



## The Effectiveness of Choice Theory Education on Reducing Work-Family Conflict of Women

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### Abstract

**Background:** One of the most significant issues of areas of work and family interactions is work-family conflict. Dominant traditional and stereotypical attitudes toward women's roles and doing institutionalized house chores provoke problems such as a decline in organizational performance and adverse physical, mental, and behavioral effects in women. The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of choice theory education on reducing work-family conflict of women working in the hospital.

**Methods:** The quasi-experimental research conducted in a pre-test and post-test control group design aimed to examine the effectiveness of the choice theory education on reducing work-family conflict of 12 participants in the experimental group and 12 participants in the control group who were selected by multistage cluster sampling.

**Results:** The result of Covariance analysis revealed that there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group in post-test ( $Pvalue < 0.001$ ,  $F = 50.13$ ).

**Conclusions:** It can be concluded that the education of choice theory's concepts can be used as one of the strategies of reducing the work-family conflict to confront its negative consequences in organizations and families.

**Keywords:** Work-family conflict, Choice theory education, Married working women.

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work-family conflict. In other words, work-family conflict is the most important issue in the field of work and family interactions and has received a great amount of attention from researchers and the public.<sup>3</sup>

According to Greenhaus, the work-family conflict will intensify, if work and family roles have a prominent position in the self-image of the person and non-compliance with work roles has inevitable consequences.<sup>4</sup> Greenhaus & Beutell have divided the work-family conflict into three types of time-based conflict, pressure-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict.<sup>5</sup> Time-based conflict results from multiple contests for seizing the time. This means that the time assigned to a given activity associated with a specific role can't be assigned to activities related to other roles. Pressure-based conflict refers to the pressure generated as a result of stressful work and family stimuli. Behavior-based conflict means that certain patterns of behaviors related to a given role are inconsistent with expectations associated with behaviors in other roles.<sup>6</sup>

Work-family conflict is a source of stress for people and is associated with negative consequences such as increased health risks for working parents,<sup>7,8</sup> inefficient performance of parenthood and marital tasks,<sup>9</sup> decreased marital satisfaction, and mental health.<sup>10</sup>

The problems prevailing among organizational employees as a result of work-family conflict include reduced productivity and work eagerness,<sup>11</sup> decreased job satisfaction,<sup>12</sup> increased employees delay and absenteeism,<sup>10</sup> increased turnover, and reduced organizational commitment.<sup>13,14</sup>

"Choice Theory" which was developed by William Glasser, as the underlying theory to explain the techniques and methods of reality therapy, is one of the important approaches in the field of conflict resolution, settlement, meeting the needs without failing others, effective communication, and selection of behavior. According to the choice theory, everything we do is "behavior" and almost all behaviors are chosen by us. People choose what to do and are always able to make better choices. If the actions of people are the consequence of their choices, then they are responsible for their behavior.<sup>15</sup>

The choice theory based treatment (reality therapy) is an approach to help people make better choices and satisfy their needs effectively and responsibly. People who are healthy, feel good and they are always successful in satisfying their needs. Reality therapy helps people learn how to have effective control over every moment of their lives.<sup>15</sup>

## Introduction

The increasing presence of women in various economic fields is the result of changes in attitudes and culture of the society, the development of social capacities for the embracement of women in various fields, higher education, and awareness of people and women in particular, as well as other economic, cultural, and social factors.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, working women grapple with problems that may affect the quality of their work. Compared to full-time housewives, working women spend much more time on house chores in the early evening hours or at weekends. In Iran, working women have to leave their children with their grandmother or other relatives, or kindergartens, and this will, in turn, cause many problems for the mother and the child.<sup>2</sup>

When people are unable to perform their work and family roles at the same time, and their work roles interfere with the family roles and vice versa, they usually experience too much pressure and cannot perform their duties well, and this leads to

As for the use of choice theory for reducing work-family conflict, the key concepts of the theory (responsibility, the reality of the present life, quality world, control, and choice) need to be taken into account. Glasser's opinion about conflict can specifically describe the impact of choice theory education on work-family conflict resolution. In other words, according to Glasser when two contradictory images emerge in the quality world at the same time, the person may experience some sort of conflict and will fail one image as the person move towards the other. As long as the person cherished both images, there is no way to escape from this conflict. For example, a meeting takes too long, if the employee leaves the meeting, the boss may get angry, and if she stays, she may miss the school plays directed by her daughter. The intensity of conflict depends on the strength of conflicting images. When both images are powerful, the conflict is so painful. The factor that exacerbates conflict, is the lack of an immediate solution. But sometimes the person may be able to do something, even if it does not lead to conflict resolution. Time will finally direct the conflict towards one of the two directions and will make decision-making easier. Of course, in many cases, the individual cannot wait, and if they fail to make a decision, they may lose one of the quality images.<sup>16</sup>

Glasser, using choice theory, helps people grappling with conflict direct the individuals towards a non-conflicting option or a choice that meets the same needs or the needs that have been failed due to conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

According to the above-mentioned points, this research provides new insights into the factors affecting the work-family conflict and helps those involved in the field of women's planning and counseling to realize the significant role of choice theory education in reducing work-family conflict, because the reduction of this conflict can be helpful in settlement of the above-mentioned negative consequences either in the family or in organizations and consequently increase employee health, marital satisfaction and more effective performance of parenthood and marital duties by them. At the organizational level, reduced work-family conflict can lead to increased productivity, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduction of employee's delay and absenteeism.

In case this issue doesn't receive enough attention, employees will face increasing conflict which will, in turn, lead to psychological stress, poor performance, and a dramatic decline in personal and organizational health standards.

According to the investigations, no research has been found on the effectiveness of choice theory in the reduction of work-family conflict on Iranian working women, the present study aims to see if the education of choice theory can reduce work-family conflicts.

## Materials and Methods

The present study is an experimental study with pre-test and post-test and control group design. The population of this study includes all married women employed in hospitals in Zanjan city in Iran. The samples are selected through multi-stage cluster sampling. In the sampling process, one was randomly selected from among hospitals, and 12 wards were also randomly selected among the wards of this hospital. Next, the work-family conflict questionnaire developed by Carlson, Kakmar and Williams was distributed among employees of

these wards.<sup>18</sup> In the next stage, 24 individuals who had obtained the highest scores were randomly assigned to the experimental group (n=12) and control group (n=12). Then the experimental group was exposed to an education of Choice Theory and it was not applied in the control group. Then work-family conflict was measured in both groups by the post-test. Also, to consider ethical principles participants signed a consent form and were assured of confidentiality.

The following instruments have been used in this study.

Work-family conflict questionnaire (Carlson, Kakmar and Williams): This scale assesses the six aspects of work-family conflict.<sup>18</sup> The items of this questionnaire are divided into six categories, each incorporating three items. It has 18 questions, the first three items measure time-based work-family conflict, the second three items measure time-based family-work conflict, the third three items measure pressure-based work-family conflict, the fourth three items measure pressure-based family-based conflict, the fifth three items measure behavior-based work-family conflict, and finally the sixth three items measure behavior-based work-family conflict. The response range on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores in this scale are indicative of a greater work-family conflict. The highest and lowest score on this scale is 18 and 90, respectively. The scale provides a score for work-family conflict as a whole and six scores for its subscales.<sup>18</sup> According to Carlson et al., the reliability of the questionnaire obtained through Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.78 to 0.87.<sup>18</sup> Motesharrei reported the alpha coefficient of 0.91 for this scale among Iranians.<sup>19</sup>

The choice theory education package: the education plan consisted of 10 workshop sessions that was performed by the first author, who is certified by the choice theory institute in Iran. To comply with the ethical issues of the research, the control group received the educational sessions after finishing the research. The study was allowed to perform by Zanjan university of medical sciences and the participant's consent to participate in the study. This package, based on choice theory was performed in 10 sessions each lasting 75 minutes. The sessions are shortly explained below:

Session 1: Introduction, description of group rules, description of the objectives and members' obligations (development of the close and friendly relationship with members, the introduction of members to each other, motivation of members, and providing the ground for involvement and active participation in meetings).

Session 2: Understanding the 6 obvious principles of choice theory (defining personal freedom by educating the main principles of choice theory and complying with them).

Session 3: Basic or genetic needs (introduction of the concept of needs, raising self-knowledge for thinking about basic needs).

Session 4: The needs and the quality of life (introduction of the quality of life and identification of its images).

Session 5: The concept of total behavior in the choice theory (introduction of the four behavioral components, the concept of behavior machine, and self-assessment of behavior).

Session 6: Behavioral system (understanding behavioral system and a variety of proposed behaviors, the introduction of the concept of accountability and responsible behaviors).

Session 7: External control and seven destroying habits (understanding the concept of external control and destroying habits it as well as the disadvantages of its using in human relations).

Session 8: Internal control and seven constructive habits (understanding the concept of internal control and the need to use it to improve relationships in life).

Session 9: WDEP process (understanding the reality therapy process and using techniques to shift from inefficient behaviors to efficient behaviors, from destructive to constructive choices, and from an unhappy lifestyle to a happy lifestyle).

Session 10: Review of previous sessions, post-test (investigating the members' perspectives and their strengths and weaknesses).

**Results**

Mean and standard deviation were calculated for different variables. The indices were stated for all data and each group (control and experimental). To study the effect of education on variation in the scores of work-family conflicts as a whole and its sub-scales, the data were analyzed, with consideration of the research methodology and plan and after confirmation of assumptions, by the SPSS-23 statistical software and through analysis of covariance.

The numbers of participants in the experimental and control group were 12. 2 members of the experimental group had no child, 6 members had 1 child and 4 members had 2 children. These figures were also held for the control group. The average age of participants in the experimental group was 35.78 (SD: 4.85) and the average age of the control group was equal to 34.67 (SD: 4.56) and a significance level of 0.578, which shows that there is no significant difference between the average age of the groups. The average work experience in the experimental and control group was 12.42 (SD: 5.70) and 9.46 (SD: 4.84) respectively at the significance level of 0.184 which showed no significant difference between the work experience of both groups. The average duration of married life in the experimental and control group was equal to 9.54 (SD: 5.07) and 10.92 (SD: 6.05), respectively at the 0.552 significance level). The groups had no significant difference in terms of the average duration of married life.

The above-mentioned average and standard deviation points associated with work-family conflict and its components are separately presented for the experimental and control groups in table 1. According to the results, no significant difference was observed between the two groups in pre-test. But the post-test results show a significant difference between

the two groups, the experimental group scores are significantly lower than the control group scores.

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to test the normality of the data and the assumption of normality was also observed in the final analysis.

Table 2 shows the results of Levene's test assumptions (homogeneity of variances), the one-dimensional analysis of variance (linearity and deviation from linearity), and the homogeneity of the regression slope in the research hypotheses. According to Levene's test results, since the obtained significance level is greater than 0.05, the experimental and control groups are not significantly different in terms of variance, thus the assumption has been observed in the covariance test. Moreover, although the significance level of the F value in the linearity test is greater than the error rate of 0.05, as in the present study, the significance level of linearity deviation test is greater than the error rate of 0.05, we can make sure about the observance of linearity assumption. Also, since the significance level of F values in the regression slope homogeneity test is greater than the error of 0.05, it can be concluded that the regression slope homogeneity has been observed.

Given that the experimental and control group members were evaluated in the pre-test and post-test stages, univariate analysis of covariance was used to evaluate the effect of choice theory education on reducing work-family conflict in two groups. Table 3 shows the results obtained from the covariance analysis of choice theory education and its impact on reducing work-family conflict, as well as its six dimensions among participants. According to table 3, the education of choice theory has led to the reduction of work-family conflict (F=50.13 and Pvalue=0.001) and its subscales of time-based work-family conflict (F=0.705 and Pvalue=0.001), time-based family-work conflict (F=40.10 and Pvalue=0.001), pressure-based work- family conflict (F=29 and Pvalue=0.001), pressure-based family-work conflict (F=11.12 and Pvalue=0.004), behavior-based work-family conflict (F=10.49 and Pvalue =0.004), and behavior-based family-work conflict (F=9.46 and Pvalue=0.006).

Eta squared value describes the percentage of variance in work-family conflict through education of choice theory: work-family conflict dimension (70%), the time-based work-family conflict dimension (70%), the time-based family-work conflict dimension (65.6%), the pressure-based work-family conflict dimension (58%), the pressure-based family-work conflict dimension (34.6%), the behavior-based work-family conflict dimension (33%), and the behavior-based family-work conflict dimension (31%).

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of work-family conflict and its components in the experimental and control groups in the pre-test and post-test phases**

Variable	Phase	Experimental group		Control group	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Time-based work-family conflict	Pre-test	10.75	1.76	12.08	2.39
	Post-test	8.08	1.16	12.25	1.68
Time-based work-family conflict	Pre-test	8.83	1.94	9.08	1.56
	Post-test	7.25	1.06	11.08	1.72
pressure-based work-family conflict	Pre-test	10.41	2.27	11.91	2.15
	Post-test	7.58	1.24	11.25	1.76
pressure-based work-family conflict	Pre-test	8.00	2.66	9.16	2.08
	Post-test	6.66	1.87	9.33	2.26
behavior-based work-family conflict	Pre-test	10.00	2.17	10.25	1.91
	Post-test	8.00	2.13	10.5	1.62
behavior-based work-family conflict	Pre-test	10.25	2.37	9.58	2.31
	Post-test	8.33	2.46	10.75	1.95
Total score	Pre-test	58.25	9.47	62.08	5.90
	Post-test	45.91	6.66	65.16	7.05

**Table 2. Results of Levene's test assumptions (homogeneity of variances), the one-dimensional analysis of variance (linearity and deviation from linearity), and the homogeneity of the regression slope**

Variable	Assumption type	F	Pvalue
Work-family conflict	Homogeneity of variances	0.382	0.543
	Linearity	1.41	0.247
	Deviation from linearity	1.06	0.447
Time-based work-family conflict	Homogeneity of the regression slope	5.35	0.055
	Homogeneity of variances	0.214	0.648
	Linearity	2.41	0.134
Time-based work-family conflict	Deviation from linearity	1.10	0.426
	Homogeneity of the regression slope	1.43	0.246
	Homogeneity of variances	0.341	0.565
Time-based work-family conflict	Linearity	0.120	0.732
	Deviation from linearity	2.10	0.565
	Homogeneity of the regression slope	0.257	0.618
Pressure-based work-family conflict	Homogeneity of variances	0.002	0.964
	Linearity	2.75	0.111
	Deviation from linearity	1.60	0.232
Pressure-based work-family conflict	Homogeneity of the regression slope	5.40	0.053
	Homogeneity of variances	1.33	0.261
	Linearity	1.43	0.245
Pressure-based work-family conflict	Deviation from linearity	0.507	0.843
	Homogeneity of the regression slope	0.288	0.597
	Homogeneity of variances	0.382	0.543
Behavior-based work-family conflict	Linearity	0.089	0.768
	Deviation from linearity	1.63	0.217
	Homogeneity of the regression slope	1.74	1.213
Behavior-based work-family conflict	Homogeneity of variances	0.02	0.890
	Linearity	0.484	0.494
	Deviation from linearity	2.98	0.056
Behavior-based work-family conflict	Homogeneity of the regression slope	0.906	0.353

**Table 3. Analysis of covariance of the choice theory education post-test results on reducing work-family conflict and its six dimensions**

	Source	Degree of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean square	Test statistics	Pvalue	Eta squared value
Work-family conflict	Pre-test	1	25.72	25.72	19.96	<0.001	0.484
	choice theory education	1	65.50	65.50	50.13	<0.001	0.705
	Error	21	27.43	1.3	—	—	—
	Total	24	26.38	—	—	—	—
Time-based Work-family conflict	Pre-test	1	25.73	25.73	19.69	<0.001	0.484
	choice theory education	1	65.50	65.50	50.13	<0.001	0.705
	Error	21	27.44	1.30	—	—	—
	Total	24	26.38	—	—	—	—
Time-based family-work conflict	Pre-test	1	16.14	16.14	7.63	<0.012	0.276
	choice theory education	1	81.88	81.88	40.10	<0.001	0.656
	Error	21	42.88	2.04	—	—	—
	Total	24	21.66	—	—	—	—
Pressure-based Work-family conflict	Pre-test	1	12.92	12.92	7.01	<0.015	0.253
	choice theory education	1	52.82	52.82	29	<0.001	0.58
	Error	21	38.24	1.82	—	—	—
	Total	24	22.60	—	—	—	—
Pressure-based family-work conflict	Pre-test	1	57.95	57.95	32.55	<0.001	0.608
	choice theory education	1	19.80	19.80	111.12	<0.003	0.346
	Error	21	37.39	1.78	—	—	—
	Total	24	16.74	—	—	—	—
Behavior-based Work-family conflict	Pre-test	1	8.81	8.81	2.63	0.120	0.111
	choice theory education	1	35.08	35.08	10.49	0.004	0.333
	Error	21	70.20	3.343	—	—	—
	Total	24	21.70	—	—	—	—
Behavior-based family-work conflict	Pre-test	1	16.53	16.53	3.75	0.66	0.152
	choice theory education	1	41.63	41.63	9.46	0.006	0.311
	Error	21	92.39	4.39	—	—	—
	Total	24	23.29	—	—	—	—

## Discussion

The data analysis results show that the education of choice theory was effective in reducing work-family conflict in women working in hospitals. Further findings associated with sub-scales also show that education of choice theory can affect six dimensions of work-family conflict as well.

The previous research associated with the effectiveness of different approaches in reducing work-family conflict, almost show the effectiveness of approaches such as group patterns of positive perspectives elaboration, the pattern of Fordyce happiness, education of lifestyle factors, Systematic motivational counseling, and the impact of life-quality-based treatment on reduction of work-family conflict.<sup>20-23</sup> These studies are consistent with the present study.

On the other hand, the reality therapy approach and education of choice theory concepts as its underlying psychology is an effective treatment approach with a lot of practices in education, parenting, management, counseling, and psychotherapy. Some researchers have been conducted on the effectiveness of the choice theory or the effect of reality therapy approach on different variables, including the effect of choice theory education and intervention on success at work, reduction of careless behaviors and increasing responsibility, increasing academic achievement among school students, and quality of life improvement and happiness on drug quitting.<sup>24-27</sup>

Considering the previous researches which have been done on the effectiveness of choice theory education on different variables, the impact of educating the main concepts of this theory such as basic needs, desires and quality world, total behavior, responsible and effective behaviors, internal and external control, constructive and destructive habits and the WDEP process can be regarded as some examples describing the impact of this approach on the dependent variable of the study (work-family conflict). Each of the above concepts, in case of proper education and practice of them by trainees, can lead to a more productive choice for the individual and shift from inefficient behavior to efficient behaviors and from unhappy lifestyle to happy lifestyle through correct identification of needs, desires and quality world, attempts to satisfy the needs effectively and responsibly, avoiding external control and destructive habits, self-assessment of attitudes and conduction of new behaviors through reality therapy. When new choices of individuals lead to a more powerful feeling of satisfaction, this affects all aspects of their life and can also be effective in solving a problem known as work-family conflict.

With a focus on the concepts such as choosing behaviors by the individual him/herself, using effective and responsible suggestions made by a creative system to satisfy the needs, and paying attention to others' needs while satisfying one's own needs, choice theory education helped people with a time-based work-family conflict to use innovative methods to find new skills in time management and draw on one of the choice theory teachings "our control over our lives is more than what we think" to change our view about being a victim of circumstances and having no choice.

On explaining the impact of choice theory education on reducing time-based family-work conflict, responsibility can be effective. Responsibility is the ability to meet one's needs in such a way that it has no negative consequences for the person, puts no burden on the shoulders of others, and doesn't deprive others of meeting their needs.<sup>15</sup> By learning this concept, and focusing on the fact that meeting needs in the field of the family should not prevent them from fulfilling their job responsibilities, the participants of the study tried to establish an equilibrium between time devoted to their family and career roles.

The impact of choice theory education on reduction of pressure-based work-family conflict can be explained in this way that education of the choice theory can direct individuals facing conflicts, towards a particular option or choice; an option that doesn't provoke conflict and can meet the needs that have been failed due to the conflict.<sup>17</sup> During the study, the subjects were educated that in case they carry their workplace tensions to their home, their family roles will be disrupted as well. Thus, they had better temporarily stop thinking about or focusing on the workplace tensions, or discussing them with family members, and rather emphasize things that are not associated with those problems and tensions.

With the emphasis on the concept of needs and the quality world in the choice theory, the impact of choice theory education on the reduction of the pressure-based family-work conflict can be examined. The participants in this study managed to develop a balance between their career and family roles and experience less significant conflicts by learning about the concept of needs and the quality world, understanding that what they regard as good and desirable is not necessarily desirable for others, and by trying to understand the quality world of people around them as well as respecting their needs.

Behavior-based Work-family conflict derives from failed attempts of individuals to change their behavior in family and career roles. When individuals learn about the concept of total behavior in choice theory, which is one of the main concepts of the theory, they find out that they can have full control over their actions and choose them. They also realize that by changing their thinking and doing, which were discussed in the education course, they can feel better experience and physiology. Thus, the way choice theory education can reduce this dimension of work-family conflict can be described below.

Explaining the impact of choice theory education on this dimension of family-work conflict is similar to the description of behavior-based work-family conflict and is based on the concept of total behavior. As explained earlier, any behavior that humans show is public and targeted and is often made of the greatest and best human efforts to achieve their demands. Behavior can be effective (provide individuals with their needs) or be ineffective (deprive individuals of their needs despite their efforts to satisfy them). Human behavior consists of four elements of action, thought, feeling, and physiology.<sup>15</sup> According to the above-mentioned points, the subjects who realized the concept of total behavior and its four components managed to identify their behaviors at home and at the

workplace and divide their behaviors into effective or ineffective groups.

The limitations of this study include the inclusion of women from one single organization, which makes it difficult to generalize the results to other groups. In other words, any generalization should be made carefully. Moreover, since the concepts have been instructed only by the researcher, the researcher's skills and personality traits should not be overlooked. The lack of a follow-up session due to time constraints and the difficulty of access to the participants is another limitation of this research. The researcher is recommended to conduct broader research with larger sample size, on other occupational groups and both men and women. Other researchers can also investigate the effectiveness of choice theory education in other job-related aspects such as job satisfaction, job motivation, turnover tendencies, organizational commitment, and occupational burnout.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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