A model of personality, work-family conflict and well-being in longitudinal data: Does gender and life stage matter?

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1. The Question

Scholars have presented antecedent-outcome models of work-family interface (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007). In these models, situational factors (e.g., work time demands and parental demands) and individual characteristics (e.g., personality traits) are seen as antecedents for work-family conflict and facilitation. Psychological well-being and functioning in different life domains in turn are seen as outcomes of work-family conflict and facilitation. However, Byron (2005) has emphasized on the basis of her meta-analysis that gender might be a strong moderator in these work-family antecedent-outcome relations. Accordingly, Matthews, Bulger and Barnes-Farrell (2010) have stressed that also the moderating effect of age in work-family interface models should be modeled instead of just treating it as a descriptor or covariate in analyses. Hence, the question that this study seeks to answer is: What is the role of gender and age in the work-family antecedent-outcome relations? The present study focuses on men and women followed longitudinally at three life stages: At the age of 36 (early midlife), 42 (midlife) and 50 (late midlife). As antecedents of work-to-family (WFC) and family-to-work (FWC), we will examine weekly working hours, time pressures at work, the number and age of children living at home and the Big Five personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 2003). As outcomes of WFC and FWC, we will examine psychological distress, job exhaustion and parenting stress. The significance of these antecedent-outcome relations is tested at each age separately to see which antecedents and which outcomes are typical for each age. Furthermore, at each age the role of gender as a moderator in these relations is examined to see which antecedents and outcomes are typical for men and which for women.

2. The Method

The data for this study is derived from the ongoing Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development (JYLS), conducted in Finland since 1968 (Pulkkinen, 2009). Those participants who were employed and had a family (spouse/partner and/or child(ren) living at home) during the data collection waves in 1995, 2001, and 2009, when the participants were respectively 36, 42, and 50 years old, are included in the present analyses. Altogether 135 participants, 65 men and 70 women, meet these criteria. The data utilized here was gathered with self-reports based on established measures. The following findings are based on zero-order correlations. The analyses will be complemented with multivariable and multigroup path analysis (i.e., structural equation modeling).

3. The Findings

Concerning the antecedents of WFC, the correlations show that at each age and in both genders weekly working hours and time pressures at work are positively related to WFC. In addition, in men, neuroticism (measured at age 33) is positively related to WFC at age 36 and extraversion is positively related to WFC at ages 42 and 50. Concerning the antecedents of FWC, the correlations show that at each age in women high time pressures at work and a high number and young age of children are related to high FWC. Also in women, conscientiousness is negatively related to FWC at age 50. For men, the correlations of FWC show that neuroticism (measured at age 33) is positively related to FWC at age 36, and that neuroticism and openness to experience are positively related to FWC at ages 42 and 50. Concerning the outcomes of WFC, it is positively related to psychological distress and job exhaustion but differently in men and women across the measurement points: WFC is related to psychological distress in men at ages 36 and 42, but at age 50 only in women. Also, FWC is related to job exhaustion at ages 36 and 50 in both genders, but at age 42 only in women. The outcomes of FWC seem also to differ in men and women across the measurement points: At age 36 FWC is positively related to psychological distress and parenting stress in men, but at age 50 FWC is positively related to psychological distress in women. Finally, at age 50 FWC is positively related to job exhaustion in both genders.

4. Policy Implications