

**THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY SUPPORT, FLEXIBLE  
WORKING HOURS AND HARDINESS ON WORK-  
LIFE BALANCE OF CHINA WORKING WOMEN**

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## ABSTRACT

### THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY SUPPORT, FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS AND HARDINESS ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF CHINA WORKING WOMEN

The aims of the present study was to investigate the effect of family support, flexible working hours and hardiness characteristic on work-life balance of China working women. The study also aims to examine the moderating role of hardiness characteristic in the relationship between family support and work-life balance and in the relationship between flexible working hours and work-life balance of China Working women. A total of 395 working women in Hebei province, China were involved in this study. The instruments used in this study composed of: *Measure of the Work-Life Balance*; *Measure of the Flexible Working Hour*; *Family Support Inventory*; and *Dispositional Resilience Scale (DRS-15)*. The findings revealed that a) family support variables (emotional sustenance and instrumental assistance) had a positive and significant influence on work-life balance among China working women. Staff motivational level also was a significant and positive predictor for work-life balance of China working women. However, the result showed a non-significant effect of flexible working hours on work-life balance of China working women. The finding for the direction of the correlation between hardiness and work-life balance also as expected. Lastly, the findings revealed that hardiness characteristic was not a moderator in all the relationship between all the independent variables in this study and work-life balance.

**Key Words: China working women, Work-life balance, family support, flexible working hours, hardiness.**

## ABSTRAK

### ***PENGARUH SOKONGAN KELUARGA, MASA KERJA ANJAL DAN CIRI KETAHANAN TERHADAP KESEIMBANGAN KERJA-HIDUP DI KALANGAN WANITA BERKERJA CHINA***

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji pengaruh sokongan keluarga, masa kerja anjal dan ciri ketahanan terhadap keseimbangan kerja-hidup di kalangan wanita berkerja China. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengkaji peranan penyederhana ciri ketahanan dalam hubungan di antara sokongan keluargan dan keseimbangan kerja-hidup di kalangan wanita berkena China serta dalam hubungan di antara masa kerja anjal dan keseimbangan kerja-hidup. Sejumlah 395 orang wanita berkerja di Wilayah Hebei, China telah terlibat dalam kajian ini. Instrument yang digunakan dalam kajian ini merangkumi: *Measure of the Work-Life Balance*; *Measure of the Flexible Working Hour*; *Family Support Inventory*; and *Dispositional Resilience Scale (DRS-15)*. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa a) pembolehubah sokongan keluarga (sokongan emosi dan bantuan instrumental) mempunyai pengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keseimbangan kerja-hidup di kalangan wanita berkena China. Tahap motivasi staf juga menunjukkan pengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keseimbangan kerja-hidup. Namun, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa kesan masa kerja anjal yang tidak signifikan terhadap keseimbangan kerja-hidup di kalangan wanita berkena China. Dapatan bagi arah korelasi di antara ciri ketahanan dan keseimbangan kerja-hidup juga adalah seperti yang dijangkakan. Pembolehubah ini meramal keseimbangan kerja-hidup secara positif. Akhirnya, dapatan menunjukkan ciri ketahanan bukanlah pembolehubah penyederhana dalam hubungan di antara semua pembolehubah bebas yang dikaji dalam kajian ini dengan keseimbangan kerja-hidup.

**Key Words:** China working women, Work-life balance, family support, flexible working hours, hardiness.

*Measure of the Flexible Working Hour (Churchill, 1979), 3) Family Support Inventory (King and Adams, 1995), and 4) Norwegian Dispositional Resilience Scale (DRS-15) (Norwegian Hardiness Scale) (Hystad, et al., 2010).* Secara keseluruhannya, didapati bahawa sistem sokongan yang kuat dari keluarga memberi kesan yang positif dan signifikan terhadap keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan di kalangan pekerja wanita Cina, tetapi ia negatif kesan daya tahan. Sementara itu, daya tahan individu telah menunjukkan hasil yang berbeza dengan mempunyai kesan yang signifikan dan negatif terhadap keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan di kalangan Wanita Pekerja Cina. Hasil menunjukkan daya tahan ialah unsur yang bertindak sebagai moderator dalam menentukan hubungan antara sokongan pasangan, waktu bekerja yang fleksibel dan keseimbangan kerja dan kehidupan wanita Cina berkerjaya. Hasil kajian ini mencadangkan kepada orang ramai tentang saranan program dan peluang yang dipercayai lebih sesuai dan sedia ditawarkan kepada wanita berkerjaya, terutamanya yang bekerja di Cina.



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Nowadays, the role of working women in their families and the society is increasingly important, but working women are faced with problems that they cannot ignore. The present study aims to investigate the work-life balance of China working women and the influences of support from their family, flexible working hours and their hardiness trait on work-life balance. Besides that, their hardiness will be tested as a moderator in the relationship between family support, flexible working hours and work-life balance. In this chapter the research background, problem statements, research questions, research objectives and significance of the present study are discussed. On top of these, this chapter also discusses the theoretical aspect of the study, research framework, conceptualisation and operational definitions of each variable as well as the research hypotheses.

### 1.2 Research Background

A defining feature of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1830) was the rise of factories, especially textile factories. The textile machine expanded from home use to being used in a factory, and was controlled by a central power source to run its machines. Before the Industrial Revolution, hand spinners were performed by a majority of female employees. It could take more than ten spinners to supply one hand-loom of yarn, but men were not spinners, so most of the workers in the textile industry were women, and more than 57 percent of factory women worker's ages was under 20 years old (Shen, 1998). Textile was the earliest career field of women entered the

working world. During that period, women who worked in factories earned only one-third of what the men were earning.

Before the First World War, the traditional female role was almost confined to the home (Yang, 2012). During the Second World War, the need for women manpower arose. Women's roles during World War II were even more extensive than during the First World War, whether the women were at home or at the front-lines, for civilians or enlisted women. By 1945, there were more than 2.2 million women working in the war industries. They were building ships, aeroplane, and weaponry (Yang, 2012). Women also worked in farms and drove trucks. Women, instead of the men, were engaged in some of the exclusive work for men. Besides that, there were also women who served in the military. The World Wars started a new era for women to contribute to war and they were recognised for their efforts outside of the home (Shen, 1998). Women who found their existence and social value through work got the recognition from the world. Women played a key role in the development of the world during this historical period.

During the World Wars, which enabled large numbers of middle-class and working-class women to attain the ideal domestic roles of being a full-time housewife or mother in child-centred households, the presence of women in the labour force continued to increase. Women who were wives made up 18 percent of the workforce in 1900, 24 percent in 1950, and 56 percent in 1987 (David & Thomas, 1988). This data show that more women of all ages and marital statuses were working outside their homes. Industrial Revolution had increased the chances of women to work outside their homes, and this revolution had influenced the thinking of women's liberation of the modern times (Shen, 1998).

### **1.2.1 Working Women in China.**

During the imperial era, Chinese women were prohibited from having any public power. Since birth until death, women had to depend on male members in their families. In that era, women had no right to make their decisions towards their lives. Women needed to follow their fathers before they married, they needed to follow



their husbands after getting married, and they needed to follow their sons if their husbands died. In ancient China, women can never leave their home. They needed to follow the traditional practice of foot-binding, which restrained them from their freedom and rights.

After the Opium War (1840-1842), there were many opium smoking places started to hire low-cost waitresses to attract male customers. The job as a waitress was the first time then for Chinese women to go out of their homes and to own a job. The waitress appeared in the history of professional Chinese women, as an independent role in the service industry in the society. A waitress then is different from a traditional charwoman, or a female artist; this occupation was the beginning of the existence of modern working women.

At the same time, Western missionaries came to China. They not only built mission schools for women to train not only religious studies, but they also provided knowledge on science, democracy, freedom, equality etc. When the students graduated, they were mostly engaged in the field of medicine and education, and were the first group of working women in China (Xiao, 2002). There was a continuation development in traditional female careers, mainly in the manufacturing and service industries, such as washing, sewing, embroidery, etc. After the 1920s, there was a considerable development for Chinese women as working women and professionals. Women started to have voting rights and the rights to participate in public affairs. Working women were starting to get rid of low-level occupational statuses, and started to join the senior professional field.

In the middle of the 19th Century, there was a development of career for women in a new field included the appearance of some new occupations in workplaces such as the railway, banks, customs offices, post offices, telecommunication offices, and police station. The development had changed the limits on the types of female occupations as well as career fields.

According to the legislative statistics office, in 1929, there were 205 female employees in Nanjing's government office, accounting for 3% of the total number of



staff (Yang, 2012). According to the national higher education statistics in 1930, there were 313 female professors at the university, and there were some well-known female educators, who served as the President of the school or college. In 1930, based on a survey from 9 provinces and 27 cities, the number of women workers had reached 374,000 (Yang, 2012). The rapid development of the professional women in politics, economics and cultural aspects should not be ignored. The development of the careers of professional women represents a new level in the development of women's career.

In the 1960s, the Global saw the women's liberation movement. They care about women's understanding on issues, social roles, women's work and people's attitude towards women. There are many aspects related to women addressed by the women's liberation. Some of them agreed with the movement for the release of women as targets, including men as well, in all areas of life; in the family, women hope to be able to confront matters on housework with their husbands, and sharing the responsibility in regards to their families. In the workplace, they hope for equality between men and women in doing the same work and receiving the same pay, and to equally succeed. Xiao (2002) believes to "emancipate" women, is to go their way, do what they want to do, to choose their way of life. Certainly, all of these must be on the premise that women can be financially independent. In modern society, working women are most likely to create "emancipating" conditions of women for their stratum.

During Mao's rule (1949–1976), Chinese women were also needed for their manual labour for farming and urban industrialisation. To compensate for their hard work, they needed to be provided access to education and politics. During that period, the Chinese government supported women's education. Thus, the numbers of illiterates was reduced from 90% in 1949 to 32% in 1993 (Xiao, 2002). In the first 30 years of the Communist rule, discrimination on women was reduced. However, women do not have jobs that had real decision-making power.

In the present day, there are more employed Chinese women. They receive the same amount of money for the same amount of work that they do. The Chinese

government has made significant efforts to achieve a high level in the economic status of China working women. Since 1949, with the founding of the People's Republic China, the rate for working women has risen. Chinese women account for 44% of the local workforce and 34.5% for the women's workforce in the world (Xiao, 2002).

### **1.2.2 Work-Family Balance of China Working Women**

There is an old saying in China that "breadwinning men and homemaking women", which refers to men in the family usually assuming the role of the head of the family. Their responsibility is as the "breadwinner", which is to be able to provide for the family's financial security. Because of men's physiological features, and the influence of traditional concepts, it is very hard for them to escape from the responsibility of taking care of the family financially. Women as wives need to undertake much housework, as mothers raising their children; these women's responsibility is conferred by the division of family roles. In view of this, women often face a dilemma between their families and their careers. It is hard to be a "successful wife" and to have a "successful in career" and to have it all.

Women entrepreneurship has become one of the principal driving forces of the world's economic growth. In business competition and government work, as well as family life, Chinese women have a significant change in the social status. The role of women in social development and the unity of women's social role and family role are the key factors of social development and progress (Gu, 2013). Women play multiple roles in the family and society; they are both wife and mother, and also a member of the society. While serving their families, they are also in pursuit of social significance and value, and to make a great contribution towards humanity. For working women, it is also similar for them to play multiple roles in the family; they are wives, mothers and their parents' daughters. Any confusion in these roles could lead to conflict. However, as members of the family, working women's contribution to the family cannot be ignored.

In China, women are often the major key player for family labour. Working women have an average housework of 3.97 hours per day, more than 1.25 hours of career men (Li, 2004). A mid-term test report from the implementation of 'Outline of Development of Chinese Women and Children' (2001-2010) in Yunnan province found that women perform house chores up to 165 minutes per day, nearly three times as much as men, in view of men being involved with housework only 59 minutes per day. Besides this, the survey also pointed out that 84.48% of women do housework, compared to 43.71% of men (Yang, 2006). There are quite a number of difficulties and challenges for working women on how to balance due to the change of their roles and between their multiple roles. During the changes in social development, the working hours has increased, especially in Beijing, Shanghai, where some working women's working hours are up to 11 hours per day (Zhou, 2012). If these working women continue working intensively for the extended time, their mental and physical health will become worse. Therefore, to keep work-life balance is crucial and it is not only for working women but also men.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

According to a survey conducted by the World Health Organization, female incidences of psychological problems are higher than that of their male counterpart. Working women are more prone to mental illness than housewife, mainly reflected in their work enthusiasm, security, and the lack of self-confidence and optimism (Zhang, 2013). Working women who stay in intense work environment (hospital, Securities Company, law court, police office) for long period of time, with strong work pressure and the burden of their families have effects to their physical and mental health. The study from Yang (2012) found that the psychological health level of China working women was lower than the normal level, about two-thirds of them have inferior health; obsessive-compulsive disorders, depression, anxieties and paranoia. A survey from the China Human Resources Development Network (An & Wright, 2005) found that 27.45% of working women have psychological problems. The findings indicated that the physical and mental health of working women and hardiness in facing setbacks and difficulties due to pressure or trouble from work and their families (Tartasky, 1993; Hansen, 2000) need attention.

In the past, under the influence of the family pattern of 'male should master outside while the female inside', people were influenced by the backward ideas that women did not need to work outside; but now, modern society advocate equality between the sexes, women have started to go to work, and the dual-working family model has become a common phenomenon (Nguyen, 2017). However, according to Duxbury and Higgins (1992), working women who are married spend time with the family and do housework more than men. Women need to bring up children, and care for older parents in the family, as well as cook, clean, etc. They also claimed that married working women experience higher work-family conflict than career men. Working women need to complete their work responsibilities and on the same time need to care for their children and do housekeeping chores. Besides, by facing the fast pace of life, with the pressure of employment competition and living cost increasing in the rapid changes of their social environment, working women suffer from lack of the sense of security and are faced with no options. In China traditional culture environment, working women seldom receive support and understanding from their spouses (An & Wright, 2005).

In western countries, many researchers begin to pay close attention to the positive effects of the family and work. The implementation of work and family balance strategies could help working women balance their work and family, such as the implementation of paid vacation system and flexible working hours at work. Working women need more family support, flexible work schedules, and boarding schools for children to reduce their work and family conflicts (Lee & Choo, 2001). Therefore, the balance between work and life for working women is important to study. However, empirical studies related to work-life balance among working women is still relatively less in China.

In workplace, the company that adopts flexible working system allows employees to plan their working hours. Flexible working arrangements are also one of the most popular measures of controlled personal time used in many companies (An & Wright 2005). According to An & Wright (2005) there are various advantages of flexible working hours such as, to improve the productivity of employees, to promote democracy at work and cooperation, to stimulate staff's work enthusiasm,



creativity and dedication. However, Allan and Sienko (1998) claimed that stability, loyalty and sense of responsibility of flexible working hour employees are lower than that of full-time employees. This is due to the lower salary paid for flexible working hour employees as compared to the full-time employees; employees' education level as well as the quality of work without strict requirements in enterprise, companies who choose flexibility would lead to the suppression of the improvement of the enterprise's innovation ability (Wei, 2008). In addition, studies also found that flexible working hour could affect the communication between employees, which may lead to work being unable to run smoothly, and conflicts occurring between employees (Moorman & Harland, 2002). Thus, the present study also aims to investigate the impact of flexible working hours on work-life balance among working women.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

Based on the problem statements, there were two research questions that need to be answered in the present study. First, working women the most desire work-life balance as they want to make work and family life as balanced as possible. Therefore, working women not only need to strive to maintain the balance between work and life, they also need help and support at work and from their family members especially their spouse. Ezra and Deckman (1996) found that the flexible working hour option was the best choice for companies to help their employees balance their work and family life. Tartasky (1993) and Hansen (2000) claimed that hardiness characteristic could help individual to accomplish tasks when he/she face setbacks and difficulties due to pressure or trouble from work or from their family. Based on the statements, the research question was developed: are flexible working hours, family support and hardiness trait influence work-life balance among working women in China?

Hayakawa and Simard (1999) and Palmer (2008) found that the implementation of flexible working hours would lead to employees' revenues decreasing, and also affecting the family's economic income. However, the support from their families and the hardiness of working women could effectively promote better work-life balance for working women (Yang, 2012). In addition, Yang (2012)

indicated that flexible working hours increase the flexibility of working women's time arrangement, and also reduces frequency of conflict from their work schedules and life planning, thus improving their work-life balance. Based on these statements, the research question raised was whether the hardiness trait of working women will moderate the relationship between their flexible working hour and work-life balance and the relationship between family support and their work-life balance?

### **1.5 Research Objective**

Based on the research questions, the following research objectives were proposed; the study aims to examine:

- a. the effect of family support, flexible working hours and hardiness characteristic on work-life balance of China working women.
- b. the moderating role of hardiness characteristic in the relationship between family support and work-life balance of China Working women.
- c. the moderating role of hardiness characteristic in the relationship between flexible working hours and work-life balance of China Working women.

### **1.6 Significance of Research**

Nowadays, women working and participating in social development through that has become a world trend; however, this trend combines traditional ideas and modern thoughts. The expectations of working women are to actively participate in work their social lives and on the other hand, handle their family related responsibilities. China is the largest labour market of the world; this study is hence helpful for a better understanding on how working women are able to balance the relationship between their family roles and career roles. Is in this issue flexible working hour, family support or hardiness characteristic of working women influence work-life balance?

There are a few enterprises in China that implemented the policy of flexible working hours although still in its infancy, and only few occupations are able to apply the system of flexible working hours. The present study seeks to find out the

the system of flexible working hours. The present study seeks to find out the expectations and feedback of China employees in enterprises where they have implemented flexible working hours in the workplace, especially from the working women in those places whether the flexible working hours are able to help them to balance between work and life. The present study also focuses on the influence of family support in two aspects: emotional sustenance and instrument assistance on work-life balance of working women. Therefore, the findings of this study may help for a better insight to the public the important of family support to the working women or men for them to be able to balance the work responsibilities and to maintain their role in family.

There are still limited studies in China for examining the relationship of family support, flexible working hour, hardiness characteristic and work-life balance among working women. Thus, the present study may fill in the knowledge gap provide more understanding of working women work and life behaviour from situational and psychological perspective. Subsequently, the findings of the present study could offer more information in the field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology based on scientific evidence.

### **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

In psychology, theory is used to provide a model or statements for understanding human thoughts, emotions and behaviors. The present study, work-family border theory that proposed by Clark (2000), and theory of role balance that suggested by Marks and McDermid (1996) and Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson and Kacmar's Resource-Gain-Development Model were used as a basis to develop the research framework.



### 1.7.1 Work-Family Border Theory

The work-family border theory was proposed by Clark (2000) indicated that work and family belong to two different areas; each area has its unique rules and role expectation. Employees transitioning between the border of work and family every day are creating and maintaining their lives in the field of both work and family while crossing this border, managing and performing their different roles in each domain, and maintaining boundaries between their work and family relationships. There are three aspects of this border: physical, temporal, and psychological. The physical border is the actual activity place of work and family residence. The temporal border is the time that is spent in these two places. The psychological border is the different sets of psychological atmosphere present at work and at home. Work and family are two independent areas but also associated with each other.

People who work and care for their families every day, shape two ranges and boundary between them, affecting the relationship between border crosser and the other members of the scope. The boundary keeper and border crosser have different understandings of the scope of work and family, and tend to affect the balance of the border crosser; however the communication between them could avoid conflicts among her roles. This theory not only illustrates the forming mechanism of the work-family conflict, but also discusses how to promote work-family balance; the 'balance' here defined as having satisfaction for both work and family lives functioning well, and minimising conflict.

The work-family border theory can be applied to a range of topics on work-family, especially focusing on the fields related to work and family. In this present study, working women need to balance work and family; to live in harmony with their families, and also finish their work at the workplace. In fact, many working women have to bring extra work home; continuing to complete unfinished work at home. At the same time, contradiction from their family members can also affect the execution of work of these working women, while they suffer negative emotions from their families. It blurs the border between work and hence proving that the work-family border theory could be applied to the study.

### **1.7.2 Theory of Role Balance**

According to Marks and McDermid (1996), role balance is just a superficial phenomenon, rather “both a behavioural pattern of acting across roles in a certain way and a corresponding cognitive-affective pattern of organizing one’s inner life of multiple selves” (Marks and MacDermid, 1996, p.421). According to them, there are two ways to engage in multiple roles: positive role balance and negative role balance. Positive role balance refers to playing every role with attention, concern and devotion, while negative role balance refers to playing these roles sluggishly, with apathy, cynicism and low attentiveness. The theory of role balance in the fields of behavioural and cognitive-affective shows that positive role balance will lead to ‘role ease’ and negative role balance will lead to ‘role strain’ (Marks and MacDermid, 1996).

Working women have to play multiple roles in society. In China, there is only one child in each family and most working women bear the responsibility to care for the elderly. Therefore, there are at least three kinds of roles in the family, a career woman is her husband’s wife, her children’s mother, and her parents’ daughter; but at the workplace, a career woman is a leader, a workmate, and an employee or playing other roles. The positive role will help working women balance work and family life. However, the negative role instead will affect the relationships at the workplace and with the family, making her not confident with her roles at work and with her family, and doubting her ability. Strong hardiness could help, offset the negative effects brought by the negative role, and support from the family can also help the working woman to share the responsibilities in her family life, and reduce her burden. The key to work and life balance depends on the balance of the working women’s role. Therefore, the theory of role balance could support this study.

### **1.7.3 Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson and Kacmar’s Resource-Gain-Development Model**

Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, and Kacmar (2007) expressed “the primary driver of facilitation is the acquisition and utilization of individual and environmental resources” (p. 73). Their study examined the antecedents of work and family identities, family support, and the organizational variables of utilization of benefits and work-family