figure 2, the relationship between role ambiguity and FWC was stronger when the respondents perceived a high level of organizational support.

The results of analysis of work to family conflict are displayed in Table 3. In Model 1, only one of the control variables (i.e., age group of 30–39) was found to be significant. All together, the control variables explained less variance in WFC than in FWC. When gender and perceived organizational support were added to Model 2, they raised the explained variance by 6% ( $F = 27.33, p < 0.01$ ). Specifically, perceived organizational support ( $\beta = -0.25, p < 0.01$ ) was found to have a significant negative relationship with WFC. This finding provides support for hypothesis 1b. Since the coefficient for gender was insignificant,

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of variables.

Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age group 30–39	0.43	0.50											
2. Age group 40–49	0.42	0.49	-0.74**										
3. Marital status (married = 1)	0.68	0.47	-0.06	0.05									
4. Number of children	0.87	1.01	-0.26**	0.19**	0.57**								
5. Availability of domestic maid	0.21	0.41	0.03	0.05	0.22**	0.29**							
6. Gender (female = 1)	0.47	0.50	0.01	0.02	-0.50**	-0.42**	-0.07						
7. Perceived organizational support	4.57	0.86	-0.08*	0.03	0.01	0.08*	0.02	-0.06					
8. Role ambiguity	2.10	0.68	0.23**	-0.14**	-0.06	-0.18**	-0.07	0.09	-0.51**				
9. Role conflict	3.82	0.77	0.04	0.04	0.01	-0.04	0.02	-0.07	-0.35**	0.24**			
10. Role overload	3.67	0.89	0.01	0.03	-0.02	-0.05	0.05	0.02	-0.31**	0.15**	0.39**		
11. Family to work conflict	2.46	1.06	0.13**	-0.07*	0.15**	0.14**	0.13**	-0.10**	-0.11**	0.24**	0.23**	0.13**	
12. Work to family conflict	3.57	1.23	0.09**	-0.04	0.03	0.01	0.05	0.02	-0.26**	0.24**	0.30**	0.42**	0.41**

*N* ranges from 819 to 877.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis of family to work conflict.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age Group 30–39	0.19**	0.13**	0.13**	0.12*
Age Group 40–49	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02
Marital Status	0.08 <sup>+</sup>	0.05	0.05	0.06
Number of Children	0.13**	0.18**	0.17**	0.17**
Availability of Domestic Maid	0.07 <sup>+</sup>	0.08*	0.08**	0.07 <sup>+</sup>
Gender		−0.03	−0.01	0.07
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)		−0.11**	0.09*	−0.09
Role Ambiguity (RA)			0.26**	−0.34 <sup>+</sup>
Role Conflict (RC)			0.18**	0.47*
Role Overload (RO)			0.06	−0.03
Gender* RA				−0.12
Gender* RC				−0.11
Gender* RO				0.14
POS* RA				0.57**
POS* RC				−0.32
POS* RO				0.06
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.06	0.07	0.15	0.16
F	10.50**	9.13**	15.54**	10.96**
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0.01	0.09	0.02
F		5.41**	28.33**	2.95**
N	814	814	814	814

Standardized regression coefficients are reported.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

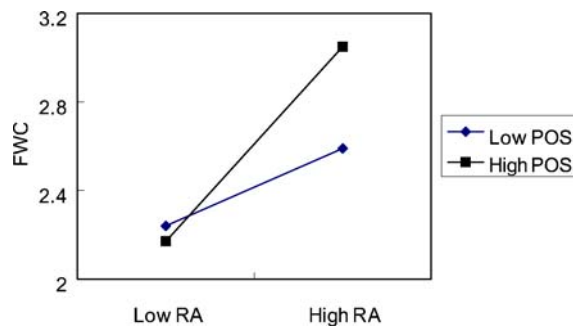


Figure 2. Effect of role ambiguity on FWC under different levels of POS.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis of work to family conflict.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age Group 30–39	0.15**	0.10*	0.11*	0.09*
Age Group 40–49	0.07	0.04	0.04	0.04
Marital Status	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.04
Number of Children	0.01	0.07 <sup>+</sup>	0.09*	0.08*
Availability of Domestic Maid	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01
Gender		0.03	0.05	–0.16
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)		–0.25**	–0.03	0.07
Role Ambiguity (RA)			0.14**	–0.38*
Role Conflict (RC)			0.13**	0.26
Role Overload (RO)			0.34**	0.67**
Gender * RA				0.01
Gender * RC				0.40*
Gender * RO				–0.19
POS * RA				0.47**
POS * RC				–0.22
POS * RO				–0.33 <sup>+</sup>
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.07	0.22	0.24
F	2.56*	9.76**	24.47**	16.81**
$\Delta R^2$		0.06	0.16	0.02
F		27.33**	54.29**	3.33**
N	815	815	815	815

Standardized regression coefficients are reported.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

hypothesis 2b (stating that women and men have similar levels of WFC) was supported. When the three work role stressors were entered as a block in Model 3, all of them were found to have a significant and positive relationship with WFC. The increment in R-square was also highly significant ( $R^2 = 0.16$ ,  $F = 54.29$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Hypothesis 3b has thus gained empirical support. The moderating effects of gender and perceived organizational support were tested in Model 4. The six interactions accounted for significant variance in WFC ( $R^2 = 0.02$ ,  $F = 3.33$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) beyond that accounted for by the main effects. Among these interaction terms, three of them stood out to be significant, including gender with role conflict, POS with role ambiguity, and POS with role overload. To show the exact moderating effects of gender and POS, we plot each of these interacting effects in figures 3 to 5. First, as shown in figure 3, the positive relationship between role conflict and WFC was stronger for women than for men. Moreover, figure 4 reveals that the positive relationship between role ambiguity and WFC was stronger when the respondents perceived a high level of organizational support. Lastly, figure 5 shows that the relationship between role overload and WFC was stronger when POS was low than when POS was high. Based on these results, H4b and H5b have gained partial support.

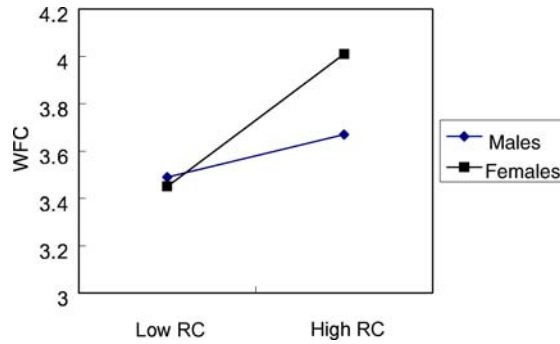


Figure 3. Effect of role conflict on WFC for males and females.

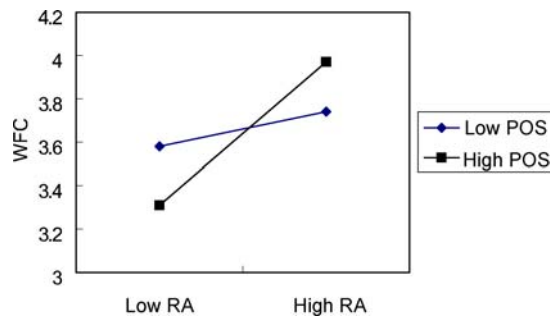


Figure 4. Effect of role ambiguity on WFC under different levels of POS.

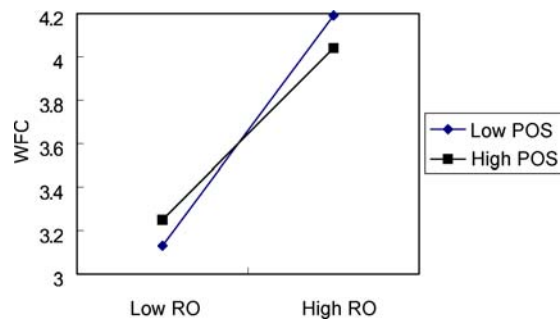


Figure 5. Effect of role overload on WFC under different levels of POS.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to replicate previous research on the direct effect of POS and work stressors on WFC and FWC using an Asian sample. In addition, we tested several new hypotheses, including the prediction that POS and gender moderate the relationship between work stressors and work-family conflict. We found that POS is

negatively related to both FWC and WFC, and that work role stressors are positively related to FWC and WFC. Thus, the Hong Kong employees in our sample are similar to Western employees in terms of the direct effects of POS and work stressors on work-family conflict.

As predicted, women and men experienced similar levels of WFC. This finding supports previous research that has shown that WFC is an issue for working women in Hong Kong (Aryee et al., 1998; Lo, Wright, & Wright, 2003; Ngo & Lau, 1998; Ngo & Lui, 1999). Contrary to what we predicted, women and men also experience similar levels of FWC. Thus our findings support previous studies using Western samples where there were no gender differences in experiencing family-work conflict (Duxbury et al., 1994; Frone et al., 1992b; Gutek et al., 1991). It also supports Choi and Chen's (2003) suggestion that contemporary Chinese men and women are becoming more involved in each other's traditional domains, which may result in non-significant gender differences. Our findings may signal that men are increasing their participation in child care and household chores despite some of the traditional cultural values still prevailing in Hong Kong that affect an individual's gender role in the family and workplace. In addition, it supports the previous findings that professional women in Hong Kong are committed to their careers (Ebrahimi, 1999; Ngo & Lau, 1998; Ngo & Tang, 1998). The increasing exposure to Western ideas through technology, media access, and globalization may be encouraging a convergence of ideas between Hong Kong women and their Western counterparts (Lo, Wright, & Wright, 2003), although gender differences are more deeply embedded in Chinese than in Western societies and Hong Kong's modern, Western outlook may be somewhat deceptive (deLeon & Ho, 1994).

In terms of the moderating effect of POS, we found that the positive relationship between role overload and WFC was weaker when POS was high, suggesting that POS can offset the adverse impact of role overload. However, contrary to what was predicted, we found that the relationship between role ambiguity and WFC was more strongly positive when POS was perceived to be high. Thus, the data suggest that POS actually exacerbates the detrimental effects of role ambiguity.

It is worth noting that although we found a main effect for POS in Model 2, its effect disappeared when role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload were introduced in Model 3. This suggests that it may be more important for organizations to reduce the levels of work role stressors than it is to worry about creating POS. POS may only be a stopgap solution to fixing the problems associated with work role stressors.

### *6.1. Theoretical implications*

By examining the moderating effect of POS, our study contributes to the work-family literature by more fully exploring the positive relationship between work stressors and work-family conflict. Our work-family model, an extension of several previous models (e.g., Casper et al., 2002; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001), suggests that POS should be included in the search for better understanding the complexities of the work-family interface. This line of research is especially promising in terms of extending the research on the direct and moderating effects of different types of support on work-family conflict.

Further, these findings support the notion that POS is a variable with important implications for employee behaviors and attitudes (Moideenkutty, Blau, Kumar, & Nalakash,

2001). Very little previous research has examined POS in different cultural contexts (see Fu & Shaffer, 2001, for an exception), thus our study contributes to the literature on the work-family interface in different cultures. By using a sample of Hong Kong Chinese employees, we investigate the generalizability of Western findings in an Asian context. It is likely that work-family conflict is experienced differently across cultures since countries vary in political, social, and economic characteristics, thus demonstrating the importance of a cross-cultural perspective in studying work-family conflict and its consequences (Joplin, Francesco, Shaffer, & Lau, 2003; Ling & Powell, 2001). This supports Westman's (2005) suggestion that introducing cultural differences into our research may add an additional important dimension, especially cultural differences in the focus on gender and gender role ideology. For example, cultural may interact with gender to predict gender differences (Westman, 2005), or demographic variables and objective characteristics of the family that covary with gender, rather than gender per se, may be better predictors of gender differences (Choi & Chen, 2003).

A further contribution of this study is that it provides a test of the differential effect of gender on the relationships in the model. Our findings reinforce the utility of examining gender differences in the pattern of work-family relationships. We found that gender differences in work-family conflict are not salient, thus supporting the notion that women and men are becoming more similar in their experiences of work-family conflict (Frone, 2000). Yet we also found that the positive relationship between role conflict and WFC was stronger for women than for men, suggesting the spillover effect from work to family may differ for the two sexes. More research is needed to explain why and under what conditions there are gender differences in the experience of the work-family interface.

## 6.2. *Practical implications*

This study has important practical implications that are quite encouraging for organizations. Perceptions of support from the organization reduce the conflict one feels with FWC and WFC. In other words, when the organization communicates to employees that they are valued, employees are less likely to experience work-family conflict. This supports the notion that employers, far more than workers, set the conditions under which parents balance work and family obligations (Gerson & Jacobs, 2001), and that organizations have a major effect on the career experiences of all employees regardless of their parental status (Aryee & Luk, 1996). Employees who perceive high levels of organizational support may believe that their organization will provide them with the resources that they might need to cope with work role stressors, resulting in conflict being reduced. In addition, the findings of this study may help global firms develop and implement HR policies that help employees better integrate their work and family responsibilities. To the extent that work and family are interconnected, maintaining a harmonious relationship between the two will benefit both the organization and employees (Fu & Shaffer, 2001).

In Hong Kong specifically, because there is weak labor legislation, Hong Kong organizations need to find strategies to improve working conditions and alleviate work-family conflict (Aryee et al., 1998; Lo, Wright, & Wright, 2003). Types of POS may be culture-specific and worthy of further study (Hill, Yang, Hawkins, & Ferris, 2004). For example, previous



research suggests that family-friendly work arrangements (e.g., flexible work hours) appeal to Hong Kong women professionals with children (Lo, 2003). Our findings support the suggestion that what is needed in Hong Kong to alleviate work-family conflict are pertinent policies, procedures, and programs, along with a shift in the organizational culture to one of family supportiveness (Ngo & Lau, 1998). Organizations need to be aware of the impact of cultural influences on their operations and to develop culturally appropriate strategies (Hill et al., 2004; Ng & Chiu, 1997; Westman, 2005).

### 6.3. *Limitations*

One limitation of our study is the sample in that our respondents are members of a particular profession, thus our findings may not be generalizable to work settings other than professional workers. We believe that our results generalize to other helping professions (e.g., social workers) as well as workers in the non-profit sector because they face similar work conditions and practices as clergy. An issue to consider is the difference between this sample of highly religious people and a more general working population. Our respondents are likely to have different work/family norms compared to less religious workers. In addition, one third of our respondents were not married which may result in an overgeneralization of the results. As with all field studies, the cross-sectional design and common method variance are potential limitations. There are limitations with regard to non-respondents in that they may have differed from the respondents in meaningful ways. Our correlational design precludes causal conclusions, therefore we are unable to address the direction of causality by our research. For example, in contrast to hypotheses 1a and 1b that POS is negatively related to FWC and WFC, we could argue that feelings of FWC and WFC produce lower levels of POS.

### 6.4. *Future directions*

Future research is needed to assess the generalizability of the findings to other professions and cultures as well as to non-professional workers. Such research should also examine different types of organizations including multinationals and not-for-profits. Future studies can do more to assess under what conditions men and women differ in their levels of work-family conflict. In addition, further research should consider multiple sources and types of organizational support such as formal organizational policies (e.g., flexible working hours and paternity leave). It would be interesting to replicate this study in a longitudinal design to determine if the relationship between POS, work stressors, and work-family conflict are likely to be sustained. We hope that our study will stimulate researchers to address these and other issues necessary to gaining a deeper understanding of the determinants and consequences of work-family conflict in different employment situations and countries.

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