

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

THE LEVEL OF PARENTAL CONFLICT,
THE PERCEPTION OF IMPORTANCE OF
LIFE ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR
WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AMONG YOUNG
WOMEN WITH DIVORCED PARENTS

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*Submitted in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's
degree in the School of Education, Bar-Ilan University*

Ramat Gan, Israel

2016

Abstract

This study examined the level of parental conflict, perception of importance of life roles and expectations of work-family conflict among young women with divorced parents.

Many studies investigated the influence of parents' divorce on their children's expectations and choices in adulthood regarding family (Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman 2008) and career (Hargrove, Creagh, & Burgess, 2002). Studies that examined the influence of parental conflict levels on the choices of young adults with divorced parents focused mainly on romantic relationships (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). The career development aspect of young adults relative to parental conflict levels also received some scholarly attention (Hargrove et al., 2002). However, the association between parental conflict levels as perceived by the child to the task of blending home and career, was not studied among young adults with divorced parents.

One hundred and fifty-three single women with divorced parents took part in the study. Participants anonymously filled four surveys: a survey examining home vs. career conflict levels (Guteek, 1991), a survey to measure parental conflict (Shulman, Scharf, Lumer & Maurer 2001), a survey to determine perceptions of importance of life roles (Amatea, Cross, Clark & Bobby, 1986) and a demographic survey.

The first research hypothesis was that among women who perceive the job role as more important than the family role, a negative correlation will be found between parental conflict levels and the level of work-family conflict. It was found that, contrary to the hypothesis, among participants who perceive the job role as more important than the family role, the higher the level of parental conflict, the higher was the expectation of a home career conflict.

The second research hypothesis was that a difference will be found in the expectations of work-family conflict levels between women who reported that they experienced high levels of parental conflict and women who reported that they experienced low levels of parental conflict.

The second hypothesis was confirmed. Among participants who reported experiencing high parental conflict levels in three different life periods (childhood, adolescence, and today), a higher home career conflict level was measured compared with participants who reported experiencing low levels of parental conflict during these periods.

The third research hypothesis was that higher work-family conflict levels are expected among women who perceive the job role as equally important as the family role, compared with women who perceive the job role as more important than the family role as well as women who perceive the family role as more important than the job role. The findings indicate that no differences were found in the expectation of work-family conflict by perception of importance of life roles.

The fourth research hypothesis was that an interaction will be found between the perception of importance of life roles and the levels of parental conflict, in relation to the level of home career conflict. In other words, in the participating groups (those who perceive the job role as more important than the family role, those who perceive the family role as more important than the job role, those who perceive the job role and family role as equally important), differences will be found in the expectations of work-family conflict among persons reporting different levels of parental conflict.

The findings indicate that no significant effect was found for the perception of importance of life roles on the levels of home career conflict, however, a significant effect was found for parental conflict: among participants who experienced a high level of parental conflict, a higher work-family conflict level was found compared with participants who experienced low parental conflict levels. In addition, no significant effect was found for the interaction between perception of importance of life roles and parental conflict. The findings did not confirm the fourth hypothesis.

Using structural equations modeling (SEM), it was found that the conflict of work interfering with family serves as a significant mediator in the correlation between parental conflict at childhood and the perception of importance of life roles (parent role-commitment and parent role-value). In contrast, it was found that the conflict of family interfering with work does not significantly mediate the correlation between parental conflict at adolescence and indices of perceived importance of life roles.

Contribution of the Findings

The main conclusion arising from the research findings is that the level of parental conflict is the most significant variable among those examined in the current study, for predicting the work-family conflict among young women with divorced parents. These findings highlight the importance of the level of parental conflict for the study of future expectations of young women with divorced parents. Accordingly, school counselors should give special attention to this variable when dealing with cases of pupils' parents' divorce