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The relationship between the work-family conflict, work alienation, job embeddedness, and turnover intention

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the intricate relationships between work interference with family, family interference with work, work alienation, job embeddedness, and turnover intention. A quantitative approach was adopted, using structured surveys to gather data from employees. The results indicate a positive association between both work interference with family and family interference with work with turnover intention. Furthermore, work alienation was found to mediate these relationships. Interestingly, the detrimental impact of work alienation on turnover intention was found to be attenuated by job embeddedness, highlighting its moderating role. Organizations must recognize the implications of work-family dynamics and work alienation on employee turnover intentions. By focusing on enhancing job embeddedness, companies can potentially alleviate the adverse effects of work alienation, leading to reduced turnover intention. While previous studies have individually explored the variables of interest, this research uniquely integrates them into a comprehensive framework, thereby shedding light on the nuanced interplays and offering fresh insights into the mechanisms driving turnover intentions in the modern workforce.

Keywords: work-family conflict; Turnover intention; work alienation; Job embeddedness.

1. Introduction

Work-family conflict, a phenomenon that has steadily gained recognition, epitomizes the tension individuals experience when juggling the demands of their professional and personal lives (Ford, Wang, Matthews, & Wayne, 2023). The globalized economy and technological evolution have intensified the pressure on employees, driving them to remain connected to their jobs round-the-clock, which subsequently blurs the boundaries between work and home (Ford et al., 2023). It is not just an issue of time management, but also of energy and commitment (Vickovic & Morrow, 2020); employees often find their energies drained by work-related tasks, leaving little for familial responsibilities. Such conflicts are not merely individual issues; they have broader socio-economic implications (Molina, 2021). Employees grappling with high work-family conflict often exhibit decreased job satisfaction (Talukder, 2019), lowered productivity (Jaafar & Rahim, 2022), and increased susceptibility to burnout (Jia & Li, 2022). Moreover, organizations too bear the brunt through elevated turnover rates and the associated costs of hiring and training replacements. In societies where family plays a pivotal role, like many Asian cultures, the dissonance caused by this conflict can be even more pronounced. Furthermore, the ever-evolving family structures and roles, with dual-earning couples and shared responsibilities, further underscore the significance of addressing work-family conflict. Addressing this conflict is not just imperative for the well-being of the employees (Jia & Li, 2022), but it also holds profound implications for organizations aiming for sustainable growth and productivity in today's dynamic business environment.

The intricate relationship between work-family conflict and turnover intention has been a topic of scholarly discourse for decades (Rafiq, Shehzad, Farrukh, & Khan, 2022; Xue, Rafiq, Meng, & Peerzadah, 2023). Employees, while being the cornerstone of an organization's success, are also ensnared in a complex web of personal and familial commitments (Stack & Malsch, 2022). When the demands of their professional roles clash with those of their personal lives, the resulting work-family conflict can catalyze feelings of disillusionment (Young & Young, 2019), dissatisfaction, and a pervasive sense of being overwhelmed. Such emotions, in turn, make employees contemplate whether their current employment aligns with their broader life goals. The contemplation

can evolve into turnover intention, which is an individual's conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the current organizational membership (Young & Young, 2019). This intention is not just an instantaneous reaction but often a culmination of prolonged stress and imbalance between work and family roles (Javed, Rafiq, Ahmed, & Khan, 2012; Rafiq, Javed, Khan, & Ahmed, 2012). While past literature has affirmed the connection between work-family conflict and turnover intention (Wu, Rafiq, & Chin, 2017), there remains a scope to delve deeper, exploring the nuances and underlying mechanisms of this relationship. Recognizing the importance of this relationship is vital, but the interaction becomes even more intricate and multi-faceted when mediators and moderators are brought into the equation. Therefore, although this relationship has been previously examined, it warrants renewed attention with a focus on intermediary and moderating variables that could provide richer insights.

As we dive deeper into the dynamics between work-family conflict and turnover intention, the concept of 'work alienation' emerges as a pivotal mediating factor (Vanderstucken & Caniels, 2021). Work alienation denotes a state where individuals feel detached, estranged, or isolated from their workplace, often stemming from a lack of meaningful connection or perceived value in their tasks (Vanderstucken & Caniels, 2021). When work-family conflicts persist, employees might increasingly sense a disconnection from their job roles, intensifying feelings of work alienation (Vanderstucken & Caniels, 2021). Such alienation can act as a driving force, propelling employees toward considering leaving their current employment. However, the relationship between work alienation and turnover intention (ÖZTÜRK ÇİFTÇİ, 2021) is not always straightforward. Introducing 'job embeddedness' as a moderator adds another layer of complexity to this relationship (Shah, Csordas, Akram, Yadav, & Rasool, 2020). Job embeddedness refers to the web of social, psychological, and financial ties that anchor an employee to their job and the organization (Shah et al., 2020). Moreover, training and development is very important (Rehman, Mansoor, Rafiq, & Rashid, 2011). When employees have higher levels of job embeddedness, even if they experience work alienation due to work-family conflicts, their likelihood to act on turnover intentions might be dampened. The intertwining of job embeddedness can significantly attenuate or strengthen the connection between work alienation and an employee's inclination to leave, necessitating its examination as a crucial moderating variable in this relationship.

In the evolving landscape of organizational behavior research, this study offers distinct contributions that bridge gaps and extend prior knowledge. Firstly, while the nexus between work-family conflict and turnover intention has been previously studied, our exploration ventures beyond by introducing work alienation as a critical mediating construct, thereby providing deeper insights into the mechanisms that fuel turnover propensities. Secondly, by integrating job embeddedness as a moderating variable, we shed light on the nuanced ways in which varying degrees of attachment to one's job can influence the trajectory from experiencing work alienation to considering departure. Moreover, by focusing on both mediator and moderator angles simultaneously, this study presents a comprehensive model, contributing to a richer, more holistic understanding of the variables at play. In essence, our findings not only resonate with academic audiences but also bear practical implications, assisting organizations in formulating effective talent retention strategies amidst the complexities of work-family dynamics.

2. Literature review and research hypothesis

2.1 Work-family conflict and turnover intention

In today's evolving landscape, factors such as economic corridors (Ali, Mi, Shah, Rafiq, & Ibrar, 2016; Ibrar, Mi, Mumtaz, Rafiq, & Buriro, 2018; Ibrar, Mi, & Rafiq, 2016; Ibrar, Mi, Rafiq, & Ali, 2019; Ibrar, Mi, Rafiq, & Karn, 2016), organizational commitment (Rehman, G, Mansoor, & Rafiq, 2012), eco-friendly environments (Jin, Rafiq, Hayat, Yang, & Al Mamun, 2023), engagement (Aman, Rafiq, & Dastane, 2023; Rafiq, Wu, Chin, & Nasir, 2019; Wu et al., 2017), embeddedness (Rafiq, 2019; Rafiq & Chin, 2019; Rafiq, Jafar, Ahmad, Dastane, & Sial, 2022), sustainable environmental practices (Farrukh, Raza, & Rafiq, 2023), leadership in green corridors (Aman, Rafiq, Dastane, & Sabir, 2022), community awareness (Ibrar, Mi, Shah, & Rafiq, 2017), accounting (Bhutta et al., 2021; Mushtaq, Dastane, Rafiq, & Başar, 2023), and education (Farrukh et al., 2021) play pivotal roles. The exploration of work-family conflict traces back to the 1960s, with initial emphasis on the unidirectional challenges. However, contemporary research elucidates it as a bidirectional issue encompassing both work-to-family and family-to-work interference. Grounded in the conservation of resources theory, the premise holds that individuals are more perturbed by resource loss than by acquisition. As such, individuals ardently endeavor to obtain, safeguard, and sustain their resources. When confronted with anticipated or actual resource depletions, pressures mount. This dynamic is manifest in work-family conflict, where individuals face dilemmas over resource allocation between professional and personal spheres. Amplifying their resources towards work inversely diminishes their familial investments and vice versa. This unequal resource allocation at work can precipitate negative outcomes. Historically, research predominantly investigated a singular facet of work-family conflict. Findings indicate a pronounced correlation between work-family conflict and turnover intentions (Zhang, Rasheed, & Luqman, 2020). Further, Zhang et al. (2020) posited that family interference with work correlates with turnover intention, making work less appealing. Additionally, work-family conflict mediates the relationship between job resources and

turnover intention. Furthermore, the experience of this conflict adversely affects employees' work attitudes, enhancing turnover propensities. With the intent to delve into both dimensions of work-family conflict, this study posits Hypotheses 1 and 2.

H1: There is a positive relationship between work interference with family and turnover intention.

H2: There is a positive relationship between family interference with work and turnover intention.

2.2 The mediating role of work alienation

In the realm of organizations, alienation is predominantly characterized by an employee's diminished personal engagement in their work activities (Shuck, Kim, & Fletcher, 2021). The discipline of management psychology delves into the notion of work alienation, illuminating the estrangement experienced by employees from their organizational roles. As elucidated by Petrovic (2019), work alienation embodies two key facets: personal and social alienation. However, Dean (1961) identifies three constituents: powerlessness, and social isolation. In contrast, Banai, Reisel, & Probst (2004) conceptualize work alienation as a psychological state triggered by discrepancies between employees' anticipations or necessities and the actualities of their work milieu, a state that often results from a lack of augmented performance (Haba, Dastane, & Rafiq, 2023), entrepreneurship (Jiatong et al., 2021), big data (Karn, Sapkota, Karna, & Rafiq, 2020; Karn, YE, & Rafiq, 2016; Shahzad, Ahmad, Hassan, & Rafiq, 2021), psychological capital (Li, Dai, Chin, & Rafiq, 2019; Ren, JIN, Rafiq, Chin, & Lee, 2019), waste reduction (Rafiq, Dastane, & Mushtaq, 2023), managerial trust (Rafiq & Weiwei, 2017), and innovation (Rafiq, Farrukh, Attiq, Shahzad, & Khan, 2023). This conceptualization, capturing the essence of employee perceptions, has garnered considerable academic endorsement. A critical causative underpinning of work alienation is its inadequacy in catering to employee needs. Work alienation encompasses diverse subjective, adverse psychological experiences in relation to one's profession. It emerges when external factors hinder an individual's ability to fulfill job demands, thereby sidelining their obligations. These determinants include work conditions, managerial approaches, emotional fatigue, work-family conflicts, and social seclusion. Importantly, work alienation mirrors employees' deteriorating mental well-being, foretelling myriad detrimental workplace behaviors (Petrovic, 2019). Supporting this, empirical analysis by Øversveen (2022) posits that alienated employees exhibit a waning sense of organizational affiliation, leading to progressively reduced work enthusiasm, culminating in their psychological estrangement. As such, work alienation profoundly impacts employees' propensity towards turnover considerations. This underscores a robust nexus between work alienation and turnover intentions. In light of these observations, the study contends that work-family conflict's effect on turnover intentions can be discerned through the prism of work alienation. Accordingly, hypotheses 3 and 4 are articulated herein.

H3: Work alienation plays a mediating role in the relationship between work interference with family and turnover intention.

H4: Work alienation plays a mediating role between family interference with work and turnover intention.

2.3 The moderator role of job embeddedness

The paradigm of job embeddedness, introduced by Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez (2001), synthesizes the embedded image and field theory concepts, postulating that individuals often encounter multifaceted constraints—both within organizations and in the broader community—that deter their departure. This framework encapsulates the myriad forces tethering individuals to their present occupations. From this vantage point, even amidst organizational dissatisfaction, employees with deep-seated attachments and high organizational commitment often elect to remain. While the inception of job embeddedness as a concept is relatively recent, empirical assessments have consistently underscored its robust inverse relationship with turnover intention. Both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness have been identified as bearing negative correlations with turnover intention (Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012). Concurrently, the various facets of job embeddedness, when viewed alongside group cohesion, bolster individual embeddedness, thereby curtailing turnover inclination (Coetzer et al., 2019). A specific probe into the realm of civil servants further corroborates this negative linkage between job embeddedness and turnover intentions (Chen Dingxiang et al., 2019). Consequently, hypothesis 5 is posited:

H5: The relationship between work alienation and turnover intention is negatively moderated by job embeddedness.

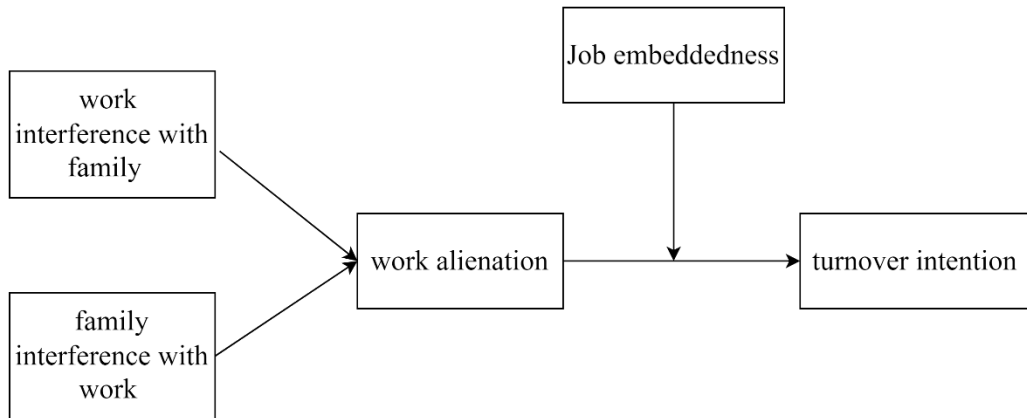


Figure 1 Theoretical model

3. Research design

3.1 Data collection and sample characteristics

In order to acquire pertinent data for this research, a questionnaire survey was administered among the employees of a leading domestic manufacturing firm. Out of the 350 questionnaires disseminated, a total of 314 were returned and deemed valid after meticulous scrutiny, reflecting an efficiency rate of 89.5%. The demographic distribution of the respondents provided a diverse representation, encompassing both genders: 169 males and 145 females. The age distribution spanned a broad spectrum, with participants ranging from as young as 18 to those aged over 60 years. The study also achieved a heterogeneous mix in terms of educational qualifications: respondents with high school or equivalent education numbered 30, those with a junior college degree accounted for 75, while individuals holding bachelor's degrees constituted the largest group at 145, and those possessing a master's degree or higher totaled 64.

The professional hierarchy within the firm was also well-represented in the sample. The majority were ordinary employees, numbering 180. Grass-roots managers followed at 75, while middle-management was represented by 48 participants. The upper echelons, or senior management, had a representation of 11 respondents. Such a diverse sample ensures a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives and experiences across different strata of the organization.

3.2 Variables and measurements

This research employed measurement tools grounded in internationally acclaimed maturity scales. These scales have undergone rigorous validation and reliability testing across various settings. Participants' responses were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale.

For assessing *work-family conflict*, the study adopted the scale from Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996). This scale addresses two distinct dimensions: "work interference with family" and "family interference with work", containing a cumulative 10 items. Its internal consistency is impressive with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.92 and 0.88 for each dimension, respectively.

The *work alienation* measure is adapted from the scale crafted by Nair and Vohra (2009). This scale integrates eight items, an example being, "Over the years I have become disillusioned about my work". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88.

The *job embeddedness* metric aligns with the comprehensive scale by Crossley, Bennett, Jex, and Burnfield (2007). Originally composed of seven items, a confirmatory factor analysis was executed which led to the exclusion of two items with low factor loadings. Five items, one of which states "I feel attached to this job," were retained. The scale's reliability was substantiated with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82.

The *turnover intention* dimension was gauged using the scale developed by Kelloway, Gottlieb, and Barham (1999). This scale incorporates four items, demonstrating a robust Cronbach's coefficient of 0.91.

Control variables were incorporated, drawing from prior research which postulates that certain demographic factors can influence employees' cognitive and behavioral orientations. As a result, gender, age, educational background, and professional position were integrated as control variables in the analytical model.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1 Reliability and validity test and common method bias test

The scales employed in this research have Cronbach coefficients exceeding 0.8, signifying high reliability for all the measurement tools utilized. Confirmatory factor analysis, executed with AMOS26.0, affirmed the five-factor

hypothesis model's superior fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.113$, RMSEA = 0.052, CFI = 0.975, IFI = 0.966, TLI = 0.945). This underscores the robust discriminant validity among the study's variables. Common method bias was evaluated using the Harman single-factor test. An unrotated exploratory factor analysis revealed a total of five factors with eigenvalues surpassing 1. Notably, the foremost factor represented 35.111% of the variance, which suggests the absence of a significant homologous bias in the data.

4.2 The descriptive statistical analysis

The descriptive data and correlation coefficients of the variables were analyzed using SPSS 26.0, as detailed in Table 1. The variable "work interference with family" showcased a positive correlation with turnover intention ($r = 0.331$, $p < 0.01$) and a notably strong positive correlation with work alienation ($r = 0.501$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, "family interference with work" revealed a significant positive correlation with both turnover intention ($r = 0.233$, $p < 0.01$) and work alienation ($r = 0.418$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, work alienation itself was positively associated with turnover intention ($r = 0.444$, $p < 0.01$). These observations preliminarily endorse the research hypotheses posited in this study.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Gender	-								
2.Age	-0.066	-							
3. Education	0.318**	-0.313**	-						
4. Position	0.201**	0.209**	0.126*	-					
5.WIF	0.097	-0.134*	0.001	-0.001	-				
6.FIW	0.145*	-0.011	-0.002	0.061	0.559**	-			
7.WA	0.018	-0.122*	-0.022	-0.072	0.501**	0.418**	-		
8.JE	-0.061	0.059	-0.047	-0.025	0.109	0.088	0.017	-	
9.TI	0.014	-0.078	-0.061	-0.041	0.233**	0.331**	0.444**	-0.318**	-
Mean	1.421	2.691	2.817	1.631	2.915	2.122	2.722	3.112	1.823
SD	0.490	0.829	0.716	0.871	1.022	0.871	0.912	0.810	0.701

Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two tail)

Table 2 Results of hypothesis testing

Variables	TI		WA			TI		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Gender	0.029	0.022	0.033	0.022	0.056	0.076	0.033	0.044
Age	0.088	0.111	0.195*	0.288*	0.044	0.055	0.023	0.064
Education	0.056	0.064	0.056	0.068	0.066	0.067	0.056	0.076
Position	0.066	0.046	0.055	0.054	0.022	0.066	0.034	0.066
WIF	0.542**		0.342**		0.014			
FIW		0.412**		0.543**		0.322*		
WA					0.545**	0.444**	0.566**	0.349**
JE								-0.351**
WA * JE								-0.111*

Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two tail)

4.3 Hypothesis testing

Hierarchical regression analysis was utilized for hypothesis verification, as detailed in Table 2. From models 1 and 2, it becomes clear that post-controlling for demographic variables, the independent variable of work interference with family displays a significant positive correlation with turnover intention ($\beta = 0.542$, $p < 0.01$). A significant positive relationship is also observed between family interference and turnover intention ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.01$), thus affirming H1 and H2.

Referring to models 3 and 4 in Table 2, post-demographic variable control, a strong positive relationship between work interference with family and work alienation is evident ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, family interference with work positively associates with work alienation ($\beta = 0.543$, $p < 0.01$).

When introducing both the independent variables of work interference with family and family interference with work, along with the mediating variable of work alienation into the regression, models 5 and 6 indicate a transition: the prior significant relationship between work interference with family and turnover intention becomes non-

significant. Nonetheless, work alienation still manifests a strong positive correlation with turnover intention ($\beta = 0.545, p < 0.01$). These underscores work alienation's role as a full mediator between work interference with family and turnover intention. The correlation coefficient between family interference with work and turnover intention diminishes ($\beta = 0.322, p < 0.05$), but work alienation remains significantly positively associated with turnover intention ($\beta = 0.444, p < 0.01$). This suggests a partial mediating role of work alienation between family interference with work and turnover intention, hence affirming H3 and H4.

Utilizing the Process procedure for mediation effect assessment and based on Bootstrap analysis, results after 5000 resamples revealed 95% asymmetric confidence intervals for the mediating effect of work alienation on both work interference with family and family interference with work in relation to turnover intention. The intervals were [0.0565, 0.4564] and [0.0345, 0.2354] respectively, none of which encompassed 0, thereby confirming Hypotheses H3 and H4.

Data from models 7 and 8 in Table 2 highlight a notable positive correlation of work alienation with turnover intention ($\beta = 0.566, p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the interaction between work alienation and job embeddedness items depicts a significant negative association with turnover intention ($\beta = -0.111, p < 0.01$), after demographic variable adjustments. This delineates job embeddedness's role as a negative moderator between work alienation and turnover intention, corroborating H5.

5. Discussion

Rooted in the theory of resource conservation, this study probes into the relationship between work-family conflict and turnover intention, focusing on the mediating impact of work alienation and the moderating influence of job embeddedness. The main findings are:

There is a pronounced positive correlation between the dual dimensions of work-family conflict and turnover intention (Yildiz, Yildiz, & Ayaz Arda, 2021). This suggests that employees grappling with pronounced work-family conflict are more predisposed to contemplate exiting their current roles (Belwal & Belwal, 2023). Work alienation acts as a full mediator between work interference with family and turnover intention, but only a partial mediator for the link between family interference with work and turnover intention. Job embeddedness significantly dampens the association between work alienation and turnover intention. Employees deeply rooted in their jobs due to embeddedness are less likely to ponder departure. Furthermore, the mediating effect of work alienation on the relation between work-family conflict and turnover intention is weakened by job embeddedness. Strengthening job embeddedness can consequently counteract turnover tendencies.

The implications of these findings are profound for managers aiming to curb employee attrition by tackling work-family conflict: With contemporary challenges such as population aging and more expansive family policies, employees are confronting unparalleled work-family clashes. It's paramount for businesses to adopt humane management styles and roll out family-centric policies. Embracing approaches like telecommuting and adaptable work schedules can effectively mitigate these conflicts. The data underscores that escalating work-family disagreements can amplify employees' emotional exhaustion, leading to potential turnover and denting organizational output. Organizations should prioritize offering therapeutic counseling services, helping employees navigate and manage negative sentiments and emotional burnout. Tailoring jobs to match employees' unique skills and capabilities is pivotal. By offering more control over job design, aligning tasks with individual strengths, and promoting work-life balance, organizations can bolster job embeddedness. This fosters a deeper bond between employees and the organization, elevating overall embeddedness.

This study offers valuable insights into the dynamics between work-family conflict and turnover intention, but there are certain limitations that need acknowledgment. Primarily, the sample pool for our questionnaire was heavily drawn from industrial enterprises, which could limit the breadth of occupational representation. This selective sampling might affect the generalizability of our results. It would be beneficial for future studies to diversify the range of occupations examined, ensuring a broader and more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, while our research focused on the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in turnover intentions, we recognize that turnover intention is a complex outcome influenced by myriad factors. Therefore, other potential mediating variables should be explored in future research to truly capture the relationship between work-family conflict and turnover intention. Lastly, our reliance on cross-sectional data poses a limitation in understanding the evolving dynamics over time. Introducing a longitudinal approach in subsequent studies would provide a richer perspective on the changing nature of these relationships.

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