Work-Life Challenges of Dual Career Couples and their Related Coping Strategies in corporate sector

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Introduction

Work and family are the key domains of an employee life. Due to an increasing flux of working women in today’s workforce, work-life integrations has become a very challenging and sensitive issue for today’s dual career couple. In addition work-life issues has become a challenging area for today’s HR practitioners since it has a direct effect on the work attitudes, absenteeism, turnover, mental and physical fatigue and other work behaviour.

Dual career couples are the couples working in same or different organisation with an ambition to pursue goals in career. They are focussed to career goals and ambitions. Work-family conflict is defined as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus and Beutell; 1985, pg 77).

Work family conflict carries both work to family and family to work conflict. These conflicts has been associated with the negative outcomes such as high absenteeism, more work stress, unmatching role demands, high turnover intentions, more emotional exhaustion and various other psychosomatic symptoms. To realize balance, dual career couple are seeking various types of coping mechanisms both from family and organisation support. The family specific support includes spouse support, domestic support, and social support. The organisation specific support includes EAP’s, flexible working policies, work from home, day-child care centre, pooling leave entitlements and many more. These supports have a negative correlation with FIW conflict leading to more life and job satisfaction, also increasing the employee loyalty towards the organisation. Some of the supports are emotional support (empathy understanding and listening between husband and wife), instrumental support (practical helps of housework and childcare) and social support. The role of supervisors is particularly even more important in creating an environment for employees to use work-life policies without any hesitation. An unfriendly culture for employees makes them feel less associated with organisation.

Therefore employer’s sensitivity is deemed required to integrate work and non-work roles and implementing formal work-life policies and various employee’s assistance programme.

Employer sensitivity means employer’s roles and responsibility towards dual career couple. How much they are concerned regarding work life problems and what is the support they provide to working couples in working place.
Supportive supervision decreases work-life conflict (FWC & WFC), job related issues and providing more job security and career development. The HR practitioner’s approaches towards employer’s sensitivity and formal and informal work-life policies in the organisation form the backbone of work-life integration. Formal work-life policies, dependent care policies and greater flexible working time are the critical elements of organisation supportive culture. All these available policies in conjunction with supportive supervisor and organisation climate helps organisation in attracting and retaining working couples in the organisation. All these leads to increased job satisfaction, more organisation commitment, less work-life conflict and reduced employee stress.

**Review of Literature**

The work-family interference is of immense importance and a critical issue. In addition, this is an important area for practitioners because work-family conflicts have been empirically related to negative work attitudes (Frone et al, 1992; Parasaruman et al 1996; Yang et al, 2000), absenteeism (Goff et al, 1990), tardiness (Hepburn and Barling, 1996), leaving work early (Boyar et al, 2005), turnover intentions (Bruke, 1988), and other negative work behaviours (Frone et al1996). Common antecedents of work-family conflict include gender, family status, work involvement and work demand. Work family conflict is associated with less job satisfaction and greater intentions to quit, with lower levels of family satisfaction and higher levels if emotional exhaustion and psychosomatic symptoms (Allen, et al 2000).

The efforts were made to address the various coping strategies adopted by working couples. The depletion between work and family interface is particularly likely when organisation support and social support is low. One of the most important factor for integrating work-life domain is social, domestic and spouse support. Social support acts as a buffer in stress and strained working conditions. Spouse support helps in balancing work and life domains resulting in career satisfaction, reduced emotional stress, buffering the affect of role overload on interrole conflict.

These supports act as a major source of child care, domestic assistance and dependent care. Supervisor support may help manage dual roles. A supportive supervisor may contribute to an employee’s energy level by discussing family related problems, reinforcing positive self-image and reducing stress by showing empathy for employees family life (Glass &Finley; 2002). Supervisors can be supportive through encouragement. Recognition and resource allocation as they are relate to work activities. Domestic maid assistance, children’s
cooperation are also the form of coping strategies adopted by working couples. These kinds of supports and coping strategies increase organisation commitment and job satisfaction.

The role of supervisor is particularly important in implementing formal flexible schedules, employee supportive organisation climate, work time policies, informal work arrangements and schedules. A sensitive employer must create a workplace culture that facilitates consistent policy implementation. He develops, implement and publicize the work-life policies send a signal throughout the organisation that work-life issues are important. Employers increasingly realize that the quality of an employees personal and family life impacts work quality. Hence a sensitive employer is associated with lower work-family conflict and higher employee control, increasing organisational commitment. However insensitive employer leads to failing work life balance, poor performance, increased absenteeism, high staff turnover, recruitment and training costs. In addition an organisation culture might not support the formal work policies and informal work arrangements, failing to implement these policies. However having a supportive supervisor might increase employees optimism about using flexibility policies in the future (Flack and Reskin, 1998; Fried 1998; Glass and Estes 1997; Kelly and Kaley 2002; Kosses, Barber and Winters 1999).

Organisation need to help employees define the boundaries between home and work. All the formal and informal work policies need to be not only in written work-life policies but also to be implemented so as to make work-life balance and increase job satisfaction and well-being of an employee.
Objectives

Objectives framed are:

1. To determine the various challenges faced by the dual career couples.

1.1 H0- There is no significant difference between various age groups and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.

H1- There is a significant difference between various age groups and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.

1.2 H0- There is no significant difference between various types of organisation and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.

H1- There is a significant difference between various types of Organisation and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.

1.3 H0- There is no significant difference between various types of family background and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.

H1- There is a significant difference between various types of family background and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.

1.4 H0- There is no significant difference between DCC with or without children and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.

H1- There is a significant difference between DCC with or without children and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.

1.5 H0- There is no significant difference between employees’ children age and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.

H1- There is a significant difference between employees’ children age and dual career couple’s work-life challenges.
2. To explore different types of coping strategies used to overcoming these challenges.

   \( H_0 \): Employee is using all coping strategies equally.
   \( H_1 \): Employee is not using all coping strategies equally.

3. To study employer sensitivity towards dual career couple’s work life balances.

   3.1 \( H_0 \): There is no significant association between employer sensitivity and written work-life balance policies.
   \( H_1 \): There is a significant association between employer sensitivity and written work-life balance policies.

   3.2 \( H_0 \): The distribution of employer sensitivity on work-life balance variables are identical.
   \( H_1 \): The distribution of employer sensitivity on work-life variables are Not identical.

4. To examine the association between employer’s sensitivity and organizational support.

   4.1 \( H_0 \): There is no significant association between employer sensitivity and organization support.
   \( H_1 \): There is no significant association between employer sensitivity and organization support.

3.3 Research design

This study was exploratory and descriptive in nature. The study sought to explore and identify the various challenges faced by dual career couples and their related coping strategies. Also, this study measured the employer’s sensitivity towards dual career couple’s work life balance and examined if there was an association between employer’s sensitivity and organisational support.
3.4 Sampling area and corporate under study

The study was carried out in corporate sectors in North Zone of India. The corporate sectors include manufacturing, services, consulting, hospital and healthcare, IT, institutes and training, ITES (BPO, KPO), telecommunication, mobile. From the list of 1047 companies 40 companies were chosen covering these sectors. Out of 40 companies, approximately 30 companies responded back.

List of companies included:

1. IBM Daksha
2. Standard Chartered Bank
3. Dupont
4. Fortis
5. Max Health Care Unit
6. Various colleges and Universities
7. Maruti Udyog
8. Punjab National Bank
9. Canara Bank
10. NHPC
11. Escorts ltd
12. JCB
13. DLF
14. HV Metalarc private limited
15. Genpact
16. Royal Bank of Scotland
17. Orange
18. Nokia and Siemens
19. Erricson
20. Metso
21. Sapient
22. KPMG
23. Accenture
24. Hay Group
25. SBI
26. HCL
27. Mentor Graphics
28. IBM India
29. Igates
30. Xerox

3.5 Population
The respondents surveyed for this study were in the North zone of India. The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire. Questionnaire was distributed online and field survey was done. Participants were from executive level to higher managerial level. Minimum criterion of education was graduation and age of minimum 21 years.

3.6 Sampling Techniques
i) **Convenience Sampling**: was done for the selection of corporates and respondents in Delhi/Ncr region. Further sub-dividing to Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Faridabad.

ii) **Quota Sampling**: Through quota sampling 50% quota was fixed for IT sector and rest, 50%, from other sectors.

iii) **Snowball sampling**: subsequent respondents were selected based on the referrals and through social networks.

3.7 Sample of Respondents
Sample was collected from North zone of India, further sub-dividing into 4 regions of Delhi/Ncr i.e. Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon and Faridabad as these cities have the largest corporate hubs in north zone. 10 to 15 participants were approached from every firm. 400 questionnaires were distributed. Finally, 315 filled questionnaires were collected, out of this after editing and criterion meeting, only 271 respondents were found to be suitable. The response rate was approximately 67 percent.
3.8 Data Collection

3.8.1 For Secondary Data
The secondary data was collected from the Newsletters of the Banks, Journals, Articles, Reports and various websites. Google Scholar, Research Gate website, Proquest were found to be the best source for the collection of secondary data.

3.8.2 For Primary Data
Data was collected with the help of questionnaire form. Questionnaire was divided into 3 parts A, B and C. Part A consists of the demographic information. Part B consists of the 27- work-life challenges items, 8-items of Employers sensitivity and 9- organizational support items. Part C consists of 16-items of coping strategies adopted by dual career couples. Likert scale ranging from strongly agree =1 to strongly disagree =5 was used for quantifying our study.

3.8.3 Validity and Pilot testing
Validity of the instrument refers to its capacity to measure what it wants to measure. 2 weeks before mailing the questionnaire pilot testing was performed on approximately 60 participants representing the population. Hence, validity of the questionnaire was checked in pilot testing. The questionnaire was send to 30 participants. Clear understanding and readability of the questionnaire was discussed with them. Also, for content validity questionnaire was forwarded to few experts. Thereafter questionnaire was again reviewed after expert opinion and pilot testing and minor changes were made to it before mailing to the participants.

3.8.4 Reliability Testing
The reliability of the total sample collected , i.e., two hundred seventy one, was calculated by applying the “Cronbach Alpha”. Alpha value of the Sixty three variables was 0.78 which met the minimum criterion (α > 0.60) (Nunnally, 1978).

3.8.5 Test of Normality
For work-life challenges, coping strategies, employer sensitivity and organisation support for dual career couples scales, the skewness and kurtosis values were below 3,
and significant level for the Kolmogorov Smirnov statistics were above 0.05, indicating that data doesn’t deviate significantly from normal distribution.

**Analysis Tools**

The various tools applied for achieving the objectives of the present study have been described below:

1. **To determine the various challenges and problem faced by the dual career couples.**
   To explore the challenges faced by dual career couple exploratory factor analysis was performed. Also Friedman test was carried out to know if equal problems are faced by all the employees.

2. **To explore different types of coping strategies used to overcoming these challenges.**
   To explore the different types of coping strategies adopted by dual career couple exploratory factor analysis was performed.

3. **To study employer sensitivity towards dual career couple’s work life balances.**
   Employer’s sensitivity towards dual career couple was analyzed by showing the association of employer’s sensitivity items with written work-life balance policies in the organisation. For this association chi-square analysis was carried out. Also Friedman’s test was carried out to study if the employer’s are equally sensitive on all variables or not.

4. **To examine the association between employer’s sensitivity and organizational support.**
   The association between employer’s sensitivity and organisational support was analyzed with chi-square association.
Objective-wise findings of the study

Objective 1: To determine the various challenges faced by the dual career couples.
To explore the various challenges faced by dual career couple 5 factors were extracted using exploratory factor analysis.
Factors extracted are Work-demand factor, 24*7 work-life confrontation, Job stress, Emotional exhaustion, Time conflict.

Objective 2: To explore different types of coping strategies used to overcoming these challenges.
Exploratory factor analysis was performed and 5 factors were extracted which were adopted by dual career couples as coping strategies.
Factors extracted were task prolonged, Flexitime working strategy, Family support strategy, Self-absorbed outlook strategy, Social support.

Objective 3: To study employer sensitivity towards dual career couple’s work life balances.
To study the employer sensitivity, Chi-square analysis was performed between written work life balance policies and 8-items of employer sensitivity items. Out of 8 items, 5-items were statistically significant associated with p-value less than .05.
Also, Friedman test was applied where p-value as 0.000 shows that employer is not equally sensitive on all the variables.

Objective 4: To examine the association between employer’s sensitivity and organizational support.
To show this association chi-square analysis was performed between employer’s sensitivity and organizational support. Employer sensitivity was the new variable computed from various employer sensitivity items. Out of 11 items, 10-items were statistically significant associated with p-value less than .05.
Limitations and Scope for Future Research

This study also suffers from many of the limitations common among work-family conflict studies. The major limitation of this study was that data were collected from both public and private sector. Collection of data from a single sector would have allowed the results to be more generalized to a wider group. Employees in both the sectors may have different perceptions of work-life issues.

In work-life issues employer sensitivity is more generalized from the perspective working couples. Hence the employer’s perspective and perception towards dual career couple should also be given due considerations. These explorations may lead to better understanding of additional variables that may serve as a indicator of employers’ sensitivity and lowered negative attitude of working couples towards the organisation. In addition, as has been common within work-family research, the sample consisted of management, not hourly employees. There has been a research gap between work-family conflicts in the lives of hourly employee versus lives of management employees.

One more area of scope for the future researchers is that a similar research can be carried on employees whose partners are entrepreneurs. So, DCC with one as an entrepreneur can provide a new insight to the various other types of work-life challenges. Moreover, the research could be extended to the couples working part-time or on contractual basis. The study could, however, be extended cross culturally in order to have more generalized conclusions. Future research can be done covering a wider area and more respondents with cross cultural extensions even across the country.