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Gender Role Orientation of Husbands and Work-Family Conflict of Wives in Dual-Earner Families

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji intensiti konflik antara peranan kerja dan keluarga yang dialami oleh pekerja wanita yang telah berkahwin, orientasi peranan gender bagi suami mereka, dan perkaitan antara orientasi peranan gender bagi suami dan konflik antara peranan keluarga dan kerja bagi wanita. Respons daripada 125 pasangan jururawat serta suami, daripada keluarga dwi-pekerjaan, berkenaan konflik antara peranan kerja dan keluarga dan orientasi peranan gender diperoleh melalui borang soalselidik dan dianalisis. Hasil penyelidikan menunjukkan wanita mengalami konflik antara peranan keluarga dan kerja dengan intensiti yang berbeza. Hampir satu pertiga daripada jururawat mengalami konflik dengan intensiti yang tinggi, manakala lebih sedikit daripada satu pertiga mengalami konflik dengan intensiti yang rendah. Orientasi peranan gender bagi suami berkisar di sekitar tradisional hingga egalitarian, dengan satu per empat daripada mereka mempunyai orientasi traditional terhadap peranan gender dan lebih sedikit daripada jumlah ini mempunyai orientasi egalitarian. Di antara tiga dimensi orientasi yang dikaji, ia itu, sikap terhadap pekerjaan, pembahagian kerja dan struktur kuasa berasaskan gender, orientasi suami adalah tradisional terhadap struktur kuasa iaitu terhadap wanita memegang jawatan kepimpinan. Orientasi mereka terhadap pembahagian kerja mengikut gender adalah bukan tradisional dan bukan pula egalitarian, manakala orientasi mereka terhadap pekerjaan berasaskan gender adalah lebih egalitarian. Terdapat perkaitan negatif yang signifikan antara orientasi suami terhadap peranan gender dan konflik antara peranan kerja dan keluarga yang dialami oleh isteri.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the intensity of work-family conflict experienced by married working women, the gender role orientation of their husbands, and the relationship between husbands' gender role orientation and wives' work-family conflict. Responses from 125 pairs of nurses and their husbands in dual-earner families on measures of work-family conflict and gender role orientations were obtained through self-administered questionnaires and analysed. Results indicated that nurses experienced varying intensities of conflict in trying to meet the demands of work and family roles. Almost a third of the nurses experienced high intensity of conflict while slightly more than a third experienced low intensity of conflict. Husbands' gender role orientation ranged from traditional to egalitarian with about a quarter of them holding traditional gender role orientation and slightly more than a quarter holding egalitarian orientation. Among the three dimensions of orientation studied, namely, attitude towards gender-based employment, attitude towards gender division of labour and attitude towards gender-based power structure, husbands' orientation was traditional toward power structure or toward women occupying leadership positions. Their

orientation toward gender division of labour was neither egalitarian nor traditional while their orientation toward gender-based employment was more egalitarian. Significant negative relationship was found between husbands' gender role orientation and wives' work-family conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The multiple role pressures experienced by women in dual-earner families render work-family conflict virtually inevitable. Work-family conflict is a form of interrole conflict in which two (or more) sets of pressures occur simultaneously such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other (Kahn et al., 1964). Based on the work of Kahn et al. (1964), Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) conceptualized work-family conflict as a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible. The concern with regard to work-family conflict results in a growing number of research in recent years that have further advanced our understanding of how work affects family life and vice versa (Aminah, 1996; Aminah, 1997; Duxbury et al., 1994; Frone et al., 1992; Netemeyer et al., 1996; O'Driscoll et al., 1992; Stephens & Sommer, 1996).

Besides studying the conflict that an individual experiences in meeting the demands of multiple roles, the analysis of multiple roles has been extended by looking at how individuals allocate the responsibilities associated with work and family roles. Work/family role allocation ranges from traditional to symmetrical pattern (Voydanoff, 1989). In the most traditional pattern, the husband is the major breadwinner and the wife performs most of the family work. Symmetrical role allocation involves a relatively interchangeable division of labour in which both the husband and the wife engage in earning outside the home and family work.

Despite the need for symmetrical role allocation among employed women, its development has been slow. Although husbands of employed women have slightly increased the amount of time spent in family work in recent years, women still spend considerably more time than men do (Pleck, 1985; Sanchez & Kane, 1996; Szinovacz, 1984). According to Core (1994) even in households where both partners work, women are likely to spend about twice as much time as men on household tasks. Since women have insufficient time to perform all the tasks expected of them as mothers, wives and worker, they experience work-family conflict (Cook & Rousseau, 1984; Crosby, 1987; Fox & Nickols, 1983). Despite the work-family conflict that they experience, women try to accommodate all the traditional household tasks in their daily schedule (Aminah, 1995). Studies have also shown that many men and some women resist major changes in the direction of symmetrical role allocation (Hood, 1983; Hunt & Hunt, 1987).

Since work-family conflict is partially a function of time and energy (Kahn et al., 1964), there is a greater likelihood that the resistance in change toward symmetrical role allocation including equitable division of household labour will result in a greater extent of work-family conflict experienced by women in dual-earner families. This is further supported by research findings on household division of labour (Lewis & Cooper, 1987) which show that working women in dual-earner families continue to be primarily responsible for the household and for childcare, which is consistent with the finding by Sekaran (1988) that working women have less discretionary time. Wiersma and Van Den Berg (1991) found that domestic responsibilities, which include housework and childcare, were a significant correlate of work-family conflict. These findings suggest that the unsymmetrical or unequal division of household labour among women and men may result in work-family conflict.

Besides the relationship between household division of labour and work-family conflict, the relationship between gender role orientation and household division of labour has been an emerging vein of research. Gender or sex role orientation refers to the beliefs individuals hold about normal roles of men and women in meeting family and work responsibilities (Bird et al., 1984) or normative conceptions of appropriate behaviour for males and females (Brogan & Kutner, 1966). Conceptually, gender role orientation is seen as ranging on a continuum from traditional gender role orientation whereby the roles of men and women are seen as distinct and separate, to a focus on non-traditional gender role orientation characterized by role sharing between men and women. Research examining men's gender role orientation in relation to family tasks found that

men who saw their roles as interchangeable with their wives' roles accepted more responsibility for tasks associated with childcare, meal preparation and cleaning than men who endorsed specialized roles between men and women (Bird et al., 1984). There are also links reported between husband's traditional gender role attitudes and participation in fewer family tasks (Perucci et al., 1978), Stafford et al., 1977), and significant correlations between husband's gender role attitudes and the proportion of the division of labour (Huber & Spitz, 1983). Research findings have shown that non-traditional ideology is associated with husband's increased solo childcare time (Baruch &Barnett, 1987). Perry-Jenkins and Krouter (1990) found that men's attitudes are important predictors of household division of labour. High levels of role sharing are also found to be related to egalitarian ideologies (Haas, 1982), and that men are more likely to share family roles if they are ideologically committed to equity (Silberstein, 1992). The importance of attitudes is further substantiated by a study of women's economic participation in the non-formal sector and the household division of labour which found that women whose husband have less traditional orientations toward gender roles were less burdened with household work (Aminah & Narimah, 1991).

The notion that women's or men's views have the greater influence on the couple's behaviour has been frequently discussed in research (Baruch & Barnett, 1987; Baxter, 1992; Bird et al., 1984; Hardesty & Bokemeier, 1989; Huber & Spitz, 1983; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990; Pleck, 1985; Ross, 1987). Much research finds that attitudes affect only one's own labour, with men's attitudes affecting husbands' share of family work and women's attitudes affecting wives (Baxter, 1992; Huber & Spitz, 1983; Ross, 1987). However, some research finds that both partners' attitudes influence wives' and husbands' labour (Baruch & Barnett, 1987; Hardesty & Bokemeier 1989; Kamo, 1988). Atkinson and Houston (1984) found significant correlations between both husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes and the proportional contribution of husbands to feminine tasks. The research findings suggest that gender role orientation bears a relationship to household division of labour among women and men in dual-earner families.

Given that gender role attitude is related to household division of labour and that household division of labour is related to work-family conflict, it is therefore expected that gender role orientation is associated with work-family conflict. The objectives of this present study are to 1) to determine the extent of work-family conflict experienced by married working women, 2) to examine the gender role orientations of husbands, 3) to examine the relationship between husbands' gender role orientations and work-family conflict experienced by women.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedure

The sample in this present study consists of female nurses working in a government hospital in the state of Selangor, Malaysia, and their husbands. Female nurses meeting the following criteria were identified: (a) married, (b) working full-time, (c) living with spouse who is fully employed, and (d) has at least one child staying with them. These criteria were established to ensure that the women as well as their husbands in the sample had quite similar responsibilities in terms of family and work roles. Using random sampling, from a list of 735 eligible nurses, 300 nurses were selected who form half of the sample size. The other half of the sample consists of the 300 husbands of these nurses.

Two sets of self-administered questionnaires (one for the nurse and another for her husband) were distributed to each nurse. The nurses were requested to have their husbands fill in the questionnaires. Out of the 300 pairs of subjects, 242 (81%) nurses and 125 (42%) husbands returned the questionnaires. For analysis, only data from 125 matched pairs were used.

The women in the sample averaged 35.2 years of age (SD = 7.14) while their husbands 37.7 years (SD = 6.74). Sixty-two percent of the women had completed secondary education, while the rest had completed post secondary education with the exception of only 9% who completed lower secondary education. With regard to their husbands, 61% had completed secondary education, while the rest of the respondents had completed post secondary or graduate level of education with the exception of only 2% who completed lower secondary education. There was an average of 2.5 (SD = 1.09) children in the family and an average of 2.4 (SD = 1.07) living at home. Fifty-nine percent of the women and 53% of the men earned an average gross income between RM1001 – RM1500

per month (USD1 = RM3.8). Only 16% of the women and 26% of the men earned more than RM1500 per month. Respondents who had children below school going age constituted 68.8%. Only 26.0% reported that they had helpers, other than family members, at home. Respondents who sent their children to child-care centres or babysitters constituted 52.9%.

Intruments

Work-family conflict was measured using the interrole conflict scale by Pleck et al. (1980). This scale consists of 8 items that were developed based on the three most prevalent aspects of work-family conflict, namely excessive work time, schedule conflicts, and fatigue or irritability. The response options for these items were 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability coefficient (alpha) for this work-family conflict scale was .85.

Fifteen items were used to measure gender role orientation. Nine of these statements were from the attitude towards women scale developed by Spence et al. (1973). The other 6 items were from the sex-role orientation scale developed by Brogan and Kutner (1976). The items can be categorised into the following dimensions, namely, 1) attitudes toward traditional and non-traditional employment of women and men, 2) attitudes toward the gender division of household labour, and 3) attitudes toward the gender-based power structure in the work and outside the work spheres. The wordings of one of the items were modified to simplify its meaning. The item was modified from "Even though a wife works outside the home, the husband should be the main breadwinner and the wife should have the responsibility for running the household" to "A working husband should leave the responsibility of running the household to his wife, even though the wife is working outside the home." The nurses' husbands were requested to state their level of agreement toward each statement using a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). High scores indicate relatively non-traditional orientation or attitudes toward gender roles. Out of the 15 items, 1 item was deleted from the scale used in this present study. This item was from the scale developed by Spence et al. (1973) and 1 from the scale developed by Brogan and Kutner (1976). The item was deleted because of lack of variance and low item-total correlation based on the reliability test via internal consistency. The item deleted was, "In general, the father should have greater authority than the mother in the bringing up of children". The scale for this present study consisted of 14 items with a reliability coefficient (alpha) of .81. The questionnaire was translated into the Malay language. To ensure that the meaning of the questions and statements were not lost during translation, a panel of four academic staff was requested to comment on the translation. Based on these comments, the translated questions and statements were improved. The panel agreed that the statements in the scales were appropriate to the Malaysian context.

RESULTS

Forty-four (35%) of the 125 women who responded reported medium intensity of work-family conflict and another forty-four (35%) reported low intensity of conflict, while 37 (30%) reported high intensity of conflict (Table 1). The overall mean for work-family conflict on a five-point scale was 2.8 (SD = .72).

TABLE 1
Distribution of wives by intensity of work-family conflict

Intensity of Conflict	Frequency	Percentage
Low (<2.43)	44	35.2
Medium (2.43-3.18)	44	35.2
High (>3.18)	37	29.6

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of items measuring work-family conflict. The most highly endorsed item was "After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I would like to do" (M = 3.41; SD = 1.14). The item that was least endorsed was "On the job I have so much work to do that it takes away time for my family interest" (M = 2.45; SD = .99).

Thirty-six (28.8%) of the husbands possessed non-traditional gender role attitudes or orientations which reflect egalitarian conceptions of appropriate male and female behaviours (Table 3). Thirty-two (24.8%) of them possessed traditional orientations whereby their attitudes toward gender-based employment, gender division of household labour and gender-based

TABLE 2
Means and standard deviations of items measuring work-family conflict

Item	Mean	SD
My work schedule often conflicts with my family life	2.86	1.12
After work I come home too tired to do some of the things I'd like to do	3.41	1.14
On the job I have so much work to do that it takes away time for my family interest	2.45	.99
My family dislikes how often I am preoccupied with my work while I am at home	2.64	1.01
Because my work is demanding, at times I am irritable at home	2.95	1.16
The demands of my job make it difficult to be relaxed all the time at home	2.48	.99
My work takes up time that I'd like to spend with my family	2.90	1.13
My job makes it difficult to be the kind of spouse or parent I'd like to be	2.71	1.20

TABLE 3
Means and standard deviations of items
measuring gender role orientation of husbands

Dimension/Item	Mean	SD
Attitude towards gender-based employment	**3.55**	**.61**
There are many jobs in which men should be given preference over women in being hired and promoted	3.03	1.19
It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have a career herself	2.90	1.16
Women should be able to compete with men for jobs that have traditionally belonged to men	3.64	.99
There should be a strict merit system in job appointment and promotion without regard to sex	3.98	.87
Women should assume their rightful place in business and all the professions along with men	3.80	.89
Women should be given equal opportunity with men for apprenticeship in the various trades	3.92	.78
Attitude towards gender division of labour	**3.10**	**.65**
Under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should share in household tasks such washing dishes and doing the laundry	3.84	.99
Women should be concerned with their duties of child bearing and house tending, rather than with desires for professional and business careers	2.39	1.01
Unless it is economically necessary, married women who have preschool-aged children should not work outside the home	2.55	1.13
A working husband should leave the responsibility of running the household to his wife, even though the wife works outside the home	3.62	1.41
Attitude towards gender-based power structure	**2.58**	**.75**
Women should take increasing responsibility for leadership in solving the intellectual and social problems of the day	3.65	.97
The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men	2.34	1.04
In groups that have both male and female members it is appropriate that top leadership positions be held by males	2.18	1.10
It is generally better to have a man at the head of a department composed of both men and women employees	2.14	1.05
Overall mean	**3.14**	**.56**

power structure were traditional. The rest can be categorised under the undifferentiated orientation group, whereby their attitudes were neither traditional nor egalitarian.

Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations of the gender role orientation dimensions and items. The mean for attitudes toward traditional and non-traditional employment of women and men was the highest (M = 3.55, SD = .61). This shows that husbands have more egalitarian attitudes toward women in relation to employment including appointment, promotion and opportunity in participation. The mean for the attitudes toward gender-based power structure or leadership was the lowest (M = 2.58, SD = .75). This shows that husbands tend to agree to the notion that men should be in positions of authority over women in the work and outside the work spheres. Husbands' attitudes toward gender division of household labour or the notion that a wife's place is in the home and the husband's at work were neither traditional nor egalitarian (M = 3.10, SD = .65). The overall mean for gender role orientation was 3.14 (SD = .56). A one-way analysis of variance revealed a statistically significant difference between the three dimensions ($F_{(2,122)}$ = 131.34, $p < .05$).

TABLE 4
Distribution of husbands by gender role orientation scores

Mean Score	Frequency	Percent
High (> 3.42)	36	28.8
Medium (2.86 – 3.42)	58	46.4
Low (< 2.86)	31	24.8

To examine the relationship between husbands' gender role orientations and work-family conflict, Pearson's product moment correlation analysis was conducted. The result indicated that there was a significant negative relationship between the two variables (r = -.15, $p < .05$). Wives whose husbands held more traditional gender role orientations were more likely to experience greater work-family conflict than wives whose husbands held more egalitarian or liberal orientations. Although husbands should be active in childcare and housekeeping because the wives were pursuing their career as well, and thus reduce their levels of work-family conflict, the research findings indicated that husbands' traditional gender role orientations or perceptions of appropriate male and female roles would likely increase the extent of conflict that wives experienced in trying to balance the demands of work and family roles.

DISCUSSION

Before understanding the relationship between husbands' gender role attitudes and the extent that wives experience work-family conflict it is pertinent to understand how husbands' attitudes or perceptions towards gender roles relate to husbands' behaviour elicited in the sharing or non-sharing of household labour. The socialisation model could assist in clarifying this relationship. This model posits that gender-role attitudes learned through the socialisation process influence the division of labour (Berardo et al., 1987; Ross, 1987). The traditional assumption is that strong family concerns are part of the feminine role, and household tasks are women's responsibilities.

Another explanation stems from the normative interaction theory. Normative interaction refers to the degree to which decisions conform to established norms about behaviour in a family (Klien and Hill, 1979). Norms refer to personal beliefs about obligations to behave in particular ways. Spouses with traditional value orientations tend to follow more culturally defined sex roles than spouses with modernistic value orientations (Silverman & Hill, 1967). The findings of Wheeler and Arvey (1981) lend support to the normative interaction theory regarding division of household labour. They found that there was a positive correlation between liberal attitudes of husbands and responsibility for female tasks. Husbands of wives with liberal attitudes tended to assume female tasks. Wives of husbands with liberal attitudes tended to assume male tasks. Spouses appear to assume responsibility for particular tasks through interaction between spouses on the basis of attitudes of the other spouse.

In addition, the role episode model by Katz & Kahn (1966) suggests that the role perceptions of an individual or role sender such as the husband, as one of the main elements in a role system, could induce the individual's or husband's role behaviour, besides the behaviour of the role receiver like the wife. This model explains the process of role-sending by the role

sender and role receiving by the role receiver in a social system. The theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) also provides explanation to the attitude-behaviour relationship. According to this theory, attitudes as deep-seated elements of a person's psychological make-up constitutes a basic influence on his or her behaviour.

Extending the relationship between attitude and behaviour, based on these theories, to that of the relationship between husbands' gender role attitudes and husband's behaviour elicited in sharing of household labour, could help one predict the behaviour of husbands from their attitudes. This attitude-behaviour relationship is also supported by Perucci et al. (1978), Huber and Spitz (1983) and Silberstein (1992) who reported that gender role attitude is related to gender division of household or domestic labour.

With regard to the relationship between gender division of labour and work-family conflict, research conducted by Wiersma and Van Den Berg (1991) has shown that domestic responsibilities, which include housework and childcare, among women and men in dual-earner families were a significant correlate of work-family conflict. Since gender role attitude is related to household division of labour, and that household division of labour is related to work-family conflict, the preceding discussion helps to explain the association between gender role orientation or attitudes of husbands and the work-family conflict experienced by the nurses.

Several limitations are noted for the study. Subjects were nurses and their husbands, and majority of them had secondary education with only about one-third who had completed post-secondary education. As the factors associated with gender role orientation and gender division of labour are culturally specific and affected by socio-economic class and education (Oakley, 1974; Clark et al., 1978), the results of this study cannot be generalised at large to other groups. Future research should examine men and women in other cultural groups, socio-economic class, and educational levels. The next step in this line of research would be to study the division of household labour among husbands and wives as one of the variables and focus on the interrelations between gender role orientations, division of household labour and work-family conflict.

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