

## GENDER, WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND FAMILY-WORK CONFLICT: A TEST OF DOMAIN FLEXIBILITY AND DOMAIN SALIENT PERSPECTIVES

**Chiyem Lucky NWANZU,**  
Department of Psychology,  
Faculty of the Social sciences,  
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.  
[nwanzuchiyem@gmail.com](mailto:nwanzuchiyem@gmail.com)

+23248063417245

And

**Nelson Harold Aruejele BOJEGHRE**  
Department of Psychology,  
Faculty of the Social Sciences,  
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.  
+2348035838952

### **Abstract**

*Two related perspectives are widely implicated in the relationship gender has with work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC). Domain flexibility perspective assumes that work responsibilities are less flexible than family responsibilities, therefore WFC would be higher than FWC for both sexes. Domain salient perspective assumes that work is more salient to males, while family is more salient to females, therefore WFC will be higher among males than among females, while FWC will be higher among females than among males. This study is an empirical test of the two perspectives. Three hundred and sixteen participants were drawn from public sector and private-owned organizations in Delta State, Nigeria. The participants comprised 144 males and 172 females, with age mean of 38 years and 8.88 standard deviation. Design of the study was cross-sectional and data were collected through self-report questionnaire. Data analysis supported domain flexibility perspective (for males,  $t(143) = 8.47, p < 0.05$ ; for females,  $t(171) = 8.93, p < 0.05$ ) and disconfirmed domain salient perspective (for WFC,  $t(314) = -.15, p > 0.05$ ; for FWC,  $t(314) = -.54, p > 0.05$ ). As conclusion, work interferes more with family responsibilities than family does with work responsibilities, and males and females suffer similar levels of WFC and FWC. To reduce WFC, work should be made more flexible with work design such as flexible work hours and telecommuting.*

**Key words: Gender, Work-family conflict, Family-work conflict, Domain flexibility, Domain salient and Nigeria**

### Introduction

**W**ork-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC) are twin concepts that are widely implicated in employee attitude, behavior and well-being (Warokka & Febrilia, 2014; Yavas, Babakus & Karatepe, 2008). It has been suggested, for instance that the quality of the interrelationship between work and family is a leverage point for adult health because it has the potential to affect health via multiple pathways (Grzywacz & Fuqua, 2000). Aside the numerous empirical concerns about conflict between work and family, there is also a

remarkable empirical interest in the beneficial effect of holding family and work roles at the same time. Various terms, such as work-family enrichment, work-family enhancement, work-family facilitation, and positive spillover have been used to refer to the process by which one role strengthens or enriches the quality of the other role. The terms expressed positive relationship between work and family, in contrasted with the work-family conflict approach which predicts a negative correlation between work and family roles (Tsai, 2008).

Family and work exist both in symbiotic and parasitic forms. Symbiotically, the family nurtures and prepares the individual for work and work sustains and maintains the individual. This is the basis of the instrumentality perspective of work-family conflict and family-work conflict. Parasitically, work responsibilities interfere with family responsibilities. Work and family roles can be allies in certain aspects and enemies in other aspects; therefore, a person may simultaneously experience work-family conflict and work-family enrichment (Faiz, 2015).

Varied theories exist for the varied forms of interaction between family and work (Madsen & Hammond, 2005). Role theory proposes that the likelihood of an individual experiencing role conflict increases with an increase in the number of his or her roles. Role conflict is defined as simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other? (Kahn et al., 1964, as cited in Faiz, 2015). The role conflict theory provides the most prominent framework for the majority of work-family conflict research (Madsen & Hammond, 2005). Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) proposes that individuals seek to acquire and maintain resources (e.g., homes, clothes, self-esteem, time, money, and knowledge) and that stress occurs when there is a loss of resources, or a threat of loss. Consequently, for the theory, work-family conflict leads to stress because resources (e.g., time, energy) are lost in the process of juggling both work and family roles, which in turn leads to job dissatisfaction, anxiety, and thoughts about quitting one's job (Thompson, 2011). The scarcity theory proposes that individuals have a fixed amount of time and energy and participation in multiple roles (e.g. work and family) results in the devotion of greater resources to one role and less resources to the other role, which inevitably causes conflict (Faiz, 2015). Expansionist theory states that multiple role occupancy has beneficial effects such that "adding" the worker role is beneficial to women, and "adding" family roles is beneficial for men. The expansionist approach does not make the assumption that energy and resources are limited and fixed but rather that they are expandable (Tsai, 2008). The expansionist theory largely accounts for

work-family enrichment, work-family enhancement, work-family facilitation, and positive spillover. The resource drain theory posits that the negative relationship that exists between work and family occurs as a result of one domain using up time and energy that are needed for the other domain (Frone, 2003). And the spill-over theory proposes that there exists negative and positive carry-over from work to family and from family to work. For instance, positive spill-over would be exhibited when the satisfaction, energy, happiness, and stimulation an individual has at work would cross-over into positive feeling and energy at home. Negative spill-over from work to family is demonstrated when the problems, conflicts or energy at work has strained and preoccupied an individual, making it difficult to participate in family life effectively and positively (Madsen, 2003).

#### Work-Family Conflict and Family-Work Conflict

Once considered as a unidirectional phenomenon (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985), the conflict between work and family is now widely discussed as bi-directional one (work-family conflict and family-work conflict). This distinction between work-family conflict and family-work conflict is necessary because of empirically identified differences such as WFC being experienced more than FWC, the latter being longitudinally related to greater depression, physical health complaints and hypertension, while WFC is longitudinally related to higher levels of heavy alcohol consumption (Carlson & Frone, 2003; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). In addition, Razak, Omar and Yunus (2010) reported that parental demand and family involvement were positively related to work interference with family (WFC), while spouse support and parental demand have significant impact on FWC. Antecedents of WFC reside primarily in the job domain, whereas antecedents of FWC lie mainly in the family domain (Frone 2003). In fact, some scholars (e.g. Duxbury, Higgins & Lee, 1994; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992) concluded that the two types of conflict are conceptually and empirically distinct constructs.

Work-family conflict refers to a form of inter role conflict in which the demands of work

interfere with one's family responsibilities (Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrin, 1996; Jex, 2008). In other words, WFC happens when someone is unable to do his or her work activities because of his or her family responsibilities (Warokka & Febrilia, 2014). Family-work conflict refers to a form of inter role conflict in which the demands of family interfere with one's work responsibilities (Netemeyer et al., 1996, Jex, 2008). In other words, FWC happens when family activities interfere with work responsibilities (Warokka & Febrilia, 2014).

Work-family conflict and Family-work conflict are reported to be in varied forms. Time-based conflict occurs when time demands in one domain makes it more difficult to attend to one's responsibilities in the other domain. Strain-based conflict occurs when the strain due to stressors in one domain impairs a person's functioning in the other. Behaviour-based conflict occurs when specific behaviors required in one role are incompatible with behavioral expectations in another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Jex, 2002; Greenhaus, & Powell, 2003). Psychological-based conflict refers to the psychological preoccupation with one role, while performing another role that interferes with one's ability to become engaged in the last role (Carlson & Frone, 2003).

### **Gender Role Theories**

That males and females differ in some attitudes and behavior appears to be widely accepted. Owing to their role as primary caretaker of their households and the nearly universal demands of motherhood (Wood & Eagly, 2002), women value more and assign a higher priority to their family roles than their work roles. On the other hand, men attach higher priorities to their job-related responsibilities (Martins, Eddleston & Veiga, 2002). Three set of theories have been offered to account for role difference between males and females. The biologically based theories posits that sex differences in attitudes, abilities, and temperaments are innate and that these innate differences cause males and females to be differentially suited for certain work and family

roles. Biologically-focused theories have discussed the possible behavioral effects of genetic, hormonal, and morphological factors. Socialization theories emphasize the significance of differential socialization for boys and girls as they mature and/or an adult milieu that maintains differential expectations and treatment in a wide variety of areas. Therefore, from cultural perspective women have the main responsibility over the family domain, while men have the main responsibility over the work domain and that neglecting these responsibilities leads to work-family conflict (Beek & Bloemberg, 2011). As would result from socialization process, it has been suggested that men's self-esteem and identity are traditionally connected to their performance of the work role, while women's self-concept is associated with their performance of the spouse and parenting roles (Madsen, 2003). The social structure theories, emerging more recently, have studied the role of the social structure, and particularly sexism, as the major underlying factor involved in sex differences in personality. This perspective attributes most previously obtained gender differences to a political, economic, and social system that has discriminated against women for centuries. It has been argued (e.g., Schaef, 1981) that much of what seems distinctive about women is shared by other low-status groups. This would include such traits as greater sensitivity to social cues, less expressed aggression, higher deference, and better knowledge and understanding of the group in power than that group has of them. Thus, according to many recent feminist theorists, gender differences in personality are most explainable in terms of deep structural organizations of a society that has systematically condoned and practiced sexism. This last type of theory could be subsumed under the category of socialization, its emphasis is sufficiently different to warrant separate discussion. Its focus has been on the structural aspects of society, which, in turn, influence both individual socialization and most adult activity (Katz, 2008; Madsen & Hammond, 2005; Schaef, 1981; Matlin, 2012). The various gender role theories offered sufficient support for

the assumption of domain salient perspective of the relationship gender has with work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

### **Empirical review**

Males and females are widely reported to vary in a number of ways in work-family conflict and family-work conflict. In a French-Canadian sample of physical therapists and psychologists, Senecal, Vallerand, and Guay (2001) found no differences between males and females in their levels of work-family conflict. Fu and Shaffer (2001) observed gender differences, with women displaying higher levels of FWC and men more WFC. Matai, Nishikido and Murashima (2008) reported no significant gender difference in the total level of WFC, and that the level of work interference with family was significantly higher in males than females and the level of family interference with work was significantly higher in females. Results in a study by Ansari (2011) indicate no significant gender difference with regard to work-family interference and family-to-work interference. In a test of asymmetrically permeable boundaries theory (similar to domain flexibility perspective) in the work-family role system, Graf (2007) reported that the model is more informative for women than men. Specifically, work characteristics were significant predictors of women's family and work conflict more than men's, but family and home characteristics were not significant predictors of men's family and work conflict than they do for women's. Among physicians, the predominant form of WFC was work-to-family conflict; more female physicians significantly experienced family-to-work conflict and strain-based WFC than men and more male physicians experienced time-based work-family conflict than women (Adam, 2008). Rajadhyaksha and Ramadoss (2012) reported that of the various work-to-family conflict variables examined, there was a significant difference between men and women in work-to-parent conflict and energy-based strain but not in work-spouse conflict, work-leisure conflict or work-homemaker conflict. Matai, Nishikido and Murashima, (2008) remarked that some research studies found no gender difference, while other

studies found that female reported higher levels of some dimensions of work-family conflict, and that several studies carried out in Japan showed that female workers experienced higher work interfering with family and family interfering with work than male workers. The above presentation clearly indicates mixed evidence as to whether males and females differ in their experience of work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The varied empirically observed relationships between gender, work-family conflict and family-work conflict have given rise to two explanatory perspectives (domain flexibility and domain salient). Domain flexibility perspective assumes that work responsibilities is less flexible than family responsibilities, therefore WFC would be higher than FWC for both sexes (Izraeli, 1993; Evans & Bartelome, 1984, as cited in Çarıkçı, Antalyalı & Oksay, 2015). Domain salient perspective assumes that work is more salient to males, while family is more salient to females, therefore males will be higher than females in WFC, while females will be higher than males in FWC (Izraeli, 1993; Cooke & Rousseau, 1984, as cited in Çarıkçı, Antalyalı & Oksay, 2015). The demands from the work domain include working hour, level of physical and mental exertion, while the family demands include largely taking care of the children, the aged and household tasks. These perspectives seem plausible, but there exists dearth of empirical test on them. Therefore, the problem statement of this study is whether domain characteristics (flexibility and salience) explain how gender relates with work-family conflict and family-work conflict. The purpose is to provide understanding that will guide work design and family support programmes for maximum benefits for both the workers and the organization

### **Hypotheses**

- 1 Work-family conflict will be significantly higher than family-work conflict for both males and females.
- 2 There will be significant gender difference in work-family conflict and family-work conflict

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Three hundred and sixteen participants were drawn from both public sector and private-owned organizations in Delta State, Nigeria. This sample size is adequate as it has above 90 percent power (at 0.05 level of significance) when the difference between the means has a medium effect size (Dewberry, 2004). The power level indicates that this study is 90 percent certain of detecting a significant difference between the means of the two populations, if such a difference exists. The participants comprise 144 (45%) males and 172 (55%) females, 225 (72%) married, 83 (26%) unmarried, and 3 (1%) widowed. Their age mean was 38 years and 8.88 standard deviation. All have had formal education with the majority holding first degree or its equivalents. The participants include junior and senior staff members of the sampled organizations. The use of both categories of staff is to enable generalization of findings within that limit

### **Instrument**

Self-report questionnaires were adopted in the study. Gender (the independent variable) and other demographic variables that include age, marital status, designation, and highest level of education were located in the section "A" of the research questionnaire. The dependent variables (work-family conflict and family-work conflict) were measured with Netemyer, Boles and McMurrian's (1996) 10-item scale on the constructs. Five items of the scale measure WFC and the other five items measure FWC. The scale covers time-based and strain-based dimensions of the variables. The scale has been reported to have a good reliability (alpha higher than .70) (Colombo & Ghislieri, 2008). According to Colombo and Ghislieri (2008) this instrument appears particularly suitable for research on the work-family relation for many reasons. It has a limited number of items and, thus, it can be used in wider studies; it detects both directions of the conflict; it does not include indicators related to the behavioral aspects of conflict, which are difficult to translate and appear relatively weak. Examples of items on the scale are

"the amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities" and "I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home" respectively for WFC and FWC. Four- points Likert method of summated rating scale (4-strongly agree, 3-agreed, 2 disagree, and 1-strongly disagree) was adopted. Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality were clearly stated in the covering letter attached to the questionnaire. The covering letter also has the phrase "there is no right or wrong answer" that aimed at urging the participants to respond as honestly as possible (Limpanitgul, 2009). For this study, examination of Cronbach's alpha reliability on the five items that measure WFC dimension of the scale yielded .87 coefficient, while examination of Cronbach's alpha reliability on the five items that measures FWC dimension of the scale yielded .70 coefficient. These statistics indicate that the scale had good reliability, as an alpha of .70 or above is considered satisfactory (Howitt & Cramer, 2011).

### **Procedure**

On the approval of the managements of the sample organizations, the research questionnaires were distributed to the participants at their work places. The distribution was done with the assistance of a few administrative staff of the organizations. By convenience sampling technique, 355 questionnaires were distributed to the participants. After an interval of three weeks, 323 filled questionnaires were received. However, after sorting out the questionnaires that were not properly filled, 316 questionnaires (participants) were finally used for data analysis.

### **Design and statistics**

A cross sectional research design was adopted. T-test was used for test of significance. Hypothesis one was tested with related t-test, while hypothesis two was tested with independent t-test. The statistics was appropriate as the hypotheses tested difference in means. For the requirements of parametric statistics, the collected data were independent, test of skewness indicated that the population of study was normally distributed, and interval scaling was archived with the adopted

Likert scaling format. The statistical analysis was accomplished with version 20 of Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). Kenny's (1987) approach to calculation of Cohen d (effect size) statistics and Howitt and Cramer's (2011) approach to interpretation of confidence interval were adopted respectively.

**Results**

The descriptive statistics indicate that on the average males and females experience moderate WFC. On the four-point scale adopted, a mean of 2.38 for males and a mean of 2.39 for females indicate agreement to experience of WFC. For FWC, a mean of 1.89 for males and a mean of 1.92 for female indicate disagreement to experience. However, because the range of option on the scale includes “strongly disagree” a mean response of “disagree” does not imply complete absence of FWC. In addition, Pearson correlation revealed positive relationship ( $r = .39$ ) between work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

Related t-test (Table 1) shows significant difference in males and females experience of both WFC and FWC. For males  $t(143) = 8.47$ , two-tailed,  $p < 0.05$ , Cohen's  $d = .70$ . For females  $t(171) = 8.93$ , two-tailed,  $p < 0.05$ , Cohen's  $d = .71$ . Therefore,

the perspective that work-family conflicts will be higher than family-work conflict for both males and females was supported. And by implication, the domain flexibility hypothesis was confirmed. The obtained Cohen's  $d (.70)$  implies that being males has a medium effect on the amount of work family-conflict experienced when compared to the amount of family-work conflict experienced. Similarly, the obtained Cohen's  $d (.71)$  implies that being females has a medium effect on the amount of work family-conflict experienced when compared to the amount of family-work conflict experienced.

As the point estimates above indicate significant results so do the confidence interval estimates. The difference between males scores ( $M = 2.38, SD = .69$ ) on WFC and ( $M = 1.89, SD = .58$ ) on FWC is .48. The 95 per cent confidence interval for this difference is .374 to .602. Since this interval does not include 0.00, the difference is statistically significant at the two-tailed .05 level. Similarly, the difference between females scores ( $M = 2.39, SD = .68$ ) on WFC and ( $M = 1.92, SD = .55$ ) on FWC is 1.47. The 95 per cent confidence interval for this difference is .359 to .562. Since this interval does not include 0.00, the difference is statistically significant at the two-tailed .05 level.

**Table 1: Related T-test Showing Whether Work-Family Conflict is higher than Family-Work Conflict for Both Males and Females.**

	Males	N	M (SD)	df	t	Cohen's d	P	95%CI	
								Lower	Upper
	WFC	144	2.38(.69)	143	8.47	.70.	.001	.374	.602
	FWC	144	1.89(.58)						
	Females								
	WFC	172	2.39(.68)	171	8.93.71.		.001	.359	.562
	FWC	172	1.92(.55)						

Source: Computation by the Author on Version 20, SPSS.

Independent t-test (Table2) shows no significant difference between males and females in both WFC and FWC. For WFC  $t(314) = -.15$ , two-tailed,  $p > 0.05$ , Cohen's  $d = -.012$ , for FWC  $t(314) = -.54$ , two-tailed,  $p > 0.05$ , Cohen's  $d = -.043$ . Therefore, the hypothesis that there will be significant gender difference in work-family conflict and family-work

conflict was not supported. And by implication, the domain salient perspective was not confirmed. The obtained Cohen's  $d (-.012)$  implies that gender has a less than small effect on work family-conflict. Similarly, the obtained Cohen's  $d (-.043)$  implies that gender has a less than small effect on family-work conflict.

As the point estimates above indicate non-significant results so do the confidence interval estimates. The difference between males scores (M =2.38, SD, .69)) and females scores (M =2.39, SD =.68) for WFC is 0.01. The 95 per cent confidence interval for this difference is -.164 to .140. Since the confidence interval passes through 0.00, the difference is not statistically significant at the two-

tailed 0.05 level. Similarly, the difference between males scores (M = 1.89, SD =.58) and females scores (M = 1.92, SD, = .55) is 0.03. The 95 per cent confidence interval for this difference is -.16 to .09. Since the confidence interval passes through 0.00, the difference is not statistically significant at the two-tailed 0.05 level.

**Table 2:Independent T-test Showing Gender Differences in both Work-Family Conflict and Family-Work Conflict**

WFC	N	M (SD)	df	t	Cohen's d	P	95% CI	
							Lower	Upper
Males	144	2.38(.69)	314	-.15	-.012	.88	-.164	.140
Females	172	2.39(.68)						
<b>FWC</b>								
Males	144	1.89(.58)	314	-.54	-.043	.59	-.16	.09
Females	172	1.92(.55)						

Source: Computation by the Author on Version 20, SPSS.

Additional unrelated t-test analysis showed that married and unmarried males do not significantly differ in both WFC and FWC at 0.05 level (married males mean =2.37, SD =.69; unmarried males mean =2.40, SD =.68). And that married and unmarried females significantly differ in family-work conflict at 0.05 level (married females mean =1.81, SD=.54; unmarried females mean =2.05, SD =.61), but do not differ in work-family conflict at 0.05 level (married females mean = 2.30, SD =.71; unmarried females mean =2.41, SD =.71).

**Discussion**

The descriptive statistics indicate that on the average males and females experience moderate WFC and that there is a positive correlation between WFC and FWC for both males and females. The latter result implies that increase in WFC would lead to increase in FWC; decrease in WFC would lead to decrease in FWC and verse visa. This study tested two widely expressed views in the literature on the relationship gender has with work-family conflict and family-work conflict. The domain flexibility view proposes that the work domain is a greater source of conflict than the

family domain for both women and men. This view was tested in hypothesis 1. The domain salient predicts that the family domain is a greater source of conflict for women than the work domain, and the work domain a greater source of conflict for men than the family domain. This view was tested in hypothesis 2. The finding on hypothesis 1 revealed that males and females experience of WFC was significantly higher than their experience of FWC. In other words, males' experience of WFC was significantly higher than their experience of FWC. Similarly, females' experience of WFC was significantly higher than their experience of FWC. This finding confirmed the domain flexibility perspective.Indeed, while another person can easily be requested or hired to do much of one's family tasks, that cannot be easily done with one's work responsibilities.

The finding on hypothesis 2 revealed that males and females do not significantly differ in their experience of WFC and FWC. In other words, males were not significantly higher than females in WFC and females were not significantly higher than males in FWC. This finding did not confirm the

domain salient perspective and it was unexpected. However, a few researchers (e. g. Ansari, 2011; Senecal, Vallerand & Guay, 2001) had reported similar findings. Two plausible explanations could be offered for the results of data analyses for hypothesis 2. The first explanation, which is for the WFC, is in the monogamous and small family size structure that is fast becoming the order of the day in the research location. Relatively small size family has greater probability than large size family to induce commitment from male for the family. For instance, it is now very common to see men preparing the children for school in the morning, doing school runs, stay with their sick children in the hospital. Man's increased family commitment means additional family responsibilities for him and reduced family responsibilities for the woman. While this reduces the difference in family responsibilities between males and females, it also means that family responsibilities are now of concern to men as it has been for women. The second explanation, which is for FWC result is in the harsh economic realities of the time. Of necessity, women in many homes are now making significant financial contributions to the upkeep of their homes. Because making financial contribution to the home is now of necessity for women, the work domain, the source of the finance is also getting significant attention from them. Increased concern for work domain in order for the family domain to function maximally has the potency to blur the supposed difference in FWC between males and females.

It was concluded that, first, work interferes more in family responsibility than family interferes in work responsibilities for both males and females. Work responsibilities are the offenders in the relationship between work life and family life. Second, the degree to which work responsibilities interfere in family responsibilities

does not differ significantly for both males and females. Males and females suffer similar levels of work-family conflict. Third, the degree to which family responsibilities interfere in work responsibilities does not differ significantly for both males and females. Males and females suffer similar levels of family-work conflict. Finally, and on the basis of correlation analysis, efforts that would lead to reduction in WFC would bring about reduction in FWC and vice versa. Similarly, increase in WFC would bring about increase in FWC and vice versa.

On the basis of domain flexibility perspective, which has confirmation in this study and a few others (such as Adam, 2008) it is recommended that to reduce WFC, work should be made more flexible. This can be achieved with work design such as flexible work hours and telecommuting. The degree male and females experience work-family conflict and family-work conflict are similar, so design of any work-life balance, work-life integration or work-life support programme should be made to accommodate both sexes. Further studies on domain flexibility hypothesis should compare individuals that are self-employed, individuals that are employed in private-owned organizations and individuals that are employed in government organizations. This recommendation is on the proposal that these varied forms of employments would differ in their levels of work flexibility. It could be proposed that self-employed individuals would have highest level of work flexibility, followed by individuals employed in government organizations and individual employed in private-owned organizations in that order. Still on the test of domain flexibility, future studies should compare individuals in different cadres (junior and senior, managerial and non-managerial). An individual level in the organization could determine organizational demand on that individual and the amount of unofficial control the individual could have over his/her work hours.

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