



The Work–Family Interface Around the World: Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

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Introduction

All over the world, working men and women are struggling to manage their work and family responsibilities. This continual juggling act is detrimental to both their work and their family lives. As a result, understanding and promoting work–family (W–F) balance has become a top agenda item for business and government leaders worldwide. The purpose of this article is to provide workers, their families, and policy makers in organizations and governments with insights, advice, and recommendations for policies and practices that will ease the strain of working parents in different parts of the globe.

A recent, global study, known as Project 3535, was directed at understanding the W–F interface (i.e., how both the negative and the positive aspects of work and family interact with one another) and its impact on the lives of working parents. The study was also aimed at identifying those W–F processes that applied to all countries versus those that were specific to certain cultural situations. Given that Project 3535 contains the most comprehensive data on the W–F interface to date, this article focuses on the implications of the results from Project 3535 to make recommendations about policies and practices that have the potential to alleviate the negative impacts of W–F conflict in different parts of the world. Wherever relevant, recommendations are supplemented with findings from the few other multinational W–F studies that have been carried out.

Project 3535

Project 3535 was a cross-cultural study that included 10 countries on four continents. These were Australia, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Israel, Spain, Taiwan, Turkey, and the United States (US). Data were gathered from nearly 3,000 married/cohabiting individuals who were organizationally employed and who had at least one dependent child below the age of 21 years living in the household. The sample was balanced in terms of gender and job position, with roughly equal percentages of men and women, and managers and non-managers.

Project 3535 examined both the negative and the positive sides of the W–F interface. On the negative side, W–F conflict occurs when work and family roles interfere with each other, for example, when long work days or work-related travel prevent you from being at home for dinner or a sick child leaves you too tired to function optimally at work. By contrast, W–F positive spillover can occur when experiences at work have a positive effect on family life or when things that happen in the family domain have a positive effect on what occurs at work. Both W–F conflict and W–F positive spillover are bidirectional, with work-to-family (WTF) and family-to-work (FTW) components. Thus, an individual could simultaneously experience WTF conflict and FTW conflict, as well as positive spillover from WTF and FTW.

In Project 3535, the work- and family-related precursors of conflict and positive spillover (such as work overload/family overload; job control/family control) and work- and family-related outcomes (such as turnover intention, family satisfaction, and life satisfaction) of the W–F interface were investigated. In addition, the study examined how gender, contextual factors (e.g., organization size, family composition), social and organizational support, and coping strategies interacted with culture to affect the W–F interface.

The countries included in Project 3535 were categorized into two groups. The Anglo/European countries (Australia, Canada, Israel, Spain, and the US) ranked higher on the UN indices of economic and human development. These countries also scored higher on measures of individualism, gender equity, and gender-role egalitarianism, and tended to have more institutionalized W–F policies and supports. The Asian countries (China, India, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Turkey) ranked lower on the UN indices of economic and human development. These countries were also more collectivistic and were characterized by greater gender inequity, more traditional gender-role attitudes, and a greater reliance on support from extended family members.

Main Findings of Project 3535 Regarding the W–F Interface

The methodology and findings from Project 3535 are detailed in the 2017 book, *The Work-Family Interface in Global Context*, edited by K. Korabik, Z. Aycan, and R. Ayman. We present here those findings that are most relevant for W–F interventions.

Findings That Were Similar Across All Countries

W–F conflict was detrimental, while W–F positive spillover was beneficial. W–F conflict was associated with several negative outcomes for employed parents. For example, WTF and FTW conflict were predictive of lower psychological well-being, family

satisfaction, and life satisfaction, as well as higher turnover intentions (i.e., intent to quit one's job and/or look for another one), as measured by participant responses to scale measures. By contrast, positive spillover, both WTF and FTW, was associated with higher family satisfaction and lower turnover intentions.

A high rate of employee turnover can be detrimental to organizations. When knowledgeable and experienced personnel leave and replacements need to be found and trained to assume positions of responsibility, it can be costly to employers and have a direct negative impact on an organization's efficiency and effectiveness. In general, turnover is significantly harmful to organizational performance. Project 3535 results imply that interventions to decrease W–F conflict and increase W–F positive spillover are imperative for organizations that wish to enhance employee well-being and decrease turnover worldwide.

Job control increased WTF positive spillover, whereas family control increased FTW positive spillover. Job control refers to an employee's ability to influence what happens in their work environment. It includes the autonomy to determine how, when, and where work should be done, as well as the authority to make decisions that affect their work. Family control is a parallel concept referring to the ability to exert control over things that happen in the family environment. Project 3535 results suggest that it would be beneficial to create opportunities for employed parents to have greater control/autonomy in the work as well as the family domain. It should be recognized that many family events (e.g., dealing with a sick child or aging parent) have an element of unpredictability that makes it more difficult for an individual to exert control over them compared to their ability to control work conditions and tasks. Still, many services and supports such as flexible work scheduling, the capacity to telework, and access to high quality child care and home care services would allow individuals to have greater control in the family domain.

Satisfaction with family-friendly workplace policies (FFWP) was related to positive outcomes. These outcomes included lower turnover intentions for both men and women in all countries except Turkey and lower WTF conflict and/or higher positive spillover in most countries.

Results from Project 3535 revealed considerable differences between countries in both the kinds of FFWP available and in employees' access to flexible work options and employer-provided services to support work and family roles. Despite this variation, there was a strong desire by employees to have access to flexible scheduling and reduced-hours options, leave to care for a sick family member, and support in dealing with family and personal emergency absences. As is often the case, women who did not have access to or had not used such policies were significantly more likely than men to believe that they would be helpful for improving W–F balance. These findings imply that organizations may be able to reduce turnover and retain talented personnel by implementing more FFWPs that satisfy their employees' needs.

Greater social support from spouse/partner was associated with lower WTF conflict. This suggests that family-based interventions focused on increasing support from the spouse or partner may need to be encouraged across countries.

Setting priorities at work was related to lower WTF and FTW conflict. Interventions that focus on helping men and women employees worldwide understand how to prioritize their work may help ease the negative aspects of the W–F interface.

Employees with greater work or family demands were more susceptible to W–F conflict. For example, those in managerial jobs experienced more FTW conflict than those in non-managerial jobs. Managerial jobs are generally characterized by greater autonomy and flexibility, but this is often accompanied by higher burden in the form of greater work overload. Although it is tempting to consider interventions aimed at reducing work overload for managers, these may not be practical given the inherent nature of those jobs. Instead, results of Project 3535 suggest that interventions aimed at teaching managers how to better prioritize tasks and allowing them more job control may be more feasible. Similarly, those on full-time schedules (i.e., who worked more hours) reported greater WTF conflict than part-time workers. Finally, employed parents with younger children

Job control...includes the autonomy to determine how, when, and where work should be done, as well as the authority to make decisions that affect their work



reported greater FTW conflict and higher turnover intentions, but also greater life satisfaction, compared to those with older children. This finding suggests that working parents of younger children may need more childcare support across the world, even as they find their parenting roles fulfilling.

Findings That Were Different Across Countries

In Anglo/European more so than in Asian countries, high work overload was associated with high levels of WTF conflict. High WTF conflict reduced employed parents' ability to balance their work and family responsibilities with ease, thereby reducing their satisfaction in the performance of these roles, as well as their satisfaction with family and life in general (except for Spain), and increasing their intention of quitting their job (except in Australia). These results are congruent with the findings of previous W-F research showing that work overload is more strongly predictive of WTF conflict in individualistic than in collectivistic cultures. This implies that more efforts are needed to reduce work overload in these countries.

In Asian more so than in Anglo/European countries, higher family overload was associated with higher FTW conflict and turnover intent. Extended family living situations are more prevalent in Asian countries. These can create a web of reciprocal obligations and support expectations that may result in higher levels of family demands and overload and more FTW conflict. The primacy of family ties in these cultures means that individuals may be more likely to get overwhelmed with their family duties and responsibilities. As one of our participants, a man from Taiwan, stated, "Social and family events like a death in the family, festivals and ceremonies, attending weddings and funerals... all these can come in the way of work." Our results suggest that employers in collectivistic countries may need to be sensitive to their employees' cultural and family obligations.

To be most effective therefore, interventions will require culture-specific and organization-specific customization. In Anglo/European countries efforts to decrease WTF conflict may focus particularly on reducing work overload, whereas in Asian countries, employers might consider ways to be sensitive to family demands as a way of lowering WTF and FTW conflict to ultimately reduce turnover.

Of note, India and China differed from the other Asian countries in the study in at least two ways. First, work overload (rather than family overload) led to higher FTW conflict in these countries, and second, higher WTF conflict was related to higher, rather than lower, family satisfaction. Given the burgeoning economy of these countries, coupled with their emphasis on family values, it appears that, even though stressed, working people in these countries, rather than pushing back on families, still accommodate family demands. At the same time, work overload, even when it contributes to WTF conflict, creates limited negative consequences for family, as work is seen as a necessary sacrifice for the family. India and China will probably require a combination of the interventions suggested for Anglo/European and collectivistic countries concurrently aimed at ameliorating heavy demands in the work and family spheres.

Although job and family control were helpful to employed parents in all countries, those in the Asian countries benefited more from having greater job and family control. Greater autonomy may be especially beneficial to employees in these countries because the collectivistic culture of these countries is likely to downplay autonomy.

In Anglo/European countries, setting priorities at home was related to lower W-F conflict, but trying to "do it all" at home and at work was related to higher W-F conflict. In other words, adopting a coping strategy that involved prioritizing tasks at home was effective, whereas trying to do everything yourself at home and at work was ineffective in reducing WTF conflict, especially for women. Furthermore, trying to do it all at work led to greater FTW conflict for both men and women

[A]dopting a coping strategy that involved prioritizing tasks at home was effective, whereas trying to do everything yourself at home and at work was ineffective in reducing WTF conflict



Overall Approach to W-F Interventions

The contributors to and outcomes of the negative and positive aspects of the W-F interface (conflict and positive spillover) are multi-level, multifaceted, and multidirectional. Consequently, we recommend basing W-F interventions on the following broad principles:

- a. W–F interventions need to be multilevel and should occur simultaneously at the organizational, family, and societal level. W–F interventions also need to be multilevel within organizations at the leadership, manager/supervisor, and the employee levels.
- b. W–F interventions across different levels should be in alignment with each other so that they are effectively able to move the needle on outcomes from the negative to the positive direction.
- c. W–F interventions need to be customized, so that deficiencies at one level can be compensated for at another level depending on the context or societal culture. As the organizational context is critical to the success of an organizational intervention, it too must be studied as part of the process of implementation.

Figure 1 summarizes specific W–F recommendations suggested at the organizational, family, and governmental/societal levels.

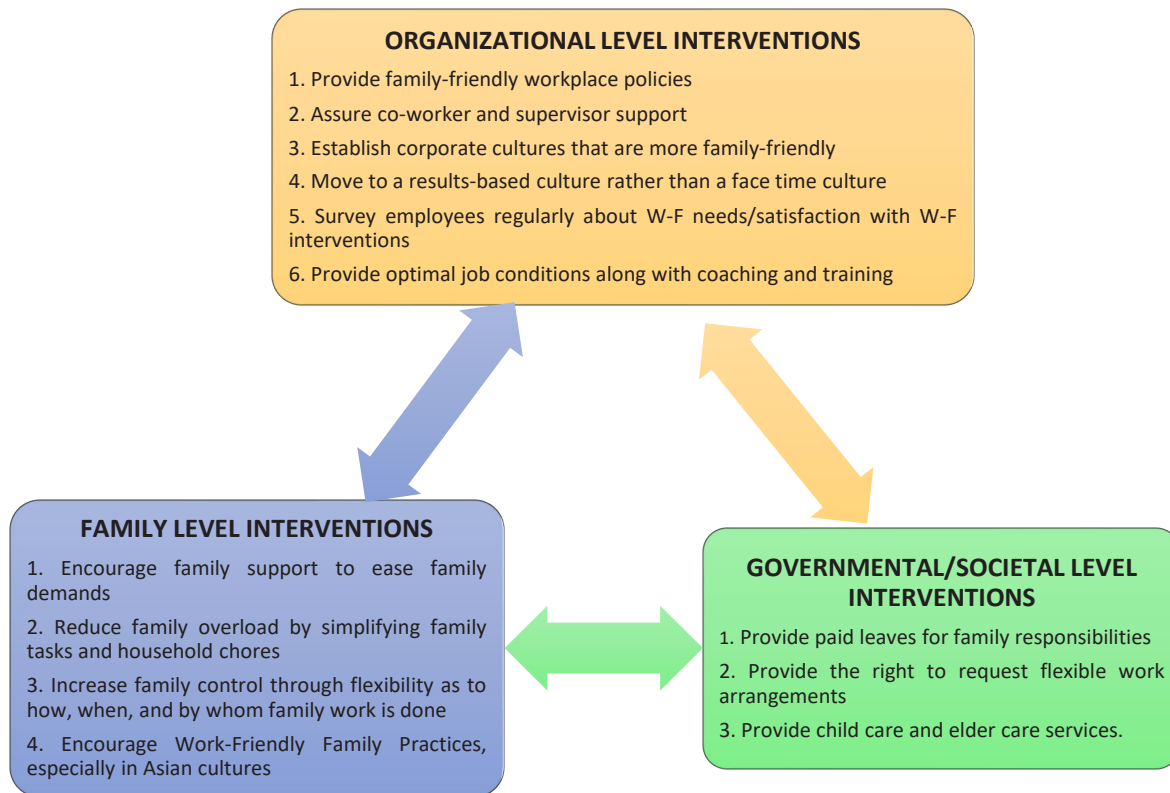


Figure 1: Multilevel work–family intervention.

Interventions at the Organizational Level

In line with the results of research carried out in North America, Project 3535 found that in all the countries studied, work obligations intruded into family life to a much greater extent than family obligations intruded into work. This speaks to the need to change organizational cultures, structures, and systems so that they provide better support to workers, because previous research has demonstrated that the provision of workplace support helps employees to better manage their work and family roles.

Develop and support family-friendly workplace policies and practices (FFWPs). The main workplace strategies for reducing W–F stress and corresponding negative outcomes, such as turnover and turnover intentions, include FFWPs that increase control over aspects of work and training supervisors to provide more support for W–F integration. FFWPs include a variety of options for employees to increase their flexibility and control over when, where, and how they conduct their work (i.e., the timing, scheduling, and location of work). See Table 1 for some examples of FFWPs.

Project 3535 results indicate that opportunities for reduced workload options that allow for adjustment of work hours based on the needs of the employee may be especially valuable for workers in Anglo/European countries, where high workloads are particularly problematic. However, when designing effective ways to offer choice in adjustments to work hours, it is important to reduce working hours and workload simultaneously. A reduction in working hours may not show the intended positive effect on W–F conflict, if the workload is not reduced accordingly. Further, policies that presumably provide flexibility or reduced work hours will not be used if employees feel that doing so is not supported by their supervisor or that by utilizing such options they are putting their job or career opportunities at risk. Therefore, it is important that organizations address policy-practice/implementation gaps.

Table 1

Types of Family Friendly Work Practices

<p>Work load flexibility: Flexibility regarding workload or amount of work. Can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time schedules: such as regular 3-day workweeks/working 20 hours per week/setting a new schedule each week. • Job sharing: occurs when two workers share the responsibilities of a full-time job, each working on a part-time basis. <p><i>Challenges:</i> Employees may not take up part-time options because they need the money; part-time job options can be of poor quality that can compromise long term career growth and development particularly for women</p>
<p>Work time flexibility: Flexibility regarding when work is done. Can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flextime: alternative start and end times for employee but total weekly or daily hours worked are the same as those for other regular full-time employees. • Compressed work week: compress full-time job responsibilities into fewer than 5 days per week or fewer than 10 days in 2 weeks. E.g. over the course of a 2-week period, an employee might work an extra hour per day Monday through Friday of one week and an extra hour per day Monday through Thursday of a second week to have every other Friday off. • Flexible shift work: involves work that is outside of standard work hours and frequently includes working at night. E.g. a husband and wife entering into an arrangement to ensure their shifts are staggered so they can meet family obligations, or an employee entering into an arrangement that ensures that s/he will not have to work an evening or overnight shift, or an employee trading a shift with a cross-trained coworker so s/he can have time off. • Part year or seasonal work schedule: flexibility is built in over the course of a year rather than over the course of a week or a day. E.g. a tax accountant can work many more hours during the busy tax season and then be able to work fewer hours during the summer months. <p><i>Challenges:</i> Can have differential effects on full- versus part-time workers at upper, middle, and lower echelons in companies; success depends critically on employee awareness and employer support - “disgruntled non-requestors” often perceive that requests for work flexibility will jeopardize job security/ career advancement, thereby making them more likely leave their jobs and seek alternative employment elsewhere.</p>
<p>Place flexibility - Flexibility regarding where work is done. Can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-based telework: working remotely from home with the help of telecommunications technology. • Satellite offices or neighborhood work centers: several employees work from a single location away from the main worksite that is convenient to both employees and customers. • Hoteling: employers assign office space on an as-needed basis to employees who frequently work offsite. <p><i>Challenges:</i> Can increase worker overwork, burnout and isolation, especially if organizations fail to conduct a business analysis to estimate how much of a job can be performed as well at home as in the office prior to embarking on telework programs.</p>
<p>Other types of flexibility: provide employees with the opportunity to alter their work arrangement or the trajectory of their career to balance W-F demands. Can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time off or time away - such as vacations and sabbaticals • Leave policies: for maternity/paternity issues, eldercare, education • Career path flexibility: a consultant moving from a travel-oriented client-facing job to a support role in the main office location <p><i>Challenges:</i> Not easily applicable to all industry sectors and types of jobs</p>

Table 2 lists important Dos and Don'ts to consider while offering FFWPs.

Table 2
Dos and Don'ts of Offering Family Friendly Workplace Practices (FFWPs)

DOs	DON'Ts
Do offer FFWPs both at a formal and informal level.	Do not offer flexibility or adjustment of work hours without also reducing workload.
Do ensure that FFWPs are voluntary for the employee and that employer and employee agree on when, where, and how work is to be done.	Do not offer FFWPs without simultaneously training supervisors at various levels to display family supportive behaviors.
Do ensure that employees are aware of FFWPs and can avail of them when required: use company newsletters, employee handbooks, and onboarding practices if required.	Do not offer FFWPs without simultaneously working to make the overall corporate culture more family friendly.
Do ensure that employees are satisfied with the way FFWPs are implemented: regularly survey employees.	Do not introduce FFWPs without also working to move away from a face-time work culture to a more results based culture.
Do actively encourage and support employees, especially managers, to utilize flexible work arrangements.	Do not forget to customize FFWPs to the cultural context.

Assure supervisor and coworker support. Supervisor support for family has been shown to be beneficial in many cultural contexts. Interventions that include training supervisors on family-supportive behaviors and how to implement flexible work options effectively have been linked to reduced W–F conflict, increased job satisfaction, and decreased turnover intentions in previous studies. Previous research also has shown that coworker support for W–F balance is related to lower WTF conflict and turnover intentions, as well as greater WTF positive spillover and job satisfaction. By contrast, coworker resentment/antagonism toward W–F balance has been shown to inhibit the use of FFWPs. Given this evidence, it seems incumbent upon organizations to implement training for managers and supervisors at all levels to display family supportive supervisory behaviors, and to develop similar programs aimed at increasing coworker support and reducing coworker resentment/antagonism around W–F issues.

It should be kept in mind that the types of behaviors that employees view as supportive may differ in different cultural contexts. For example, employees in collectivist cultures may view certain behaviors from a supervisor such as a manager visiting a sick employee at their home as appropriate, whereas those in individualistic cultures may see such behavior as intruding on their privacy. Thus, there is a need to adapt FFWPs and family-supportive supervisory behavior to relevant cultural norms.

Establish corporate cultures that are more family friendly. This would involve changing prevalent assumptions that W–F balance is an issue that applies only to women; changing expectations about workloads and working in the evening, on weekends, and on vacations; and adjusting travel schedules to give employees more time at home. Project 3535 results suggest that changing corporate cultures may be especially helpful for employees in traditionally gender unequal and family-oriented Asian cultures where employees were found to overaccommodate work demands into an already demanding family sphere.

Move from face time to results-based organizational cultures. The first step here would be to conduct a cultural audit/review. The real overhaul would be a change in how work is perceived and how hours are perceived—so a change from “how many hours did you spend” to “what was accomplished” would be necessary. While implementing a results-based culture however, organizations would need to be careful not to interpret this to mean “results at any cost. For instance, even though sometimes it may be time inefficient to meet in the workplace rather than work remotely, there can be positive benefits of colleagues eating lunch together or meeting face to face in the office space. A change away from a face time culture may also be more difficult to achieve in collectivistic societies due to Confucian values that pressure employees to stay with their teammates until all work is accomplished and not to leave work until their boss leaves.

Survey employees. As a prelude to culture change initiatives, organizations should monitor employee use of W–F programs and regularly survey employees about their needs for and satisfaction with W–F policies, just as they would conduct job

satisfaction or employee engagement surveys. Employees can be asked about what a family-friendly workplace looks like to them (what it consists of) and a consensus among employees can be developed, which is then implemented. In addition, program evaluation should be undertaken.

Provide optimal job conditions along with coaching and training. Jobs can be redesigned to help employees work more efficiently and/or be restructured to slim down roles and expectations. It may be necessary to manage the expectations of customers and clients through client/customer education. Organizations can also play a role in providing employees with information and skills-based training regarding setting boundaries and priorities. This would involve assisting them with goal setting and helping them set more realistic targets. Employees should be encouraged to have regular discussions with managers about their work priorities. Technology could assist with this; better use of communication technology for work and planning and scheduling tools and techniques could be encouraged. Moreover, coaching employees to understand and articulate their personal career goals and work priorities could serve to alleviate W–F conflict experienced by working men and women worldwide.

Interventions at the Family Level

Interventions at the family level often focus on reducing family demands and overload and/or increasing family control and autonomy. These may be particularly important in Asian cultures due to the centrality of family life in these contexts.

Encourage family support to ease family demands. Family support has been found to alleviate W–F conflict, especially if it is needed and perceived to be useful. Project 3535 found that spousal support was helpful in reducing WTF conflict. Family support from other sources such as extended family members and paid household helpers can be encouraged but only if it provides helpful rather than unhelpful support. For example, the study results showed that paid household help could be related to higher instead of lower W–F conflict.

Spousal/partner support, both emotional and instrumental, can be encouraged through couple counseling and family/marital counseling programs. Although not currently very popular, these are likely to be more helpful and needed in Asian countries where family demands are higher. The social taboo associated with seeking couples counseling in these contexts could be minimized by offering these programs as part of employee assistance programs in organizations, through health care professionals' offices to improve mental and emotional well-being and minimize stress, or even through school counseling programs targeted at working parents and working couples, because academic success of children is highly valued in Asian contexts.

Reduce family overload by simplifying family tasks and household chores. Family demands can be eased by simplifying family tasks and scheduling issues surrounding child, elder, pet, and household care through the utilization of concierge services; food, grocery, and laundry delivery services; personal assistants; housekeepers, and so forth. In developed country contexts these services, though formally available, can be expensive. In lesser developed country contexts, these services though inexpensive are less reliable because a formalized market place for them is still lacking. For instance, paid household help, though frequently available in Asian countries, is known to be informal and unprofessional in nature, as a quote from a working woman from Indonesia reflects, "My servant is not skillful, so I have to teach her all the time. She is now pretty good at handling domestic chores... However, another problem appeared when she had a boyfriend...she often disappeared... so I made a schedule for her when she could leave home for dating...I asked her for cooperation to obey the schedule."

Reduce family overload by redefining family roles through education and awareness building. New meaning systems, values, and patterns of behavior can be encouraged within the family to increase family and life satisfaction. In gender inequalitarian cultures especially, some restructuring of family roles and responsibilities and reallocation of tasks may be required so that family demands fall more equitably on family members. Redefining what it means to be a good wife, good parent, good spouse, good daughter/daughter-in-law, and so forth in a manner that reduces or rationalizes expectations of family behaviors could allow family demands to be more sustainable with work demands. It could prevent women from trying to become

Family support has been found to alleviate W–F conflict, especially if it is needed and perceived to be useful.



superwomen and adopting coping strategies of trying to do everything at home as was evidenced in our study. Similarly, cultural changes can reinforce more active father involvement and men's roles in caregiving. This would require a stance of education to be taken up by companies and/or society. Just as companies have a "take a child to work day," in Asian cultures especially, companies could plan a "take a parent or parent-in-law to work" day, so that parents of (women) employees can get a realistic sense of work demands. As one working woman from Indonesia mentioned, "I get stressed when facing my husband's family. They often come to my house and spend a long time at my house. Especially my sister-in-law, she doesn't care whether I am busy or not. She insists on me accompanying her just for sightseeing and shopping."

Increase family control through flexibility as to how, when, and by whom family work is done. We found that having family control was related to higher FTW positive spillover. Although family "events" such as sickness of children or the needs of elderly family members may not be predictable, more control could be exercised over decision making surrounding how to handle these events. Services that offer doctors or sitters on demand, before and after school pick ups and drops offs on demand, 24-hour urgent care clinics, online shopping for groceries, 24-hour lockers to receive online deliveries and packages, and so on, could allow for more control of family matters. The market for such services is very under developed in some parts of the world providing a space for more interventions in this area. Employers might also consider how resource and referral programs might assist employees to find child care and home care services, and/or information or support regarding parenting or caregiving.

Encourage work-friendly family practices especially in Asian cultures. Just as we have family-friendly workplace practices, in Asian cultures especially, employees could benefit from the adoption of work-friendly family practices (WFFP) within the family. This would require a moving away from the current overaccommodation of work into the family sphere as is culturally prevalent (wherein work is seen as a duty toward family), to a more pragmatic response to managing family demands. This could include, for instance, advance preparation of meals; online grocery shopping; scheduled professional home cleaning services; event planners for family and religious festivals; and professional elder, child, and hospice care services. In emerging market economies such as India, China, and Turkey, some of these services are starting to be seen in urban areas. For instance, in Turkey there are "grandparent training sessions" available that orient older generations to the demands of the lifestyles of younger working couples. In China, there are phone apps available to schedule short term child care/sitters. Because these services are new and quality control could be an issue, organizations could play a role in vetting and developing a network of these that could be referred to employees or offered to them as a benefit based on their tenure in the company. This may have the added advantage of reducing turnover and the intention to quit the workplace due to family overload and WF conflict. In some developed countries where college tuition is expensive, organizational benefits could include partial or full remission of college expenses for employees or their dependent children. Social/governmental policies could play a supportive role in the use of such services through tax deduction programs or, alternatively through public investments to lower tuition costs.

Interventions at the Government and Societal Level

Government policies that are pertinent to promoting W-F reconciliation are varied across the globe and reflect different goals, histories, views of the role of the state in health and social care, and institutional mechanisms. Public policies and programs may require or encourage employers to provide certain benefits to employees that complement what governments provide directly or through public agencies. Moreover, government policies and programs are critical for developing and promoting social norms and values that reflect the rights of workers to fair and equitable treatment, environments that protect their health and safety, and practices that help employees meet their obligations in earning and caregiving roles.

Provide paid leaves for family responsibilities. These could include paid job-protected maternity leave, which is offered in almost every country as a primary means to ensure maternal and child health; paid parental leave, including leave that can be shared by both parents after childbirth; paternity leave to encourage greater paternal involvement; paid caregiving leave to

Employers might also consider how resource and referral programs might assist employees to find child care and home care services, and/or information or support regarding parenting or caregiving.



provide care for a family member who is seriously ill; and bereavement leave. There are also family leaves that might be used for any of the situations above, as well as for a personal or family emergency or illness.

The specific nature of these leaves, including eligibility requirements, duration, rate of income replacement, and so on varies across countries, but increasingly job protected, paid leaves are seen as essential policies to increase women's labor force attachment and promote men's involvement in care; provide job protection for workers with family responsibilities; and enable workers to reduce W–F conflict.

Research suggests employers benefit from these policies in that employees who have access to job-protected leaves are less likely to leave their job and view their employer more favorably, increasing organizational commitment. These impacts also reduce the likelihood that employers will have to bear the costs of recruiting and replacing valuable employees with organization-specific knowledge and skills. Employers can capitalize on these benefits by providing an income top up when employees are on leave, allow for extended leave beyond the period mandated by law, and facilitate a gradual return to work following a leave when appropriate. Most importantly, employers can recognize the value of supporting employees, particularly when family demands are high, by adopting a culture that respects employees and integrates leaves and flexible work options as tools that not only accommodate individual workers at particular times but function as part of organization-wide practices that promote employee engagement and effectiveness.

Provide the right to request flexible work arrangements. A statutory right to request flexible work arrangements exists in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and several US states and in Canada for federally regulated workers. In general, this legislative approach provides eligible workers with a right to request flexible work options and obligates employers to seriously consider the request. Businesses can decline a request if it would result in high costs or is not feasible for operational reasons. Evaluation data from the UK suggest that flexible work options have become more available since the introduction of the Right to Request, that it has opened access to flexible working options that do not lead to a reduction in salary and that both men and women are requesting flexible alternatives.

Provide child care and elder care services. In most countries, child care and early education programs, after-school care, and elder care services are provided as part of education or children's services, or as a component of health and social care provision. It is not anticipated that most employers would be expected to provide or sponsor such programs themselves. In emerging market countries such as India and China however, because the provision of such services by the state are limited or inadequate, one is witnessing a rise in these services being offered by private organizations.

Employers can play an important role in supporting such policies, providing employees with information, and even providing in-kind support (such as participating on a board and providing guidance about effective practices). Moreover, employers can play an important role in advocating for high quality, affordable services that meet employees' needs.

Conclusion

In this article we reviewed findings of Project 3535, a study of culture and the W–F interface in 10 countries, and used the findings to recommend W–F interventions aimed at reducing the negative outcomes of W–F conflict for employees and their organizations. Some of the study's findings supported previous research and are applicable worldwide, whereas other findings regarding employees' experience of the W–F interface differed across Anglo/European and Asian cultures. There was clearly no one single culture that could be considered the best when it came to W–F balance. Based on Project 3535 findings, this article makes recommendations for W–F interventions at the organizational, family, and governmental/societal levels. It further advances the idea that to be effective, multilevel W–F interventions must be aligned with each other and should be appropriately customized to societal cultures and organizational contexts.

[M]ultilevel W–F interventions must be aligned with each other and should be appropriately customized to societal cultures and organizational contexts

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