Uncovering Work-Life Interference among Australian Muslim Men: Implications for Human Resource Management

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Abstract: Work-life interference is a significant workplace issue that has substantial human resource management implications. The goal of this study is to expand our understanding of the work-life interference experienced by Muslim men who are a significant ethno-religious cultural minority in Australia and New Zealand. Muslims have distinct cultural and religious values, which suggest that they may have different experiences from the mainstream Australian and New Zealand population. This raises questions about the applicability of work-life policies and programs to this population and underscores the importance of understanding their experiences from a human resource management perspective. Data collected from 301 men using survey questionnaires indicate that participants experience low levels of interference and the pattern is similar to that found among workers from societies known to uphold collectivistic cultural values. In accordance with workers in such societies, job demands a stronger predictor of interference than work hours, which raises doubts about the effectiveness of work-life policies such as flexible work options around working hours. At a broader level, the research highlights the need to re-think the policies designed to facilitate work-life balance among workers who have different cultural and religious beliefs than the mainstream population.

Keywords: work/life balance, strategic human resource management, non-English speaking background (NESB) workers, religion, cross-cultural behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Research on the antecedents (causes) and outcomes (consequences) of work-family interference has grown enormously. Yet, much of this research has been conducted in Western societies on white, English-speaking Anglo-Saxon populations. While research on the experiences of cultural populations has grown, there is a need to progress this body of research and uncover how workers from diverse backgrounds experience work-life interference. In light of this, this study examines work-life interference among Australian Muslim men, focusing on the antecedents and outcomes of work-life interference for this population. The study contributes to our understanding of how different cultural and religious beliefs affect work-life interference, discussing the implications for human resource management (HRM). To date, that there has been no published research that has examined such issues among this ethno-religious minority.

In its simplest definition, a Muslim is a person who embraces the religion of Islam, or is born into a Muslim family, and believes in the oneness of God and the finality of the Prophet Muhammad. Australian Muslims have distinct cultural and religious values, which suggest that work-life interference may be experienced differently from the mainstream Australian population. Understanding their experiences is important from a management perspective because work-life interference is perceived to be at the core of issues essential HRM (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Haar & Roche, 2008), and has been associated with a number of negative organisational outcomes (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). This prompted some authors, such as Grzywacz and Carlson (2007), to argue that helping employees

achieve a level of work-life balance (low levels of work-life interference) may be a powerful leverage point for promoting individual and organisational effectiveness. What is debateable is how organisations can assist their employees to achieve feelings of balance. One very important agreement among researchers is that organisations need to be aware of their workers' specific needs to promote a family supportive workplace culture (Bardoel, Moss, Smyrnios, & Tharenou, 1999; Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). Therefore, a greater understanding of Muslim men's experiences can provide organisations with an important framework and knowledge base to promote balance and create a family supportive culture that is sensitive to not only Muslim men but a growing number of workers with unique and diverse needs and responsibilities.

WORK-FAMILY INTERFERENCE

Work-family interference (perceived as a subset of work-life interference) is defined as a form of conflict/interference where the pressure from work and family roles are mutually incompatible causing stress and difficulties (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). It is bidirectional in that work can interfere with family and family can interfere with work (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Distinguishing the direction of influence is important as the outcomes can be different. For example, work-related antecedents such as long work hours can lead to work-to-family interference while family-related antecedents such as extended home duties can be associated with family-to-work interference (Byron, 2005)

Antecedents and Outcomes of Work-Family Interference

Examining the antecedents and outcomes of work-family interference has been a key interest among researchers. Identified work-related antecedents include negative workplace relationships, long and inflexible working hours, role overload, role ambiguity, job involvement, underutilisation of skills, job insecurity, shiftwork and low control over working conditions (Byron, 2005; Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011). However, the role of work hours has received the most attention. A strong positive relationship between working hours and work-to-family interference has been established suggesting that the more hours people work, the more likely they will experience interference (Byron, 2005; Michel, et al., 2011; Sharma, 2012). This is because working hours are an important time-based demand where the time an individual spends at work cannot be spent in the non-work role.

Several family-related antecedents of work-family interference have also been explored. Marital status (being married), number of dependants, employment status of spouse, children with a disability, time taken to fulfil family-related roles, and presence of conflict/interference for spouse have all been associated with family-to-work interference (Michel, et al., 2011). The general belief in this area is that spending more time on family-related roles increases the risk of interference (Fu & Shaffer, 2001).

There has also been interest in the outcomes or consequences of interference (Allen, et al., 2000; Amstad, Meier, Fase, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011), with a strong focus on organisational outcomes (Allen, et al., 2000; Bellavia & Frone, 2005; Rantanen, Kinnunen, Feldt, & Pulkkinen, 2008). Research in this area provides a clear description of the negative outcomes of work-life interference on a workplace, alluding to the fact that workplaces have a vested interest in minimising interference among their employees (Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002; Dixon & Sagas, 2007). For example, a negative relationship between work-family interference and job satisfaction is consistently found, suggesting that as interference increases, job satisfaction decreases (Allen, et al., 2000; Bohle, Quinlan, Kennedy, & Williamson, 2004; De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott, & Pettit, 2005; Hayman, 2009). Furthermore, work-to-family interference is more strongly associated with job dissatisfaction than family-to-work interference. This is because workers begin to blame their jobs and workplace when they feel that it interferes with their family and non-work commitments.

Work-Family Interference from a Male Perspective

Work-family interference is considered to be an issue for both men and women (Foley, Yue, & Lui, 2005; Windslow, 2005 as cited in Korabik, McElwain, & Chappell, 2008). Research however has mostly focused on women and the challenges they experience (see Daly, Ashbourne, & Hawkins, 2008 for a review; Russel & Hwang, 2004). The emphasis on women is understandable considering the amount of time they spend attending to family tasks and some of the disadvantages they experience in the workplace because of their gender (Mooney, 2009). However, the lack of focus on men is problematic because of the changes in traditional gender roles (Perrone, Wright, & Jackson, 2009). Societal and cultural changes in men's status and roles have led to most men becoming more involved with their children and household activities (Perrone, et al., 2009). Despite these changes, Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport (2007) argue that workplaces have continued to perceive men as the ideal worker who is unburdened by family and other commitments and is continuously available for full-time employment without excuse. The changing gender roles underscore the need to understand the experiences of how men as workers, fathers and husbands experience work and non-work domains with a particular focus on interference.

Experiences of Australian Muslim Men

Australian Muslims are a growing cultural and ethnic minority groups in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011). The latest 2011 Census indicated that there were approximately 476,290 Muslims in Australia, an increase of almost 40% from the 2006 census figure of 340,392 (ABS, 2011) Muslims are also a significant minority in New Zealand and there were approximately of 41,000 Muslims residing in New Zealand in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2011). Unlike the broader Australian population, Muslims in both Australia and New Zealand consist of more males than females and are significantly younger (ABS, 2006; The Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand, 2009). The age structure of Muslims in both countries indicate that they are concentrated in the more economically productive years of their lives, further highlighting the value of uncovering how they experience work-life interference.

Muslims, like many other minority groups in Australian and New Zealand, are characterised by ethnic, social and cultural diversity (Kolig, 2003; Rane, Ewart, & Abdalla, 2010). While it is important to acknowledge this diversity, there are values and beliefs which are common to many Muslims. Most of these values and beliefs are linked to religion and culture. Religiously, Islam provides a framework for living in the world for practising Muslims (Esposito, 1994). Thus, it is highly likely that Islamic beliefs, values and customs influence work and non-work experiences. Also, from a cultural perspective, there is some evidence to suggest that many Australian Muslims trace their ancestry back to collectivistic cultures where the emphasis is on social support and sense of belonging (Khawaja, 2007). This suggests Australian Muslims could share similar views with people of collectivistic cultures and may experience similar work-family outcomes.

One of the few studies to examine how the workplace affects the health and wellbeing of Muslim men was recently conducted by Sav, Sebar and Harris (2010). Interviews with working men suggested that their efforts to balance work and non-work (life) commitments had significant implications for the occupations and industries they preferred to work in as well as Muslim men's relations with fellow work colleagues and supervisors. The men often indicated being satisfied with their workplace and committed to their jobs when they believed that workplaces were being understanding and attentive to their non-work commitments, particularly those related to religion. The voices of Muslim men in Sav et al's (2010) study indicates that

work-life issues are prominent among this sub-population and there are positive ramifications for workplaces who assist them in balancing work and life commitments.

Theoretical Basis of the Present Study

The research is informed by the theoretical models highlighting the influence of culture on work-family interference. This body of research indicates that the perceptions and prevalence of work-life interference, its antecedents and outcomes tend to vary across cultures (Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Grzywacz et al., 2007; Lim, Song, & Choi, 2012; Liu & Low, 2011; Powell, Francesco, & Ling, 2009). For example, work and family roles are perceived to be segmented in individualistic societies and integrated in collectivistic societies (Aycan, 2008). Accordingly, integration leads to feelings of enhancement (positive spillover) between work and family roles in collectivistic societies, whereas incompatibility between the work and family roles leads to experiences of interference in the individualistic societies (Joplin, Shaffer, Francesco, & Lau, 2003).

The influence of culture on the relationship between work-life interference and its antecedents is identified in a study conducted by Yang, Chen, Choi and Zou (2000). These authors examined the sources of interference in the individualistic USA and collectivistic Chinese societies in two studies. While the first study revealed that American and Chinese employees experienced interference similarly, study two revealed that American employees experienced greater family demands compared to Chinese employees. Furthermore, family demands had a greater impact on interference in the USA than in China, whereas job demands had greater impact on interference in China than in the USA. According to Yang et al. (2000), sacrificing family time for work in collectivistic societies is perceived as self-sacrifice for the benefit of the family. However, in an individualistic society, sacrificing family time for work duties was generally viewed as a failure to care for significant others (Yang, et al., 2000).

Although research exploring the role of culture on work-family experiences has increased over the past decade, most research has been conducted with Asian samples. Therefore, little is known about the experiences of workers from other racial and cultural groups. This study will help to fill this gap by uncovering work-life interference among a sample of employed Australian Muslim males, a minority group characterised by cultural diversity. It is important to note that our focus is on work-life rather than work-family to incorporate social roles outside work. This way, we hope to respond to Frone's (2003) call who urged researchers to "move beyond work-family balance to explore the balance between work and the other non-work or life roles" (p. 160). On the basis of evidence indicating that men experience higher levels of work-to-life interference (WTLI) than life-to-work interference (LTWI), we predict the following:

Hypothesis 1 Participants will experience greater levels of work-to-life interference than life-to-work interference

Our hypothesis is based on the traditional gender role expectations, which predict that men spend more time at work and experience more work-to-life interference than women because of their breadwinner role (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005). While this hypothesis is descriptive, it is important to test whether Muslim men experience higher levels of work-to-life interference than life-to-work interference, in accordance with the traditional gender role attitudes. Although research indicates that job demands are a stronger predictor of work-life interference than work hours in collectivistic cultures (Yang, et al., 2000), we hypothesise the following:

Hypothesis 2 Work hours will be a stronger predictor of work-to-life interference than family demands, religiosity and job demands

Our hypothesis is again made in the context of traditional gender roles which are more common in collectivistic than individualistic cultures. We predict that Muslim men will spend long hours at work because of their breadwinner roles and experience higher levels of work-to-life interference than life-to-work interference. Consequently, we suspect that work hours will have a more significant effect on interference than job demands.

On the assumptions of the role scarcity perspective, which suggests that people have fixed amount of resources to spend on their role commitments, and involvement in multiple roles exhausts these resources, ultimately limiting or impairing their physical and psychological functioning (Aryee, et al., 2005), we predict the following:

Hypothesis 3 Family demands will be a stronger predictor of life-to-work interference than religiosity, work hours and job demands

Finally, recognising that individuals experience greater levels of dissatisfaction with their jobs when they believe that their work roles interfere with non-work roles, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 4 Work-to-life interference will be a stronger predictor of job satisfaction than life-to-work interference among Muslim men

The acceptance or rejection of each hypothesis will enable us to address the two research questions posed in this study:

1. How does work-life interference manifest itself among Australian Muslim men?
2. What are the implications of work-life interference among this sub-population for HRM?

METHODS

Sample and Procedure

A total of 301 participants were recruited from various Islamic organisations/mosques in South East Queensland (SEQ) to participate in this study. Participants were approached and asked to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. Data was also collected by recruiting participants via the World Wide Web (Internet). The web-based survey was identical to the paper-and-pencil questionnaire in terms of the scales used and provided an opportunity to access participants from diverse backgrounds. A small-scale pilot study of the survey questionnaire was conducted prior to administering it to the chosen population. Elements of the approach taken in this research have also been articulated in Brough, Kalliath, O'Driscoll, Maxwell, & Siu's research into work-family balance and operationalised in their project instrument Work-Life Balance: Making work-life work (ARC Discovery Project, DP0770109, 2007).

A number of demographic items were included in the questionnaire. Participants were asked to specify their age, ethnic and cultural background, educational qualifications, occupation, total household income, employment status (part-time or full-time employee), tenure, number and age of dependants, country of residence between birth and 18 years of age, marital status, and spouse employment status.

The mean age across the sample was 35.4 years (range = 18-68, SD = 11.25), indicating that participants were concentrated in the more economically productive years of their lives. The majority of participants were employed on a full-time basis (75.7%). A large number of workers (N = 128, 42.5%) were employed in managerial or professional occupations and 50 (16.6%) in the white-collar occupational field (sales, customer service and clerical). Furthermore, almost 30% were employed in the blue-collar occupations, which included domestic, tradesman, labourer, and production or transport workers. The overwhelming majority of participants (N = 215, 71.4%) were married. Just over half (N = 163) were caring for one or more dependent child in their home. As expected, a large number of men (N = 121, 40.2 %) who were married, were in a family relationship where they were the primary income earner and had a spouse who was

either primarily responsible for domestic duties or was unemployed. On the other hand, 82 (27.2 %) men reported that their partner was employed outside the home.

Work-life interference was measured using a measure first developed by Fisher (2001) and validated by Hayman (2005) in Australia. Participants were asked to respond to 11 questions asking how often their job interacted negatively with their personal life and how often their personal life impacted negatively on their work on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Hayman (2005) reported an alpha coefficient of .70 on this measure.

Perceived job demands (PJD) and perceived family demands (PFD) were measured using a 9-item measure developed and validated by Boyar, Carr, Mosley Jr and Carson (2007). A sample item on PJD was 'My job requires all of my attention'. Conversely, a sample item on PFD included 'I have a lot of responsibility in my family'. Each item was assessed on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Boyar et al. (2007) reported good levels of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for both the PJD (.89) and PFD (.77) scales.

Work hours each week was assessed by a single item, which asked the number of hours participants worked in a typical week.

Religiosity was assessed via a 3-item measure developed and validated by Haj-Yahia (1998). A sample item in this measure was 'In general, to what extent do you consider yourself religious?' Responses to these items were based on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not At All) to 4 (To a Great Extent). Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the religiosity scale has been reported to be .88 and .85 (Haj-Yahia, 1998).

Job satisfaction was assessed using the 3-item Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979). A sample item included; 'In general I don't like my job'. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each item on 5-point Likert-type scale. Good levels of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the measure have been reported. Coefficient α was .88 by Allen (2001).

Analysis

A paired samples t tests was conducted to test H_1. Hypotheses 2 to 4 were examined via hierarchical multiple linear regressions. Demographic variables such as marital status, number of dependents and job type were entered in Step 1. In the subsequent steps, least theoretically important variables were entered with the most theoretically important variable entered in the final Step. The effect of each variable over and above the previous variable was analysed in each regression analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Participants generally reported low levels of work-to-life interference (WTLI) (M = 2.88, SD = .98, range 1-5) and even lower levels of life-to-work interference (LTWI) (M = 2.30, SD = .75, range 1-5). The average working hours each week was 38.21 (SD = 12.15, range = 5-70). The average reported job demands (M = 3.40, SD = .87, range = 1-5) was slightly higher than the average family demands reported (M = 3.19, SD = .84, range = 1-5). There was a significant positive relationship between work hours and job demands (r = .33, p < .01). As expected, there was no significant relationship between work hours and family demands (r = .04, p > .01) and a significant positive relationship between job demands and family demands (r = .24, p < .01). Participants also reported high level of religiosity (M = 3.33, SD = .05, range = 2-4) and religiosity had a moderate positive relationship with job satisfaction (r = .35, p < .01). The

coefficient (Cronbach's) alpha for each scale also maintained acceptable to good levels of reliability.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 WLI	2.9	.98	**.84**						
2 LWI	2.3	.75	.41**	**.81**					
3 Religiosity	4.3	1.1	-.18**	-.18**	**.90**				
4 Work-hours	38.2	12.2	.33**	-.03	-.07				
5 Job-demands	3.4	.87	.49**	.14*	-.13*	33**	**.90**		
6 Family-demands	3.2	.84	.20**	.19**	.09	.04	24**	**.85**	
7 Job-satisfaction	3.6	.96	-.38**	-.33**	35**	-.02	-.05	-.11	**.84**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Cronbach's Alpha on the diagonal in bold

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression on the Prediction of Work-to-Life interference

Steps	Variables	Work-to-life interference Step 5 (β)	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1	Marital satisfaction	-.14*		
	Dependents	.07		
	Job type	-.08	.04**	.04**
Step 2	Family-demands	.13**	.09**	.05**
Step 3	Religiosity	-.13**	.13**	.04**
Step 4	Job-demands	.40**	.29**	.16**
Step 5	Work hours	.24**	.32**	.03**

Note: β = standardized beta coefficients; Job type was dummy coded into 0 = casual or part-time employee and 1= full-time employee; Marital status was dummy coded into 0 = single/never married and 1 = married; Dependents was dummy coded into 0 = no dependent children and 1 = presence of dependent children. *= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression on the Prediction of Life-to-Work Interference

Steps	Variables	Life-to-work interference Step 5 (β)	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1	Marital status	-.17*		
	Dependents	.03		
	Job type	-.04	.02	.02
Step 2	Religiosity	-.17**	.05**	.03**
Step 3	Work hours	-.03	.05	0
Step 4	Job-demands	.09	.07*	.02*
Step 5	Family-demands	.21**	.11**	.04**

Note: β = standardized beta coefficients; Job type was dummy coded into 0 = casual or part-time employee and 1= full-time employee; Marital status was dummy coded into 0 = single/never married and 1 = married; Dependents was dummy coded into 0 = no dependent children and 1 = presence of dependent children. *= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$

There was a statistically significant difference in the scores for WTLI (M = 2.88, SD = .98, SE = .06, range = 1-5) and LTWI (M = 2.30, SD = .75, SE = .04, range = 1-5), t(290) = 10.32, p < .05, d = .67. Based on this result, H_1 was supported.

After step 5, with all IVs in the equation, the multiple correlation coefficient R = .57, was significantly different from zero, F(7, 275) = 18.47 p < .01. The beta coefficients (β) presented in Table 2 suggests that job demands was the best predictor of WTLI (β = .40, p < .01), followed by work hours (β = .24, p < .01), marital status (β = -.14, p < .05), followed by family demands and religiosity, which both made a small, yet significant contribution to the prediction of WTLI. Hence, H_2 was not supported.

After step 5, with all IVs in the equation, the multiple correlation coefficient R = .33, was significantly different from zero, F(7, 275) = 4.81 p < .01. Table 3 suggests that as predicted, family demands was the best predictor of LTWI (β = .21, p < .01). This was followed by religiosity (β = -.17, p < .01) and then marital status (β = -.17, p < .05). Based on these results, H_3 was supported.

Table 4 Hierarchical Regression on the Prediction of Job Satisfaction

		Job satisfaction		
Steps	Variables	Step 3 (β)	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1	Marital status	.05		
	Dependents	.03		
	Job type	.06	.01	.01
Step 2	LTWI	-.21**	.13**	.12**
Step 3	WTLI	-.32**	.21**	.08**

Note: β = standardised beta coefficients; Job type was dummy coded into 0 = casual or part-time employee and 1= full-time employee; Marital status was dummy coded into 0 = single/never married and 1 = married; Dependents was dummy coded into 0 = no dependent children and 1 = presence of dependent children. *= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$

After step 3, with all IVs in the equation, the multiple correlation coefficient R = .46, was significantly different from zero, F(5, 281) = 14.88, p < .01. The beta coefficients (β) presented in Table 4 suggest that as predicted, higher levels of WTLI were a stronger predictor of job satisfaction (β = -.32, p < .01) than LTWI (β = -.21, p < .01). Hence, H_4 was supported.

DISCUSSION
The findings of this study are consistent with the limited research undertaken on work-life research in collectivistic societies. For example, it was found that Australian Muslim men experienced infrequent (low to moderate) levels of interference, which is consistent with research in collectivistic societies where interference between work and family roles is perceived as limited (Aycan, 2008; Koyuncu, Burke, & Woplin, 2012). In fact, previous research with Australian Muslim men indicates that possible enrichment between work and non-work roles is experienced more frequently than interference (Sav et al., 2010). Nevertheless,

work negatively influencing family and personal life was more prevalent than family and personal life negatively influencing work. This is consistent with research suggesting that workers from collectivistic cultures experience less interference between work and family, mainly because they perceive these domains to enrich one another (Aryee, et al., 2005; Koyuncu, et al., 2012). Furthermore, given that all of the participants were either born/raised or spent most of their lives in Australia, our findings suggest that cultural and religious beliefs shape work-life experiences well beyond immigration.

Further evidence that Australian Muslim men's interpretation and experience of work-life interference is consistent with collectivistic cultures is evident in the findings linked to the hypothesis oriented on factors predicting work-to-life interference (hypothesis 2). Job demands was the strongest predictor of work-to-life interference compared to work hours, religiosity and family demands. This reflects the notion that work hours are a less significant predictor of work-life interference than perceived work load (generally conceptualised as job demands) in collectivistic societies (e.g. Lu, Kao, Chang, Wu, & Cooper, 2008; Spector et al., 2004). Islamic teachings and beliefs about paid employment provide a possible explanation for why job demands are a stronger predictor of work-to-life interference than work hours. Islam attaches great importance to paid employment, considering it a source of independence and a way of promoting personal growth (Yousef, 2000). Given that the participants were moderately to highly religious, spending time at work (long work hours) as time-based demands may have been seen as a positive demand and a necessary element in providing for the family. Our findings also challenge the dominant understanding of work hours being a stronger antecedent of interference than job demands and indicate that greater attention may need to be given to job demands, particularly for workers from non-traditional backgrounds.

As hypothesised, family demands explained greater variance in the prediction of life-to-work interference (H_3) than job demands, work hours and religiosity. Our findings support the role scarcity perspective of work-life interference indicating that family-related demands such as childcare and household duties all increase the risk of life-to-work interference (Byron, 2005; Michel, et al., 2011). Religiosity also explained a small, yet significant variance in the prediction of both life-to-work interference and work-to-life interference. However, being religious was related to lower levels of life-to-work interference. Hence, religion was seen as a resource rather than a demand. Because of their religious identity, we believe that carrying out religious roles generated positive energy and resources that enabled Muslim men to cope with interference.

The results also support the differentiation between work-to-life interference and life-to-work interference as the two types of interference appeared to have different antecedents. For instance, work-related antecedents associated more with work-related interference while family-related antecedents correlated more with life-to-work interference. However, some antecedents including being married and religiosity maintained significant associations with both types of interferences suggesting that certain antecedents can simultaneously have a relationship with both types of interference. Finally, work-to-life interference was a stronger predictor of job satisfaction than life-to-work interference. This is expected because workers who perceive their work to interfere with their family are likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs. This is consistent with research in both collectivist and individualistic cultures, indicating that work-to-family interference is more strongly associated with job satisfaction than family-to-work interference (Allen, et al., 2000).

HRM Implications

The research findings have important implications for human resource management (HRM). Our findings confirm that work-to-life interference is more prevalent among Muslim men than

life-to-work interference. Hence, programs targeting work-life interference among this sub-population should first be directed at reducing how work interferes with non-work (life) commitments. Second, our findings add to the large body of research which shows the negative consequences (job dissatisfaction) of work-life interference for workers and organisations. For organisations, the economic imperative should underpin the promotion of a work-life friendly workplace that is supportive of employees' non-work lives. In the absence of such a supportive culture, employees are likely to experience negative consequences of work-life interference including job dissatisfaction, absenteeism and a lower level of organisational commitment. Our findings also confirmed that being religious is associated with higher levels of both direction of interference; however, the strength of the relationship was weak. Hence, if workplaces fail to consider religious roles and their implications for how religious workers devote time and energy to work commitments, they may fail to create a work environment that is sensitive to non-work roles. The addition of religion into our conception of work-life interference as presented in this study forces us to think about other life roles, not commonly considered within the work-life literature. That is, there is a strong need to broaden the scope of work-life policies beyond family to include other non-work commitments (religious, social, leisure, study etc.).

Our findings question the suitability of certain family-friendly policies for Australian Muslim men and others upholding collectivistic cultural values. Because work hours were a less significant predictor of interference than job demands, it is highly possible that flexible work options around working hours may not reduce interference among Muslim men where long working hours are seen as a way of supporting the family. Instead, flexible work options around job demands may be more important. It is recommended that aspects of the working environment, particularly those pertaining to job demands be regularly reviewed and closely monitored to promote a workplace culture supportive of workers with unique and diverse needs and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Research on work-life interference has mostly focused on white, middle class and educated Anglo-Saxon populations. Much less research is available on the experiences of ethnic minorities. This study contributes to filling this gap by focusing on a largely neglected group of men from a range of occupations, ages, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and family circumstances. The findings confirm theoretical models and empirical research on workers of backgrounds known to be more collectivistic in orientation. While research on collectivistic cultures and work-life interference has generally been conducted with Asian samples, the findings of this research suggest that the theoretical models are also applicable to ethno-religious minority groups residing in predominantly individualistic societies such as Australia. Furthermore, the tendency to view work and family as integrated may be even stronger in Australian Muslim men because of their religious beliefs. Such beliefs usually encourage distinct gender roles, where the man's role is usually to work and financially support his wife and family (Dhami & Sheikh, 2000).

Several limitations are associated with this study. The study relied on cross-sectional self-report data to examine participant's experiences. However, because of the lack of conceptual knowledge on this study's focus of interest, developing an initial understanding was more appropriate and hence, self-report data was used. Furthermore, our study did not use a random sample. However, drawing a random sample of Australian Muslims is extremely difficult as there are no reliable listings of names. This study significantly increases our understanding of the experiences of an under-researched ethno-religious cultural minority, positively contributing to the body of work-family knowledge. Our findings underscore the need to re-think the effectiveness of policies designed to facilitate work-life balance among workers who have different cultural and religious beliefs to the mainstream population.

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