

# ROLE AMBIGUITY AND ROLE OVERLOAD AS IMPORTANT PREDICTORS OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

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## ABSTRACT

*Work stress had two important components: role ambiguity and role overload. This research used a cross-sectional research design because it permitted the researchers to integrate the work stress literature and the actual survey as the main procedure of collecting data for this study. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the relationship between the work stress and work-family conflict of workers using 97 questionnaires collected from navy in Malaysia. The outcomes of testing hypothesis by using smartPLS path model confirmed two important findings. First, role ambiguity was significantly correlated with work-family conflict. Second, role overload was significantly correlated with work-family conflict. This result confirms that the ability of employees to appropriately manage the ambiguity and overload in performing daily job may reduce reduce work-family conflict in the studied organization.*

**Keywords:** *role ambiguity, role overload, work-family conflict*

## INTRODUCTION

Stress is a term multi-dimensional and has a different interpretation of the language and organization. In language perspective, the meaning of word stress comes from the Latin word "stringere" that depicts the hardship and suffering. According to Iskandar (1984), stress is defined as the urge to push or bear the burden difficult to bear. Statt (1981) has stated that the definition of stress as physical and psychological tensions prolonged in the time that could affect one's ability to handle a situation.

In organizational perspective, the term of stress is a cognitive product interpretation of the situation (Abu Al Rub, 2004; Ismail *et al.*, 2010; Larson, 2004; Wickramasinghe, 2012). According to scholars Selye (1987) has described that the pressure is a non-specific response to the actions demand or load on the body. For example, the reaction of the body that interfere with workers' psychological and physiological impending discomfort on the body of worker (Montgomery *et al.*, 1996; He, Zhao & Archbold, 2002). There are two types of stress; eustress and distress. The eustress which is constructive pressure response to stress that is healthy and positive. While, distress is the destroying of the response to stress that is unhealthy and negative (Beehr & Bhagat, 2000; Ismail, 2010; Yu Fei, 2012). In a recent study, the work stress has two main components; role ambiguity and role overload (Abu Al Rub, 2004; Eby *et al.*, 2005; Ismail *et al.*, 2010; Trayambak *et al.*, 2012; Yu-Fei *et al.*, 2012). Role ambiguity is defined as an individual who does not have clear information about the objectives, scope of work, expectations of the supervisor, and job responsibilities that lead to work-related stress. The phenomenon of role ambiguity occurs when it cannot determine the action to be taken to meet the

demands of the role (Matteson & Ivancevich, 2003; Wright, 2009). While, role overload is defined as the element that includes the number of hours worked, the responsibility should be implemented, routine and non-routine jobs that exceed the capabilities and skills of workers in a time (Ismail *et al.*, 2010; Yu Fei, 2012; Ismail, 2014).

Surprisingly, extent studies in the workplace stress reveal that the level of role stressor may have a significant impact on employees' work-family conflict (Allen *et al.*, 2000; Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001; Yu-Fei *et al.*, 2012). From an organizational behavior perspective, work-family conflict is defined as a form of conflict between the role of the pressures of work and family roles are incompatible; namely, participation in the work (family) becomes difficult because of participation in the family (work) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Ismail, 2010). According to Frone (2003); Kinnunen & Mauno (2008) have defined work-family conflict as the difficulties faced when work-family balance. Time and energy are concentrated in one role will reduce the amount of time and energy that should be used in other roles. Citing a study written by Greenhaus and Boutell in Willis and O'Conner (2008) has defined that work-family conflict occurred is due to the demand that is not consistent with roles in the workplace and the family. In another meaning, work-family conflict exists when expectations related to the role of uncertainty does not meet the requirements of other roles (Greenhaus, Tammy & Spector, 2006). The work-family conflict is dominant stemming from the conflict between the role. The studies prove that the work and family domains are interdependent and have a dynamic relationship with each other (Namasivayam & Zhao, 2007). The researchers also identify that the long period of work, duty, and heavy load has a direct influence on work-family conflict (Boyar *et al.*, 2008; Kim *et al.*, 2005). The evidence presented in this section suggests that it is important to create a successful balance between work and family domains so few demands in both domains can be met efficiently, and the resources required can be accessed and used easily (Sparks & Cooper, 1999; Bass, Butler *et al.*, 2008).

Although the nature of this relationship is significant, little is known about the job stress as an important predicting variable in the workplace stress research literature (Sparks & Cooper, 1999; Ismail *et al.*, 2013). Most scholars argue that this condition may be caused by several factors. First, too many previous studies that are describing the characteristics of the pressure of work as conceptual discussion about the definition, types and forms of work pressure. Second, previous studies are more interested in studying the differences in perception of workers according to the demographic characteristics of the working pressure. Third, previous studies are more emphasis on the degree of robustness of the relationship between work stress and family conflict in general. These findings have not much attention given by previous studies to measure the impact of the size and nature of the relationship between work stress and family conflict. Therefore, the above study approach is not able to produce sufficient information to serve as a useful guide to practitioners in drafting plans for a comprehensive strategic action to prevent and deal with work stress and negative behavior in a competitive organization (Gallie & Russell, 2009; Major *et al.*, 2002; Tatman *et al.*, 2006; Yu Fei *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, this situation inspires the researchers to further investigate the nature of this relationship. This study has two main objectives; first is to measure the relationship between role ambiguity with work-family conflicts. Second is to measure the relationship between role overload and work-family conflict.

Several recent studies investigating job stress have been carried out in direct effect model for measuring the work stress in different organizations. For example the 368 married women staff in the office of Ahwaz who joined the labor force and at the same time have family responsibilities (Nabavi & Shahryari, 2012), 96 samples of non-academic staff in academic and public institutions in Sarawak (Yu-Fei, 2012), 118 academic staff at one of the public universities in Malaysia (Ismail *et al.*, 2014). This finding confirms that work-related stress role ambiguity and role overload work to improve the ability of workers to control the worker's family conflict (Nabavi & Shahryari, 2012; Yu-Fei, 2012; Ismail *et al.*, 2014).

The relationship between work stress and family conflict is consistent with the recommendations that put forward by the theory related to job stress. For example, the spillover theory by Edwards and Rothbard's (2000) has stated that the work can impact positively or negatively on the family. First, it shows that the attitudes and behaviors such as working overtime in the workplace can contribute to difficulties at home. Second, the situation that different about this theory is that employees consider working very boring and concluded that "lack of work" (energy deficit) and make employees become lazy. This leads to less employee motivation and do not spend time with family or employees do not make anything for the family. This is known as the "negative spillover". This negative interference results from the disruption faced by individuals in this domain and work in domain affect the performance of the worker's family. In the meantime, the balance of a person's working life is tied to the balance between work responsibilities and family responsibilities or life. Thus, workers who have work-life balance is an individual who can balance work and life domain.

While, role theory by Kahn *et al.* (1964) has stated that that responsibility will lead to a lot of work pressure (role ambiguity and role overload) that will eventually lead to tension. This condition can cause physical and psychological workers disrupted in some way. First, conflicting duties would trigger conflict role ambiguity. Second, the collection of duties/roles can induce feelings of burden in self. The applications theory that related to job stress shows that the essence of the correspondence attitudes and behavior of employees in managing work-family regularly can improve the ability to control the role ambiguity and role overload that lead to a reduction work-family conflict. Therefore, the responsibility must be enhanced in order to create a balance between work-family. Based on the literature review above, the hypothesis to be tested can be seen in Figure 1.

H<sup>1</sup>: There is a positive relationship between role ambiguity with work-family conflict

H<sup>2</sup>: There is a positive relationship between role overload and work-family conflict

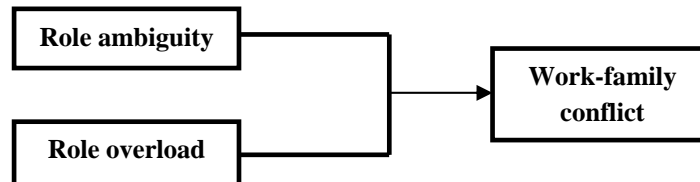


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

## METHODS

This research uses a cross-sectional research design because it permits the researchers to integrate the work stress literature and the actual survey as the main procedure of collecting data for this study. The main advantage of using this procedure is it can help the researchers to collect accurate data, avoid the occurrence of bias and improve the quality of data being collected (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010; Cresswell, 2013). This research was conducted at a naval base in Malaysia. For the confidential reasons, the name of this organization is kept anonymous. At the initial stage of this study, the researchers prepare a draft questionnaire which was built based on the work stress literature review. After that, a back-translation method has been used to translate the questionnaire into Malay and English versions in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010; Cresswell, 2013). This research was carried out on a naval base in Malaysia.

The survey questionnaire has two parts; first, the role ambiguity is measured using six items that adapted from the role ambiguity literature (Rizzo *et al.*, 1970; Matteson & In Vancevich, 1979;

Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Fu & Shaffer, 2001). The dimensions used to measure role ambiguity are objectives, the scope of duties, responsibilities, and performance evaluation criteria. Second, role overload is measured using six items that adapted from role overload literature (Rizzo *et al.*, 1970; Matteson & In Vancevich, 1979; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Fu & Shaffer, 2001). The dimensions used to measure role overload are time to complete the task, excessive workload, the amount of time, a new task, and the quality assignment. Lastly, family conflict is measured using 11 items adapted from the literature with respect to work-family conflict literature (Netemeyer, Boles & Mcmurrian, 1996; Allen *et al.*, 2000; Boles *et al.*, 2001; Eby *et al.*, 2005). The dimensions used to measure work-family conflict are attitude, time with family, time doing personal activities, family-work performance, work stress and focus on family. All these items are measured using a scale of seven response options ranging from "Strongly Disagree (1) "to" Strongly Agree (7) "and" was really Satisfied (1) "to" Very satisfied (7)". Demographic variables are used as control variables because this study focuses on the employee attitudes.

A purposive sampling method is used to distribute 160 questionnaires to naval personnel at a Navy base in Malaysia. Of the number, 97 usable questionnaires are returned by the researchers. This sampling technique is applied because the management of the organization had not given the list of registered employees to the researchers and this situation has prevented the researchers from utilizing a random technique in choosing respondents for this research. The respondents answer questionnaires based on their consent. Further, SmartPLS package version 3.0 is used to assessed the validity and reliability of the survey questionnaire data and test the research hypotheses (Ringle *et al.*, 2009; Henseler *et al.*, 2009).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of the respondents can be seen in Table 1. It shows the results of the research that the respondents are men (100,0%), aged from 25 to 29 years (40,0%), marital status is married (72,0%) level of education SPM (85,0%), power is non-officer (90,0%), TLDMSK unit Lumut (19,0%), length of service of 10 to 14 years (35,0%) and net income of RM501 to RM1000 (58,0%).

Table 1 Profile Sample Survey (N = 97)

Profile of respondents	Sub-Profile	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100,00</b>
Age	20-24 years	17	17,0
	25-29 years	40	40,0
	30-34 years	29	29,0
	35-39 years	11	11,0
Marriage Status	Single	25	25,0
	Married	72	72,0
Level of Education	SPM	85	85,0
	STPM	2	2,0
	Certificate / Diploma	6	6,0
	Degree	4	4,0
Power	Officer	7	7,0
	Non officer	90	90,0

Table 1 Profile Sample Survey (N = 97) (Continued)

Profile of respondents	Sub-Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Men	100,00	100,00
TLDM Unit	FOC	2	2,0
	KdDuyong	13	13,0
	KdJebat	8	8,0
	Kd Kelantan	10	10,0
	KdPanglimaHitam	17	17,0
	Kd Selangor	12	12,0
	LPL	1	1,0
	Markas Armada	14	14,0
	MSA	1	1,0
	SK TLDM Lumut	19	19,0
Length of Service	1-4 years	17	17,0
	5-9 years	31	31,0
	10-14 years	35	35,0
	15-19 years	12	12,0
	20 and up	2	2,0
Net Income	Less than RM500	1	1,0
	RM501 until RM1000	58	58,0
	More than RM1001	38	38,0

Table 2 shows the load factor for each item is more than 0,7; this indicates that the items for each construct have reached the standards of validity and reliability of analysis prescribed (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Gefen & Straub, 2005). Next, each construct is a composite reliability value that more than 0,70, it means that the measurement scale has high internal consistency (Chua, 2006; Henseler *et al.*, 2009).

Table 2 The Weighting Factors and Weighting Cross to Construct Different

Construct	No. of item	Cross-Factor Loading	Composite Reliability
Role ambiguity	5	0,739-0,838	0,895
Role overload	6	0,739-0,901	0,926
Work-family conflict	11	0,722-0,907	0,956

While in Table 3 shows the result of convergent and discriminant validity analysis. All constructs have values of average variance extracted (AVE) that larger than 0,5, which is within the acceptable standard of convergent validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). All constructs also have the values of AVE square root (in diagonal) are greater than the squared correlation with other constructs (in off-diagonal). This shows that all constructs meet the acceptable standard of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler *et al.*, 2009).

Table 3 The Result of Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analysis.

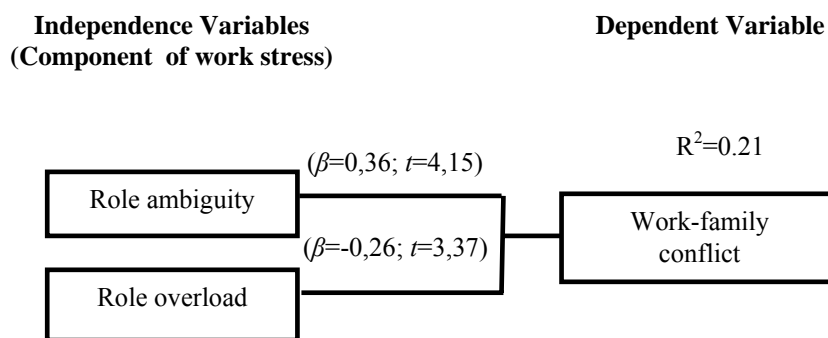
Construct	AVE	1	2	3
1.Role ambiguity	0,622	<b>0,895</b>		
2.Role overload	0,801	0,498	<b>0,834</b>	
3.Family Work-Conflict	0,663	0,303	-0,057	<b>0,813</b>

Table 4 shows the test results construct multi-collinearity statistic. The statistic colinearity test results between independent variables (role ambiguity and role overload) and dependent variables (work-family conflict) have a lower value than 0,5; means are free of serious colinearity problems (Hair *et al.*, 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The means for the variables are from 4,21 to 5,10 signifying that the levels of role ambiguity, role overload, and work-family conflict ranging from high (4) to highest level (7). Overall, the analysis results confirm the constructs of this study meet the standards established validity and reliability.

Table 4 Basic Statistics and Analysis of Variance Inflation Factor

Construct	Mean	Standard	Deviation	Varian	Inflation	Factor
				1	2	3
1. Role ambiguity	4,60		0,872		1,002	
2. Role overload	4,21		0,277		1,002	
3. Work-family conflict	5,10		0,215			

The outcomes of Testing Hypotheses 1 and 2, is shown in Figure 2.



Note: The significance at \*  $t > 1,96$

Figure 2 Outcomes of SmartPLS Path Model Analysis

Additionally, a test of predictive relevance for the reflective endogenous latent variable is further conducted based on Stone-Geisser's formula:  $q^2 = Q2 \text{ included} - Q2 \text{ excluded} / 1 - Q2 \text{ included} = 0,118$ ; indicating that it is greater than zero for the reflective endogenous latent variable. This result has predictive relevance. In terms of explanatory power, the  $q^2$  value for work-family conflict is less than 0,15; it shows that it has medium predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

Figure 2 presents the quality of model predictions in the analysis that demonstrated by the score of R square. The inclusion of role ambiguity and role overload in the analysis has explained 21% of the variance in work-family conflict. While the results of testing hypotheses using path analysis model SmartPLS has produced two important findings: first, the role ambiguity has a significant and positive association with work-family conflict ( $\beta = 0,36; t = 4,15$ ). Therefore, H1 is supported. The second role overload has a significant and positive association with work-family conflict ( $\beta = -0,26; t = 3,37$ ). Therefore, H2 is supported. Overall, these results confirm that the role ambiguity and role overload is able to act as predictor variables that are important to work-family conflict for Navy Malaysia.

The findings of this research show that role ambiguity and role overload are important predictors of work-family conflict in the studied organizations. In the context of this study, management has planned and implemented various types of job levels and classifications based on proper job analysis methods (e.g., ranking and classification methods) in order to encourage employees accomplishing their organizational goals and strategy. According to the majority respondents, the levels of role ambiguity, role overload, and work-family conflict are high. This situation explains that the ability of employees to appropriately handle ambiguity and overload in performing daily job may reduce the interference of work problems in family affairs and enhance their family well-being. This finding also has supported and extended the previous studies mostly published in Western countries.

The implications of this study can be divided into three main categories: theoretical contribution, the robustness of research methodology, and practical contribution. In terms of contribution to the theory, this study has highlighted two important findings that role ambiguity and role overload is able to act as an important predictor variable on work-family conflict. These findings have supported and broadened studies by Major *et al.*, (2002); Ismail *et al.*, (2013), Nabavi & Shahryari, (2012); Yu-Fei, (2012); Ismail *et al.*, (2014). From the perspective of practical contribution, this study can be used as a guide for employers and employees in addressing the issue of stress at work. This can be achieved if the top management to pay attention to the following aspects: the first is the content of training programs related to job stress should be implemented to help employees identify serious acute physiology (e.g., physical illness) and psychological (e.g., mental illness). The second is the method of training programs related to job stress should be given greater emphasis, particularly from the aspect of spiritual practices to reduce stress and tension physiology. The third is encouraged teamwork within the organization to create positive relationships with other employees and to cooperate in achieving work targets. The fourth is workers who suffer from anxiety, and stress-related disorders should be given time off work enough rest. Fifth is workshops or courses to be conducted in connection with the task of increasing efficiency and compatibility with the expertise of employees that is important to ensure job satisfaction and reduces stress. When workers are exposed to this situation, they will show the spirit and confidence to do any work because early exposure has been provided about knowledge and expertise in the field of employment than if the worker has to do additional work or another side of assignments outside he/she expertise. Finally, a program should be implemented by using internal or external resources through counseling units to assist employees to obtain guidance on the management control work pressure. If the above recommendations are given due consideration, it seeks to encourage employees to manage work stress regularly.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research has tested a conceptual framework developed based on the job stress research literature. The instrument used in this study has met the criteria of the validity and reliability analyses. The outcomes of SmartPLS path model analysis confirm that role ambiguity, and role overload are significantly correlated with work-family conflict; thus H1 and H2 are supported. These results prove that the ability of employees to appropriately manage ambiguity and overload in performing daily job may lead to lower work-family conflict. This finding also is consistent with the previous studies mostly published in overseas and Malaysia.

This research is cautious with the methodological and conceptual limitations. First, the cross-sectional methods used in this study could not detect issues or reasons for the relationship between the variables that are more specific. Second, this research does not measure the relationship between specific indicators for the component of work stress and family conflict. Third, the results of the analysis model route SmartPLS just focus on clarifying the variance level of conflict work-family

based on the variables involved in the research, but there are many more factors that should be emphasized is important (for example, demographic characteristics of the respondents and the type of work stress). It should be taken into account to estimate the degree of robustness of the relationship between these variables. Finally, this research only uses sample navy Malaysia, and they are selected using simple purposive techniques. Therefore, this research only describes the pattern of the relationship between the variables of the study in general and may not be generalizable to the different organizational background.

Limitations of the study above can be used as a guide to improve future studies. Among the actions that can be taken is the first of several personal characteristics and organization need to be explored in more detail as it can prove the similarities and differences in work-family conflict. Second, the study design as longitudinal study should be used to collect data, describing communication patterns, directions, and degrees of relationship between the dependent variable and independent variable. Third, future research should use more than one organization to reflect the nature and degree of firmness of the relationship between job stress and work-family conflict. Fourth, the independent variables are also to be taken into account in future research as a form of stress because stress is often seen as an important predictor of the attitudes and behavior of employees. The addition of a dependent variable can give better results, precise, and strong. Fifth, the dependent variable should be added as variables of job satisfaction, health, life satisfaction, stress, and so on. Finally, moderator or mediate variables need to be added as co-worker support, supervisor support, organizational support, and partner support that should be considered in future studies. This can improve the study conducted by the findings more robust and also to measure the effectiveness of the working pressure to produce a more accurate assessment and detailed. Therefore, this situation can encourage employees to give full support to maintain the competitiveness of the organization.

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