

# Work-Family Conflict among Service Employees in Malaysia: Do Sociodemographic Factors Matter?

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**Abstract** Individuals are often occupied with multiple social roles, which makes it necessary to consider the significance of each role separately. Particular roles require a certain amount of time and a specific demand to be fulfilled, which can be rather onerous. The competition for an individual's finite resources such as time and energy often leads to irreconcilability between the work and family domains. The process of determining which of coexisting multiple selves should be prioritized is subject to the surroundings, personal preferences, and micro settings such as the sociodemographic background of the individual. Therefore, this study examines the influence of different sociodemographic factors on work-family conflict. Service employees from five main cities in Malaysia were surveyed and the data were analyzed with a regression-based approach. The findings indicate that employees in the service industry experience more work-to-family conflict (WFC) compared to family-to-work conflict (FWC). There is no significant relationship between marital status, parental status, or type of employment and work-family conflict. However, women were less likely to experience FWC than men. A significant relationship was found between ethnicity, specifically for Malaysian-Chinese and Malaysian-Indians, and work-family conflict. The study sheds some light on the influence of different social factors on work-family conflict. It may serve as a foundation to develop better work arrangements in assisting individuals to manage their multiple responsibilities.

**Keywords** individual differences · service employees · multiple social roles · work-family conflict

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## Introduction

Individuals engage in multiple social roles for resources and social support. Undertaking multiple roles is a manifestation of individual transformation into a more complex organized being. However, each role comes with a different set of demands, which can be taxing or gratifying. Individuals are facing challenges in effectively managing their work and family responsibilities. This is due to the advancement of information communication technologies such as smartphones and email, which have made it possible to access work anytime, anywhere. The demographic changes in the workforce and irregular working hours adopted by international employers have also contributed to the diminishing work-family boundaries. Interactions with clients that are eight to twelve time zones away intensify the probability of work-family interference.

According to Greenhaus and Beutell, work-family conflict occurs because of the incompatibility between the work and family domains. However, the permeability and flexibility of the boundaries separating the work and family domains are defined by individual differences. The discrepancies between work and family life depend on personal preferences and characteristics and are not a product of social norms. Those who perceive their work role as more prominent will invest more in work fulfillment and neglect other activities. In contrast, individuals who prioritize family over work tend to flex their work boundaries to accommodate household responsibilities. Nevertheless, work-to-family conflict (WFC) occurs more often compared to family-to-work conflict (FWC). This is due to the mentally demanding work tasks that often exhaust cognitive resources, which in turn creates strain and impairs well-being.

Previous studies have over-emphasized situational factors contributing to the incompatibility between work and family domains, such as time pressure, work- and family-related strain, job involvement, and household responsibilities. In recent years, scholars have started to pay attention to the influence of individual differences such as dispositional factors and sociodemographic background on work-family interference. Dispositional factors such as negative affect, neuroticism, and self-efficacy were found to have a significant relationship with work-family conflict. However, sociodemographic factors have often been considered as control variables and have received little attention in previous work-family studies.

The phenomenology approach to self-organization suggests that individuals are well aware of how their multiple roles fit together. This awareness helps individuals to determine which role should be more prominent in a specific time and place. However, the process of prioritizing roles is subject to the surroundings, role partners, and micro settings such as the sociodemographic background. Individual preferences strongly influence the enactment of roles in the personal and professional domains. Therefore, one must acknowledge that they are connected to each other and are subconsciously organized according to personal preferences.

When approaching work-family issues, only a handful of researchers have considered the impact of individual differences on work-family spillover. Among the individual differences, the demographic factors have been extensively scrutinized, including gender, marital status, and type of occupation. Yet, these efforts have been inadequate to allow for a better understanding of the mechanisms whereby individual differences influence the outcomes of the work-family interface.

This research was conducted to examine the influence of individual differences on work-family conflict. The two main objectives of the present study are to examine the following: (1) the level of WFC and FWC among service industry employees in Malaysia, and (2) the influence of individual differences on WFC and FWC. Individual differences in this study refer to sociodemographic factors, namely gender, marital status, parental status, ethnicity, and type of employment. By clarifying the influence of sociodemographic factors on work-family conflict, we can shed some light on how individuals of different backgrounds perceive and manage their multiple social roles.

## **Literature review**

### **Work-family conflict**

Individual resources such as time and energy are limited, which can lead to negative interactions between two competing domains. Work-family conflict is a product of incompatibility between work and family demands. The process of fulfilling the demands of one domain makes it difficult to meet the demands of another. The term “work-family conflict” was coined in 1985 by Greenhaus and Beutell to describe the competitive nature of the work-family interface for individual finite resources. Several terms, such as work-family conflict, work-family interference, and negative work-family spillover, have been employed to describe the irreconcilability between work and family responsibilities. Previous studies have used work-family conflict and work-family interference (WFI) or work-home interference (WHI) interchangeably. Nevertheless, all of these terms refer to the mutual incompatibility of work and family responsibilities.

Early work-family studies conceptualized work-family conflict as a unidirectional construct. Kopelman, Greenhaus, and Connolly developed an 8-item unidimensional scale to assess work-family conflict. A scale with a similar concept but which overlooked the significance of family-to-work conflict was developed in 1996 by Stephen and Sommers. Recently, researchers have started to assess work-family conflict as bidirectional, distinct constructs: WFC and FWC. The earliest bidirectional multi-dimensional constructs were proposed by Netemeyer et al. in 1996 and Frone and Yardley in 1997. Neither construct covered the three types of work-family conflict as suggested by Greenhaus and Beutell. However, Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams developed a 16-item bidirectional construct with six dimensions that covered time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflict. Despite some agreement on direction and type of work-family conflict, the variations in the scales used in previous studies resulted in diversified and inconsistent findings. The current study has adopted the scale introduced by Carlson et al. for a more comprehensive understanding of work-family conflict.

### **Individual differences and work-family conflict (WFC and FWC)**

The way in which individuals perceive things, situations, and people differs depending on their personal characteristics and preferences. Therefore, work and family roles carry different values for different individuals. Engagement in multiple social roles can lead to role conflict,

which is one of the most debated topics in the work-family interface. The significance of the work-family interface has prompted organizations to offer employee-assistance programs to help employees to better manage their work and family responsibilities. Organizational culture has been altered and alternative work arrangements have been offered to accommodate the need for work-life balance. Yet demarcating the work and family spheres is still a struggle.

Previous work-family studies have over-emphasized the influence of situational factors and given limited attention to person-environment fit. Factors such as job and family involvement, schedule flexibility, and work and family stress have often been associated with work-family conflict. However, family-related factors such as parental status, number of children, and household responsibilities also make a significant contribution to work-family interference. Some studies have even indicated the role of support from partner and children in reducing work-family conflict. Recently, researchers have started to show more interest in the influence of individual differences such as dispositional factors and sociodemographic factors on work-family interference. Sociodemographic factors have been extensively investigated; however, previous studies almost always have treated them as control variables.

### **Sociodemographic background and work-family conflict (WFC and FWC)**

#### *Gender and work-family conflict.*

Gender role is a set of norms that match the social norms of gender-based responsibilities and role-related behaviors. Reports on the role of gender mostly focus on work-family conflict. So far, the findings have been inconclusive and failed to provide consistent evidence on the role of gender differences in work-family experience. Gender-related expectations seem to determine the boundaries that separate work from family life, as work-to-family conflict was found to be higher among men; and family-to-work conflict was more common among women. There is a common agreement on the role of women as wives and mothers, whereas men are regarded as the sole breadwinners of the family. Although the sex-role attitude was prevalent throughout history up until the 1970s, it seems to be making a comeback despite evidence undermining its validity.

Gender is found to be significantly correlated with work-family conflict. Work-family conflict was reported to be higher among women compared to men. According to Parasuraman and Simmers, women experienced more work-family conflict in both directions due to their higher devotion to family and household responsibilities. Employed mothers of young children generally reported higher work-family conflict compared to their counterparts. For most women, the family domain is the center of their life, which makes them vulnerable to negative stereotyping in the workplace. Although gender-based roles are no longer relevant among dual-career couples, women still spend more time on childcare (e.g., child bearing, child rearing) and household responsibilities compared to men.

Work and family demands are burdensome and afflict women disproportionately. When men report more work-to-family conflict, it is possible that they need more time to fulfill their work commitments. Women, on the other hand, desire more time at home. Therefore, hypothesis 1 (H1) proposes that gender influences work-family conflict.

*H1 (a): Gender influences WFC.*

*H1 (b): Gender influences FWC.*

### *Marital status and work-family conflict.*

Marital status has often been significantly associated with work-family conflict. Some researchers have found that spouses and partners benefit the individual by providing support for better work-life balance. Support from a family member fosters more positive energy, which can be transferred to the work domain and thus enhance job performance.

According to Pleck's work-family role system, the increasing number of married women in the workplace causes a considerable amount of strain and exhaustion due to competing work and family demands. Devoted husbands face the same dilemma when it comes to diverting their energy for an equal share of household responsibilities and career advancement. Fox et al, believed that marriage did not necessarily influence the level of work-to-family interference but was significantly associated with FWC among men. The presence of a spouse or a partner reduces FWC among women but not among men. Having a partner make social roles more valuable and provides women with psychological support to deal with the competing demands of multiple roles. Hypothesis 2 (H2) of this study proposes that marital status influences work-family conflict.

*H2 (a): Marital status influences WFC.*

*H2 (b): Marital status influences FWC.*

### *Parental status and work-family conflict.*

The value attributed to the work and family domains can determine the impact of parental status on work-family conflict. According to Mennino, Rubin, and Brayfield, the presence of children regardless of age in a household contributed to higher work-family conflict. However, other studies have found that individuals with children aged 6 to 18 years experienced higher work-family conflict. The influence of parental status on work-family conflict was suggested to be gender specific. Despite working in family-friendly organizations, women reported higher work-family conflict compared to men. Nevertheless, men also experience difficulty juggling work and family responsibilities. They do have their share of childcare and household responsibilities, although these are less than women have to deal with. Therefore, hypothesis 3 (H3) in this study proposes that parental status influences work-family conflict.

*H3 (a): Parental status influences WFC.*

*H3 (b): Parental status influences FWC.*

### *Ethnicity and work-family conflict.*

A limited number of studies have investigated the role of ethnicity in work-family conflict. Ethnicity has mostly been examined as a control variable in previous studies. In a multicultural

country such as Malaysia, ethnic diversification might influence the experience of work-family conflict. Among the Malays, for example, women are still expected to be fully accountable for domestic responsibilities despite their participation in the workforce. Moreover, Malay women seem to agree that they should not compete professionally with men, and believe they should be nondemanding and obedient. Although the perception and tradition appear old-fashioned, women's roles have remained unchanged despite their holding higher positions with good career prospects.

The phenomenology approach to self-organization highlights the effects of culture and subculture on the choice of the most salient role. Ethnicity comes with its own set of values and shared beliefs, which guide personal decisions as to which role performance is more salient for overall well-being. Different roles and identities are integrated to determine the allocation of an individual's finite time and energy. This may result in favoring one role and neglecting role partners in another role. Nevertheless, it may nurture the balance for individuals with multiple social roles, leading to different outcomes for personal well-being. Therefore, hypothesis 4 (H4) proposes that ethnicity influences work-family conflict.

*H4 (a): Ethnicity influences WFC.*

*H4 (b): Ethnicity influences FWC.*

#### *Type of employment and work-family conflict.*

According to Dolcos and Daley, type of employment is interrelated with job attributes, rewards system, organizational functions, and organizational culture and support. The private and public sectors inherit different elements that influence the occurrence of work-family conflict. Public sector employees prefer a secure and stable job, while those who work in the private sector are motivated by monetary rewards and opportunities for personal growth. Civil servants are less motivated by challenges and desire a supportive working environment. Therefore, the probability of experiencing work-family conflict is lower among civil servants than among private sector employees.

The public sector offers a friendlier social environment with a high level of workplace social resources, a stronger employee support system, and better family-friendly policies. The difference between the private and public sectors can also be explained from an administrative perspective and in terms of commercial function. The function of the private sector is oriented more towards profit and sales-related transactions. The public sector, on the other hand, tends to be directed towards administrative functions. Individuals must constantly decide between work and family. Some opt for better work-family balance and others show higher commitment to work and organizational citizenship behavior. Therefore, hypothesis 5 (H5) proposes that type of employment influences work-family conflict.

*H5 (a): Type of employment influences WFC.*

*H5 (b): Type of employment influences FWC.*

## Methodology

### Participants

This study involves 531 employees of the service industry who work not less than 30 hours per week. Individuals who worked less than 30 hours a week on average were considered underemployed due to their insufficient working hours, regardless of their willingness to accept additional working hours. This is because the experience of such employees in terms of work-family conflict could differ substantially in comparison with those who worked 30 hours per week or more. Therefore, those who worked less than 30 hours were not included as respondents of this study.

According to the Economic Planning unit, in 2010, 59.4% (6.84 million) of the Malaysian workforce was in the service industry. It is estimated that this number will increase from 8.4 million (60.9%) in 2015 to 9.55 million (62.5%) by 2020. Therefore, it is fitting for this study to focus on service employees since they represent more than half of the Malaysian workforce.

Of the 531 participants, 179 (33.7%) work in the public sector, while 352 (66.3%) work in the private sector (Table 1). The participants were a convenient sample, recruited from 11 different service-related industries. Data were collected through an online questionnaire from those residing in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor (Shah Alam and Klang), Kota Kinabalu, and Kuching from March to August 2017 (6 months). The majority of the respondents are female (68.2%) and have never been married (64.8%). Only 152 (28.4%) of the respondents reported having children in the household. In terms of ethnicity, the largest group was Malaysian-Chinese (37.3%), followed by Malay (27.1%), the indigenous ethnic group of Borneo (27.1%), and Malaysian-Indians (8.5%).

**Table 1** Profile of respondents

Sociodemographic factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	169	31.8%
Female	362	68.2%
<b>Marital status</b>		
Unmarried	344	64.8%
Married	187	35.2%
<b>Parental status</b>		
Yes	151	28.4%
No	380	71.6%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Malay	144	27.1%
Chinese	198	37.3%
Indian	45	8.5%
Indigenous ethnic group of Borneo	144	27.1%
<b>Sector of Employment</b>		
Public sector	179	33.7%
Private sector	352	66.3%

## Measures

Work-family conflict in this study was measured as a bidirectional construct. An 18-item construct by Carlson et al. was employed to assess the level of WFC and FWC. The data on sociodemographic factors such as gender, marital status, parental status, ethnicity, and type of employment were gathered with self-developed items. As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha for WFC and FWC is 0.833 and 0.896, respectively. Therefore, the measures employed in this study are reliable, since the reported Cronbach's alpha values are higher than the recommended minimum level of 0.7.

**Table 2** Reliability statistics

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Work-to-family conflict (WFC)	9	0.833
Family-to-work conflict (FWC)	9	0.896

The purification process of indicators was conducted with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Potential collinearity issues were examined based on the variance inflation factors (VIF) and tolerance level obtained from the multiple regression analysis. A tolerance level of 0.2 or lower and a VIF value of 5 or higher is an indication of a critical collinearity problem. Indicators of this study have a minimal tolerance level of 0.382 and the variance inflation factors (VIF) range from 1.404 to 2.615. Therefore, there is no indication of a critical multicollinearity issue among indicators involved in this study.

## Data analysis

A regression-based approach introduced by Preacher and Hayes was employed to analyze the influence of sociodemographic factors such as gender, marital status, parental status, ethnicity, and type of employment on WFC and FWC. The approach is mathematically identical to ANOVA and MANOVA but enables the model, parameter estimates, and model fit statistics (such as  $R^2$ ) to retain all the information about how the groups differ from each other, unlike when groups are collapsed to form a single dichotomous variable. It also allows for simultaneous hypothesis tests if the groups are represented using carefully selected group codes to represent comparisons of interest.

## Results

Table 3 displays the mean and standard deviation for WFC and FWC. Respondents of this study experienced only occasional work-to-family interference (Mean = 2.84), and family or household responsibilities rarely interfere with their work domain (Mean = 2.33).

Of the five (5) sociodemographic factors, only gender and ethnicity have a significance influence on work-family conflict (WFC and FWC). As shown in Table 4, ethnicity explains 6.55% of the variance in WFC. Gender and ethnicity explain 1.1% and 8.64% of FWC variance,



**Table 3** Descriptive statistics

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Work-to-family conflict (WFC)	2.84	0.638
Family-to-work conflict (FWC)	2.33	0.710

respectively. There is no significant influence of marital status, parental status, or type of employment on WFC and FWC. Therefore, all hypotheses proposed in this study were rejected except for H1 (b), H4 (a) and H4 (b).

Table 5 presents the coefficients, standard deviations and  $\rho$ -values for the relationship between sociodemographic factors and work-family conflict (WFC and FWC). There is no significant relationship between gender, marital status, parental status, or type of employment and WFC. However, Malaysian-Chinese experienced 0.2806 more work-to-family interference compared to the Malays. Malaysian-Indians experienced 0.5691 more WFC compared to the Malays.

**Table 4** The influence of sociodemographic factors on WFC and FWC

	Work-to-Family Conflict				Family-to-Work Conflict			
	$R^2$	Adj $R^2$	$F$	$\rho$	$R^2$	Adj $R^2$	$F$	$\rho$
Gender	0.0004	-0.0015	0.1857	0.6667	0.0110*	0.0091	5.8710	0.0157
Marital status	0.0052	0.0014	1.3845	0.2514	0.0017	-0.0021	0.4437	0.6419
Parental status	0.0009	-0.0010	0.4685	0.4940	0.0034	0.0015	1.8219	0.1777
Ethnicity	0.0655*	0.0602	12.3215	0.0000	0.0864*	0.0812	16.6222	0.0000
Employment	0.0069	0.0050	3.6726	0.0559	0.0005	-0.0013	0.2871	0.5923

Note : \* $\rho < 0.05$

**Table 5** The relationship between sociodemographic factors and WFC and FWC

	Work-to-Family Conflict			Family-to-Work Conflict		
	Coefficient	$SE$	$\rho$	Coefficient	$SE$	$\rho$
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	2.8264	.0491	.0000	2.4431	.0544	.0000
Female	.0256	.0595	.6667	-.1595*	.0658	.0157
<b>Marital status</b>						
Single	2.8784	.0341	.0000	2.3572	.0380	.0000
Married	-.1006	.0582	.0845	-.0666	.0649	.3052
<b>Parental status</b>						
Yes	2.8138	.0519	.0000	2.4003	.0577	.0000
No	.0420	.0614	.4940	-.0921	.0682	.1777
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
Malay	2.6605	.0515	.0000	2.0718	.0567	.0000
Chinese	.2806*	.0677	.0000	.5012*	.0745	.0000
Indian	.5691*	.1056	.0000	.3677*	.1162	.0016
Indigenous ethnic of Borneo	.1127	.0729	.1227	.1644*	.0802	.0409
<b>Employment</b>						
Public	2.7697	.0475	.0000	2.3575	.0531	.0000
Private	.1119	.0584	.0559	-.0349	.0652	.5923

Note : \* $\rho < 0.05$

There is a significant negative relationship between gender and FWC. Females experienced less FWC compared to men. Respondents of different ethnicity also experienced different levels of FWC. Malaysian-Chinese, Malaysian-Indians, and the indigenous ethnic group of Borneo respectively experienced 0.5021, 0.3677, and 0.1644 more FWC compared to the Malays. However, there is no significant relationship between marital status, parental status, or type of employment and FWC.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

### **Level of work-family conflict (WFC and FWC)**

Respondents of this study reported that they experienced more WFC; while their family responsibilities rarely interfered with work demands. Organizations are perceived as less accommodating and forgiving compared to family members. Consequently, family boundaries are more permeable and subject to intrusion from work demands. Previous studies have found the occurrence of WFC to be higher compared to FWC. Work involves extensive cognitive processes that exhaust one's mental and physical resources. Therefore, work-related thought can distract from family life regardless of having a positive or negative attitude, or having to deal with the past, the present, or the future.

Family boundaries are more permeable to externally imposed or self-initiated dissemination compared to work boundaries. According to Hall and Ritchen, family boundaries are more permeable in a cognitive way for women and in a behavioral way for men. As a result, women tend to think of work at home, while men tend to do work-related activities at home. Those with better control over family demands are able to control such spillover until a more convenient time. Unfortunately, work-related demands cannot be delayed, because unconditional readiness is highly valued by employers.

### **Sociodemographic factors and work-family conflict (WFC and FWC)**

Several findings of this study contradict the findings obtained in previous work-family studies. The lack of significance for the correlations between work-family conflict and marital status, parental status, and type of employment in this study is perplexing. Marital status and parental status are often rather strongly associated with higher work-family conflict. Those who work in the private sector have been repeatedly reported to experience more work-family interference; however, this did not appear to be the case in this study. Furthermore, the present findings suggest that childcare and household responsibilities are not a significant determinant of work-family conflict. Yet, what is more to be inferred from these findings is how individuals adapt to ever-changing work demands and family responsibilities.

This study demonstrated that women experienced less family-to-work interference compared to men. Family-friendly policies seem to provide stress-reducing benefits for female employees and improve their well-being. Engaging with family matters during working hours has become more acceptable over the years. According to the Separate Sphere Theory, men are the main

breadwinners; and women are responsible for household duties. Despite the dramatic increase in the number of dual-earner families, the concept of gender segregation has remained as a key determinant of work and family domains. Regardless of participating in the workforce, women are still almost solely responsible for child-rearing and household responsibilities in most cultures.

Men seldom discuss their household responsibilities openly. Therefore, it is uncommon for male employees to seek assistance from the organization to better manage their work and family responsibilities. Organizations offer limited family-friendly benefits to men compared to women, despite that dual-earner couples share equal responsibility for supporting the family financially. The lack of family-friendly policies for male employees may contribute to higher family interference in Malaysia.

The present findings revealed that Malaysian-Chinese experienced higher work-family conflict in both directions, work-to-family and family-to-work, compared to other ethnicities. This can be attributed to a life philosophy “prioritizing work for family,” which is common among the Chinese. According to Zhang, Li, and Foley, in the Chinese culture, “prioritizing work for family” is a major effort to secure the family’s well-being. Malaysian-Chinese seem not to be willing to sacrifice their career advancement since it determines the family’s well-being. The ultimate goal for an individual is devotion to work and making a living even at the cost of family life. If work performance fails to fulfill their ultimate goals of benefiting the family, they may demonstrate reduced performance and loyalty towards the organization.

It is also not surprising to find that Malays experienced low work-family conflict compared to other ethnic groups. The Malay culture stresses strong bonds between family members. Looking after family members is a part of the Malay’s family responsibilities. In addition, collectivist cultures highlight the importance of family ties, emotional and financial obligations, and interdependency among family members. Ethnicity comes with its own set of values and shared beliefs, which guide personal decisions on which role performance is more salient for overall well-being. Different roles and identities are integrated to determine the allocation of an individual’s finite time and energy. This may result in favoring one role and neglecting role partners in another role. Nevertheless, it may nurture a balance for individuals with multiple social roles, leading to different outcomes on personal well-being.

### **Implications of the study**

The inclusion of sociodemographic factors as predictors in this study provided a different perspective on how individual differences influence work-family conflict. It was common for demographic factors to be treated as control variables in previous work-family studies. However, the combinations of individual characteristics vary across cultures and families and through the stages of life. The inclusion of the four major ethnic groups in Malaysia—Malay, Chinese, Indian, and the indigenous ethnic group of Borneo—sheds some light on the influence of different cultural values on work-family conflict. The findings of this study indicate that ethnicity contributes to varied magnitudes of the work-family experience in multicultural countries such as Malaysia. Work and family values of the four major ethnic groups in Malaysia seemed to be shaping how individuals perceived and managed their multiple social roles.

Based on the results of the present work, it may be safely concluded that people do differ in their preferences for managing multiple social roles. Some prefer to integrate their personal life

with their professional life. Others opt for complete separation. Therefore, providing more options and tailored benefits to cater for different needs creates a sense of flexibility and control and boosts morale, and, consequently, enhances job and life satisfaction. A cafeteria plan, for example, enables employees to choose benefits that are best suited to them in their stage of life and prevents wastage of certain benefits. Those who prefer segmentation might opt for flexible time, job sharing, and a compressed work-week; whereas those who prefer integration are more likely to be satisfied with on-site childcare and gym facilities.

Restructuring work arrangements, such as flexible scheduling or telecommuting, can foster the reconciliation between work and family demands, which can ultimately improve physical and mental health. Many employees yearn for better job conditions and are even willing to trade job promotions for more flexibility at work. There is plenty of room for improvement to create a more supportive working environment in Malaysia. However, it requires cooperation among employees, organizations, and policy makers to create policies that support work-family balance and employment sustainability.

### **Limitation of the study**

A cross-sectional approach was employed, which may limit the generalization of the findings. Data were collected simultaneously at one point in time to reduce the probability of data manipulation. This allowed for the comparison of multiple variables at the same time. Although the cross-sectional approach is widely used in social science studies, it limits the ability to detect causal effects of individual differences on work-family spillover and job satisfaction over a prolonged period of time. A future study should consider a longitudinal approach to address this issue. Longitudinal approaches allow researchers to monitor the development of and changes in the work-family conflict experience.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides empirical data on how sociodemographic factors influence an individual's inclination to experience work-family conflict. Although respondents in this study experienced more work-to-family conflict, the influence of individual differences was found to be more significant on family-to-work conflict. Family roles seemed to spill over into the work domain more often than the other way around. One of the most interesting findings to emerge from this study is the significant relationship between ethnicity and work-family conflict. Experience of work-family conflict was shown to vary depending on an individual's ethnic background. This study allows for a better understanding of the effects of selected personal characteristics on work-family conflict. The evidence generated by this study can be used to develop better work arrangements and policies to accommodate multiple social responsibilities.

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