

## Sloan Network Encyclopedia Entry

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### Work and Family: Cross-National Comparisons (2006)

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#### Basic Concepts and Definitions

This entry examines work-family linkages in national and cross-national settings. It discusses historical, economic, political, religious and social factors that influence the national context (Hass, 2003; Treas & Widmer, 2000). In particular, the focus is on research examining national trends that answer the questions listed below:

1. Why do nations differ in how they address concerns regarding work-family linkages?
2. What beliefs do nations have about the importance of the work, spouse, and parental roles? Should children be taken care at home? Are mothers the best caregivers of children? Can public institutions do a fair job of caring for infants and preschoolers?
3. How do nations respond as an increasing number of women seek an education as well as employment? Are they supportive? Do they offer state supported programs for childcare, parental leave, and tax incentives that encourage men and women to seek employment on an equal footing?
4. How and why do nations differ regarding gender roles? Are they trying to change their expectations regarding what men and women should do in the family domain? How are traditional expectations changing?
5. How and why do nations differ in their expectations of performance from male and female employees? Do they expect different performances from married and single, male and female employees? Do they expect different performances from male and female employees who are also parents?
6. Is it the responsibility of the government to help married employees balance work and family issues?

#### Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies

Nations differ with regard to how they think about work and family and the importance of each of these domains in human lives (Knudsen & Waerness, 2001; Feldman, Masalha, & Nadam, 2001). Based on the history, economy, politics, religion, and culture of the country, perceptions regarding work-family linkages

may differ across nations. The national context serves as a gauge for clarifying the underlying assumptions regarding the division of labor and role expectations at work and in the family structure. It also throws light on the rate of change and direction of future trends regarding work-family linkages that can be expected. For example, Brewster & Rinduss (2000) found that drops in fertility rates are related to increased participation of women in the labor force implying that there is an underlying assumption of a fundamental incompatibility between women raising children and being involved in the workplace. Specifically, in Japan, there has been a significant reduction in fertility as women are avoiding or postponing marriage and childbirth. Ireland, Italy, and Spain also show similar drops in fertility rates.

Knowing whether a nation is traditional or liberal, strongly religious or not, economically successful or struggling, and whether or not it provides government aided childcare arrangements and parental leave is important. Such information would allow organizations to anticipate the expectations employees bring to the work place and the pressures they face from their family roles. It would also provide some indication of the social support employees may receive from their families and communities as they try to combine their work and family roles. Warner, Lee, and Lee (1986) examined ethnographic data from over 186 societies to study how much marital power women had in nuclear versus extended families, in matrilineal and patrilineal societies. They found that women in nuclear families have more marital power than women in extended families. Also, women in more complex social structures where there are more numbers of kinship ties and a patrilineal structure had lesser power. Norms in patrilineal structures support male dominance and family power structure is influenced not by negotiation between husband and wife, but is defined by the kingroup.

### **State of the Body of Knowledge**

This section organizes cross-national research on work-family issues into two categories: those that have compared two or more nations and those that have been done within single nations.

#### ***What do cross-national studies reveal?***

Joplin, Shaffer, Francesco, and Lau (2003) conducted focus groups in five countries (China, Hong Kong, Mexico, Singapore, and the United States) and report that macro level factors such as economic, social, technological and legal factors have a strong influence on work-family conflict for married employees. Similarly, Whitehouse (2002) examined disparities in the earnings of employed women across the UK and Australia even though both nations tend to support a traditional family structure in which males are the main breadwinners. They report that there are several factors that influence the wages earned by married employees (such as national policies) and for women, particularly in UK, motherhood seems to result in lower wages.

*U.S., Britain, and Sweden.* In 1992, Bailyn raised some very fundamental questions about the work-family interface. What does it take to succeed at work? Who will take care of the family? Are women still

expected to take care of the family? What is the national policy on this? With the entry of women into the labor force causing a blurring of boundaries between work and family, how can we reconcile an employee's family needs with organizational needs? Is it the organization's responsibility to worry about family needs? Can you still expect an employee with high ability to place full devotion on work? She reported that answers to these questions depended on a nation's economic and social context as well as on the kind of work and kind of organization. Different countries provide different contexts for work-family linkages. In the U.S., work and family tend to remain separate. Family is perceived to be private and an employee is expected to give work top priority rather than try to balance home and work responsibilities. There is also the unspoken understanding that women are expected to take care of the home. Then there is the rule that to be able to succeed at work, an employee has to be completely loyal to the work role and commitment all the time and energy to it. There are lots of rewards for doing this and an employee can get tempted to follow this route, much to the detriment of the family. In the U.K., the government has created an infrastructure that allows the balancing of work and family, such as flextime and working from home for women. Women can take a 2-5 year break of unpaid leave following childbirth and return later. There is no attempt at hiding the fact that there is no equality between men and women, and that women, in Britain, work on a "Mommy track". In Sweden, every individual is given the opportunity to pursue economic self-sufficiency. The government takes responsibility for the family's well-being. There is state approved daycare and parental leave that both parents can avail. In this way, the government supports the needs of the families, should both parents choose to work, thus supporting equality in gender roles. In contrast, in the U.S., women have to meet male work demands in the workplace. All this shows that national policies reflect ideological differences regarding gender roles, women's contributions to society, and what employers should do for their employees.

*Sweden and U.S.* Seward, Yeatts, and Zottarelli (2000) analyzed research studies regarding Swedish and U.S. fathers' attitudes toward father's involvement in childcare, the amount of parental leave taken, and determinants of whether leave was taken by fathers. Compared to the U.S., Sweden is more progressive in its support of fathers' involvement in childcare. In 1990, Sweden was the first country to allow 3 months of unpaid maternity leave in 1937, up to 15 months of paid "regular" leave to be taken by parents (but not simultaneously), and then in 1993 to allow one month of non-transferable paternity leave. This is by far one of the most generous worldwide parental leave policies supported by the government. However, even though this option is available, Swedish fathers still take lesser leave than mothers, as they indicate concern about financial losses (both short term and long term), less support from coworkers and supervisors, and not wanting to compete with mothers in taking care of children. While Swedish fathers could count the amount of leave they took in terms of weeks per year, U.S. fathers could count it only in days per year. In the U.S., it was in 1942 that most employers offered female employees mandatory and unpaid leave. The 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act provided expectant mothers some protection and benefits and it was the Family and Medical Leave Act passed in 1993 that allowed parents of a newborn or adopted child the option of up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave (provided the organization

had over 50 employees and the parents met a certain history of past employment with the organization). Despite this option, fathers are relatively more reluctant to take parental leave and prefer to use sick leave/vacation days to care for children. This pattern of available opportunities as well as usage suggests that in the U.S. the general climate supporting fathers' involvement still follows a traditional separation of parental roles with women being the prime caretakers. Coworkers and supervisors reflect these norms when they are more supportive of female rather than male employees taking parental leave. However, the differences between the national policies and fathers' usage of parental leave suggests that relative to the U.S., Sweden's policies are more supportive of fathers' involvement in childcare.

*23 European nations and U.S.* Treas and Widmer (2000) studied 23 European nations as well as the U.S. and found that a nation's policies institutionalize family and gender ideologies that communicate to the public what is expected at home and at work. Between the 1980s and 1990s women started working even before it had been sorted out whether employment of women hurts the children. In some countries, children are seen as being more central, for example, Italy rates them highest followed by Austria, West Germany, Irish, British, and the Dutch. Nations differ regarding concerns about preschool kids being negatively impacted by working moms. Welfare, labor, and taxation policies of nations reflect the unspoken beliefs about gender and family norms. There are some differences based on religion, with Protestants seeming more liberal than Catholics. 23 nations (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Italy, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Israel, Netherlands, West Germany, Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, and the U.S.) were grouped along a continuum with social democracies at one end, conservatives at the other and liberal in the middle. All were asked to respond to a survey question, "Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part time or not at all under these circumstances?" This was to be examined at four life-stages: married but no kids, with preschool kids, with school age kids, after kids leave home. Results indicated that before and after kids it was acceptable for women to work, mothers of preschool children should either work part time or stay at home, and school age children's mothers should work part time. The countries could be grouped into three clusters: Work-oriented (Canada, East Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, U.S.) countries were more tolerant and supportive of women's employment, family accommodating countries (Australia, Austria, West Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, and Russia) were also supportive and had policies in place that help working women, and motherhood-centered countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Slovenia, Spain) that were less encouraging of women working especially when they have preschoolers at home. These clusters of nations differed in their support of whether or not women should be working across the four life-stages.

*Nine nations: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United States.* Bianci, Casper, and Peltola (1999) compared dual-earner couples from nine nations (Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United

States) to examine the factors that determine why women contribute less than men to family income. Through their analysis they found that these nations could be classified along a continuum ranging from social democratic welfare states (Finland, Norway, and Sweden), liberal welfare states (United States, Canada, and Australia) and conservative welfare states (Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands) representing the conservative welfare states. The authors note that social democratic states tend to actively support women's participation in the labor force by offering helpful policies such as daycare and parental leave as well as tax benefits. Liberal welfare states offer relatively fewer publicly supported programs and parental leave policies are not mandatory for all organizations. While there are equal opportunities that women may pursue, there are no strong incentives that encourage women's participation. Finally, conservative welfare states clearly prefer women to avoid entering the labor force so as to take care of the family. The authors cite the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and its emphasis on men's role in the workplace and women's at home. In these countries women are discouraged from entering or remaining in the labor force when they marry and have children. There are few childcare options or tax benefits for working mothers. An interesting finding was that married women's economic dependency was the least in social democratic countries, moderate in the liberal welfare states, and highest in the conservative welfare states. However, when looking at the factors across nations, it was found that within any family, wives' economic dependency on husbands' earnings increased with age, presence of preschool children and number of children.

*15 nations in the European Union (E.U).* Haas, L. (2003). Even though more than half (54%) of the women in the E.U. are employed, there is a great deal of variation in the parental leave policies of the 15 member nations. Parental leave is differentiated from maternity, paternity, sick, and family leave, and is considered to be more gender-neutral and protects the job until the employee returns. Variations in paternity leave reflect the attitudes toward gender, parenting, and sharing of work and family roles. This author reiterates that governments should help employees combine their work and family obligations through mandated leave policies that encourage male and female employees to be equally responsible for childcare. Such policies would communicate to employees that their family lives are important and that they can attend to both aspects of their lives. It also allows for male and female employees to spend time with their children. In dealing with work-family issues and E.U. members subscribe to one of four models. The first is a privatized (noninterventionist) care model and includes Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. The governments of these countries consider the care of young children as being the private business of its employees. It subscribes to the idea that the female and extended members of families will help out with childcare and expect men to be the breadwinners. For example, Greece and Portugal offer three months of unpaid leave for each parent and Spain offers both parents a longer period of unpaid parental leave with a return to their job guaranteed (up to three years). The second model is a family-centered care model and includes Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and Luxembourg. In this model, some effort is made to recognize the value of women's employment, even though men are considered to be the primary bread earners. Government policies encourage women to seek part time work while raising

children and it is assumed that women will stay at home with infants. For example, Austria, Belgium, France, and Germany allow leave that is about three years for each child with a fixed, low rate of compensation. Even though fathers can also take this leave, social norms discourage men from doing so. The third model is the market-oriented care model and the countries that adhere to it are Ireland, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. These nations support more traditional norms for families and support the notion of mothers taking care of the home and children. For example, in Ireland and the UK, only recently have parents been allowed 14 weeks, whereas in The Netherlands they are allowed only part-time leave. Further, employers in Ireland and The Netherlands can choose to postpone leave requests if they believe an employee's absence could cause problems at work. Fathers rarely take any unpaid leave. While the government does not do much to support working parents, employers do what they can. The last model is the valued care model and includes Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, with Sweden ranking as the most progressive. The governments of these countries are strongly supportive of male and female participation in the workplace and at home. In Denmark, working parents have access to two types of subsidized leaves: parental leave (a family entitlement of 14 weeks, 16 weeks if father takes at least two weeks), and child care leave (an individual entitlement of 26 weeks). Both leaves are paid, at about 60% of usual wages. In 1999, Denmark gave fathers an incentive to take parental leave by offering families two extra weeks if couples shared leave. Sweden is the most radical of all nations and emphasizes gender equality in the workplace and in the family by providing several policies such as individualized taxation, equal employment legislation, good quality childcare that is also subsidized, and finally, mandated parental leave for both parents. Fathers who take leave are not stigmatized and perceived as being less professional in the workplace. In Sweden, 450 days of paid leave are available to parents at the birth or adoption of a child. During these thirteen months, employees receive 80% of their salary up to a certain income level and are paid at a low fixed rate for the remaining three months. Parents have flexibility regarding whether they want to take full, half, or quarter days of leave and regardless of the organization's size or situation, the parental leave is mandatory. Since fathers do take leave, employers are adapting by rethinking how work can be done by allowing telecommuting, helping male and female workers stay involved in work even while on leave. Employers are coming to recognize that parents who are able to take care of family responsibilities make better workers and now even offer fathers economic incentives as encouragement to take leave.

*Great Britain, Sweden, and Norway.* Knudsen & Waerness (2001) examined the response of three nations to mothers' employment as a reflection of underlying assumptions regarding gender equality. This is an important issue as it deals with the very heart of the concept of family. Given that more marriages are breaking up and women are postponing marriage and motherhood, it is important to examine how nations are dealing with these issues. Questions that were explored in this study were: What are social norms regarding mothers' employment and how it affects young children and the family? Why should mothers' employment have any negative outcomes for children and family? Why do some think that employment provides self-fulfillment for mothers and is also beneficial for the child? Results showed that

Sweden is the most progressive and liberal and Norway is the least supportive of married women's employment. Compared to men, women were more positive about being employed, especially if they were younger, better educated and less religious.

*Finland, Germany, The Netherlands.* Pfau-Effinger (1998) compared Finland, Germany, and The Netherlands with regard to the factors that determined women's participation in the labor force. Whether or not they worked full time or part time depended not only on the availability of daycare but also the norms and values about what women should be doing. Women seek employment as a way to gain autonomy. When they work part time or quit to raise children, it is because their employers are not supporting their efforts at being independent. Society tends to think that children receive the best care when they remain at home and are looked after by their mothers. During the 1950s and 1960s, The Netherlands and West Germany adhered to traditional models with the male as the breadwinner in the family. According to this model, there was incompatibility between the work and family roles and these had to be kept separate. Following the Second World War, there were changes in this model, with The Netherlands undergoing more dramatic changes than West Germany. Gradually, it was being recognized that children could be taken care of outside the home and also by others besides the mother. Today, mothers seeking employment is more acceptable in The Netherlands rather than in West Germany, though in both, part-time employment of mothers is perceived to be better than full-time work. In Finland, the family model was based on a rural, agrarian model with gender roles based on greater equality. Spouses maintained egalitarian yet gender-specific roles and shared childcare responsibilities. Today, women actively seek full time work and it is socially acceptable for children to be taken care of in public institutions. Further, the Finnish government also supports female employment through social insurance and tax policies that treat married employees as individuals rather than as couples.

*Austria, U.S., Turkey, India.* Wagner, Kirchler, Clack, Tekarslan, and Verma (1990) compared families in Austria, U.S., Turkey and India with regard to power relationships and degree of interdependence in conflict situations. Western (Austria and U.S.) families tended to be modern with greater mutual emotional interdependence and regarding power distribution there is a range from patriarchal to egalitarian styles. India and Turkey represented societies that are more traditional with a clearer segregation of gender roles. In India, gender roles tended to be complementary to reduce sources of conflict. Families in which women were able to fulfill their traditional role as well as their work role were happier than families in which women experienced a conflict between their work and family roles. Turkey has a more authoritarian, patriarchal style with male domination and extended families, and separate spheres of control for men and women. Within these spheres, women and men tend to have more autonomy even though overall, it may be male dominated.

*U.S., China, Hong Kong.* Shafer, Joplin, Bell, Lau, and Oguz (2000) examined gender discrimination in the workplace across three nations. The U.S. is a democratic, capitalist, technologically advanced, modern society. Half its workforce consists of women, 60% of the women work, and it legally prohibits

discrimination. China is a socialistic, communist country that is becoming technologically advanced. 60% of the workforce consists of women and 73% of women are working. Historically, it has provided equal rights to men and women and a 1992 law safeguards women's rights and interests. However, there are still traditional attitudes towards women's employment and they face discrimination when it comes to hiring and layoffs. Social values give lower preference women with more stereotyping and discrimination. Hong Kong has a mix of a traditional Chinese society and had been ruled by the British and its economy is on par with most Western nations. Since a 1996 law, sex discrimination is illegal in Hong Kong, where 37% of the labor force consists of women and 50% of women work.

*Japan and the U.S.* Harris & Long (1999) did an interesting qualitative study on Japanese and American males regarding their caregiving for their elders. With increased participation of women in the workforce, 15 percent of caregivers to the elderly in Japan are men, compared with 28 percent in the United States. This qualitative study compared two of the wealthiest, best educated, and most technologically advanced countries in the world, Japan and the U.S. with regard to how they differ in their ideas of family structure, gender roles, and expectations of caregiving. In-depth interviews with 15 Japanese and 30 American men revealed that traditional Japanese norms place a moral obligation on male children (filial piety), especially the eldest son to take care of the parents. Typically, the eldest daughter-in-law becomes responsible for taking care of her husband's parents. But with more women working (women comprise about 46% of the US labor force and in Japan they comprise about 41%), the size of the family shrinking, and aged people living longer, caregiving of elder members of the family is beginning to be shared by males too. In the U.S., elders try to stay independent as long as possible and are quite willing to reside in nursing homes, if their children are unable to take care of them. In this study, the American males felt a moral commitment and a sense of devotion to take care of their sick parents. Japanese men found that their employers and colleagues were not very understanding of their caregiving responsibilities and assumed that their wives should be helping out.

*Israeli-Jewish and Arab-Palestinian.* Feldman, Masalha, and Nadam (2001) examined cross-national differences in the transition to parenthood in samples of 110 Israeli-Jewish and 62 Arab-Palestinian dual-earner couples living in Israel. All the participants were educated, new parents from a middle-class background, and had worked prior to childbirth and returned after the birth of the child. In Israel, working mothers are allowed 3 months of paid maternity leave and receive accommodations in work conditions for a complete year on return to the work place. Arab families tended to adopt more traditional parental role expectations and there was the presence of a multigenerational, extended family social support structure that provided childcare allowing a relatively easier transition back to work. All the Arab couples lived in close physical proximity to at least one set of grandparents, while this was true of only 6% of the Israeli couples. In contrast, Israeli-Jewish families tended to be more nuclear in structure and the family was a more cohesive unit with cooperative and mutual understandings between husband and wife, regarding role expectations. Family cohesiveness was positively correlated with marital satisfaction. Israeli parents



showed higher levels of involvement and interactions in the care of the infants. Arab fathers who tended to be more traditional experienced a smoother adaptation to work experiences following parenthood, while this was true of Israeli fathers who were more egalitarian. Compared to Israeli mothers, Arab mothers had an easier time returning to work as two-thirds of the infants were cared for by family members and they experienced lower levels of separation anxiety. Further, Arab mothers were mostly first generation career women and saw their careers more as a source of income rather than as a source of self-expression. Implications of this study were that new parents should be reassured that transition to parenthood is normally accompanied by marital problems as well as anxiety and conflict associated with childcare. Employers and legislators could help by allowing part-time opportunities, providing childcare arrangements, and a flexible parental leave option.

### ***Single nation studies and what they tell us.***

*India.* In a study of the work and family lives of 100 Indian fathers of 8<sup>th</sup> graders from urban, middle-class families, Larson, Dworkin, and Verma (2001) found that work and family life remained fairly independent and compartmentalized. This division of family roles was not perceived as unjust by either the mothers or the fathers, and was seen as an efficient way of running the home with less overlap and potential for conflict (men stay out of the kitchen and women stay out of banking and shopping). Fathers were not expected to help with household chores (whether or not there was extended family or domestic help to give a hand). If men were to help out with housework, women perceived this as a negative reflection on their own competence as homemakers. Based on Hindu religion, it was the 'dharma' or duty of fathers to protect their families from any negative experiences. Hence, even if they had a bad day at work (frustration/stress) men did not allow it to impact their family life by withdrawing socially or being irritable. Instead, Indian fathers occupied the role of a privileged "family man," spending time in a leisurely manner at home in a close, comfortable, and engaged relationship with adolescent children, irrespective of whether it were a daughter or son. In particular they expressed a positive affect while talking and eating with family members. Indian culture places a strong emphasis on family unity, compliance with family norms, and duty to family norms; these guide the behavior of fathers, mothers, and children. All members are loyal to family values and invest their time in family activities (for example, adolescent children do not spend their time by themselves in their bedrooms, and nor do fathers withdraw socially if they have experienced stress at work). This study found that these urban, middle class men reported doing work for about 35 hours per week. They spent the rest of the time at work socializing with others (having tea, chatting) as social networks are highly valued. Relative to their counterparts in developed or Western countries, they did not feel as hurried, overscheduled and pressured at work. These findings are supported by previous work (Komarraju, 1997).

*Malaysia.* In a study of 22 Malaysian dual-career couples, Komarraju (2002) found a traditional division of labor with men reporting a significantly higher degree of priority being given to careers, being able to

advance rapidly at work, and thinking that they could successfully combine career, family, and personal life. In contrast, women indicated a significantly higher degree of participation in housework and childcare, higher stress due to combining work and family responsibilities, family responsibilities intruding in career success, and having to choose between family and career responsibilities. As a means of coping with the stress of work-family conflict wives reported using outside help and relaxing standards for doing things. Overall, wives seemed to experience higher levels of work-family conflict compared to husbands, and seemed to feel pressure to attend to a majority of family responsibilities despite being employed full-time along with their husbands. On the other hand, having wives who were employed full-time did not seem to increase work-family conflict for men. In a study of 380 married, professional and clerical, Malaysian women, Noor (1999) reports similar findings. For women, the family role was the most important and they were primarily responsible for matters related to children. The data showed that job autonomy (having control over work responsibilities) and spouse support reduced some of the stress they experienced from work-family conflict. Qualitative data revealed that many women found religion and their relationship with God as a buffer that prevented them from experiencing a heightened level of psychological distress. Ahmad (1996) studied work-family conflict among 82 Malaysian women researchers who were married and had at least one child, and found that life satisfaction was positively related to work and family satisfaction. Further, work-family conflict explained a significant amount of variance in work and life satisfaction.

*Singapore.* Aryee (1992) studied the antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict in a sample of 354 married professional women in Singapore. As in other Asian countries, there are an increasing number of women entering the labor force and remaining there through marriage and childbirth. Given that traditional family roles still dominate society, women experience greater difficulties in combining work responsibilities with family work (as a spouse, homemaker, and parent). Aryee highlights the role of religion and culture in assigning men a superior status as breadwinners and women occupying a secondary status in the role of the homemaker. Singaporean society expects that professional women take on work responsibilities while still retaining all the housework and childcare tasks, thus causing them to experience a greater degree of work-family conflict. Specifically, women with stronger marital commitment experienced greater job-spouse conflict, spouse support was negatively related to job-spouse conflict, parental demands was positively related to job-parent conflict, and number of hours worked as well as task autonomy, affected work-family conflict. Work-family conflict decreased life-satisfaction.

*Hong Kong.* Chan and Lee (1995) describe the importance of the family unit in Hong Kong as a source of emotional satisfaction. Even though families are responding to modernizing forces and becoming more nuclear, they still emphasize family ties to kinsmen and there are strong clusters of nuclear families that are based on expectations of loyalty. It is expected that obligations to parents are fulfilled and filial piety is the social norm. In turn, elders help out younger members of the family and often help out with childcare

as a duty to the family. In an initial study of 207 dual-earner, Hong Kong couples, Aryee and Luk (1996) noted that the dual-earner family is becoming more common and the importance of a career as a source of personal growth is being acknowledged. While there were no gender differences in career satisfaction, good childcare arrangements were significantly important for the career satisfaction of men and women. Aryee, Fields, and Luk (1999) tested a U.S. model of work-family interface with a sample of 320 Hong Kong employees and reported that Hong Kong respondents live in two worlds: a modern, industrialized economy that is comparable to the U.S., Britain, and Australia, in which they are expected to work hard for long hours. At the same time they live in a society that is also dominated by Chinese Confucian philosophy in which the family is the most important unit. Hence, Hong Kong employees tend to combine these two forces by perceiving work mainly as a means of providing for the family. The boundaries between work and family are blurred as they see work as being instrumental in maintaining family well-being. In the U.S. and Europe, work, family, and self have clearer boundaries, and work can be experienced as being in conflict with self and family. Results showed that there was a positive reciprocal relationship between work-family conflict and family-work conflict and also showed that job and family satisfaction were important for life satisfaction. What was different was that for the Hong Kong respondents, work interfering with family had a direct effect on life satisfaction and an indirect effect through family satisfaction. If these workers were not able to spend time with their families and meet family obligations because of work, they were likely to be less satisfied with family satisfaction that in turn reduced life satisfaction. These results are supported in another study (Aryee, Luk, Leung, Lo, 1999) that explains how Hong Kong society practices what is termed "utilitarian familism" which means that the family is placed above all else and whatever an individual does, it is to promote the family. So, work is a means of promoting the family's financial security. The authors report that Hong Kong based companies need to address needs of working parents as much as other companies that have different national origins. Working parents experience a lot of stress, trying to keep the family in tact and still trying to complete work responsibilities.

*Australia.* Elloy (2001) conducted a study on 167 Australian lawyers and accountants (including 34 women) and found that stress among dual-career couples was caused primarily by role overload (having to fulfill roles as worker, spouse, and maybe parent) and by family conflict. The interesting feature was that work-family conflict, role ambiguity, and role conflict that typically emerge as having a positive relationship with stress, in the U.S., failed to do so with this Australian sample. Elloy offers the explanation that an informal Australian lifestyle that may allow families to have more control over their environment and supportive employer policies may reduce sources of stress.

## Implications for Research and Practice

There has been relatively less research in nations in the Middle East and on the African continent. Future research needs to explore how the historical experiences of these nations as well as their economic, religious, and social policies influence public policies toward work-family issues. This information would be useful to researchers as well as multinational corporations that set up units in these nations and could be incorporated in training programs as well as in formulating human resource policies. Hill, Yang, Hawkins, and Ferris (2004) surveyed IBM employees in 48 countries and found that employees perceived job flexibility as being related to reduced work-family conflict and increased job satisfaction. They recommend that multinational organizations should provide job flexibility to male and female employees in diverse cultures. In an interesting cross-national study of managerial stress in 25 countries, Poelmans, Spector, Cooper, Allen, O'Driscoll, and Sanchez (2003) report that government policies that support family needs of married employees help to reduce managerial stress.

With increased globalization and sophistication in technology the very nature of work is being transformed (for example, telecommuting and outsourcing). Hence, an organization's workplace policies should reflect an awareness of cross-national expectations regarding work and family roles. As and when needed, organizations need to make adjustments to the national context, as this would ensure meeting employees' needs and maintaining productivity levels.

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