Work-Supportive Family, Family-Supportive Supervision, Use of Organizational Benefits, and Problem-Focused Coping: Implications for Work–Family Conflict and Employee Well-Being

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Employees \(n = 230\) from multiple organizations and industries were involved in a study assessing how work–family conflict avoidance methods stemming from the family domain (emotional sustenance and instrumental assistance from the family), the work domain (family-supportive supervision, use of telework and flextime), and the individual (use of problem-focused coping) independently relate to different dimensions of work–family conflict and to employees’ affective and physical well-being. Results suggest that support from one’s family and one’s supervisor and the use of problem-focused coping seem most promising in terms of avoiding work–family conflict and/or decreased well-being. Benefits associated with the use of flextime, however, are relatively less evident, and using telework may potentially increase the extent to which family time demands interfere with work responsibilities.

Significant research attention has been given to the difficulty that people have in successfully juggling family and work responsibilities. The challenge associated with managing work and family roles has been studied under the rubric of work–family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Previous studies have linked work–family conflict to job and family dissatisfaction, life dissatisfaction, reduced job performance, increased absenteeism from work and from home, and decreased affective and physical well-being (see Frone, 2003), suggesting that research on potential means of averting such conflict is greatly needed.

The main objective of our study was to further elucidate the potential benefits and/or shortcomings of various promising methods of averting work–family conflict, including support from the family for one’s work role, support from the immediate supervisor for one’s family role, use of family-friendly organizational benefits, and problem-focused coping. The logic underlying our hypotheses stemmed largely from the notion of valued personal resources as described by Hobfoll (1989) and used by some scholars to explain the underpinnings of work–family conflict (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).

Our study contributes in various ways to the existing body of research on strategies to avoid work–family conflict. First, we measured both directions (work interference with family, family interference with work) as well as multiple forms (time-based, strain-based) of conflict, addressing the call for more studies to examine multiple dimensions of work–family conflict (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). By doing so, we provide a finer-grained examination of the possible value associated with each of the conflict avoidance methods studied. Second, we measured two distinct forms of family-provided support, instrumental assistance and emotional sustenance, which have seldom been studied by work–family researchers. Third, although previous studies examining family-friendly organizational benefits largely asked respondents whether specific benefits were offered by their employer, we add to the few studies that measured whether employees actually use such benefits (Allen, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Also, instead of measuring benefit use by collapsing across multiple benefits (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999), we independently measured two commonly offered benefits, flextime and telework, to gauge their respective relationships with work–family conflict dimensions. Fourth, our study adds to the literature that has conceptualized work–family conflict as a stressor leading to reduced employee well-being (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).
Specifically, we tested whether different dimensions of conflict would explain (mediate) relationships between conflict avoidance strategies and employee well-being. Finally, our study is the first examination of whether characteristics of the family domain (family support for one’s work role), the work domain (supervisory support for one’s family role, use of telework and flextime), and the individual or “self” (problem-focused coping)—that is, individual differences that span both work and family roles (Eby et al., 2005)—independently relate to different dimensions of work–family conflict and to employee strain.

Theory and Hypotheses

In his seminal article, Hobfoll (1989) introduced the notion of valued resources as a basis for explaining stress. Resources are defined as those objects (e.g., one’s home), personal characteristics (e.g., traits and skills), conditions (e.g., intimate relationships, seniority), or energies (e.g., time, mental and physical energy, knowledge) that are valued by the individual, either because they help to define the person or because they serve as a means of securing additional resources. Hobfoll’s arguments essentially suggest that the more people can gain or conserve such resources, the more they will feel successful and/or able to achieve higher levels of success in life, and the less they will experience stress.

The notion of valued resources can be used as a lens through which to understand interference between work and family roles (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Grandey & Czepiel, 1999). Work–family conflict can be viewed as a condition in which one role drains the resources (e.g., time and energy) that people need to fully participate in and be successful in the other role. Time-based conflict reflects one role consuming the time and/or removing the scheduling flexibility that is necessary to meet expectations in the other role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Strain-based conflict indicates that stressors in one role drain the person’s mental and/or physical energy (indicated by exhaustion, reduced ability to concentrate) that is needed to meet expectations in the other role (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Carlson et al. (2000) provided empirical support for a third form of work–family conflict, namely behavior-based conflict, where “specific behaviors required in one role are incompatible with behavioral expectations in another role” (p. 250). As pointed out by Edwards and Rothbard (2000), this dimension of conflict is not an indication of resource loss. Because our study focused on conflict avoidance methods that would theoretically help to prevent resource loss, we focused our study on dimensions of conflict that are more clearly indicative of resource loss, namely time-based and strain-based conflict.

Work-Supportive Family Members

King, Mattimore, King, and Adams (1995) provided empirical evidence that family members can support employees in their efforts to meet work demands by providing emotional sustenance, which consists of encouragement and understanding, and instrumental assistance, which involves relieving the employee of home-related duties or responsibilities. Hobfoll (1989) viewed social support as a resource to the extent that such support provides or facilitates the preservation of valued resources, such as time and energy. Although Adams, King, and King (1996) noted that these two forms of family support could help avert work–family conflict, subsequent research has focused on emotional support to the exclusion of instrumental support (Bernas & Major, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

Instrumental assistance. By relieving the employee of home-related responsibilities, family support would provide the employee with more time for work-related engagements, thereby preventing time-based family interference with work. Moreover, by having to deal with fewer family-related responsibilities or concerns, the employee is likely to have more energy available for his or her work role. Thus, instrumental assistance provided by family members may also help to curb strain-based family interference with work.

Hypothesis 1a: Instrumental assistance relates negatively to time- and strain-based family interference with work.

Emotional sustenance. When family members provide emotional sustenance, they take the time to listen to the employee’s concerns and try to make him or her feel better by providing encouragement. As such, emotional sustenance would likely have an overall calming (as opposed to strenuous) effect on employees when they are home, suggesting that the family role would be less likely to drain the energy that employees need at work. Thus, the provision of emotional sustenance would theoretically help prevent strain-based family interference with work.
Hypothesis 1b: Emotional sustenance relates negatively to strain-based family interference with work.

Family-Supportive Immediate Supervision

Considering the influence immediate supervisors can have on employees’ workload and work-related stressors (Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Gudanowski, & Nair, 2003), immediate supervisors can reduce the extent to which their employees’ work role interferes with their family role. In terms of time-based work interference with the family, accommodating employees’ family-related obligations (e.g., by letting an employee leave work early to care for a sick child or parent) would be indicative of helping the employee find the time needed to attend to family matters. With respect to strain-based family interference with work, employees with supportive supervisors would be less likely to be concerned about making an unfavorable impression upon the supervisor by tending to family-related obligations (Regan, 1994). Moreover, supervisors who are family supportive would conceivably help to reduce their employees' work-related concerns that would potentially sap the energy they need to fully participate in family activities (cf. Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Supporting this argument, Frone, Yardley, and Markel (1997) found that employees describing their boss as supportive reported less distress at work, which in turn was related to less work interference with the family.

Hypothesis 2: Family-supportive supervision relates negatively to time- and strain-based work interference with family.

Use of Flextime and Telework

In order to help employees meet family-related demands, many organizations offer a variety of benefits, most of which are intended to provide greater schedule flexibility (Glass & Estes, 1997). This is in keeping with Hobfoll’s (1989) view that flexibility is a valued resource. Within the United States and in Canada, flextime has been reported as being the most commonly offered family-friendly benefit, followed by telework (Comfort, Johnson, & Wallace, 2003; Society for Human Resource Management Foundation, 2001). Because of the emphasis on flexible work arrangements within North American organizations, we focused our attention on employees’ use of flextime and telework.

Previous empirical research shows that the availability of flextime is associated with increased employee autonomy or control over work-related matters, which in turn is linked with reduced work–family conflict (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). With flextime, whereas there are typically core hours during which employees are expected to be at work, employees are relatively free to plan when they begin and finish work, provided that the expected total number of daily work hours is respected. With telework, employees are given more scheduling freedom by being able to work from home.

By giving employees greater control over scheduling work-related activities, the use of flextime and telework would theoretically reduce the extent to which the work role prevents the employee from finding the time to fulfill family-related obligations. Such control provides employees with the capability to reschedule certain work-related tasks so that more pressing family-related concerns can be addressed. Accordingly, employees who use these benefits should report lower levels of time-based work interference with family than those who do not use them. However, it is unclear whether using flextime or telework would help prevent strain-based work interference. Indeed, more schedule flexibility may not curb other work-related concerns or challenges (e.g., work role ambiguity), suggesting strain-based work interference with families may not be avoided.

Hypothesis 3a: Employees who use flextime and telework report less time-based work interference than do those who do not use these benefits.

Although we argued that the use of telework would be associated with lower levels of work interference with the family, it is also theoretically plausible that using this benefit would be associated with greater work interference with family, which challenges arguments presented above, as well as greater family interference with work. Telework removes the clear geographic separation between work and family roles, making it potentially more difficult for individuals to segment work and family, that is, maintain a boundary between both roles (Eckeneode & Gore, 1990). It is therefore possible for a person working at home to either have more difficulty letting go of work responsibilities or have more difficulty letting go of family responsibilities, resulting in more time-based work interference with family and time-based family interference with work, respectively. Spending more time trying to deal with concerns or challenges in either role while at home may also lead to more
strain-based role interference, as argued by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). The above arguments echo Hobfoll's (1989) suggestion that a resource (e.g., flexibility) may not always be valuable and may even be detrimental in certain instances.

Hypothesis 3b: Employees who use telework report higher levels of time-based and strain-based family interference with work and of time-based and strain-based work interference with family than do those who do not use this benefit.

Problem-Focused Coping

When individuals have little or no social support or cannot use family-friendly benefits, they are essentially left to themselves to find ways of balancing work and family. People who tend to use a problem-focused coping style when faced with life's difficulties may more easily avoid work–family conflict. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described problem-focused coping as a defense against environmental stressors that is typically directed at defining problems, generating alternative solutions, weighting the alternatives in terms of their costs and benefits, choosing among them, and acting. Problem-focused coping has been shown to be a potentially effective means of managing the work–family interface (Aryee, Luk, Leung, & Lo, 1999; Rotondo, Carlson, & Kincaid, 2002). By taking the necessary steps to efficiently fulfill responsibilities at home and at work, individuals would have more time at their disposal to participate in both roles and experience less energy depletion by more effectively surmounting challenges in either role. Thus, problem-focused coping would theoretically help avert both directions of time-based and strain-based conflict.

Our reasoning is consistent with Hobfoll’s (1989) argument that individuals are generally motivated to invest some resources in an effort to achieve a net gain of resources. By using a problem-focused coping style, individuals invest some of their time and energy in planning and carrying out ways of dealing with challenges in their work and family environments to more easily fulfill role obligations.

Hypothesis 4: Use of problem-focused coping relates negatively to time- and strain-based family interference with work and to time-based and strain-based work interference with family.

Conflict Avoidance Methods, Work–Family Conflict, and Employee Well-Being

In the preceding paragraphs, we used the notion of valued resources to explain relationships between potential conflict avoidance methods and perceptions of work–family conflict. Using the same underlying rationale, we now explain why perceptions of work–family conflict would relate to reduced employee well-being and why such perceptions would theoretically mediate the relationships between conflict avoidance methods and well-being.

Within the stress literature, strains are generally viewed as aversive reactions to stressors, which are conditions within an individual’s environment that require adaptive responses from that individual (Jex & Beehr, 1991). Two commonly measured strains are reduced affective well-being (e.g., anxiety, irritation, depression) and reduced physical well-being (e.g., headaches, difficulty sleeping). Several scholars believe it is individuals’ perceptions of stressors in their environment that are more direct or proximal antecedents of strains than are objective environmental conditions (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lazarus, 1991, 1995; Spector, 1998).

Hobfoll’s (1989) conceptualization of stress provided more specificity in terms of the perceptions of one’s environment that can cause strains. He proposed that actual or perceived (a) loss of resources, (b) threat of losing resources, or (c) lack of resource gain is sufficient to trigger strains because an individual’s belief in his or her own success or in being able to achieve higher levels of success in life would be compromised. The construct of work–family conflict has been operationalized as the individual’s perception of the work–family environment in which the demands of one role drain resources that the individual needs to successfully meet demands in the other role (e.g., Carlson et al., 2000). Moreover, failure to meet role demands may potentially threaten the individual’s ability to maintain or gain valued resources, such as close relationships at home or a promotion at work. Thus, following Hobfoll’s (1989) logic, perceptions of work–family conflict would theoretically cause strains such as reduced affective and physical well-being. Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) presented similar reasoning. Various studies have reported a negative relationship between work–family conflict and affective as well as physical well-being (e.g., Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997).

If having a supportive family, having a supportive supervisor, using family-friendly benefits, and using
problem-focused coping relate to work–family conflict, and such conflict relates to well-being, then the variables we identified as potential work–family conflict avoidance methods may indirectly relate to employees’ well-being through their relationship with work–family conflict.

Hypothesis 5: Work–family conflict mediates relationships between conflict avoidance methods and the employee’s affective and physical well-being.

Method

Participants

Our goal was to involve participants working in various organizations and industries in order to more easily generalize our findings and to maximize variance across our variables (especially the use of flextime and telework, which is likely to vary more across than within organizations due to organizational differences in benefit availability). To this end, we first asked an administrator of the executive-level master of business administration (MBA) program from a large Ontario university to invite all 250 of the program’s alumni to participate in our study on a voluntary basis. This administrator was familiar to all alumni and was therefore in a good position to gain their agreement to participate. Of the 250 questionnaires sent out, 122 were returned, representing a response rate of 49%. To increase our sample size, we contacted 200 randomly selected alumni of the same university’s business school. The database from which this sample was drawn includes alumni from the school’s undergraduate (commerce) and MBA programs, excluding those from the executive MBA program. Of the 200 questionnaires sent, 116 were returned, representing a response rate of 58%. After elimination of cases with missing data, we had a total sample of 230. None of our participants were self-employed at the time of the survey.

Men comprised 58% of the sample. Eighty-four percent of respondents were either married or cohabiting. Overall, 69% of respondents reported having at least one live-in dependent, with 7% having at least one infant under age 2, 11% having at least one child between the ages of 2 and 4, 22% having at least one child between the ages of 5 and 11, 22% having at least one child between the ages of 12 and 18, and 6% living with at least one adult with a disability or chronic illness. Thirty-two percent of participants were senior managers, 32% were middle-level managers, 14% were first-level managers, and 21% did not hold a managerial or supervisory position. The average organizational tenure was 9 years, and the average age was 44 years. Various industry sectors were represented, with the four most frequently reported being service (12%), health/social welfare (10%), finance (9%), and government (26%). For education, most respondents (68%) had at least a master’s degree (i.e., master of arts, sciences, or business administration).

Measures

Time-based and strain-based work–family conflict. We used four scales developed by Carlson et al. (2000). For each direction of conflict, each form (time-based, strain-based) was measured by three items. Carlson et al. reported internal consistency estimates that ranged from .79 to .87 and provided confirmatory factor analysis results that supported the scales’ discriminant validity. Recent research supported the generalizability of Carlson et al.’s reported factor structure to Canadian and New Zealand employee samples (Lapière et al., 2005). A 5-point Likert-type response scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used, with higher scores indicating greater conflict. Sample items include “My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like” (time-based work interference with family), and “Because I am often stressed from family responsibilities, I have a hard time concentrating on my work” (strain-based family interference with work).

Physical well-being. We used Spector and Jex’s (1998) Physical Symptoms Inventory (PSI), which assesses general somatic complaints. Respondents indicated how frequently they had experienced 13 symptoms of poor physical well-being (e.g., an upset stomach or nausea, eye strain, tiredness or fatigue, headache) over the previous 6 months using a 5-point response scale that ranged from less than once per month or never to several times per day. Responses were recoded so that higher scores represented better physical well-being. It should be noted that although this measure’s internal consistency estimate suggests acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .73$), Spector and Jex (1998) stressed that this measure is a causal indicator scale (sometimes termed a formative measure), meaning the items are considered to be indicators of separate, albeit related, constructs. They can be summed, but internal consistency is not a meaningful measure of scale reliability. Spector and Jex’s meta-analytic review of studies using the PSI provided evidence of its validity. The PSI relates to theoretical antecedents, including work-related constraints (average $r = .26$), interpersonal conflict at work (average $r = .26$), and the amount of work for which a person is responsible (average $r = .27$), and to theoretical outcomes, such as intent to quit (average $r = .33$) and absenteeism (average $r = .19$).

Affective well-being. Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau’s (1980) 13-item scale was used to capture affective strains. Using Caplan et al.’s original 4-point response scale that ranged from never or a little to most of the time, respondents indicated how frequently they felt negative emotions, including anxiety (e.g., “I feel nervous,” “I feel jittery”), depression (e.g., “I feel sad,” “I feel blue”), and irritation (e.g., “I get angry,” “I get irritated or annoyed”). These types of emotions have been studied as strains, particularly as reactions to the experience of work stressors (e.g., Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Spector, Dwyer, & Jex, 1988; Tettrick & LaRocco, 1987). Given our interest in measuring overall affective well-being, we summed across responses to all 13 items. Responses were recoded so that higher scores represented better affective well-being. Previous work–family research using Caplan et al.’s (1980) measure reported that the 13-item scale was internally consistent (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$), and shared significant relationships in the predicted directions with family interference.
with work, work interference with family, and supervisor-provided support (O’Driscoll et al., 2003).

Use of flextime and use of telework. We used a shortened version of Allen’s (2001) checklist of family-friendly benefits. Using a yes–no response format, respondents indicated whether each benefit—“Flextime (latitude in starting and ending time)” and “Telecommuting (working from home)” — was provided by their organization and, if it was, whether they actually used the benefit. Because most prior studies had measured whether family-friendly benefits were offered and not whether they were used, we wanted to compare benefit users with nonusers who reported that their organization offers the benefit and with nonusers who reported that their organization does not offer the benefit. Following Pedhazur (1982), for each benefit we created two dummy-coded vectors to represent these three subgroups. To test Hypotheses 3a and 3b using regression coefficients, we created the vectors such that benefit users received the code of 0 in both vectors for a given benefit. Forty-three percent of respondents reported using telework, 15% reported not using telework but that it was offered by their organization, and 42% reported not offered by their organization. Sixty-five percent of respondents reported using flextime, 19% reported not using flextime but that it was offered by their organization, and 16% reported not using flextime and that it was not offered by their organization.

Family-supportive supervision. We used Clark’s (2001) three-item scale. Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with items describing their immediate supervisor’s behavior (e.g., “My supervisor understands my family demands”) using a 5-point Likert-type response scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Clark reported an internal consistency estimate of .86. Using confirmatory factor analysis, she also demonstrated that the measure was distinct from flexibility in scheduling one’s work day and from autonomy at work.

Emotional sustenance and instrumental assistance provided by the family. We used King et al.’s (1995) 20-item Family Support Inventory for Workers (FSIW). Response options ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree along a 5-point scale. The subscale for each form of support contains 10 items. A sample item for emotional sustenance is “Someone in my family helps me feel better when I’m upset about my job.” A sample item for instrumental assistance is “When I’m having a difficult week at my job, my family members try to do more of the work around the house.” King et al. conducted confirmatory factor analyses revealing that both forms of support are distinct from one another. They provided further evidence of convergent and discriminant validity by examining correlations with alternative measures of instrumental and emotional support from the family and with measures of other sources of social support (coworkers, supervisor). Finally, they reported internal consistency values of .95 for emotional sustenance and .93 for instrumental assistance.

Problem-focused coping. We modified Aryee et al.’s (1999) 20-item scale to measure problem-focused coping by rewording items to more clearly denote a general coping style, as opposed to one that is specific to either the family or the work domain, and by adding two new items based on the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) to improve the internal consistency of the scale. Respondents indicated how often they used the behaviors described when trying to deal with difficult or stressful situations in life. Items included “Try to manage responsibilities at home or at work more efficiently,” “Set priorities so that the most important things get done,” “Try to be very organized so that you can keep on top of things,” “Ask someone for assistance in overcoming the situation, such as hiring a baby sitter or a maid service, asking a friend or family member for help at home, or asking a coworker for help at the office,” “Try to analyze the situation in order to understand it better,” and “Make a plan of action and follow it.” As this was a modified scale, we conducted a principal-axis factor analysis on the six items. The analysis extracted a single factor with an eigenvalue exceeding 1.00 that explained 43% of the nonerror variance across items. Factor loadings for the six items were .57, .82, .73, .36, .58, and .78. Response options included never, seldom, occasionally, often, and always.

Control variables. Controls commonly used in work–family research were measured to help avoid statistical confounds. Controls included gender (coded 1 for male and 0 for female), age, organizational tenure, job level (senior management, middle-level management, first-level management, and nonmanagement), marital status (coded 1 for married/cohabiting and 0 for unmarried/not cohabiting), and education level.

Methods Used to Reduce Response Biases

Although our data were provided by a single source, the possibility of this method distorting our findings was small. Meta-analytic research by Crampton and Wagner (1994) showed that bivariate relationships among stress and anxiety ratings (e.g., job stress, family support, physical fatigue, scheduling stress, emotional exhaustion, somatic complaints) provided by a single source are not significantly different from those provided by multiple sources. Still, we took precautions, based on recommendations by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), to reduce single-source bias. First, to reduce social desirability, respondents were reassured on multiple occasions prior to completing the survey that their answers would be completely anonymous. Second, we chose scales that varied in terms of their response formats to curb consistency bias.

Results

Descriptive statistics, Pearson product–moment correlations, and internal consistency estimates are provided in Table 1. Categorical measures were excluded from this table because values reported would have little meaning. Hierarchical ordinary least squares multiple regression was used to test all hypotheses. A statistical confound can exist if a variable relates to two other variables that are hypothesized to be related (e.g., supervisor support and time-based work interference with family). We found that two of our proposed control variables, education and age, did not meet this criterion for any of our hypothesized relationships. In order to conserve degrees of freedom, we excluded these two variables from our
**Table 1**

Descriptive Statistics, Pearson Product–Moment Correlations, and Internal Consistency Estimates (N = 230)

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<td>12. Affective well-being</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All rs ≥ |.13| are significant at p < .05; all rs ≥ |.19| are significant at p < .01; all rs ≥ |.24| are significant at p < .001. Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency) values are reported in italics in the diagonal where applicable. n/a = not applicable; FIW = family interference with work; WIF = work interference with family.
Hypothesis 4 was partially supported. Problem-focused coping related negatively to strain-based family interference with work but did not significantly relate to the other dimensions of conflict.

To Test Hypothesis 5, we followed Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method. The first condition for mediation, showing that the independent variables (conflict avoidance methods) relate to the mediators (dimensions of work–family conflict), was evaluated by testing Hypotheses 1 through 4. Neither the use of flextime nor family provided emotional sustenance related to any of the work–family conflict dimensions, only strain-based work interference with family significantly related to well-being variables through strain-based conflict avoidance methods that met these criteria was family-supportive supervision. Results of the Sobel test (Baron & Kenny, 1986) further supported the mediating role of strain-based work interference with family in the positive link between family-supportive supervision and affective well-being ($z = 2.77, p < .01$).

**Discussion**

**General Findings and Implications for Theory and Practice**

Not all of our hypotheses concerning theoretical relationships between conflict avoidance methods and dimensions of work–family conflict were supported. Referring to Hobfoll’s (1989) notion of valued resources, this may indicate that some of the conflict avoidance methods we studied are more effective than others in terms of helping individuals gain or conserve resources in such a way that they...
would be less likely to perceive one role as draining resources that they need to fully participate in the other role.

In terms of family-provided support, results suggest that instrumental assistance may be more effective than emotional sustenance in helping to avert family interference with work. This is not to say emotional sustenance is without merit. Indeed, emotional sustenance shared significant zero-order correlations with work–family conflict dimensions (see Table 1). It may be that family members who provide emotional sustenance also tend to provide instrumental assistance, rendering it difficult to disentangle the relative benefits of each and masking the unique benefits of emotional sustenance. We found it interesting that emotional sustenance shared a unique positive relationship with respondents’ physical well-being, whereas instrumental assistance was not uniquely related with either measure of well-being. Emotional sustenance may provide employees with the resources needed for better physical well-being (e.g., having nurturing intimate relationships; Hobfoll, 1989). Overall, it would appear of potential value to get both forms of family support.

Regarding family-supportive supervision, our results are consistent with the argument that immediate supervisors are in a key position to help employees avoid work interference with family (e.g., Allen, 2001). That family-supportive supervision was related to lower levels of both time-based and strain-based work interference with family suggests it could be wise for organizations to ensure immediate supervisors are encouraged, trained, or already disposed to support their subordinates’ family obligations. Also, our mediation findings are in keeping with arguments based largely on Hobfoll’s (1989) conceptualization of stress. That is, by helping to prevent perceptions of strain-based work interference with family, family-supportive supervision would indirectly help protect employees’ affective well-being. This bolsters the potential value of family-supportive supervision.

Surprisingly, our results do not show that flextime use is of clear benefit to individuals. This may indicate that flextime provides few resources that help to curb family interference with work and sustain well-being. This may especially be true given the fact that most of our sample was comprised of managers, who may potentially have more demanding jobs than peo-

Table 3
Multiple Regression Results for Hypothesis 5 (N = 230)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Affective well-being</th>
<th>Physical well-being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Marital status</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Job level</td>
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<td>−.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organizational tenure</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Family-supportive supervision</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Problem-focused coping</td>
<td>.29***</td>
<td>.23***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Emotional sustenance</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Instrumental assistance</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Flextime (Dummy Vector 1)</td>
<td>−.08</td>
<td>−.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Flextime (Dummy Vector 2)</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>−.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Telework (Dummy Vector 1)</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Telework (Dummy Vector 2)</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Time-based FIW</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Strain-based FIW</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Time-based WIF</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Strain-based WIF</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.33***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>.30***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²b</td>
<td>.15***</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²a</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.14***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Standardized regression coefficients are reported. FIW = family interference with work; WIF = work interference with family. ΔR²b = variance explained by independent variables over and above controls; ΔR²a = variance explained by work–family conflict dimensions over and above all other predictors.

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.
ple in other occupations. For example, having to work very long hours on a regular basis is bound to hamper participation in family activities, regardless of individuals' flexibility to determine when they will start and stop their work day. Alternatively, it may be that informal support, such as that provided by supervisors and family members, is relatively more salient to the avoidance of work–family conflict than is the use of formal organizational policies. Recent research has demonstrated that informal aspects of the work environment explain a greater share of the variance associated with employee outcomes, such as work–family conflict, than do formal benefits and policies (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Behson, 2005). Although these explanations are plausible, our findings may also be attributable to measurement. It has recently been suggested that researchers need a more nuanced approach to the study of flexibility (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2005). Beyond examining the use of policies, not just their availability, researchers should study the way in which flexibility is actually enacted (e.g., frequent vs. infrequent schedule switches). Our gross measure of benefit use did not capture the full range of this more nuanced approach, which may have influenced the magnitude of our observed relationships.

Our findings on telework fuel doubt that using this benefit helps avoid work–family interference. We found evidence of the opposite, in that telework users reported higher levels of time-based family interference with work than did nonusers, whether these nonusers reported that their organization offered telework or not. That the same pattern of results did not emerge for strain-based family interference with work may signify that the time devoted to family demands while at home does not significantly drain the energy that people need when they are attentive to work demands. Also, that telework users report higher levels of family interference with work but not of work interference with family suggests that when one brings work home, it could be easier for family demands to deplete resources needed for work than the reverse. Perhaps difficulties associated with a reduced ability to segment life roles depends on the specific context in which role boundaries are blurred. As Piotrowski (1979) noted, people may tend to suppress work-related thoughts and behaviors while in the family context, whereas they may curb family-related thoughts and behaviors while in the work context. It terms of practice, our findings indicate that organizations should ensure candidates for telework arrangements are not prone to being burdened by family responsibilities.

We found that problem-focused coping related to less strain-based family interference with work, but not to time-based family interference with work. Such coping skills could help individuals prevent family stressors from draining energy that is needed at work but may be of little if any help in terms of securing more time for work activities. This may reflect time that is lost when using problem-focused coping to overcome family-related stressors. That such coping was unrelated to either form of work interference with family may be a sign that problem-focused coping is more effective in situations that individuals perceive are under their control (Aryee et al., 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). People may have more control at home than at work, which may help explain why research consistently shows that work interference with family is reported to occur more often than is family interference with work (Frone, 2003). Situational constraints at work (e.g., externally imposed deadlines) may make it difficult for problem-focused coping to be of significant value in that role. We also found that those who use problem-focused coping tend to report better affective well-being, but this relationship was not mediated by work–family conflict. Overcoming stressors at home may be beneficial to one’s affective well-being.

Finally, we found that strain-based work interference with family was the only dimension of work–family conflict that demonstrated a unique relationship with affective and physical well-being. This is consistent with research showing that strain-based work interference with family shares a stronger negative link with subsequent well-being than does time-based work interference with family (Van Hoof et al., 2005). Our findings may reflect the conditions under which resource loss perceived within the work–family environment hampers well-being. If people tend to value family over work (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000), reduced well-being could be more likely when individuals perceive that their family life is compromised, especially if they view their work role as draining the energy they need to meet family expectations.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Several limitations to the present study should be considered. A primary limitation is that our data are cross-sectional. This precludes our ability to make causal inferences regarding our observed relationships, despite the theoretical legitimacy of positioning conflict avoidance methods before work–family conflict, and work–family conflict before well-being.
However, consistent with our theoretical view, Van Hoof et al. (2005) tested competing models using longitudinal data and found that the model in which work interference with family preceded well-being (fatigue, depression) provided a better fit to the data than the one in which well-being preceded work interference with family. Also, it is unlikely that telework users reporting higher time-based family interference with work would signify that people who experience more time-based family interference with work would be more inclined to use telework. Indeed, Rau and Hyland (2002) found that people experiencing more interrole conflict showed no preference for teleworking over a normal work arrangement. Moreover, qualitative research by Harris (2003) suggests that people with high family-related demands would be less inclined to telework.

Another limitation is that our affective well-being scale’s variance may have partially been attributable to transitory moods as well as respondents’ personality-based propensity to experience negative affect, thus potentially obscuring the interpretation of our findings. This possibility was raised by Spector, Zapf, Chen, and Frese (2000) in light of the similarity between scales intended to measure strains, those intended to measure moods, and those intended to measure stable personality traits. This could lead to inaccurate conclusions on relationships between stressor perceptions and strains. Unfortunately, there is strong disagreement on the best means of averting this potential problem (Brief, Burke, George, Robinson, & Webster, 1988; Spector et al., 2000).

In terms of future research, our findings speak mostly to the experiences of managerial employees. Further research is necessary to ascertain whether the relationships observed generalize to other employee groups whose role demands may differ from those of the typical manager. Research is also needed that examines family-supportive supervision in terms of emotional sustenance and instrumental assistance. Some work along these lines has begun in that Warren and Johnson (1995) conceptualized family-related supervisor support as sensitivity to employee needs (emotional sustenance), whereas Greenberger, Goldberger, Hamill, O’Neil, and Payne (1989) assessed supervisor support in terms of offering flexibility to employees (instrumental assistance). It would also be useful to measure emotion-focused coping alongside problem-focused coping, the latter of which may be viewed as more of an instrumental form of coping. Simultaneously investigating instrumental and emotional strategies to avoid work–family conflict across all three domains (work, family, and self) would offer a more complete examination of how parallel aspects of each domain may benefit (or not) one’s ability to successfully manage the work–family interface. It may also be fruitful to determine the value of coworker support relative to that of supervisor support in terms of avoiding work–family conflict. Recent research suggests that social support from coworkers may help reduce the strain experienced by employees (Beehr et al., 2003; Beehr, Jex, Stacy, & Murray, 2000).

Conclusion

This study provided a finer-grained examination of potential means of avoiding work–family conflict and of protecting one’s well-being. Our findings suggest that while support from one’s family and from one’s supervisor and the use of problem-focused coping seem most promising in these respects, benefits associated with the use of flextime are relatively less evident, and using telework may potentially increase the extent to which family time demands interfere with work responsibilities. Overall, we found that factors based within the workplace (supervisor support), the family (family support), and the individual (problem-focused coping) may each play a unique role in helping to avert work–family conflict.

References


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