

Job Stress, Work-to- Family Conflict and Social Support in the Education Industry

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Abstract

This paper is based on specific research that has been conducted on work-to-family conflict among teachers in specific schools in Malaysia . Teachers are agents that are important in delivering quality education to students. Teachers contribute to developing high quality in education and human capital to the nation. However, teachers face considerable stress and conflict in carrying out their tasks effectively that lead to work family conflict. This study will examine three main components of job stress that lead to work family conflict which is role overload, role ambiguity and role conflict and also the role played by social support in reducing work-family conflict. The findings of the study are yet to be disclosed, but this paper is heavily based on the research conducted.

Keywords: *Job stress, work-to-family conflict, role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict*

INTRODUCTION

Work and family are two important domains for every individual that are not easily separated especially in the 21st century. As there is a growing number of individuals that have been faced with the tasks of trying to balance the demands and needs associated with multiple roles, many studies have attempted to understand the nature of the relationship between work and family. These two domains have become a major issue for both men and women especially dual-earners, as they become workers, parents, parents and child. This happens as individual's demand unlimited time and excessive energy in order to fulfil the needs and responsibilities of these two domains (Rathi & Barath, 2013). While struggling in balancing the roles between work and family, interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict will happen among individuals. The failure of an individual to maintain a balance between work and family domains will result in work-family conflict (WFC).

Thus this paper aims to review the literature concerning the impact of job stress that leads to work-family conflict and the role of social support in reducing the level of

WFC. In addition to that, this paper developed a conceptual framework of antecedents of WFC as it is postulated that job stress leads to WFC.

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Work-family conflict (WFC) refers to the relationship between employees' work lives and their non-work pursuits (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). It is a situation when an employee does not know how to prioritize and balance the demands of either work or family consequently. If role demands in both work and family domains are incompatible, conflict will ensue. There is evidence that WFC is bi-directional (O'Driscoll *et al.*, 2003), which is work-to-family conflict (W2FC) and family-to-work conflict (F2WC) (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2010). This directionality is also confirmed by Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, and Semmer, (2011) in meta-analysis that found the primary effect of WFC lies in the domain where the conflict is originated. But, it can be argued that the extent to which the individual is experiencing pressure between work and family roles is likely to be dependent upon their subjective perception of the situation and contributing factors such as history (medical), personality, context (supply of support) and well-being. To effectively manage human resource (HR), it is important to understand the role of an individual in their work and family life. This issue encourages the growing interest to study inter-role conflict, both conceptually and via empirical studies.

In this era of globalization, the balancing between work and family is the most difficult task for individuals particularly married couples. They need to focus upon their family since their work roles cause them to have difficulty in balancing the demands of work and family demands. Furthermore, due to advancement of technology, it can lead an individual to experience incompatibility between the pressures of work and family. This situation could lead to W2FC as employees will be accessible through WhatsApp, email, computer, or cellular phone although they are at home. Therefore, this is one way in which work and family lives have become entangled and conflict is created between work and family.

However, Akintayo (2010) argues that conflict can disrupt the balance of work and personal life of an employee which can result in domestic disharmony. This situation happens as there is imbalance between work responsibilities and meeting the needs of family. Many challenges also have arisen in addressing the balance between work and family demands. Nowadays WFC appears in the life of most people without their notice and knowledge. WFC which takes place in the individual's daily life generates problem in the work performance as they might get engaged in conflict. Reddy (2010) stated that WFC is unavoidable in this modern era. There could be many

reasons and one of the reasons is ongoing changes that occur in working life that play an important role in one's family life. Job stress seems to be the main trigger of WFC.

Studies on WFC have become an area of concern for many scholars, and studies have examined the factors that lead to WFC which have increased over the past few decades (Ahmad, 2008; Byron, 2005; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Michel *et al.*, 2010). There are various studies that have been done in Western contexts such as US, Canada, but limited studies have been done on job stress and work-family conflict in Malaysia.

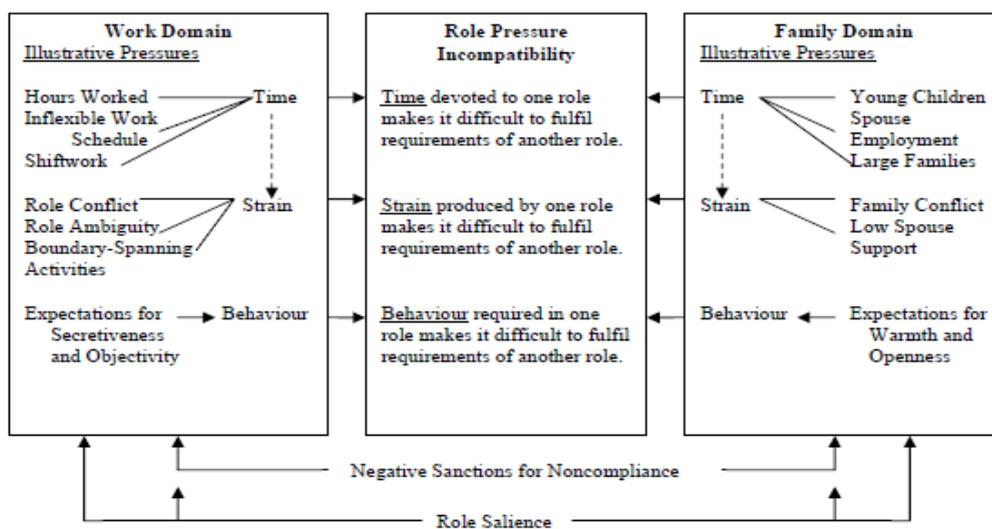
So far, the area of research on WFC in Malaysia had focused on professional positions such as doctors (Abd Razak, Mohd Nasurdin, & Yeop Yunus, 2011), academic staff (Ismail, Mohamed, Sulaiman, Ismail, & Wan Mahmood, 2010), and junior physicians (Ahmad, 2010), but there are limited studies done on the teaching profession. Palmer, Rose, Sanders, and Randle, (2012) claimed that research on teachers need to be extended because they are more vulnerable to inter-role conflict. Among the highest number of public servants in Malaysia, teachers have to deal with many commitments towards the society and also their family.

There are three main studies explaining WFC among teachers in Malaysia. The first study was done by Panatik *et al.*, in 2011 that determined the level and impact of WFC among school teachers. The result of the study discovered that the teachers have high level of W2FC compared to F2WC. While in 2012, Ismail and Nordin constructed and validated the measurement scale of WFC Efficacy for Malaysian married female teachers. The findings depict that measurement model of WFC efficacy can represent and be used as initial assessment of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and provide valuable information for future teachers' teaching training. Last but not least, Hashim, Othman and Hamzah (2013) carried out a study among married female teachers in Klang by using the Big Five Personality Traits as the moderator of the relationship between WFC and job satisfaction as well as analyzed the data using Rasch Measurement Model. The evaluation of the mean square infit and outfit suggests that the data exhibited; fit the model, statement in the questionnaire depicts higher reliability coefficient and greater consistency, and it confirms the robustness and the validity of the instrument that can be applied in any organizations in Malaysia.

Forms of Work-Family Conflict

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) have distinguished three forms of work-family conflict, namely; time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behaviour-based conflict. Researches have consistently used this conceptualization to assess the various

antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Michel *et al.*, 2010). But, it is found that individuals always experienced only time and strain-based conflict compared to behaviour-based conflict. This situation happens as there is interference of roles between work and family frequently which occurs due to factors related to time-based (i.e.: working hours, work and family involvement), and strain-based (role ambiguity, work and family stressors, role conflict, and parental demands) roles. Figure 1 shows the summarization of the different relationships that can occur between the three forms of WFC by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985).



Source: Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p. 78)

Figure 1 Work and Family Role Pressure Incompatibility

Based on Figure 1, it shows that role pressures from work domains and family domains can emerge simultaneously in both directions. Excessive role demands from the work domain (i.e.: hours worked, inflexible work schedules) may result in work-to-family conflict. Whilst, excessive role demand from family domain (i.e.: domestic chores, children duties) may result in work-to-family conflict. Time-based conflict is induced by time limitations of individual to perform the responsibilities of different roles, so that the time for doing an activity in a role cannot be applied for the activities of another role. The pressures from the roles can cause strain-based conflict as a result of work and family stressful factors, such as the stress of a role has devastating effects

on the individual's performance in another role. Last but not least, behaviour patterns of a role are in conflict with behavioural patterns of another role. When a person is unable to fulfil the behavioural expectations of a role, he/she is subjected to behaviour-based conflict.

JOB STRESS

Job stress happens to employee when there is mismatch between the demands of the job and the existence of capabilities and resources of the employee to meet those demands (Blaug, 2007). While according to Salami (2011), job stress is defined as the experience of unpleasant negative emotions such as tension, depression, anger, frustration, and anxiety which result from different aspects of work. Job stress is also faced by employees in a situation where work related factors interact with employees in a manner that disrupt their physiological conditions forcing them to deviate from normal functioning (Mehta, 2013).

Study by Chin, Ismail, Ahmad, and Kuek, (2012) to analyze the effect of job stress characteristics on both academics and non-academics staff from higher learning institutions in Sarawak shows that the characteristics of job stress which are role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict have impact on the level of WFC. It is also confirmed in the study done by Rimi and Rubel, (2013) that there is a positive relationship between specific job stress and WFC. The results disclosed that role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict play important roles that have effect on behaviours, emotional exhaustion, job attitudes, and interpersonal conflict.

Betoret (2006) define teacher stress as role ambiguity, work overload, pressure of K-12 teacher roles, lack of effective communication, inadequate resources, poor working conditions, student misbehavior, lack of professional recognition, and staff conflicts. A sizeable body of research has demonstrated that the components of role stress (role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload) have a harmful effect on teachers and organizational performance, with ramifications including compromised work performance, job dissatisfaction, decreased organizational commitments, burnout and turnover (Fried, Shirom, Gilboa, & Cooper, 2008; Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper, 2008). The cited researchers concluded that resources such as self-efficacy, coping skills, and social support could work to counter the deleterious effects of role stress.

As teaching Y-generation nowadays is getting difficult, it can be seen that stress is increasing steadily day by day in the educational sector, and the education profession can be dangerously stressful (Mehta, 2013). Teachers have contributed to developing

high quality of education and human capital of the nation but at the same time have to cope with their task which is teaching and learning. Stress levels among teachers are readily increasing due to growing number of demands from students, parents and society, as well as job requirement by Ministry of Education (MoE) (Abdul Samad, Hashim, Moin, & Abdullah, 2010).

Heavy workload, increasing demands and job requirements can cause teachers to experience WFC. At home teachers might be doing work responsibilities such as grading exam papers and preparing lesson plan for the next day. They have to devote time for work responsibilities outside school hours, which results in lesser quality time to be spent with family and children (Erdamar & Demirel, 2014). This may cause problems known as WFC. If they can balance the responsibilities between work and family domain, they can be satisfied with their job and family life. Kappagoda (2014) claimed that WFC is one of the salient issues in modern society that is experienced by teachers in Sri Lanka. This is because, other than needs to improve their quality of teaching, teachers also need to balance between work and family responsibilities.

There are three salient characteristics of job stress : (i) role overload, (ii) role ambiguity, and (iii) role overload (Chin *et al.*, 2012; Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Ismail *et al.*, 2010; Michel *et al.*, 2010). These three characteristics are mostly present in work domain.

Role Overload

The first characteristic is role overload. Michel *et al.*, (2010) refers to role overload as innumerable task given to an employee which must be completed within the time frame. In a normal sense, role overload happens when work roles requires employee to put more effort and time than he/she has, thus the roles cannot be performed adequately and comfortably In the meantime, role overload can be defined as having too much work tasks but minimum time to do those tasks. One antecedent that is commonly used as a variable in relation to WFC is role overload because it refers to having too many work tasks need to be completed within a particular time period (Hall, Dollard, Tuckey, Winefield, & Thompson, 2010; Rotondo & Kincaid, 2008) Study done by Işık, Işık, and Hamarta (2016) among academic staff in public and private universities in Tukey have shown that role overload can significantly predict time-based and strain-based conflict.

In the education field, Nkweke and Dollah (2011) define teachers' work role overload as the works of academic teachings and administration delegated to teachers to achieve the goals and objective outlined by the schools. When there is limited time and energy to perform demands from both work and family roles adequately, work role overload occurs (Yip, Rowlinson, & Siu, 2008). In the study conducted by Grzywacz,

Arcury, Coates, and Quandt, (2007), it was confirmed that employees may encounter WFC due to role overload. It is a situation where employees often experience role overload due to having limited time to fulfil various role demands. Employees associating with too heavy work are burdening themselves as it is beyond employees' capability to cope and thus often results in stress.

As there is role overload, it makes teachers to side-line their core job as a teacher which is teaching in classroom. The impact of role overload creates a lot of grievances from teachers (Abas, Nurasyikin, Masood, & Esa, 2014). Majority of the teachers who are involved in workshop management experience work role overload such as holding positions as a form teacher, advisor for co-curriculum and certain subjects, as well as coordinator for School-based Assessment (PBS) and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS/KBAT). Work role overload has been found to be a significant antecedent of WFC (Booth & Matthews, 2012; Brown & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2013; Burke, Koyuncu, Fiksenbaum, & Tekin, 2013; Hsiao & Barak, 2014). As work intensifies in a competitive labor market, organizations expect to have more work hours and high productivity from their employees. Meanwhile, employees may believe that meeting those expectations is a prerequisite for career advancement or for keeping their jobs. Thus, when they spend too much time at the workplace, they will have limited time to fulfill family demands.

Role Ambiguity

Second characteristic under job stress is role ambiguity. According to Beigi, Ershadi, and Shirmohammadi, (2012), role ambiguity happens when an employee does not have clear information regarding what is expected on the job, and how the reward system works. Employees have clear role expectations when he/she is provided adequate and accurate information that is needed for performing the task given. In an organization, when employees do not have certain information related to their work objective or responsibilities, or when they do not know what the supervisor expects, it may lead to higher levels of stress. While Beigi *et al.*, (2012) found that role ambiguity can happen when an employee does not have clear information regarding what is expected on the job, who to report, and how the reward system works. Higher role ambiguity can lead to lower level of job satisfaction and self-assurance, but also higher level of job-related tension. Fu and Shaffer, (2001) found that individuals who have ambiguous job definitions regularly would experience higher level of WFC.

Many additional roles have been transferred to teachers which are not their sole domain such as being appointed as administrative coordinators. Holding these additional non-academic positions could be a detriment to them since they might not have enough time to focus on classroom as well as family. The lack of having job-

related information concerning various aspects of job specifics in what to do in their role as teacher can create role ambiguity. It is the situation where the teacher holding a position is not sure of what his role entails as a teacher (Moss, 2015).

Papastylianou, Kaila, and Polychronopoulos, (2009) believe that there are four dimensions concerning role ambiguity that teachers may experience. These dimensions include; (i) ambiguity of objectives, expectations and responsibility (what is expected, what could be done, what should be done), (ii) ambiguity of processes (how the objectives work), (iii) ambiguity of priorities (what things could be done and in what order), (iv) ambiguity of behavior (how the professional himself/herself expects to act in various situations, what kind of behavior will lead to the desirable or necessary results). The result of the study shows that role ambiguity faced by female teachers in Greek was on average quite low. This happens as Greek teachers are well prepared for their job position, know what is expected and what they should do in order to achieve the objectives of the school.

There are several studies that show the existence of a positive relationship between role ambiguity and WFC. Chin *et al.*, (2012) stated about the impact of job stress characteristics on the workforce and organizational social support as a moderator towards the WFC. This study involved 96 academic and non-academic staffs in tertiary education in Kuching, Sarawak and found positive relationship between role ambiguity and WFC. Specifically, Ryan, Ma, Hsiao, and Ku, (2015) conducted a study on antecedents and consequences of WFC among university food managers in US. The result shows that there is significant and positive relationship between role ambiguity and WFC.

Role Conflict

The third salient characteristic of job stress is role conflict. When there is simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressure, it will create compliance with one incompatible with the other, thus role conflict exist (Beigi *et al.*, 2012). Employees experience role conflict when he/she is expected to try and do something that would create conflict with his/her personal values. Role conflict can be explained as the outcome of uncertainty concerning what the role an individual needs to perform in an organization. A recent definition views role conflict as an incompatibility in expectations towards the behavior of a person in his/her role (Gilbert, Winne, & Sels, 2011). In a nutshell, it can be concluded that when an employee faces different expectations, role conflict exists as compliance with one expectation may make it impossible or troublesome to effectively and successfully comply with other expectations.

Different roles give rise to certain sets of role expectations and simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of role expectations may necessitate responses and tasks that may be competing, so that compliance with one would make compliance with other more difficult, thus the concept is called role conflict. The lack of having job-related information concerning various aspects of job specifics in what to do in the role of a teacher can involve and create role conflict. It is a situation where a teacher's identification with the role and demands received from another colleague involves conflicting instructions due to an inherited existence of the position (Moss, 2015).

This is supported by Makaye and Ndofirepi, (2012) that conducted research among teachers from selected schools in Zimbabwe. There are four causes of role conflict: (i) goal incompatibility (lack of agreement concerning the direction of evaluating task accomplishment), (ii) organizational structure (in a school it can be seen in the relationship between head and teachers. The problem lays in the view points of each member and their roles in schools (iii) performance expectations (activity or performance of one person in a group that affects the subsequent performance of other members. For example, one member's work cannot begin until another member provides some needed information), (iv) unavailability of resources (at a school for instance books and furniture are mostly short in supply).

There have been some research findings, which found that there is positive relationship between role conflict and WFC. Idris (2011) conducted a study on time effects of role stress on psychological strain among lecturers in public universities in Malaysia. The study found that there is a significant and positive relationship between role conflict and WFC. Abu Bakar and Salleh (2015) also proposed a conceptual framework that shows higher role conflict will lead to higher level of WFC. While Beigi *et al.*, (2012) found that role conflict was positively associated with WIF because conflict at hospital draws resources away from the family domain thus results in higher level of WIF among Iranian operating room personnel.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

The existence of social support in the organization can help employee in balancing the demands of work and family (Boyar *et al.*, 2014). Employees often experience high demands of time and energy that can create stress and conflict within and across work and family domains. Social support can positively impact the employee by buffering the impact of stressful and demanding work or family environments. But the role of social support in improving work to resolve W2FC relationship is not adequately explained in organizational support literature (Arshadi, 2011; Ismail, Mohd Nor, *et al.*, 2013).

Supervisors are gatekeepers as they interpret and execute organizational rules and policies (Muse & Pichler, 2011). Existence of support from supervisors may enhance employees' predictability, purpose, and hope when handling upsetting and threatening situation in the workplace environment. Hsiao and Barak, (2014) carried out a study among 168 Mexican workers in a former sweatshop owned and managed by Korean expatriates. The hierarchical regression analysis showed that supervisor support did not moderate the positive relationship between job stress (role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload) and WFC.

Colleagues support is defined as "perceiving positive professional and personal relationships with co-workers" (Thaden, Jacobs-Priebe, & Evans, 2010). Bogo, Paterson, Tufford, and King, (2011) have strictly stated that co-worker support is important for employees to overcome everyday hardship they encounter in the workplace. Support from co-worker can decrease employees' isolation, thus make them feel that they are not alone. Ismail *et al.*, (2010) in their study confirms that co-worker's social support act as a partial moderating variable as co-worker's social support moderate the relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict with WIF but not moderate the relationship between role overload and WIF.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Two theories are related with this study which is Role Theory and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. These theories explain why some family or personal resources may buffer the negative impact of job stress among employed women and also how the role expectation of women as homemakers may influence their experiences of work-to-family conflict. Role theory posits that individuals occupy multiple roles simultaneously each with its own set of expectations, functions, and associated behaviours. As they carry multiple roles in a row, it will lead to inter-role conflict (Kahn *et al.*, 1964) as there is limited resources (i.e.: energy and time) or incompatibility of diverse roles (employee roles vs. family roles). While COR theory suggests that individuals grow and develop by obtaining resources (i.e.: object, conditions, personal characteristics, and energy) from their environment. Unfortunately, there tends to be a limited quantity of resources available from their environment. Teachers have multiple roles and work task cause them stress. Stress occurs as those resources are threatened or lost, or if resources investment does not result in the desired result. It is where COR theory is applied by the existence of social support from supervisor and colleagues, to generates a positive effect in the work domain and increase the quality of life in the family domain.

There are many studies that have examined work-family conflict as an important dimension in enhancing effectiveness in organizations. This is because work family

conflict has unfavorable consequences such as lack of organizational commitment (Malik & Awan, 2015; Zulfiqar, Najeeb, & Qamar, 2014) turnover (Gokulakrishnan & Ramesh, 2013; Nohe & Sonntag, 2014) and decreasing job satisfaction (Dartey-Baah, 2015; Warokka & Febrilia, 2014). However, to date, there have been little attempts made to empirically discuss the relationship between job stress and WFC among teachers in the context of Malaysia.

Many studies have confirmed that role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict will lead to WFC. Studies suggest that the higher the level of job stress (role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict), an individual will encounter high level of work-family conflict. A study on the impact of job stress on WFC is therefore proposed to understand the relationship that exists between the variables. Therefore, a conceptual framework that links job stress and WFC is therefore proposed as shown in Figure 2*.

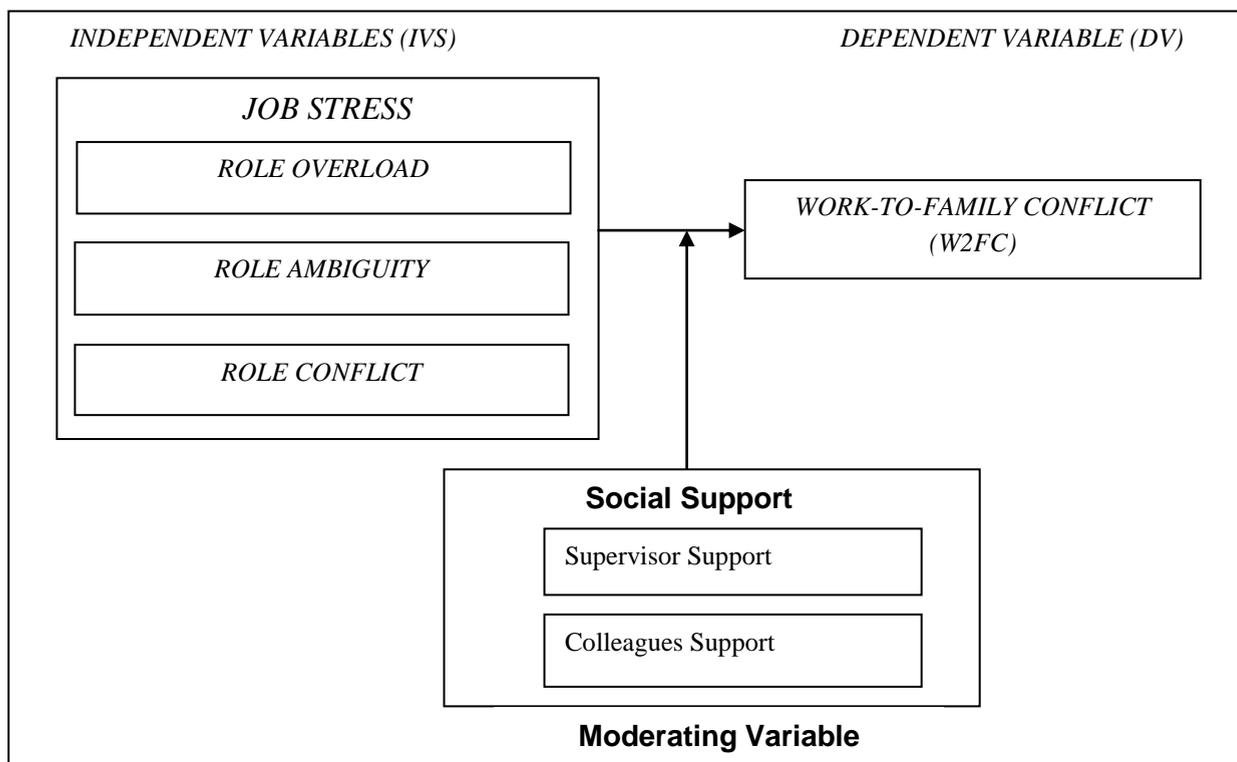


FIGURE 2: Conceptual Framework To Show The Relationship Between Job Stress And Work Family Conflict

* The author has proposed a conceptual framework that has been adopted and adapted from her study. It is based on the literature review and studies that have been done.

CONCLUSION

These three components of job stress (role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict) are important determinants of work-to-family conflict especially in education. This paper proposes a conceptual framework that links job stress with W2FC. Future research that empirically investigates this proposed framework is suggested to validate the proposed hypothetical links between the construct. It is also suggested that the framework can be tested in a different setting with different occupational groups, as well as “add on” any moderator or mediator variable.

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