Family-Responsive Interventions, Perceived Organizational and Supervisor Support, Work–Family Conflict, and Psychological Strain

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This study examined organizational family-responsive policies, perceptions of the organization as family supportive, and supervisor support as issues that may be salient to the experience of conflict between paid employment (work) and family roles. Data were collected from 355 managerial personnel...
in New Zealand. Although work–family conflict and psychological strain were strongly linked, the availability of organizational policies had no significant association with levels of conflict or strain, whereas policy usage was related only to work-to-family interference and not to family-to-work interference. On the other hand, perceptions of the organization as family supportive and supervisor support for work–family balance displayed significant relationships with key variables, highlighting the importance of these variables for interventions designed to ameliorate the negative impact of work–family conflict on managerial well-being. Implications for the effective implementation of family-responsive interventions are discussed.

KEY WORDS: work–family conflict; psychological strain; role conflict; supervisor support; family-responsive interventions; perceived organizational support

With the increased representation of women in the labor market and an associated growth in the proportion of dual-earner families, individuals and organizations in many countries are confronted with the challenge of managing the balance between work, family, and personal life (Aryee, Fields, & Luk, 1999; Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Elloy & Smith, 2003). This challenge has been discussed in the literature for over 20 years, and many organizations have put in place initiatives to assist their employees in maintaining a balance between work and family lives (Frone, 2003). These interventions are generally aimed at facilitating flexibility and supporting employees with child care, although recently elder care support also has received some attention. Numerous strategies have been implemented by organizations to alleviate the negative impact of interference between work and family commitments and responsibilities, which is typically referred to as work–family conflict (Frone, 2003). However, there is a paucity of empirical research examining the effects of organizational policies and initiatives on employees, and especially the mechanisms by which these practices influence employee psychological well-being.

Substantial evidence illustrates possible negative effects of work–family conflict, especially that conflict or interference between people’s jobs and their family lives may be a significant source of strain and dissatisfaction. High levels of work–family conflict have been associated with greater health risks for working parents, lowered performance in the parental role, lowered productivity at work, less life satisfaction, higher anxiety and work-related strain, and reduced marital satisfaction among partners and spouses (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985; Pleck, 1985; Small & Riley, 1990; Voydanoff, 1987). Occupying multiple roles has been associated with role strain, psychological distress, and somatic complaints (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Interference between work and family has also been linked with
psychological distress (Hughes & Galinsky, 1994; MacEwen & Barling, 1994; Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Granrose, 1992). Burke (1988) tested a model in which work–family conflict led to psychosomatic symptoms and negative feeling states. Similarly, Greenglass (1985) found that interference between job and family life was related to depression, irritation, and anxiety in married female managers, whereas Atkinson, Liem, and Liem (1986) and Dew, Bromet, and Shulberg (1987) observed that work conflict was related to both individual well-being and a person’s functioning as a partner and parent. Grant-Vallone and Ensher (1998) found that expatriates who reported interference between work and their personal life experienced reduced vitality and increased depression.

Research findings over the past 10–15 years have indicated that there are two directions in which work–family conflict can occur, work to family and family to work, and that both directions of conflict may be related to negative outcomes. For clarity, in this article we refer to directional conflict as interference and use the expressions work-to-family interference (WFI) and family-to-work interference (FWI) to differentiate the two directions of the more global concept of work–family conflict. In the present study, we focused on one potential outcome of work–family conflict: psychological strain. The first hypothesis examined predicted the following:

Hypothesis 1: Work–family conflict (both directions) will be positively related with psychological strain.

As noted previously, there has been relatively little empirical examination of the benefits of family-supportive organizational initiatives. However, some preliminary research has demonstrated a relationship between such initiatives and a range of employee reactions, such as increased satisfaction with work–family balance (Ezra & Deckman, 1996), reduced work–family conflict (Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990), increased affective commitment to the organization (Grover & Crooker, 1995), reduced turnover intentions (Grover & Crooker, 1995), reduced turnover and economic losses (Rodgers & Rodgers, 1989), employee retention, and lower job-related strain (Johnson, 1995). Furthermore, the presence of work–family policies has been associated with higher levels of perceived organizational performance (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000) and increased organizational productivity (Konrad & Mangel, 2000), as well as enhanced organizational citizenship behavior (Lambert, 1990). Given these encouraging findings, in the present research we explored the potential benefits of several organizational practices, such as utilization of flexitime, compressed working weeks, telecommuting, provision of on-site child-care facilities, subsidization of off-site child care, paid maternity and/or paternity leave, and provision of elder care support. Our study extended previous findings by
considering both the availability of organizational policies relating to work–family balance, and their usage, and simultaneously examining several potentially relevant initiatives. In keeping with the above studies, and especially the work of Goff et al. (1990), we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 2a: The availability of family-responsive policies within the organization will be associated with lower levels of work–family conflict.

Hypothesis 2b: Usage of family-responsive policies within the organization will be associated with lower levels of work–family conflict.

Although some studies have indicated that the existence of so-called “family-friendly” policies yields positive benefits for individuals and, ultimately, for the organization itself, others have suggested that the availability and usage of policies may not be sufficient to produce a significant alleviation of the strain resulting from work–family conflict. Over and above formal policies, support from managers and supervisors is needed for individuals to experience any real reduction in work–family conflict. Some recent studies have shown that organizations must create a family-friendly culture, that is, an environment in which managers support and value employees who are striving for better balance between work and family life (Allen, 2001; Clark, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). More specifically, emotional, practical, and social support from direct supervisors has been found to facilitate the reduction of conflict between work and family (Allen, 2001).

Following earlier research by Thomas and Ganster (1995) and Thompson et al. (1999) on the role of the supervisor and organizational support in ameliorating the impact of work–family conflict, Allen (2001) introduced the concept of family-supportive organization perceptions (FSOP), which refers to individual perceptions that the organization as a whole is sensitive to, and supportive of, employee efforts to balance work and family commitments and responsibilities. These perceptions are distinct from those formed of the family-supportiveness of the supervisor, which is discussed later. Allen (2001) found that perceptions of the organization as being supportive of work–family balance were associated with reduced work–family conflict and enhanced job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In addition, FSOP mediated the relationship between formal work–family policies and the attitudinal variables. From her findings, Allen suggested that the “positive effect of family-supportive benefits appears to be attributable to an enhancement of employee perceptions that the organization as a whole is family-supportive” (p. 429).

The present investigation tested Allen’s (2001) proposition that FSOP may play a critical mediator role in the relationship between organizational benefit availability and WFI, as well as between benefit usage and WFI.
Following Allen’s logic and the findings of her research, which are consistent with Lazarus’s transactional model of stressor–strain relationships (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), we postulated that perceptions of how family supportive an organization is would mediate the relationship between organizational policies and levels of work–family conflict experienced by employees. That is, when family-supportive policies are available and utilized by a person, they will be associated with a perception that the organization as a whole is family supportive, which in turn will be related to a reduction in work–family conflict.

Hypothesis 3a: FSOP will function as a mediator between the availability of organizational work–family policies and levels of work–family conflict.

Hypothesis 3b: FSOP will function as a mediator between usage of organizational work–family policies and levels of work–family conflict.

A further issue that emerges out of the more general social psychological and organizational literature on social support is the potential for social support from significant others to buffer the impact of stressors on strain. The buffering hypothesis has been examined in numerous studies on the role of social support in stressor–strain relationships (see, e.g., Cooper, Dewe, & O’Driscoll, 2001). However, although some studies (e.g., Goff et al., 1990; Thomas & Ganster, 1995) have verified that the presence of social support reduces the negative consequences of work-related stressors and work–family conflict, others (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1995) have found little evidence of a buffering effect. Indeed, some studies (Fenlason & Beehr, 1994) found a “reverse” buffering effect, whereby increased levels of social support led to a deterioration rather than an improvement in well-being.

Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons to believe that the relationship between work–family conflict and psychological strain is reduced among individuals with more family-supportive supervisors in comparison with those whose supervisors are less supportive in this respect. A recent meta-analysis (Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999) confirmed that generally social support does play a buffering role in the relationship between work-related stressors and a variety of strain variables. Similarly, Carlson and Perrewé (1999) compared several models linking social support with work–family conflict and stressors to clarify the relationships between these variables. They found that social support may reduce perceived role stressors (conflict and ambiguity) and time demands and, thus, indirectly decrease the negative impact of work–family conflict. Although there are other possible mechanisms by which social support may influence levels of strain, including a direct reduction in strain itself, in the present context it
would seem feasible to posit that support from a supervisor may function as a buffering variable, protecting the individual from the strain associated with high levels of work–family conflict. Our fourth hypothesis was designed to examine this possibility. Specifically, we assessed the extent to which the individual’s superior (immediate manager) was supportive of the person’s efforts to maintain a balance between work commitments and family life.

Supervisor support for work–family balance could have buffering effects in various ways. For instance, high levels of supervisor support might moderate the relationship between policy usage and levels of work–family conflict. However, the most likely buffering effect of supervisor support is on the relationship between levels of work–family conflict and the experience of psychological strain. Specifically, we anticipated that the presence of a family-supportive superior would ameliorate the positive relationship of WFI and FWI with psychological strain. Hence, in this study we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 4:** Support from the supervisor for work–family balance will moderate (reduce) the relationship between work–family conflict and psychological strain.

**METHOD**

**Sample**

As part of a larger international research project (Collaborative International Study of Managerial Stress II), a sample of 355 New Zealand managers (men = 252, women = 100) was obtained by means of the membership list of the New Zealand Institute of Management. Participants were employed in a wide range of industries, with the highest percentages being in the service (22.4%) and hospitality (21.3%) sectors. The average age of respondents was 49.1 years ($SD = 10.86$), with ages ranging from 22 to 76 years. The large majority (87.6%) were either married or living with a partner, just over half (58.6%) indicated that they had no dependent children living with them, and a large proportion (41.7%) also reported that they had no dependents of any age living with them. Almost all the sample (93.3%) identified their ethnicity as European.

Average tenure within their current organization was 11.2 years ($SD = 10.27$). In terms of managerial level, 54.1% indicated that they were top-level managers, 27.3% were middle-level managers, 5.6% were first-level managers (supervisors), and 10.7% identified themselves as having nonsu-
pervisory status. Just under half (45.6%) reported that they typically worked 41–50 hr per week, and 32.1% reported a typical working week of 51–60 hr.

**Measures**

A questionnaire booklet was constructed to assess the variables of interest in this research, along with the above demographics.

**Work–Family Conflict**

Two directions of work–family conflict were assessed: WFI and FWI. Both variables were measured using nine items from the Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) instrument. Three forms of interrole conflict (time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict) were included for each of the two directions of conflict. For the present purposes, however, the three forms were combined to generate single indices of WFI and FWI. Illustrative items are “My work [family] keeps me from my family [work] activities more than I would like”; “Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I come home I am too stressed to do the things that I enjoy”; “Due to stress at home, I am often preoccupied with family matters at work.” Each item was responded to using a 5-point Likert-type (from 1 [agree] to 5 [disagree]) format. Internal consistencies (Cronbach’s alpha) for the two forms of interrole conflict were .85 (WFI) and .81 (FWI). Responses were averaged across relevant items to generate the global indices of WFI and FWI.

**Psychological Strain**

The 13-item measure developed by Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison, and Pinneau (1980) was used to assess levels of psychological strain. This measure comprises a set of adjectives, such as sad, depressed, irritated, and nervous. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (never or a little) to 5 (most of the time), the frequency with which they experienced each feeling. Responses to positive attributes (such as calm or cheerful) were reverse-scored. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .83, and item responses were averaged to yield a total strain score for each respondent.
Supervisor Support

The extent to which participants felt that their supervisor was supportive of their efforts to balance work and family life was gauged with a three-item index constructed by Clark (2001). Respondents indicated, on a 5-point Likert (rated from 1 [agree] to 5 [disagree]) format, whether they felt that their supervisor understood their family demands, listened when they talked about their family, and acknowledged that the person had family obligations. Cronbach’s alpha for the three items was .88, and item scores were averaged to generate a total supervisor support score for each person.

Family-Supportive Organizational Perceptions

Allen’s (2001) 14-item instrument was used to assess the extent to which people felt their organization was supportive of employee efforts to balance work and family life. Respondents were asked to reflect on the extent each item represented the beliefs or assumptions held by their organization. Most of the items in this instrument are worded negatively (e.g., “It is considered taboo to talk about life outside of work”); these negative items were reverse-scored so that a higher score indicated a perception of the organization as being more family supportive. A 5-point response format (rated from agree to disagree) was used, and the Cronbach’s alpha across the 14 items was .89. Item responses were averaged to construct a total perceived organizational support score for each person.

Organizational Benefits

A list of 10 organizational family-responsive policies similar to those used by Allen (2001) was used here. These benefits included flextime, compressed work schedules, telecommuting, part-time work, on-site child-care centers, subsidized local child care, child-care information/referral services, paid maternity leave, paid paternity leave, and elder care. For each benefit, respondents were asked to select one of four responses: (a) “not offered, and I don’t need it”; (b) “not offered, but I could use it”; (c) “offered but not used”; and (d) “offered and I use it.” To derive a score for benefit availability, responses (a) and (b) were coded 0 and responses (c) and (d) were coded 1. Total benefit availability was then computed by summing availability scores across the 10 benefits. To obtain a benefit usage index, responses (a), (b) and (c) were coded 0, and response (d) was
coded 1. Total benefit usage was computed by summing usage scores across the 10 benefits.

Procedure

Questionnaires were mailed to members of the New Zealand Institute of Management, a professional organization representing managers from a diverse array of industry sectors in New Zealand. Questionnaire completion was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were assured of confidentiality. Completed questionnaires were returned directly to Michael P. O’Driscoll. The overall response rate was just over 25%.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means and standard deviations for all the major variables are presented in Table 1, along with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for derived variables. Reported levels of work–family conflict were on average relatively low, with the mean score for WFI being 2.9 and the mean FWI score being 2.3 on the 5-point scale. Similarly, levels of the criterion variable (psychological strain) were also relatively low (M = 1.6 on the 5-point scale). In fact, over 80% of the sample scored less than 2 on this measure, suggesting that psychological strain or distress was generally low in this group.

In contrast, levels of perceived work–family support from the super-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1. WFI</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>−31</td>
<td>−36</td>
<td>−48</td>
<td>−20</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. FWI</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>−31</td>
<td>−32</td>
<td>−32</td>
<td>−05</td>
<td>−07</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Psychological strain</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>−23</td>
<td>−24</td>
<td>−14</td>
<td>−10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Supervisor support</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. FSOP</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Organizational benefits available</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.83</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Organizational benefits used</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.06</td>
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</table>

Note. Ns = 350–355. WFI = work-to-family interference; FWI = family-to-work interference; FSOP = family-supportive organizational perceptions.

*aDecimal points have been omitted; correlations equal to or above .17 were significant at p < .01.

*bRespondents who reported no dependents have been excluded; n = 201 for these correlations.
visor ($M = 3.6$) and from the organization ($M = 2.9$) were in the moderate range. Finally, the results suggest that these managers were not making substantial use of family-friendly policies. Excluding respondents who did not have dependents ($n = 150$), the average benefits availability score (out of 10) was 2.6, and the mean usage score was just 1.0. In fact, 72% of respondents reported having three or fewer work–family benefits available to them, and 91% reported using two or fewer benefits.

Bivariate correlations between the core variables are depicted in Table 1. The two forms of work–family conflict were significantly intercorrelated (.55), suggesting a substantial degree of coincidence between WFI and FWI. Remarkably similar patterns of correlations were found between these two variables and others investigated in this study. Both forms of conflict were significantly associated with psychological strain ($rs = .35$ and $.30$, respectively), which provides support for Hypothesis 1, and they both showed similar negative correlations with supervisor support and FSOP. On the other hand, the data did not support Hypothesis 2a, as neither WFI nor FWI was significantly correlated with organizational benefits availability. Partial support was obtained for Hypothesis 2b, as WFI but not FWI was significantly (negatively) linked with usage of organizational benefits.

In addition to being correlated with WFI and FWI, psychological strain was negatively related to supervisor support ($r = -.23$) and to FSOP ($r = -.24$) but not to benefit availability or usage. There was also an association between supervisor support and FSOP ($r = .35$), but neither of these variables was significantly linked with benefit availability or reported usage.

**Mediation Effects**

Hypotheses 3a and 3b predicted that FSOP would function as a mediating (intervening) variable in the relationship between work–family benefits and interdomain conflict. We tested the mediation hypotheses by using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) mediated regression technique. Specifically, they recommend a three-stage process: (a) regress the mediator on the predictor variable, (b) regress the criterion on the predictor variable, and (c) regress the criterion variable simultaneously on the predictor and mediator variables. Mediation is indicated when the following conditions are met: (a) there is a significant relationship between the mediator and predictor variables (Step 1), (b) there is a significant relationship between the predictor and criterion variables (Step 2), (c) the mediator is significantly related to the criterion variable (Step 3), and (d) the relationship of the predictor with the criterion variable is less in the third equation than in
the second. Full mediation occurs when the predictor variable has no significant relationship with the criterion variable once the effect of the mediator is controlled. Partial mediation is indicated when the predictor–criterion association is reduced in magnitude but remains significant when the mediator is controlled.

Results from these analyses are presented in Table 2 and Table 3. Table 2 depicts equations in which availability of organizational benefits was the predictor variable, whereas Table 3 shows the findings for benefits usage. It is evident from Table 2 that FSOP did not mediate relationships between benefits availability and the conflict variables. Although benefits availability was associated with perceptions of the organization as being family supportive (Step 1) and FSOP was a significant predictor of reduced WFI and FWI (Step 3), there was no significant relationship between benefits availability and either WFI or FWI; hence, there was no mediation effect for FSOP.

A slightly different picture emerges from Table 3, in which FSOP did exhibit a mediating role in the relationship between organizational benefits usage and WFI (Equation 1), although not FWI (Equation 2). In Equation 1, the initially significant relationship between organizational benefits usage and WFI (β = -.20) became nonsignificant (β = -.13) when FSOP was added to the regression equation, indicating a mediating effect of FSOP in this relationship. In other words, it would appear that the positive advantages of using organizational policies may occur because these policies create a perception that the organization supports work–family balance, which in turn leads to a reduction in the experience of WFI.

Table 2. Mediating Effects of Family-Supportive Organizational Perceptions on the Relationship Between Organizational Benefits Availability and Work–Family Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>R²</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>FSOP</td>
<td>Organizational benefits</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>2.24*</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>WFI</td>
<td>Organizational benefits</td>
<td>−.08</td>
<td>−1.12</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>WFI</td>
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<tr>
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<td>FSOP</td>
<td>−.46</td>
<td>−7.11**</td>
<td>.21</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>FSOP</td>
<td>Organizational benefits</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>2.24*</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>FWI</td>
<td>Organizational benefits</td>
<td>−.05</td>
<td>−0.76</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>FWI</td>
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<td>−0.04</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>−.33</td>
<td>−4.81**</td>
<td>.11</td>
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Note. Respondents with no dependents were excluded. For the t test, df = 199 for Steps 1 and 2 in each equation and df = 198 for Step 3 in each equation. WFI = work-to-family interference; FWI = family-to-work interference; FSOP = family-supportive organizational perceptions. 

*p < .05. **p < .01.
Hypothesis 4 predicted that supervisory support for work–family balance would moderate the relationship between work–family conflict and psychological strain. This hypothesis was examined with separate hierarchical regressions for WFI and FWI as predictors and psychological strain as the criterion variable. Results of these analyses are displayed in Table 4. Both WFI and FWI were significantly and positively related to levels of strain, and supervisor support showed a significant negative association with strain. The moderator effects are shown in Step 3 of each equation in Table 4. The interaction between WFI and supervisor support did contrib-

**Moderating Effects of Supervisor Support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>−.20</td>
<td>−2.81**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>−.13</td>
<td>−1.96</td>
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Equation 2: FWI

<table>
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<th>Step</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
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<td>2.32*</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Supervisor support</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>−0.99</td>
<td>.01</td>
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Note. Respondents with no dependents were excluded. For the t test, the dfs = 330 for Step 1 in each equation, 329 for Step 2, and 328 for Step 3. WFI = family-to-work interference; FWI = work-to-family interference; FSOP = family-supportive organizational perceptions.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

**Table 3. Mediating Effects of Family-Supportive Organizational Perceptions on the Relationship Between Organizational Benefits Usage and Work-Family Conflict**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β</th>
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<th>$R^2$</th>
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<td>2.32*</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>FSOP</td>
<td>Organizational benefits</td>
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<td>−6.87**</td>
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Equation 2: FWI

<table>
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<th>Step</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>FSOP</td>
<td>Organizational benefits</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>2.32*</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>FSOP</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>−0.99</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>FSOP</td>
<td>Organizational benefits</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>2.32*</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>FSOP</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>−0.99</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. WFI = work-to-family interference; FWI = family-to-work interference; FSOP = family-supportive organizational perceptions.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

**Table 4. Moderating Effects of Supervisor Support on the Relationship Between Work-Family Conflict and Psychological Strain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strain criterion</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>WFI</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>7.58**</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Supervisor support</td>
<td>−.12</td>
<td>−2.32*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>WFI × Supervisor Support</td>
<td>−.63</td>
<td>−2.63**</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Equation 2: FWI

| Step 1 | FWI       | .30 | 5.74** | .09  |
| Step 2 | Supervisor support | −.15 | −2.82** | .01  |
| Step 3 | FWI × Supervisor Support | −.21 | −0.92 | .00  |

Note. WFI = work-to-family interference; FWI = family-to-work interference.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
ute significantly to reduced strain, whereas the FWI × Supervisor Support interaction did not.

Figure 1 provides a graphical illustration of the significant interaction between WFI and supervisor support. To plot the interaction, mean strain scores were computed for respondents in four categories: high WFI–high support, high WFI–low support, low WFI–high support, and low WFI–low support. Where respondents experienced low levels of WFI, supervisor support had little or no buffering influence. However, when levels of WFI were high, respondents who reported greater amounts of support from their supervisor experienced less psychological strain than did their counterparts who reported lower supervisory support. In other words, under conditions of high WFI, supervisor support did function to alleviate the negative impact of WFI on individuals.

**DISCUSSION**

The present study contributes in several ways to the literature on interventions directed at alleviating work–family conflict and psychological strain among organizational members. First, it simultaneously considered three types of interventions that have been reported in previous studies to
be relevant for alleviating work–family conflict: work–family benefits (Allen, 2001; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), family-oriented organizational support (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999), and supervisor support for work–family balance (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Clark, 2001). Second, although managers may be thought to have greater resources and more access to organizational family-responsive policies than do other organizational members, it is nevertheless important to explore the extent to which work–family conflict is an issue for managerial personnel and the impact that organizational initiatives may have on their lives.

Results from this study illustrate that, although levels of work–family conflict and psychological strain were not, on average, substantially high in this sample, the predicted linkage between these variables was nevertheless supported. As has been found in previous research in this field, individuals who reported greater levels of WFI and FWI were more likely to experience strain than were those reporting less work–family conflict. There was also a positive correlation between the two directions of work–family conflict, suggesting that individuals who experience one are likely to also experience the other, and the strength of relationship with strain was similar for WFI and FWI.

Perhaps the most surprising of our findings, however, is that availability and usage of formal organizational policies were not strongly connected in a direct manner with either lower work–family conflict or reduced strain, although there was a negative relationship between usage of policies and WFI, which is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Allen, 2001; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999). Hence, although many organizations may introduce these initiatives as mechanisms for reducing strain among their employees, the policies by themselves may be insufficient to generate significant stress reduction in this area (Thompson et al., 1999). Rather, development of an organizational culture that is perceived to be supportive of work–family balance may be a necessary condition for the alleviation of work–family conflict and related negative effects.

There are several possible explanations for these findings. First, as our study was cross-sectional, we are unable to make firm statements concerning the causal relationships between variables. Formal organizational policies may take some time to exert a beneficial impact on organizational members, and there may be a lag between the introduction of these initiatives and the full realization of their impact. For instance, paid parental leave was legislated in New Zealand in 2002, hence its utilization and impact may not have been fully realized at the time our data were collected. Furthermore, usage of policies by participants in the present study was generally quite low. This may suggest that the policies were ineffective, or it may indicate a lack of need. What may be relevant for measuring the impact of benefits on experiences of work–family conflict may not be their
mere availability but rather their actual usage. In fact, we did find a significant relationship between benefit usage and reduced WFI, suggesting that only individuals who actually use the policies to reconcile their work and family life experience the benefits.

A third explanation may lie in the nature of our sample. As noted above, compared with other personnel, managers may have more discretion and control over their time and other resources, which may diminish their reliance on formal policies to enhance a balance between their job demands and family lives. Bailyn (1997) has referred to this as “operational flexibility.” In addition, higher level managers (who represented 54% of our sample) have more financial resources to afford child care, housekeeping, and other benefits that can reduce the demands on their time and energy from family commitments. In sum, it may be that a critical factor in terms of reducing work–family conflict is the extent to which individuals have control over both their job demands and their family responsibilities, and increased control and flexibility will significantly reduce both the level of work–family conflict and its impact on well-being (see also Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Policies and practices that are designed to increase control and flexibility are therefore more likely to be beneficial.

Having said that, managers may be reluctant to make use of formal organizational initiatives, partly because of the demands on their time but also because the culture of the organization may frown upon such usage. Our data on FSOP confirm this possibility. Where respondents perceived that their organization was supportive of work–family balance, levels of work–family conflict were lower, as was psychological strain, and, at least for WFI, FSOP mediated the relationship between policy usage and reduced conflict. On the other hand, where the organization expects its managers to be wholly devoted to their jobs and the organization, these managers may be reluctant to use practices even when they are formally available to organizational members because they may feel stigmatized by their colleagues and superiors. As noted by several commentators (Allen, 2001; Blair-Loy & Warton, 2002; Frone, 2003; Thompson et al., 1999), policy implementation by itself may be insufficient under these circumstances to generate the required change in organizational culture.

A related point is that not all policies will be equally effective in alleviating work–family conflict. For instance, Meyer, Mulerjee, and Sestero (2001) noted that not all policies are consistently associated with firm profitability. Contrary to the general belief that more is better, we may need to adopt a philosophy of adequacy or “fit.” Balance between work and family life may be more affected by a single intervention that is directly salient to the person’s needs rather than an array of policies, some of which are not relevant for that person. For example, a single or divorced female manager who has to travel a lot for her firm may not be helped by flextime
or even on-site child-care centers, because there is no one to pick her child up at the end of the day. Relevant benefits for this employee could be pay for overtime, compensation of costs associated with overnight child care, or compensation of overnight absence with an extra half day off after returning from a business trip. In short, interventions need to be tailored to employee needs, and there is little evidence that a one-size-fits-all approach will be effective. Further research is needed to explore whether and how firms endeavor to address specific needs of their employees. It is also important, for both research and practical application, to consider the extent to which employees have control over their work demands (e.g., time) and the resources needed to address work–family issues.

Particularly interesting for the intervention literature is the confirmation of previous studies (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999) that it is not formal policies by themselves that make a critical difference in reducing work–family conflict but rather the practical support received from the organization and management in day-to-day operations (Galinsky & Stein, 1990). We found that FSOP was significantly associated with reduced work–family conflict. The implication for organizational intervention is clear: When designing interventions, organizational change agents should not just focus on policy development and communication but should also focus on the actual change of organizational norms and values embodied in the company management. Only if the company culture is perceived to be supportive, as expressed in the general shared belief that giving attention to one’s family is not associated with reduced commitment, will employees actually feel less tension between their work and family responsibilities.

A specific form of organizational support is the perceived support received from representatives of the organization, its managers. Our results suggest that, particularly in individuals who experience high levels of conflict, supervisor support can moderate (buffer) the effects of work–family conflict on strain. In other words, supervisors or higher level managers may play a pivotal role in minimizing the negative impact of work–family conflict and, hence, of strain among employees. Increasing supervisor awareness of an individual’s needs may be an important strategy for anticipating work–family conflict and preventing the development of conflict-induced strain. Hence a primary intervention approach aimed at preventing work–family conflict and strain may be more effective under these conditions than secondary or tertiary interventions that focus more on assisting individuals to deal with the consequences of these stressors (Cooper et al., 2001). Supervisor support may need to extend beyond a general awareness and emotional support to include targeted instrumental support, such as offering flexibility in work arrangements and other benefits that could assist the person and meet his or her specific needs. Managers need to be familiar with and have an understanding of the range of circum-
stances that their employees confront, and they need to have the capability to balance company or firm requirements and individuals’ needs. Ultimately, such an approach will yield positive outcomes for both organizations and their members (Clark, 2001; Frone, 2003).

In summary, although the cross-sectional nature of the current study and its reliance on self-report data limit conclusions that can be drawn about causal relationships between organizational policies and work–family variables, the findings are consistent with and extend previous research, confirming the importance of an organizational culture that is perceived by its members to be supportive of their efforts to attain a balance between their career and personal lives. It is evident that organizational interventions need to focus not merely on the development and implementation of formal “family-friendly” policies but also on engendering a perception that organizational norms and values are family responsive. In many if not most situations, a key role is played by the individual’s immediate supervisor or manager, who transmits organizational norms into actual practices. Our data illustrate that investing time and effort in the translation of these norms and values into real benefits may be an important intervention in its own right and can have significant implications for both perceptions of the family responsiveness of the organization and levels of work–family balance for individuals.

REFERENCES

Carlson, D., Kacmar, K., & Williams, L. (2000). Construction and initial validation of a


