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#### Araştırma Makalesi

# Importance of Flexibility on Decreasing Work-family Conflict Among Employed Mothers

### Çalışan annelerin iş-aile çatışmalarının azaltılmasında esnekliğin önemi Doruk Uysal Irak<sup>a</sup>

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#### ABSTRACT

In this study the role of two types of flexibility, based on time and place, on work-family conflict was investigated among employed women who have at least one child age of 6 or younger. Although the role of flexibility has been studied in previous studies it is novel to compare types of flexibility among mothers in Turkey. Participants were asked to complete a 15 minutes online survey. One hundred and fifty employed mothers who have at least one child age of 6 or younger were participated. In order to test the hypothesis linear regression analyses were conducted. Results showed that for work-family conflict, temporal flexibility is important whereas for family-work conflict operational flexibility is much more important. This study highlighted the differences between flexible work arrangements which is beneficial for human resources departments and public policy practices. Therefore, they can consider new plans which will be developed at workplace for offering flexibility in order to deal with work-family conflict.

#### MAKALE BİLGİSİ

ÖZ

Anahtar Kelimeler: Esneklik, İşyerinde Esneklik Uygulamaları, İş-Aile Çatışması, Aile-İş Çatışması

Tarihler: Geliş 25 Ocak 2018 Düzeltme geliş 3 Nisan 2018 Kabul 3 Nisan 2018 Bu çalışmada iki tür esneklik türü olarak zamana ve mekana bağlı esnekliğin, 6 ya da daha küçük yaşta en az bir çocuğu olan çalışan annelerin iş-aile çatışmalarındaki rolü araştırılmıştır. Esneklik uygulamalarının rolü daha önceki bazı çalışmalarda ele alınmış olsa da, bu çalışma Türkiye'de çalışan annelerde farklı esneklik türlerinin karşılaştırılması açısından yeni bir çalışmadır. Katılımcılardan 15 dakika süren çevrimiçi bir ankete katılmaları istenmiştir. Araştırmaya 6 ya da daha küçük yaşta en az bir çocuğu olan 150 çalışan anne katılmıştır. Hipotezleri test etmek için doğrusal regresyon analizi yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları iş-aile çatışmalarında zamana bağlı esnekliğin önemli olduğunu, aile-iş çatışmaların da ise mekansal esnekliğin daha öncelikli olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu araştırma özellikle insan kaynakları departmanlarında ve kamu politikaları için faydalı olacağı düşünülen farklı esnek işveri uygulamaları arasındaki farka dikkat çekmektedir. Böylece çalışanların yaşadıkları iş-aile çatışmalarıyla mücadele edebilmek için işyerinde geliştirilebilecek esneklik planlamaları yapılabilir.

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## 1. IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBILITY FOR DECREASING WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AMONG EMPLOYED MOTHERS

Work-family conflict (WFC) is one of the most pervasive and problematic workplace stressor in today's world (Kelloway et al., 1999). It may cause burnout (Jawahar et. al., 2007), decrease life satisfaction (Moreno-Jimenez et. al., 2009) and it has negative effect on well-being (Mauno et. al., 2006). Increase in number of dual career couples and women, more employees need to juggle between roles of family and roles of work which leads to WFC. In order to reduce WFCsome organizations prefer to use Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) such as working from home or giving a control over employee's work schedule.

Some researchers prefer to use the term of FWA which is described as flexibility in terms of place, where the work is completed and in terms of time, when the work is completed (Rau & Hayland, 2002). Flexibility is not only used for reducing WFC, it has also positive implications for several outcomes such as high job satisfaction, family wellbeing, high engagement, low turnover, and low stress (Campbell Clark, 2001; Chou, Boldy, & Lee, 2002; Currivan, 1999; Hall & Parker, 1993; Marshall & Barnett, 1994; Meyer, 1997; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Stokols, Pelletier and Fielding (1996) put emphasis on flexible work schedules in claiming that environmental support is necessary for encouraging positive lifestyle changes among employees. Moreover, Wayne and Casper (2016) found that especially women employees feel FWA are important to deal with WFC. However it is still a controversial issue whether perception of flexibility is related to lower WFC or how different types of flexibility are related to WFC.

Most of the previous studies have measured those effects globally (e.g., Eek & Axmon, 2013; O'Driscoll et al., 2003; Thompson, Payne & Taylor, 2015) in other words they did not compare different types of flexibility arrangement to each other. Studies have shown mixed results as researchers (e.g., Allen et al., 2013; Shockley & Allen, 2007) suggested new studies to discover the role of FWA on WFC. FWA are not very common in Turkey and less amount of people can use those arrangements compared to the other European countries (OECD, 2016). Moreover to our knowledge, the possible relation between different types of flexibility and WFC has not been studied among employees working in Turkey.

Although it is a controversial issue whether gender differs for reporting higher or lower WFC

(Rajadhyaksha et al., 2015), it is believed that higher job related demands leads to lower performance of family roles especially for women (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). Munn and Greer (2015) stated that "work-family friendliness" at workplace would be more needed for women compared to men (p. 21) and they are preferred more likely by women (Hammer & Neal, 2008). In this study the role of two types of flexibility, based on time and place, on work-family conflict was investigated among employed women who have at least one child age of 6 or younger. Recently a new policy which offers flexible employment for employed women has been accepted in Turkey. However it is not clear whether flexibility has positive influence on employed mothers or whether any differences exist between types of FWA. Most of the studies discuss flexibility in general (e.g., Doğrul & Tekeli, 2010; Turgut, 2011), thus this study will be unique as it compares types of flexibility and as participants were employed mothers from different cities of Turkey.

#### 2. BACKGROUND AND REVIEW

#### 2.1. Work-family conflict (WFC)

WFC is described as "a form of an interrole conflict which reveals incompatibility in work and family role pressures in some respect" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p.77). WFC conflict occurs when a person's work related responsibilities interfere with family related responsibilities, while family-work conflict (FWC) occurs when a person's family related responsibilities interfere with work related responsibilities (Galovan, et al., 2010). Involvement in a role more than its requirement, limits the time and the energy required for the other role (Hargis et al., 2011). According to the Rational View theory when an individual spends time and involves to a role excessively, then the other role will be perceived as a secondary one (Pleck, 1977). Also the number of hours which was spent on nonwork task is positively related to WFC or FWC (Byron, 2005). Being married (Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977), raising children (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1980; Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981; Greenhaus & Kopelman, 1981) and living in a large family (Cartwright, 1978; Keith & Schafer, 1980) are all contributive factors for experience of high FWC. Work-family conflict can be in three forms one of them was named as time-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) in which one domain takes a lot of time that makes it impossible to fulfill the requirements of the other domain, therefore incompatibility arises between work and family. Strain-based is another type, occurs when one domain creates strain feelings that create difficulty to fulfill the

requirements of the other domain and incompatibility arises between two domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Last type of work-family conflict is behavioral-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In this one, differences between behavioral requirements of domains lead to incompatibility between work and family. Studies about WFC examine different types separately or together related to their research questions.

## 2.2. Flexible work arrangements (FWA) and its relation with WFC

In order to support employees to better handle the interface between work and family conceptualized as family-friendly or supportive programs (Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999). Numerous organizations have attempted FWA as a way for helping employees to balance between work and family responsibilities. FWA are the term for work options that allow flexibility in terms of 'where' to work (often referred to flex place) and/or 'when' to work (Allen et al., 2013). Moreover, the most progressive organizations do not only institute programs, they changed their culture of organization to familyfriendly way (Galinsky & Stein, 1990). Family supportive cultures supporting FWA are perceived as important to deal with WFC among women compared to men (Wayne & Casper, 2016).

In literature the characteristics of family-friendly work cultures has been described as temporal flexibility (flexible work scheduling), operational flexibility (flexible work processes) and an understanding about the needs of family by employer (Bailyn, 1997). Temporal flexibility is the ability to decide about employees' own work schedule (Campbell-Clark, 2001). Previous studies have shown that temporal flexibility increases individual's autonomy and job control which in return has a positive effect on work-family problems (Thomas & Ganster, 1995), disappearance of symptoms of one's job stress, absenteeism, and burnout (Kingston, 1990) and also job satisfaction (Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Rothausen, 1994; Ronen, 1984). According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), one of the main reasons of WFC is identified as time-based conflict. It occurs when time demand in one side's responsibilities (e.g., work) interfere with other side's responsibilities (e.g., family). Therefore perceptions of work-family inference may decrease with temporal flexibility since it leads to having more time to spend with family (Christensen & Staines, 1990). Also various other studies (e.g., Kundu et al., 2016) found the importance of time related flexibility to experience lower WFC. In a recent research by Rastogi, Rangnekar and Rastogi (2016) found that temporal flexibility is a stronger predictor of WFC compared to operational flexibility. According to these previous studies and findings we can develop the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 1**: Temporal flexibility will be negatively related to WFC.

The second characteristic of family-friendly workplace is operational flexibility. This term has been conceptualized by Bailyn (1997) as having control over the working conditions. Moreover, it contains the self- determination about how the work is to be done. In other words employees have the autonomy to make their choice about how the work is to be done without monitoring and proscription (Bailyn, 1997). Numerous studies stated that there is a positive relationship between having autonomy and job satisfaction (Parker, Wall & Jackson, 1997). According to the Job Characteristics Theory, core job characteristics such as autonomy or feedback are important as they have a positive impact on employee outcomes such as job satisfaction and motivation (Oldham, 1996). Having control over the place where one works can help to reduce employee strain (Allen et al., 2013). Moreover employees who work in organizations being offered operational flexibility, are more successful at managing their family life, they are happier and more peaceful because they are freer to make their own decisions as well as being more productive and satisfied with their job (Bailyn, 1993). However, other researchers found that this relationship depends on the personal features (see in Schneider, Reichers, & Mitchell, 1982). In family perspective, operational flexibility can cause higher family functioning and satisfaction with family life since they have the autonomy to direct their family lives (Campbell-Clark, 2001). Flexibility increases control and autonomy of employees which would help them to deal with the demands of their family (Allen et al., 2013). According to the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) flexibility which supports schedule control would help employees to decrease the demands of work. Therefore, when employees feel control over their schedule more likely they would feel balance between the demands of their family and the demands of their work. In recent studies (e.g., Kim & Gong, 2017; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006) flexibility was found as a good predictor of lower FWC which was also hypothesized in this study. Thus according to these previous studies and findings we can develop the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2:** Operational flexibility will be negatively related to FWC.

#### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1. Participants and Procedures

In order to test the hypothesis the study was conducted with employed mothers who has at least one child age of 6 or younger than 6. Mothers who have a child younger than age of 6 experience higher conflict compared to the mothers with older children (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1980; Pleck, Staines & Lang, 1980). It is relatively difficult to reach employed mothers with a child younger than 6. In order to increase the number of participants in the study, a nonprobability sampling technique called snowball sampling was used. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, in which recruitment emails were sent directly to personal contacts who were asked to forward the invitation to their network list. Participants were asked to

complete a 15 minutes online survey which was hosted and stored by Survey Monkey. One hundred and fifty employed mothers who have at least one child age of 6 or younger and who were working in various cities of Turkey (İstanbul, İzmir, Bursa, İzmit, Çorum, Mersin) were participated in the study. They were between 17 and 41 years old (M =31.6; SD= 3.7) and all have at least one child age of 6 or younger than 6. They are all married mothers and half were working in private organizations (53%). In terms of number of children they have, 81 % of the mothers indicated they have 1 child, and 17 % indicated they have two children and 2 %reported they had 3 or more children. Mean organizational tenure of the participants was 2.64 (SD = .97). (see Table 1)

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

A	M= 31.6		
Age	SD= 3.7		
Education (%)			
High school	9610		
University	%68		
Master's-Doctorate	9622		
Number of children (%)			
1	%81		
2	9617		
3 or more	962		
Age of first child (%)			
Smaller than 1	%15		
1-2	%32		
2-4	9631		
4-6	9621		
Job position (%)			
Manager	%14		
Nonmanager	%55		
	M= 2.6		
Job tenure (year)	SD= 0.9		

N=150

#### 3.2. Measures

Flexibility: In order to measure the extent of temporal flexibility and operational flexibility the scale developed by Campbell Clark (2001) was used in this study. The scale was standardized by Uysal, Irak & Koc (2014). In this scale temporal flexibility was measured by 5 items and operational flexibility was measured by 5 items. Original scale had Cronbach Alpha reliability of each subscale as .83, and .86 (Campbell Clark, 2001), in this study the reliability was found .74 for temporal flexibility, .72 for operational flexibility and total scale reliability was .77. Some items include; "I am able to arrive and depart from work when I want"; "I can choose what I do at work". By using those items, it is possible to measure perceptions of employed mothers' autonomy over their schedule and demands of their job. In order to analyze the validity of the two factor Flexibility scale a confirmatory factor analysis was applied by using AMOS 21. First-order CFA model was applied as the items are taken as the indicators of the flexibility measure, so only a measurement component was examined instead of other higher order CFA's which can be described as a reduced form of a structural model (Byrne, 2001) The CFA results indicated that all estimates fell within the acceptable range ( $\chi^2 = 58.19$ ,  $\chi^2$  /df= 1.72, p=.01, GFI=.93,CFI= 95, RMSEA=.07, AGFI=.90) and two factors model had an acceptable fit to the data.

Work-family conflict: Standardized version (Aycan & Eskin, 2005) of 10 item scale developed by Netenmeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996) was used to measure Work-family Conflict. The scale has 5 items to measure family to work conflict and 5 items to measure work to family conflict. Sample item includes "The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities" (W to FC) and "I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home" (F to WC). Response scale was 5 point Likert scale. The internal consistency of the W to FC scale was .92 and of the F to WC scale was .90 for the present sample. In order to analyze the validity of the two

factor Work-family conflict scale a confirmatory factor analysis was applied by using AMOS 21. The CFA results indicated that all estimates fell within the acceptable range ( $\chi^2=70.86$ ,  $\chi^2$  /df= 2.21, p=.00, GFI=.92, CFI= 95, RMSEA=.09, AGFI=.86) and two factors model had an acceptable fit to the data.

Demographics: Participants were also asked to indicate their age, number of children they have, age of their children, marital status, education level, organizational tenure, and type of organization (private, public).

#### 4. RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and zeroorder correlations for the measured variables are shown in Table 1. There was a significant negative correlation between temporal flexibility and WFC (r =-.23), negative correlation between operational flexibility and WFC (r = -.17) and FWC (r = -.24). In order to examine any possible difference between employees working in public sector and private sector, total scores of the participants in four main variables were compared between employees in public (n= 69) and private (80) organizations. ANOVA results showed that there were no significant differences between type of a sector in terms of employees' workplace flexibility (temporal and operational flexibility), WFC and FWC. (see Tables 2)

In order to examine the differences between temporal flexibility and operational flexibility in predicting work-family conflict, two linear regression analyses regressing each of work-family conflict and family-work conflict were conducted (see Tables 3 and 4). According to the results there were significant differences between the two types of workplace flexibility in terms of predicting workfamily conflict. As expected, temporal flexibility (B= -.20) was significantly negatively related to work-family conflict (R  $^2$  = .06, F (2, 149) = 4.82, p < .05), but operational flexibility was not

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities and Inter-scale Correlations for Measured Research Variables

	М	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Temporal flexibility	11.19	4.44	(.74)				
2. Operational flexibility	17.86	4.04	.38***	(.72)			
3. Work-family conflict	14.95	4.91	23**	17*	(.92)		
4. Family-work conflict	12.32	4.59	09	24**	.53***	(.90)	

Note: N = 150; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Anal	yses for Variables Pred	licting Change in Work-	Family Conflict
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Variable	В	SE B	β
Temporal Flexibility	22	.09	19*
Operational Flexibility	12	.11	09

<sup>\*</sup>p < .05.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Change in Family-Work Conflict

Variable	В	SE B	β
Temporal Flexibility	.00	.09	.00
Operational Flexibility	27	.09	24**

<sup>\*\*</sup>p < .01.

significantly related to work-family conflict. Thus Hypothesis 1 was supported. On the other hand, operational flexibility (B = -.24) was significantly and negatively related to family-work conflict (R² = .06, F (2, 149) = 4.59, p < .01) which supports Hypothesis 2, but temporal flexibility was not significantly related to family-work conflict. Thus, when we compare  $\beta$  values, for work-family conflict temporal flexibility is important whereas for family-work conflict operational flexibility is much more important.

#### 5. DISCUSSION

In this study, the relationship between FWA (temporal flexibility and operational flexibility) and WFC-FWC were studied among employed mothers having at least one child younger than 6. FWA has been attracted attention in many countries however it is still a new concept in Turkey as few organizations are offering flexibility at the workplace. As OECD (2016) declared that in Europe, 3 out of 4 employees can use FWA which improves work-life balance, especially for working parents. However in Turkey flexibility is less common; frequently apply as part-time employment (Caspi et al., 2007). Although availability of flexible arrangements was not asked directly in this study, main concern was perceptions of employed mothers about FWA at their workplace.

When employees working in public and private sectors were compared in terms of their WFC and

perceptions of flexibility, no significant diffences was found which was also parallel with the previous studies (e.g., Doğan, Bozkurt & Demir, 2015). Although public sector might have more flexibility compared to private sector, no significant difference was found in this study when the perceptions of employees about the FWA and WFC from each sector were compared. This can be related to collecting only subjective data. Therefore in new studies both subjective and objective data would be needed in order to examine this question in more detail.

As predicted it was found that high temporal flexibility was a significant predictor of WFC whereas high operational flexibility was a significant predictor of FWC. Study results are also consistent with the previous studies by Allen et al. (2013), Kundu et al. (2016), Rastogi et al. (2016) and Shockley and Allen (2007). Thus, when mothers perceive higher autonomy over their work schedule they will report less WFC and when they have flexibility where they can complete their work they will report less FWC. Thomas and Ganster (1995) stated that job control will help employees to deal with their work-family problems. When employees are given an opportunity to schedule their job demands they will also have enough time to fulfill the demands at home. Mothers will have ability to plan and manage their responsibilities proactively when there is flexibility (Allen et al., 2013). Study results were paralel with the literature (e.g., Campbell-Clark, 2001; Kim & Gong, 2017) confirming that operational flexibility decreases FWC. In conclusion using FWA is beneficial for

employed mothers with small child in terms of having lower WFC. Another key finding of this research was the differences between temporal flexibility and operational flexibility in terms of their relation with WFC and FWC. Although there is not clear knowledge about the availability of FWA in Turkey, perceptions of such arrangements are found important for employed mothers.

Current study has also some limitations. First, it was based on a cross-sectional design which makes it hard to make causal inferences. There is a strong need for more longitudinal research in this area which examines perceptions of WFC and FWA among employed mothers. A second limitation is that the study used a self-report measure which raises the issue of common method variance that may have inflated the correlations. However, other methods such as observer ratings may equally be affected by some bias (Spector, 2006). Also the number of participants was limited in the study which can be a limitation of this research. It is really difficult to reach employed mothers having a child younger than 6 and also it is difficult for those mothers to give their time to respond a survey. In addition flexibility was measured by only asking perceptions of employees, so in future studies collecting data both for perceptions about flexibility and actual flexibility would be beneficial to compare differences between data. Research among European countries showed that employees having university degree have more control over their working times compared to others (OECD, 2016) however because of the not having equal sample size in groups education difference did not compared. In future studies collecting data from mothers with different educational backgrounds would be beneficial to confirm any difference. At last, in future studies other variables that mediate the relationship between WFC and FWA, such as support, workload and career dedication, should be studied.

#### 5.1. Conclusion and Practical Implications

Although FWA is not very common in Turkey it has been given much more importance because of its benefits both for employees and for organizations. FWA is important for reducing WFC but using flexibility was also related with greater productivity (Shockley & Allen, 2007). Moreover organizations offering flexibility are also perceived as most attractive and supportive organizations (Thompson, Payne & Taylor, 2015). As more women prefer to continue their career and take responsibilities as a mother, organizations should offer FWA in order to deal with negative attitudes and outcomes at workplace. As it was confirmed with this research and others studies such as Allen

et al. (2013) or Shockley and Allen (2007) it would be beneficial for human resources departments and public policy practices consider new plans for offering FWA in order to deal with WFC. Although flexibility is beneficial for all employees, FWA can be like a life buoy for employed mothers with small children.

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