The direct effects of work-family conflict on turnover intentions were explored with 203 New Zealand government employees. Further, work-family usefulness was used as a possible moderating of these direct effects. Direct links were found between the two types of conflict (work-family and family-work) and turnover intentions. Further, work-family usefulness held significant interaction effects for both conflict types. Employees whom perceive high levels of work-family usefulness have lower turnover intentions than employees with low work-family usefulness, and this is significantly lower when both work-family and family-work conflict increases. Consequently, conflict from the office and home encourages turnover intentions, but the perceived usefulness of work-family practices can reduce the negative effects of conflict. The implications for organisations and future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** work-family conflict, turnover intentions, work-family usefulness

Work-family conflict studies deal with the complications modern employees have in balancing their work and family responsibilities. Aligned with the growth in attention in the work-family conflict literature, has been the acceptance that work-family practices can alleviate some of the conflicts and its associated outcomes (Hall & Parker, 1993). However, the influence of work-family practices on conflict outcomes remains poorly understood. Consequently, the present study seeks to explore turnover intentions as an outcome of work-family and family-work conflict, and tests the moderating effect of work-family usefulness to determine whether work-family practices may play a buffering role between conflict and outcomes. Further, the present study is based in New Zealand, which aids the internationalisation of work-family studies. This is appropriate given that New Zealand has similar demographic characteristics as the United States (Pringle & Tudhope, 1997).

The work-family conflict literature has been transformed over the past two decades. Early studies focused upon work based conflict only, to the exclusion of the home (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998).
However, current research acknowledges that earlier studies focusing upon workplace conflict entering the home was a limitation. For example, Frone, Russell, and Cooper (1997) stated there is a methodological flaw in studies that measure work-family conflict from a single-direction focus. Consequently, typical research into the work-family conflict phenomena includes conflict originating in both the home and workplace and interfering in the opposite domains (e.g. home to workplace and workplace to home), for example Adams, King and King (1996), Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996), and O'Driscoll, Ilgen and Hildreth (1992). In support of these approaches, the present study examines the effects of conflict bi-directionally, with work-family conflict (WFC) representing workplace issues intruding into the home (e.g. taking work home) and family-work conflict (FWC) representing home issues entering the workplace (e.g. dealing with childcare issues at work).

**WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND HYPOTHESES**

The outcomes associated with work-family conflict have been widely explored in the literature. For example, Kossek and Ozeki (1998) found in their meta-analysis, that work-family and family-work conflict is negatively related to job satisfaction and life satisfaction. The proposition that work-family conflict can encourage employees to consider leaving their organisation is well supported. Indeed, turnover intention is one of the most studied job related outcomes in the work-family conflict literature (e.g. Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Cohen, 1997; Good, Page, & Young, 1996; Maertz, 1999; Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001). Despite this interest, few studies have sought to explore turnover intention associated with conflict in New Zealand. Expanding the internationalisation of work-family conflict studies is important for providing a greater globalised understanding of the effects of work and family pressures on employees.

Cohen (1997) asserted work-family conflict could cause employees to quit their job, and his claim has been supported (Good, Sisler, & Gentry, 1988). Therefore, employees experiencing greater conflict in the workplace that intrudes into the home (WFC) become encouraged to seek employment elsewhere, perhaps in search of a ‘less stressful’ workplace. Importantly, Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) argued that non-work factors, such as family issues and responsibilities, may also influence turnover...
intentions. Their statement suggests that employees experiencing conflict from the home in the workplace (FWC) may also seek employment elsewhere. In this context, employees may be looking to reduce their working hours, or rearrange their work schedule, so family issues do not impact on their work. While WFC has had clear links with turnover, studies exploring FWC have been mixed. For example, Anderson et al. (2002) found WFC predicted turnover intentions, but not FWC, while Shaffer et al. (2001) found both WFC and FWC related to turnover intentions. In the New Zealand context, Haar (2004) found both work-family and family-work conflict predicted employee turnover intentions, which encourages a bi-direction approach. As such, the present paper seeks to advance studies of non-work influences of turnover intention, and hence tests both WFC and FWC as predictors of turnover intention.

**Hypothesis 1:** WFC will be positively related to turnover intention.

**Hypothesis 2:** FWC will be positively related to turnover intention.

**Moderating Effects**

While the work-family practices literature much popularist attention (e.g. Overman, 1999), it has only recently gained greater academic and empirical support (e.g. Lambert, 2000, Haar & Spell, 2004). Indeed, critics of work-family practices have argued its potential effects have been largely descriptive and lacked thorough theoretical and empirical evidence (Tenbrunsel, Brett, Maoz, Stroh & Reilly, 1995). This criticism has also spread to the work-family conflict literature. For example, Kossek and Ozeki (1998: 146) suggested there is little research linking work-family practices with job outcomes and work-family conflict, stating “research on organizational work-family policy is often disconnected from studies on individuals’ experiences with work-family conflict”. There have been some recent developments in this area. For example, Haar (2004) explored employee perceptions of work-family support as a moderating of work-family and family-work conflict and turnover intentions. However, both these relationships had no significant effect.

A recent development by Lambert (2000) was the measure of work-family usefulness, which found that employees who considered their firm’s work-family practices as more useful would reciprocate
with greater organisational citizenship behaviours. As such, this measure may provide a greater tool for tapping the interacting effect that work-family practices may play in work-family conflict-outcome studies. This approach links well with findings by Grover and Crooker (1995), who established that employees were more attached to their firm if it offered work-family practices irrespective of their personal benefit from the practices. As such, tapping into use of work-family practices may be a limited outlet for exposing the effectiveness of work-family practices in reducing the conflict-turnover relationships. A reason why work-family usefulness might have some positive influence on these relationships is that work-family practices are often depicted as allowing greater balance between work and family responsibilities (Hall & Parker, 1993). As such, employees who feel work-family practices are more useful and provide them with help, or the opportunity of help when needed, will be better able to buffer the effects of work-family conflict on turnover intentions. Given the organisation in this study offers six work-family support practices that are applicable towards both work and family roles, the interaction effect is hypothesised bi-directionally.

**Hypothesis 3:** The relationship between WFC and turnover intention will be reduced (buffered) when there is high perceived work-family usefulness.

**Hypothesis 4:** The relationship between FWC and turnover intention will be reduced (buffered) when there is high perceived work-family usefulness.

**METHOD**

**Sample and Procedures**

Data were collected from a New Zealand Government department in the financial services sector, as part of a wider study on work issues. Surveys were sent through the organization’s Intranet, which every employee has access to. From 622 employees, a total of 203 participants responded (32.6% response rate). Surveys were administered with a four-week time lag to reduce the possibility of common method variance. The first questionnaire contained the demographic and criterion variables (turnover intentions), while survey two contained the predictor variables (WFC and FWC) and the moderator variable (work-family usefulness). On average, the participants were 40.5 years old, white (88%), married (81%), female (75%), parents (74%) and union members (67%). Average tenure was
12.6 years, with 73% blue collar and 27% were white collar. On average, respondents earned $40,000 and 40% held some tertiary/university qualification.

**Measures**

Turnover intentions was measured using a 4-item measure by Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers & Mainous (1988), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. Sample questions include “I have recently spent time looking for another job” and “I often think about quitting my present position”. This scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .86.

Work-family conflict was measured using the 14-item Inventory of Work-Family Conflict (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2000), with statements divided equally (7 each) between work and family interference, with anchors 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. WFC items included “After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I’d like to do”, and “My job makes it difficult to be the kind of spouse, partner or parent I’d like to be”. FWC items included “My family takes up time I would like to spend working”, and “At times, my personal problems make me irritable at work”. The Cronbach’s alphas of these measures were .73 (WFC) and .86 (FWC).

Work-family usefulness was measured using a 6-item measure by Lambert (2000), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. Questions followed the stem “work-family practices…” and a sample question was “Make it easier for me to plan work schedules and goals”. This scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .92.

There are a number of demographic factors that have been found to influence employee work-family conflict levels (e.g. Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper, & O’Brien, 2001; Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002). To eliminate the effect these variables have on the conflict-turnover intention relationships, the following variables were controlled for: gender (1=female, 0=male), family size (as total number of children), working hours (per week), and salary (coded 1=under $20,000 per annum, 8=over $80,000 per annum, with the five categories in between spread in $10,000 lots).
**Analysis**

To examine the direct effects of WFC and FWC on turnover intentions (Hypotheses 1 and 2), and the potential moderating effects of work-family usefulness on these relationships (Hypotheses 3 and 4), separate hierarchical regression analysis were computed with turnover intentions as the criterion variable. Control variables (gender, family size, total hours worked, and salary) were entered in Step 1. In Step 2, predictor variables were entered separately (WFC and FWC). The potential moderating variable (work-family usefulness) was entered separately in Step 3. Lastly, the interaction variables were entered at Step 4 (WFC/FWC multiplied by work-family usefulness). Aiken and West’s (1991) centering procedure was used. Consistent with Cohen and Cohen (1983) recommendations, regression coefficients for the control effects were obtained from Step 1 in each analysis, coefficients for the predictor effects were obtained from Step 2, coefficients for the moderator effects were obtained from Step 3, and coefficients for the interaction terms were obtained from Step 4.

**RESULTS**

Descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Hours worked</td>
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<td>2. Salary</td>
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<td>3. WFC</td>
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<td>4. FWC</td>
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<td>5. Work-family usefulness</td>
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<td>6. Turnover intention</td>
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</table>

N=203, *p<.05, **p<.01

Table 1 shows that turnover intentions is significantly correlated with WFC (r=.18, p<.05) and FWC (r=.18, p<.05). WFC and FWC are also significantly correlated to each other (r=.67, p<.01), and salary is significantly correlated with WFC (r=.15, p<.05) and FWC (r=.20, p<.01).
Results of the regressions are shown in the two tables below. They show that WFC was significantly related to turnover intentions (β= .18, p< .05), which supports Hypothesis 1. Likewise, FWC was also significantly to turnover intentions (β= .16, p< .05), supporting Hypothesis 2. Both WFC and FWC accounted for a minimal 3 percent (p< .05) of the variance for turnover intentions. The interacting effect of work-family usefulness was also supported for both types of work-family conflict. Work-family usefulness buffered the relationship between WFC and turnover intentions (β= -.14, p< .05), which supports Hypothesis 3. Similarly, work-family usefulness buffered the relationship between FWC and turnover intentions (β= -.16, p< .05), which supports Hypothesis 4. These interaction effects from work-family usefulness accounted for a modest 2% (p< .1) for both WFC and FWC towards turnover intentions.

| Table 2. WFC Predicting Turnover | Turnover Intentions |
| Variables | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 3 | Step 4 |
| Controls | | | | |
| Gender | -.29** | -.29** | -.29** | -.28** |
| Family size | -.04 | -.03 | -.03 | -.04 |
| Hours worked | -.13 | -.14 | -.14 | -.15 |
| Salary | .07 | .05 | .04 | .07 |
| Predictor | | | | |
| Work-family conflict (WFC) | .18* | .18* | .16* | |
| Moderators | | | | |
| Work-family usefulness | | | -.05 | -.05 |
| Interactions | | | | |
| WFC x Work-family usefulness | | | -.14* | |
| R² change | .09* | .03* | .00 | .02† |
| Total R² | .09 | .12 | .12 | .14 |
| Adjusted R² | .07 | .09 | .08 | .10 |
| F Statistic | 3.48* | 3.80** | 3.21** | 3.21*** |

†p< .1, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Standardized regression coefficients, all significance tests were single-tailed.

| Table 3. FWC Predicting Turnover | Turnover Intentions |
| Variables | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 3 | Step 4 |
| Controls | | | | |
| Gender | -.29** | -.28** | -.28** | -.27** |
| Marital status | -.04 | -.04 | -.04 | -.04 |
| Family size | -.13 | -.12 | -.12 | -.14 |
| Hours worked | .07 | .03 | .02 | .05 |
| Predictor | | | | |
| Family-work conflict (FWC) | .16* | .16* | .14* | |
**Moderators**
Work-family usefulness - .04  - .05

**Interactions**
FWC x Work-family usefulness - .16*
R² change .09*  .03*  .00  .02†
Total R² .09  .12  .12  .14
Adjusted R² .07  .08  .08  .10
F Statistic 3.48*  3.76**  3.05**  3.21**

†p< .1, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Standardized regression coefficients, all significance tests were single-tailed.

To facilitate interpretation of the significant moderator effects, plots of the interactions are presented in Figures 1 and 2 (below). On Figure 1, WFC low and high represent points below and above the WFC mean (M=2.5), and this is the same for the graphed lines for work-family usefulness (M=3.7). On Figure 2, FWC low and high represent points below and above the FWC mean (M=2.1), and this is the same for the graphed lines for work-family usefulness (M=3.7).

**Figure 1. Interaction between WFC and Turnover Intention by Work-Family Usefulness.**
Plotting the interaction terms (Figure 1) illustrates that when WFC levels are low, there is little difference between respondents registering high or low levels of work-family usefulness towards turnover intentions. When WFC increases, all respondents register increased turnover intentions. However, respondents with low work-family usefulness experience a much greater increase in turnover intentions than those with high levels of work-family usefulness.

Figure 2. Interaction between FWC and Turnover Intention by Work-Family Usefulness.

Plotting the interaction terms (Figure 2) illustrates that when FWC levels are low, there is some difference between respondents, with those registering low levels of work-family usefulness having higher levels of turnover intentions than those with high levels of work-family usefulness. When FWC increases all respondents register increased levels of turnover intentions. However, respondents with low work-family usefulness experience consistently greater levels of turnover intentions than those respondents with high levels of work-family usefulness.
DISCUSSION

A focus of this paper was to explore conflict bi-directionally as a predictor of turnover intention from a sample of New Zealand government employees. Similar to the international literature, employees with greater WFC were found to predict higher turnover intentions. In addition, FWC was found to predict turnover intentions, which builds on findings that have previously been mixed in the literature. Consequently, employees within this government department are more likely to consider leaving their organization when they experience heightened levels of conflict from the home and office. These findings reinforce the proposition that work-family conflict studies need to explore both WFC and FWC, especially given the lesser explored FWC-turnover intentions relationship. Given that both types of conflict accounted for similar amounts of the variance for turnover intentions (both 3%), suggests that conflict from the workplace and home has the equal potential to encourage an employee in this study to leave their organization. However, the overall variance is still rather small, encouraging the study of additional factors that may encourage turnover intentions among employees.

To examine the influence work-family practices have on the outcomes of work-family conflict, work-family usefulness was tested as a potential moderator of the work-family and family-work conflict relationships with turnover intentions. The interaction effects were supported for both types of conflict, with work-family usefulness buffering the negative relationships found in the direct effects of the regression models. Thus, respondents who perceive work-family practices being more useful are less likely to consider leaving their organisation when conflict from the home and office increases. Conversely, employees who rated the work-family practices as less useful were more likely to be considering leaving the company when conflict levels increased. Given that the measure of work-family usefulness is rateable by both users and non-users of work-family practices, this also provides support for the positive effects of work-family practices being applicable to non-users also, like Grover and Crooker (1995) found. Consequently, the firm in the present study should be aware that even work-family practices that are not used could still provide positive benefits for employees. For example, employees might view the practices as being a ‘safety net’, which leaves them happy because they know it is there if they need it. Consequently, knowing that these practices for balancing
work and family issues are available may provide employees with a buffering effect when conflicting issues arise.

Overall, these findings are important, because Kossek and Ozeki (1998) have maintained that studies need to address the effects of work-family practices on the outcomes of work-family conflict. However, it must also be highlighted that the overall interaction effects are somewhat minor, accounting for an additional 2% of the variance for turnover intentions for both WFC and FWC. Consequently, while these findings provide support for work-family practices, it also shows that the effect within this organisation is minor. Further studies are needed to provide a greater insight into the effects work-family usefulness can have on work-family conflict outcomes, including other familiar outcomes such as job and life satisfaction.

**Limitations**

There are limitations that warrant caution when interpreting these results, such as a single organisation and the use of self-report data. Major et al. (2002) has noted that the use of self-reported data is typical in work-family conflict, and similar to Major et al. (2002), Harman’s one factor test was used to test for common method variance. This test requires all study variables be included in a global factor analysis (unrotated), and the production of a single component is likely due to common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The present data produced seven components, with the largest accounting for 22% of the variance. As a single dominating component did not emerge, this test indicates no evidence of common method variance.

Another limitation is the high correlation between the WFC and FWC measures ($r=.67, p<.01$). While these measures are significantly correlated, they are not usually as high as reported here. For example, Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Collins (2001) reported $r=.34 (p<.01)$ between WFC and FWC. In addition, the outcomes predicted by the two conflict measures were very similar for both direct and indirect effects. However, to test whether these measures are distinct, they were checked with other job outcomes from the wider study. While both WFC and FWC were significantly correlated with job
and life satisfaction (results not shown), the r values were distinct, with varying significance levels, indicating the items do measure distinct conflict aspects. In addition, the moderation effects figures (one and two) show distinct differences suggesting different buffering effects. Further support is found in another study using this same measure (Haar & Spell, 2001), which also found these variables to be highly correlated ($r = .70, p< .01$). Consequently, the findings here suggest that for turnover intention in the organisation in this present study, WFC and FWC have very similar effects because these sources of conflict are having identical effects. However, the high correlations on the work-family conflict measure do suggest it needs further refinement.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the findings in this New Zealand government department support WFC and FWC predicting turnover intention. In addition, the significant interaction effect from work-family usefulness indicates that work-family practices can play a part in reducing the negative outcomes of work-family conflict. Further, the interaction effects also support that work-family practices may be beneficial irrespective of whether an employee actually uses the work-family practices. Having them there as a ‘safety net’ may be sufficient for them to buffer negative outcomes from conflict. Consequently, the present study provides new direction for work-family conflict studies testing outcomes and the effects of work-family practices. Obviously, further studies are needed to replicate these findings before the effects found here can be suggested as being generalisable.
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http://www.humanresources.co.nz/articles/2001-10-16_word_family.pdf


