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Xinyuan Zhao

Sun Yat-Sen University, zhaoxinyuan@hotmail.com

Hailin Qu

Oklahoma State University, h.qu@okstate.edu

Jingyan Liu

Sun Yat-Sen University, ljy6633@126.com

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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HOSPITALITY EMPLOYEES'  
WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND RELAXATION/SOCIAL INTENTIONS

Xinyuan Zhao  
School of Business, Sun Yat-Sen University  
Guangzhou, China

Hailin Qu  
Oklahoma State University  
Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA

and

Jingyan Liu  
School of Business, Sun Yat-Sen University  
Guangzhou, China

Abstract

A field survey was conducted to investigate the effects of hospitality employees' work-family conflict on relaxation and social types of leisure intentions. Hypothesis testing followed the two-step approach of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Based on 271 valid responses in four full-service hotels, the study found that work-family conflict had both direct effects on hospitality employees' leisure intentions and indirect effects mediated by job tension. Practically, hospitality organizations can utilize the results in applying appropriate leisure activities to help employees effectively cope with work and family role conflicts.

Key Words: Work-family conflict, Relaxation intention, Social intention, Job tension

Because of the job characteristics such as long work hours, irregular and inflexible work schedules, low wages, and limited weekend time off, hospitality employees have to deal with incompatible role conflicts between work and family domains (i.e., work-family conflict; WFC), which increase individuals' job tension (Wong & Ko, 2009). Leisure activities often being implied as an offset to the common stressors in work and family domains (Lerner-Baron, 2007). However, little research about which kind of leisure activities would be appropriate and effective for hospitality employees to release WFC stress has been conducted. The purpose of the current study is to fill this research gap by investigating how hospitality employees' work-family conflict influences job tension and ultimately relaxation and social types of leisure intentions.

Leisure intentions are human motivations to take leisure activities as an escape from regular work and family environments while releasing anxiety and stress (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Relaxation intentions reflect individuals' 'escape' motivations from daily life pressures and 'search' motivations to find calm and peaceful places, while social intentions represent human motivation to build and maintain companionship, friendship and feelings of belonging (Ryan & Glendon, 1998).

WFC consists of two interdependent dimensions (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992a): work interfering with family (WIF), and family interfering with work (FIW). High levels of WIF and FIW result in high levels exhaustion. Therefore, hospitality employees' need for relaxation and social activities are necessary to buffer life strain and to live in comfort. Through relaxation and social activities, hospitality employees can separate themselves from 'never-completed' work and family tasks while also increasing their sense of control regarding the

boundaries among work, family and leisure domains. Therefore, we propose that WIF and FIW have positive impacts on hospitality employees' relaxation and social intentions: (H1a) WIF positively affects hospitality employees' relaxation intentions; (H1b) FIW positively affects hospitality employees' relaxation intentions; (H2a) WIF positively affects hospitality employees' social intentions; and (H2b) FIW positively affects hospitality employees' social intentions.

Job tension refers to psychological or psychosomatic symptoms of anxiety and stress as a result of an individuals' job (Netemeyer, Johnston, & Burton, 1990). When hospitality employees encounter greater levels of WIF or FIW, they will then perceive higher levels of job tension. Under these stressful situations, employees are more likely to join certain kinds of leisure activities with the intention of increasing relaxation, building/sustaining social connections, and increasing feelings of belonging to family. Therefore, we develop the hypotheses as: (H3) job tension positively influences relaxation and social intentions; and (H4) job tension partially mediates the relationships of WIF/FIW to relaxation and social intentions.

#### Method and Results

Four hundred questionnaires were distributed at four full-service hotels targeting at similar markets, and two hundred and seventy-one employees returned valid responses (response rate = 67.8%). Relaxation and social intentions were examined by seven items with factor loadings above .70 from the shortened Beard and Ragheb Leisure Motivation Scale developed by Ryan and Glendon (1998). Work-family conflict was measured with Grandey et al.'s (2005) six item measure. Job tension was examined using three items asking participants to report their status of anxiety and stress at workplace (Schaubroeck, Cotton, & Jennings, 1989). Participants' responses were all collected on a seven-point scale anchored with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

As the two-step Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) suggests, the results of the five-factor CFA (i.e., WIF, FIW, job tension, relaxation intention, and social intention) suggest that the measurement model fits adequately for the sample:  $\chi^2_{(179)} = 314.17$  ( $p < .01$ ), GFI = .88, AGFI = .85, CFI = .92, IFI = .93, RMSEA = .06 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The structural model also showed adequate fit for the sample:  $\chi^2_{(180)} = 300.61$  ( $p < .01$ ), GFI = .87, AGFI = .84, CFI = .85, IFI = .86, and RMSEA = .06 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). WIF had a significant, positive impact on job tension ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $p = .02$ ), relaxation intention ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and social intention ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p = .04$ ), supporting H1a and 2a. FIW has positive effects on job tension ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but unexpectedly, negative impacts on relaxation intention ( $\beta = -.22$ ,  $p = .01$ ) and social intention ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p = .03$ ), not lending support for H1b and 2b. Finally, job tension showed no significant influences on relaxation intention ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .12$ ) and social intention ( $\beta = -.07$ ,  $p = .17$ ). Therefore, H3 and the partial mediation role of job tension, H4, are not supported.

#### Discussion and Implications

Although leisure activities are frequently suggested as a way of coping with stress in the WFC context, few previous studies empirically examined the relationship of hospitality employees' WFC to leisure intentions. The present study demonstrated that WIF had positive relationships to relaxation and social intentions. The findings may be explained by the theoretical notion that family boundaries are more permeable than work boundaries (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992b). That is, work demands are more likely to interfere with family life than vice versa. When hospitality employees encounter high workloads there is less chance to take care of family affairs, and in turn employees may perceive high role conflict and the low control of life events. Under this circumstance, employees would have stronger intentions to break away from work. They could choose to be with family, meet friends, join parties, take a vacation with family members, or even find a peaceful place to stay to escape work. On the contrary, when hospitality employees' excessive family responsibilities and demands prevent them from working hard, they might have lower levels of job tension. But since avoiding family burdens and focusing on work engagement, they

tend to allocate more personally available resources (e.g., time) to work domains and to have less intentions to participate social and relaxation activities.

Leisure activities are recommended for hotel employees to help cope with job stress from work-family conflict in general. However, the current study also suggests that leisure activities may not be the best way to cope with job tension but specifically, an effective method to release interferences from excessive workloads to family responsibilities. Accordingly, hospitality organizations and managers would have to focus on avoiding the potential impact of employees' work stress on time and energy to fulfill family demands. Hotels providing employees more options of leisure activities in the workplace include leisure companionship, leisure palliative coping, and leisure mood enhancement (Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000). These activities could not only release hospitality employees from work and family loads, but also provide them mood enhancement and more energy to deal with various role demands.

When applying the present findings, hospitality scholars and practitioners should be aware of the following limitations. The current study collected responses of both dependent and independent variables in a single self-reporting questionnaire. Since the current study collected the responses from four full-service hotels the sample may not be able to fully represent employees in other hospitality organizations.

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