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Work-Family Conflict in Sri Lanka: Negotiations of exchange relationships in family and at work

ABSTRACT

This study's aim is to understand how dual-earner couples experience and deal with work-family conflict in Sri Lanka. Twenty-five interviews were conducted to identify if and how couples negotiated within their marital relationships, and between themselves and their supervisors, to reduce or cope with work-family conflict. The interviews indicated that negotiations at home and at work concerned *contributions* to the exchange relationship and were unlikely to adversely affect the (home or work) exchange relationships. Negotiations at home were more likely to be initiated by the women than the men. Further, the interviews revealed an influence of spouse's gender role ideology on the success of the negotiation at home. Negotiations at work were more likely to be initiated by the interviewees than by their supervisors. The results suggest that individuals in cultures with high power distance should still initiate negotiations when they feel it is possible to obtain favorable outcomes.

Keywords: Work-family conflict, exchange relationships, negotiation

INTRODUCTION

With the increase in dual-earner couples, conflict and balance between family and work lives have become important issues for families and organizations. On the basis of social exchange and conflict theories, we explored in this study if and how individuals reorganized two exchange relationships, leader-member exchange and partner exchange, to reduce or cope with work-family conflict. Leader-member exchange is defined as the quality of the relationship shared by a supervisor and a subordinate (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Based on the leader-member exchange literature and definition, we defined a parallel concept in the family sphere - "partner exchange" - as the quality of exchange relationship between spouses/partners. An individual's relationship with important others, such as partners/spouse, is argued to be essential for understanding work-family conflict (e.g., Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). The relationship with the supervisor can also be an important factor in this understanding (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007). Further, most work-family conflict research has been conducted in Western cultures. However, due to globalization and workforce mobility there is a growing need to understand work-family conflict in non-Western cultures.

This study's overarching aim, therefore, is to understand how dual-earner couples experience and deal with work-family conflict in a non-Western country, such as Sri Lanka. As a result, one contribution of this study to the work-family conflict literature is the extension of work-family conflict research and social exchange theory to a non-Western culture. A second contribution is a more fine-grained understanding of dual-earner couples' experience of work-family conflict and their negotiation of exchange relationships to reduce work-family conflict. A third contribution of this study is the finding that the extended family serves as a "work-family arrangement" for Sri Lankan dual-earner couples, something not found in most Western cultures.

REORGANIZATION OF EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS

Individuals utilize various strategies to cope with or reduce the conflict and stress derived from their work and family lives (Fogarty, Machin, Albion, Sutherland, Lalor, & Revitt, 1999; Moore & Gobi, 1995; Quick, Henley, & Quick, 2004). Negotiation is one such strategy. Negotiations of relationships at home and at work are forms of structural role redefinition (Hall, 1972). Structural role redefinition is "to confront one's role senders and come to mutual agreement on a revised set of expectations" (Hall, 1972, p. 474). An example is a woman who negotiates with her employer to finish work early so that she can be home when her children arrive from school. Other examples are rescheduling home activities that clash with work activities (Powell & Greenhaus, 2006) and the reallocation and sharing of one's role tasks, such as cleaning, washing, and child care, with one's spouse. According to Hall (1972), the critical feature of these structural redefinition approaches is that they all involve dealing directly with environmental transmitters of the structurally imposed demands, actively attempting to alter (reduce, reallocate, reschedule, and so forth) these demands and coming to agreement with the role senders on a new set of expectations (p. 474).

Reorganization of an exchange relationship can occur within the exchange relationship or by leaving the exchange (Rank & LeCroy, 1983; Sprey, 1979). It is reasonable to assume that individuals will attempt to reorganize relationships in order to cope with or reduce their work-family conflict before deciding to leave the exchange relationship (e.g., separation or divorce). Reorganization of the exchange relationships requires that individuals negotiate with the other party (in this case, the spouse or the supervisor). Negotiation facilitates the solving of problems by people. The negotiation process is invoked by two or more people attempting to make joint decisions when their initial preferences differ (Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999). It is assumed that the people involved in the dispute best know the facts, so the eventual resolution of the dispute

will reflect the parties' actual needs and priorities (Roberson, 2006). When there is commitment towards the exchange relationship, the two parties are most likely to resort to negotiation to solve the problem and arrive at a win-win solution (Lin & Miller, 2003). Thus, reorganization of exchange relationships is expected to be a characteristic of whatever strategy dual-earner couples use to reduce their work-family conflict (Rank & LeCroy, 1983).

To reduce work-family conflict, individuals may negotiate their roles within exchange relationships at either home or at work. At home, one aspect that individuals may negotiate in the partner exchange is the allocation of household responsibilities. Research has shown that women's full-time employment and higher income have an effect on the division of household work, such that there is a trend towards egalitarian gender division of household work (bargaining power theory or resource theory) (Strober & Chan, 1998). This effect on the division of family responsibilities is due to women's greater bargaining power in negotiating the sharing of household work with their spouses (Fuwa & Cohen, 2007; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Standh & Nordenmark, 2006). A country's social policies with regard to gender equality at work (such as affirmative action, anti-discrimination policy, parental leave, and child care facilities) also influence women's bargaining power to negotiate household work with their spouses and gender equality at home (Fuwa & Cohen, 2007). For example, the provision of child care facilities by the State reduces the child care burden of women and the use of parental leave by both parents encourages sharing of household and child care work. Similarly at work, employees may negotiate the relationships with their supervisors (leader-member exchange). For example, an employee might negotiate working hours (e.g., start time and/or finish time), responsibilities, and working conditions.

With regard to social exchange relationships, Liden and Maslyn (1998) define leader-member exchange in terms of four dimensions: affect, loyalty, contribution and professional

respect. In a high quality exchange relationship, leaders and members show mutual affection, express public support for one another, contribute efforts to help one another achieve work goals, and demonstrate respect for each other's professional accomplishments (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). According to leader-member exchange theory, supervisors treat their employees differently in line with the quality of their relationship (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). This differential treatment might include flexible work schedules or other changes to work priorities to help balance work and family (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Following the leader-member exchange construct, we further define partner exchange in terms of affect, loyalty, contribution, and respect within the dyad. In partner exchange relationships, "affect" can be seen as the mutual affection spouses have for each other based primarily on interpersonal attraction. "Loyalty" can be seen as the expression of public support for one's partner. It also requires faithfulness to the partner. "Contribution" is proposed to be the perception of the current level of household-oriented activity each partner puts forth towards the (explicit or implicit) mutual goals of the family. "Respect" is proposed to be admiration of one's partner as a good human being, for the qualities and characteristics she or he possesses (that is, the positive perception of the total person). These four dimensions combined constitute partner exchange.

Finally, a person who values a traditional gender role ideology will abide by cultural traditions and expectations of family and gender roles. The traditional gender role ideology identifies specific and distinct roles for men and women in marriage, such that the husband should be the head of the family and the wife should be submissive (Denton, 2004). The male partner who values traditional gender roles will expect the female to follow traditional wife and mother roles. In contrast, when male partners do not value a traditional gender role ideology, they provide domestic support to female partners. Our theoretical rationale is supported by past research. Research shows that husbands with a non-traditional gender role ideology are more

supportive of their wives' employment than are husbands with a traditional gender role ideology. Such husbands do somewhat more housework and child care, and share decision-making power more readily (Amato & Booth, 1995; Scanzoni & Szinovacz, 1980). Therefore, the male spouse's gender role ideology is likely to influence the negotiation of domestic duties between a dual-earner couple.

To our knowledge, no studies have been conducted to examine the reorganization of the exchange relationships between a focal person and his/her spouse (partner exchange), and between a focal person and his/her supervisor (leader-member exchange) in an Eastern culture. All studies to date on the division of work and care use Western samples or participants (e.g., Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). Further, some of the existing literature is based on experimental design (e.g., Kluwer, Heesink, & van de Vliert, 2000). Hence, this study is exploratory and aims to understand the ways in which individuals in an Eastern culture reorganized their exchange relationships (with partners and supervisors) in an attempt to reduce work-family conflict.

In the next section, we describe the research methodology, data source, interview sample and results of this study. We conclude with a discussion of the results, practical implications, this study's strengths and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

METHOD

Research Site: Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is rich in its diversity of culture, race, language and religion. It has a recorded history spanning over 2,500 years, which explains how Sri Lankan society and culture have been influenced by the traditional Indian civilization and culture, by the British and European colonial heritage and development policies, and by the strategies of post-independence governments. Sri Lankans display many Eastern characteristics in their family and social interactions (Chandrakumara, 2007), but are starting to demonstrate some Western influence (Nanayakkara,

1992). For example, Sri Lankan society is slowly changing in relation to attitudes towards women. It is becoming acceptable for married women to work outside their homes, but women are still expected to have the full or primary responsibility for child care and housework even if they undertake paid work outside their homes (Jawahir, 1992). Further, "culture-bound assumptions about the sanctity of marriage and the woman's responsibility to her family are nourished and sustained by religious ethics, moral codes and traditions which help promote an ideology of male dominance" (Dias, 1990, p. 220). Although Sri Lankans exhibit many Eastern traits in family and other social interactions, at work these traits tend to be mixed with Western philosophies and practices. For example, Nanayakkara (1992) noted that many Sri Lankan managers maintain high power distance and individualistic cultural traits (compared to many Western countries). However, they tend to exhibit collective traits in familial and other social interactions (Chandrakumara & Budhwar, 2005). Thus, there is variance in values, beliefs and behavior, especially among Sri Lankans living in urban areas.

There is also variance in the country's legislative approach to women's rights and work practices. Sri Lanka's constitution guarantees equal rights to women. However, Sri Lanka has not ratified the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention 156 regarding equal opportunity and equal treatment in employment for men and women workers with family responsibilities (ILO, 2005). As a result, Sri Lankan organizations do not have policies to help reduce work-family conflict. In particular, Sri Lankan labor laws and company policies are not family-friendly. For example, companies do not provide flexi-time and part-time options, or on-site child care or crèche facilities. Labor laws provide for paid maternity leave of only 84 working days for the first two childbirths and unpaid maternity leave is not available (Maternity Benefits Act of 1985). Further, discrimination, the "glass ceiling" and sexual harassment prevail (Wickramasinghe & Jayatilaka, 2006).

Data Source

This study was conducted as part of a larger study on work-family conflict. Data were collected in the Spring of 2007 by surveying a large sample of dual-earner heterosexual couples who were employed full-time in Sri Lanka. Homosexual couples were excluded from the sample so as not to confound work-family conflict issues with stressors associated with being a homosexual couple, such as coping with being treated differently and/or experiencing discrimination (Button, 2001; Hunt, 2002; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). A total of 709 survey packets containing two questionnaires (one for the focal person and the other for her/his spouse) were distributed among managerial level employees and professionals in 42 private sector organizations in and around Colombo, Sri Lanka. Each organization's HR manager distributed the questionnaire among the managerial and professional staff through internal mail. Surveys were distributed only to individuals with a working spouse/partner. Each participant was asked to provide his/her spouse with the spousal questionnaire. Spouses were instructed to complete their questionnaire independently of the focal person. Gender role orientation was obtained from the spouse's survey; all other variables were measured on the focal employee's survey. The surveys were pre-coded to help match the focal person's and his/her spouse's surveys upon return.

Of the 709 surveys packets delivered, 226 (or 32%) were completed and returned. Of these 226 respondents, we obtained the matched spouse survey for 205 of them. The final sample size was 185 (for a 26.1% final response rate) employee-spouse dyads after deleting cases with missing data in relevant variables. The interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of the 185 dual-earner couples who participated in our larger study. Eighty one (81) focal persons and 56 spouses volunteered to be interviewed. Among these volunteers, there were 38 matched couples. From these matched dual-earner couples, 13 (34%) couples met the selection criteria which were that both parties in the relationship (1) had to agree to be interviewed and (2) were amongst the

dual-earner couples with the highest scores on the Carlson, Kacmar, and William's (2000) work-family conflict scale. The second selection criterion was required to explore how such couples might have reorganized or were reorganizing their relationships in an attempt to reduce work-family conflict. Thus, the sampling technique was purposive, as recommended by Kuzel (1999).

Instrument and Procedure for Data Capture

We were unable to interview the spouse (the husband, as he had gone abroad on work) of one of the 13 dual-earner couples selected for this study. Hence, 25 interviews were conducted instead of 26. The first author conducted all 25 interviews in 2007 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Nineteen interviews were done in person and six were conducted by telephone. We obtained written consent from the interviewees prior to the interviews. Twenty interviewees gave permission to digitally record their interviews. For the remaining five interviews, the interviewer noted the main points of the conversation during the meeting and wrote additional notes immediately after it. Interviews were conducted in a place convenient to the participants: at their workplace, in a public place (e.g., KFC), or in an office at the University of Colombo.

The interviews lasted on average half an hour; six interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. A semi-structured format was used to interview the participants. Each spouse was interviewed separately so that one spouse did not influence the other's answers. All interviews were conducted in English except for one, which was conducted in Sinhala. The first author was able to conduct this interview because she is sufficiently fluent in Sinhala. Furthermore, as the interviewee understood English (she was able to read and answer the survey), the first author was able to ask her questions in English. In turn, the interviewee answered the questions in Sinhala. The majority of the interviewees appeared to be candid in stating their opinions and experiences during the interviews. The interview commenced with four structured questions, two of which were identical to the questions asked on the survey. The identical questions were "how long have

you been married to your spouse?" and "how long have you been working under the current supervisor/manager?" The other two questions were about the individual's daily routine and whether she/he experienced stress as a result of combining work and family responsibilities. These four questions served two purposes: one as an ice-breaker and the other to check the answers obtained in the survey. There was 100% agreement in the answers for the two identical questions in the survey and the interview.

In the second part of the interview, the interviewer asked participants about the sources of stress at home and at work, the relationships with the spouse and the supervisor, any negotiations regarding workload at home and at work, and the consequence of such negotiations on their relationships. We focused on stress as an outcome or as an antecedent of work-family conflict because past studies have found relationships between stress and work-family conflict. For example, family role stressor and work role stressors, such as work-role conflict, have been found to be causes of work-family conflict (Boyar, Maertz Jr., Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). Further, job stress is an antecedent to work interference with family conflict (Fox & Dwyer, 1999). Similarly, individuals have reported conflict between work and family roles because they experienced extensive stress in the work and family domains (Stoeva, Chiu, & Greenhaus, 2002). Judge, Boudreau, and Bretz Jr. (1994) found that conflict between work and family roles led to job stress. Some researchers consider work-family conflict as a source of stress that influences an individual's well-being (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim in English, including the "ers", "uhs" and pauses (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 51). Word emphasis, incomplete sentences and grammatical errors as spoken by the interviewees were also included in the transcriptions. As the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the interview quotes reflect the fact that English was a second language for

all the interviewees, as well as illustrating the prevalence of "Sri Lankan English" (Mendis, 2007). The "ers", "uhs" and pauses were omitted from the interview quotes included in this manuscript.

Sample Description

As can be seen from Table 1, of the 25 persons interviewed, twelve were male and thirteen were female. The average age of interviewees was 34.4 years (ranging from 26 to 51 years). The interviewees had been married for an average of 7.24 years (ranging from six months to 25 years) and they had been working for their current manager for an average of 39.15 months (ranging from 1.5 months to 16 years). Four of the 13 couples had no children.

Insert Table 1 about here

The above descriptive data were obtained from the interviewees' surveys and interview data. Specifically, information on the interviewee (i.e., whether the interviewee is the focal person or the spouse) and on age were obtained from the surveys. Data on the number of years the respondents had been married for and the number of months under the current supervisor were obtained from the interview data (and cross-checked against the survey data).

Method of Analysis

All 25 text files of the transcriptions were imported into QSR NVivo 7 software package for analysis (Bazeley, 2007). After coding the main themes using the software, we manually coded the sub-themes, given the manageable volume of data.

The qualitative data obtained through interviews were analyzed using an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Langley, 1999) and thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Prior knowledge and theoretical concepts informed the interview protocol, but the themes

and codes used to code the data were data-driven. Initially, we used themes based on the

interview questions to code each interview. Then, transcripts were constantly compared to arrive

at new themes and categories that reflected recurrent patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Loscocco,

1997; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This is also known as the template organizing style of analysis

(Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Thus, in the second stage of the analysis, new codes/themes were

created to fit the themes that emerged. At each stage of coding we calculated the number of

responses for the themes and sub-themes.

With regard to the calculation of number of responses for sub-themes, if an interviewee

stated more than one example for a sub-theme, we counted those examples as one response.

However, if interviewees gave examples while elaborating on their experiences that fitted more

than one sub-theme, we counted each example as a separate response.

This research was conducted from a positivistic paradigm (Hatch, 2006). As a result,

frequency counts and tabulations were employed in the analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The

analysis was performed at the *individual level* (regardless of whether the individual was a focal

person or spouse), not at the couple level.

Reliability

We addressed the issue of reliability by using multiple coders (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer,

2007) and by calculating inter-coder reliability. Inter-coder reliability addresses the consistency

of implementation of a rating system (Stemler, 2001). A doctoral candidate, who was proficient

in qualitative research, was the second rater. We gave a list of the themes and sub-themes to the

second rater who then independently content-coded a sub-sample of 19 interviews. The results of

the content-coding of the transcripts by the two independent raters (the first author and the

doctoral student) were compared. We then calculated two indices of inter-coder reliability: the

percentage agreement and Cohen's kappa. Cohen's kappa is the proportion of agreement between

the raters after accounting for chance agreement. The percentage agreement was 80.89%, and

Cohen's kappa was 0.37. Percentage agreement of 80% or greater is acceptable and Cohen's

kappa between 0.21 and 0.40 is considered a fair strength of agreement (Stemler, 2001). We were

able to resolve the discrepancies in coding and, therefore, the coding of the transcripts (i.e.,

content analysis) can be regarded as reliable.

RESULTS

The results of the qualitative analysis are grouped into the codes/themes that emerged. As

can be seen from Table 2, we identified 6 themes on the topic of negotiation. The themes were:

negotiation at home, who initiates the negotiation at home, the consequence of negotiation on the

relationship with one's spouse, negotiation at work, who initiates the negotiation at work, and the

consequence of negotiation on the relationship with one's supervisor. It should be noted that

coding in more than one sub-theme was possible; when interviewees mentioned more than one

sub-theme, each was counted as a separate response.

Insert Table 2 about here

Negotiation at Home

The objective of the study was to examine if negotiation of the exchange relationship

occurred at home and/or at work due to work-family conflict. The majority of the interviewees

(84%) reported that they engaged in formal negotiation of the exchange relationships at home.

For example, one interviewee explained that when she got married she was too young to know

about discussing the sharing of household work with her husband, but now she does after

realizing the benefits of discussing matters with her husband to sort them out. Another

interviewee said,

Since February we are discussing it out and we are trying to work out things, these are the activities which he will be doing and these are the activities that I will be doing. So it's a very recent development which has happened in our lives.

(Interviewee 25, spouse, female, 32 years)

A further 16% of the interviewees reported to engage in gradual or voluntary negotiation of the exchange relationship at home. That is, they did not verbally or formally negotiate their exchange relationship, but changes were nonetheless made to the exchange relationship with the spouse because male spouses were sufficiently sensitive to their wives' family workload.

I will help her and I personally believe in that. When it comes to marriage both husband and wife should help each other.

(Interviewee 21, focal, male, 38 years)

One interviewee said that her husband voluntarily shared the house work and hence, there was no need to initiate negotiation.

Changes actually comes from my husband's side. He gives good support and adjusts. Looking at me sometimes he comes and asks "Can I help you?"…. He on his own, actually by looking at my way, my behaviors sometimes I get angry, mad. Because I need clean environment also. But I don't have time to do it. When I see my house messed up so I get mad with him. Now he knows and he cleans. That's how he has adjusted.

(Interviewee 10, spouse, female, 27 years)

The above comments and quotes illustrate the objective of negotiations in the spousal exchange relationship. Negotiations with the spouse seemed to focus on the spouse's contribution towards household and child care work. The above quotes also demonstrate that these husbands do not hold traditional gender role ideology. They seem to view marriage as equal partnerships where

both spouses should contribute towards household responsibilities (i.e., belief in egalitarian gender roles).

Apart from the interviewees who formally negotiated and gradually negotiated the exchange relationship, 12% of the interviewees, all of whom were men, reported that there was no need to negotiate with the spouse. Specifically, the interviewees said there was no need to negotiate household work, as they had their mother/mother-in-law/domestic help to assist their wives with the home responsibilities. Therefore, these male interviewees saw no role for themselves in household and child care work as they believed home responsibilities were women's domain. These sentiments reflect a belief in traditional gender roles in the family.

*We are living with my parents. There is no difficulty for u*s.

(Interviewee 4, focal, male, 26 years)

It should be noted that of the 13 couples interviewed, only three couples had no help from either their parents or paid domestic with the household and/or child care work. Of the remaining ten couples, three couples had parents and/or in-laws' help, another three couples had paid help at home, and four couples had both parents/in-laws and paid help.

In summary, some negotiation of the exchange relationship between spouses took place within the dual-earner couples interviewed. The objective of the negotiation was to adjust the spouse's contribution towards household and/or child care responsibility. Therefore, the negotiation was in terms of the contribution dimension of the social exchange rather than in terms of the affect, respect or loyalty dimensions. In addition, a male spouse's value of traditional gender roles seemed to have an influence on whether negotiations took place or not. The above two results are similar to past research in Western context (e.g., Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). Finally, the fact that 84% reported engaging in formal negotiations and 16% experienced gradual

negotiations or voluntary contributions indicate that redistributions of domestic labor among Sri

Lankan dual earner couples were, by and large, achieved.

Who Initiates the Negotiation at Home

The perceptions differed among husbands and wives with regard to who took the initiative

to negotiate the exchange relationships at home. Of the 13 women who stated that there was

negotiation at home, nine said that the negotiation was likely to be initiated by themselves. As

this female interviewee explained,

I ask. …. otherwise he prefers reading or watching TV.

(Interviewee 16, spouse, female, 32 years)

In contrast, of the eight men who reported negotiating at home, five perceived the negotiations to

be jointly initiated by themselves and their wives. The other three (14%) male interviewees

reported that they initiated the negotiation. It can be concluded, therefore, that in most cases the

woman initiated the negotiation at home. She did so possibly because she had the primary

responsibility for household and child care work and found it difficult to manage those

responsibilities together with paid work and, hence, needed her spouse's assistance. This result is

in line with research in Western context (e.g., Kluwer et al., 2000).

The Consequence of Negotiation on the Relationship with One's Spouse

It is said that every action has a reaction. Therefore, we investigated (from the

respondents' perspective) if negotiation with the spouse (and the supervisor) had a consequence

on his/her relationship with the spouse (and supervisor). Of the interviewees who reported

negotiation at home, the majority (86%) said that the negotiations had a positive consequence or

had no consequence on the relationships with their spouses. In fact, 49% of the interviewees felt

that such negotiations strengthened their relationships because discussions gave them an

opportunity to understand each other. The rest of the interviewees said that the negotiations had no consequence on their relationship with the spouse.

Because we have been married for 6 years we have an understanding of each other.

(Interviewee 12, spouse, female, 29 years)

Then we started talking. Now things are OK, both of us are able to discuss and talk among each other and rectify matters which didn't happen initially. I think it all depends on how mature you are in life.

(Interviewee 24, spouse, female, 38 years)

Only three interviewees reported negative consequences for the relationship with the spouse as a result of attempts to negotiate the exchange relationship at home.

And what he says is [that] *bringing home the food and dropping me to transport is sort of enough for a man to do.*

(Interviewee 19, spouse, female, 27 years)

I have asked my husband [to share household and child care work] *but he said it is a woman's job. He has never touched a broom. … He watches TV after work. … I did all the work myself. Even kids I looked after. I did not depend on my parents for that. At one point I thought of leaving the relationship as he never helped.*

(Interviewee 2, focal, female, 46 years)

The above two quotes highlight the fact that when husbands believe in traditional gender role ideology, the wives were not successful in negotiating at home. These quotes also bring to the fore the culture-bound assumptions that women are chiefly, if not solely, accountable for home responsibilities.

In summary, based on the interviewees' own perceptions, negotiations with spouses had predominantly positive results for this sample of dual-earner Sri Lankan couples. However, the

success of the negotiations depended on the spouse's degree of belief in traditional gender role ideology.

Negotiation at Work

The majority of the interviewees (68%) reported that they engaged in formal negotiation of the exchange relationships at work. Most formal negotiations involved negotiating heavy workloads. There were a few reasons why the interviewees did not negotiate with their supervisors. One reason was that the interviewee perceived the supervisor not to be in a position to do anything about heavy workloads due to lack of resources. For example, one interviewee said that the supervisor was not in a position to do anything about the workload as everyone in the department was faced with such problems and there were resources constraints.

> *But this is the normal thing* [high workload]. *All the people in our department work like that. So this is not only for me.* [So I did not negotiate with my boss]

(Interviewee 4, focal, male, 26 years)

Another reason was that the interviewees perceived work in the private sector to be hard and stressful, and that they had to learn to deal with this workload and stress. For example, two interviewees said although they had no problem talking or negotiating with their supervisors they did not do so, as no positive outcome was expected. The third reason was that interviewees thought the supervisor might view attempts to negotiate work matters as a sign of weakness or lack of ability on the part of the individual. Length of the work relationship does not appear to be a reason for non-negotiation. There was no significant difference in the average length under one's supervisor between those who reported engaging in formal negotiation and those who did not (38.73 months vs. 39.93 months, respectively).

However, interviewees who took the initiative to negotiate with their supervisors enjoyed successful outcomes.

At the beginning of the year when we prepare duty list we talk a lot. ... Compared to others' work load if mine is more I have spoken to him. If I cannot do all the allocated work I tell him. Because after undertaking to do the tasks I cannot neglect them, right?

(Interviewee 12, spouse, female, 29 years)

A few interviewees felt the need to return the kindness and understanding shown by their supervisors by, for example, working hard, putting in more hours or doing extra work. In one particular instance, the interviewee was quite emotional and sounded deeply touched by the supervisor's behavior when she was describing her supervisor's kindness and understanding, and the need to reciprocate him. Such appreciation and reciprocation of a supervisor's good deeds reflect the high-power distance characteristic of an Eastern culture.

My father met with an accident.... I always want to see my father every day after the accident, and to be with him at least for one hour. So, I asked her [the executive] *whether the manager could give me around 2 to 3 hours for me to see my father and then come back to work.... my manager called me to his office and said you can always use my driver and the car if you have a problem, not to worry about that .... I couldn't express my happiness in words. .... Now, if he asks me to come on Sunday to work I can't, I can't tell no. Because I feel that I am dedicated. I also have a responsibility to respect him, to show my gratitude. I always feel that I should... if he is in a difficult situation if **he** * [interviewee's emphasis] *asks help I think that I **must** * [interviewee's emphasis] *do it.*

(Interviewee 19, spouse, female, 27 years)

In summary, most of the Sri Lankan men and women in this study's sample were able to discuss work-related problems with their supervisors and sort them out. A few interviewees were also able to discuss home-related problems with their supervisors, such as having a sick parent. In line with past research on the impact of supervisor support on work-family conflict (e.g., Beutell

& Wittig-Berman, 2008), the interviewees in this study said that having an understanding supervisor helped deal with their stress and, thus, reduce their work-family conflict. Peculiar to this study, and reflecting its Eastern cultural context, is the interviewees' profound appreciation of their supervisors' approachability and understanding.

Who Initiates the Negotiation at Work

Of the 17 interviewees (68%) who reported negotiation at work, 13 of them (77%; five men and eight women) reported initiating the negotiations themselves. The remaining four interviewees (23%) reported that either their supervisors or they initiated the negotiations. Men and women were similarly likely to initiate negotiations at work.

The Consequence of Negotiation on the Relationship with One's Supervisor

Of the 17 interviewees (68%) who reported negotiating the exchange relationship at work, 15 interviewees (88%) felt that the negotiations had either a positive consequence or no consequence on the relationships with their supervisors.

> *Actually he appreciated. Because I told him I don't want to make mistake just because I am overloaded. So, he actually appreciated before I have done something wrong I am telling him ahead.*

(Interviewee 14, focal, female, 34 years)

More specifically, most of the interviewees (53%) stated that negotiations had no consequence on their relationships with the supervisor. We consider negotiations at work not having any consequence on the relationship with one's supervisor as a good outcome, because the interviewees described their relationship with their supervisor as quite open and friendly. Only three interviewees (18%) felt that their supervisors did not appreciate the attempts to negotiate or discuss the workload. For example, one interviewee perceived some negative feelings in the relationship with her supervisor.

In summary, regardless of gender, it was mostly the interviewees who initiated the negotiations with their supervisors. In most cases, negotiations of exchange relationships at work were successful in that the supervisors were able to address the interviewees' requests and the negotiations did not change the quality of the relationships between the interviewees and their supervisors.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the interviews was to identify whether and how dual-earner couples negotiated their exchange relationships to reduce their work-family conflict. To achieve this aim, we interviewed a sub-sample of 13 dual-earner couples in Sri Lanka who had reported high work-family conflict in a larger study. The semi-structured interview method was chosen to obtain in-depth descriptions of the work and family lives of dual-earner couples in Sri Lanka.

The majority of the dual-earner couples in this sample engaged in formal or informal negotiation of the exchange relationships at home and at work to alleviate family- or work-derived conflict. Whether at home or at work, it was the individual who experienced the inequality in the exchange relationship who was likely to initiate the negotiation. As a result, negotiations at home were more likely to be initiated by the women than the men in dual-earner couples, and negotiations at work were initiated by the interviewees rather than by their supervisors. Further, the negotiations with the spouse and the supervisor were about contributions. Negotiation regarding other aspects of social exchange such as trust, respect, and affect were not reported. Negotiations at home and at work had mostly a positive or no consequence on the relationships with one's spouse and supervisor. Whilst the success of negotiations at home depended on the husband's gender role ideology, successful negotiations at work depended on the characteristics of the supervisor and on the resources available. As a result of having an understanding and supportive spouse and/or supervisor and successful negotiations,

individuals reported experiencing increased commitment, affection and loyalty towards the other party (i.e., spouse and supervisor). This indicates that, even in Eastern cultures with very strong gender roles, dual-earner couples benefit from talking to each other to sort out matters such as the sharing of household and child care responsibilities. In particular, women who work outside the home benefit from initiating the negotiation of the division of labor with their spouses.

Despite the Eastern cultural values of high power distance, individuals' negotiations with their supervisors yielded positive outcomes. Further, such negotiations did not have negative consequences on the relationships between the individuals and the supervisors. Hence, individuals should initiate negotiations with their supervisors when they feel it is possible to obtain favorable outcomes. For example, individuals in dual-earner couples can benefit from negotiating the implementation of family-friendly programs, such as flexible work practices (e.g., compressed work week, flexi-hours) and control over work hours, if these are not offered by their organizations.

The negotiations between the spouses, and between the interviewees and their supervisors, in this study were similar to Hall's (1972) coping strategy of structural role redefinition (role bargains). The stress/conflict coping strategies used by the interviewees such as sharing of household and child care work at home with one's spouse can be considered examples of structural role redefinition. Overall, these strategies are problem-focused strategies.

Limitations of the Methodology

One of the major limitations of qualitative research is the inability to generalize interview findings to other settings. However, the aim of the interviews was not to obtain generalizable data but to gain an understanding of how dual-earner couples coped with or reduced their work-family conflict by negotiating their exchange relationships.

A second limitation is the subjectivity involved in qualitative research. However, this drawback was minimized in this study as the interviewer (the first author) had had prior training and experience in interviewing. Second, as all interviews were conducted by one interviewer a high level of consistency was maintained in capturing interview data. Third, as we used an interview protocol and a semi-structured interview method we were able to obtain comparable information from all interviewees. Finally, we calculated two inter-coder reliability measures, the percentage agreement and Cohen's kappa. The results of these measures suggested that the analysis was reliable.

Suggestion for Future Research

We now have new insights regarding negotiations among dual-earner couples and between individuals and supervisors to reduce or cope with work-family conflict. These insights were gained from the qualitative data. Such detailed descriptions from interviewees about their work and family lives could not be obtained from a quantitative survey. However, given that this study was exploratory, more nuanced and in-depth research is required in this area. For example, future qualitative research can investigate if negotiation with regard to affect, loyalty and respect take place within dual-earner couples in an attempt to reduce work-family conflict and if these dimensions influence work-family conflict.

Conclusion

Overall, an important contribution of this study is its (indirect) test of the cross-cultural robustness of "Western" work-family and social exchange theories. More specifically, "Western" work-family and social exchange theories are used in this study to gain insights on the work-family conflict experienced by dual-earner couples in an Eastern society. The notion that women or mothers are responsible for household and child care work seems to be universal. In the case of Sri Lankan women, they are undoubtedly socialized to feel and be responsible for household

and child care work (Gunawardena et al., 2004; Wickramasinghe & Jayatilaka, 2006). It is possible that because of this socialization, some Sri Lankan men are slow to adapt to having a working spouse, and to being requested to help with the household and with child care. It is also possible that because of socialization, women accept the fact that they will spend more hours in household and child care work than their husbands (even though both are in paid employment).

Furthermore, this study provides a fine-grained understanding of the negotiations in the exchange relationships (with spouses and supervisors) of Sri Lankan dual-earner couples in an attempt to reduce or cope with work-family conflict. For example, insights from the interviews revealed an influence of spouse's gender role ideology on the negotiation of the exchange relationship at home. Previous research in Western countries has found a relationship between division of labor and marital satisfaction (Stevens, Kiger, & Riley, 2001; Strober & Chan, 1998; Wilkie, Ferree, & Ratcliff, 1998). Similarly, this study's interviews indicate that Sri Lankan women who work outside the home report marital unhappiness when their husbands do not share household and child care work, and report marital happiness when they do. Hence, this study's results suggest that gender role ideology might be an especially important factor to consider in research on work-family conflict in Eastern cultures.

Negotiating exchange relationships at home and at work is a stress and conflict management strategy. Further, negotiations of exchange relationships at home and at work are forms of structural role redefinition (Hall, 1972), which include the reallocation and sharing of role tasks such as cleaning, washing, and child care with one's spouse. Such a direct approach to coping with stress is possible only if the situation or environment is changeable by the individual (Quick et al., 2004; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007). Therefore, the interviews indicate that Sri Lankan individuals identify the sources of stress that are changeable by them (or under their control) and attempt to change the root causes of the stress or conflict. Thus, the negotiation

strategy adopted by the individuals in this study is used to manage as well as resolve work-family conflict and stress.

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TABLE 1

Description of Interview Sample

Interviewee Number	Focal/Spouse	Gender	Age (years)	Married (years)	Interview Method	Interview Recorded
1	Spouse	Female	27	0.5	In person	Yes
2	Focal	Female	46	25	In person	No
3	Focal	Male	27	0.5	In person	Yes
4	Focal	Male	26	1	Phone	Yes
5	Focal	Male	51	19	In person	Yes
6	Spouse	Female	49	19	In person	No
7	Spouse	Female	31	6	In person	No
8	Focal	Male	32	6	In person	Yes
9	Spouse	Female	36	4	Phone	Yes
10	Spouse	Female	27	1	In person	Yes
11	Focal	Male	32	6	In person	Yes
12	Spouse	Female	29	6	In person	Yes
13	Spouse	Male	40	9	In person	Yes
14	Focal	Female	34	9	In person	Yes
15	Spouse	Female	32	7	In person	Yes
16	Spouse	Female	32	3	In person	Yes
17	Focal	Male	34	7	In person	Yes
18	Focal	Male	36	4	Phone	Yes
19	Spouse	Female	27	6	Phone	No
20	Focal	Male	34	6	In person	No
21	Focal	Male	38	3.5	In person	Yes
22	Focal	Male	32	3	Phone	Yes
23	Focal	Male	38	13	In person	Yes
24	Spouse	Female	38	13	In person	Yes
25	Spouse	Female	32	3.5	Phone	Yes

TABLE 2

Themes, Sub-themes, Frequencies and Sample Quotes

Themes and Sub-themes	Frequency (%) (Number of responses)[1]	Sample quotes (Interviewee number)
1. Negotiation at home[2]		
1.1 Yes	84 (21)	After about two months after marriage I told him that it is difficult for me to do and he very willingly took over all the cleaning in the house. (Interviewee 1)
		My husband is a very cooperative person. There is no separation, like you are the woman you wash and do everything. If I even say today I am tired can you cook, he is ready to cook. (Interviewee 9)
1.2 No	12 (3)	As per my experience dialogue [with my wife] doesn't work. (Interviewee 11)
		My wife, my mother is there. With that we have two domestics. Most of the work is taken care of. (Interviewee 23)
1.3 Gradual/voluntary	16 (4)	He on his own actually by looking at my ... behaviors. That's how he has adjusted. (Interviewee 10)
		Actually I don't know if we discussed but it gradually happened … maybe like after 4 years after marriage. (Interviewee 14)
		Actually spontaneously we settled in. We didn't even talk [about sharing housework]. (Interviewee 21)
2. Who initiates the negotiation at home[3]		
2.1 Wife	48 (10)	Me, me, me. Because if I have the difficulty I have to start. (Interviewee 25)
2.2 Husband	14 (3)	Normally husband does. Always he is the one to start. (Interviewee 14)
2.3 Both	38 (8)	Mostly me, sometimes she also does [initiate the negotiation]. (Interviewee 8)
3. The consequence of negotiation on the relationship with one's spouse[3]		
3.1 Positive	49 (10)	Positive, positive. We try to give our best effort when we contribute to each other and try to

TABLE 2

Themes, Sub-themes, Frequencies and Sample Quotes (continued)

Themes and Sub-themes	Frequency (%) (Number of responses)[1]	Sample quotes (Interviewee number)
3.1 Positive (contd.)		support. So it is positive effect. (Interviewee 25)
		It has got better. Because my wife has understood that I am doing everything to enhance the standard of the family. (Interviewee 5)
3.2 Negative	14 (3)	It has affected the degree of relationship I think. Because those days … we had a very close relationship. I think that kind of behavior [of mine of not sharing work when my wife asked] has affected the relationship. (Interviewee 11)
		He … orders that I have to do certain things. (Interviewee 19)
3.3 No consequence	38 (8)	Actually there is no bad effect [on the relationship] as most of the time we understand each other and do the work. (Interviewee 12)
		Asking for contribution at home did not affect the relationship with my husband. (Interviewee 6)
4. Negotiation at work		
4.1 Yes	68 (17)	Yes I have talked to my manager about work. (Interviewee 6)
		My boss knows my situation. I have spoken to him. (Interviewee 7)
4.2 No	32 (8)	I have not spoken to my boss about it. Because I feel there will be no positive outcome even if I take up this matter. (Interviewee 18)
		Actually no. I feel if I tell such things [negotiation] to him [boss] then it will show my inabilities. (Interviewee 11)
5. Who initiates the negotiation at work[4]		
5.1 Self	77 (13)	Yeah, I have talked and have done some modifications to my job description. (Interviewee 3)
5.2 Both	23 (4)	He [boss] sometimes asks how things are. Sometimes I tell him. So, either initiates. (Interviewee 7)

TABLE 2

Themes, Sub-themes, Frequencies and Sample Quotes (continued)

Themes and Sub-themes	Frequency (%) (Number of responses)[1]	Sample quotes (Interviewee number)
6. The consequence of negotiation on the relationship with one's supervisor [4,5]		
6.1 Positive	35 (6)	He understood me. He understood that I really have problems. (Interviewee 12)
		They [directors] were happy about the changes. (Interviewee 5)
6.2 Negative	18 (3)	I feel he would have perceived it in a negative way. I feel it … he never openly said anything bad. But I feel it would have affected negatively to some extent. (Interviewee 15)
		Yes they did initially [perceive it negatively]. I mean when you try to change something which has been going on for a long time. (Interviewee 24)
6.3 No consequence	53 (9)	No, no. I don't see it has affected. (Interviewee 13)
		I consider my boss as a very nice man. So, it hasn't affected the relationship. (Interviewee 17)

[1] When interviewees mentioned more than one sub-theme, each was counted as a separate response. However, if an interviewee gave more than one example for the same sub-theme, his/her responses were counted only once. n = 25 was used to calculate percentage/frequency except when stated otherwise.

[2] One interviewee provided examples for "no negotiation" and "voluntary contribution". Two interviewees provided examples for "negotiation" and "gradual contribution".

[3] Percentage/frequency based on n = 21; those who answered "yes" to negotiation at home.

[4] Percentage/frequency based on n = 17; those who answered "yes" to negotiation at work.

[5] One interviewee provided example of a "negative" and a "positive consequence of negotiation with one's supervisor".