

## **The Link between National Paid Leave Policy and Work–Family Conflict among Married Working Parents**

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We investigated relationships between four dimensions of work–family conflict (time- and strain-based work interference with family, time- and strain-based family interference with work) and three key national paid leave policies (paid parental leave, paid sick leave, paid annual leave) among a sample of 643 working married parents with children under the age of 5 across 12 industrialised nations. Results provided some evidence that paid sick leave has a small but significant negative relationship with work–family conflict. Little evidence was revealed of a link between paid parental leave or of a link between paid annual leave and work–family conflict. Family-supportive organisational perceptions and family-supportive supervision were tested as moderators with some evidence to suggest that paid leave policies are most beneficial when employees' perceptions of support are higher than when they are lower. Family-supportive organisational perceptions and family-supportive supervision were both associated with less work–family conflict, providing evidence of their potential benefit across national contexts.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades scholars across the globe have focused a great deal of attention on work–family conflict (e.g. Allen, Shockley, & Biga, 2010; Poelmans, 2005; Yang, Chen, Choi, & Zou, 2000). Rooted in role theory (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), work–family conflict (WFC) is a specific form of interrole conflict in which pressures from the work (family) role are incompatible with pressures from the family (work) role. That is, participation in one role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Research has demonstrated that WFC occurs in two directions, in that family can interfere with work (FIW) and work can interfere with family (WIF) (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005).

In considering work and family issues from a cross-national perspective, one aspect of context that is frequently discussed but rarely included in research is government-sponsored family-supportive policy. It is widely recognised that there are considerable differences across countries with regard to policies and laws designed to help individuals balance career and caregiving. Countries differ in the extent to which they sponsor paid leave for childbirth and adoption, paid sick leave, and paid annual vacation. To illustrate, the United States (US) provides no paid leave to mothers following the birth or adoption of a child, while Germany provides 52 or more weeks (Heymann, Earle, & Hayes, 2007).

Work-family researchers often advocate for greater family-related government social supports as a way to address the needs of working parents (e.g. Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Neal & Hammer, 2007). For example, the US is frequently referred to as “lagging far behind” or as “paling in comparison” with other industrialised countries in terms of policies designed to provide support to working families (e.g. Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Hammer & Zimmerman, 2011; Heymann et al., 2007; Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2009). As noted by Williams (2010), “A growing number of American scholars document the lack of supports for working families and advocate adoption of European-style policies” (p. 6). Williams goes on to note that, “Failures of public policy are a key reason that Americans face such acute work-family conflict” (p. 8).

As the above statements suggest, arguments for greater governmental family supports, such as paid maternity leave, are predicated on the notion that the availability of such supports will result in less work-family conflict for employees. However, this is a taken for granted conjecture that has yet to be subjected to empirical scrutiny. Moreover, there are also advocates for a nongovernmental approach to work-family policy. The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) argues that rather than a government-imposed mandate, all employers should be encouraged to voluntarily provide paid leave for illness, vacation, and personal days to accommodate the needs of employees and their family members (SHRM, 2011).

The objective of the current study is to provide an initial test of the relationship between national paid leave policies and work-family conflict. We seek to determine whether the availability of such policies is associated with the work-family conflict reported by working married parents with children under the age of 5. We include the following policies: (1) duration of paid maternity leave, (2) duration of paid paternity leave, (3) duration of paid sick leave, and (4) duration of paid annual/vacation leave. In addition, we examine the local work environment and the interplay between local work environments and national policy by investigating interactions between national policy and informal work-family supports within organisations. Specifically, we investigate family-supportive organisational perceptions and

family-supportive supervision as moderators (Allen, 2001; Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009). Our investigation includes both directions (WIF and FIW) as well as two forms (time and strain) of work–family conflict. Given the increasing calls for change in work–family policy at a national level, the current study represents an important contribution to the work–family literature.

## Work–Family Conflict and National Policy

From a theoretical perspective, national policies such as paid time for sick leave and parental leave are thought to be beneficial to working parents because they serve as a resource that can help avert conflicts between work and family (e.g. Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Goode, 1960). Paid leave policies act as a resource in that they enable employees to meet caregiving obligations while also remaining a viable member of the workforce. In countries such as the US, the responsibility for acquiring the resources that enable individuals to manage work and family responsibilities is primarily left to individuals and organisations (Neal & Hammer, 2007). Working parents are encouraged to rely on their own means for managing work and family, and the adoption of work–family arrangements within organisations is framed as a business case (den Dulk, 2005). In other industrialised countries the government takes a stronger role by mandating resources such as paid leave (Heymann et al., 2007).

While paid leave policies are frequently discussed as critical to reducing work–family conflict, there is a small but growing body of research that offers contradicting evidence. A recent qualitative study revealed that women in the UK and the Netherlands reported that national policy had not impacted their lives in any tangible way (Yerkes, Standing, Wattis, & Wain, 2010). In addition, the notion that individuals within the US experience the greatest amount of work–family conflict across the globe can be challenged. In a study investigating work–family pressures across 18 countries means ranged from 24.8 to 35.6 (Spector et al., 2005). Participants from the US reported the fourth lowest mean (26.8). Hypothesising that individuals living in countries with more generous country-level social supports (i.e. Sweden) would experience less work–family conflict than would individuals living in countries with less generous social supports (i.e. the UK), Strandh and Nordenmark (2006) investigated work–family conflict in five countries (Sweden, the Netherlands, the UK, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) that differed in terms of the extensiveness of governmental supports. The results contradicted their hypothesis in that women in Sweden reported more conflicts between work and household demands than did any other category of people across all five countries. Similarly, Mortazavi, Pedhiwala, Shafiro, and Hammer (2009) found no differences in the amount of WIF or FIW experienced across

individuals from the Ukraine, Iran, and the US. As noted by Yerkes et al. (2010), policies at the national level may not effectively connect with the day-to-day experiences of individuals who are combining work and family roles.

To further investigate this issue, we adopt a policy approach rather than a country approach. A policy approach differs from a country approach in several ways. First, in previous research country has essentially been used as a proxy for policy. In the current research we study policy directly and not only the existence of policy but specific policies and their duration. Second, policy and country are not interchangeable in that different countries can have the same policy. Third, a policy approach permits us to isolate specific policies. As research accumulates, this is important as it can help determine which policies may be more or less effective with regard to different outcomes. In sum, we conduct a direct test of the relationship between government-provided policies and work–family conflict by investigating the relationship between the length of different forms of paid leave and four forms of work–family conflict: time-based WIF, strain-based WIF, time-based FIW, and strain-based FIW. Because of the competing perspectives regarding the relationship between policy and work–family conflict, we pose the following research question.

*Research Question 1:* Does duration of government-provided paid leave relate to work–family conflict?

## Family-Supportive Work Environment

Although there has been limited research attention focused on the connection between national policy and work–family conflict, a substantial body of research has documented that more family-supportive work environments are associated with less work–family conflict. Within the work–family literature, two aspects of the work environment have received considerable attention, overall perceptions of family support and family-supportive supervision.

Multiple constructs have been developed that capture an overall assessment of the family-supportiveness of the organisation. They include work–family culture (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999), family-supportive organisational perceptions (FSOP) (Allen, 2001), face-time orientation (Shockley & Allen, 2010), and work–family climate (Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001; O'Neill, Harrison, Cleveland, Almeida, Stawski, & Crouter, 2009). In general, family-supportive organisations are those that give employees ample opportunity to have both a fulfilling work life and personal life and that do not expect employees to put work ahead of family. Perceiving that the organisation is more family supportive relates to a variety of positive

outcomes that include less work–family conflict, greater job satisfaction, less intention to quit, and greater employee well-being (e.g. Allen, 2001; Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011).

Supervisors have also been recognised as essential to enabling employees to manage work and family. Research results consistently indicate that individuals who report that their supervisors are more family supportive report less work–family conflict (e.g. Allen, 2001; Kossek et al., 2011; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). In addition, family-supportive supervision has been associated with positive job attitudes, less intent to leave the organisation, and more positive spillover from family to work (e.g. Allen, 2001; Hammer et al., 2009). Research from a leadership perspective has further documented that individuals who report high quality leader–member exchange with their supervisors also report less work–family conflict (Bernas & Major, 2000; Golden, 2006; Major, Fletcher, Davis, & Germano, 2008).

Most of the research on family-supportive environments and work–family conflict has been conducted in the US; however, there is some evidence that these concepts extend to other countries. O'Driscoll, Poelmans, Spector, Kalliath, Allen, Cooper, and Sanchez (2003) found that greater FSOP and family-supportive supervision was associated with less WIF and less FIW among a sample of New Zealand managers. Mauno, Kinnunen, and Pyykko (2005) found that a more supportive work–family culture was associated with less WIF. Most recently, in a five-country study, Lapierre, Spector, Allen, Poelmans, Cooper, O'Driscoll, Sanchez, Brough, and Kinnunen (2008) reported significant correlations between both directions of work–family conflict and FSOP. We further test these relationships in our multi-country sample. Based on previous research, and the fact that there is no obvious reason to expect informal family supportiveness to be ineffective in certain nations, we propose the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* Greater family-supportive organisational perceptions are associated with less work–family conflict.

*Hypothesis 2:* Greater family-supportive supervision is associated with less work–family conflict.

Research has yet to examine interactions between country policy and the organisational work environment in predicting work–family conflict. It seems likely that the family supportiveness of the work environment acts as moderator. Specifically, a lack of more proximal family support from the organisation may undermine the positive effects of national family-supportive policy. For example, when employees feel that the organisation and/or their supervisor is non-supportive of family needs, they may fear that taking advantage of available paid sick leave could jeopardise their career or

standing within the organisation regardless of the source of the support. Those who have nationally sponsored paid leave may feel distressed if they feel pressured by their organisation to place work first and to minimise policy use. Supervisors can hinder the benefits associated with available supports through poor scheduling practices (e.g. demanding that employees work late) or through their own “career before family” attitudes (Hammer et al., 2009; Smith & Gardner, 2007). Accordingly, we propose the following:

*Hypothesis 3:* Family-supportive organisational perceptions (FSOP) moderate the relationship between duration of paid leave and work–family conflict, such that the relationship is more negative when FSOP is higher.

*Hypothesis 4:* Family-supportive supervision (FSS) moderates the relationship between duration of paid leave and work–family conflict, such that the relationship is more negative when FSS is higher.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

Data are from a larger international study concerning managerial work–family conflict. Because the focus of the study was on variation in national policy, a multi-country sample was required. We used data from the second Collaborative International Study of Managerial Stress (CISMS2) (Lapierre et al., 2008; Masuda et al., 2012; Spector et al., 2007). To best isolate the effects of national policy, several inclusion criteria were used. To help rule out national economy as a contributing factor, participants had to reside in developed, industrialised countries. Industrialised countries from our dataset were identified through two sources. First, we used the “advanced economy” classification of the International Monetary Fund. Second, we considered membership in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Most OECD members are developed countries considered as high-income economies. Based on this information, we included participants from the following 12 countries: Australia ( $n = 74$ ), Canada ( $n = 30$ ), Finland ( $n = 33$ ), Greece ( $n = 41$ ), Japan ( $n = 34$ ), The Netherlands ( $n = 29$ ), New Zealand ( $n = 43$ ), Slovenia ( $n = 76$ ), Republic of South Korea ( $n = 58$ ), Spain ( $n = 161$ ), United Kingdom ( $n = 41$ ), and the United States ( $n = 23$ ). We emphasise that policies, rather than countries, are the focal point of our research. We also considered individual criteria. Because of our focus on policies intended to help individuals manage caregiving and paid work, only married participants with infants or toddlers (age 4 and under) who worked 20 or more hours per week were included. This yielded a sample size of 643. Of those, 478 were male, 164 were female, and one did not indicate gender. Average age was 37.10 ( $SD = 5.45$ ).



A common questionnaire was developed and distributed to research partners who were responsible for data collection in their country. Research partners were instructed to collect data from managers only, to collect as representative a sample as possible, to target participants within diverse industries and organisations, and to recruit participants who worked for local companies as opposed to multi-nationals. Specific procedures varied in individual countries for data collection (e.g. some used management associations to recruit participants, whereas others used business school alumni lists). In countries where English was not the native language, research partners translated the questionnaire into the appropriate language and independently back-translated it into English. The back-translated version was independently checked against the original English questionnaire for accuracy of translation.

## Measures

*Work–Family Conflict.* Both directions (WIF and FIW) of work–family conflict and the time- and strain-based forms were assessed using the three-item subscales from the measure developed by Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) (e.g. WIF-strain: “I am so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family”; FIW-time: “The time I spend with my family often causes me to not spend time in activities at work that could be helpful to my career”). Responses were based on a 5-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores representing greater work–family conflict. Coefficient alpha across the four scales ranged from .81 to .85.

*Family-Supportive Organisation Perceptions (FSOP).* Allen’s (2001) 14-item measure was used to assess FSOP. Participants were instructed to report the extent to which each item was representative of the views of their organisation. Example items include “The way to advance is to keep nonwork matters out of the workplace” and “Employees are given ample opportunity to perform both their job and their personal responsibilities well.” Responses were made on a 5-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating greater support. Coefficient alpha = .90.

*Family-Supportive Supervision.* Three items developed by Clark (2001) were used to assess family-supportive supervision (e.g. “My supervisor understands my family demands”). Responses were made on a 5-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating greater support. Coefficient alpha = .88.



*National Policy.* Information regarding national policy was taken from the *Raising the Global Floor: Adult Labor* online database (<http://raisingtheglobalfloor.org/index.php>). As noted on the website, “With the support of the Ford Foundation and the Canada Foundation for Innovation, Raising the Global Floor measures governmental performance around the world in meeting the needs of working women, men, and their families. Developed by researchers at the McGill University Institute of Health and Social Policy and the Harvard School of Public Health, the elements of the database comprise an evidence-based set of national labor policies that affect workers’ ability to meet health and welfare needs.” The website provides detailed information regarding the methodology used to develop the database. Scale scores used in the current study were based on those reported in the database. Duration of paid maternity leave was based on a 5-point scale: 1 = none, 2 = less than 14 weeks, 3 = 14–25 weeks, 4 = 26–51 weeks, 5 = 52 weeks or more. Duration of paid paternity leave was based on a 5-point scale: 1 = none, 2 = less than 2 weeks, 3 = 2–13 weeks, 4 = 14–51 weeks, 5 = 52 weeks or more. Paid vacation/annual leave was based on a 5-point scale: 1 = none, 2 = 1–1.9 weeks, 3 = 2–2.9 weeks, 4 = 3–3.9 weeks, and 5 = 4 or more weeks. Duration of paid sick leave was based on a 5-point scale: 1 = none, 2 = 1–10 days, 3 = 11–30 days, 4 = 31 days to 25 weeks, and 5 = 26 weeks or until recovery. Because maternity and paternity leave were highly correlated ( $r = .91$ ), they were summed to create a parental leave variable. Policies were treated as ordinal measures in the analyses.

*Control Variables.* To help rule out the possibility that our results were attributable to demographics, we controlled for age (measured in years), job tenure (measured in months), gender (dummy coded male = 0, female = 1), education (“secondary education” = 1, “some university” = 2, “university degree” = 3, “MA/MSc” = 4, “PhD or Doctorate” = 5), and spouse work status (1 = full time, 2 = part time, 3 = none). Because there is evidence suggesting that national differences in collectivism may play a role in explaining individuals’ experience of work–family conflict (e.g. Spector et al., 2007), we controlled for collectivism. We imputed in-group practices (“as is”) collectivism scores based on the GLOBE study (Gelfand, Bhawuk, Nishii, & Bechtold, 2004). Higher scores indicate stronger collectivistic values.

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analyses

Because of the nested nature of our data (participants were nested within countries), we conducted a set of analyses to assess whether a significant degree of variation in work–family conflict was attributable to country. We

used the Mixed procedure in SPSS to estimate the significance of the random effect. Non-significant Wald Z scores were obtained for each of the four measures of work–family conflict, suggesting that multilevel modeling was not necessary.

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the study variables are shown in Table 1. Research Question 1 concerned the relationship between national policy and work–family conflict. As shown in Table 1, the zero-order correlations between the different forms of WFC and national policy ranged from  $-.15$  to  $.12$ . Small but significant effects were observed that indicated that longer paid parental leave ( $r = -.09, p < .05$ ) was associated with less WIF-time. Longer sick leave was associated with less FIW-time ( $r = -.10, p < .05$ ), less WIF-strain ( $r = -.08, p < .05$ ), and less FIW-strain ( $r = -.15, p < .01$ ). Longer annual leave was associated with more WIF-time ( $r = .12, p < .01$ ).

## Hypothesis Testing

To test Hypotheses 1–4, a series of regression equations were conducted. As noted by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), ordinal independent variables such as the national policy variables included in our data can be used in multiple regression models with satisfactory results. Control variables were entered at Step 1 of the equation, the set of national policy variables was entered at Step 2, the target work environment variable was entered at Step 3 (family-supportive organisational perceptions or family-supportive supervision), and the interaction terms were entered at Step 4. This process was repeated for each of the four work–family conflict variables.

Table 2 shows the results of the analyses involving family-supportive organisational perceptions (FSOP). Hypothesis 1 was supported in that the addition of FSOP to the regression equation resulted in a significant increment in the variance associated with work–family conflict beyond that contributed by the control variables and the national paid leave variables. Specifically, FSOP accounted for 13 per cent additional variance associated with WIF-time, 2 per cent associated with FIW-time, 17 per cent associated with WIF-strain, and 2 per cent associated with FIW-strain.

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analyses involving family-supportive supervision. Hypothesis 2 was supported for three of the four work–family variables. Specifically family-supportive supervision (FSS) accounted for 6 per cent additional variance associated with WIF-time, 0 per cent associated with FIW-time, 6 per cent associated with WIF-strain, and 1 per cent associated with FIW-strain.

With regard to Hypothesis 3, of 12 possible interactions, two were significant (see Table 2). Specifically, FSOP moderated the relationship between parental leave and WIF-time and between sick leave and WIF-strain. Values

TABLE 1  
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. WIF-time	—													
2. FIW-time	.20**	—												
3. WIF-strain	.46**	.27**	—											
4. FIW-strain	.14**	.50**	.33**	—										
5. Parent leave	-.09**	.00	-.05**	.00	—									
6. Sick leave	.04	-.10*	-.08*	-.15**	.19**	—								
7. Ann. leave	.12**	.00	.06	-.04	-.17**	.39**	—							
8. FSOP	-.35**	-.10*	-.41**	-.15**	.01	-.07	-.02	—						
9. FSS	-.21**	-.01	-.20**	-.08*	-.06	.02	.20**	.39**	—					
10. Age	.00	-.02	-.08	-.06	-.05	.02	-.08*	.04	.02	—				
11. Tenure	-.07	-.06	-.05	.03	.05	.07	-.05	-.14**	.01	.35**	—			
12. Sex	-.07	.15**	.10*	.10*	-.09*	-.08*	-.06	.00	.03	-.13**	-.11**	—		
13. Education	.03	.12**	-.03	.00	.06	.11**	.04	.05	.10*	.09*	-.20*	.05	—	
14. PS	.06	-.09*	-.05	-.12*	-.03	-.10*	-.10	.11**	-.04	.06	.02	-.41**	-.09*	—
15. IGC	.10*	-.07	.10*	.02	-.08*	.28**	-.13**	-.15**	.02	.07	.10*	-.06	.19*	-.11**
Mean	3.34	2.51	3.06	2.11	6.47	3.90	4.36	3.18	3.51	37.10	NA	NA	NA	NA
SD	.96	.91	.96	.81	2.42	1.58	1.12	.71	.91	5.45	NA	NA	NA	NA

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

$N = 632-643$

FSOP = family-supportive organisational perceptions. FSS = family-supportive supervision. PS = Partner work status. IGC = In-group collectivism.

TABLE 2  
Results for Family-Supportive Organisational Perceptions as a Moderator

	WIF-time		FIW-time		WIF-strain		FIW-strain	
	Entry <sup>a</sup>	Final <sup>a</sup>	Entry	Final	Entry	Final	Entry	Final
Step 1								
Age	.03	.06	-.00	.01	-.06	-.02	-.06	-.05
Tenure	-.10*	-.15***	-.02	-.03	-.05	-.11**	.05	.04
Gender	-.04	-.01	.11*	.12*	.09*	.11**	.06	.05
Education	-.01	.01	.10*	.12**	-.07	-.04	-.00	.02
Spouse work	.06	.12**	-.04	-.04	-.01	.06	-.10*	-.10*
Collectivism	.12**	.11**	-.10*	-.08	.10*	.12**	-.02	.07
R <sup>2</sup> change	.02*		.04***		.03*		.02*	
Step 2								
Parental leave	-.06	-.47*	.04	.32	-.00	-.24	.05	.18
Sick leave	-.03	.10	-.13**	.04	-.17***	.26	-.23***	-.08
Annual leave	.15**	-.23	.04	-.26	.16**	.20	.06	.07
R <sup>2</sup> change	.03**		.01		.03***		.04***	
Step 3								
FSOP	-.37***	-.89**	-.14**	-.15	-.42***	-.27	-.13**	.05
R <sup>2</sup> change	.13***		.02**		.17***		.02**	
Step 4								
Parental × FSOP		.50*		-.32		.28		-.16
Sick × FSOP		-.14		-.21		-.50*		-.18
Annual × FSOP		.51		.40		-.06		-.02
R <sup>2</sup> change	.01		.01		.01		.00	
Overall F		10.63***		4.02***		14.06***		4.00***

<sup>a</sup> Entry indicates the coefficient when the variable was first entered into the equation and Final denotes coefficient when all the variables were included in the equation. FSOP = family-supportive organisational perceptions.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

TABLE 3  
Results for Family-Supportive Supervision as a Moderator

	WIF-time		FIW-time		WIF-strain		FIW-strain	
	Entry <sup>a</sup>	Final <sup>b</sup>	Entry	Final	Entry	Final	Entry	Final
Step 1								
Age	.01	.02	.01	.01	-.07	-.06	-.06	-.05
Tenure	-.09	-.07	-.03	-.01	-.05	-.03	.05	.07
Gender	-.04	-.02	.11*	.10*	.09*	.11*	.06	.05
Education	-.02	.01	.09*	.11*	-.07	-.04	-.01	.01
Spouse work	.05	.08	-.04	-.04	.01	.01	-.09*	-.10*
Collectivism	.12**	.18***	-.11*	-.07	.10*	.20***	-.02	.08
R <sup>2</sup> change	.02*		.04**		.03**		.02*	
Step 2								
Parental leave	-.06	-.05	.04	.38*	-.01	-.04	.04	.19
Sick leave	-.02	.13	-.13**	-.36*	-.18***	-.04	-.22***	-.34
Annual leave	.15*	.44**	.05	.49**	.16**	.30	.06	.30
R <sup>2</sup> change	.03**		.01		.03***		.04***	
Step 3								
FSS	-.25***	.12	-.04	.51*	-.25***	-.08	-.09*	.16
R <sup>2</sup> change	.06***		.00		.06***		.01*	
Step 4								
Parental × FSS		-.02		-.42*		.04		-.18
Sick × FSS		-.22		.30		-.20		.15
Annual × FSS		-.36		-.71**		-.12		-.35
R <sup>2</sup> change	.01		.02*		.00		.00	
Overall F		5.93***		3.22***		6.12***		3.29***

<sup>a</sup> Entry indicates the coefficient when the variable was first entered into the equation and Final denotes coefficient when all the variables were included in the equation.  
FSS = family-supportive supervision.  
\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

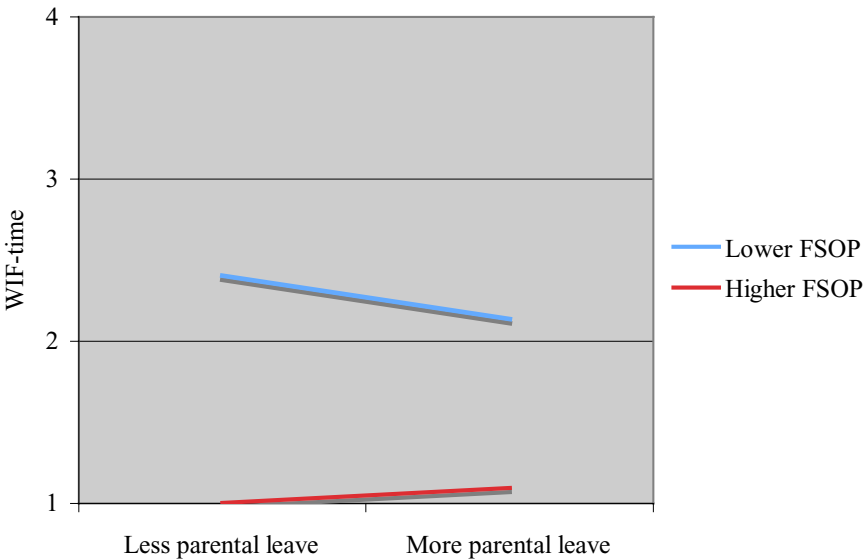


FIGURE 1. Parental leave by family-supportive organisational perceptions (FSOP) interaction on WIF-time.

one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator based on procedures described by Aiken and West (1991) were used to plot the interactions. The interaction between parental leave and FSOP on WIF-time is depicted in Figure 1. As shown in Figure 1, the slope of the relationship between paid parental leave duration and WIF-time when FSOP was high was flat. However, when individuals perceived that their organisation was less family-supportive, the slope was negative, suggesting that longer paid sick leave was associated with less WIF-time. The interaction between sick leave and WIF-strain exhibited a somewhat different pattern (see Figure 2). When individuals perceived that their organisation was more family supportive, longer sick leave was associated with less WIF-strain.

With regard to Hypothesis 4, two of the 12 possible interactions were significant (see Table 3). Specifically, FSS moderated the relationship between parental leave and FIW-time as well as that between annual leave and FIW-time. Illustrations of the interactions are shown in Figures 3 and 4. As shown in Figure 3, the relationship between parental leave and FIW-time was positive when FSS was low and was negative when FSS was high. In other words, longer parental leave was associated with greater FIW-time when family-supportive supervision was lower. As shown in Figure 4, a similar but more pronounced relationship was observed with regard to

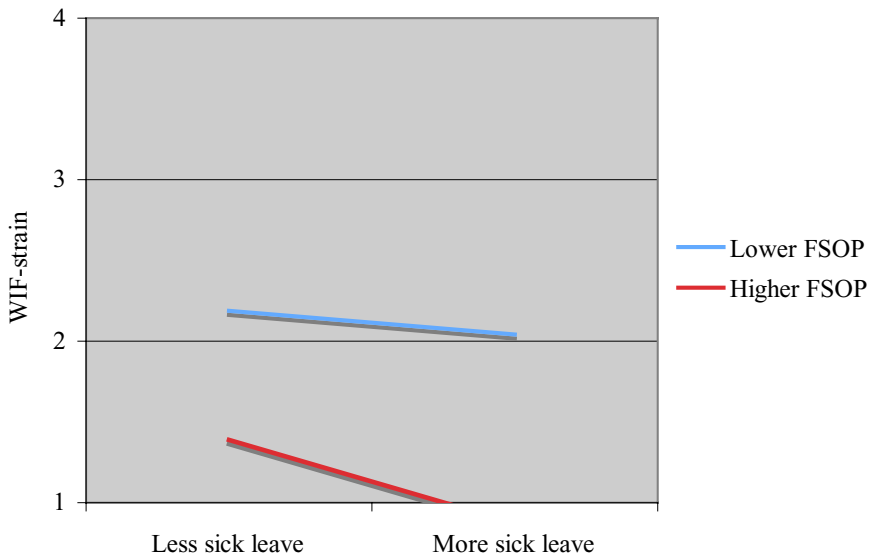


FIGURE 2. Sick leave by family-supportive organisational perceptions (FSOP) interaction on WIF-strain.

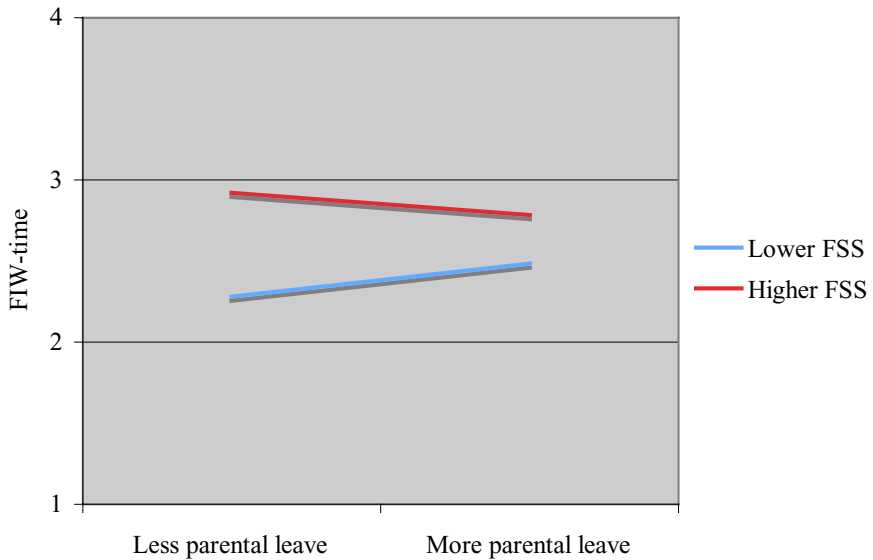


FIGURE 3. Parental leave by family-supportive supervision interaction on FIW-time.



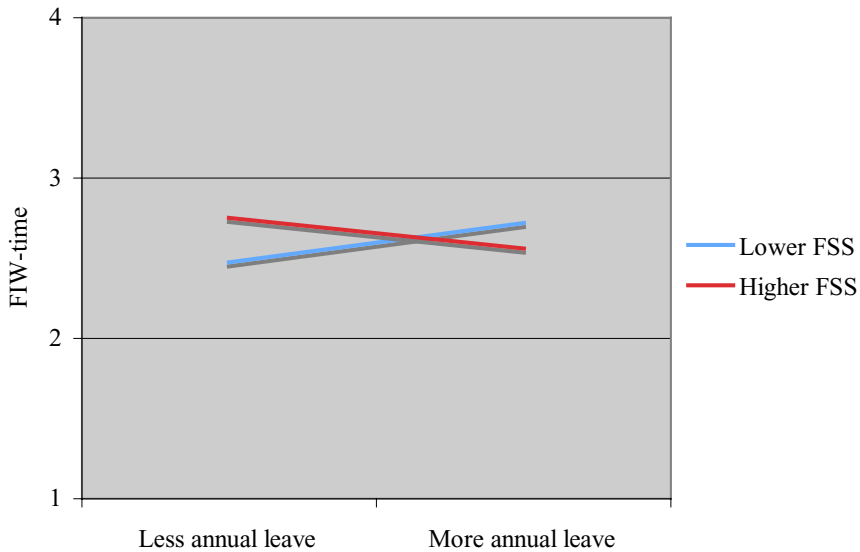


FIGURE 4. Annual leave by family-supportive supervision interaction on FIW-time.

annual leave. Specifically, longer annual leave was associated with greater FIW-strain when supervisors were less family supportive and with less FIW-time when supervisors were more supportive.<sup>1</sup>

## DISCUSSION

A great deal of discussion has centered on how national policy can aid employees in their efforts to balance their work and nonwork responsibilities, but there has been little research investigating what, if any, direct link exists

<sup>1</sup> We conducted all analyses with country as an added control variable. Results were the same as those reported. Given recent debates about the use of control variables (e.g. Spector & Brannick, 2011), we also repeated all regression analyses without controls. The results differed in that without the controls three of the four significant interactions became non-significant at  $p < .10$ . To further investigate, additional analyses were conducted in which all cases that were incomplete (i.e. missing one or more controls) were eliminated so that the sample size was the same across all equations with and without the controls. Difference in sample did not matter in that the same results were found with or without the controls. Next we added and removed different combinations of controls. These analyses suggested that the inclusion of tenure plus either collectivism or partner work status (or both) produced equations in which the moderators went from non-significant ( $p < .10$ ) to significant. Notably, these are the control variables that are significantly related to the dependent variables.

between policy and work–family conflict. In the current study, we investigated relationships between three key national policy supports and four dimensions of work–family conflict among a managerial sample of working married parents with children under the age of 5 across 12 industrialised nations. Moreover, we examined family-supportive organisational perceptions and family-supportive supervision as moderators. The results of our analysis reveal several key findings.

Our study provides a direct test of the assertion that government paid leave social policy relates to work–family conflict. As a set, the paid leave policies contributed additional variance beyond control variables toward the explanation of WIF-time, WIF-strain, and FIW-strain. However, the individual policies differed in terms of unique contributions. We found no evidence that paid annual leave relates to less work–family conflict. In fact we found a small but significant *positive* relationship between duration of paid annual leave and both types of WIF. No relationship between parental leave and any of the four dimensions of work–family conflict was detected. Paid sick leave demonstrated small but significant relationships with both forms of FIW and with WIF-strain. The availability of paid sick leave helps employees address their own health needs as well as the needs of family members. Thus, it is not surprising that a policy that permits working parents time to take a sick child to the physician or to stay at home to care for the child can help alleviate chronic work–family conflict, particularly FIW. Previous research within the US has shown that paid sick days are positively associated with improved self-reported health status, reduced delays in obtaining needed medical treatment, and fewer preventable emergency department visits (Miller, Williams, & Yi, 2011). The current study extends existing research in a cross-national context with regard to the potential benefits of paid sick leave in relation to work–family conflict.

The results provide further evidence supporting the notion that a family-supportive work environment relates to less work–family conflict across national contexts (Haas, Allard, & Hwang, 2002; Lapierre et al., 2008; Mauno et al., 2005). Indeed, the zero-order correlations observed in the current study between FSOP, FSS, and WIF are similar in magnitude to the meta-analytic effect sizes reported by Kossek et al. (2011). Specifically, Kossek et al. reported an average-weighted correlation of  $-.36$  between family-supportive organisational perceptions and WIF and an average-weighted correlation of  $-.25$  between family-supportive supervision and WIF.

We also observed several interactions between policy and the work environment variables. FSOP moderated the relationship between paid sick leave and WIF-strain such that the negative relationship between the two was stronger when FSOP was higher than when FSOP was lower. Thus, a family-supportive organisation can enhance the benefits of paid sick leave. FSS moderated the relationship between parental leave and FIW-time, as well as

that between annual leave and FIW-time. The nature of both of the interactions was such that there was a positive relationship between paid leave and FIW-time when family-supportive supervision was lower. In other words, longer paid leave was associated with more FIW-time when supervisors were lower in family support. However, the availability of longer paid leave was associated with less FIW-time when supervisors were higher in family support. Thus, the results suggest that in order for parental or annual leave to be beneficial in terms of FIW-time, individuals also need to have a family-supportive supervisor. Although we found limited support overall in terms of the number of moderators detected, the results suggest that continuing to investigate the interplay between local and national contextual factors may yield additional insight into ways to mitigate work–family conflict.

Interestingly, our results also show little relationship between national paid leave policy and FSOP. This is good news in that the findings suggest that family-supportive organisations can emerge regardless of the level of government sponsored supports in the country. We did detect a moderate correlation between family-supportive supervision and paid annual leave. Perhaps supervisors who have the opportunity to spend more time with their own families because of paid leave are more supportive of the family-related needs of others.

## Limitations

There are several limitations to the present study that should be acknowledged. Although the direction of our theoretical predictions is sound in that work–family conflict is less likely to cause national policy than national policy is to cause work–family conflict, because our data are cross-sectional causality cannot be inferred. A particular concern is that we do not know over what time horizon the policies investigated in the current study might help minimise WFC. Clearly long-term longitudinal data are needed to track changes in WFC and policy over time to better understand relationships between the two variables.

The generalisability of our results should be viewed with caution for several reasons. First, our data consisted of a very small sample of participants from a select number of countries. We emphasise that these samples are not representative and that no conclusions can be drawn with regard to specific practices as enacted in specific countries. In addition, the sample was limited to managers, which was necessary to control for occupational differences that might influence the results. It should be recognised that managers are likely to have more power within the labor market than lower level, lower skilled workers. Therefore, it is possible that the national policies investigated may be more beneficial for workers not represented by the current sample. In addition, because one objective of the research was to examine the link

between paid maternity and paternity leave and work–family conflict, we limited our sample to married employees with children under the age of 5. This was done to ensure that our study sample was composed of employees who had recent opportunities to benefit from the policies investigated (Maertz & Boyar, 2011).

Our results were limited to investigating work–family conflict as an outcome. It is important to keep in mind that national paid leave policies may have salutary effects on other outcomes such as employee and child health, employee absenteeism, and turnover. Finally, our results were limited to reports of chronic work–family conflict. Research is needed that assesses episodic work–family conflict.

## Implications for Research and Practice

Given that the current study represents only a first step in understanding the link between paid leave policy and work–family conflict, it would be at best premature and at worst irresponsible to offer recommendations for practice and/or social policy implementation. However, the pattern of findings across the three types of paid leave highlights the importance of considering specific policies and specific situations. The frequency and situational scope of the three policies investigated in the current study differ greatly. The situational circumstances that give rise to paid parental leave is a low base-rate event (e.g. the total fertility rate in Europe is 1.5 children per woman; ESHERE Capri Workshop Group, 2010) and is applicable only to a very specific situation (the birth or adoption of a child). As noted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),

Maternity, paternity and parental leaves (and in some countries home-care benefits) are most valuable to parents as part of an overall policy support system supporting the reconciliation of work and family life. All too often, however, policy does not provide a continuum of supports in which case decisions concerning a few months early in a child's life, though very important, do not change much the overall work and family balance that parents face throughout the child-raising years. (OECD, 2007, p. 119)

In contrast, paid sick leave can be used intermittently as needed and it covers multiple types of situations that can occur on an ongoing basis across the lifespan. When viewed from a long-term perspective of matching policy with situation, individuals are likely to encounter more opportunities to take advantage of paid sick leave than to take advantage of policies that involve parental leave.

In consideration of the small and non-significant effects observed overall though, and consistent with emerging qualitative work (i.e. Yerkes et al., 2010), we also underscore the importance of not viewing government-

provided supports as a silver bullet to work–family challenges. The findings with regard to the organisational supports suggest that more proximal forms of support may be more beneficial in terms of addressing work–family conflict. Based on the effect sizes observed in the current study as well as that of Kossek et al. (2011), the local work environment seemingly has greater potential impact on the day-to-day work lives of individuals.

The results of the current study set the stage for several avenues for future research. Additional research is needed to test potential links between national paid leave policy among other samples. We limited our sample to married parents with children under the age of 5 in an effort to restrict the sample to those who may benefit most from national parental policy supports. However, when focusing on specific policies such as paid sick leave, individuals from a broader variety of family contexts may benefit. Further, because we were interested in the potential impact of policy rather than country context our sample was limited to industrialised nations. It is important to also understand the link between national supports and work–family conflict in transitional or third world country contexts.

The focus of the current study was on a specific set of social policies, duration of paid parental, sick, and annual leave. Other family-supportive policies such provision for childcare may have beneficial results. The results of the current study also need to be expanded to investigate the *use* of paid leave and its impact across time. For example, it is possible that the use of paid parental leave has beneficial downstream effects on work–family conflict. New parents who have taken paid leave may have had greater opportunity to implement preventative coping strategies that help preclude the occurrence of work–family conflict after they re-enter the work role.

In the current study we examined the interplay between national and local contexts. In future studies, it could be useful to also include individual difference variables. Recent meta-analytic research indicates that dispositional variables such as negative affect demonstrate a robust relationship with both WIF and FIW (Allen, Johnson, Saboe, Cho, Dumani, & Estep-Evans, 2012). It may be that individual differences interact with organisational and/or national context. In addition, individual skills may be important. For example Lapierre and Allen (2012) recently found that control at work was more negatively related to WIF among employees who engaged in more rather than less planning behavior. Effective planning skills may enable individuals to better harness the potential benefits of national and organisational policies.

## Conclusion

The present study is the first to provide a direct test of the relationship between government-sponsored paid leave policy and work–family conflict.

Additional research that investigates individual, organisational, and national variables is needed in order to have a more complete picture of the most effective ways to mitigate work–family conflict.

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