

## *The Effect of Relationship Enhancement on Solving Dimensions of Work-Family Conflict*

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**Received:** 1 Feb 2017      **Accepted:** 18 June 2017

### **Abstract**

**Background:** Work-family conflict is one of the components which have been paid attention in the present era due to changes and evolutions taken place in the field of work nature.

**Objectives:** The present research was conducted by the aim of investigating the effect of relationship enhancement on solving work-family conflict.

**Methods:** This is a quasi-experimental study with pretest post-test design with a control group. 30 married staff working in municipality of Karaj city were selected by simple random sampling method, and were allocated randomly into intervention and control groups (n=15). Data was gathered through Rastegar khaled 17 item family-work conflict questionnaires. For the intervention group, relationship enhancement program was held through 7 educational sessions per week. Control group did not receive any formal educational training until the end of the research process. The research data were analyzed through univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) in SPSS 20.

**Results:** The results indicated that there is a significant difference between intervention and control groups in the family-work conflict variable. In other words, relationship Enhancement program has led to solving family-work conflict among the intervention group subjects in the posttest stage.

**Conclusion:** It is suggested that counselors use this educational program in different occupational organizations and institutions for the purpose of reducing work family conflicts and improving relationships.

**Key words:** *Relationship Enhancement, Family-Work Conflict*

### **Introduction**

Empirically and theoretically, interference has been observed in the occupation field with the family field and also in the family field with the occupation field. Work-family conflict occurs when individuals are in a condition in which they have to play multiple roles which need

considerable time, energy and commitment, and meanwhile, the different roles get interfered with one another [1].

Work-family conflict is an especial type of conflict between roles which has led to a conflict between different, inconsistent and also bilateral demands which are caused by job and family

responsibilities [2] and the pressures created by roles and demands of work and family which are inconsistent and interfering in some aspects [3-7], and also leads to facing with numerous expectations of roles [8].

Conflict is a basis for studying a set of contradictory demands which is derived from the interference of multiple roles. On the other hand, when work or family roles are highlighted for the person and the demands of the other role are not met, conflict would arise [9]. Work-family conflict can be derived from two sources: first the interference of work issues with family, in which, pressures of the work setting that disrupt the family roles of the individuals; second the interference of family issues with work, in which, requirements of the family setting disrupts the individual in playing work responsibilities [10].

Therefore, the responsibilities, concerns, and pressures of the work or family area which enter the other area, disrupt the balance between work and family. When the duties of the family setting are brought to the work setting, or when work requirements interfere with personal life, the person would be troubled. The existence of numerous problems and tensions in both work and family settings, would lead the person towards distress [11].

In the proposed models, three major conflicts are introduced, including time-based conflict, pressure-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict [12,13]. Time-based conflict is the result of multiple competitions for grasping the time to do another activity related to the other role undertaken simultaneously [14,15]. Pressure-based conflict is, in fact, the induced pressure resulted by stressful stimuli in work and family. These stimuli cause physical and psychological tensions such as stress, anxiety, exhaustion, depression, impatience and irritability in both family and work roles, which make it difficult to meet the demands of the other role [16,17]. In the behavior-based conflict, the specific patterns of behaviors related to a role are inconsistent with the behavioral expectations related to the other role [16].

Recently, researchers tried to obtain an appropriate understanding of the effects of work-family conflict [18,19]. Scholars found a

significant and negative relationship between work-family conflict and the job satisfaction [20], emotional well being [21]; components of job satisfaction and mental health [22]; life satisfaction [23]; components of job satisfaction and mental health [24]; job satisfaction, organizational support and necessary flexibility in occupation [25]; job and family satisfaction [26].

The research conducted on dual-career couples have indicated that changes in the family structure due to the employment of wife would lead to increased conflict and reduced marital happiness. In the other words, while an employed wife can provide a better support for her husband (compared to an unemployed wife), they would have a better economic status and they would experience less anxiety regarding financial issues, but there would occur a number of family and work conflicts in their life, including job stress, high work-pressure, role conflict, child-care-related problems, elderly-care problems and issues related to the balance of job, family, and personal needs [18].

There are various programs and strategies related to work-family conflict, among which, the Relational Enhancement Program (RE) can be noted as the first communicational skills training program which has absorbed considerable attention [27].

RE was formed in early 1950 [28], the first three-year research program suggested that this approach has been effective [29], and it was proposed as a skill-based program [30]. The theory underlying the RE approach is a unique combination of four major psychotherapy schools: psychodynamic, behaviorism, humanism, and interpersonal approaches [29]. From another point of view, RE is a combination which integrates psychoanalysis, behavioral, communicational and systems perspectives [31]. This program is unique in many respects: first, it can be used for distressed and non-distressed individuals [32]. Second, it is flexible and has the capability to be conducted in various forms [27]. Generally, the RE program helps the individuals to improve their relationships and also maintain the quality of these relationships over time [32,33].

In other words, based on the RE perspective and the findings of the research on this field [24-28],

the following issues can be noted: healthy relationships, problem and conflict solving ability in a dual and fair way, the ability to keep the caring climate during discussion and problem solving, the ability to adopt the perspective of the other person, the ability to communicate with other individuals, the ability to see oneself and the other person clearly (without bias), the ability to prevent or reduce negative-negative interaction cycles and anger, the ability to change the expected behavioral patterns of the individual, helping the individual to achieve his/her desired and expected changes and helping the opposite side (the other person) to make his/her desired changes. By creating a positive thought, the negative thoughts and feelings would be covered under positive thoughts and feelings, and a friendly relationship would be formed. In a friendly relationship, the motivation for change would increase considerably [29, 39-41].

The results of this program and learning communicational skills and interactional skills would be increased quality of life [42], life satisfaction [43], adjustment [44-47], and intimacy, commitment and trust [48, 49].

Regarding the role of work-family conflict in appropriate function of the individual, addressing this issue is of fundamental importance. Work-family enhancement is associated with expansion of the personal sources, that is, time, energy, and commitment [50]. This model proposes that personal sources of the individual are ample and improvable. Since cooperation in multiple fields can enhance the individual's ability to use personal sources in other fields, therefore, moving from one role to another can be positive [51]. For the purpose of achieving this goal, that is, enriching work and family fields and reducing unhealthy work-family conflicts, we must start by highlighting the importance of the role of relational enhancement approach in solving problems and improving the quality of communication skills. In addition to the mentioned issue, the existing research gap in the field of the effect of relational enhancement program on solving work-family conflict motivated the researcher to investigate the effect and efficacy of this approach for solving work-family conflict.

## Methods

This is a quasi-experimental study with pretest post-test design with a control group. The study conducted after obtaining the introduction letter for municipality of Karaj, Alborz Province Center of Iran, in spring 2015 and the agreement of the educational department. Inclusion criteria were married, with a degree of at least a high school diploma and a child. Among 85 qualified individuals enrolled for participation in the research, 30 individuals were selected through simple random sampling method and were allocated randomly into intervention and control groups (n=15 per group).

Before intervention a pretest performed for both intervention and control groups. The intervention group received the relational enhancement program and the control group was put in the waiting list and received no intervention. It was explained for the participants that the training sessions are designed for two purposes: first, to help them improve their relationships in work and family fields, and second, for conducting a research. After completing the work-family conflict questionnaire as the pretest, the intervention group received seven 90-minute educational sessions of relational enhancement program. The control group received no intervention in this step, but for the ethical issues related to the research, after finishing the research, another course was hold for the control group. Educational sessions lasted from early May to early July of 2015. In terms of ethical considerations, the confidentiality of the information was explained and a written consent was taken from the participants.

In the present research, for gathering the data, the work-family conflict self-report scale has been used which was developed and standardized by Rastegar Khaled (2004). This scale includes 17 items, 8 items of which are assigned to work-family conflict and 9 items are assigned to family-work conflict. In Rastegar Khaled study on 644 dual-career couples in 22 regions of Tehran, Iran, it was shown that the Alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.90 in the preliminary analysis and 0.89 in the final analysis, both of which are relatively high [2]. For obtaining the scale validity, construct validity method and factor

analysis were used. After finishing the statistical calculations, 17 items were selected with highest correlation coefficients with the whole scale.

After finishing the training programs, and in the final session, a post-test was conducted in all the staff in both groups. The results of the post-test were compared with the scores of pretest for both groups in order to determine the efficacy of the relational enhancement program on solving work-family conflict. Finally, for preventing from the effect of the intervention group on the control group at the end of the training procedure, some individuals from the control group were randomly interviewed. The protocol for relational enhancement training sessions in the present research is as follows [29, 43]:

The aims of first session were: Conducting the pretest, getting familiar with the group administrator, introducing the group members, explaining the rules and determining the frameworks and describing general principles of relational enhancement skills with assigning task.

Second session aims were: Helping the individuals to deepen their empathetic mutual understanding skill and have an emotional bond in their dialogue. They also had to improve the empathy skill in their connections and appreciate what others do. A task is also assigned to the group.

Third session aims were: Helping the individuals to improve the cooperation spirit by their discussion/negotiation skill in order to facilitate an open relationship, and finally enhance their collaborative problem-solving skill. Also, they must express themselves in a way that minimizes the defensive posture of the other person, along with a task.

In fourth session we were looking to help attendees to improve their ability to control emotions and manage the conflict condition in a more effective way; so that security and respect would be maintained in their relationships, along with a task.

The fifth session aims were; helping participants to create a solution by problem/conflict-solving skill, achieving an agreement or an action plan and learning an approach which increases the possibility of gaining a satisfactory result for both sides along with task.

Aims of the sixth session were: Helping individuals to change their behavior and helping others to change themselves increase the possibility of successful execution of a consensus change in their behavior. Also, by using facilitation skill, keep their dialogues in an appropriate direction and monitor (control) their dialogues. A task is also given.

In the seventh session as the final session the individuals were helped to stabilize the place of these skills in their life by generalization skill, and enhance these skills in long-term by using maintenance skill. Finally, summarization and post test would be done.

### Results

Mean and standard deviation of age in individuals of intervention and control groups were  $36.53 \pm 3.5$  and  $35.53 \pm 5.8$ , respectively. Majority of the participants had an educational level of bachelor's degree (43.3%) and the rest had associate degree (13.3%), master's degree (30%) and PhD (13.3%).

For examining the normality of the scores' distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used and the results suggested that the assumption of normality in the data distribution is established in both tests in terms of work-family conflict and family-work conflict ( $p > 0.05$ ). According to t-test there was no significant difference between pretest scores of intervention and control groups. After intervention significant difference observed between two study groups both in work-family conflict and family-work conflict ( $p = 0.001$ ) (table 1).

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of pretest and post test scores of Work with Family Conflict and family with work in two experimental and control groups**

conflict	Pretest				*P value	Post test				*P value
	Intervention		Control			Intervention		Control		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
<b>Work-family conflict</b>	22.47	5.57	25.33	2.71	0.084	25.07	2.46	17.93	3.46	0.001
<b>Family-work conflict</b>	24.20	7.77	26.07	3.36	0.401	26.40	3.26	22	5.79	0.001

\* t test

Comparing pre test and post test mean scores of study variables showed significant difference only in intervention group (p=0.001) (table 2).

**Table 2: Results of dependent t test for Work with family conflict and Family with work conflict of study groups**

Conflict	intervention				*P value	Control				*P value
	Pretest		Post test			Pretest		Post test		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
<b>Work with family conflict</b>	22.47	5.57	17.93	3.46	0.001	25.33	2.71	25.07	2.46	0.943
<b>Family with work conflict</b>	24.20	7.77	22	5.79	0.001	26.07	3.36	26.40	3.26	0.785

\* paired t test

Also, the Levene's test showed that the observed F value is not significant in 0.05 significance level (p>0.05), therefore, the variance of work with family conflict (F= 2.25, SIG= 0.14) and family with work conflict (F= 1.54, SIG= 0.22) is not different among the participant members (intervention and control groups) and the variances are equal.

For investigating the efficacy of relational enhancement, the univariate covariance analysis

(ANCOVA) was used, and the results are reported in tables 3 and 4. As seen in table 3, the difference between the mean scores of solving work-family conflict is significant in the post test stage after controlling for pretest scores in both intervention and control groups. That is, the relational enhancement has led to solving work-family conflict (F= 62.30, SIG= 0.01). In addition, results of univariate covariance analysis show an effect size of 69%.

**Table 3: Results of univariate covariance analysis of relationship enhancement on solving work with family conflict**

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of squares	F	significance	Effect size
<b>Pretest</b>	161.58	1	161.58	48.32	0.01	0.64
<b>Group</b>	208.53	1	208.53	62.30	0.01	0.69
<b>Total</b>	14501	30				

**Table 4: Results of Univariate covariance analysis of Relationship Enhancement on solving family with work conflict**

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of squares	F	significance	Effect size
Pretest	572.42	1	572.42	327.59	0.01	0.92
Group	65.41	1	65.41	37.43	0.01	0.58
Total	18334	30				

As observed in the above table, the difference between the mean scores of solving family-work conflict is significant in the posttest stage after controlling for pretest scores of both groups. That is, the relational enhancement has led to solving family-work conflict ( $F= 37.43$ ,  $SIG= 0.01$ ). Furthermore, results of univariate covariance analysis show an effect size of 58%.

### Discussion

In the present research, the effectiveness of relational enhancement on solving dimension of work-family conflict was investigated. Results of comparing two groups (intervention and control) in terms of age and education level variables suggested that both groups were similar in relation to these factors.

According to the first hypothesis which says relational enhancement is effective on solving work-family conflict; it can be said that relational enhancement has been effective on solving work-family conflict. Findings of the present research are consistent with the research conducted by Nabavi and Shahriari (2012) [52], Weer and Greenhaus (2014) [53], Konik (2014) [54], Carroll et al (2013) [55], Brower and Darrington (2012) [56], and Montgomery and Cook (2005) [57]. The conflict of family-work is the interference of family roles with work roles. The more responsibilities individuals accept and the more overloads they feel in their family roles, the more the possibility of interference of family roles with work roles would be, and a ground for formation of conflicts would be provided. It can be said that the necessary time for family roles limits the available time for doing work roles, and therefore, by having a time commitment to a role, the time dedicated to the other role would be lost. Formation of conflict in family setting and its overflowing to the work setting is caused by

various factors. Meanwhile, lack of necessary skills to solve interpersonal problems is highlighted as another major factor. Conflict sources in this field mainly include marriage, lack of support or low support of couples for one another, parental role, responsibility of parenting, and the working hours if the wife. Those individuals who lack the necessary flexibility to modify and adjust their functional patterns in these fields, struggle with a high conflict. The relational enhancement program, addresses this field, which equips the individuals with relational skills and directs them towards considering their and others' responsibilities, demands, expectations and needs. In fact, RE puts emphasis on interpersonal problems and tries to decrease family-work conflict by increasing the quality of relationships in family setting, such as increasing the quality of performing tasks related to the home, increasing family support and reducing expectations; and enrich the role of each member in improving the relationship. Accordingly, this program asks the individuals to consider the proposed skills in their life and act based on those skills in order to provide a ground for establishing a balance in this field.

In the second hypothesis, it was said that the relational enhancement program is effective on solving work-family conflict; it was found that the relational enhancement program has been effective on solving work-family conflict, as well. The conflict of work-family suggests the interference of work roles with family roles. In fact, work tasks keep the individual from performing his/her family responsibilities such as fatherhood or supporting the spouse. Overflow of the conflicts in the work setting into the family setting is caused by various factors such as tension in relationships with colleagues, lack of action-freedom in the work environment, lack of

necessary support from the supervisors, work shifts, and addiction to work and intense willingness to perform work tasks in long hours. There is negative and significant relationship between work-family conflict and the perceived fairness in the organization, organizational commitment and vitality. Kossek and Lambert (2005) proposes that the level of conflict in the work field with family is considerably higher than the level of conflict in the family field with work [58]. And of course, this can be attributed to the high flexibility and the adaptability of family with work fields of the individual.

In the relational enhancement program, considering responsibilities, demands and needs of both sides are emphasized. RE seeks to meet the needs of both side of the relationship and to achieve a desired status through helping individuals to understand personal differences and similarities, search for individual identity, try to meet personal needs and consider these needs and goals as the aim of establishing the relationship (1,2). RE aimed to teach skills such as discussion and negotiation, conflict management, and problem/conflict solving to individuals in order to improve and enhancing interpersonal relationships, which is in fact a foundation for solving the conflicts [59-61].

According to results of the present research, it can be said that the relational enhancement program, is an effective model for reducing the intensity of work-family conflict of Kraj municipality staff. The results of the present research, along with confirming the findings of prior studies on this field, provide promising evidence about the effect the relational enhancement model on solving work-family conflict. Accordingly, the present research can be helpful in proposing a new empirical finding for enhancing work-family enhancement, and it can also lay the ground for future research in this field in other organizations such as health and medical institutions. In such a situation, health care professionals, especially nurses, experience different conflicts, including interpersonal relationships [62]. The relational enhancement program may be useful for nurses to solve their work family and family work conflicts.

**Conflict of interest:**

There is no conflict of interest.

**Funding:**

There is no supporting financial resource.

**Acknowledgement**

It should be noted that the present research is the result of the corresponding author's dissertation for masters' degree, which has been approved in Kharazmi University of Tehran with code 2294385. The researchers want to express their especial appreciation to the respected authorities and participants who were very helpful and friendly in conducting the present research.

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