



How work–family conflict affects employees’ well-being in Chinese hotels: the moderating effects of Spouses’ work–family conflict and gender

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Abstract

Drawing on the spillover-crossover model and gender role theory, this study aims to uncover the antecedents of employees’ well-being by investigating a three-way interaction between employees’ work-family conflict (WFC), spousal WFC (SWFC), and employee gender. Paired samples of 239 hotel employees and their spouses in China were recruited as study respondents. Hierarchical regression analysis was performed to test the hypotheses. Findings showed that WFC had a significant negative correlation with employees’ well-being. In addition, SWFC significantly moderated the relationship between WFC and employees’ well-being. The interaction between WFC and gender did not display a significant effect. The triple interaction of WFC, gender, and SWFC significantly influenced employees’ well-being. This study incorporates familial factors (i.e., SWFC) and individual factors (i.e., gender) into a single framework to examine the joint effects of multiple boundary conditions. This work expands exploration of the boundary conditions of WFC in predicting employees’ well-being. Findings also enrich the understanding of gender differences at the family and individual levels.

Keywords WFC · SWFC · Gender · Employees’ well-being

Introduction

The concept of work-family conflict (WFC) has received particular attention from social scientists over the last 40 years (Carlson et al., 2018; Karapinar et al., 2020). WFC refers to incompatible role pressure between the work and family domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985); it occurs when work stress limits a person’s ability to complete family

activities, reflecting negative spillover from work to family (Byron, 2005). Among various service-oriented organizations, hospitality industry employment has been regarded as stressful due to long working hours, irregular schedules, split shifts, and other unfavorable circumstances (Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016). These factors collectively inspire WFC.

WFC is often tied to stress and other concerns (Anderson et al., 2002; Huang et al., 2019) and naturally causes one’s mental health to deteriorate (Yucel & Fan, 2019). Many countries have begun to consider employees’ health at work since the World Health Organization issued the *Almaty Declaration* (O’Donnell, 2004). The society emphasizes the people-oriented management concept, that is, employees are not only the tools and ways to achieve organizational performance, but also the interests of employees themselves are one of the purposes of organization and management. Organizations need to consider and implement corresponding ethical issues in human resource management (Greenwood, 2002). Under this premise, variables in the family field, such as subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and family relationship quality, began to come into the researchers’ view. One aim of health promotion in the workplace

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is to improve workers' well-being rather than simply to minimize illness or burnout. A sizable body of literature has contemplated the nexus of WFC and well-being at work (Carlson et al., 2018; Karapinar et al., 2020).

Although the existing studies can explain the general impact of WFC on employees' well-being, they have not reviewed two important issues that our research seeks to address. First, most scholars have adopted an individualized approach: they focus on employees to the neglect of couples even though many workers are in partnered relationships (Molina, 2021; Yucel & Fan, 2019). Family is the most basic social unit in China (Zhang et al., 2014). The attitude and behavior of Chinese employees have a clear familial tendency (Aryee et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2014). As highlighted by Trompenaars and HamptonTurner (1998), culture plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' delineation of work and family domains. Compared with Western society, China has a collectivist culture (Aryee et al., 2005; Thein et al., 2012) that is family-centered (Gaspar, 2013). Spouses reside within a family sphere and inevitably influence each other (Cheung & Wong, 2013). Work-family conflict is predominantly a contextual issue rather than an isolated individual concern in the majority of cases (Pan & Yeh, 2019). Therefore, within the Chinese context, investigating work-family conflict from a family-level perspective holds significant local. Second, Most of the studies in this field to date have been confined to examining the antecedents and consequences of WFC (Anderson et al., 2002; Byron, 2005; Molina, 2021; Ollo-López & Goñi-Legaz, 2015), but paid little attention to the boundary conditions of WFC. We propose that while work and family pressures negatively influence well-being, the strength of this effect depends on family resources (the spouse's work status) and the individual's social role (gender).

Spillover-crossover model provides a research framework for exploring the above issues. The spillover process refers to the transmission of role stress from the work domain to the home domain, thereby impacting an individual's emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. The crossover of psychological experiences is exemplified in situations where one spouse's strain (WFC in this study) influences the level of strain experienced by their partner (Bakker et al., 2008; Westman, 2001). Because the WFC experienced by one spouse can increase demands on their partner's family

commitment, it has the potential to exacerbate issues related to work-life balance and further compromise employees' well-being. Drawing upon the spillover-crossover model, we hypothesize that an individual's well-being is influenced not only by their own WFC but also by their spouse's WFC.

In addition, as suggested by the gender role theory, cultural norms and ideologies regarding gender-specific behavior can influence WFC as well (Mortazavi et al., 2009). Traditional gender roles consider work as more important for men, whereas family responsibilities and household duties fall under the purview of women (Bakker et al., 2008). If this is the case, it may be inappropriate to interpret the moderating roles of these factors in isolation (Molina, 2021).

Grounded in the premises of spillover-crossover model and gender role theory, we have developed a contingency model of the linkages between employees' WFC and their well-being. Figure 1 illustrates three-way interactive relationships, taking SWFC and the focal employee's gender as joint boundary conditions. We predict that an employee will exhibit low well-being if (a) they experience WFC (thus threatening family resources such as time and energy), (b) their spouse also experiences WFC (increasing the focal employee's family needs), and (c) they are a woman (i.e., shouldering greater expectations about family roles). We test this model in Chinese hotels.

This study offers several implications. First, in addition to delineating the potential role of WFC, we highlight the utility of spillover-crossover model as a conceptual approach that unearths contingencies in the relationship between WFC and well-being. Second, different from work concerning individualistic societies, this research sheds light on work and family stress in collectivist societies by examining how WFC (among both employees and spouses) shapes employees' well-being. Third, this study integrates family factors (i.e., SWFC) and individual factors (i.e., gender) in one framework to examine the joint effects of multiple boundary conditions. The proposed three-way interaction model demonstrates that people connected by key social roles share experiences of social stress, a finding which extends the boundary conditions of WFC in predicting employees' well-being.

Theory and hypothesis development

Spillover-crossover model

Spillover-crossover model (SCM) pointed out that individual work experience would spill over into the family field, and individual work experience would also be transmitted to partners through social interaction (Bakker & Demerouti,

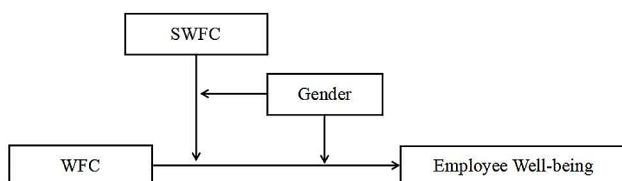


Fig. 1 Proposed conceptual model

2013). The spillover of “experiences from one domain of a person’s life to another” is a within-person process (Byron, 2005). The cross-over process occurs “when a stressor or psychological strain experienced by one person affects the level of strain of another person is referred to as crossover” (Westman, 2001). Thus, in crossover, stress experienced in the workplace by an individual may lead to stress being experienced by the individual’s partner at home. Whereas spillover is an intraindividual transmission of stress or strain, crossover is a dyadic, interindividual transmission of stress or strain.

The SCM integrates the existing bodies of literature on spillover and crossover phenomena. For instance, Shimazu et al. (2009) discovered a positive association between job demands and self- and partner-ratings of work-family conflict, which subsequently resulted in a negative impact on the partner’s reports of relationship satisfaction as well as physical and psychological health. Bakker and Demerouti (2013) pointed out that work-family conflict reduces individuals’ social support behaviors for their spouses, while increases social demeaning behaviors, which seriously affects the quality of couples’ relationships. Among dual-earner couples, individual work-family conflicts may further have a series of negative impacts on their spouse’s family life satisfaction and marital quality (Li et al., 2017). In a study conducted among working couples in the Netherlands, Pluut et al. (2018) discovered that spousal support acted as a protective factor for employees experiencing emotional exhaustion, mitigating the impact on work-family conflict. Furthermore, spousal support was found to moderate the indirect effect of workload on work-family conflict through its influence on emotional exhaustion.

The SCM represents a concrete application of conservation of resources theory in the work-home domain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). However, the advantage of the SCM lies in its specificity and elaboration of resource classification. Unlike conservation of resources theory, which is widely applied in organizational behavior and psychology, SCM provides a focused theoretical framework for comprehending the linkage mechanism, boundary conditions and consequences of work-family interface among employees (Chan et al., 2020). The difference between SCM and conservation of resources theory lies in the interaction mechanism. Firstly, SCM focuses on the simultaneous interaction of multiple agents, including internal reactions within individuals and cross-over processes between individuals. Secondly, while SCM primarily emphasizes partners in the family field, conservation of resources theory encompasses a wider range of objects such as partners, children, and oneself (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). In summary, drawing upon the SCM model, we elucidate that an individual’s

psychological condition is influenced by both their personal WFC and their spouse’s WFC.

Work-family conflict (WFC)

Conflict theory suggests that one’s work and family environments feature distinct norms and requirements and are therefore incompatible (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). Specifically, WFC is “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). This definition cites two types of inter-role conflict: (1) WFC, wherein role stress at work impedes functioning at home; and (2) family-work conflict (FWC), wherein role stress at home interferes with functioning at work (Bakker et al., 2008). Because hotel work involves long hours, irregular schedules, and other potentially undesirable attributes (Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016), the impact of WFC is especially salient.

Employees’ well-being

People endeavor to maintain some degree of well-being in their daily lives. Well-being generally refers to a subjective and global judgment about whether one experiences positive emotions, is free from negative emotions, and is satisfied with life (Diener, 1984). It also stresses sound psychological functioning and the fulfillment of one’s potential (Zheng et al., 2015).

Work well-being can be captured by indicators such as job satisfaction, job engagement, subjective well-being, and job stress. Proponents of employee benefits contend that the work environment is unique from one’s living conditions. Thus, employees’ well-being should be differentiated from general well-being (Ilies et al., 2007; Zheng et al., 2015) in terms of work, life, and psychological well-being. As this study pertains to WFC, we included life well-being and work well-being in employees’ well-being.

WFC and employees’ well-being

Employees’ well-being has often been taken as a proxy of employees’ overall happiness in organizations. Previous studies have found that work-family conflict has a significant negative impact on well-being (Carlson et al., 2011; Lin et al., 2014). According to the spillover effect, work-family conflict (WFC) refers to the transmission of individual role stress from the work domain into the family domain, thereby intensifying employees’ emotional burden and subsequently impacting their emotions and behaviors (Maslach

and Jackson, 1986). This effect combined with Hobfoll's (2001) conservation of resources theory can help elucidate why WFC affects individual well-being. Conservation of resources theory proposes that when faced with the threat of resource loss, or lack of expected resource gains, individuals experience a wide range of stress responses (Karapinar et al., 2020). The stress responses include dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety and physical stress due to the depletion of valuable resources while juggling both work and family roles (Chan et al., 2020; Foley et al., 2005). Consequently, compulsive tendencies drive workaholics to allocate more resources (e.g., time and emotions) towards work at the expense of fewer available resources for their families.

In the hospitality industry, work and family stressors such as long hours, erratic schedules, and childcare influence employees' psychological functioning. This situation creates occupational stress as well as a sense of loss—work saps time and energy that should be committed to one's family (Hobfoll et al., 2018). In other words, by threatening valuable resources (time and energy), WFC may amplify perceived tension and diminish one's well-being at work and in life (Cho & Tay, 2016). As concerns the amount of resources available, the conservation of resources theory postulates that an individual who has limited resources may be more vulnerable to subsequent losses (Hobfoll, 2001). The WFC can create a new potential loss of resources, which induces stress. Empirical research (e.g., Cheung et al., 2013; Hobfoll et al., 2018; Karapinar et al., 2020) has shown that the depletion of resources caused by WFC will spillover to a person's psychological state. So when employees face the conflict between work and family, work-related affairs will consume a lot of resources, time and energy of employees, resulting in employees being unable to deal with family affairs well. When faced with more complicated and trivial family affairs, employees' well-being will decrease.

The following hypothesis is put forth accordingly:

H1: WFC is negatively related to employees' well-being.

Moderating effect of spousal WFC (SWFC)

Based on crossover effect, we expect that the WFC experienced by one spouse exerts an influence on the WFC of their partner. There are two mechanisms that can account for the crossover phenomenon. The first mechanism suggests that demands experienced by one spouse can transfer and impact the demands of the other spouse. Bolger et al. (1989) discovered a link between workplace stress experienced by an individual and subsequent stress experienced by their spouse at home. Increased WFC is positively associated with heightened home demands, such as an overload

of household tasks and emotional demands (Bakker et al., 2008). In essence, WFC impedes optimal functioning within the domestic sphere. Greenhaus et al. (1989) proposed that the number of hours a spouse works per week is positively correlated with WFC, that non-working spouses can liberate their partner from household and childcare responsibilities, whereas workers with an employed spouse are likely to perceive WFC more negatively. Employees' stress increases when family demands negatively influence work demands. This circumstance generates time demands and role overload (Karapinar et al., 2020). Therefore, when an employee's spouse is also grappling with WFC, his/her family demands increase.

Another proposed mechanism is that the demands experienced by one spouse can have a crossover effect and impact the mood of the other spouse (Rook et al., 1991). Riley and Eckenrode (1986) examined how an individual's exposure to stressful events affects the emotional well-being of their close associates. They suggest that experiencing undesirable events may create a need for support, causing associates to feel anxious and guilty when they are unable to meet these demands. Similarly, a crisis experienced by an individual's close partner may diminish social support for that person, subsequently leading to additional stressors (e.g., increased workload) or experiences of stress (e.g., emotional exhaustion) (Pluut et al., 2018). In line with conservation of resources theory, a spouse's instrumental support (e.g., tangible assistance with problems, taking on more responsibility in childcare and household duties) alleviates negative effects tied to their partner's WFC and well-being (Adams et al., 1996; Halbesleben et al., 2010; Karapinar et al., 2020).

Overall, WFC is then more apt to affect overall psychological well-being as postulated below:

H2: SWFC moderates the strength of the relationship between employees' WFC and employees' well-being, with a negative relationship being stronger for workers whose spouses experience high WFC (vs. low WFC).

Moderating effect of gender

According to social role theory, individuals tend to abide by the gender role setting caused by different social functions, and eventually internalize this role setting (Eagly & Karau, 1991). Traditional gender roles and social rules encourage men to pursue professional success and take on more work roles than family roles (Zhang et al., 2013). Social rules encourage women to invest more in the family and take family responsibilities more seriously (Eagly & Karau, 1991). The husband hence tends to be more concerned than

the wife about responding to job demands; the wife is to support her husband in prioritizing work for the benefit of the family.

Most married couples in China are dual-earner families. Requiring staff to meet family expectations during work can put more role pressure on these employees, especially for women (Cheung & Wong, 2013; Foley et al., 2005). Even though China is undergoing modernization, under the influence of the traditional culture of “men dominate the outside and women dominate the inside”, the spillover effect still has gender role differences (Li et al., 2017). Women usually spend more time than men on housework and childcare (Bakker et al., 2008). Many women see these activities as their main responsibilities. Women who must perform additional work can thus face more pervasive stress in balancing work and family. Female employees in turn perceive greater WFC than their male counterparts, which may detract from an intrinsically positive mental state (Cheung & Wong, 2013). Gender role theory further argues that the higher men’s WFC, the more family responsibilities their wives take on (Cheung & Wong, 2013). Women who assume a range of work roles can experience anxiety and guilt because these roles are inconsistent with societal expectations around the family. Rising negativity may then prompt female employees to perceive WFC as more disruptive. Women working in hotels might encounter more time and role pressure in relation to family responsibilities as well. Compared with men, female employees more readily sense WFC with their spouses. The notion of equality continues to gain recognition; even so, wives in China still tend to oversee their family’s needs, most notably childcare (Zhang et al., 2013). Gender roles are thus presumed to be a key driver behind workers’ well-being:

H3: Gender moderates the strength of the relationship between employees’ WFC and well-being, with a negative relationship being stronger for women than for men.

Triple interaction of employees’ WFC, SWFC, and gender

According to Aryee et al. (1999), cultural variations influence individuals’ responses to work and family pressures. Given the significance of family in Chinese society, individuals’ attitudes, decisions, and behaviors exhibit distinct familial tendencies. This study contends that when assessing the negative moderating impact of family members on employees’ work-family conflict (WFC) and well-being, it is imperative to consider gender roles.

With the societal expectation of “men dominate the outside and women dominate the inside”, husbands are thought

to derive positive experiences from work while women do so from family. On the contrary, a male employee and his wife both experienced WFC, and although the husband had difficulty meeting the needs of his family, this was similar to society’s expectations of the husband’s work role. Husbands exhibit more work-first behaviors. Male employees’ well-being is hence less affected (vs. female employees) by SWFC. Among female employees who experience WFC, when their husbands experience WFC as well, according to societal expectations of women’s roles, the demand for wives to participate in the family increases. This undoubtedly lessens their work input to compensate for men’s input and protect the family’s interests. Balancing work and family becomes more challenging, further causing the wife to consume resources and increase stress (Westman, 2001). Female employees’ well-being is thus more significantly affected (vs. male employees) by SWFC. Intuitively, WFC should be more negatively associated with well-being when (a) the employee is female and (b) SWFC is relatively high. It is essential to address context in the impact of WFC on employees’ well-being. Stated formally:

H4: A three-way interactive relationship exists among WFC, SWFC, and employee’s gender in predicting employees’ well-being. Specifically, the negative relationship between WFC and employees’ well-being is strongest for female employees with high SWFC.

The hypothesized model is depicted in Fig. 1.

Methods

Research design and sampling technique

Because this study aimed to test hospitality employees’ WFC and well-being, the target population consisted of hotel staff. Respondents were recruited from different provinces in China to boost findings’ generalization. The questionnaire was randomly distributed to potential participants through an online survey company, *Credamo* (<https://www.credamo.com>), which was contracted to collect nationwide data. Data collection consists of three phases:

Participant recruitment and screening

Participants were recruited through the online platform *Credamo*. *Credamo* sent the registration questionnaire to eligible target respondents (married hotel employees). The registration questionnaire also mentioned a RMB 100 incentive. Eligible target respondents then completed the survey and forwarded it to matched respondents (i.e., their

spouses). Matches were verified and saved based on three factors: (1) forward-forwarded: the registration questionnaire was forwarded between respondents (e.g., employees forwarded it to their spouses) to ensure a successful pairing; (2) joint verification: respondents gave consistent answers to verification questions (e.g., both parties provided identical information for the prompt “Our wedding registration date”); (3) two-way verification: both respondents entered each other’s information correctly (e.g., spouse’s birthday). Only when all the information is verified, the subject is considered to have successfully matched. The participants were duly informed that their data would be utilized exclusively for academic research purposes, with a guarantee of strict confidentiality regarding personal information. In total, 325 matching pairs of hotel employees and their spouses were established in this stage.

First-stage survey

Credamo sent the formal questionnaire to the 325 matched employee-spouse respondents. Employees reported their demographics, WFC, and FWC; their spouses reported their own demographics and WFC.

Second-stage survey

Three weeks later, *Credamo* sent questionnaires regarding the employee’s own well-being to the 325 matched employees. Matched employee-spouse respondents who completed all surveys were compensated RMB 100.

Data sample

Following two rounds of question answering, a total of 276 matched employee-spouse questionnaires were returned, yielding a 84.92% response rate. After discarding invalid questionnaires such as incomplete answers and high repetition rate, 239 pairs of valid samples were remained. The sample of 239 employees was 54.0% 152–130 female and 46.0% male 87–109 ($SD=0.5$). Most of the participants were young, ranging in age from 26 to 40, and their workplace tenure was between 1 and 15 years for a mean of 7.76 years ($SD=5.86$).

Measures

WFC and SWFC. Five WFC items were adopted from the instrument employed by Carlson et al. (2000). Responses were scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; e.g., “I’m too busy with my job to spend time with my family”). The Cronbach’s alpha scores for WFC and SWFC were 0.95 and 0.88, respectively.

Employees’ well-being. Employees’ well-being was evaluated using a 10-item instrument on a similar 7-point Likert scale adapted from Zheng et al. (2015) (e.g., “My life is very interesting”). The Cronbach’s alpha value for this measure was 0.92.

Gender. Male and female respondents were coded as 1 and 2, respectively.

Control variables. Control variables included demographic characteristics such as age, education, workplace tenure, number of children, and work time (Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016). Age, workplace tenure, and number of children were represented by actual values, whereas work time over the last two weeks and education level were each dummy variables (three shifts = 1, day shift = 2, night shift = 3; junior high school or below = 1, senior high school = 2, junior college = 3, undergraduate degree = 4, graduate degree = 5). Cheung and Wong (2013) identified FWC as a key factor affecting one’s psychological state. Therefore, employees’ FWC was controlled in this study. The 5-item scale compiled by Carlson et al. (2000) was used for measurement, and the consistency coefficient was 0.84.

Results

Homology deviation test

Harman’s single-factor test (Hair, 1998) was used to test the homology deviation. Unrotated factor analysis was performed on all items corresponding to the study variables. Results showed that the first factor explained 31.50% of the variance in each variable, below the standard of 40% to indicate that the homology deviation was acceptable.

Scale reliability and validity

Maximum likelihood exploratory factor analysis was carried out on the 21 items to assess the model’s convergent validity. All four factors’ eigenvalues exceeded 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations are listed in Table 1. Composite reliability index values surpassed Hu and Bentler’s (1999) recommended thresholds.

Confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed in AMOS 17.0. After removing the dummy variable (gender), a three-, two-, and single-factor model were compared. The three-factor model containing the focal constructs ($\chi^2/df=2.46$, $RMSEA=0.08$, $CFI=0.93$, $TLI=0.92$, $IFI=0.93$, $SRMR=0.07$) had the best fit to the data versus the alternatives.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Age	3.25	1.35										
2 Education	4.75	0.78	-0.23**									
3 Tenure	7.76	5.86	0.77**	-0.08								
4 Number of child	2.05	0.54	0.27**	-0.12	0.15*							
5 Work time	2.05	0.39	0.05	-0.02	0.09	0.03						
6 FWC	2.39	0.99	0.12	-0.13	-0.01	-0.04	-0.12					
7 WFC	3.38	1.64	0.16*	-0.161*	0.03	-0.08	-0.04	0.64**	(0.95)			
8 Employee well-being	5.47	0.93	-0.10	0.04	0.02	0.08	-0.04	-0.42**	-0.49**	(0.92)		
9 SWFC	4.68	1.26	0.17**	-0.15*	0.132*	0.04	-0.01	0.25*	0.35	-0.11	(0.88)	
10 Gender	1.54	0.50	-0.08	-0.15*	-0.04	-0.03	-0.05	0.09	-0.00	0	-0.09	1

Note. $N = 239$. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. The diagonal is the consistency coefficient. Gender is a dummy variable coded as follows: 1 = male; 2 = female

Hypothesis tests

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted on each variable via SPSS 22.0 to test the moderating effects of gender and SWFC. As summarized in Table 2, employees’ WFC had a significant negative impact on their own well-being (Model 1, $\beta = -0.187, p < 0.01$). H1 was thus supported. Hypotheses 2–4 theorized that SWFC and gender may moderate the negative effect of WFC on well-being. WFC, SWFC, and gender were centered on their grand means, and interaction terms (two-way and three-way) were computed by multiplying the mean-centered predictor variables. We followed the three procedures described by Hayes (2018). In Model 2, SWFC was added as a moderator of the association between employees’ WFC and well-being. This model explained 27.6% of the variance in well-being [$F(8,230) = 10.977, p < 0.01$] and demonstrated a significant interaction effect (Model 2, $\beta = -0.055, p < 0.05$). In Model 3, employee gender was taken as a moderator of the association between employees’ WFC and well-being; it explained 28.3% of the variance [$F(9,229) = 10.032, p < 0.01$] and had a marginally significant interaction effect (Model 3, $\beta = -0.052, p < 0.1$). The two moderators, SWFC and gender, interacted in Model 4 to form a moderated moderation model. The full model explained 31.3% of the variance in employees’ well-being [$F(14,224) = 7.279, p < 0.01$]. We also observed a significant simple negative effect of WFC on employees’ well-being (Model 4, $\beta = -0.235, p < 0.01$). The negative impact of WFC on employees’ well-being was also a function of SWFC (Model 4, $\beta = -0.068, p < 0.05$), lending support to H2. The pattern of this interaction is shown in Fig. 2. In support of the hypothesis, WFC was negatively associated with well-being when SWFC was high ($\beta = -0.190, p < 0.05$) rather than low ($b = -0.051, ns$). The negative impact of WFC on employees’ well-being was not a function of gender ($\beta = -0.052, ns$); as such, H3 was not supported. A three-way interaction manifested between WFC, SWFC, and gender; that is, the moderation of the negative effect of WFC on employees’ well-being by SWFC was a function of the employee’s gender ($\beta = -0.016*, p < 0.05$).

We adopted the bootstrap method to test the significance of triple interaction. If the confidence interval (CI) did not include 0, then the effect was significant. As shown in Table 3, when SWFC exceeded 1 standard deviation for female employees, WFC had a significant negative impact on employees’ well-being ($\beta = -0.71, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-1.0819, -0.3390]$). When SWFC was less than 1 standard deviation, the negative effect of WFC on employees’ well-being was not significant ($\beta = -0.23, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.6870, 0.2298]$). Among male employees, irrespective of whether SWFC was above or below 1 standard deviation, the negative effect of

Table 2 Regression results for three-way interaction in predicting employee well-being

Predictors	Employee well-being			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	-0.148* (-2.182)	-0.117 (-1.793)	-0.113 (-1.714)	-0.103 (-1.556)
Education	-0.044 (-0.601)	-0.062 (-0.878)	-0.069 (-0.961)	-0.049 (-0.692)
Tenure	0.027 (1.818)	0.024 (1.698)	0.024 (1.659)	0.022 (1.533)
Number of child	0.167 (1.571)	0.088 (0.852)	0.110 (1.069)	0.091 (0.890)
Work time	-0.249 (-1.765)	-0.171 (-1.272)	-0.208 (-1.533)	-0.187 (-1.380)
FWC	-0.385** (-6.782)	-0.304** (-8.282)	-0.181* (-2.590)	-0.196** (-2.806)
WFC	-0.187** (-3.421)	-0.192** (-4.017)	-0.200** (-4.693)	-0.235** (-5.308)
SWFC		0.100 (1.948)		-0.113 (-1.240)
Gender			0.004 (0.037)	0.030 (0.274)
WFC*SWFC		-0.055* (-1.991)		-0.068* (-2.190)
Gender*WFC			-0.052+ (0.816)	-0.113+ (-1.623)
SWFC*Gender				-0.142 (-1.464)
				-0.016* (-1.214)
R ²	0.051	0.276	0.283	0.313
Adjusted R ²	0.031	0.251	0.255	0.270
F	F (5,233)=2.523, p=0.030	F (8,230)=10.977, p=0.000	F (9,229)=10.032, p=0.000	F (14,224)=7.279, p=0.000
ΔR ²	0.051	0.225	0.074	0.102
ΔF	F (5,233)=2.523, p=0.030	F (3,230)=23.831, p=0.000	F (3,229)=7.924, p=0.000	F (7,224)=4.772, p=0.000

Note. N=239. +p<0.1, *p<0.05, **p<0.01. Inside the parentheses is the t-value

Fig. 2 Interaction between WFC and SWFC predicting employee’s well-being

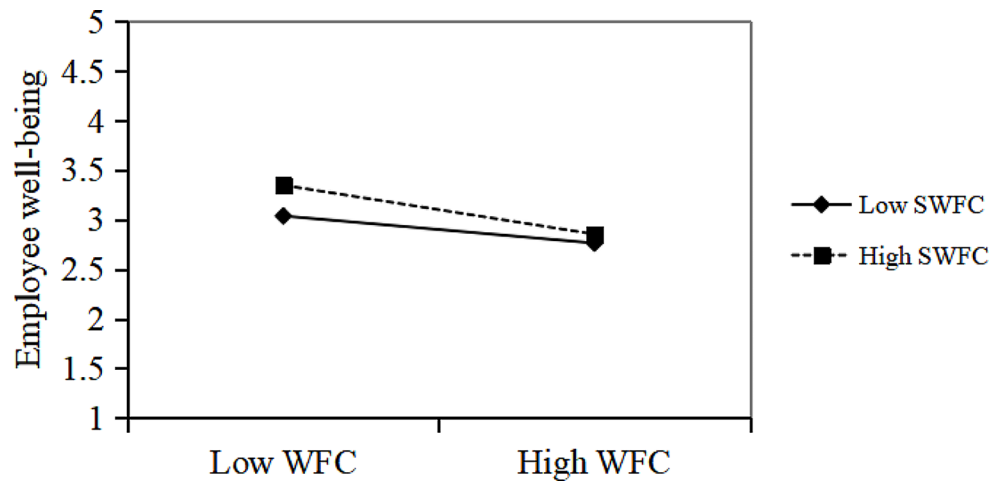


Table 3 Conditional effect of WFC on employee well-being at values of the moderators

GENDER	SWFC	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
1.0000	3.4172	0.1074	0.2576	0.4170	0.6771	-0.4002	0.6150
1.0000	4.6795	-0.0618	0.1530	-0.4038	0.6867	-0.3632	0.2397
1.0000	5.9418	-0.2309	0.2018	-1.1446	0.2536	-0.6286	0.1667
2.0000	3.4172	-0.2286	0.2326	-0.9828	0.3268	-0.6870	0.2298
2.0000	4.6795	-0.4695	0.1370	-3.4276	0.0007	-0.7395	-0.1996
2.0000	5.9418	-0.7104	0.1885	-3.7687	0.0002	-1.0819	-0.3390

Note. N=239. 1 = male; 2 = female

WFC on employees’ well-being was not significant. Therefore, SWFC appeared more likely to reinforce the negative impact of WFC on employees’ well-being among female employees. These results further supported H4.

The conditional negative effect of WFC on employees’ well-being as a function of SWFC and gender is presented

graphically in Fig. 3. Regarding the relationships between WFC and employees’ well-being, the slope of the high SWFC - female combination was significantly different from the other three combinations of SWFC and gender (low-female, high-male, and low-male). The negative relationship between WFC and employees’ well-being was

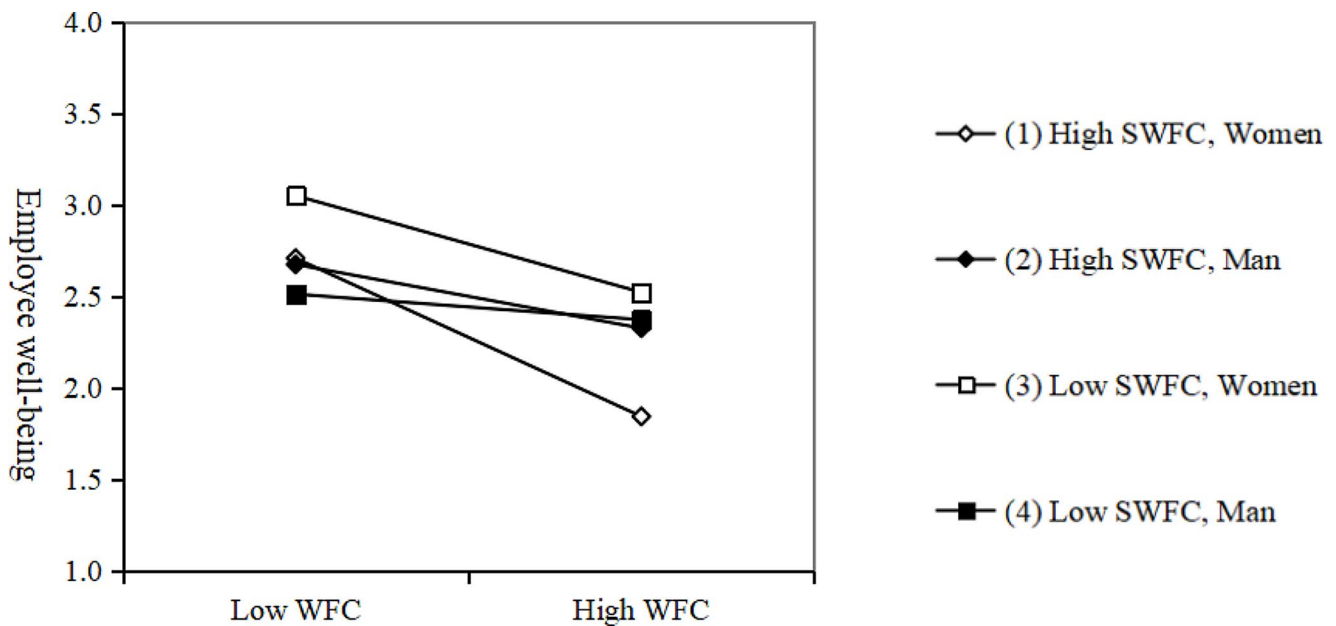


Fig. 3 Interaction between WFC, SWFC, and gender predicting employee's well-being

Table 4 t-test results on WFC for different SWFC and gender

	Means		SD		t-statistics
	Males(<i>n</i> = 109)	Females(<i>n</i> = 130)	Males(<i>n</i> = 109)	Females(<i>n</i> = 130)	
WFC	3.38	3.39	1.05	0.98	1.52
WFC	High SWFC(<i>n</i> = 67)	Low SWFC(<i>n</i> = 66)	High SWFC(<i>n</i> = 67)	Low SWFC(<i>n</i> = 66)	0.83
	4.68	4.09	1.23	1.64	

Note. *N* = 239. The upper and lower 27% rule is used here based on Kelley's (1939) derivation. According to the total score of SWFC from high to low, the top 27% of SWFC was listed as *High SWFC*, and the lower 27% was listed as *Low SWFC*.

most pronounced for female employees with high SWFC, again reinforcing Hypothesis 4.

Supplemental analysis

This study revealed that the strength of an employee's reaction to WFC depends on their gender and whether their spouse experiences WFC. Our results largely aligned with our expectations. However, gender and SWFC may also directly affect WFC. For instance, because women tend to complete more household duties than men, they may experience greater WFC (Cheung & Wong, 2013; Foley et al., 2005). Similarly, employees whose spouses have low WFC undertake fewer family responsibilities and experience less WFC (Greenhaus et al., 1989). The above nuances cannot be ignored when interpreting these moderating effects.

To test this possibility, we conducted *t* tests on WFC using different levels of gender and SWFC. Results are displayed in Table 4. There were no significant differences in our samples. Although generally speaking, women are more sensitive to work-family conflicts, their work intensity and job pressure are lower than that of male employees, which will ease the level of work-family conflicts of female

employees (Cheung & Wong, 2013; Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008). It appears that females employees with a working spouse must adjust how they manage family responsibilities to avoid experiencing more WFC. This result is also aligned with the conclusion of Cheung and Wong (2013), that the moderating effects of gender and spousal working dynamics should not be confounded by their direct effects on WFC.

Discussion and conclusion

Hotel employees are prone to experiencing physical and mental exhaustion due to their work demands. It is noteworthy that excessive dedication of resources to work can impede individual well-being and have repercussions on one's family domain. To examine the impact of WFC, we scrutinized the effect of employees' WFC along with the moderating roles of SWFC and gender among employee's WFC and well-being using a sample of workers from independent hotels in China. WFC's direct effect on well-being was significantly negative.

Consistent with SCM, the experience of WFC exerts a significant emotional toll on employees. The crossover of

psychological experiences is exemplified by situations in which the strain experienced by one spouse (WFC in this study) affects the well-being of the other spouse. In the Chinese context, rising living costs and increased opportunities for higher education have contributed to the growing prevalence of dual-career families. Due to the detrimental impact of long and inflexible working hours on hospitality professionals, who perceive work as crucial for sustaining their family's financial stability, they often possess limited bargaining power with employers and fewer resources to effectively manage issues related to work-family conflict (WFC) or work-family balance (Karapinar et al., 2020). Consequently, employees facing simultaneous pressures from work and family may encounter challenges in achieving a harmonious integration of their familial and professional responsibilities, particularly when their spouse is employed rather than being a non-working partner.

Spouses facing high SWFC may have trouble providing instrumental support, thus depriving their partners of the advice and understanding expected from a spouse. When spouses have low WFC, employees can directly reduce perceived tension and better manage stressful situations by deploying coping mechanisms in the work and family domains (Powell et al., 2009). Consistent with Karapinar et al.'s (2020) proposed model, spousal support appears to reduce the impacts of WFC by lessening the severity of family-related burdens. This finding suggests SWFC as a major attribute inhibiting greater employee well-being.

Surprisingly, neither gender nor the interaction between gender and WFC was found to have a significant effect on employees' well-being. Several studies have nonetheless shown that gender moderates this relationship (Cheung & Wong, 2013; Zhang et al., 2013). This discrepancy may be due to preconditions for the moderating effects of personality traits on WFC, such as employees' views on gender equality. Traditional wives (who have a weak view of gender equality) automatically take on more housework when faced with WFC, whereas egalitarian wives do not; they implement other solutions, such as hiring hourly workers to help with household chores. Li et al.'s (2017) study in China echoes the claim that the moderating effects of an egalitarian gender role orientation convey gender differences. Husbands' egalitarian gender role orientation did not moderate the relationship between wives' WFC and husbands' life satisfaction. However, the moderating role of wives' egalitarian gender role orientation was attenuated rather than enhanced. Coping abilities may also influence how men and women perceive WFC. For instance, Yucel and Fan (2019) found that men are more strongly affected by their own WFC or FWC: compared with women, men have limited experience handling WFC. They also possess smaller social

support networks in general (Williams, 2010), which may render men susceptible to such stressors.

The conclusions of this study can be elucidated more effectively when situated within a specific cultural framework. In the traditional Chinese context, there exists a prevailing notion of men dominate the outside and women dominate the inside. Women typically shoulder greater domestic responsibilities, such as childcare and household management, consequently facing heightened familial pressures (Zhao et al., 2019). Simultaneously, in terms of traditional social roles, societal expectations for women's family duties often surpass those for their professional pursuits; with an emphasis on stability rather than success in the latter domain. Consequently, women encounter less immediate occupational pressure from external factors. While male employees tend to experience greater career-related stress to achieve success, they may have fewer daily family obligations overall since there is no significant disparity in work-family conflict between genders (Cheung & Wong, 2013; Zhao et al., 2019).

Although gender had no significant effect on employees' well-being in this study, the triple interaction of WFC, gender, and SWFC played a notable role. The interaction term between gender and SWFC could strengthen the negative impact of employees' WFC on well-being. The negative relationship between employees' WFC and well-being was strongest when a female employee's spouse had high WFC. China employees are also strongly influenced by Confucian values relating to maintaining one's household. To cope with high living costs, an increasing number of females must find ways to work without sacrificing their traditional social roles of caring for children and the household (Demerouti et al., 2005). Female employees with a working spouse exhibit heightened concerns regarding domestic and childcare responsibilities, often encountering challenges in obtaining comprehensive familial support from their employed partners. The prioritization of family obligations, coupled with inadequate spousal assistance, can engender increased role conflict and time-related stressors for individuals striving to achieve work-family balance (Cheung & Wong, 2013). Consequently, this leaves them with limited time and energy to establish a robust emotional connection with the organization. In this particular context, these working women may experience an overwhelming burden in meeting their family's needs, thereby impeding the development of a high level of well-being.

Theoretical implications

This research makes several contributions to theory. First, we incorporated employees' and spouses' WFC into one framework. Findings thus enrich the understanding of WFC

at the family level. Most other studies have employed a personalized approach, focusing on individual employees while ignoring the influence of the family environment (Molina, 2021). However, China's strong family culture makes Chinese employees deal with work-family conflicts more at the family level rather than the individual level (Aryee et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2014). Scholars have speculated about these crossover effects (e.g., Westman, 2001), but less empirical attention has been paid to them compared to spillover effects (Yucel & Fan, 2019). In the Chinese context, this study explores the impact of work-family conflict on well-being from the family level, which makes the research problem closer to reality and Chinese cultural situation, and enhances the explanatory power of the theory. It also promotes the localization research of work-family conflict.

This study's findings also indicate that SWFC does not merely have a direct relationship with employees' well-being. In fact, we only noticed a marginal impact of SWFC on employees' well-being (see Model 4 in Table 2, $\beta = -0.113$, $p < 0.1$). This variable instead serves as an inhibiting factor that may aggravate consequences among employees suffering from family resource deprivation. Findings offer fresh insight into the antecedents of employees' well-being, underscoring SWFC as a fundamental contextual variable that can diminish well-being even among workers with low WFC.

Second, our study contributes to theory on work and family in general and to the SCM more specifically. Previous studies only examined the negative impact of work-family conflict on individual life satisfaction, but ignored the possible positive effects of their interaction. This investigation proposes and finds that gender and spousal working status are the joint moderators influencing the negative effects of WFC and FWC on well-being. We assembled a complex contingency model to unveil the boundary conditions of employees' WFC. Even though gender did not moderate the relationship between WFC and employees' well-being, it significantly influenced the triple interaction terms of WFC and SWFC. Owing to the strong influence of traditional gender role ideology, Chinese women prioritize family roles over work roles. In addition, Chinese women who take on the primary childcare and household responsibilities are more willing to make sacrifices for their careers, particularly in a collectivist society such as China. Women tended to encounter greater WFC when their husband also experienced a higher degree of such conflict. This association is logical given that women typically hold more family responsibilities than men.

These details also expand the view of gender differences on the family and individual levels. Research on work and family has long demonstrated that these environments can bear adverse effects. Our study clarifies that one's own

characteristics and their partner's work-family conditions matter to well-being. Personal and partner effects should thus be more carefully profiled in health research.

Practical implications

Against the backdrop of intensifying workplace competition and the growing prevalence of dual-earner families, the phenomenon of work-family conflict between spouses has emerged and progressively escalated. Failure to promptly adjust and intervene in this matter will undoubtedly result in significant detrimental consequences for individuals and their families. This study provides implications for how to mitigate the adverse effects of work-family conflict.

Firstly, the results of this study have beneficial implications for tourism managers in the Chinese cultural environment. For instance, organizations can provide family support programs and reasonable working hours to reduce workers' stress. Managers can refer to historical data to determine labor demands for different positions, even though shifts among front-line staff fluctuate due to the unpredictable nature of hotel work. Releasing schedules in advance will help staff and their families arrange activities (Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016). In China's collectivist cultural milieu, enterprises can proactively alter their mindset by prioritizing organizational support and fostering a family-friendly corporate culture instead of adhering to traditional notions like "sacrificing personal time for work performance". Undoubtedly, this approach will facilitate talent retention and foster sustainable development.

Second, considering the significant moderating influence of the spouse's employment status, employees should strive to maintain a moderate level of separation between their work and home domains, refraining from carrying work-related stress and emotions back into their personal lives. It is advisable for hotel organizations to take into account the personal circumstances by identifying whether an employee's spouse is employed and understanding their family structure (e.g., number and age of dependents or elderly relatives). In cases where employees face substantial familial pressures, it would be beneficial to arrange work schedules in a reasonable manner to minimize time conflicts. Additionally, organizations should provide psychological counseling services on work-family conflict (WFC) for all employees as a means to facilitate problem-solving.

Thirdly, the issue of women's status in the workplace warrants greater attention. In collectivist societies, such as China, traditional social roles remain unchanged and the notion of 'men dominate the outside, women dominate the inside' persists without fundamental alteration. When both partners experience work-family conflict (WFC), women bear a heavier burden both professionally and domestically.

Within family life, husbands should demonstrate increased consideration for their wives' familial responsibilities and strive to minimize negative interactions between spouses in order to mitigate the reciprocal impact of WFC.

Finally, as a complement to humanistic management, employees' self-promotion is important. Striving to enlarge one's work-based competencies through training can benefit efficiency, minimize time-based WFC, and bolster job performance. Employees also need to arrange their time reasonably and communicate effectively with their loved ones in order to balance work and family.

Limitations and future directions

This study investigates the work-family relationship of hotel employees in China, taking into account the work status of spouses at the family level. However, there is a dearth of analysis on the unique factors pertaining to the family characteristics. For one hand, the framework does not consider the influence of marriage years, but Cheng et al. (2014) found that marriage years influence marital quality (the level of mutual accommodation) for wives in China. Furthermore, marital quality also impacts overall health levels (Robles et al., 2013). Future research can explore how marriage years influence the effects of work-family conflict, to enrich the research on WFC issues at the household level. On the other hand, given China's deep-rooted influence from traditional Confucian culture and its emphasis on familial importance, the social and economic structure of China revolves around families. Against this backdrop, several novel and intriguing research questions emerge that warrant investigation—for instance, how multi-generational dynamics impact family interactions. The significance of family and the transmission of child-rearing values in Chinese culture often results in retired individuals assuming the responsibility of raising grandchildren, while many dual-income families rely on their elders for childcare support, thereby offering distinctive familial resources. However, Mustillo et al. (2021) highlighted that such living arrangements may give rise to disparities in values, behaviors, and other aspects due to intergenerational differences. The cohabitation of multiple generations in the same household can lead to conflicts between family and work, as individual resources may be consumed due to factors such as generation gap and interference in private space. Therefore, it is necessary to explore whether this unique Chinese family phenomenon has advantages or disadvantages, and whether it can effectively mitigate work-family conflict among Chinese employees and foster positive work-family relationships.

Although work-family issues have gained attention, the conflict and benefits arise from the broader macro-level

context they reside in. However, existing empirical studies have overlooked “macro factors”, with only few study exploring “government administrative efficiency” (Heras et al., 2021). Yet, the influence of macro-factors like social policies on work-family dynamics cannot be ignored. For example, China's implementation of the two-child policy since 2016 has strained Chinese employees' work-family relationships due to increased childcare responsibilities. Many Chinese families now face challenges related to division of labor and achieving a work-family balance. To address its aging population issue proactively, China is optimizing its birth policy further—a crucial macro factor to consider in studying work and family dynamics. Future research should prioritize examining the macro-contextual aspects of work-family by expanding upon the SCM and exploring individuals' diverse responses to various macro factors.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the measurement of well-being in our study was based on static (i.e., cross-sectional) data, while this concept inherently possesses dynamic characteristics. As employees' well-being encompasses both positive and negative emotional experiences (Yucel & Fan, 2019), its level may be influenced by their perceptions of work and life. Longitudinal research conducted by Matthews et al. (2014) revealed that the impact of work-family conflict on well-being was initially negative but became positive after a 6-month follow-up period. Subsequent research may incorporate methodologies such as long-term job logs to effectively monitor the well-being of workers and capture more comprehensive fluctuations in their mental state.

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Data availability The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Ethical considerations The study was approved by the internal ethical committee at Hangzhou Vocational & Technical College and Zhejiang Gongshang University. The respondents had given an informed consent to participate in the surveys.

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