EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT. AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON SICKNESS PRESENTEEISM

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between work-family conflict and attendance dynamics, having in view the case of sickness presenteeism. We presume that the negative interference of work with family can predict if employees attend work when ill. The research was conducted on a convenience sample of composed of 126 employees (M=41.6, SD=5.50), working in public and private Romanian organizations. The majority of the participants were from dual-earner couples and over a half had dependent care responsibilities. Work-family conflict was assessed using 9 items measuring the interference between work and family from Carlson, Kacmar and Williams (2000) multidimensional WFC scale and one item measure of sickness presenteeism (Aronsson, Gustafsson, & Dallner, 2000). Results indicated that work-family conflict predicted sickness presenteeism, but in a small extent. The generalization of results must be made with cautions, due to the small sample size, and other research limitations, including the cross-sectional design of the study, sample composition and the use of self-report measures. Implications and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: work-family conflict, sickness presenteeism, health, attendance dynamics.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Carlson, Kacmar and Williams (2000) work–family conflict (WFC) represents a topic that is intensively investigated in contemporary organizational behavior research, for practitioners, as well as academics, the management of the two domains’ interface gaining its centrality (Rothbard & Dumas, 2006). Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, and Semmer (2011) indicate that work–family conflict is frequently perceived as a potential stressor that impacts well-being and behavior.

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Starting from the canonical definition introduced by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), Bellavia and Frone (2005) assert the bidirectional nature of WFC; thus, two directions can be traced: family interfering with work (family-work conflict) and work interfering with family (work-family conflict) (Bellavia & Frone, 2005). Also, as Brough and O’Driscoll (2005) indicate, three distinct forms of WFC were introduced by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), namely time, strain and behaviour-based conflict (Brough & O’Driscoll, 2005).

According to Frone (2003), the possible consequences of WFC have been examined in an increasing number of studies. Allen, Herst, Bruck and Sutton (2000) introduced an effective taxonomy that distinguished between: work-related (e.g. job satisfaction and performance, commitment, turnover and absenteeism), non-work related (such as family, marital, or life satisfaction), and stress related (including somatic symptoms, general psychological strain, burnout) work-family conflict outcomes.

Focusing on the last class of effects, meta-analytic studies indicate a weighted mean correlation of .29 between WFC and physical symptoms or somatic complaints (Allen et al., 2000), and of .28 between WIF and health problems (Amstad et al., 2011). Work-family conflict can also be associated with health-related attendance dynamics, in their study, Jansen, Kant, van Amelsvoort, Kristensen, Swaen and Nijhuis (2006) indicating that WFC is linked to sickness absenteeism.

Although it represents a recent subject of research, information regarding its antecedents being scarce (Böckerman & Laukkanen, 2010), sickness presenteeism (SP) can be considered a topic with arising popularity (Biron & Saksvik, 2009). According to Hemp (2004), although less visible, presenteeism seems to imply higher costs than absenteeism. Also, Hansen and Andersen (2008) provide evidences that sickness presenteeism can have the same occurrence as sickness absenteeism.

Johns (2010, p. 521) defines sickness presenteeism as „attending work while ill”, suggesting to embed work attitudes and experiences (Johns, 2010, p. 535), in the SP research.

In their empirical study, Aronsson, Gustafsson, and Dallner (2000) indicate that middle-aged employees and parents can experience increased sickness presenteeism, women exhibiting mildly elevated SP rates than men (Aronsson et al., 2000). Böckerman and Laukkanen (2010) provide evidence that among others, regular overtime, working full-time, and more than 48 hours/week can enhance SP. In addition, research indicated that high job demands can encompass in time presenteeism (Demerouti, Le Blanc, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Hox, 2009).

Having in view these findings, we can observe that SP can be associated with demographic and work-related factors that are pellicular to work-family conflict.

Among other work experiences, Johns (2011) examined work-family conflict and the connections with sickness presenteeism. WFC predicted subjective ($\beta=.23,$
p <.01) and objective rates (β=.18, p <.05) of SP (Johns, 2011, p. 491), and also productivity loss measured with Work Limitations Questionnaire (β=.16, p <.01) (Johns, 2011, p. 493). The conflict between family and work domains was related to the productivity loss measured by Stanford Presenteeism Scale and Work Limitations Questionnaire (Johns, 2011).

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

Starting from this theoretical background, the objective of this paper is exploratory, examining the link between work-family conflict and sickness presenteeism. We thus explore whether SP is prevalent among employees experiencing WFC. The main hypothesis of the study is that work-family conflict predicts sickness presenteeism. We consider that employees reporting WFC will be present at work despite illness. According to Aronsson et al. (2000), we measured sickness presenteeism as employees’ own assessment regarding their attendance rate at work, although being sick.

3. METHOD

3.1. PARTICIPANTS

The study is based on a convenience sample, 126 employees from Romanian organizations participating at the current research. 78.6% were women and 21.4% men, with ages ranging from 27 to 56 years (M=41.6, SD=5.50), mainly from the educational, human resources, communication and banking sectors.

All the participants were married, 88.1% being from dual-earner couples (with an employed spouse), and 53.2 % having at least one child. Also, 13.5% had an elder dependent in their care. All employees were working full-time, 32.5% in the public sector and 67.5% from the private sector, 29.4% having a leadership position.

3.2. INSTRUMENTS

Work-family conflict was assessed using the Carlson, Kacmar and Williams (2000) multidimensional measure. The scale is composed of 18 items that tap the two directions and the three forms of conflict, rated on a five point scale ranging from „strongly disagree” to „strongly agree”. The scale was translated and adapted in Romanian by Şulea, Virgă and Galben (2010). For the current study, the 9 items measuring work interference with family were selected, the internal consistency of the scale being of α=.87.

We measured presenteeism, following Aronsson et al. study (2000), with a single question: „Has it happened in the previous 12 months that you have gone to
work despite feeling that you really should have taken sick leave due to your state of health?” (p. 504). The responses were made on a four point scale, ranging from „No, never” to „Yes, more than 5 times” (Aronsson et al., 2000). We dichotomized the responses in view of conducting logistic regression.

3.3. PROCEDURE

The employees were contacted and informed about the topic of the research; those who agreed to participate filled in an online survey regarding work-family conflict that contained the WFC and SP measures. They were briefed regarding the anonymity and confidentiality of the results. The data were collected and a logistic regression was conducted using SPSS 16.00. However, we must mention that, having in view the statistical properties of logistic regression, the generalization of the results must be made with cautions. More precisely, logistic regression requires a much larger sample size than linear regression (Popa, 2010, p. 187), the number of participants ranging from 50 to at least 10 subjects/predictor, some authors considering the sample size to be of a minimum of 150 subjects (Popa, 2010, p. 187).

4. RESULTS

In order to examine if work-family conflict predicts sickness presenteeism, logistic regression analysis was performed, the dependent variable being dichotomized. We followed Aronsson et al. (2000, p. 504) coding procedure in order to examine the occurrence of sickness presenteeism (0 = No, never/Yes, once, 1 = Yes, 2–5 times/Yes, more than 5). For work-family conflict, means and standard deviations were calculated (M=3.08, SD=.77).

The regression model tested was significant ($\chi^2$ =17.55, $p<.001$), the Nagelkerke’s $R^2$ coefficient of .175 indicating however, a weak prediction, 17.5% of the variance of sickness presenteeism being explained by work-family conflict (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>-2 Log likelihood</th>
<th>Cox &amp; Snell R Square</th>
<th>Nagelkerke R Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>153.931</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Hosmer & Lemeshow test ($\chi^2$ =5.69, $p>.68$) indicates that the prediction model fits the research data (Table 2).
Table 2. Hosmer & Lemeshow test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.692</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.682</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The classification table presents the correspondence between the observed values of the criterion and those predicted by the model (Table 3). As it can be observed, the total percentage of right classification is of 70.6% (52.8% for the absence of sickness presenteeism and 83.6% for SP occurrence).

Table 3. Classification model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sickness presenteeism</th>
<th>Percentage Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 0</td>
<td>Sickness presenteeism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results indicate that WFC can be considered a predictor of SP (Wald=14.52, p<.001, OR=2.94, 95%CI=1.69-5.14).

Thus, a logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict sickness presenteeism using work-family conflict as a predictor. The test of the full model against a constant only model was significant, indicating that the predictor reliably distinguished between the occurrence and absence of sickness presenteeism ($\chi^2 = 17.55$, p<.001 with df=1).

Nagelkerke’s R² of .175 indicated a weak relationship between prediction and grouping. Overall prediction success was 70.6% (52.8% for the absence of SP and 83.6% for the occurrence of SP). The Wald criterion demonstrated that work-family conflict made a significant contribution to prediction (Wald=14.52, p <.001). EXP(B) value indicates that when work-family conflict is raised by one unit, the odds ratio is 2.94 times as large, and therefore employees are approximately 3 times more likely to come to work when sick.
5. CONCLUSIONS

The current study is an exploratory one, examining the role of work-family conflict in predicting sickness presenteeism. The hypothesis of the study was supported; employees that experienced interference between work and family reported coming to work despite illness. Thus, the results highlight the impact of work-family conflict on health-related attendance dynamics (Johns, 2011).

Starting from these results, a number of practical implications can be traced. First, for example, by providing family-friendly benefits as flexible working arrangements, which can enhance control in dealing with various work and family demands (Allen, 2001), organizations can reduce deleterious “presenteeism cultures” (Johns, 2010) and foster “family-supportive environments” (Allen, 2001).

Also, by redesigning job demands as Demerouti et al. (2009, p. 64) suggest, presenteeism, but also work-family conflict, can be decreased.

However, we must notice that the explained variance in the logistic regression indicates a weak prediction and the percent of right classification can be improved, when examining the absence of SP. Thus, some strong limitations of the research must be highlighted.

The first weakness relies in the sample size, which can be considered unfitted for logistic regression (Popa, 2010). Thus, the results of the study must be interpreted with cautions. Secondly, according to Geurts and Demerouti (2003) a large majority of WFC studies are based on cross-sectional design, and self-report measures. The current study does not surpass this methodological weakness, and we suggest that further studies should adopt a longitudinal design and preferably based on objective reports.

Also, as Geurts and Demerouti (2003) draw attention, the samples used in WFC research are traditionally composed of women and white-collar employees. The structure of the current sample reflects this limitation, and more studies should be conducted having in view more balanced and occupationally diverse sampling.

Other limitations rely in not controlling for the effects of general health, which was strongly associated with presenteeism (Johns, 2011) and measuring presenteeism with a single, self-report, item.

Future research directions might consist in examining the relationship between WFC and SP having in view gender and occupational differences, but also the forms of WFC (especially strain-based and time-based conflict).

Also, focusing on the suggestion that presenteeism and absenteeism should be examined concurrently (Johns, 2010, p. 534), and having in view that family-work conflict was related to the number of days of absenteeism, but also with presenteeism productivity loss (Johns, 2011, p. 494), future studies could explore the role of work-family conflict and family-work conflict in predicting sickness absenteeism and sickness presenteeism.

Received at: 23.12.2011, Accepted for publication on: 14.01.2012
6. REFERENCES


