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Overnight work-travel, work-to-family conflict, and psychological distress

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ABSTRACT

Overnight work-related travel (OWT) is a job demand that is increasing among employees in the United States. Research suggests the impact of OWT is positively associated with work-to-family conflict (WFC) and mental health problems, such as psychological distress. By using data from a sample of 123 employed adults that travel overnight for work and live in dual-earner households in the United States, we examined the associations between the duration of OWT and (a) WFC and (b) psychological distress. We also examined if the associations between OWT and our outcomes were moderated by the gender of the respondent. Results indicated positive associations between the duration of OWT and both WFC and distress, but *only* among men, as compared to women. Our results signal a potential shift in the experience of work and family between men and women that may have differing consequences for their WFC and mental health. Our results highlight a need for further research in this area.

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1. Introduction

The U.S. labor force looks different from a few decades ago, with women's rates of participation steadily increasing over the past few decades, and more families with dual-income earners (Pew Research Center, 2015; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Simultaneously, the nature of work also has changed significantly in the past few decades. Employees are expected to be flexible, have multiple skills, are tethered by technology, and change jobs more frequently (Sheller & Urry, 2006). The spatial mobility of workers in the form of long-distance commuting, overnight business travel, and work-related migration, for example, is also increasingly common of a wide range of employment contexts (Gustafson, 2012; Rieger & Viry, 2017). In particular, since 2009, the number of business-related work-trips has increased by 38% each year, and in 2015 over 488 million business trips occurred in the United States (Lake, 2020).

Overnight work-related travel (OWT) may have positive implications for employee work success, such as higher economic rewards for the family unit (Swenson & Zvonkovic, 2016) and increased probability of job advancement (Roehling & Bultman, 2002). It may also serve as a form of respite from work, home, and family (e.g., Westman et al., 2008). However, it also is a job demand that requires significant resources in time and energy (Greenhaus et al., 1989; Rieger & Viry, 2017) that may limit the traveler's ability to balance paid work and unpaid family obligations (Borowski et al., 2019; Mäkelä et al., 2014a, 2014b; Roehling & Bultman, 2002; Voydanoff, 2005). These competing expectations may result in work-to-family conflict (WFC)—a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures at work make participation at home more difficult (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Further, added pressure of OWT may affect mental health problems, such as psychological distress,

depression, and anxiety (Liese et al., 1997; Rogers & Reilly, 2002; Rundle et al., 2018). Mental health problems are important outcomes to study because they represent a “social mirror” that reflects the social conditions in which people live (Pearlin, Avison, & Fazio, 2007).

In this paper, we draw on data from 123 employed business travelers living in dual-earner households in the United States to add to the limited scholarship on OWT. Specifically, we examine the direct and gender contingent association between the duration of OWT, WFC, and mental health, as measured by psychological distress. We examine psychological distress because it is one of the most widely used indicators of mental health and a common behavioral response to stressful conditions, which manifests as a mixture of depression and anxiety (Wheaton & Montazer, 2017). Our findings signal that shifts in women’s and men’s daily lives may not be as consistent with persistent normative cultural understandings of women’s and men’s roles at work and home.

2. Literature review

Research has shown how a wide range of job demands, including work hours, shift work, and overtime work, affect WFC and mental health outcomes (e.g., Voydanoff, 2005). Scholars are also focusing on OWT, an increasingly prevalent job demand (Borowski et al., 2019), particularly its impact on WFC. Understanding the effects of OWT on WFC is important because WFC is a chronic stressor within the stress process model (Pearlin, 1999; Wheaton et al., 2013). Chronic stressors are threats, demands, or structural constraints that have no clear start or endpoint; are often insidious; and, are influenced by the context in which they are experienced (Wheaton et al., 2013). Some scholars argue that WFC poses an unprecedented mental and physical health risk (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Young, 2015) that is more detrimental to individuals’ health beyond unemployment and exposure to second-hand smoke (Goh, Pfeffer, & Zenios, 2015).

We rely on resource drain theory (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Goode, 1960) to situate our predictions for the associations between OWT and WFC, and mental health. This theory is one of the classic theories that is often used to explain the link between work and family (Moris & Madsen, 2007). It refers to the phenomenon that when limited resources, such as time, energy and attention, are transferred or shifted from one domain (i.e., family) to another (i.e., work), available resources in the original domain decrease. When the remaining or unused resources become insufficient, are depleted, or both, the potential for increased levels of stress, and burnout, for example, may ensue (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Frone, 2003). Thus, this theory suggests that it is through the reduction of valuable resources, like time, energy, and attention for family and household demands, that OWT may increase the experience of WFC, and mental health problems. A few studies on the association between OWT and WFC, and mental health, however, suggest that gender may moderate this association (Greenhaus et al., 1989; Liese et al., 1997; Mäkelä et al., 2014a; Westman et al., 2008, 2004). Below we discuss the extant literature on OWT, followed by the scholarship on gender, as related to OWT.

2.1. Overnight-work-related travel

In theory, OWT can have both negative and positive consequences for the traveler’s experiences of WFC and mental health outcomes. On the one hand, OWT may provide benefits such as privileges, status security, psychological energy and personal growth, which may increase individual resources and facilitate role performance, potentially reducing WFC and providing rewards to the traveler and his/her family (Roehling & Bultman, 2002). According to Swenson and Zvonkovic (2016), OWT may be beneficial for the traveler’s outcomes when it is associated with higher economic rewards for the family unit. OWT may also offer a form of respite from work, home, and family (Jensen, 2014; Westman et al., 2008). Time away may evoke a sense of freedom and independence, be perceived as stimulating and enriching, and a source of variation and new experiences (Gustafson, 2012; Westman et al., 2008, p. 2009), all of which may lead to a reduction in WFC and mental health problems.

On the other hand, OWT is a job demand that should have detrimental consequences for the work–family interface and individual well-being. Resource drain theory would suggest that OWT should compress an individual’s time with family, so it should increase WFC and mental health problems; OWT may limit the availability of employees to participate in family roles and routines (Gustafson, 2006; Hughes & Galinsky, 1994). Furthermore, the unpredictability of scheduling and control over work travel may also affect families (Borowski et al., 2019; Jensen, 2014); travelers may feel disappointed or apprehensive (Espino et al., 2002), particularly for families with young children (Gustafson, 2006).

Despite the above-competing possibilities in the relationship between OWT and WFC, and mental health problems, the limited empirical research in this area has generally yielded support for the latter assertion. Overall, research suggests a positive association between number of work-related nights away from home (duration) and WFC (Jensen, 2014; Mäkelä et al., 2014a, 2014b; Voydanoff, 2005), distress, anxiety, and depression (Rogers & Reilly, 2002; Rundle et al., 2018); and between number of trips per year and medical insurance claims for distress (Liese et al., 1997). Taken together, these studies suggest that OWT should be detrimental for the traveler’s WFC and mental health outcomes. In the present study, we focus on the duration of OWT as a situation likely to decrease the time, energy, and attention (resources) available for family life, and thus, in the line with resource drain theory, would deplete resources and lead to increased WFC and mental health problems. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Overnight work-related travel is associated with increased WFC, and mental health problems, as measured by psychological distress.

2.2. The added dimension of gender contingencies

Gender may be one of the most important bases of life development that impacts individual experiences in various life domains. Through socialization and societal expectation of traditional gender roles, men and women often respond to situations based on stereotypes of the roles (family/work) they occupy (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012). Consequently, households may develop residential and work-related travel arrangements that further reinforce a gendered division of labor (Rüger & Viry, 2017) and perpetuate a separate spheres model of breadwinning men and caregiving women (Blair-Loy, 2003; Blair-Loy et al., 2015). The different meanings men and women ascribe to work, and family roles may influence their perceptions of WFC (Ridgeway, 2011; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) and their mental health (Glavin et al., 2011; Simon, 1995). Women may view work and family roles as independent, and experience WFC as pervasive and non-specific. In contrast, men may see their work and family roles as interdependent, and experience WFC as specific, delimited, and less consuming. Thus, men may view work—and the associated demands, such as OWT—as central to their family role (i.e., breadwinner) whereas women may see work (and OWT) as additional to their key family role (i.e., caregiver).

Buttressing the above argument, research suggests that when men travel for work, they may be more likely to delegate their share of domestic tasks to their partner. In contrast, women business travelers may be more likely to still take on much of the traditional female tasks, such as preparing meals ahead of time and making to-do lists, prior to departure (Kollinger-Santer & Fischlmayr, 2013; Roehling & Bultman, 2002). Furthermore, research by Westman et al. (2008) suggests that women may experience more WFC than men after they return from their trip, possibly because upon their return women are more likely than men to find household demands waiting for them. Thus, resource drain theory would suggest that OWT may be more critical for women’s than for men’s role performance, in part, because the losses of resources (time and energy) may accumulate (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) more for women than men. The differential gender experiences and expectations, and the perceived failure to fulfill prescribed gender roles when away from home for extended periods of time, may manifest as gender differences in WFC and mental health, where women may experience more distress and WFC compared to men.

Alternatively, OWT may be more detrimental for the WFC and mental health of men than women. In most western countries, there has been a shift, at least in discourse, from a “male breadwinner/female caregiver” model to an “adult worker family” model, which expects full-time paid work, and equal participation at home from both women and men (Duncan et al., 2003; Gustafson, 2012). While, as discussed above, women still do more housework than men, the gap has decreased (Carlson et al., 2018). In line with this shift, men are also increasingly expressing a desire to be more involved in their family’s lives (Brumley, 2018; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Doucet, 2009; Kotila et al., 2013; Kulik & Sadeh, 2015; Wada et al., 2015; Williams, 2008; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Yet, this desire may be incongruent with cultural expectations that travelling for work may be more acceptable for men than women (Rüger & Viry, 2017). Further, employer expectations of ideal workers may perpetuate a masculine standard (Blair-Loy et al., 2015); ideal workers are expected to be willing and able to prioritize work above family and other non-work obligations. Thus, in the context of resource drain theory, an increase in duration of OWT among men may not only mean less time, energy, and attention available for one’s family and “expected” responsibility for household demands among this group, but it may be compounded by the clash between these two ideologies—leading to greater WFC and mental health problems among men, as compared to women. Some research provides support for this assertion. For example, Mäkelä et al. (2014b) found the number of travel days per year increased WFC more for men than for women. Liese et al. (1997) found rates of insurance claims for both mental and physical health were 80% higher for men who traveled for work, as compared to their non-traveling counterparts. In contrast, rates of insurance claims were 18% higher among women who traveled for work than non-traveling women.

Taken together, the scholarship suggests that the relationship between OWT and WFC, and between OWT and psychological distress, should vary by the gender of the respondent. However, given recent shifts in women’s and men’s roles at home and work, the direction of this moderated association is not clear. We, thus, hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Gender of the traveler will moderate the associations between OWT and increased WFC, and psychological distress.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

This study analyzed data from an online survey administered to a sample of adults living in the United States (approved by the Institutional Review Board of Wayne State University). The original purpose of the study was to examine the role of different relationship types—proximal, commuter, constrained, and long distance (discussed below)—on several work, relationship, family, and health outcomes. To be eligible for study participation, respondents had to (a) be married or living with a partner, (b) living in the United States, (c) have paid employment, and (d) have partners who have paid employment.

In September 2017, we contracted Qualtrics, LLC to recruit and administer the survey. Quota-based convenience sampling was used to recruit on our four relationship types.¹ The informed consent page explained the purpose of the survey and informed respondents that identifying information would not be collected or linked to responses. Respondents who provided consent were re-directed to the survey hosted through the Qualtrics online survey platform. A total of 2,956 individuals initiated participation by clicking on the link to our questionnaire. However, 2,524 individuals were screened out since they were not eligible for study participation (e.g., were not employed, were single, or did not live in the United States) or the quota had already been filled for

¹Qualtrics works with partner networks to select respondents for surveys through various means. Some are recruited through email invitation, in-app notifications, and SMS notifications, informing them about a survey for which they may qualify. Other times, respondents see surveys they are likely to qualify for upon signing into a panel portal. Potential respondents are informed the survey is for research purposes only, how long the survey is expected to take, and what incentives are available.

a particular relationship type. Those screened out did not complete the survey. The final analytic sample provided to us by Qualtrics comprised 432 geographically diverse individuals (44 states and the District of Columbia).

For the purposes of the current paper, we restricted the sample to respondents who indicated traveling as part of their job. This resulted in a final sample of 125 individuals. After excluding respondents with missing cases on any of the study variables, our final sample size was 123. The median survey time for our subsample was 21 minutes ($\bar{X} = 28$ minutes) with an interquartile range of 15 to 29 minutes.

3.2. A note on the sample

In auxiliary analyses (available upon request), we compared selected characteristics of our sample to two subsamples from the National Survey of Midlife Development (MIDUS) Refresher study (2011–2014) in the United States: (1) respondents in dual-earner households (employed sample; $N = 1,205$), who (2) indicated working more than one night in the past year overnight, including overnight for work-related travel (traveler sample, $N = 456$). Generally, overnight work-travelers in our sample differed from samples of other travelers in the general population and that of the MIDUS subsamples. For example, women constituted a disproportionately higher percentage than men (66% to 34%) in our sample. By contrast, previous traveler samples (e.g., Westman & Etzion, 2002) and both the MIDUS subsamples had higher percentages of men (MIDUS_{employed} = 54% male; MIDUS_{traveler} = 68% male). Similar to previous research our sample was composed of mostly (65%) white respondents (Hancock & Page, 2013), but ours was a much smaller percentage than that reported in the MIDUS (MIDUS_{employed} = 85%; MIDUS_{traveler} = 87%).

Our sample was in some ways like that of business travelers reported in the previous research and that in the two MIDUS subsamples. Our sample was composed of mostly employees in higher-level jobs like managers (25%) and other professionals (43%) (Gustafson, 2006; Swenson et al., 2015). Furthermore, as with previous research on OWT, our sample, on average, was well-educated (Westman et al., 2008; bachelor's degree or non-university certificate or diploma, $\bar{X} = 4.83$, where 1 = *grade school (grade 6)* to 14 = *doctorate degree*; see Table 2). In both MIDUS subsamples, the most common highest level of education attained was a four- or five-year college, or bachelor's degree. Despite these similarities, given our small sample size and the overrepresentation of females, we caution against any generalizations.

3.3. Measures

3.3.1. Work-to-family conflict (WFC)

A measure of WFC was calculated by taking the mean of six items that asked respondents about the prevalence of the following situations: “I do not have enough time for my family or other important people in my life because of my job,” “I do not have the energy to do things with my family or other important people in my life because of my job,” “My job has kept me from doing as good a job at home as I could,” “My job keeps me from concentrating on important things in my family and personal life,” “My job keeps me away from my family too much,” and “I feel physically or emotionally drained when I get home from work.” The response categories included “very often” (5), “often” (4), “sometimes” (3), “rarely” (2), and “never” (1). We generated an index of WFC by averaging responses. In the confirmatory factor model, all the loadings were above .80 and when averaged as an index, the internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha (α)) was .93. Higher scores represented greater WFC.

3.3.2. Psychological distress

We measured psychological distress by taking the mean of 16 items adapted from several sources, including Radloff's (1977) Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), Spielberger Anxiety Scale (Spielberger et al., 1979) and the K10 index (Kessler et al., 2003), to tap at psychosomatic symptoms of malaise, depression, and anxiety. For example, respondents were asked how often within the past two weeks, "did you feel lonely," "nothing made you happy," and "did you worry over possible misfortunes." Possible responses included "none of the time" (1), "a little of the time" (2), "some of the time" (3), "most of the time" (4), or "all of the time" (5). Confirmatory factor loadings were above .76 and higher scores represented greater distress ($\alpha = .97$).

3.3.3. Duration of work-related travel (OWT)

To garner data regarding participants' duration of OWT, respondents were asked: "During the past three months, how many nights have you been away from home overnight on business?" Response options ranged from 1 to 90. Given the skewed nature of this variable (skew = 5.23), we used the natural logarithm in all multivariate analyses.

3.3.4. Gender

We use a dummy measure to contrast female (=1) respondents to male (omitted reference group) respondents.

3.3.5. Covariates

The analyses controlled for several covariates that may impact our focal associations (Gustafson, 2006; Hancock & Page, 2013; R uger & Viry, 2017; Swenson et al., 2015; Voydanoff, 2005; Westman & Etzion, 2002; Westman et al., 2008). These variables were chosen from a larger list of potential covariates. We included covariates that were theoretically or conceptually relevant and had low VIF values (lower than 2). Covariates included respondent's age (years); marital status (1 = *married*, 0 = *common-law*); sexual orientation (1 = *heterosexual*; 0 = *other*); number of children in the household under the age of 18; respondent's race (1 = *white*); and a dummy variable to measure the occurrence of partner's OWT (1 = *partner travels for work*). Education was measured on a scale of 1 = *grade school (grade 6)* to 14 = *doctorate degree*. Typicality of overnight travel in the past three months was measured on a scale of 1 = *not at all typical* to 5 = *very typical*. We controlled for three employment-related measures, including number of *hours* the respondent indicated working, and the number of hours the respondent indicated their partner working in a typical week; and a dummy variable indexed with three categories to measure the respondent's occupation (management, professional, vs. other (reference group)).

A dummy variable indexed with four categories was created to measure relationship type: long-distance, commuter, constrained, and proximal (reference group). To measure relationship type, respondents were asked to select one of the four statements that best described their relationship, all prefaced with "generally speaking": (a) "my partner and I are unable to interact with each other face-to-face every day due to work obligations (e.g., travel, out-of-town work location) but can spend quality time together face-to-face on a regular and/or frequent basis" (*commuter*); (b) "my partner and I are able to interact with each other face-to-face every day but cannot spend quality time together face-to-face on a regular and/or frequent basis due to work obligations (e.g., travel, out-of-town work location, different schedules)" (*constrained*); (c) "my partner and I are unable to interact with each other face-to-face every day and cannot spend quality time together face-to-face on a regular and/or frequent basis due to work obligations (e.g., travel, out-of-town work location)" (*long-distance*); and (d) "my partner and I are able to interact with each other face-to-face every day and can spend quality time together face-to-face on a regular and/or frequent basis" (*proximal*). We controlled for relationship type for two reasons. First, we sampled on these four relationship types and thus it was important to adjust for them in our analyses. Second, these relationship types are a good proxy for at least some other types of spatial mobility of workers (e.g., long-distance or commuters) that may have important consequences for the association between OWT and our dependent variables.

3.4. Analytical strategy

All statistical analyses were performed using SAS 9.4 software. In Table 1 we report correlations among our key variables. Descriptive statistics for all variables for the entire sample and by gender are reported in Table 2. We tested mean differences across all measures using t-tests and chi-square tests for binary variables, respectively. To test our hypotheses, we conducted multivariate analyses using ordinary least square regression techniques in SAS 9.4, for WFC (Table 3), and psychological distress (Table 4). Each table first presents regression results for the effect of control variables (Model 1). Next, to test Hypothesis 1, the focal variables are added in Model 2. Finally, to examine if the association between OWT and our outcomes is moderated by gender (Hypothesis 2), we add the interaction term between female and OWT in Model 3. We present standardized results in both Table 3 and Table 4.

4. Results

4.1. Correlations and descriptive statistics

As can be seen in Table 1, the only significant correlations between our focal variables were between OWT and WFC, and between WFC and distress.

Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 2. Overall, average duration of OWT was close to seven nights ($\bar{X} = 6.94$, $SD = 11.76$), and the sample displayed moderate WFC ($\bar{X} = 3.36$, $SD = 1.09$) and distress ($\bar{X} = 2.69$, $SD = 1.19$). “Constrained” was the most prevalent relationship type (33%),

Table 1. Correlation among focal study variables.

	1	2	3	4
(1) Duration of overnight work-travel	–			
(2) Female	–.08	–		
(3) Work-to-family conflict	.22*	.01	–	
(4) Psychological distress	.09	–.05	.59*	–

* $p < .05$

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for all variables in the study.

	Total (N = 123)			Female (N = 81)		Male (N = 42)	
	Range	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Work-to-family conflict	1–5	3.36	1.09	3.36	1.07	3.35	1.15
Psychological Distress	1–5	2.69	1.19	2.64	1.17	2.78	1.22
Duration of overnight work-travel	1–90	6.94	11.76	6.67	11.12	7.44	13.03
Co-variables							
Heterosexual (vs. other)	0–1	.89		.89		.88	
Age	22–61	36.18	9.46	35.74	10.14	37.02	8.04
White (vs. other)	0–1	.65		.69		.57	
Education	1–8	4.83	1.51	4.79	1.47	4.90	1.60
Married (vs. cohabiting)	0–1	.69		.63		.81*	
Number of children under 18 years	0–5	.94	1.05	1.01	1.14	.81	.86
Relationship type (vs. proximal)							
Long distance	0–1	.15		.15		.14	
Commuter	0–1	.26		.26		.26	
Constrained	0–1	.33		.31		.36	
Partner travels overnight for work (vs. not)	0–1	.47		.47		.48	
Hours worked at work/week (Partner)	0–60	39.29	12.55	41.51	10.78	35.00*	14.59
Hours worked at work/week (Respondent)	2–56	31.19	11.76	32.15	11.80	29.34	11.59
Typicality of overnight travel	1–5	3.60	1.25	3.48	1.39	3.83	.88
Occupation (vs. other)							
Management	0–1	.25		.26		.24	
Professional	0–1	.43		.43		.43	

*Significantly different from female respondents ($p < .05$, two-tailed test)

Note: Proportions presented for categorical variables and Mean (SD) presented for continuous variables. Significant mean/proportional differences between male/female subgroups are based on t-tests and chi-square tests ($\alpha = .05$), respectively.

Table 3. Regression of the relationship between duration of overnight-work travel and work-to-family conflict (N = 123).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Control variables						
Heterosexual (vs. other)	-.07	-.72	-.06	-.58	-.08	-.77
Age	-.26**	-2.65	-.25**	-2.54	-.26**	-2.67
White (vs. other)	.23*	2.38	.22*	2.37	.22*	2.34
Education	.04	.39	.00	.00	-.01	-.06
Married (vs. cohabiting)	.12	1.13	.12	.10	.14	1.40
Number of children under 18 years	-.18	-1.71	-.18	-1.77	-.20*	-1.99
Relationship type (vs. proximal)						
Long distance	.11	1.09	.06	.52	.03	.28
Commuter	.32**	2.75	.30**	2.61	.29**	2.52
Constrained	.34**	2.79	.35**	2.92	.35**	2.96
Partner travels overnight for work (vs. not)	-.12	-1.19	-.15	-1.47	-.15	-1.57
Hours worked at work/week (Partner)	-.00	-.10	-.03	.10	-.08	-.76
Hours worked at work/week (Respondent)	-.22*	-2.01	-.26*	-2.42	-.27*	-2.56
Typicality of overnight travel	.25*	2.53	.16	1.49	.18	1.64
Occupation (vs. other)						
Management	.06	.55	.07	.61	.07	.66
Professional	.12	1.01	.16	1.33	.15	1.24
Focal Variables						
Duration of overnight work-travel (logged)			.24*	2.18	.27*	2.44
Female			.09	.98	.13	1.33
Interaction Effect						
Female X duration of overnight work-travel (logged)					-.20*	-2.00
Constant	3.35***	37.10	3.35***	37.69	3.34***	37.89
Adjusted R^2 /DF	.1638/15		.1907/17		.2132/18	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed test)**Table 4.** Regression of the relationship between duration of overnight-work travel and psychological distress (N = 123).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Control variables						
Heterosexual (vs. other)	-.17	-1.63	-.16	-1.50	-.18	-1.71
Age	-.31**	-3.01	-.31**	-2.94	-.32**	-3.09
White (vs. other)	.28*	2.74	.28**	2.74	.27**	2.71
Education	-.11	-.94	-.14	-1.17	-.15	-1.25
Married (vs. cohabiting)	-.01	-.05	-.02	-.15	.01	.06
Number of children under 18 years	-.11	-1.03	-.11	-.95	-.13	-1.16
Relationship type (vs. proximal)						
Long distance	-.05	-.45	-.09	-.72	-.12	-.98
Commuter	.11	.91	.10	.79	.08	.67
Constrained	.13	1.05	.13	1.00	.13	1.01
Partner travels overnight for work (vs. not)	-.02	-.22	-.04	-.35	-.05	-.43
Hours worked at work/week (Partner)	-.11	-1.05	-.11	-1.06	-.17	-1.53
Hours worked at work/week (Respondent)	-.39***	-3.42	-.41***	-3.54	-.42***	-3.70
Typicality of overnight travel	.19	1.85	.13	1.13	.15	1.28
Occupation (vs. other)						
Management	.09	.74	.09	.80	.10	.84
Professional	.07	.60	.10	.13	.09	.72
Focal Variables						
Duration of overnight work-travel (logged)			.14	1.17	.17	1.43
Female			-.01	-.10	.02	.24
Interaction Effect						
Female X duration of overnight work-travel (logged)					-.22*	-2.06
Constant	2.67***	28.34	2.68***	28.32	2.67***	28.37
Adjusted R^2 /DF	.2199/15		.2154/17		.2389/18	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed test)

followed by “commuter” (26%), “proximal” (26%), and “long-distance” (15%). We did not observe any significant gender differences across the different relationship types. Most of the respondents in our sample were white (65%), in heterosexual relationships (89%), and married (69%). However, significantly more men (81%) than women (63%) indicated being married as opposed to cohabiting. Furthermore, men tended to be in relationships with partners who worked significantly fewer hours per week ($\bar{X} = 35.00$, $SD = 14.59$) than the partners of our female respondents ($\bar{X} = 41.51$, $SD = 10.78$). We did not observe gender differences for any other variables.

4.2. Overnight work-travel, WFC, and gender

The analyses presented in Table 3 tested our hypotheses regarding WFC. Model 1 included the effect of all control variables. These variables explained 16% of the variance in WFC. Results of this model showed a negative association between age and WFC, and between hours worked by the respondent and this outcome variable. There was also significantly higher WFC among white participants (vs. others), and those in commuter ($\beta = .32$) and constrained ($\beta = .34$) relationships versus those in proximal relationships. Finally, increase in typicality of OWT was associated with an increase in WFC. To test our first hypothesis, we added the effect of OWT and female in Model 2. The addition of these variables increased the adjusted R^2 to 19%. The relationship between OWT and WFC was positive and significant ($\beta = .24$), providing support for Hypothesis 1.

To test our second hypothesis, we included an interaction term between female and OWT in Model 3 ($R^2 = .2132$). As predicted, there was a significant interaction effect between OWT and female ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .05$) on WFC. We used coefficients from Model 3 to calculate slopes for the effect of OWT separately for men and women (WFC = Duration of overnight work-travel + Female X duration of overnight-work travel).² While the associations between OWT and WFC were positive and significant among our male respondents ($\beta_{male} = (.27 - (-1.40) * .20) = .55$, $p < .01$), the association between OWT and WFC was not significant for females ($\beta_{female} = (.27 - (.72) * .20) = .13$, $p > .05$). This result is presented graphically in Figure 1a.

4.3. Overnight work-travel, psychological distress, and gender

In Table 4, we replicated the above findings for psychological distress. As can be seen in Model 1, age, and hours worked per week of the respondent were negatively associated with this outcome. Like results for WFC, white respondents reported significantly higher distress than non-white respondents. We did not observe a significant association between any of the other controls including number of children under 18 years of age or education, and distress (or WFC).³ Unlike the prediction of Hypothesis 1, the addition of OWT—and female—did not improve the fit of Model 1; OWT and female were not significantly associated with psychological distress. However, the interaction between female and OWT (Model 3) was significant ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .05$). As with results for WFC, the association between OWT and distress was only positive and significant among our male respondents ($\beta_{male} = (.17 - (-1.40) * .22) = .48$, $p < .05$). This association was not significant for females ($\beta_{female} = (.17 - (.72) * .22) = .01$, $p > .05$). The result of model 3 is presented graphically in Figure 1b.

²Given that we standardized all variables ($z = \bar{x} - \mu/\sigma$) before their inclusion in the multivariate analyses, gender no longer equals 1 for female and 0 for male. Rather, gender equals -1.40 for males ($z = (0 - .66/.47)$), and equals $.72$ for females ($z = (1 - .66/.47)$).

³In auxiliary analyses, we examined the association between number of children and the outcomes for different child age groupings (i.e., number of children under 6, between 7 and 12, and between 13 and 18). However, we did not find any significant associations between number of children in these different age groups and WFC, or distress. We also examined the association between different education groups and our outcomes. Again, we did not find any significant associations and the model that treated education as a series of dummy variables did not improve on the model that treated education linearly for either outcome (results available upon request).

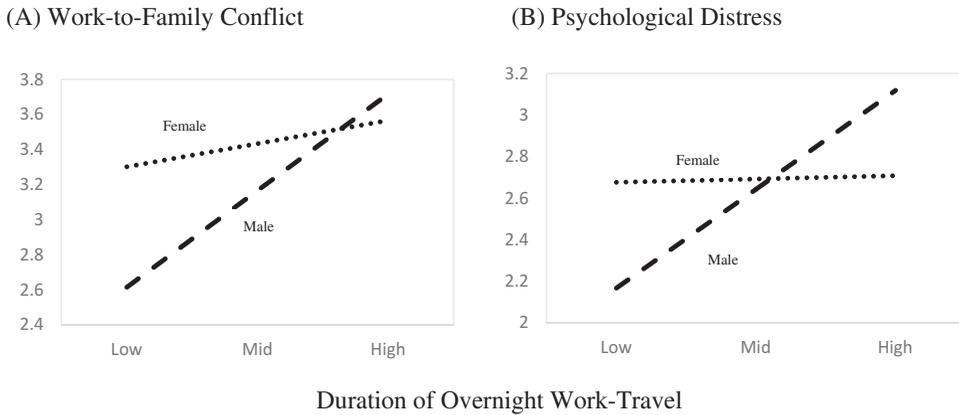


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the effect of duration of overnight work-travel by gender on (a) work-to-family conflict and (b) psychological distress. *Note:* Predicted values shown here are derived from Model 3 of Table 3 and Table 4, respectively.

5. Discussion

This study examined the direct and gender contingent associations between OWT and WFC, and psychological distress. OWT can be a form of respite (Westman et al., 2008). It may also be an avenue to career development and promotion, and, thus, a job advantage (Rundle et al., 2018) that may be beneficial for individual health and experiences of WFC (Swenson et al., 2015). However, consistent with previous research (Jensen, 2014; Mäkelä et al., 2014a, 2014b; Rogers & Reilly, 2002; Rundle et al., 2018; Voydanoff, 2005), we found OWT to be detrimental to both WFC and psychological distress—but only among men (Mäkelä et al., 2014a). We did not find a significant association between OWT and either of our two outcomes among the women in our study. Our findings suggest the importance of unpacking how OWT may impact the traveler, particularly because the cultural norms on women's and men's roles in work and family remain highly gendered (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Blair-Loy, 2003) but have not kept pace with changes in the realities of men and women's everyday lives.

Research suggests men are increasingly expressing attitudes and desires to be more involved in their family's lives (e.g., Brumley, 2018; Doucet, 2009; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Maume, 2016; Williams, 2008; Wada et al., 2015). While women still spend more hours on housework and caregiving, particularly hands-on tasks and mental labor like planning and organizing (Damingler, 2019; Offer, 2014), the gap is closing on housework, most significantly among middle-income couples (Carlson et al., 2018; Miller & Carlson, 2016). In addition, fathers are doing more childcare than ever before (Kotila et al., 2013; Kulik & Sadeh, 2015). Yet, these shifts in everyday life remain incongruent with the still dominant cultural norms on work and family (Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Ridgeway, 2011; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). In particular, work organizations remain largely structured for ideal workers—those who prioritize work above family and other non-work responsibilities persists, perpetuating a masculine standard (Kelly et al., 2010; Padavic, Ely, & Reid, 2020; Williams et al., 2013). Thus, OWT may be more acceptable for men, as compared to women (Rüger & Viry, 2017), for example, but it may also create greater tensions between work and home for men, increasing their WFC and psychological distress.

According to resource drain theory, because resources such as time, energy, and attention are limited, the more resources spent on one activity reduces the resources available for another. OWT is a job demand, which requires significant time and energy. Among men, an increase in OWT may be especially critical for their psychological health and experiences of WFC. OWT may not only signify a reduction of resources for their family (as it would for women) but it may negate their desire to be increasingly involved with home and family, violating the ideal worker and separate spheres expectations. When men's family role was associated almost exclusively with their breadwinner

status, their views of work and family as interdependent likely did not create conflict. However, our results suggest that men may be experiencing interdependence distinctly, increasing their WFC and psychological distress. That is, in addition to their expected family role as the financial provider (Ridgeway, 2011), men are becoming more involved with family and expected to take on greater caregiving and household tasks, resulting in tension between the competing spheres of work and family (Blair-Loy, 2003; Maume, 2016; Williams et al., 2013).

It is also possible that men who travel may be more likely to have partners who are more family-oriented and may react more negatively to the absence of their partner (Mäkelä et al., 2014a). According to Thoits (1992), social roles that are salient for individuals' identity—i.e., employment—are only associated with reduced problematic outcomes, such as mental health problems, and we suggest WFC, when role stress is low. Among men whose partners react negatively to their absence, role stress may be high, leading to higher WFC and psychological distress among this group. However, this proposition is speculative and should be examined in the future research.

Previous research has found time away may evoke a sense of freedom and independence and be perceived as stimulating and enriching (e.g., Westman et al., 2008), which should lead to a reduction in the experiences of WFC, especially among women (e.g., Swenson & Zvonkovic, 2016) who, on average, may need a bigger break from household demands. We did not find this to be the case in our data. Although our data do not have gender attitude measures, it may be that the women in our study are in partnerships with other career-oriented people (Mäkelä et al., 2014a), potentially negating the detriments of OWT on our outcomes.

Alternatively, our results may reflect women's practical and psychological resiliency to dealing with stress (Rutter, 1987). Women may be better able to face the stressors associated with OWT (i.e., pre-trip planning; post-trip demands), and may learn to "make do" with what resources they have or find creative alternatives to meet their needs (i.e., cook food before leaving, make to-do lists, etc.), which might negate the impact of OWT on WFC or distress among this group. Previous research that has found women's sleep, as compared to men's sleep, to be more resilient to the effect of stressors provides some support for this assertion (Bixler et al., 2009).

5.1. Future research and limitations

Our results signal a gendered difference in the association between OWT and WFC, and psychological distress. However, we suggest some caution when interpreting our findings. First, our study reflects a convenience sample with associated potential selection biases and differs from the general population. For example, our sample included considerably more female than male respondents. Also, due to the original study's purpose, only individuals in dual-earner households were included in our sample. Consequently, we cannot generalize our results.

Second, the small size of our sample may not have been sufficient to offer enough statistical power to detect significant effects. Furthermore, while the standardized effects for the effect of OWT on our outcomes for men were of medium size (around .5), this effect for the entire sample and the interaction between OWT and female on our outcomes were small. Thus, it is important for future research to replicate our findings using larger, more demographically diverse and gender-balanced data.

Third, our study cannot determine why OWT was detrimental for the experience of WFC and distress of men only. In this study, we use resource drain theory to situate our findings. However, the interpretations we presented, such as reduced resources, cannot be tested with these data. Future research should test these mechanisms as well as modifying mechanisms—such as gender role attitudes and resiliency. Dyadic (couple-level) data would also provide a greater understanding of crossover effects among couples. This type of data would allow for better understanding of how, for example, the traveling partner's gender role ideology, or feelings about the traveler's absence, may impact the WFC and mental health outcomes of the traveler, or that of the partner.

Fourth, we used cross-sectional data, which limits our causal assumptions about the impact of OWT on WFC and distress. Our analyses are not unique to previous research where others have examined the association between OWT and a global measure of work-family and health outcomes (Voydanoff, 2005) using cross-sectional data. However, a limitation of our paper is that we did not have WFC or distress measured before, during, or after each overnight-work trip, which may fluctuate based on these trip stages (Westman et al., 2008, 2004).

Fifth, we used a conventional method to measure duration of OWT in the past three months (e.g., Jeong et al., 2013; Voydanoff, 2005); however, this is not without limitations. While we adjusted our analyses for the typicality of the travel and relationship types, we did not know how often per year the respondent traveled in combination with duration of each trip. Our conceptualization of OWT did not allow us to decipher those who had traveled overnight five times in the past three months for seven nights each and those who had traveled once for 35 nights, for example.

Finally, while we situated our analysis within the resource drain theory, the findings may also be consistent with other theories used in the work-family literature such as the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001), which suggests that individuals aim to gain, maintain and protect which they value: resources such as time and energy. The actual or threatened loss of those resources leads to diminished well-being and increased WFC. Further, role theory (Eagly, 1987) would suggest women, because of their expected double roles, should be more negatively impacted by OWT than would men. However, our findings reveal this is not the case. We know women's and men's roles at home and work have been changing. Thus, our explanation for what seems to be a counterintuitive finding for the relationship between OWT and our outcomes among men may be the result of the changes we have seen among how women and men spend their time with family. This is noteworthy and warrants more research to examine if our finding shows men are experiencing WFC differently than they have in the past.

Other antecedents could reveal a greater understanding of our findings. While we include most antecedents of WFC in our analyses, our data did not include other variables that may be important in the relationships in this study. For example, future research should include specific measures for domestic or childcare chores. This may reveal a greater understanding of the tension between ideal workers and increasing expectations of housework and childcare that is more egalitarian, providing a possible explanation of men's higher association of OWT with WFC, and psychological distress. We also suggest including additional modifiers, such as parental status, pre-trip preparation, place of travel (domestic vs. international), or breadwinning status of the traveler (Mäkelä et al., 2014a; Swenson et al., 2015; Westman et al., 2008). Research should also examine the relationship between OWT and (1) work-to-family *behavioral* role conflict (Clark et al., 2019), and (2) other emotional or mental health outcomes. Finally, the workplace context is salient for how employees experience WFC. Research that allows scholars to peel back the layers of *how* structural and cultural characteristics play out for workers could influence workplace policy to help employees more equitably balance competing demands.

Despite these limitations, our study serves as a good starting point for future research on the effect of OWT on WFC and mental health. With the increasing number of married women and mothers remaining in the labor force, women's and men's lives are dramatically different today. This, combined with rising work demands, including greater OWT, suggests work and family life boundaries are increasingly permeable, and men may be particularly impacted by this permeability. Indeed, our results provide credence to the potentially growing difficulty among men to reconcile the competing demands of home and work (Maume, 2016; Padavic et al., 2020). Without better workplace support, this tension is unlikely to dissipate soon. We encourage future scholarship to replicate our study and help us understand more the increasingly complicated lives of women and men at home and work.

Highlights

- Duration of work-related travel (OWT) is positively related to work-family conflict (WFC).
- Duration of work-related travel (OWT) is unrelated to psychological distress.
- But, the effect of OWT is moderated by gender for both outcomes.
- Among men, duration of OWT is associated with higher WFC and distress.
- Among women, OWT is not associated with either outcome.

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