

Telecommuting Article Critique

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The article "Telecommuting's Differential Impact on Work-Family Conflict: Is There No Place Like Home?" written by Timothy D. Golden from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and John F. Veiga and Zeki Simsek from the University of Connecticut (2006) analyzed the differentiated impact of telecommuting on both work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC). It addressed the limitations of the previously conducted research, resolved inconsistencies, and contributed to the comprehensive understanding of telecommuting on the work-family partnership. Moreover, they broadened the research model to include three factors that would magnify the impact: job autonomy, scheduling flexibility, and household size.

The study was conducted on 454 telecommuting employees out of 1,261 full-time employees of a large tech firm. The 1,261 were randomly chosen to participate and were contacted via email by senior management. The 454 employees that responded all graduated from college, married, and the average age was 37 years old. The researchers used a web-based survey, which was anonymous and confidential. The demographics were 65% men and 35% women. The researchers reported that the sample reflected the same gender configuration in the "population of professional-level telecommuters at large" (p. 1344). The respondents averaged four years of telecommuting and averaged 18.9 hours per week out of a 45 hours work week period.

Six measures were used, developed by Carlson et al. (2000); three were used to measure the relation between WFC and time. Contrarily, three were used to measure WFC and psychological strain at home due to telecommuting. Similarly, the researchers used another six of Carlson et al.'s items to measure FWC and time spent on family responsibilities and FWC and psychological strain such as tension and anxiety that would interfere with the individuals' ability

to do their job. Consequently, respondents were also asked on the survey how many hours they worked at home to assess the extent of telecommuting. In addition, to verify the reliability, they subsequently asked them what percentage of their workweek they spent telecommuting. A four-item measure developed by Langfred (2000) was used to assess job autonomy - the freedom and control they had to decide what jobs had to be done; however, to sustain the measure's reliability, the researchers dropped one of them.

Furthermore, to measure scheduling flexibility, the researchers used a five-item measure developed by Pierce and Newstorm (1983) to assess how much flexibility the respondents had to choose when they worked and if their schedule was independent of others. Similarly, household size was calculated by including a spouse, significant other/partner, children, and any elderly living at home. Researchers also included controlled variables such as age, gender, management levels, and tenure based on previous research. Lastly, researchers controlled for the impact of FWC and vice versa when they tested for the extent of telecommuting on WFC; this was done to control for any unspecified feelings of conflict that could flow over between the two constructs.

The results were divided into two tables and three figures. Table 1 showed correlations for each measure and Table 2 showed regression analysis for each moderator. The three figures demonstrated the extent of telecommuting concerning each moderator, such as job autonomy, scheduling flexibility, and household size. As shown in Table 2, the results supported Hypothesis 1, which suggested that "the more extensively individuals telecommute, the lower their WFC" (p. 1345). In addition, Table 2 also supported Hypothesis 2, which suggested: "a positive relationship between the extent of telecommuting and FWC" (p. 1345). Therefore, the FWC is higher when individuals telecommute more. However, Hypothesis 3a was partially supported, and results suggested that "although lower levels of autonomy enhance the effects of extent of

telecommuting on WFC, higher levels do not" (p. 1345).

Nevertheless, the results found no support for Hypothesis 3b that "predicted that job autonomy would moderate the positive relationship between telecommuting and FWC" (p. 1345). Furthermore, Hypothesis 4a shown in Table 2 (Model 1, Step 4), "which predicted that scheduling flexibility would moderate the negative relationship between extent of telecommuting and WFC was supported" (p. 1345). It meant that remote workers with high flexibility working from home had a significant negative relationship with WFC. Likewise, for those employees with low flexibility, a close relationship was discovered.

Unfortunately, Hypothesis 4b was not supported by the study as shown in (Model 2, Step 4) since it did not predict that scheduling flexibility would have a positive relationship between working remotely and FWC. Likewise, Hypothesis 5a was not supported by the study because it did not predict that a household size had a negative relationship between telecommuting and WFC. However, Hypothesis 5b was supported since it predicted a positive relationship between telecommuting and FWC. As shown in Figure 3, it suggested that, "although larger households exacerbate the effects of telecommuting on FWC, smaller households do not. Furthermore, when "scheduling flexibility is high, WFC decreases at a faster rate, as expected" (p. 1345).

The research study provided a more involved telecommuting model and its impact on WFC by focusing on its differential impact on WFC and FWC. Overall, the study concluded that the more exhaustively an employee telecommutes, the less work interferes with family, diminishing WFC. Conversely, FWC increases as the family interferes with work. The study also showed that employees who had less autonomy had a significant reduction in WFC. However, there was no significant decline in WFC for employees who had more job autonomy regardless of how much they telecommuted. In addition, results also suggested that telecommuters who

have greater flexibility in deciding when to work have a lower WFC. Therefore, working from home is additionally enhanced when telecommuters have more prominent families.

Consequently, there is no critical change in FWC for those with smaller households independent of working from home.

Some limitations of the study are that researchers cannot conclusively say whether working from home reduces WFC but can only conclude that the degree of working from home is negatively connected with WFC. Likewise, the study design cannot exclude the likelihood of reverse/reciprocal causality between working from home and WFC. Furthermore, there are limitations on the study design since the survey used was a self-reported method. Nevertheless, researchers are aware that the self-report and cross-sectional facets of their design can limit the extent to which they can place confidence in the interpretations presented. However, the researchers believed that their study brought insight into the differential impact of telecommuting on WFC and provided a suitable platform for more extensive research to clarify its many perspectives. Although the study identified tradeoffs between WFC and FWC, its design did not depict other benefits of fusing work and family that "role enhancement theory may outweigh the strains' (p. 1348). Perhaps researchers will discover that although FWC increases as employees telecommute exhaustively, telecommuters also encounter significant family enrichment that offsets FWC.

In conclusion, the study produced significant results; however, there were limitations to how the study was conducted. Naturally, employed adults encounter WFC when requests and strain arise from both work and family role expectations. Therefore, compliance "with one role would make it more difficult" to comply with the other (p. 1341). Telecommuting has been perceived, as a method for decreasing conflict since it facilitates employees to manage better the

demands of work to oblige family needs willingly. Nevertheless, others have seen telecommuting as an origin of conflict due to closer proximity and greater accessibility to the individual, contributing to work's detriment.

Nonetheless, this study contributes to the more extensive comprehension of telecommuting on a work-family relationship. Researchers agree that there is much to know about the "full extent of the tradeoffs involved in everyday practice, as our findings suggest an upside and a downside" (p. 1348). However, telecommuting in some situations can contribute positively to more significant enrichment of family life.

References

- Golden, T. D., Veiga, J. F., & Simsek, Z. (2006). Telecommuting's differential impact on work-family conflict: Is there no place like home? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*(6), 1340–1350. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.6.1340>