Negative and Positive Crossover between Spouses

October 2020

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INTRODUCTION
There is ample evidence that job stress has an impact on workers’ mental and physical well-being. Little attention, however, has been paid to workers’ significant others’ reactions. Job stress arises when demands exceed abilities, while job-related strains are reactions or outcomes resulting from the experience of stress. In this entry we focus on the impact of one's stress on the partner's stress or strain. We will start with the basic concepts and definitions, we will then relate to the importance of crossover to work-family issues, we'll then elaborate on the up to date body of knowledge and sum up with implications for practice and research in the work-family arena.

BASIC CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS
The Crossover Model

Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler and Wethington (1989) differentiated between two situations in which stress is contagious: spillover - stress experienced in one domain of life results in stress in the other domain for the same individual; and crossover - stress experienced in the workplace by the individual's spouse leads to stress being experienced by the individual at home. Whereas spillover is an intraindividual, inter-domain contagion of stress, crossover is a dyadic, interindividual, inter-domain contagion. Thus, the inter-personal process that occurs when a psychological strain experienced by one person affects the level of strain of another person in the same social environment is referred to as crossover. Thus, spillover is a process by which attitudes and behavior carry over from one role to another. Spillover is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for crossover. The crossover model adds another level of analysis to previous approaches by adding the intraindividual level and the dyad as an additional focus of...
research. In other words, crossover is conceptualized as a process occurring from one individual at the work place to the spouse at home. This indicates that whereas spillover affects only the individual, crossover can affect the dyad and the family.

**IMPORTANCE TO WORK- FAMILY STUDIES**

Most stress theory and research focus on the individual. By focusing on the dyad and the family, crossover research highlights the processes occurring in the family and how stressors generated at work affect the whole family. Crossover research also indicates how transmitted stressors can cause work family conflict. It is important to note that positive experiences also crossover from one partner to another leading to more happy families.

**BODY OF KNOWLEDGE**

Findings suggest that one partner's strain affects the well-being of the other so that one's strain is often a stressor to the other. Studies have focused on different variables in the crossover process. Some have focused on the crossover of job stress from the individual to the spouse (Burke, Weir, and DuWors 1980), some have examined the process whereby job stress of the individual affects the strain of the spouse (Rook, Dooley, and Catalano 1991), and others have studied how psychological strain of one partner affects the strain of the other (Westman & Etzion, 1995). Also, some of these studies found bi-directional crossover from husbands to wives and from wives to husbands (Barnett, Raudenbush, Brennan, Pleck, and Marchall 1995) while others found uni-directional crossover from husbands to wives but not from wives to husbands (Jones and Fletcher 1996).

Thus far, researchers have found evidence for the crossover of anxiety (Westman, Etzion, and Horovitz, 2004), burnout (Bakker and Schaufeli 2000), depression (Howe, Levy, and Caplan 2004; Song, Foo, and Uly 2011), distress (Barnett, Raudenbush, Brennan, Pleck, and Marshall 1995), marital dissatisfaction (Westman, Vinokur, Hamilton, and Roziner 2004), Work-
family conflict (Hammer, Allen, and Grigsby 1997), and physical health complaints (Westman, Keinan, Roziner, and Benyamini 2008).

**Positive Crossover**

While the original definition of crossover focused on stress and strain, and most crossover studies have found evidence of the crossover of psychological stress and strains, Westman (2001) suggested broadening the definition of crossover to include the transmission of positive experiences and states. The first crossover studies investigated negative crossover, of one spouse affects the stress or strain of the other. One possible reason for the neglect of the possibility of positive crossover is that stress research relies heavily on medical models, with their emphasis on negative effects.

Westman (2001) proposed that the crossover mechanisms (direct, indirect, and common experiences) are equally applicable to negative and positive crossover. The empathy definition mentioned before allows for the sharing of both positive and negative emotions. If the crossover process operates via empathy, one would expect to find not only negative crossover but positive crossover as well. Thus, empathy could just as easily involve the sharing of another's positive emotions and the conditions that bring them about. Thus, positive events and emotions may also cross over to the partner and have a positive impact on his or her well-being. Just as strain in one partner may produce an empathetic reaction in the other, which increases the recipient’s strain, work engagement expressed by one partner may fuel the partner’s engagement.

Crossover of positive emotions may also occur indirectly, following an interaction between the partners. When one person’s resources at work (such as support and personal control) increase, he or she may have a positive interaction with the spouse and provide support, leading to well-being of the spouse. Finally, spurious positive crossover effects may occur in a work environment where all workers are exposed to the same levels of job resources (e.g., flexible work arrangements).
Extension of the crossover process to positive experiences and states is in line with the growing interest in positive psychology (e.g., Seligman 2000) and with Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden-and-build theory, which postulates that positive emotions broaden individuals’ thought–action repertoires, prompting them to pursue a wider range of thoughts and actions than they typically use. In the interpersonal context, the broaden-and-build theory predicts that positive emotions broaden people’s sense of self to include others and enhance individuals’ identification with others, consequently producing greater feelings of self–other overlap and “oneness” (Waugh and Fredrickson 2006). Most studies that have demonstrated positive crossover have focused on the crossover of engagement (Demerouti, Bakker, and Schaufeli 2005; Westman, Etzion, and Chen 2009), mood (Song et al. 2008), and marital satisfaction (Liu, Ngo, and Cheung 2016). Liu and Cheung (2015) investigated the crossover of work–family enrichment (WFE) and found that a wife’s level of WFE was linked to lower psychological strain as well as greater life, marital, and job satisfaction for her husband. In addition, the husband’s level of WFE was positively associated with his wife’s marital satisfaction. These results are encouraging because they indicate that WFE contributes not only to individual well-being, but also enhances a partner’s well-being. According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson 2001), positive emotions arising from an individual’s perception of WFE should promote outwardly oriented thoughts and actions, stimulating the person to respond favorably to the needs of their partner through performing more generative activities, such as showing sympathy or concern about family issues or providing help and support. Accordingly, the partner should perceive improved relationship quality, which then translates to the partner’s enhanced subjective well-being.

One can think of many instances of positive crossover, such as enjoyable experiences at one’s job leading to the crossover of job satisfaction and engagement, eliciting a good mood in the partner at home. Similarly, supportive family relationships and attitudes can create positive crossover to the work setting. Altogether, positive crossover appears to be a fertile field for enhancing theoretical thinking and making practical contributions to the literature.
The Spillover–Crossover Model

One useful contribution to recent crossover discussions is the integration of the crossover and spillover literatures, producing improved insight into the processes that link the work and family domains. Bakker and Demerouti (2013) described a spillover–crossover model (SCM) where experiences built up at work first spill over to the home domain, influencing behavior at home, and then cross over to the partner’s well-being. For example, Bakker, Demerouti, and Dollard (2008) found that job demands were positively related to the employee’s own work–family conflict (i.e., negative spillover), which also impacted their partner’s exhaustion (i.e., crossover). Shimazu, Bakker, and Demerouti (2009) found that job demands were related to work–family conflict and poor relationship quality (i.e., negative spillover) and to partners’ depressive symptoms and physical complaints (i.e., crossover).

Focusing on positive outcomes, Rodríguez-Muñoz, Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti, and Bakker (2014) found in a daily diary study that work engagement had a direct effect on happiness (i.e., positive spillover) and also directly influenced partners’ happiness (i.e., crossover). Similarly, Bakker et al. (2014) noted that work engagement was positively related to work–family facilitation (i.e., positive spillover), which in turn, also predicted own and partner’s life satisfaction one year later (i.e., crossover). Finally, Liu et al. (2016) reported evidence for the spillover of work–family enrichment and crossover of marital satisfaction between partners.

The Role of Gender in the Crossover Process

The first stress crossover studies were unidirectional and examined and found effects of husbands’ job stress on the well-being of their wives. These studies related to the wives as the passive recipients of stress and strain from their husbands, neither assessing nor controlling wives’ job and life stress. Therefore, we cannot rule out the possibility that what appears as direct crossover of stress from husbands to wives is an outcome of wives’ job or life stress or of common family stressors or life events affecting both partners.

Reviewing the directionality of the crossover raises the issue of the role of gender in the crossover process. Gender is certainly a potential moderator of the impact of one’s stress on
the spouse’s strain, because of differences in the traditional role demands and expectations for men and women. There is some indication that women are more susceptible than men to the impact of stressors affecting their partners. Kessler and McLeod (1984) suggested that because of their greater involvement in family affairs, women become more sensitive not only to the stressful events that they themselves experience but also to those that affect other family members. Johnson and Jackson (1998) suggest that women may act as "shock absorbers", taking on the men’s stress. Although the notion that women may be more vulnerable to stress than men is not well established, it does appear that the relevance of the family as a direct source of stress is stronger for women than for men.

Several studies of dual-career families found bi-directional crossover effects of stress or strain of similar magnitude from husbands to wives and from wives to husbands in cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Barnett et al. 1995; Westman and Etzion 1995). At the same time, some researchers detected only uni-directional crossover from husbands to wives (Westman, Etzion, and Danon 2001). Evidence concerning gender differences in the crossover process is mixed. Considering the inconsistency of the results concerning the role of gender in the crossover process, and bearing in mind that gender is often confounded with occupation, status, and culture, the role of gender needs to be reexamined in terms of traditional versus modern gender-role ideology.

Gender has been described as a key moderating variable within the crossover process, with findings suggesting that the crossover process is different for men and women). However, one pertinent issue which is commonly overlooked within these discussions is the social culture or context in which any gender differences occur. Several researchers have claimed that this moderating role of gender is actually a product of this social context (i.e., gender ideology) rather than a clearly delineated different experience of crossover between the sexes.

As an example, Westman et al. (2004) studied a sample of officers in the Russian army and found strong unidirectional crossover of marital dissatisfaction from husbands to wives, but no such crossover from wives to husbands. A closer assessment of the results indicated that
what appeared to be a gender difference was actually a result of cultural gender ideology. Although both spouses were dual-career workers and shared the role of breadwinners, they both held traditional gender attitudes regarding the key roles of husbands and wives—even when the wives were employed in more prestigious professions and earned more than their husbands. These attitudes included viewing the husband as the main breadwinner and head of the family, while the wife managed the housework and children. The women were breadwinners from the income point of view, but had a traditional, supportive role from the cultural gender ideology perspective.

In another assessment of gender differences, Liu and Cheung (2015a) with a sample of Chinese dual-earner couples demonstrated gender differences in the crossover process stemming from the nature of the predictors and outcomes. Although a woman’s negative work–family experiences (assessed as work–family conflict) were not associated with her husband’s outcomes, the husband’s level of work–family conflict significantly impacted his wife’s marital dissatisfaction. The authors suggested that a husband’s high levels of work–family conflict may result in his exhaustion and an inability to nurture his relationship with his wife. A second explanation is that work–family conflict may influence husbands to have a negative interaction pattern with their spouse, decreasing wives’ marital satisfaction (i.e., indirect crossover).

Similarly, Liu and Cheung (2015b) found that only wives’ empathy moderated the crossover from husbands’ work–family interface to wives’ outcome variables. They suggested that the prominent role of women’s empathy in the crossover process may be attributed to the traditional gender ideology of East Asian societies (e.g., China and Japan). Several studies have demonstrated similar crossover effects for both men and women, but have found a gender difference in the actual crossover mechanisms. For example, Lu, Lu, Du, and Brough (2016) found bidirectional crossover effects between husbands and wives in a sample of dual-earners employed in China. However, they found that the wives’ family identity salience mitigated the crossover effects of the husbands’ work–family conflict, but the
husbands’ family identity salience did not moderate the crossover effect of the wives’ work–family conflict. Similarly, Liu et al. (2016) reported similar crossover effects for work–family enrichment and marital satisfaction for both men and women in another assessment of dual-earners employed in China. However, the patterns of social interaction leading to the crossover process were different for each gender. Specifically, husbands’ work–family enrichment related to wives’ marital satisfaction indirectly through wives’ perceptions of increased social support, whereas wives’ work–family enrichment related to husbands’ marital satisfaction through husbands’ perceptions of decreased social undermining.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

The crossover model (Westman 2001) is an exploratory tool that can help to close the gap in our knowledge of the ways in which work influences family life, and vice versa. The effect of a job demand may be multiple, affecting the individual, a spouse, family members, friends, managers, and co-workers. Furthermore, findings of crossover reinforce the idea that a more complete understanding of the relationship between family and work stress may be achieved by changing the unit of study from the individual to the family.

Furthermore, whereas crossover is usually defined and studied as a transmission of stress, it is suggested that the scope of its definition and investigation should be broadened to include the transmission of positive events or feelings as well. Future crossover studies should incorporate the crossover processes of positive affect and related experiences. The investigation of positive crossover can add to theoretical thinking and broaden the current boundaries of crossover models. It also carries many practical implications. For example, positive actions taken by management may contribute to additional positive outcomes that have not been originally planned, including eliciting good mood and satisfaction in the spouse.

The focus of crossover research should be extended from the dyad to the whole family. Several researchers have shown the effects of crossover on children. Crossover does have serious implications for the whole family and more research is needed to explore the effects of
parental job-stress on children. It is apparent that recent investigations have expanded upon a number of original crossover components, noticeably the crossover of positive states and emotions and the impact of gender, ensuring that this field remains receptive to broader contexts including the emphasis upon positive psychology more generally (e.g., Seligman 2002) and the changing roles of working men and women (e.g., Brough and O’Driscoll 2015).

Information about the couple as a dyad adds to our understanding of well-being in husbands and wives above and beyond that provided by information about the individual. Thompson and Walker (1982) pointed out that for research to be dyadic, the problem must be conceptualized at the level of the relationship and the analysis must be interpersonal. The focus must be on the pattern of the responses between the two individuals. Crossover research suffers from a paucity of findings specifying the relationship between one person’s stress and strain and the partner’s stress and strain.

There is a need for systematic research of the individual and societal conditions under which one or another form of crossover is more likely to emerge. The findings of some crossover studies are based on a conceptual model with explicit pathways and therefore offer an important direction for the design of future interventions for couples experiencing stress and strain. Some of these findings suggest that such interventions should focus on the reduction of social undermining as it is found to be a powerful mediator of the adverse impact of stress on strain.

There are a number of areas where further research is anticipated to further inform our understandings of the crossover process, especially in terms of the specific (long-term) functioning of the mechanisms of crossover. For example, we do not yet know how long-lasting crossover effects are because longitudinal studies remain rare. Although a handful of studies demonstrate crossover effects occurring within a one-year time timeframe, research designs based on longer time lags are clearly required. It is also currently not clear which of the three key mechanisms of crossover (i.e., direct crossover, indirect crossover, and common stressors) have the greatest impact upon the transfer of positive and negative emotions, and which of
these mechanisms most influence their duration over time. We anticipate that recent technological developments enabling increased opportunities to adopt innovative approaches to theory-testing and development, easier administrations to large research samples, inclusion of longitudinal data collection techniques, and the availability of statistical software enabling the testing of both multinational samples and complex research models, will ensure that this issue of time is increasingly considered by future investigations.

It is also feasible that the long-term impacts of negative and positive crossover may differ, and the extent to which this difference is impacted by gender, family size (i.e., dependent children and relatives), type of work, and social cultures are anticipated to be of considerable interest, but have yet to be considered by empirical research. Again we anticipate that recent advancements in statistical software especially will enable these potential moderating and/or mediating variables to be assessed in more detail. For example, statistical analysis allowing for the simultaneous testing of multiple moderators and mediators enables more complex, but also more realistic, theoretical explanations to be assessed.

Finally, as this field gains more traction, we anticipate that alternative explanations of the crossover process will be introduced. We have observed the testing of new theoretical models occurring in related fields, such as occupational stress and work–life balance, and note the advancements to knowledge such assessments have produced. For example, the refinement of Westman’s (2001) original conceptual crossover model into the crossover–spillover model (Bakker and Demerouti 2013) generated a flurry of testing, resulting in an increased volume of recent crossover research. Other refinements to Westman’s (2001) model are also emerging, including for example, a five-stage crossover process model described by Muller and Brough (2017). An important development described by Muller and Brough’s model is that partners are not passive recipients within the crossover process, but instead actively influence their receipt (or not) of positive and negative emotions and states from their spouses. Thus research assessing how exactly this active influence occurs and under what specific circumstances, is anticipated to be produced over the next few years.
Findings also suggest that efforts to reduce the stress and strain of employees should target their spouses too. It would be advisable for management to provide assistance programs to individuals working in stressful conditions and their spouses. It appears that if a distressed spouse is not part of the solution, he or she is likely to become a big part of the problem. Thus, what is needed are programs that train and counsel couples in developing skills for reducing negative interactions and enhancing their relationships. The primary objective of such programs is prevention and ongoing improved functioning, achieved by focusing on techniques designed to help couples manage negative affect and handle conflict situations.

REFERENCES


