

Work-Life Balance and Satisfaction with Family Life: A Methodological Analysis

By

Anjali Rangaswami

ABSTRACT. Balancing work duties and family responsibilities is an ongoing struggle for many American adults. As work is a crucial aspect of maintaining a family unit, an individual's level of work-life balance may affect how they feel about their family life. This raises the question, is there an association between Americans' work-life balance and their satisfaction with family life? To address this question, a sample of 809 American adult respondents was drawn from the International Social Survey Program's (ISSP) Family and Changing Gender Roles Module. The variable of work-life balance was measured by asking respondents how often in the past three months they experienced difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities because of the amount of time spent on their job. The variable of satisfaction with family life was measured by asking respondents how satisfied they were with family life. The data was analyzed using IBM's SPSS software, where I performed a one-way ANOVA test and cross-tabulation to test for association between work-life balance and satisfaction with family life. My findings indicate a significant difference in satisfaction with family life given variation in the frequency of difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities due to work. In particular, participants who "never" experienced difficulty with balancing work and family responsibilities had a higher level of satisfaction with family life than those who experienced difficulty "several times a month" and "several times a week" ($P = .001$).

INTRODUCTION

In a society which values work as an integral part of maintaining and supporting a family unit, assessing the impact of work responsibilities on one's satisfaction with family life is of great interest. The family is an institution which holds sociological significance relating to structure, as it dictates and socializes many norms, especially regarding the division of power and labor within a family unit. More specifically, the family can be understood as an "institutional arena," or a social space wherein "relations between people in common positions are governed by accepted rules of interaction" (Cohen 2020:9). The family arena also interacts closely with the State and the market arenas. Thus, the following question arises: is there an association between Americans' work-life balance and their satisfaction with family life? In my research, the independent variable is work-life balance and the dependent variable is satisfaction with family life. While previous studies have indicated possible associations between hours worked per week and satisfaction with work-family balance, I did not encounter research that conceptualized or measured work-life balance and satisfaction with family life in the particular way I have chosen (McNamara et al. 2013).

BACKGROUND

My research is well-positioned within the range of inquiries into work-life balance and satisfaction with family life. The dilemma of balancing both work and family responsibilities is perhaps one of the most relatable experiences in our culture. Broader research suggests that increases in the level of work-life balance, measured in terms of time spent on leisure and personal care, can improve the level of overall life satisfaction for men and women (Hideo 2020). However, both work and familial duties may encroach on an individual's ability to spend time on themselves. More specific research demonstrates that work-life balance and job satisfaction are negatively related to work-family conflict, further alluding to the interaction between the workplace and the family (Talukder 2019). Literature also indicates that the individual characteristics of one's work-family boundaries influence their overall work-life satisfaction, and that increased work-family interference is associated with decreased flexibility with familial boundaries (Lin and Jinyan 2015). Thus, individual family norms, such as boundary-setting and flexibility, may further affect how responsibilities are balanced and experienced. In addition, work design characteristics may influence the levels of work interference with family (WIF) among adult workers, where work conditions such as full-time work, varied work shifts, work from home, and work overload are associated with increased odds of experiencing WIF (Smith, Yu and Le 2020). Notably, the likelihood of experiencing WIF increases for employees with children (Smith et al. 2020). Workplace policies regarding flexibility of work schedules may be a further influence, particularly for hourly workers, as the ability for employees to take time off during the workday is associated with greater levels of happiness (Golden, Henly and Lambert 2013). Interestingly, a 1996 study found that workers who reported higher levels of job involvement also reported higher levels of work interfering with family, while workers who reported higher levels of family involvement also reported higher levels of family interfering with work (Adams, King and King 1996). However, while numerous studies examine facets of the work-life and work-family dilemma, my research possesses a unique and specific focus on the relationship between work-life balance and satisfaction with family life overall.

DATA AND METHODS

All data was gathered from the Family and Changing Gender Roles Module codebook collected by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) in 2012 and analyzed using IBM's SPSS software. Although the Family and Changing Gender Roles Module is an international survey, in this analysis, I focused on the context of the United States. The total number of respondents in the survey I analyzed was 809. The sample consisted of adults in the United States over the age of 30 years. The independent variable, work-life balance, is defined as balancing the responsibilities of both paid work and family duties (Lim and Mishra 2020). To measure work-life balance, I will be using Question R23b from the ISSP codebook which asks how often in the past three months "it has been difficult for me to fulfill my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job." The answer options are "several times a week," "several times a month," "once or twice," "never," and "doesn't apply/no job." Respondents who selected "doesn't

apply/no job” have been excluded from my research, as I am not interested in measuring their cases. Thus, the independent variable is an ordinal variable with 4 categories, where the highest difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities is represented by “several times a week” and the lowest difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities is represented by “never.” The dependent variable, satisfaction with family life, is measured using Question R26 from the ISSP codebook which asks, “All things considered, how satisfied are you with family life?” The answer options are “completely dissatisfied,” “very dissatisfied,” “fairly dissatisfied,” “neither satisfied or dissatisfied,” “fairly satisfied,” “very satisfied,” and “completely satisfied.” Thus, the dependent variable is an ordinal variable, which is treated as an interval ratio variable for the purposes of my analysis, with 7 categories; “completely dissatisfied” represents the greatest dissatisfaction with family life, where dissatisfaction decreases incrementally with each category until “completely satisfied,” which represents a complete lack of dissatisfaction with family life.

The methodological approach I utilized was selected based on the conceptualization of the independent and dependent variables, work-life balance and satisfaction with family life, respectively. I tested for an association between my two variables using a one-way ANOVA test in SPSS. I performed a cross-tabulation between my independent and dependent variables to see if there was a preliminary association. My methodology and selection of tests enabled me to compare the different levels of familial life satisfaction among different levels of difficulty completing family responsibilities due to work.

FINDINGS

The mean for my independent variable, difficulty fulfilling family responsibility due to work obligation, is 3.03 (Table 1), indicating on average that respondents experience difficulty either once or twice a month or never. However, while the mean can indicate the central tendency of a dataset, it does not reflect variation and can be influenced by outliers.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Summary

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Difficulty fulfilling family responsibility	816	1	4	3.03	1.061
Satisfaction with family life	1263	1	7	2.37	1.146
Valid N (listwise)	809				

Alternatively, the standard deviation indicates variation in the data, making it a useful statistic especially in tandem with the mean. The standard deviation for my independent variable, 1.061 (Table 1), means that 68% of participants experience difficulty fulfilling

family responsibility either once or twice a month or never. The mean for my dependent variable, satisfaction with family life, is 2.37 (Table 1), indicating on average that respondents are either “very” or “fairly” satisfied with family life. The standard deviation of 1.146 (Table 1) for my independent variable means that 68% of survey participants are either “very” or “fairly” satisfied with family life.

Table 2: Summary of ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Between groups	18.777	3	6.259	5.311	.001
Within groups	948.691	805	1.178		
Total	967.468	808			

The results of the ANOVA (Table 2) demonstrate that difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities due to work has a significant influence on satisfaction with family life (ANOVA, $F_{3,805} = 5.311$, $P = 0.001$). People who had difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities “several times a week” due to work were significantly less satisfied with their family life than those who “never” experienced difficulty fulfilling their family responsibilities (Tukey’s HSD, $P = .003$). Similarly, people who had difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities “several times a month” were significantly less satisfied with their family life than those who “never” experienced difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities (Tukey’s HSD, $P = 0.043$).

Table 3: Cross Tabulation of Independent and Dependent Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Several times a week	105	1	7	2.55	1.373	2.29	2.82
Several times a month	132	1	6	2.42	1.049	2.24	2.60
Once or twice	212	1	7	2.33	1.082	2.18	2.48
Never	360	1	6	2.13	1.004	2.03	2.24
Total	809	1	7	2.29	1.094	2.21	2.36

The 95% confidence interval for respondents who “never” experienced difficulty is [2.03, 2.24] (Table 3). Thus, I have 95% confidence that the average of my population, namely

all adults in the United States who have “never” experienced difficulty fulfilling family obligations due to work, lies between 2.03 and 2.24. The 95% confidence interval for respondents who experienced difficulty “once or twice” is [2.18, 2.48] (Table 3). As such, I have 95% confidence that the population mean of all American adults who experienced difficulty “once or twice” lies between 2.18 and 2.48. The 95% confidence interval for respondents who experienced difficulty “several times a month” is [2.24, 2.60] (Table 3). I thus have 95% confidence that the population mean of all American adults who experienced difficulty “several times a month” lies between 2.24 and 2.60. The 95% confidence interval for respondents who experienced difficulty “several times a week” is [2.29, 2.82] (Table 3). Thus, I am 95% confident that the population mean of all American adults who experienced difficulty “several times a week” lies between 2.29 and 2.82. As such, across all levels of difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities, I have 95% confidence that on average, the American adult population is either “very” or “fairly” satisfied with family life.

Table 4: Post Hoc Tests – Multiple Comparisons

(I) Difficulty fulfilling family responsibility	(J) Difficulty fulfilling family responsibility	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard Error	P	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Several times a week	Several times a month	.128	.142	.803	-2.4	.49
	Once or twice	.222	.130	.316	-.11	.56
	Never	.419*	.120	.003	.11	.73
Several times a month	Several times a week	-.128	.142	.803	-.49	.24
	Once or twice	.094	.120	.863	-.22	.40
	Never	.291*	.110	.043	.01	.58
Once or twice	Several times a week	-.222	.130	.316	-.56	.11
	Several times a month	-.094	.120	.863	-.40	.22
	Never	.197	.094	.156	-.05	.44
Never	Several times a week	-.419*	.120	.003	-.73	-.11
	Several times a month	-.291*	.110	.043	-.58	-.01
	Once or twice	-.197	.094	.156	-.44	.05

**The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level*

My null hypothesis is that satisfaction with family life does not differ based on frequency of difficulty fulfilling family duties due to time spent at work. My alternative hypothesis is that satisfaction with family life is associated with frequency of difficulty completing family obligations due to work. I found evidence to reject the null hypothesis ($P < 0.05$). More specifically, people who have difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities “several times a month” and “several times a week” due to work are significantly less satisfied with their family life than those who never experience difficulty fulfilling their family responsibilities ($P = .001$).

CONCLUSION

My ANOVA analysis demonstrates a significant difference in satisfaction with family life given variation in the frequency of difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities due to work. Post-hoc testing (Table 4) reveals further nuances within my sample. Specifically, participants who “never” experienced difficulty with balancing work and family responsibilities in the past three months have a higher level of satisfaction with family life than those who experienced difficulty “several times a month” and “several times a week” ($P = .001$).

The results of my statistical analysis help to answer my initial research inquiry, which investigates whether there is an association between Americans’ work-life balance and their satisfaction with family life. The evidence from my analysis suggests that work-life balance is associated with satisfaction with family life, although further investigation is needed and encouraged. I chose to conceptualize my independent variable, work-life balance, as Question R23b from the ISSP codebook on Gender and Family Life, which measured respondents’ frequency of difficulty completing family responsibilities due to time spent at work. While struggling to allocate time to family due to work is one indication of poor work-life balance, there are other measures which can be used that may capture more or better data about the variable of work-life balance. As the International Social Survey Program is a particularly comprehensive survey, the findings I received are representative of the American adult population, which enables me to generalize my findings as such. For more information about the ISSP’s sampling strategy, see the ISSP codebook on Gender and Family Life (ISSP Research Group 2016). Notably, there are additional limitations in this research which should be acknowledged, particularly regarding the sample that was utilized. Notably, all ISSP respondents were over the age of 30 years, which means that younger adults were simply not accounted for. In future research, I would recommend that a sample size which represents adults under the age of 30 years be drawn, in order to assess applicability to the wider adult population within the United States. In addition, future research should investigate the potential role of sociological factors such as social class, race, and ethnicity on work-life balance and satisfaction with family life. My research contributes to a growing body of literature which examines the impacts of work on the family unit, a topic which remains important and relevant in social science research and beyond.

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