



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK DEMANDS,
WORK-TO-FAMILY CONFLICT AND BURNOUT
AMONG CIVIL SERVANTS IN PENANG

BY

NURUL AMAL BINTI SHAIK MOHD RODHI

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requirement for the degree of Master of Human Sciences
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the direct effect of work demands on burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment), and mediator effect of work-family conflict on the relationship between work demands and burnout. Work demands was assessed by the Job Content Questionnaire, work-family conflict was assessed by the Work-Family Conflict Scale while burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey. The measurements were administered to 150 civil servants in Penang. The findings from this study indicate that work demands and work-family conflict were positively associated with burnout (both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). Work demands were also found to be positively associated with work-family conflict. The results also show that work-family conflict mediated the relationship between work demands and burnout. However, this mediation effect was only found for the relationship between work demands and emotional exhaustion, and between work demands and depersonalization. No mediator role of work-family conflict was found in the relationship between work demands and personal accomplishment. It is recommended that organizations find ways to implement appropriate intervention to assist civil servants, especially in creating coping strategies in work-family conflict as a means to reduce burnout and improve employees' well-being.

خلاصة البحث

تحققت هذه الدراسة من التأثير المباشر لمتطلبات العمل على الإرهاق (لإجهاد العاطفي، واهتزاز الشخصية، والإنجاز) وتأثير وسيط صراع الأعباء الأسرية على العلاقة بين متطلبات العمل والإرهاق. تم تقييم متطلبات العمل عن طريق استبانة حول مضمون العمل، أما تقييم صراع الأعباء الأسرية فقد تم تقييمه عن طريق مقياس صراع الأعباء الأسرية، بينما تم قياس الإرهاق باستخدام مقياس كشف الإرهاق لمسلاش Maslach _ مسح عام. تم تطبيق الأدوات السابقة على مائة وخمسين موظفا بالخدمة المدنية بولاية بنجاب (Penang). أشارت النتائج المستخلصة من هذه الدراسة إلى أن متطلبات العمل وصراع الأعباء الأسرية ترتبط بصورة إيجابية بالإرهاق (الإجهاد العاطفي واهتزاز الشخصية كليهما) كما استُخلصَ أيضا أن متطلبات العمل مرتبطة بصورة إيجابية بالأعباء الأسرية، كما أظهرت الدراسة أيضا أن صراع الأعباء الأسرية متوسط العلاقة بين متطلبات العمل والإرهاق. لكن تأثير هذه الوساطة وُجِدَ فقط في العلاقة بين متطلبات العمل والإجهاد العاطفي، وبين متطلبات العمل واهتزاز الشخصية، ولم يتم الوقوف على أي دور لوساطة الصراع الأسري في العلاقة بين متطلبات العمل والإنجاز الشخصي. من الموصى به أن تجد مؤسسة العمل طرقا لتطبيق التدخل المناسب للتسهيل على موظفي الخدمة المدنية، وخاصة استراتيجيات المواجهة لصراع الأعباء الأسرية كوسيلة لتقليل الإرهاق، وتحسين رفاه عيش الموظفين.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Psychology).

.....
Hariyati Shahrima Abdul Majid
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Psychology).

.....
Harris Shah Abdul Hamid
Examiner

This dissertation was submitted to the Department of Psychology and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Psychology).

.....
Harris Shah Abdul Hamid
Head, Department of
Psychology

This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Psychology).

.....
Ibrahim Mohamed Zain
Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic
Revealed Knowledge and
Human Sciences

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it is not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Nurul Amal binti Shaik Mohd Rodhi

Signature

Date

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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK DEMANDS, WORK-FAMILY
CONFLICT AND BURNOUT AMONG CIVIL SERVANTS IN PENANG**

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Dedikasi orang muda dengan sedikit beban sejarah dan kompetensi yang tertanggung:

This research is dedicated to my beloved parents, educators,

brothers and sisters out there,

This is the experience that never disappoints or saddens me or stirs up my feelings,

But it is a blend experience with big change towards me.

“In the sky is your provision and that which you are promised”

[51:22]

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In an article recently published in BERNAMA (October 10, 2012), it was reported that the number of employees diagnosed with chronic medical and psychological illnesses in Malaysia has increased by 0.5 to 1 % among the 1.4 million civil servants in this country. Statistics reported by the Ministry of Health shows that as many as 1.8 % of employees have been diagnose with depression (*Kosmo*, September 21, 2012), heart disease and cancer (*Berita Harian*, 2010, November 25). These health concerns have led the government and employers to highly invest in treatments and face losses in an effort to produce productive workers (*Bernama*, July 3, 2013). There have been claims that these physical and psychological illnesses are related to various organizational and work-related variables (*Kosmo*, September 21, 2012). In other words, people get ill because of what happens at the workplace. Some characteristics of the workplace that have been cited to cause these physical and psychological illnesses are changing roles and responsibilities, high job insecurity, increased demands and low social support (Borg & Kristensen, 2000; Lund & Borg, 1999).

Studies conducted over the past few years have revolved around how these changing workplace variables affect the employees (Panatik et al., 2012; Razak et al., 2011; Mostert, 2009; Karatepe et al., 2010; Shimazu et al., 2010; Peeters et al., 2005). These include negative work performance, higher attrition rate, higher turnover of intention and as well as burnout. It is interesting to note that, regardless of occupation, if the workplace demands exceed resources, employees will begin to experience

negative life outcomes (*Kosmo*, September 21, 2012). For instance, in high stress occupations like that of doctors and nurses (Cooper et al., 1988), demanding environment at the workplace and working condition has led to the negative health and well-being among employees resulting in depression and burnout (Antoniou et al., 2003).

A similar picture may also be observed among civil servants in Malaysia. There is a worrying trend among these employees with regard to their health and well-being (Kasan et al., 2012). In a study, Kasan et al. (2012) have found that intrinsic factors as well as organizational structure and climate were found to be the main sources of stress. This study also found that stress affected motivation, performance and thinking as well as physical and emotional well-being of civil servants. Questions arise as to what may have contributed to these negative consequences and it is suggested that it could be the result of the high demands and challenges they experience at the workplace (Shimazu et al., 2010; Peeters et al., 2005).

Between 2008 and 2009, cases of problematic and low performing civil servants were reported to increase from 5,344 cases in 2008 to 6,133 cases in 2009, which involves a 0.84 % or 789 cases increase (*Berita Harian*, 2010, November 25). The Malaysian Public Service Director stated that there are some problems that may contribute to this circumstance, for instance, employees' discipline, relationship with other workers, poor performance and chronic health problems such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer (*Berita Harian*, 2010, November 25). Nevertheless, all cases reported ought not be taken lightly as they can affect the overall image of the public service and further raises the question of the extent to which civil servants are capable of undertaking their respective roles and duties. This is to ensure the effectiveness of

services provided to further contribute to the development of the agency as well as the nation (*Bernama*, October 10, 2012).

In recent years, the Malaysian Public Service has introduced many changes through reorientation and evolution of civil service structure with planned improvements and innovations to meet the development demands and future needs (The Official Website of Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia, 2013). In order to achieve the expectation of Vision 2020 which aims at making Malaysia a high income and developed nation, public servants need to perform many tasks such as delivering services, handling public interests, ensuring public security and safety as well as implementing community programmes (The Official Website of Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia, 2013). However, through all transformation plans introduced, these changes could result in higher job demands and pressure among civil servants at work settings (Ismail et al., 2009). Under these circumstances, conflict may occur between job demands and home related demands as both of them play an important role in the Malaysian society.

One of the possible reasons for negative health outcome among civil servants is work-family conflict (Ismail et al., 2009). Work-family conflict occurs when demands in one role are incompatible with the other. The conflict which arises between these two roles (work matter and family matter) is a type of inter-role conflict whereby compliance to the demands of one role can increase the difficulty to comply with another role (Vallone & Donaldson, 2001).

Burnout is actually a possible consequence of work-family conflict faced by civil servants in Malaysia. A study conducted by Dyrbye et al. (2011) found that work-family conflict is positively associated with burnout. According to the expectations and demands mentioned earlier, the current circumstances can create a

condition that could affect the well-being of civil servants leading to burnout. Burnout is a term used to describe a serious problem resulting from the continuous stress and constant demands associated with physical, emotional and mental exhaustion after continually being in an emotionally demanding condition (Montgomery, Panagopolous & Benos, 2006; Rupert, Stevanovic & Hunley, 2009). According to Maslach and Jackson (1981), burnout comprises of three elements; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion involves feelings of being emotionally drained by others. Depersonalization refers to the negative and impersonal attitudes toward clients, while reduced personal accomplishment refers to the negative evaluation of one's own accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Based on these three components, Cordes and Dougherty (1993) define burnout as a response syndrome of these three elements and further describe burnout as a type of job stress which results from various work demands.

This introductory section aims to introduce the importance of understanding the current situation and challenges faced by Malaysian civil servants in their effort to meet the expectations while working towards the development of the country. In order to ensure the well-being of civil servants, it is also important to emphasize the domain of work-family conflict as it is one of the determinants for burnout as well as the possible mediator for the relationship between work demands and burnout. Unfortunately in the Malaysian context, so far, the relationship between work demands, work-family conflict and burnout among civil servants has not been studied extensively. Thus, the present research aims to investigate the relationship between work demands, work-family conflict and burnout besides examining the role of work-family conflict as a mediator in the relationship between work demands and burnout.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Malaysian Public Service plays a very important role in the country's development and modernization (The Official Website of Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia, 2013). The services that are provided help to improve the success of nation building by producing efficient work performance and high productivity, catering to the well-being of employees. However, in order to achieve this, job demands have increased over the years. Thus, civil servants have had to face increasing job demands that do not exist before. These job demands often lead to negative health consequences which may affect job performance and productivity. Kasan's study has shown that the Malaysian public sector is exposed to ongoing stress due to the demands for excellence and new work strategies (Kasan et al., 2012). The effects of these demands however, have not been closely examined.

Literature has consistently shown the direct relationship between work demands and burnout (Panatik et al., 2012; Peeters et al., 2005). However, there is lack of understanding on how work demands relate to burnout through work-family conflict. Previous findings found inconsistency in the impact of work-family conflict and how it should be positioned in the framework theoretically (Shimazu et al., 2010; Mostert, 2009; Lingard & Francis, 2005). Due to this unclear role of work-family conflict, many researchers have suggested that work-family conflict can play many functions such as stressor, outcome, predictor and even mediator. Less is understood on how work demands and burnout are mediated by work-family conflict. Therefore, this study investigates both direct and indirect relationships between work demands, work-family conflict and burnout among civil servants in Malaysia. Specifically, this present study examines the relationship between work demands and burnout and as well as the role of work-family conflict as the mediator in this relationship.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Theoretical Importance

Theoretically, this research will serve as an attempt to incorporate three distinct variables which are work demands, work-family conflict and burnout. While it is obvious as mentioned earlier that work demands and work-family conflict are bound to be related to burnout, unfortunately in Malaysia, few studies have been carried out to examine the relationship between work demands, work-family conflict and burnout among civil servants. The gap in this area lies in the lack of emphasis on the indirect effects of work-family conflict on the relationship between work demands and burnout although previous studies have shown the effect of work-family conflict on well-being and job outcomes (Noor, 2003; Ahmad, 2008). Thus, this research aims to fill in the existing gap in the literature on work-family conflict and burnout among civil servants in Malaysia.

Practical Importance

Practically, this study intends to understand the well-being of civil servants in Malaysia. Individually, public servants need different strategies to reduce burnout and to cope with work-family conflict and work demands in order to improve their well-being. Moreover, the findings and discussions from this research can be beneficial as reference and guideline for the authorities and recommendations can be made to the Public Service Commissions of Malaysia to provide strategies for a healthy lifestyle and a more conducive workplace environment in order to achieve Vision 2020. In the same way, the outcome of this research can be useful for this particular workplace research setting which is the Penang Administration Government to implement appropriate intervention measures for their employees' well-being.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The specific research questions to be addressed in this current research are as follows:

1. What is the relationship between work demands and burnout among civil servants in Penang?
2. What is the relationship between work demands and work-family conflict among civil servants in Penang?
3. What is the relationship between work-family conflict and burnout among civil servants in Penang?
4. Can work-family conflict mediate the relationship between work demands and burnout among civil servants in Penang?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present research study are:

1. To examine the relationship between work demands and burnout among civil servants in Penang.
2. To examine the relationship between work demands and work-family conflict among civil servants in Penang.
3. To examine the relationship between work-family conflict and burnout among civil servants in Penang.
4. To determine the mediator effect of work-family conflict on the relationship between work demands and burnout.

1.6 CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

This section consists of definitions of the variables involved in this research. The three variables which are work demands, work-family conflict and burnout are further explained as follows.

1.6.1 Work demands

Conceptual Definition:

In the present research, ‘work demands’ refers to the degree to which the working environment contains stimuli that require some effort and encapsulates the idea that job demands lead to negative consequences if they require additional effort beyond the usual way of achieving work goals (John & Fletcher, 1996).

Operational Definition:

‘Work demands’ refers to scores measured by the five-item scale developed by Karasek’s (1985) Job Content Scale.

1.6.2 Work-family conflict

Conceptual Definition:

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define ‘work-family conflict’ as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible so that participation in one role (home) is made more difficult by participation in another role (work)” (p. 77).

Operational Definition:

‘Work-family conflict’ refers to scores measured by the five-item scale developed by Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996).

1.6.3 Burnout

Conceptual Definition:

‘Burnout’ according to Maslach et al. (1996) refers to “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity” (p. 4).

Operational Definition:

‘Burnout’ refers to scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) measured by the scale developed by Maslach and Jackson in 1981. This inventory consists of 16 items on job-related feeling.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through the assessment of previous existing literature related to work demand, work-family conflict and burnout, an analysis is presented in five sections. The first section of this chapter provides discussions on past studies related to the impact of work demands on burnout. The second section highlights the findings and arguments of previous studies with regard to the influence of work demands on work-family conflict. In the third part of this chapter, an analysis and evaluation of past studies and discussions on the relationship between work-family conflict and burnout are explored. The fourth part highlights the discussions on the mediating role of work-family conflict in the relationship between work demands and burnout. Lastly, the final section of the literature review highlights the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the present research.

2.1 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK DEMANDS AND BURNOUT

Much attention has been focused on the direct relationship between work demands and burnout. Work demands affect employees through several expressions of burnout, such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Most literature that study the effects of work demands on one's well-being have focused more on emotional well-being. So far, little attention has been given towards other dimensions of burnout such as depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

A study conducted by Peeters et al. (2005) examined the predictor of burnout by examining several types of work demands such as quantitative, emotional and mental job demands. The study was restricted to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of burnout. Job demands were measured using scales from the Dutch Questionnaire on the Experience and Evaluation of Work (Veldhoven et al., 2002) and burnout was measured using the Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS). Two subscales of the MBI-GS were assessed, to which there were five items on emotional exhaustion ($\alpha = 0.92$), and four items on depersonalization ($\alpha = 0.86$). All of the items were scored on a seven-point rating scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (daily). Higher scores on both dimensions indicate a higher experience of burnout. Results reveal a positive correlation between job demands and the two dimensions of burnout. Work-family conflict was moderately correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = 0.50, p < 0.01$) and weakly correlated with depersonalization ($r = 0.22, p < 0.01$). Of the three types of job demands mentioned above, the quantitative demands indicated the highest correlations with work-family conflict ($r = 0.39, p < 0.01$). This result mirrors similar results with other studies on work demands and burnout, in which work demands appeared to have a direct effect on burnout. This present research is expected to explore the direct relationship between work demands and burnout by incorporating all three dimensions of burnout; emotional exhaustion, personal depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. The work demands in this present study focus on items that are measured using the five-item scale derived from Karasek (1979).

A study conducted by Panatik et al. (2012) in Malaysia examined the relationship between work-related stress and job outcomes such as job satisfaction and turnover intention. Work-related stress components comprise of job demands, job