WORK STRESS IN AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONALS: THE ROLE OF CULTURE, GENDER AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Shruti Mujumdar

Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August, 2008

School of Psychology
University of Adelaide
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract viii
Declaration x
Acknowledgements xi
List of Tables xiii
List of Figures xvi

## Chapter 1: Introduction 1

1. Overview 1

1.1 Meaning of Stress 2

1.2 Sources of Stress 4

1.2.1 Examples of Categories of Job Stressors 8

1.2.2 Theoretical Models of Occupational Stress 13

1.2.3 Non-Occupational Sources of Stress 14

1.3 Work Stress and Family Stress: A Complex Situation 18

1.4 Cultural differences in Work Stress and Work-Family Conflict (Individualism v/s Collectivism) 22

1.5 Acculturative Stress and Cross Cultural Adaptation 26

1.6 History of Indian Immigration to Australia 29

1.7 Need for the Studies 34
Chapter 2: Study 1. Occupational Stress and Work-Family Conflict among Indian Immigrant Women in Australia 38

2. Overview 38

2.1 Gender, Work, and Stress 38

2.2 Introduction to Work-Family Conflict (WFC) 49

2.3 Theories of Work-Family Conflict 52

2.4 Gender Differences in Work-Family Conflict (WFC) and Family-Work Conflict (FWC) 57

2.5 Women in Part-Time Employment 60

2.6 Women and Work Stress in Australia 62

2.7 Culture and the Role of Social Support 64

2.8 Occupational Stress and Work-Family Conflict for Indian Immigrant Women in Australia 65

2.9 Need for the Study 68

2.9.1 Research Questions for Study 1 69

Chapter 3: Methodology, Results and Discussion of Study 1 71

3. Overview 71

3.1 Procedure 72

3.1.1 Participants 72

3.1.2 Measures 73

3.1.3 Interview Procedure 75

3.2 Selection of Measures 75
Chapter 5: Methodology, Results and Discussion of Study 2  140

5. Overview 140
5.1 Method 140
5.1.1 Participants 140
5.1.2 Measures 141
5.1.3 Procedure 143
5.2 Research Questions for the Study 144
5.3 Data Analyses 145
5.4 Results 145
5.4.1 Results of the Effects and Interaction of Culture and Gender 156
5.5 Discussion 158
5.6 Conclusion 172
5.7 Limitations and Strengths of this Study 174
5.8 Future Research 175

Chapter 6: Study 3. Crossover and Spillover among Dual Earner Couples in Australia  176

6. Definition of Crossover and Spillover 176
6.1 The Role of Gender in the Crossover Process 180
6.2 Partner Crossover Effects 182
6.3 The Present Study 184
6.4.1 Dependent Variables Used in this Study 187
8.2 Gender Differences between Australian and Indian Men and Women  253
8.3 Gender Differences in Crossover Research  255
8.4 Crossover and Spillover Correlations  255
8.5 Contribution of this Research to the Work Stress Literature  261
8.6 Future Research  263

**Appendices** 266

- Appendix A Ethics Approval 266
- Appendix B Participant Information Sheet 270
- Appendix C Participant Consent Form 274
- Appendix D Job Satisfaction Scale 275
- Appendix E Job Stress Items 276
- Appendix F Work-Family Conflict Scale 277
- Appendix G Interview Questionnaire 279
- Appendix H Ethics Approval for Study 3 284
- Appendix I Participant Information Sheet 288
- Appendix J Fatigue Questionnaire 291
- Appendix K Dyadic Adjustment Scale 293
- Appendix L Family Organised Cohesiveness Scale 295
- Appendix M Family Support Scale 297
- Appendix N Family Friendly Working Arrangements 299
References
Abstract

Australia is one of the most popular countries for immigrants to settle. Many highly qualified Indians from India have made Australia their home, and they hold important positions in the Australian work-force.

The Australian work-force now consists not only of employees from different countries, but also of parents who try to balance their work roles and family roles simultaneously. For dual-earner families this can be difficult and could lead to increased job stress and work family conflict. Due to these cultural and gender differences, experiences in the paid work-force cannot be assumed to be the same for all employees. The purpose of this research was to investigate the role of culture and gender among working professionals in Australia and to study the interactional patterns within dual-earner couples in the Australian work-force.

This was exploratory research and was conducted using three studies. All studies were cross-sectional, and qualitative as well as quantitative measures were used for data collection. In the first study data were collected from matched pairs of 10 Australian and 10 Indian born mothers who were employed in the Australian work-force. Interviews were conducted and responses to the interview were recorded. Results suggested some significant differences in job stress, with Australian mothers experiencing more job stress than Indian mothers. Further, interview results indicated that women from both cultures were responsible for most of the household work.
Study two of the thesis combined culture and gender to investigate job satisfaction, work stress and work family conflict among Australian men and women working in the Australian work-force \((N = 58)\). A 2 X 2 ANOVA was used for this. There were no cultural differences found among men and women of both cultures on measures of job satisfaction, work-family conflict and family-work conflict. However, cultural differences were observed on the job stress scale with Australian men and women experiencing more job stress than Indian men and women. There were also significant gender differences in job stress, work-family-conflict and family-work conflict. Australian men and Indian men reported higher family-work conflict. Results of this study revealed significant gender differences and therefore, the third study was designed to investigate these gender differences further.

Study three investigated the role of gender and work stress variables through crossover and spillover research. Many gender differences in predictors of fatigue, job stress and dyadic adjustment were found among couples both working in white collar professions. This study too strengthened the traditional gender role with women experiencing higher job stress and family-work conflict.

It is suggested that these findings contribute to the work-stress literature in three ways. Findings confirm that gender, rather than culture, are responsible for differences among immigrants in their perception of job satisfaction, work-family conflict and family-work conflict. Findings also confirm the traditional gender role of women, who are responsible for most domestic household work, and also demonstrate that increase in work-family conflict and family-work conflict contributes to an increase in job stress among dual-earner couples. This research has provided an insight into factors contributing to both crossover and spillover among Australian dual earner professionals, an area which has not received much attention.
Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in The University of Adelaide Library, being made available for loan and photocopying.

Shruti Mujumdar

August, 2008
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank many people whose guidance and support has helped me during the course of my candidature.

I would first like to thank my supervisor Professor Helen Winefield for all her guidance, advice and expertise. I would like to thank her especially for patiently reading all my drafts and for all her invaluable suggestions. It is deeply appreciated. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor Dr. Neil Kirby for all his suggestions, help and guidance.

I am very grateful to Bob Wilson from the School of Psychology, University of Adelaide for all the statistical help he has provided me.

I would like to thank my mother and father for giving me the opportunity to pursue a PhD. Without you Aai and Appa, I would never have been in Australia.

I wish to acknowledge my sister Bharati and her husband Raju for allowing me to be their guest in Adelaide, and for all the lunches, dinners and informal chats.

This thesis would not have been complete without the support of my husband Makarand who has not only encouraged me, but has truly balanced “work and family” in my absence. My
thank you also goes to my son Sarang for all his technical help and for being so patient with his mother during her candidature.

Last but not the least, I am very grateful to all my participants. Without their responses, this thesis would never have been possible.
List of Tables

Table 3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Matched Pairs of Australian and Indian Mothers 78

Table 3.2 Means, Standard Deviations and Significance (t-tests) of Comparison between Australian-Born and Indian-Born Working Mothers 80

Table 3.3 Responses to Interview Questionnaire by Australian and Indian Women Participants 81

Table 5.1 Demographic Characteristics of all Men and Women Participants 146

Table 5.2 Responses to Household and Work Survey 148

Table 5.3 Cultural Differences between Australian and Indian Participants on Job and Home Related Factors 152

Table 5.4 Gender Differences between Men and Women on Job and Home Related Factors 153
Table 5.5 Additional Questions for Indian Immigrant Men and Women

Table 5.6 Results of Chi-Square Tests to Determine Significant Differences among Australian and Indian Men on aspects of Cooking and Doing Housework

Table 5.7 Means and Standard Deviations of Culture and Gender on all Study Variables

Table 6.1 Family-Friendly Working Arrangements in Australia

Table 7.1 Employment Status and Level of Education of Participants of the Study

Table 7.2 Number of Children for the Couples

Table 7.3 Means and Standard Deviations for all Study Variables for all Couples

Table 7.4 Within-Individual (Spillover) Correlation Coefficients for Husbands
Table 7.5 Within-Individual (Spillover) Correlation Coefficients for Wives 218

Table 7.6 Crossover Correlation Coefficients for Husbands and Wives 220

Table 7.7 Predictors of Fatigue in Husbands 221

Table 7.8 Predictors of Fatigue in Wives 222

Table 7.9 Predictors of Dyadic Adjustment in Husbands 223

Table 7.10 Predictors of Dyadic Adjustment in Wives 224

Table 7.11 Predictors of Job Stress in Husbands 225

Table 7.12 Predictors of Job Stress in Wives 226

Table 7.13 Results of the Family-Friendly Policy Questionnaire for Husbands and Wives 227
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Causes of Occupational Stress 07
Figure 1.2 Levels of Qualifications for Australian and Indian Population 33
Figure 1.3 Percentage of Australians and Indians in Various Jobs in Australia 34
Figure 2.1 Model of Work-Family Conflict 51