



Research Article

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## Restaurant staff's work family conflict and subjective well-being: Characteristics, influence and countermeasures

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### ABSTRACT

*In modern society, the people who work in catering industry suffer the most intensive work-family conflict; Because of those mental and psychological anxiety from work-family conflict and unpleasant, it caused a serious challenge for subjective well-being of employees. This paper use theoretical analysis and model building to research the relationships between work family conflict and subjective well-being of catering employees. Firstly, by analyzing primary job characteristics in catering industry, the manifestations and consequences of work-family conflict, and main influential factors of subjective well-being, also extend a discussion on the relationship between them. At last, this paper puts forward some methods in the dominant economic areas, like flexible employment, implementation of the employees assistance program, and manager of employments support programs. Meanwhile, in the implicit non-economic areas, Concerned about the mental health of employees, and nurturing family-friendly corporate culture to help employees balance work and family relations, to enhance their subjective well-being serve as a reference.*

**Key words:** Restaurant staff; Work family conflict; Subjective well-being

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### INTRODUCTION

With the deepening of reform and opening up, on the one hand, the rapid development of China's economy, people's living standards have markedly improved, but on the other hand, under the fast-paced lifestyle, people's increasing pressure, with limited time and energy is difficult to balance the relationship between work and family, and the resulting emotional and psychological anxiety, unpleasant caused a serious challenge on subjective well-being of employees. A large number of studies have shown a positive correlation of happiness and high efficiency, high level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment was positively related with high sense of happiness. Huey-Ming Tzeng (2002) also found that the higher the happiness of employees, lower employee turnover intention.[1] In related research, compared to other occupations, those who work in the service industry have a both strongest extent of work - family conflict and family-work conflict. Service industry employees get the weakest support in balance system of work family conflict, and enjoy the lowest level of family care benefits. Moreover, they have suffered the most serious negative career consequences owing to enjoying work family - balancing policy. [2]The restaurant industry is not only the important part but also the indispensable pillar of the service sector. So, exploring the relations between work family conflict and subjective well-being of catering junior staff is important for human resource management. Currently, for the study of work family conflict, many researchers analyze the impact of work family conflict on employee attitudes and behavior, and provide general equilibrium strategy. In the field of subjective well-being, following happiness research on college students, urban residents, teachers and other groups, more and more domestic researchers began to focus on factors of subjective well-being of employees. Y. J. Miao, J. Feng and S. Y. Bai (2009) summarized the factors that affect employee well-being as personal motivation, nature of work, income, interpersonal, organizational support and pressure. J. Feng (2010) proposed four influence factors of happiness in the master's thesis, including individual factors, job factors, organizational factors and stress factors. Y. H. Liang(2009) divided the influences into subjective factors(personality traits, self-efficacy and locus of control)

and objective factors (economic factors, cultural factors, social support, job factors, family factors, and self-actualization). But few researchers do detailed analysis of the relationships and law of function between work family conflict and subjective well-being from some key factors, and put forward construction methods of employees' subjective well-being to integrate into the process of human resource management. Thus, this essay analyzes primary job characteristics in catering industry, the manifestations and consequences of work-family conflict, and main influential factors of subjective well-being, also extend a discussion on the relationship between them. At last, this paper puts forward some methods in the dominant economic areas, like flexible employment, implementation of the employees assistance program, and manager of employments support programs. Meanwhile, in the implicit non-economic areas, Concerned about the mental health of employees, and nurturing family-friendly corporate culture to help employees balance work and family relations, to enhance their subjective well-being serve as a reference.

## **2. The connotation of work-family conflict and subjective well-being.**

### *2.1. The analysis on the concept and performance of work-family conflict*

The study on work-family relations began in the fifties of the 20th century in western countries. Work-family conflict and work-family balance are two aspects of the work-family relationships. Role itself, especially the female professional problems is the focus of the early research. Since the 1980s, more and more researchers pay close attention to work family conflict. Work family conflict is defined as a special inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work demands and family needs are mutually incompatible in some respects. [3] When personal time and energy are insufficient to meet the requirements of both work and family roles at the same time, work family conflict emerges. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) distinguished three forms of work family conflict: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behavior-based conflict. More recently, researchers have begun to recognize the duality of work family conflict by considering both directions: work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW) (Carlson et al., 2000; Frone et al., 1992; Frone, 2003). In the present study, we conceptualized Work-family conflict (WFC) as conflict due to work interfering with family, and family-work conflict (FWC) as conflict due to family interfering with work. Thus, the work family conflict can be subdivided into six dimensions: Time-based WFC; Time-based FWC; Strain-based WFC; Strain-based FWC; Behavior-based WFC; Behavior-based FWC.

### *2.2. The concept and forming rules of subjective well-being*

Subjective well-being (SWB) mainly refers to the subjective feeling and consciousness out of the concept of object, is one of comprehensive evaluation on one's living conditions and social status, including two parts of human emotion evaluation and cognitive evaluation. [4] Diener (2000) proposed the thinking structure of subjective well-being on the basis of past thirty years of research: (1) For the past, present and future life satisfaction; (2) Positive emotion experience; (3) Negative emotional experience; (4) The satisfaction of all aspects of life: work, family, health, economic status and self. [5] SWB is a subjective assessment of people's overall living conditions, this evaluation is one that includes joy, excitement, pain, sadness and other emotional experience and complex neural physiological processes of cognitive judgments in life. [3] L. L. Lou revealed the forming rules of SWB: external stimuli → basic emotions → processing → emotional significance → cognitive model → evaluation of SWB on the basis of the physiological mechanism of emotion and cognition. Furthermore, she divided the human life into two major categories: dominant field and implicit field, and argued that human has different generating mechanism of SWB in different field of life. In dominant field, the generation of SWB more affected by cognitive evaluation especially in the sense of social comparison, the ultimate happiness is generated in the joint action of the two feelings of emotion and cognition. In implicit field, the generation of SWB does not need the cognitive evaluation of brain center, without interference of the external cognitive evaluation, SWB is natural emotional experience and there are no negative effects of social comparison.

## **3. Work family conflict and subjective well-being of catering junior staff**

### *3.1. The characteristics of catering entry positions*

As important pillar of the service sector, catering industry mainly provide social life service for the development of the national economy, it is the combination of labor-intensive and knowledge-intensive. Catering product quality and service skills largely depend on the employees' experience and attitude. At different times, on different occasions or for different clients, catering products and service provided by the same staff will be varying. The characteristics of catering entry positions are concluded following: (1) Special working hours: Compared to other industries, catering junior employees work longer. On a service jobs, most of the catering grass-roots staff average work 8-10 hours a day, even up to 12 hours, and there is overtime, shift phenomenon. In bars, KTV and other places, the employee's work time is not stable. They should clean up after all guests leave, often need to work until four or five in the morning. In addition, the working time of catering always concentrates at some stage, their work rhythm is uneven. To meet the needs of the guests, working hours depends on the guest dining time. When the guests rest, it's time to work for the catering employees. Especially during the holiday, the restaurant staff is as busy as bees. [6] (2)

Intensive workloads and the requirement for high quality of service: Diet products include not only the food but also service process. Catering grass-roots staff should contact with guests face to face. To provide guests with enthusiasm, sincere service, they need to spend a lot of emotional and psychological energy, full of pressure and challenges. Because of the special service objects, employees provide corresponding service according to the need of customers. In the periods of peak dining, noisy, but staff should try their best to lead customers, arrange seating, and assist the guest order and repast. This process requires the employee to be efficient and enthusiastic, which are both of energy consuming and stressful. In order to reach the restaurant's service standards, and satisfy the guests, catering staff should serve with relaxed and pleasant mood, their negative emotions is not allowed to be shown at work. [7]

### *3.2. Work family conflict consequences of catering junior staff*

According to the investigation and study, compared to other occupations, employees in service industry have a strongest extent of work family conflict, which is much to do with their feature of jobs.[8] The work family conflict of catering junior staff mainly reflects in: (1) Time-based conflict. On one hand, due to longer working hours and most focus on the rest time of clients, employees spend less time on getting along with their family. Especially during the holidays, when family members call for collective outings, but catering junior staff can't accompany by, their potential guilty will lead to work-family conflict based on time. On the other hand, when family members urged them to participate in family activities, or have a sick family member in need of care, they can only ask for leave temporarily. This may affect the completion of work and their promotion, which is known as family-work conflict based on time; (2) Strain-based conflict. Catering junior staff service for a variety of customers, they should bear customer complaints and boss scolding. The intensive workloads tend to lead to stress, anxiety, fatigue, depressed mood, and it may influence family harmony if these moods were brought into family. This is work-family conflict base on strain. (3) behavior-based conflict. Similarly, employees would be bored, irritable and cold owing to an absence of support and understanding from their family, which may affect the quality of service. This is called strain-based family-work conflict. Time-based work family conflict and strain-based work family conflict will bring catering junior staff severe consequences both in economic and non-economic field.

#### *3.2.1. Economic fields*

In the economic field, the junior staff in the restaurant industry suffered a long-term work family conflict, which would affect the individual wages, promotion, organizational commitment and turnover if they failed to deal with. When time-based FWC occurs, the individual may be absent or ask for leave because of taking care of the family, which directly affects the employee's basic income. Under family pressure, their mood would be affected. And the resulting gloomy and mistakes may be complained by customers, low efficiency and terrible service would influence their performance bonuses. Even more, even if the employee have the competence for a higher position, considering his family influence on work, superior doesn't take him as candidate of promotion. When work family conflict reaches a certain level, catering enterprises could not try to understand the actual situation and develop strategies to help employees deal with work-family conflict, but reprimand and punish employees. This will worsen the status of employees, and reduce job satisfaction, organizational identification, resulting in low organizational commitment. In this case, employees are likely to choose to leave and hunt for other jobs so as to have more time and energy to balance work and family needs.

#### *3.2.2. Non-economic fields*

In the family, as a result of the interference of work, employees rarely accompany the aged, children and partners. The lack of communication for a long time makes communication barriers is more and more obvious, relationships, family affection fade. When employees show their negative emotions of the work at home, if the family members do not understand and support, quarrels and conflict is inevitable, which makes a direct impact on family harmony and marital satisfaction. In terms of individual health, work family conflict and low levels of health are closely linked. Employees play different roles in the work and family, the resulting role conflict and role overload could easily lead to psychological stress and physical exhaustion. One's time and energy is limited, if catering junior staff are under work family conflict for a long time, and unable to seek help outside or inner balance, it is easy to cause psychological and physiological diseases that affect the personal health.

### *3.3. Main influential factors of catering junior staff's subjective well-being*

L. L. Lou divided our life into dominant and implicit field. Based on the theory, the influence factors of grassroots employees subjective well-being can be divided into two categories: dominant factors and the recessive factors.

#### *3.3.1. Dominant factors*

In the dominant areas, the main factors affecting SWB level of catering junior staff are following: (1) Wage. Wage is the basic and the most important source of family income for the majority of the junior staff, their household spending relies on wage. Although the effects of material factors on individual SWB is limited, but for catering junior staff, small wage change will affect their life. If the salary is not enough to satisfy the employees themselves

and their families the basic physiological needs, their SWB level will be low obviously. [9](2) Promotion. Long-term work in the junior service work, boring, high repeatability, no promotion space, lack of challenge, it's easy to make employees exhaustion and burnout. Provided for promotion and fulfilled potential, employees will keep working enthusiasm, the job satisfaction and happiness also arise in the progress and growth. (3) The work arrangements. Work arrangements' impacts on SWB of catering junior staff mainly reflect in the work pressures. Appropriate pressure can improve the staff's job performance and job satisfaction. But it will be just the reverse and cause a series of negative reactions when the work pressure exceeds the capacity of staff.[9] Physiological manifestations of headache, rapid heartbeat, decreased appetite, etc., psychological stress, anxiety fatigue, may cause agitation, irritable mood, insomnia, etc., which led to a high absenteeism rate and turnover. [10] The work pressure of catering junior positions embodies in two aspects of workload and time arrangement. Some catering companies streamline personnel in order to reduce employment costs, resulting in unclear division of labor. There is no time to rest at the peak of dining, employees should not only help the kitchen but also serve and arrange guests seated. They still keep smiling to ensure the quality of service at an intensive work, which adds a lot of work pressure. On schedule, employees often have to work shifts and work extra hours, almost no right to choose the time on their own. In the situation, there is nothing much time to accompany their family and educate children, not to mention recreation and entertainment. What's worse, the subjective well-being of employees has been affected seriously.

### 3.3.2 Recessive factors

Health is the capital of revolution and two aspects of physical health and mental health are included. Job promotion and salary are no longer attractive if you don't have a good health. Mental health is the unity of individual internal coordination and external adaptation. In the established objective environment, a man of mental health would experience more positive emotions and weaken negative feelings, as a result of increasing SWB. Under the high strength and high-pressure, self-regulating and maintaining mental health plays an important role for catering junior employees in improving SWB.[11]After individual health problems solved, harmonious family relations is the protection of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction. [12]Family contradictions resulting from time-based WFC and strain-based WFC will affect the SWB of catering junior staff. Do employees get understand, support and help from enterprise or family members is essential for the maintenance of family relationships. Moderate entertainment may help to eliminate the effects of stress at work, entertainment's impact on individual SWB is mainly manifested in the aspect of emotional experience. [13]In their spare time, employees can be entertained by way of their own interests and do the things they like to do. In this process, they experience positive emotions, such as happy, excited, relaxed, etc., and relieve work pressure and negative feelings caused by the family conflict, such as anxiety, tension, boredom, so as to promote individual SWB.[14]

## 4. Relationships analysis between work family conflict and SWB of catering junior staff

### 4.1. Relations between catering junior staff's SWB and consequences of work family conflict

Due to the characteristics of catering junior positions, employees encounter the time-based and strain-based work family conflict, resulting in serious consequences. In economic field, such as a decrease in revenue, promotion blocked and high turnover intention. In non-economic field, employees' health damaged, family relations faded, low job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This series of consequences affect the individual SWB by acting on the individual emotion, experience and cognitive evaluation. The degree of work family conflict is negatively related to subjective well-being of junior employees. [15] High level of work family conflict corresponds to low level of SWB, and high levels of SWB is associated with a lower degree of work family conflict.

Consequences of work family conflict of catering level employees in the economic field correspond to the dominant factor affecting their SWB, the consequences in non-economic areas and recessive genes correspond. The more severe the degree of work family conflict are, and aren't not solved within a certain period, the more serious the consequences will be, thus, employees show lower subjective well-being.[16] In dominant field, work family conflict lead to reduced revenue and low performance evaluation. Employees feel negative feelings after the emotional response to stimuli, and further cognitively evaluate the primary emotions. Comparing to the income of their expectations and others, they experienced a greater emotional gap. In the joint action of both affective and cognitive feelings, low level of SWB arises. In implicit field, there are family squabbles, individual physical and psychological discomfort, and low organizational commitment resulting from work family conflict. Employees perceive stimulus and make judgment according to their emotional experience, rather than find relevant information and appropriate comparison standard to cognitive processing. In this evaluation model of SWB, the happiness gap is smaller than the dominant field. But similarly, the negative effects caused by the unmet emotional needs have a direct link with SWB.

### 4.2. Relations between work family conflict resolution and SWB utility

Life satisfaction, positive emotions, negative emotions are three basic composition of subjective well-being. The

individuals of low subjective well-being are not satisfied with their living conditions( including work, family, health, themselves) and social status, their experience of negative emotions (such as shame, anxiety, depression) is more than positive emotions (happiness, a sense of accomplishment and pride, etc.). In this case, the staff will look for reasons in order to reduce a sense of dissatisfaction and improve individual SWB. If the low level of SWB is caused by work family conflict, employees will seek to balance work and family relations. [17]When the work family conflict alleviated or solved, staff may get a promotion and increasing incomes. However, as a result of cognitive setting and the lack of awareness of adaptability, the utility separates with the employees' subjective well-being. Employees think that they are deserved increased revenue and promotion, or compare with their expectation and others, thus the utility is weakened, and the raise of SWB level is limited. [18]But in implicit field, the alleviation of work family conflict is conducive to family relationships. In addition, individuals have enough time to focus on physical and mental health, thus strengthen the organization's identity. This series of utility without the participation of cognitive evaluation, employees experienced the emotion directly, and perceived happiness increment, there is no social comparison offset the utility. [19]So, companies and individuals could resolve work family conflict from the dominant economic and implicit non-economic areas of two-pronged approach to significantly enhance SWB of employees.

#### 4.3. Relational model of work family conflict and subjective well-being

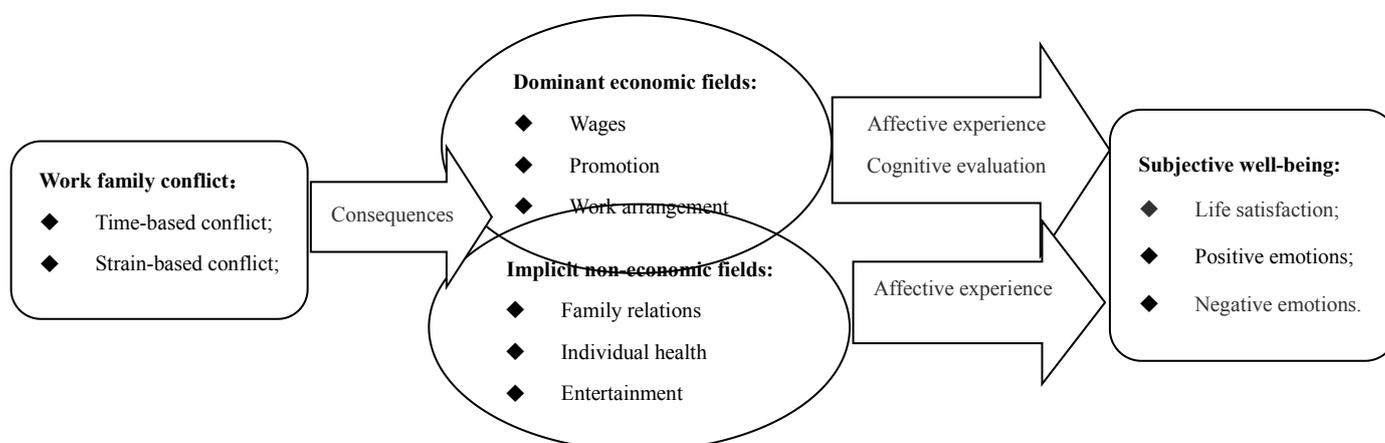


Figure 1: Relational model of work family conflict and subjective well-being

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5. Management advices of work family relations and SWB

Happy catering junior staff often experience positive emotions, in the process, they naturally reveal the smile, showing enthusiasm and sincere attitude, pass happiness to customers and get high praise. In addition, their creativity, reliability and service quality are more likely to get approval from managers. [20]Catering enterprises' enhancing the overall well-being of employees is easier to drive positive emotions, creating a cheerful organizational climate and culture, to improve efficiency and quality of work. There is relations between work family conflict and subjective well-being, as the important factors that affect employee's SWB, conflict resolutions are beneficial to the improvement of employees' SWB.

#### 5.1. Dominant economic fields

##### 5.1.1. Flexible employment practices.

During holiday and the peak of dining, catering junior staff has to work with intensive workloads and be busy like bees. Training stable part-time staff not only alleviates the employment needs of restaurant at dining peak, but also help to improve the flexibility of work arrangements. When regular employees should take time off for taking care of family members, part-time personnel work instead temporarily, this would avoid the enterprise loss and family feud. Catering enterprises could choose college students as long-term and stable part-time workers. They have enough spare time to attend a part-time job and are away from home, thus suffer the less work family conflict. Such a flexible employment not only alleviates the time-based work family conflict of formal employees to a certain extent, but also make the enterprise got a better balance between performance and human cost.

##### 5.1.2. The implementation of the Employee Assistance Program benefits.

High-intensity work and family responsibilities caused great pressure to catering junior employees. It is necessary to set up a systematic, long-term assistance and welfare programs for employees, including disease prevention, accident, family care policy. In the dominant economic fields, develop benefit plan about disease and accident

prevention for employees. The implementation of family care welfare policies can help employees fulfill family responsibilities and enhance employees' corporate identity and loyalty, furthermore, it is conducive to understand and support enterprises for employees' family. There are a variety form of family care welfare policies, such as providing consultation services about child-care and pension information; Enterprises contact with authority care to ask for a discount price; Take caring for a sick child or the aged into the formal sickness days. Set up a manager to centrally manage family care policies, keep employees abreast of related services and benefits. On the implementation of employee welfare assistance program, supplemented by manager support plan, business executives, managers and other leaders must support work family balance system, and the employees' promotion not associated with. Only under the support of managers, employees will not worry about the negative effects on their career development owing to enjoyment of work-family balance system, such as reducing merit pay and yearly bonus, promotion hampered.

## 5.2. *Implicit non-economic fields*

### 5.2.1. *Focus on employee mental health*

In individual psychological health, business executive should pay more attention to the psychology and behavior of employees, provide guidance, consultation and training for the employees with poor bearing capacity. By positive psychology guidance, enhancing the employees' self-adjustment capacity and ability of balancing work and family relations, to mitigate the negative effects of strain-based work family conflict and improve job performance of employees. For employees, who are the subject and bear the serious consequences of work family conflict, they should clarify the relationship between work and family, define clear the responsibility for family, and conduct proper division of labor. In this way, actively seeking and keep a balance between work and family. If blindly take evasive attitude, problems remain unresolved and even exacerbated, what's more, as a result of ending in failure both at work and family. In addition, they can take part in recreational activities, such as physical exercise, travel, picnic, etc. to adjust the working status and eliminate psychological pressure.

### 5.2.2. *Nurturing family-friendly corporate culture*

Because of the special working hours, catering junior staff rarely has the opportunity to dine and travel with their family. Therefore, on the one hand, catering enterprises should take the initiative to understand the difficulty of employees, establish a harmonious working atmosphere and treat the staff as their families, delivering the warmth of the enterprises, to enhance organizational commitment and lower turnover rate. On the other hand, provide opportunities of dining and entertainment with family members for employees. On family members' birthday or wedding anniversary, give employees consumption discount in the restaurant, so their families could enjoy greetings and services from the enterprise, and get a comprehensive knowledge and understanding about employees' work. On restaurants anniversary, employees could invite their family members to attend the banquet, and enterprises exhibit staff themselves and their team work achievements, inspiring employees and their families a sense of pride, to win more understanding and support from their families. For the employees themselves, keep effective and sincere emotional communication with the enterprise, and seek for help promptly, so that executives have a comprehensive understanding of their situation and give support to help them solve the problem. Besides that, in order to avoid the effects on employees' mood and the quality of service resulting from incomprehension of families, it is necessary to communicate effectively with their families and strive for the support of family members. Through the tripartite exchange based on the family members - employees - enterprise to nurture family-friendly corporate culture.

## CONCLUSION

This paper studies on catering junior staff's work family conflict resulting from the special characteristics of catering junior post. As dominant factors, economic conflict consequences have significantly negative impacts on the individual SWB in the dual role of cognitive evaluation and emotional experience. And the non-economic conflict consequences corresponding to the recessive influence factor of SWB, have limited negative effects on SWB due to lacking of the participation of cognitive evaluation. According to the above analysis, this paper builds the relational model of work family conflict and subjective well-being, and puts forward to alleviate the work family conflict and enhance subjective well-being of employees through flexible employment and implementation of staff assistance program in the dominant economic areas. Meanwhile, in implicit non-economic areas, focusing on employees' mental health and nurturing family-friendly corporate culture to help employees to balance work and family relations.

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