An examination of the influence of perceived job threat, job pressure and work-life balance/conflict among Australian academics

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Acknowledgements:
Helen Watt & Paul Richardson, Monash University
Work-Life Balance (WLB)

- The degree to which an individual is able to simultaneously balance the temporal, emotional and behavioural demands of both paid work and family responsibilities (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris & Weitzman, 2001)

- Positive Spillover (Zedeck, 1992).
Work-Life Conflict (WLC)

- Occurs when involvement in one domain, for example work or personal life, interferes with involvement in the other domain (Zedeck 1992; Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006)

- Negative Spillover (Zedeck, 1992)
The degree to which a job is perceived as taxing, exceeding resources and/or endangering well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra & Ironson, 2001)
Why Study Academics?

- Increasing stress, pressure and organisational change in universities has led to research interest in the area of job stress on work-life balance and work-life conflict amongst Australian academics.
- Research suggests that psychological strain and WLC is increasing among academics.
- Previous studies have investigated general stress and job centered work-life balance initiatives (such as flexible work schedules) amongst general samples.
- Very few studies have investigated academics specifically, and their ability to balance work and personal life, and avoid work-life conflict.
Aims of the Research

• This research explores the impact of job-stress on work-life balance and work-life conflict among Australian academics.

• Drawing on Spillover Theory it was hypothesised that high levels of job stress (job threat stress and job pressure stress) would predict increased levels of work-life conflict, and decreased levels of work-life balance.

• A further aim was to examine gender differences in work-life balance practices
Methodology

- **Sample:** 139 academic staff employed in Australian post-secondary higher education

- **Measures:**
  - **Work-Life Balance** (Hill et al., 2001), e.g., “It is easy for me to balance the demands of my work and my personal life”
  - **Work-Life Conflict** (O'Neil, Helms & Gable, 1986), e.g., “I feel torn between my hectic work schedule and caring for my family and friends”
  - **Job Stress** (Stanton et al., 2001) [job threat stress and job pressure stress] e.g., “nerve-wracking” or “demanding”

- **Procedure:** Anonymous on-line self-report questionnaire
  - Invitation emailed to colleagues, who forwarded to potential participants
  - Advertised in a higher education magazine
Demographics

- Age ranged from 25 to 66 years ($M = 43.66$, $SD = 11.06$).
- Number of years employed in an academic position ranged from 0.25 to 40 years ($M = 7.88$, $SD = 7.41$).
- Number of work contact hours per week up to 70 hours ($M = 25.10$, $SD = 16.54$), with Mode 40 hours per week.
- 80 female, 58 male and 1 did not specify gender.
- Highest academic teaching level: 42.4% lecturer, 22.3% tutor, 16.5% senior lecturer, 3.6% associate professor, 2.9% professor, 0.7% academic head, 7.2% ‘other’
- Academic duties most often performed were teaching and research (55.4%), 23% taught only, 15.1% research only, 2.9% administration, and 3.6% percent indicated ‘other’ duties.
- Social Sciences discipline (21.6%), 16.5% Business, 7.2% Engineering and Industrial Sciences, 6.5% Education, and a wide range of other disciplines reported
Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Threat Stress</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0 - 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Stress</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0 - 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work-life Balance</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>1 - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-life Conflict</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>1 - 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( N = 139 \)
## Results

### Reliability Coefficients and Bivariate Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Job Threat Stress</th>
<th>Job Pressure Stress</th>
<th>Work-Life Balance</th>
<th>Work-Life Conflict</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Threat Stress</td>
<td>[0.85]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Pressure Stress</td>
<td>0.65*</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-Life Balance</td>
<td>-0.70*</td>
<td>-0.64*</td>
<td>[0.84]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work-Life Conflict</td>
<td>0.74*</td>
<td>0.66*</td>
<td>-0.85*</td>
<td>[0.93]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 139. Note: Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities are shown on the diagonal in bold. * p<0.001*
### Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Job Stress and Work-Life Balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Pressure Stress</td>
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<td>-.31*</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Threat Stress</td>
<td>-.87</td>
<td>-.50*</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 139. * p<0.001

### Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Job Stress and Work-Life Conflict

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<td>.58</td>
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<td>1.09</td>
<td>.54*</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 139. * p<0.001
Implications

- Both forms of Job stress influenced academics’ perceived ability to balance their personal and work lives, and was associated with increased conflict between work and personal lives.
- Feelings of anxiety and being internally threatened by work (job threat stress) more strongly influenced academics’ work-life balance and work-life conflict than did time and pressure demands (job pressure stress).
- Restructures and other significant changes in the work environment causing high pressure and anxiety, could create imbalance or conflict between work and life domains.
- Despite existing interventions aimed to prevent work-life issues in universities (e.g., flexible work schedules), job stress and WLC are still evident.
- Universities should contemplate incorporating a stress management (job threat focus) component into HRM programs promoting work-life balance, and interventions aimed at combating work-life conflict.
- Awareness of work-life balance and work-life conflict for both male and female academics through targeted HRM programs.
Limitations & Future Research

- Wider array of related constructs
- Sample size could be increased
- A multi-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods, including behavioural observations, focus groups or interviews, to gain a fuller perspective (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2001)
- Longitudinal data could be used to test
  a) theorised causal relationships between job stress and work-life issues
  b) directed relationships of WLC and WLB (e.g., work-to-family conflict, family-to-work facilitation)
- Inclusion of mediators (e.g., mental health) and moderators (e.g., personality measures, spirituality)
- Further research on WLB interventions aimed at preventing stress
Summary

• Job stress demonstrated a detrimental influence on academics' abilities to balance their personal and work lives and contributed to increased conflict between their work and personal lives

• Universities should consider implementing stress management interventions (particularly for job threat stressors) into Human Resource Management employee work-life balance initiatives

• Universities may also like to consider providing further preventative measures to prevent such job stress
Thank-you for listening!

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Any Questions?
References


