Inter-Role Conflict and Mental Health in Early Adulthood Females

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ABSTRACT

Inter-role conflict is one of the most common and challenging realities. It occurs when an individual faces dual demands from different roles, and the situation is likely to cause a lot of psychological strains. This kind of conflict was most prevalent among females in the early adulthood age of development, a period that involves a turning point to other important developmental tasks in life such as procurement of employment, further educational pursuits, and formation of settlement or marriage. Work and family responsibilities become intertwined during this phase, as the drive for career advancement merges with other obligations, potentially impacting one's health. The effects of inter-role conflict on mental health can be significant, impacting such outcomes as anxiety, depression, and stress. Anxiety might manifest itself through constant apprehension or a low probability of performing well in one or more positions. At the same time, depression can cause a lack of self-worth and a negative outlook on life. Such mental health issues can lead to maladjustment in behavior, which means that one can become less productive at work as well as seclusion in their relationships. Inter-role conflict, if persistent, causes chronic stress, which worsens these concerns and may lead to irreversible mental health problems. This review also explores the impact of inter-role conflict on mental health outcomes and explores potential strategies to mitigate these effects. Some realistic approaches to reducing the psychological load include time management, role prioritization, and seeking social support. This literature review emphasizes the importance of psychological strategies from existing literature to help young women manage their roles more effectively. Therefore, by integrating literature from the existing research, this study illuminates how inter-role conflict affects early adulthood females' mental health with a focus on coping strategies.

Keywords: Inter-role Conflict, Role conflict, Mental health, Early Adulthood Females, Coping Mechanisms

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between inter-role conflict and mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and stress:

An important topic of concern, especially in the field of mental healthcare, is the connection between inter-role conflict and mental health consequences like stress, anxiety, and depression. When expectations from several roles—like job and family—cannot be reconciled, inter-role conflict arises, causing severe

psychological stress **(Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).** Inter-role conflict can worsen mental health conditions like anxiety and depression, and nurses are especially susceptible to its negative effects because they frequently endure high levels of work-related stress **(Mark & Smith, 2012; Zurlo et al., 2020).**

This tension is frequently exacerbated by the demanding and resource-constrained healthcare environment, particularly for individuals juggling work and personal obligations **(Papazian et al., 2023).** Employees who struggle to reconcile the conflicting demands of their jobs may experience higher levels of stress, which could have a detrimental effect on their mental health **(Schneider et al., 2023).** Furthermore, the psychological toll of inter-role conflict is not limited to stress; it also significantly contributes to the development of anxiety and depression, particularly when individuals perceive their efforts to manage conflicting demands as futile **(Siegrist, 1996).**

According to research, nurses who experience a lot of work-family conflict report worse mental health outcomes, such as more signs of despair and anxiety **(Zurlo et al., 2020).** Gender differences further complicate this link, as women, who are frequently the primary carers at home, experience more inter-role conflict and more severe psychological suffering as a result **(Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).** In order to create interventions that can lessen these negative effects and improve the wellbeing of healthcare professionals, it is crucial to comprehend how inter-role conflict affects mental health.

Research has consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between negative mental health outcomes and work-family conflict, a particular kind of inter-role conflict **(Wang et al., 2023).** For instance, research by **Frone (2000)** and **Grzywacz & Bass (2003)** indicates that individuals experiencing high levels of work-family conflict are more likely to suffer from anxiety disorders.

Furthermore, research indicates that stress from inter-role conflict may make symptoms of anxiety and depression worse, especially in settings with high job expectations and little social support **(Murcia et al., 2013).** When people lack the tools or coping strategies to balance the conflicting demands of job and family life, the psychological suffering brought on by this conflict may worsen **(Mark & Smith, 2012).** Recent findings also emphasize the need to explore the link between inter-role conflict and diagnosable mental health conditions, as such conflicts are not only a source of general distress but also a significant risk factor for clinical disorders like Generalized Anxiety Disorder **(Wang et al., 2023).**

Developing successful therapies to lessen work-family conflict and the psychological difficulties it causes requires an understanding of how inter-role conflict affects mental health. Improving both organisational productivity and individual well-being requires addressing these problems.

Inter-Role Conflict (IV) ----------> Mental Health Outcomes (DV: Anxiety, Depression, Stress) Inter-Role Conflict (IV) ----------> Coping Mechanisms ----------> Mental Health Outcomes

The first line represents a direct relationship between **Inter-Role Conflict** and **Mental Health Outcomes**. The second line represents the mediated pathway where **Inter-Role Conflict** influences **Coping Mechanisms**, affecting **Mental Health Outcomes**.

Overview of the issues related to work-family conflict, gender roles, and coping strategies:

Developing successful therapies to lessen work-family conflict and the psychological difficulties it causes requires an understanding of how inter-role conflict affects mental health. Improving both organisational productivity and individual well-being requires addressing these problems.

The balancing act between work and family responsibilities has been a central focus of research on gender roles and psychological well-being, particularly for married professional women. **Aryee (1992)** highlighted the pervasive nature of work-family conflict among married professional women in Singapore,

revealing that such conflict often leads to significant strain and impacts overall life satisfaction. This finding underscores the complexity of managing multiple roles, a theme widely explored in the literature. Studies have indicated that there is a particularly strong correlation between gender roles and work-family conflict. For example, **Duxbury and Higgins (1991)** found that gender plays a critical role in the experience of work-family conflict, with women often reporting higher levels of conflict than men. This is further supported by **Barnett and Marshall (1991),** who examined the relationship between women's work and family roles, noting that conflicting demands can lead to psychological distress and reduced subjective well-being.

Concepts of gender roles and the psychological effects of juggling several demands are frequently the foundation of the theoretical framework used to explain these dynamics. **Bem (1974)** introduced the concept of psychological androgyny, suggesting that flexibility in gender roles could alleviate some of the stress associated with role conflict. In the same way, **Ashmore (1990)** highlighted the significance of comprehending sex and gender as crucial elements in personality and role management, suggesting that strict adherence to traditional gender norms may make it more difficult for women to balance their obligations at home and at work.

The effect of life events, like parenthood, on gender roles and related disputes further muddies the waters. In their investigations of the effects of family life cycle stages on sex-related self-attributions, **Feldman, Biringen, and Nash (1981)** and **Feldman and Aschenbrenner (1983)** showed that changes in family roles can result in variations in gender identity and heightened role conflict.

Researchers have also looked on the coping strategies used by those who are dealing with work-family conflict. Women frequently use different coping mechanisms than males when they anticipate work-family conflict, according to **Burley's (1994)** analysis of gender differences in coping responses. Men and women experience different levels of stress and psychological suffering as a result of these gender-based differences in coping mechanisms, which can have a substantial impact on the results of role conflict.

In sum, the literature suggests that work-family conflict is a multifaceted issue influenced by gender roles, life transitions, and coping strategies. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective interventions to support women in managing the competing demands of work and family life (**Aryee, 1992; Ashmore, 1990; Barnett & Marshall, 1991; Bem, 1974; Burley, 1994; Duxbury & Higgins, 1991; Feldman et al., 1981; Feldman & Aschenbrenner, 1983**).

How role conflict contributes to the relationship between inter-role conflict and mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and stress issues and find potential coping mechanisms:

Role conflict has long been a significant area of interest in the study of occupational stress and its impact on mental health outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and stress. The complexity of balancing multiple roles, particularly in contexts where expectations are unclear or contradictory, often exacerbates inter-role conflict, leading to detrimental effects on an individual's mental health. This relationship is particularly evident in environments where work-life balance is challenging, such as in various organizational settings (**Akanji, 2013; Koustelios, Theodorakis, & Goulimaris, 2004**). The stress arising from role conflict can manifest in various forms, including work-family conflict, which has been shown to correlate with decreased job satisfaction and increased psychological strain (**Boles, Wood, & Johnson, 2003; Britt & Dawson, 2005**).

Role conflict and mental health have a crucial interaction that impacts both organisational results and personal well-being. Employees who face conflict in their roles, uncertainty about their responsibilities,

and an overwhelming workload are more likely to experience negative psychological effects like burnout and a desire to quit their jobs, according to research **(Chen, Lin, & Lien, 2011; Eisenhauer, Willower, & Licata, 1985).** Furthermore, these mental health consequences may be lessened or made worse by the coping strategies used by those who are experiencing role conflict **(House & Rizzo, 1972; Hammer & Tosi, 1974).**

In addition to proposing alternative coping strategies that could mitigate these impacts, this research investigates the role conflict's involvement in the association between inter-role conflict and mental health outcomes, including stress, anxiety, and depression. By studying the subtleties of role conflict and its effects on mental health, the study builds on the body of previous literature and offers practical advice on how to deal with role-related stress.

In many organisational contexts, role conflict is a common problem where people frequently run against competing demands and expectations that can cause serious psychological suffering. Role conflict tension has a significant impact on mental health outcomes, such as stress, anxiety, and depression, especially when it combines with inter-role conflict. Role conflict may worsen the impacts of inter-role conflict, increasing the psychological strain on people, according to the intricate interactions between these components. **(Mohr & Puck, 2007; O'Neil et al., 1986).**

Role conflict has been shown to have an effect on job satisfaction and performance in addition to individual well-being, which exacerbates mental health problems **(Madera, Dawson, & Neal, 2013; Viator, 2001).** Increased stress and a decline in general mental health might result from the combined demands of job and family responsibilities, which are exacerbated by ambiguous or contradictory expectations **(Karatepe, 2008).** Furthermore, unclear responsibilities can lead to dissatisfaction and a sense of powerlessness, which can exacerbate mental health issues like depression and anxiety **(Tang & Chang, 2010; Tubre & Collins, 2000).**

This paper explores the role of conflict as a contributing factor in the relationship between inter-role conflict and mental health outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and stress. It also examines potential coping mechanisms that may help mitigate the adverse effects of role conflict on mental health. By understanding the underlying dynamics of role conflict, this study aims to provide insights into strategies to enhance individual well-being and organizational effectiveness.

Can stress management interventions mitigate the negative effects of inter-role conflict on mental health outcomes?

It has been demonstrated that stress management treatments (SMIs) lessen the detrimental impact of inter-role conflict on mental health outcomes. Web-based SMIs have been shown to dramatically lower perceived stress and improve occupational self-efficacy, which is important for workers who experience effort-reward imbalances **(Nixon, Stewart, & Miller, 2022).** Furthermore, methods such as HeartMath have been successful in lowering burnout among healthcare professionals, which enhances mental health and job happiness **(Salalila, 2024).** Additionally, culturally appropriate stress management programs have been shown to be effective in reducing stress biomarkers and easing mental health symptoms, especially among Indigenous groups **(Aker, Thompson, & Wilson, 2023).**

Nevertheless, the situation can affect how effective SMIs are. The need for additional solid evidence in this field is highlighted by the inconsistent outcomes of pre-deployment psychological training for military troops, for example **(Harden, Green, & Crawford, 2021).** According to Cedstrand, Laursen, and **Haugen (2022),** co-created occupational health interventions in the construction industry did not result in a

significant reduction in stress. This suggests that organisational elements are crucial in determining the efficacy of SMIs.

Overall, while SMIs are beneficial in reducing stress and improving mental health, their effectiveness may depend on the specific environment and implementation strategy. Tailored interventions that consider cultural and occupational contexts are particularly effective. Furthermore, SMIs might need to be complemented by organizational changes to fully address inter-role conflict and its impact on mental health **(Jelen, Roberts, & Lee, 2024).**

2. Discussion & Conclusion

It is evident from examining the literature on inter-role conflict and mental health outcomes that there are several facets to the relationship between conflicting roles and mental health. Depending on variables including gender, work demands, and coping strategies, the impact of this conflict varies. Inter-role conflict is more common among women, especially those who provide care, and this can result in elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The literature emphasises the necessity of organisational support and structural adjustments to effectively minimise role conflicts, even though stress management interventions (SMIs) are helpful in addressing these challenges **(Wang et al., 2023).**

The ways that various work environments and gender norms influence inter-role conflict require more investigation, particularly in relation to mental health conditions like depression and generalised anxiety disorder. In order to improve resilience and well-being in communities dealing with major role conflicts, future research should also concentrate on how gender-sensitive and culturally inclusive treatments might be developed.

The research highlights the strong correlation between inter-role conflict and negative mental health consequences, including stress, anxiety, and depression, especially in high-stress settings like the medical field. This conflict disproportionately affects women, who frequently balance job and family responsibilities, which exacerbates psychological pressure. Organisational support and role clarity are essential for lowering inter-role conflict and fostering well-being, even though stress management interventions (SMIs) and coping mechanisms can lessen some of these impacts. Furthermore, the study emphasises how crucial it is to address gender roles and life transitions in order to create efficient therapies that might lessen the psychological strain of juggling several responsibilities.

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