

Work-from-Home and Work-Family Conflict in Dublin, Ireland

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ABSTRACT:

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about the indispensability of work-from-home policy because organisations needed to continue with their business operations despite the interruption of the pandemic. Due to this, there is the need to ascertain whether work-from-home instigated or reduced the conflict between work and family lives of workers in Dublin, Ireland. Consequent upon this, this study was initiated to examine the effect and relationship between work-from-home and work-family conflict amongst workers in Dublin, Ireland. The study was underpinned by Work-Family Border Theory and embraced a quantitative research approach. Data was collected via the use of electronic questionnaires (Google forms) and was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics such as simple (bivariate) regression and Pearson's correlation analyses. Findings from the study indicated that work-from-home has a positive effect on work-family conflict and also showed a moderately positive relationship between work-from-home and work-family conflict amongst workers in Dublin, Ireland. The study concluded that work-from-home does not reduce work-family conflict instead it increases it. As a result, the study recommended that organisations in Dublin should reduce the workload of workers by automating some job responsibilities through the use of technology so as to reduce the conflict existing between the work and family lives of workers.

Keywords: Work-from-home, work-family conflict, work-family border theory, telecommuting, work-family balance.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is no question that the family continues to remain the most important unit of the community, which in turn makes up a country.

Although it may only consist of 2 to 100 members, what makes it work greatly relies on how its members communicate and relate with each other. Over the years, this has continually been threatened, as the major provider(s) of the family is seen to spend lesser and lesser time with the other members. Work plays a vital role in a family's existence; this is because it is the major and most times the only source of income. This makes work and family two of the most important aspect of life as one depends immensely on the other and a nation depends largely on the productivity of both units (Toyin, 2016).

In an attempt to bring a solution to the earlier stated problem, the work-from-home possibilities have emerged. This allows employees to work from the comfort of their homes giving them the ability to meet the needs of the family. The new technology is seen to be a game changer as it converted work from a place you report to daily or as scheduled to an activity that could be done at any conducive environment. With the flexibility of this new structure, the potential to turn the pre-industrial cottage into a post-industrial electronic cottage, where people can achieve a work-life balance gives a glimpse of a better future (Alvin, 1980). Although this seems to aid and soften the situation, the question remains whether it will bring the required work-life balance. Even though this allows employees to work from home, it remains a challenge for achieving the needed work/life balance. Various studies have shown that some issues for employers concerning work-from-home is seen in the level of turnover and productivity. While that of the employees revolves around dealing with immediate issues that may arise around them as they try to focus on work.

This paper aims to define work-from-home; to take a deeper view of how much of an impact working from home could have on work-family life in an organisation and bring an

understanding of how it could influence new issues on work/life balance.

1.1 Research Questions

- (i) What is the effect of work-from-home on work-family conflict?
- (ii) What relationship exists between work-from-home and work-family conflict?

1.2 Research Objectives

- (i) To determine the effect of work-from-home on work-family conflict
- (ii) To ascertain the relationship between work-from-home and work-family conflict.

1.3 Research Hypotheses

- H1: There is no effect of work-from-home on work-from-home on work-family conflict.
- H2: There is no relationship between work-from-home and work-family conflict.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Work-from-Home

Various studies in the literature have proposed the term “work-from-home” to be the same as “telecommuting”, “virtual work”, “telework”. However, a slight difference exists between them. While telecommuting or virtual work may mean performing the responsibilities of a job outside of the workplace through electronic means, work-from-home has to do with performing job responsibilities strictly at home (Susilo, 2020). According to Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garces (2020), telework has to do with the work performed remotely at a place distant from the traditional workplace using computer technology. Carillo, Cachat-Rosett, Marsan, Saba, and Klarsfeld (2021) stated that telework comprises two major aspects – distance from the place of work and the utilisation of information and communication technology (ICT). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defined telework as the performance of work outside the premises of an employer via the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) like tablets, smartphones, laptops, and/or desktop computers (Eurofound and ILO, 2017).

With respect to the postulation of Susilo (2020) as seen above, work-from-home should not be seen as a synonym to telework. Thorstenson (2020) consented to this by stating that telework can be performed away from the office at any location but work-from-home can only be performed away from the office at home. In support of this, Rupiatta and Beckmann (2016) stated that work-from-home is composed of two major aspects. The first being that employees carry out their work outside the workplace and the second being that there is a connection between the

office and home. Eurofound and ILO (2017) further identified work-from-home to be a type of telework that is done by employees strictly at their various homes. It is called “home-based telework” by them. Consequent upon the foregoing, the term “work-from-home” as the name implies simply means carrying out official job responsibilities from the confines of one’s home. It is simply doing the work of an organisation from home instead of the workplace or any place else.

2.1.1 Dimensions of Work-from-Home

Karanikas and Cauchi (2020) identified several dimensions with respect to work-from-home arrangement. Some of these dimensions include; mental health, the role of interactions and isolations, work-family balance, frequency and prevalence of telecommuting, etc. As regards mental health and wellbeing, various studies have revealed that working outside the conventional office, especially from home reduces stress and depression amongst employees (Anderson, Kaplan, & Vegal, 2015; Wang, Albert, & Sun, 2020). Moreover, working from home tend to make employees feel isolated from each other as their level of interactions is seen to reduce due to their physical absence. With respect to work-life balance, Karanikas and Cauchi (2020) revealed that work-family conflict could be reduced to a great when work-from-home arrangement is made. Concerning frequency and prevalence of telecommuting, this has to do with how often employees are allowed by organisations to work from their respective homes.

2.2 Work-Family Conflict

Scholars are of a uniform view that work-family conflict was first introduced by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). In their definition, work-family conflict is a friction that emanates from the role pressures of work and family domains which are to a higher degree not compatible and therefore it becomes difficult for an individual to perform the affected role satisfactorily. In the words of Dubrin (1991), work-family conflict is a role conflict that occurs when an individual attempts to fulfil two different roles either as a father and worker or as a mother and worker. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2003) cited in Obrenovic, Jianguo, Khudaykulov and Khan (2020), it is a psychological issue that encompasses an imbalance between work and personal lives of employees. It is a kind of inter-role conflict where pressures from work role and family roles are not compatible to a certain degree (Hsu, 2011). Also, it is the competition between the professional role of an individual and his/her family/personal life. From the foregoing

definitions, work-family conflict can be defined as a conflict that arises from the different roles an individual play both as a family member and a worker.

2.2.1 Dimensions of Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict was in earlier times taken to be a unidirectional term until stated otherwise by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) (Arisi-Nwugbulla, 2016). The uni-directionality of the term was about the demands of the work role affecting the role of the family only. However, due to the assertion of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), the bi-directionality of the term involves both how the demands of the work role affects family role and the demands of family role affect work role. When the demands from work disrupts or interferes with the family role, it is termed as work-to-family conflict (WFC) while when the demands of family interferes with work or professional role, it is termed as family-to-work conflict (FWC) (Arthi & Sumathi, 2020; Akram & Ch, 2020).

Furthermore, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) grouped work-family conflict into three areas – time based, strain-based, and behaviour-based conflicts. Both the work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC) can be seen from these three areas. Time-based conflict is one that arises when the time allocated for the performance of a given role intercepts with the time allocated for the performance of the other role. Strain-based conflict arises when an employee is

unable to meet the demands required from one role due to the stress garnered from the other role while behaviour-based conflict arises when the behaviour effective for the performance of a given role is ineffective or inappropriate for the performance of the other role.

2.3 Work-from-Home and Work-Family Conflict

Work-from-home has been an issue that was given serious importance until the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic. Due to this, many organisations have implemented it as a lifeline policy to save the organisation from a total collapse. With the presence and continual advancement in information and communication technology, it makes it easier for organisations to implement the work-from-home policy without fear as they are sure of the continual execution of business operations.

Despite the significance of work-from-home to the continual existence of various organisations especially during the pandemic, there is a prospect it has on reducing the conflict between employees’ professional roles and family/personal life roles. When an employee is allowed or instructed to work from home, there is every possibility that the conflict being experienced in the work and family domains could be reduced or eliminated. Working from the confines of one’s home where his/her family is situated has the prospects of eliminating the tension between professional and family life.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable
Work-from-Home

Dependent Variable

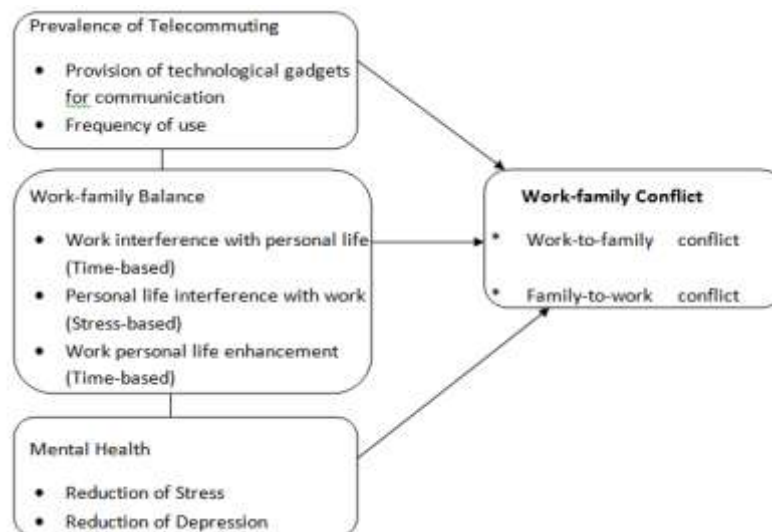


Fig. 2.1 : A model showing the relationship between work-from-home and work-family conflict
Source: Adapted from Madsen (2003) and Agha, Azmi, and Irfan (2017)

The above model shows a relationship between work-from-home and work-family conflict. As shown above, the independent variable (work-from-home) is measured by three parameters as revealed by Karanikas and Cauchi (2020) – prevalence of telecommuting, work-family balance and mental health. It should be noted that the measures of work-life balance were adopted from Agha et al. (2017). On the other hand, the dependent variable (work-family conflict) are being measured by just four parameters which are work-to-family conflict based on time, work-to-family conflict based on stress and family-to-work conflict based on time, and family-to-work conflict based on stress.

2.5 Empirical Review of Literature

Madsen (2003) examined the influence home-based teleworking had on work-family conflict. In this study, primary data was used and was analysed with the aid of regression method. Findings from the study revealed that employees who worked from home had lower levels of different work-family conflict dimensions than those who worked from the conventional workplace. This implies that work-family conflict decreased for employees who worked from home than those who worked in the office.

Sakamoto and Spinks (2008) evaluated the effect of teleworking from home on work-family conflict in the childcare stage. The study made use of primary data and a sample of 357 employed and self-employed fathers and mothers with school children living in Tokyo. The study's results showed that there is a lower level of work-family conflict for those who work from home than those who work outside the home.

Leung and Zhang (2017) conducted a study on telecommuting practices using the perspective of work/family border theory. A sample of 509 information workers of ICT companies in Hong Kong was used. Results indicated that as people increased their use of ICT in the performance of their work duties, the more they perceive their work/family borders to be flexible and permeable. The study also found out that work-to-family conflict had a significant positive association with technostress.

Schall (2019) investigated the relationship between remote work and the levels of job satisfaction of employees in the workplace by using work-family conflict, telecommuting intensity and perceived autonomy as mediating variables. Primary data was used with a sample of 185 employees via an online survey. The study's results showed that a positive relationship existed between

remote work and job satisfaction. This implies that an increase in the use of remote work in organisations causes a corresponding increase in the job satisfaction levels of employees. The study concluded that this is possible because remote work reduces work-family conflict, increases higher perceived autonomy and telecommuting intensity which in turn increases employees' job satisfaction.

Obrenovic et al. (2020) evaluated the effect of work-family conflict on psychological safety and psychological well-being using a model of job performance. While conducting this study, primary data was used with a sample of 277 company employees in Bahrain. The study revealed that work-family conflict has a negative impact on psychological safety and psychological well-being of employees. The study concluded that the existence of work-family conflict reduces the psychological safety and psychological well-being of employees.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Work-Family Border Theory

This theory was propounded by Clark (2000) and it states that individuals cross borders daily between the spheres of work and family. This means that employees daily transit between the roles they play at work and in family/personal life. The main notion of this theory is that borders and links between family and work must be rightly managed so as to ensure the desired balance is created and maintained (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015). The life of an employee is principally divided into two – work/professional life and personal life. Due to this, it is expected that employees are to know when to draw the line so as to ensure neither their work nor family lives are affected. This study is premised upon this theoretical underpinning because it critically shows or explains the work-family conflict being experienced by employees. The theory illustrates that the work life has a limit that should not be exceeded and vice versa if employees are not to experience conflict between their work and family lives. Therefore, understanding this theory helps in the creation of a work-life balance for employees.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy states the method by which the research is conducted and by which means the theories and data are gathered, collected or put together in such a way that the final result is drawn upon a strong base. It is key to note that there exists two major types of research philosophies: positivism and interpretivism.

The positivism takes a holistic view of subject matters even though in most cases, the research could be alien to the researcher. While the interpretivism view reality in a more individualistic approach. Interpretivism believes that people hold their own view or sense of reality (Casper, 2007).

From the latter, positivists argue that information can only be derived from phenomena that can be observed and evaluated, and that a researcher must remain detached and uninvolved. Interpretivists, on the other hand, argue that intelligence emerges from a combination of factors like observation and analysis of complex social structures, of which the researcher may be a part of. Concerning this, quantitative was selected for this work as it provides a suitable approach for data collection and analysis. This means the research adopts positivism approach as a best-fit approach.

As a research theory originating from natural sciences, positivism prescribes that evidence should be used to explain the universe, which can then be investigated. Quantitative analysis is linked to positivism and systematic data collection techniques, as well as deductive research methods that use data to test theories.

In order to provide proper evidence, data was collected with reliable variables. This study's quantitative analysis was focused on evaluating relationships between variables that were numerically calculated and analysed. However, due to a lack of access to the entire population of private-sector workers, probability sampling was not feasible in this analysis. Probability sampling is often not necessary or sufficient to address a research question in business research since it needs a sampling frame. As a result, various sampling methods, such as non-probability sampling, should be used (Mark, 2012).

3.2 Sample

Participant's selection was from a variety of private and public sector employees in Ireland who were both working full-time and part-time from home. The participant includes male and female regardless of their marital status and whether or not they have children. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 66 years as legally required. Convenience sampling was used to obtain those included in the sample. As a result, the study generated a sample of 101 employees working full-time and part-time from home. Convenience sampling was used because many respondents refused participating in the study. This delayed the study for a long duration of time. Hence, the researchers made do with those who were willing to participate and available.

3.3 Research Instrument

The study made use of survey questionnaires with close-ended questions. In measuring the work-family conflict construct, Haslam, Morawska, and Sanders (2010) and Frone, Yardley and Markel (1997) work-family conflict scales were adapted. Using a 3-point Likert scale of 1-Agree, 2- Indifferent, and 3-Disagree, respondents were expected to respond to the questionnaire items by ticking just one out of the three Likert scale points.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The participants were assured of the safety of their identity and their place of work. This was made known that the questionnaire is totally anonymous as it does not require participants to provide personal data. It was made clear to all participants that their participation was voluntary. Also, all participants were advised that they will be provided with a copy of the collected results on request.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Socio-Demographic Features of Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	44	43.6
Female	57	56.4
Total	101	100.0
Age		
18-21 Years	13	12.9
21-30 Years	83	82.2
31-40 Years	5	5.0
41 and above	0	0.0
Total	101	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	87	86.1
Married	14	13.9
Divorced	0	0.0
Widow	0	0.0
Total	101	100.0
Education		
High School	13	12.9
Graduate	40	39.6
Postgraduate	37	36.6
Doctorate	11	10.9
Total	101	100.0
Type of Organisation		
Self-Employed	11	10.9
Private Organisation	90	89.1
Public Organisation	0	0.0
Total	101	100.0
Type of Staff		
Intern	13	12.9
Contract	22	21.8
Permanent	66	65.3
Total	101	100.0
Duration of Employment		
1-3 years	85	84.2
4-6 years	5	5.0
7 years and above	11	10.9
Total	101	100.0

Table 4.1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Source: Field Survey (2021)

From the above table (Table 4.1), it is seen that 43.6% of respondents are male while 56.4% are female, showing that more of the respondents are of the female. Concerning the respondents' age, 12.9% are between the ages of 18 and 21 years, 82.2% are between 21 and 30 years while 5% were between 31 and 40 years old. As regards marital status, 86.1% of the respondents are still single while 13.9% are married. Concerning education, 12.9% of the respondents are still in high school, 39.6% are graduates, 36.6% are in their

postgraduate level while 10.9% have doctorate degrees. With regards to the type of organisation, 10.9% of the respondents are self-employed while 89.1% are employees of a private organisation. Concerning staff type, 12.9% are interns, 21.8% are contract staff while 65.3% are permanent staff. Finally, with respect to the duration of employment, 84.2% of the respondents stayed in an employment duration of 1-3 years, 5% are employed for a duration of 4-6 years while 10.9%

are employed within a duration of 7 years and above.

4.2 Simple Regression Analysis Output

Table 4.2.1
Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Work-from-Home	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Work-Family-Conflict

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.371 ^a	.137	.129	2.44151

a. Predictors: (Constant), Work-from-Home

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	93.925	1	93.925	15.757	.000 ^b
	Residual	590.135	99	5.961		
	Total	684.059	100			

a. Dependent Variable: Work-Family-Conflict

b. Predictors: (Constant), Work-from-Home

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.816	1.116		2.523	.013
	Work-from-Home	.190	.048	.371	3.969	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Work-Family-Conflict

Source: Field Survey (2021)

The above tables are representations of the simple regression analysis output conducted to test for the first hypothesis of the study. As seen in the Model Summary, adjusted R square is seen at 0.129 implying that 12.9% of the variations in work-family conflict can be predicted by work-from-home. As regards labelling the significance of the model, the ANOVA table shows the F-statistics which is 15.757 to have a p-value of 0.000. Using a significance level of 0.05, it is seen that the p-value<0.05, implying the statistical significance of the regression model.

Moreover, in testing the first hypothesis of the study, the regression coefficients would be used. As shown in this table, work-from-home is seen to have a p-value of 0.000. With this p-value being lesser than the significance level of 0.05 (p-value<0.05), it is correct to state that the null hypothesis (H₀) is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This means that work-from-home has an (positive) effect on work-family conflict amongst workers in Dublin, Ireland.

4.3 Correlation Analysis Output

Table 4.3.1

Correlations		Work-from-Home	Work-Family-Conflict
Work-from-Home	Pearson Correlation	1	.371**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	101	101
Work-Family-Conflict	Pearson Correlation	.371**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	101	101

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Table 4.3.1 is a tabular depiction of the correlation analysis of the study. It helps the study in testing the second hypothesis of the study which states that work-from-home and work-family-conflict have no relationship with each other. As seen in Table 4.3.1 above, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is seen at 0.371. This result shows that a moderate relationship exists between work-from-home and work-family conflict. Furthermore to determine the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis, using the p-value which is lesser than the significance value of 0.05 (p-value<0.05), it shows that the alternative hypothesis is accepted at the rejection of the null hypothesis. This therefore means that work-from-home has a moderate relationship with work-family conflict.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This research aimed at examining the effect of work-from-home on work-family conflict amongst the working class in Dublin, Ireland. Also, the study sought to determine the kind of relationship existing between these two variables in the study area. From the study's analysis, it was seen that work-from-home had a positive effect on work-family conflict. This finding shows that when workers work from home, their family responsibilities tend to clash with their job responsibilities. Furthermore, the study revealed a moderately positive relationship between work-from-home and work-family conflict. This means that an increase in the adoption of the work-from-home stirs an increase in the conflict existing between both work and family domains. These findings are in tandem with that of Andrade and Lousa (2021) who in their study revealed that workers find it difficult to be in control over their family and work roles when working from home, which results into work-family conflict. Also, the finding of Lippe and Lippenyi (2018) corroborates this study's findings. According to them, the ideal

culture of a worker escalates the conflict existing between work and family irrespective of the gender. This means that the expectation of meeting targets by workers, irrespective of gender, when working from home puts them on their toes to achieve such expectations. As a result their whole attention tends to be focused on their jobs while family responsibilities are neglected.

However, these findings negate the assertions of Darouei and Pluut (2020); Madsen (2003); Sakamoto and Spinks (2008) who are in the line of thought that work-from-home has the potential of reducing work-family conflicts. The scenario where workers work from home just implies a change of physical location; the actual work responsibilities are not reduced nor changed. The volume of work to be done in the workplace is still the same volume of work to be done at home; only that the worker's physical presence is not in the workplace but in his/her home. Hence, it should not be concluded that working-from-home reduces the conflict between work and family domains.

VI. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Deducing from the study's findings, it can be concluded that work-from-home does not reduce work-family conflict since a positive causal and correlational relationship exists between both variables. The study showed that an increase in work-from-home causes a moderate increase in the conflict existing between work and family domains. As a result, it is expected that organisations in Dublin, Ireland reduce the workload of workers by automating some job responsibilities through the use of technology. This would help ease the burden upon workers and reduce the conflict existing between their work and family lives.

Having completed this research, it is necessary to bring out some of the study's flaws.

One of them is the inability to extrapolate the study's findings to the entire population due to the use of convenience sampling method. Additionally, the study made use of only quantitative research method. This means that the study is unable to grasp an in-depth understanding of why work-from-home increases work-family conflict in Dublin, Ireland. As a result, it is suggested that a future study be carried out that utilises a probability sampling technique like simple random, stratified proportionate sampling, etc. Also, another study be performed that adopts a qualitative approach.

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