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Level of economic development of the country of origin and work-to-family conflict after migration to Canada[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Using a sample of employed adults living in Canada, this article examines patterns and antecedents of work-to-family conflict (WFC) among immigrants, relative to the native-born. We test whether the origin-country— or intermediary country of residence— country-level economic development, and length of residence in Canada interact to affect WFC differentially for immigrants. We hypothesize that origin-country economic development impacts the value and transferability of immigrants' capital in the host country. Discrepancies between the two results in underemployment, stressful work experiences, and thus greater WFC for immigrants, relative to the native-born. Results indicate greater WFC among recent and established immigrants from less developed countries and among established immigrants from developed countries. This finding, however, is conditioned by gender and particularly strong among established immigrant men from less developed countries, compared to their female counterparts.

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1. Introduction

Work-family conflict, which can be defined as a form of inter-role conflict through which events in one's work life interfere with those in one's family life and vice versa, is considered an unprecedented mental and physical health risk faced by North American's today (see [Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985](#); [Bellavia and Frone, 2005](#); [Young, 2015](#)). In fact, a recent meta-analysis placed it as more detrimental to individuals' mental and physical health beyond unemployment and exposure to second-hand smoke ([Goh et al., 2015](#)). Despite these startling patterns, work-family scholars do not know how this stressor affects various populations—especially among foreign versus native-born residents because of sampling limitations (see [Grzywacz et al., 2005](#); [Malinen and Johnston, 2011](#); [Flippen, 2014](#), for studies of work-family conflict of specific foreign-born samples). Furthermore, no studies—to our knowledge—have examined WFC among immigrants within Canada. These distinctions are important in advancing research on work-family conflict and immigration for two reasons.

First, immigrants are *the* major contributor of current and future demographic and economic growth of Canada ([Yassaad, 2012](#)). As the number of the foreign-born continues to grow, the significance of their well-being for long term societal “health” becomes increasingly important. It is therefore essential to understand how work-family conflict is differentially

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distributed among immigrants compared to the native-born using systematic studies; research conducted on predominantly native-born participants cannot generalize to immigrants.

Second, it is important to understand differential experiences of work-family conflict among the foreign-born compared to the native-born, given that employment opportunities are not the same for all immigrants. New-arrivals are required to transplant their entire life in a new country, and start anew—re-establishing familial and social connections, while seeking employment opportunities in novel workplaces. However, quality employment opportunities in a new country may be more available to some immigrants compared to others (Montazer et al., 2016). Job quality influences the work stressors and resources available to the employee—characteristics that may either help or hinder one's ability to balance work and family demands (Bakker et al., 2003). In the current paper, we focus on one type of work-family conflict: conflict that arises when one's work life interferes with one's family life—referred to as work-to-family conflict (WFC) and argue that, controlling for pre-migration human capital the level of economic development of origin-country at the time of immigration will influence immigrants' employment opportunities and thus exposure to work stressors, which in turn, will influence WFC experiences. By using comprehensive survey data from a random sample of adults living in Toronto, Canada (Neighborhood Effect on Health and Well-being Study)—a metropolitan city comprising over 50 percent immigrants, we ask: (1) Does the level of economic development of origin-country affect immigrants' experiences of WFC? (2) If so, does the length of residence in Canada influence this relationship? (3) Are these associations between economic development of origin-country, length of residence and WFC mediated by stressful work conditions? And (4) Are the hypothesized relationships between immigration, length of residence, and WFC moderated by gender? We elaborate on the rationale for these research questions in the following sections.

2. Background

2.1. Work-to-family conflict

We focus on work-to-family conflict (WFC), as opposed to family-to-work conflict (FWC), for two specific reasons: First, WFC is considered a more prevalent and problematic stressor, compared to FWC (Amstad et al., 2011; Voydanoff, 2005); and, second, we are primarily concerned with *work-related experiences* among immigrants post-migration, and the ways in which they interfere with family obligations creating conflict between the two spheres.

Popular theories of WFC note the importance of *work conditions* in predicting these conflicts. Noted work-related antecedents include: nonstandard shifts, job demands or pressures, reduced flexibility or authority, and the absence of creative work, or safe employment conditions (Bellavia and Frone, 2005; Clark, 2000; Karasek, 1979; Michel et al., 2011). The unpleasant work conditions and extensive psychological/time commitments associated with one's job may spill over into the family sphere, either objectively (by reducing the time one has to tend to family commitments), or subjectively (by reducing the psychological and emotional resources necessary to tend to family concerns), resulting in WFC experiences (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

Research to-date on the antecedents and consequences of WFC largely focuses on native-born, white North American or other Western populations, while largely neglecting the experiences of immigrants in these countries (Grzywacz et al., 2005). Studies that have examined the effect of immigration on WFC have done so with specific migrant groups in the United States or small non-random samples (Grzywacz et al., 2005; Flippen, 2014; Malinen and Johnston, 2011); or, have focused on workers in low-status jobs and report mixed findings. While some of these studies show elevated WFC among immigrants because of their position as low-skill workers (Flippen, 2014), others report lower WFC (Malinen and Johnston, 2011), despite employment in lower status jobs (Grzywacz et al., 2005). No studies to date have examined WFC among immigrants in Canada—where in 2011 the foreign-born represented 20.6% of its total population from close to 200 origin-countries (Statistics Canada, 2013).

2.2. Level of economic development, immigrant labor market opportunities and work-to-family conflict

Due to the large number of sending countries, individual studies that examine varying outcomes, including WFC, of *specific* immigrant groups may miss similarities across groups that exist because of social, economic, or cultural similarities in the countries of origin and not generalize to other immigrants from other countries (Jasso et al., 2004; van Tubergen et al., 2004; Montazer and Wheaton, 2011). In this paper, we consider the context of origin more broadly, and distinguish countries by the level of economic development as measured by the Gross National Product (GNP) per capita of the home-country at the *time* of immigration. We advocate this approach as it achieves a broader explanation of the immigration process beyond specific cases (Montazer & Wheaton, forthcoming). The GNP per capita is the total “income of all citizens of a country including the income from *factors of production* used abroad,” and can be interpreted as “the average income of a country's citizens” (The World Bank, 2003). It is not a universal marker of disparity among nations, since it does not account for cultural differences that are important in the migration and adjustment process (Jasso et al., 2004). Nonetheless, economic indicators such as GNP of a country still reflect an important range of differences in the structure of opportunities, and availability of resources (Clark and Clark, 2004; van Tubergen et al., 2004; Montazer and Wheaton, 2011) that impact the recognition and translation of immigrant's human capital into employment opportunities in the host-country (Bratsberg and Ragan, 2002; Friedberg, 2000;

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