

ICAP 2010 Individual Oral Paper

An examination of the influence of perceived
job threat, job pressure and work-life
balance/conflict among Australian academics

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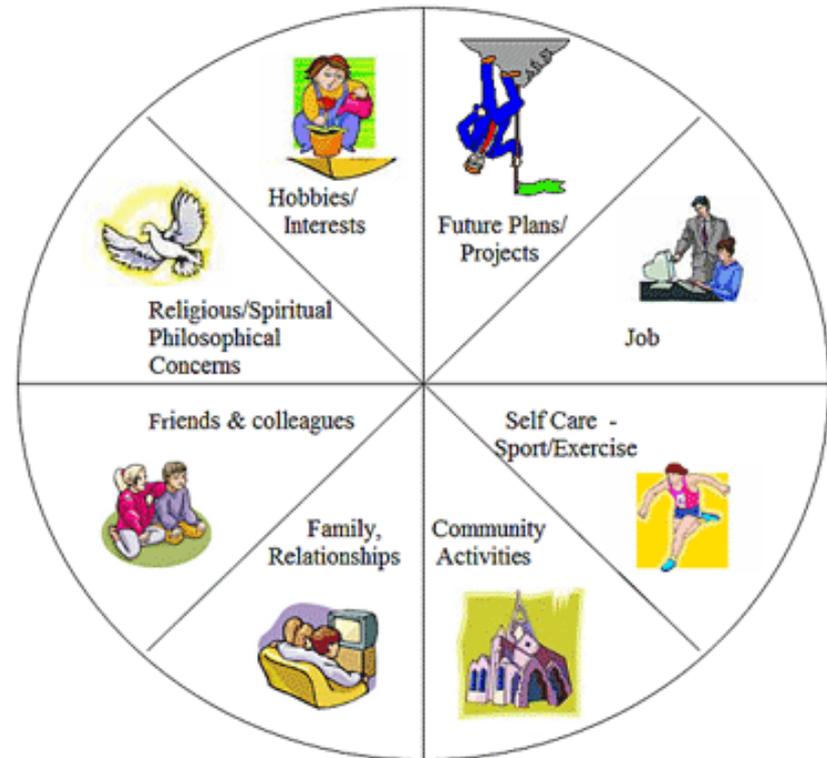
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Work-Life Balance (WLB)

- The degree to which an individual is able to simultaneously balance the temporal, emotional and behavioural demands of both paid work and family responsibilities (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris & Weitzman, 2001)
- Positive Spillover (Zedeck, 1992).

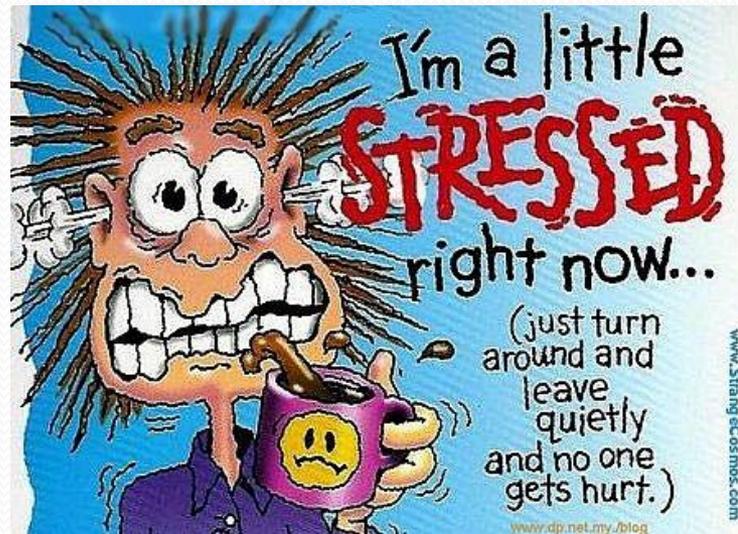


Work-Life Conflict (WLC)

- Occurs when involvement in one domain, for example work or personal life, interferes with involvement in the other domain (Zedeck 1992; Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006)
- Negative Spillover (Zedeck, 1992)



Job Stress



- The degree to which a job is perceived as taxing, exceeding resources and/or endangering well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra & Ironson, 2001)

Why Study Academics?

- Increasing stress, pressure and organisational change in universities has led to research interest in the area of job stress on work-life balance and work-life conflict amongst Australian academics
- Research suggests that psychological strain and WLC is increasing among academics
- Previous studies have investigated general stress and job centered work-life balance initiatives (such as flexible work schedules) amongst general samples
- Very few studies have investigated academics specifically, and their ability to balance work and personal life, and avoid work-life conflict

Aims of the Research

- This research explores the impact of job-stress on work-life balance and work-life conflict among Australian academics.
- Drawing on Spillover Theory it was hypothesised that high levels of job stress (job threat stress and job pressure stress) would predict increased levels of work-life conflict, and decreased levels of work-life balance.
- A further aim was to examine gender differences in work-life balance practices

Methodology

- Sample: 139 academic staff employed in Australian post-secondary higher education
- Measures:
 - Work-Life Balance (Hill et al., 2001), e.g., “It is easy for me to balance the demands of my work and my personal life”
 - Work-Life Conflict (O'Neil, Helms & Gable, 1986), e.g., “I feel torn between my hectic work schedule and caring for my family and friends”
 - Job Stress (Stanton et al., 2001) [job threat stress and job pressure stress] e.g., “nerve-wracking” or “demanding”
- Procedure: Anonymous on-line self-report questionnaire
 - Invitation emailed to colleagues, who forwarded to potential participants
 - Advertised in a higher education magazine

Demographics

- Age ranged from 25 to 66 years ($M = 43.66$, $SD = 11.06$).
- Number of years employed in an academic position ranged from 0.25 to 40 years ($M = 7.88$, $SD = 7.41$).
- Number of work contact hours per week up to 70 hours ($M = 25.10$, $SD = 16.54$), with *Mode* 40 hours per week.
- 80 female, 58 male and 1 did not specify gender.
- Highest academic teaching level: 42.4% lecturer, 22.3% tutor, 16.5% senior lecturer, 3.6% associate professor, 2.9% professor, 0.7% academic head, 7.2% 'other'
- Academic duties most often performed were teaching and research (55.4%), 23% taught only, 15.1% research only, 2.9% administration, and 3.6% percent indicated 'other' duties.
- Social Sciences discipline (21.6%), 16.5 % Business, 7.2% Engineering and Industrial Sciences, 6.5% Education, and a wide range of other disciplines reported

Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Range</i>
Job Threat Stress	1.17	.83	.00	3.00	0 - 3
Job Pressure Stress	2.07	.90	.00	3.00	0 - 3
Work-life Balance	4.34	1.45	1.20	7.00	1 - 7
Work-life Conflict	3.98	1.69	1.00	7.00	1 - 7

N = 139

Results

Reliability Coefficients and Bivariate Correlations

	Job Threat Stress	Job Pressure	Work-Life Balance	Work-Life Conflict
Job Threat Stress	[.85]			
Job Pressure Stress	.65*	[.88]		
Work-Life Balance	 -.70*	 -.64*	[.84]	
Work-Life Conflict	 .74*	 .66*	-.85*	[.93]

$N = 139$. *Note:* Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are shown on the diagonal in bold. * $p < 0.001$

Job Stress & WLB/WLC

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Job Stress and Work-Life Balance

	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
Job Pressure Stress	-.50	-.31*	.12
Job Threat Stress	-.87	-.50*	.13

N = 139. * *p* < 0.001

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Job Stress and Work-Life Conflict

	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
Job Pressure Stress	.58	.31*	.13
Job Threat Stress	1.09	.54*	.14

N = 139. * *p* < 0.001

Implications

- Both forms of Job stress influenced academics' perceived ability to balance their personal and work lives, and was associated with increased conflict between work and personal lives.
- Feelings of anxiety and being internally threatened by work (job threat stress) more strongly influenced academics' work-life balance and work-life conflict than did time and pressure demands (job pressure stress).
- Restructures and other significant changes in the work environment causing high pressure and anxiety, could create imbalance or conflict between work and life domains.
- Despite existing interventions aimed to prevent work-life issues in universities (e.g., flexible work schedules), job stress and WLC are still evident
- Universities should contemplate incorporating a stress management (job threat focus) component into HRM programs promoting work-life balance, and interventions aimed at combating work-life conflict.
- Awareness of work-life balance and work-life conflict for both male and female academics through targeted HRM programs

Limitations & Future Research

- Wider array of related constructs
- Sample size could be increased
- A multi-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods, including behavioural observations, focus groups or interviews, to gain a fuller perspective (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2001)
- Longitudinal data could be used to test
 - a) theorised causal relationships between job stress and work-life issues
 - b) directed relationships of WLC and WLB (e.g., work-to-family conflict, family-to-work facilitation)
- Inclusion of mediators (e.g., mental health) and moderators (e.g., personality measures, spirituality)
- Further research on WLB interventions aimed at preventing stress

Summary

- Job stress demonstrated a detrimental influence on academics' abilities to balance their personal and work lives and contributed to increased conflict between their work and personal lives
- Universities should consider implementing stress management interventions (particularly for job threat stressors) into Human Resource Management employee work-life balance initiatives
- Universities may also like to consider providing further preventative measures to prevent such job stress

Thank-you for listening!

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Any Questions?

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