

The Impact of Flexible Working Arrangements, Work-Family Enrichment, Family-Work Enrichment and Boundary Segmentation Preferences on Job Satisfaction among Working Women

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of flexible working arrangements, work-family enrichment, family-work enrichment and boundary segmentation preferences on job satisfaction of Chinese working women using Social Exchange Theory. Data were collected from 354 respondents through questionnaires and analyzed quantitatively using the partial least squares method. It was found that flexible working arrangements have a significant positive effect on job satisfaction, work-family enrichment, and family-work enrichment. Meanwhile, work-family enrichment, and family-work enrichment have significant positive effects on job satisfaction. Boundary segmentation preferences negatively modulate the effect of flexible working arrangements on work-family enrichment (or family-work enrichment). From a theoretical perspective, this study will further enrich the social exchange theory and provide a new perspective for understanding individual behavior. From a practical perspective, this paper provides relevant support for companies to balance employees' work-family conflicts and promote the implementation of family-friendly practice policies in human resource management.

Keywords: Flexible working arrangements, Work-family enrichment, Family-work enrichment, Boundary segmentation preferences, Job satisfaction

1.Introduction

With the continuous progress of society, flexible working arrangements have become the focus of academic circles and major organizations around the world. As stated in the 2015 World Work Report, about 80% of global organizations offer some form of flexible working arrangements to their employees (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). However, most such arrangements are still mainly concentrated in foreign organizations, and the penetration rate of flexible working arrangements in China is not high. However, the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in 2019 led to a wide range of industrial enterprises around the world to shut down production, forcing companies to introduce various flexible working arrangement policies. As a result, more and more employees are given the freedom to choose when and where they work. In the post-pandemic era, flexible working arrangements continue to play an important role in practice, which also provides an important basis for us to explore the impact of flexible working arrangements on employees' work-life balance.

However, a real challenge is that with the increase in the number of new female employees and the popularity of dual-earner households, it is becoming more common for men and women to share family and work responsibilities (Feng & Liu, 2020). This inevitably leads to conflict between work and family and can cause both work and life stress for employees (Aura & Desiana, 2023). Moreover, under the influence of factors such as slowing economic growth, increasing employment pressure and gender discrimination in employment, Chinese professional women are faced with the problem of inadequate employment (Gao H., 2023). The increase in the number of children further weakens women's competitiveness in the job market, highlighting the severe challenges that Chinese working women face in juggling work and family (Zhao, 2023).

From a woman's perspective, family-friendly policies have a significant impact on fertility decisions and well-being. The implementation of such policies not only enhances women's ability to balance work and family, but also reduces the cost of raising children, which has a positive effect on fertility decisions (Gan & Li, 2021). It can be seen that flexible working arrangements can satisfy women's psychological and physiological needs, such as being respected, needed, understood and cared for. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to study the impact of flexible working arrangements on the job satisfaction of working women. The findings can also provide reference value for the formulation and implementation of family-friendly policies.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Underpinnings Theoretical

Social exchange theory is considered one of the key conceptual frameworks for understanding workplace behavior and was originally proposed by Blau (1964) and others. According to this theory, when one party is treated favorably, he feels obliged to reciprocate accordingly, e.g., when a person feels that he receives valuable rewards from others, he is more motivated to continue to invest. Applied to the work-family interface, where employees feel that the organization has made an effort to help them balance their work and family roles, for example by offering flexible working hours and location, the norm of reciprocity will motivate them to reciprocate with more positive attitudes, such as being more engaged and committed to their work and the organization (Aryee et al., 2005; Wayne et al., 2006). Overall, social exchange theory provides a framework to help understand the interactions, motivations and decision-making processes between employees and employers under flexible working regimes. In practice, consideration of these theoretical principles can contribute to the development and implementation of more effective flexible working policies.

2.2 Job Satisfaction

Hoppock (1935) first introduced the concept of “job satisfaction”, then Vroom (1964) defined job satisfaction as the emotional and psychological perceptions perceived by employees, and Locke (1976) considered job satisfaction as a feeling of pleasure or a positive emotional state that an individual derives from his or her job. This paper mainly refers to the architectural definition of job satisfaction, which is understood as an individual's overall satisfaction with his/her job, which reflects the employee's feelings and evaluations of his/her work environment, job content, working conditions, organizational culture and career development. Job satisfaction is closely related to employee efficiency and productivity. Employees with high levels of satisfaction are usually more dedicated and motivated, thus improving organizational performance (Khan, 2022; Ghimire et al., 2023). Therefore, this paper provides a valid measure of job satisfaction through five dimensions: compensation and benefits, the job itself, growth and promotion, achievement and recognition, and interpersonal relationships.

2.3 Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible working arrangement was firstly proposed by a German economist in 1960 to alleviate the problem of traffic congestion when commuting to and from work, which refers to the fact that employees can arrange their working time flexibly according to their needs after completing certain tasks assigned by the organization or under the length of the working hours stipulated by the organization, thus replacing the original fixed working system (Schein et al., 1977). Flexible working arrangements are those in which employees have some autonomy and flexibility in terms of when, where, and how they work. Such arrangements usually include forms of flexible working hours, telecommuting, compressed work weeks (e.g., four-day work week), and flexible commuting times (Putri et al., 2021; Aura & Desiana, 2023). Firstly, flexible working arrangements can enable employees to better co-ordinate their work and family life, thereby reducing the pressure of life. Secondly, flexible working arrangements have also become an important tool for organizations to attract talented people and reduce staff turnover. Therefore, this paper provides a valid measure of flexible working arrangements through three dimensions: time flexibility, workplace flexibility, and sharing work atmosphere.

Ugargol & Patrick (2018) argued that higher levels of flexibility in the work environment lead to employees working harder and more engaged. The implementation of flexible working arrangements can enable employees to better balance work and family affairs, which helps to cultivate positive work attitudes and improve employees' job satisfaction (Putri et al., 2021). Alotaibi (2023) believes that if managers provide employees with decision-making autonomy and supervisor support, employees' performance will be naturally improved. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Flexible working arrangements have a significant positive impact on job satisfaction.

Flexible working arrangements may play a positive role in the process of resource interconversion, thereby increasing the richness of working families (Awan et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2022). Flexibility increases employees' influence over work and family issues (T. D. Allen et al., 2013) and thus increases the degree of work-family enrichment for employees (Beham et al., 2020). Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Flexible working arrangements have a significant positive impact on work-family enrichment.

There is a strong positive relationship between flexible working arrangements and family-work enrichment. Employees can adjust their work arrangements more flexibly to meet the various challenges and demands of family life. Promote harmonious relationships among family members (Li Y. et al., 2020). Flexible working hours and locations can meet the needs of family members, facilitate the participation of employees in family activities, and thus improve the quality of family life, while the resolution of family affairs can also enable employees to devote themselves to work to realize the gain of family to work (Kim et al., 2021). Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Flexible working arrangements have a significant positive impact on family-work enrichment.

2.4 Work-Family Enrichment

Crouter (1984) proposed the concept of work-family positive infiltration, believing that an individual's positive emotions, behaviors, skills and values in one field would be transferred to another field, and the two fields

would be similar. Subsequently, Grzywacz & Bass (2003) put forward the concept of work-family promotion, which is interpreted as the individual's input in a social system (work/family) will bring benefits (development, emotion, capital, effectiveness) (Wayne et al., 2004). Greenhaus & Powell (2006) pointed out that although researchers have put forward different concepts around the relationship between work and family, they pay the same attention to the essence, that is, they all believe that some experience and resources gained by employees in work are conducive to improving their family life quality. Therefore, this paper will measure work-family enrichment through three dimensions: capital, emotion, and development.

Gordon et al. (2007) argued that employees who experience work-family enrichment and career satisfaction may be more satisfied with the success they achieve in their careers. A study with corporate employees found that employees' work-to-family gains significantly and positively predicted their job satisfaction (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). A study of a group of nurses also found that work-to-family gain was significantly and positively related to job satisfaction (Zhang L. et al., 2016). When employees receive work-to-family gains, they are able to be more productive and complete their work more accurately (Koekemoer et al., 2020). Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Work-family enrichment has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction.

2.5 Family-Work Enrichment

Greenhaus & Powell (2006) proposed the concept of family-work enrichment, which suggests that family-work enrichment refers to the fact that some experiences, resources, etc. gained by an individual in the family contribute to the quality of his or her work, and that a well-balanced and co-ordinated state is achieved between the individual's family and work life in order to realize the positive influence and complementary effects of each other (Kalliath et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021). This balance and coordination enables individuals to better cope with their work and family responsibilities while deriving gains from both sides, including but not limited to increased work productivity, enhanced family well-being, reduced stress and anxiety, and increased life satisfaction. The achievement of family-work enrichment often requires concerted efforts and support between individuals, families and organizations to build supportive work environments and healthy family relationships (Li et al., 2020; Lin Z. et al., 2021). Thus, family-work enrichment can be measured through three dimensions: efficiency, affective and developmental.

Greenhaus & Powell (2006) argued that the gain of family to work should lead to better work outcomes, such as putting more energy into work. Koekemoer et al. (2020) point out that the richness that employees experience in terms of family (in terms of emotions, attitudes, etc.) will carry over into their careers and thus affect their perceptions of professional success. When employees experience the positive effects of family life, they are more productive and focused in the workplace, and family-work enrichment also contribute to higher job satisfaction among employees (Lin Z. et al., 2021). Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Family-work enrichment has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction.

2.6 Boundary Segmentation Preferences

Nippert-Eng (1996) proposed the boundary theory which suggests that people create boundaries between work and family roles in order to better simplify the world around them. Boundary segmentation preferences essentially describes the idea that there are different segmentation integration preferences between managing work and family and divides this into two categories, those with segmentation preferences and those with integration preferences (K. A. Basile & Beauregard, 2020; Reinke & Gerlach, 2022). Those people who are segmentation preferences tend to clearly delineate the boundaries of work and family and avoid working from home or leaving work to take on family responsibilities (Kondrysova et al., 2022). Boundary integrators, on the other hand, prefer to blur the lines between work and home, bring work home, and try to combine work and home. They tend to juggle work and family roles. (B. E. Ashforth et al., 2000; Masuda et al., 2012).

Individuals with high work-family segmentation preferences have a stronger sense of boundaries, so when at work, they ignore family influences, which in turn discourages the transfer of resources from work to the management of family affairs, making work-family enrichment less effective (J. Liu et al., 2013). Individuals with low work-family segmentation preferences, i.e. segmentation integrators, who tend to integrate the two domains of work and family, are able to naturally utilize the resources generated by flexible working arrangements in the family, which in turn leads to enhanced (work-family enrichment) (Hecht & Allen, 2009). Thus the higher the work-family split preference, the weaker the effect of flexible working arrangements on work-family enrichment, while the lower the work-family split preference, the stronger the effect of flexible working arrangements on work-family enrichment. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6: Boundary segmentation preferences negatively moderate the effect of flexible working arrangements on work-family enrichment.

Individuals who tend to have high work-family segmentation preferences are reluctant to allow work to become too associated with family, which may diminish the effect of transferring family resources to work matters, thus reducing the experience of family-work enrichment. (T. Allen et al., 2024). Individuals who tend to have low work-family segmentation preferences typically have a weaker sense of work-family boundaries and are able to naturally apply resources from the family domain to their work, facilitating the free switching and

application of resources between the different domains, which, in turn, the gain effect of work on the family is enhanced (Han et al., 2020). Thus the higher the work-family split preference, the weaker the effect of flexible working arrangements on family-work enrichment, while the lower the work-family split preference, the stronger the effect of flexible working arrangements on family-work enrichment. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H7: Boundary segmentation preferences negatively moderate the effect of flexible working arrangements on family-work enrichment.

2.7 Research Model

The conceptual model of this paper, derived from the literature review and research hypotheses is presented in Figure 1.

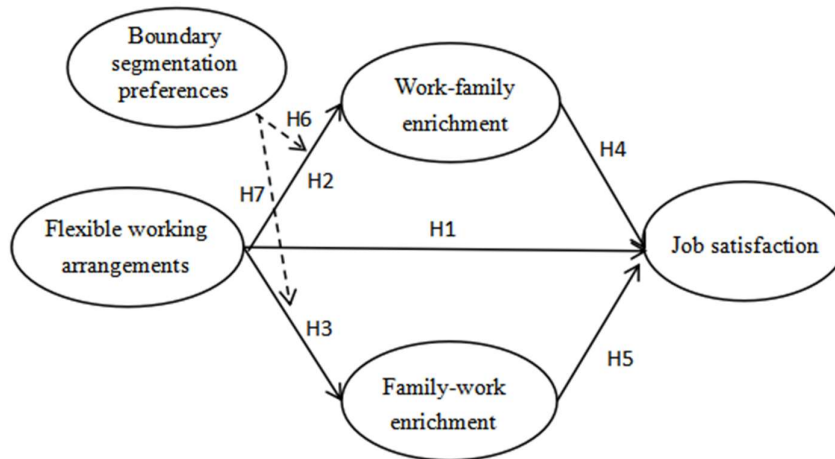


Figure 1 Conceptual model

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Sample Design

In this paper, we study working women from enterprises that implement flexible working arrangements in various industries in Guangxi, China. We used the online questionnaire platform "Questionnaire Star" to collect the data online. In fact, in order to ensure the smooth progress of the questionnaire, we sent out 412 questionnaires. After eliminating the ineffective questionnaires with short time for answering questions, more information missing and obviously the same rule of answering questions the remaining valid questionnaires were 354, with an effective recovery rate of 85.92%.

3.2 Demographics

The basic description of 354 valid data from formal investigations in this study is shown in Table 1. The results show that the research objects of this survey are all women, and from the age point of view, the sample of "31-40 years old" is relatively large, accounting for 40.96%. From the perspective of marriage and childbearing, 38.14% of the samples were "Married with children", while "Married with no children" accounted for 25.99%. In terms of academic qualifications, the proportion of "Bachelor" is the highest 44.07%. The industries surveyed were mainly other industries, financial industry, manufacturing industry and education industry, accounting for 19.21%, 17.51%, 17.23% and 16.10% respectively. The positions of the respondents are mainly Grassroots staff and Junior manager, 41.24% and 31.64% respectively, which indicates that most of the respondents are married women, and in the career promotion period, are facing the dual pressure of family and work.

Table 1 Sample Demographic(n=354)

Name	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Lower than 20	21	5.93
	21-30	86	24.29
	31-40	145	40.96
	41-50	62	17.51

Name	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	51 or above	40	11.30
	Unmarried	127	35.88
Marriage and childbearing	Married with no children	92	25.99
	Married with children	135	38.14
Education	High school or below	35	9.89
	Junior college education	96	27.12
	Bachelor	156	44.07
	Master or above	67	18.93
Nature of the industry	Internet industry	50	14.12
	Financial industry	62	17.51
	Education industry	57	16.10
	Manufacturing industry	61	17.23
	Service industry	56	15.82
	Others	68	19.21
Position	Grassroots staff	146	41.24
	Junior manager	112	31.64
	Middle manager	64	18.08
	Senior manager	32	9.04

3.3 Measurement

The measurement scales used in this study are well-established scales that have been validated many times and have been widely used in national and international studies, and the questionnaire items were designed using a five-point Likert scale. The flexible working arrangement scale consists of three dimensions derived mainly from the measurement questions of (Breaugh 1985; Kossek et al., 2001; Rau & Hyland 2002; Matthews et al., 2010). Both the work-family enrichment and family-work enrichment scales consist of 3 dimensions, and both draw on Carlson et al. (2006). The Job Satisfaction Scale consists of 5 dimensions and was taken from studies by (Saarenoksa, 2021; Chai & Zhang, 2022; Bai & Guo, 2022; Aura & Desiana, 2023; Li Q. & Mao, 2022; Yanchovska & Vladimirov, 2023). Kreiner (2006) believes that boundary division preference is a single-dimensional concept, and Kreiner's division of work-family boundary division preference has been recognized by a large number of domestic and foreign scholars, so the scale of boundary division preference is taken from Kreiner's study (2006). Table 2 shows the abbreviations of variables and dimensions.

4. Data Analysis and Results

This study used partial least squares (PLS) modeling using the SmartPLS 4 version (Ringle et al., 2024) as the statistical tool to examine the measurement and structural model. Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression is a form of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) that is capable of testing multiple relationships between

independent and dependent variables simultaneously. PLS-SEM was chosen as the main method of data analysis in this study for two main reasons: first, the mediation test of PLS-SEM has higher statistical efficacy compared to other methods such as the Sobel test with the same sample size (Ghazali et al., 2019). Secondly, PLS-SEM does not require the data to be normally distributed, which makes the analysis process easier and faster (Hair et al., 2022).

4.1 Measurement Model

Reflective measurement models are typically assessed using these criteria: indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2022). In this paper, internal consistency and reliability will be examined using external loadings, composite reliability (CR) values and average variance extracted (AVE) values. Generally, the loading value should be 0.708 or higher to show that the index has good explanatory power (Hair et al., 2019). Composite reliability (CR) is at least greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In general, the AVE value should be 0.50 or above (Hair et al., 2019). As can be seen in Table 2, the loading values were all greater than 0.708, the CRs were all higher than 0.7, and the AVEs were all higher than 0.5, indicating that the scales in this study have good internal consistency and reliability.

HTMT is a measure of discriminant validity that is primarily used to assess the similarity between latent variables. It is generally accepted that if the HTMT value is below 0.85, it indicates good discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). According to Table 3, the HTMT values between the variables in this study are below 0.85, which indicates good discriminant validity between each variable.

Table 2 Measurement model results

Variables	Dimensions	loadings	CR	AVE
Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA)	TF	0.843	0.889	0.727
	WF	0.853		
	SWA	0.861		
Work-Family Enrichment (WFE)	CA	0.834	0.881	0.712
	EM	0.862		
	DE	0.836		
Family-Work Enrichment (FWE)	EF	0.870	0.88	0.711
	EMO	0.825		
	DEV	0.834		
Boundary Segmentation Preferences (BSP)	BSP	0.877	0.91	0.716
		0.814		
		0.832		
		0.860		
Job Satisfaction (JS)	RW	0.822	0.911	0.673
	WI	0.819		
	GP	0.823		
	AR	0.786		
	IR	0.850		

Table 3 Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	FWA	WFE	FWE	BSP	JS
FWA					
WFE	0.724				
FWE	0.745	0.699			
BSP	0.227	0.479	0.438		

JS	0.767	0.763	0.791	0.284
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4.2 Structural Model

Once the evaluation of the measurement model is satisfactory, the next step is to evaluate the structural model on the PLS-SEM results. In this study, the structural model was evaluated accordingly by relevant indicators such as model fit (R^2), f^2 Effect Size, statistical significance and correlation of path coefficients, and so on, in order to judge the reasonableness and reliability of the model (Hair et al., 2022).

Firstly, R^2 indicates the proportion of variance explained by each endogenous construct and is an indicator of the explanatory power of the model. In general, R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are considered significant, moderate, and weak, respectively (Henseler et al. 2009; Hair et al. 2011). As shown in Table 4, the R^2 of the variables WFE, FWE, and JS are 0.524, 0.506, and 0.589, respectively, indicating a relatively strong degree of explanation, and the adjusted R^2 values are slightly lower, but all are above 0.5. The results show that the model performs well in explaining the variance.

Second, the effect value (f^2) is used to assess the contribution of individual predictor variables to the explanatory power of the endogenous variables in the regression model. Typically, the interpretive criteria for f^2 values are 0.02 for small effects, 0.15 for medium effects, and 0.35 for large effects. These values help to judge the importance of a particular predictor variable to the model (Cohen, 1988). According to Table 5, most of the f^2 values are above 0.15, indicating that the variable has some effect on the model, and it is noteworthy that FWA has a significant effect on both WFE (0.586) and FWE (0.612), suggesting that the variable plays a significant role in the explanatory power of the model.

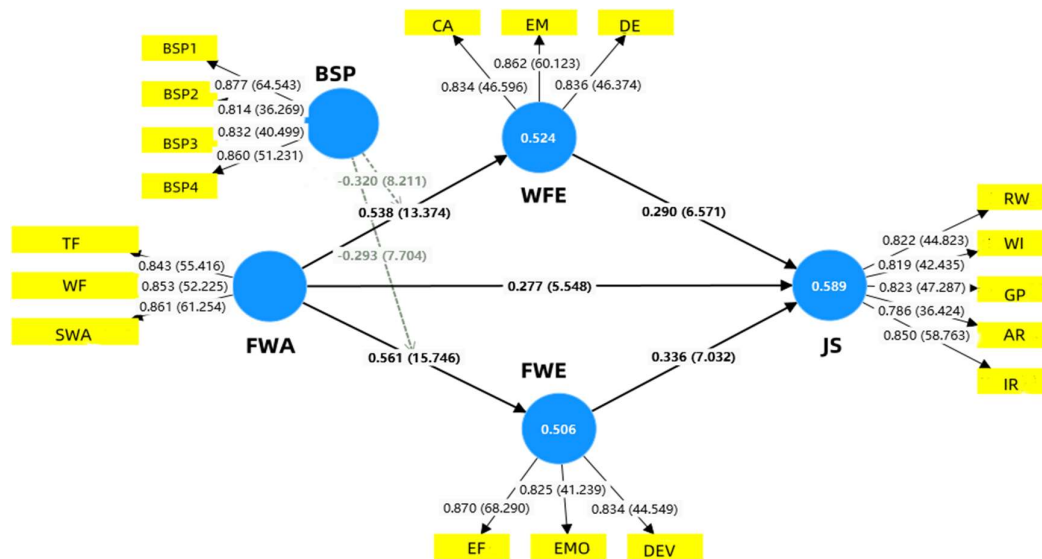
Finally, in this study, path coefficients and T-values were calculated by Bootstrapping. The number of Bootstrap cases is set to 5000 and the path coefficients and T-values are calculated. The path coefficients of the structural model in this study are shown in Table 5 and Figure 2. Flexible working arrangements ($\beta=0.277$, $p<0.001$), work-family enrichment ($\beta=0.290$, $p<0.001$), and family-work enrichment ($\beta=0.336$, $p<0.001$) were positively related to job satisfaction, thus supporting H1, H4 and H5. flexible working arrangements had a significant and positive relationship with work-family enrichment ($\beta=0.538$, $p<0.001$) and family-work enrichment ($\beta=0.561$, $p<0.05$) had a significant and positive relationship, thus supporting H2 and H3. In addition, $BSP \times FWA \rightarrow WFE$ ($\beta=-0.320$, $p<0.001$) is obtained based on interaction significance, suggesting that boundary segmentation preference negatively moderates the effect of flexible working arrangements on work-family enrichment, supporting hypothesis H6. $BSP \times FWA \rightarrow FWE$ ($\beta=-0.293$, $p<0.001$) was significant, suggesting that boundary segmentation preference negatively moderates the effect of flexible working arrangements on family-work enrichment, supporting hypothesis H7. The 95% guide confidence interval does not include zero, confirming our findings.

Table 4 R-square - R-adjusted

	R-square	R-square adjusted
WFE	0.524	0.520
FWE	0.506	0.502
JS	0.589	0.585

Table 5 Results of path analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original sample(O)	Sample mean(M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-values	P-values	f^2
H1	FWA $\rightarrow$ JS	0.277	0.277	0.050	5.548	0.000	0.103
H2	FWA $\rightarrow$ WFE	0.538	0.538	0.040	13.374	0.000	0.586
H3	FWA $\rightarrow$ FWE	0.561	0.560	0.036	15.746	0.000	0.612
H4	WFE $\rightarrow$ JS	0.290	0.291	0.044	6.571	0.000	0.121
H5	FWE $\rightarrow$ JS	0.336	0.336	0.048	7.032	0.000	0.158
H6	$BSP \times FWA \rightarrow WFE$	-0.320	-0.317	0.039	8.211	0.000	0.204
H7	$BSP \times FWA \rightarrow FWE$	-0.293	-0.291	0.038	7.704	0.000	0.166



5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study found, firstly, that flexible working arrangements significantly affect job satisfaction among working women ($H1$, $\beta=0.277$), aligning with the findings of scholars such as Greenhaus & Powell (2006) and Aura & Desiana (2023). Second, flexible working arrangements significantly affect work-family enrichment and family-work enrichment with path coefficients of $\beta = 0.538$ ($H2$) and $\beta = 0.561$ ($H3$), aligning with the findings of scholars such as Beham et al. (2020) and Li Y. et al. (2020). Again, work-family enrichment and family-work enrichment were significantly associated with job satisfaction with path coefficients of $\beta = 0.290$ ($H4$) and $\beta = 0.336$ ($H5$), respectively, aligning with the findings of scholars such as Yan B. et al. (2020) and Lin Z. et al. (2021). Finally, there is a negative moderating effect of boundary segmentation preferences in flexible working arrangements and work-family enrichment $\beta = -0.320$ ($H6$), and a negative moderating effect of boundary segmentation preferences in flexible working arrangements and family-work enrichment $\beta = -0.293$ ($H7$), aligning with the findings of scholars such as Han et al. (2020) and T. Allen et al. (2024).

The results of the above hypotheses indicate that the flexibility, autonomy and sense of control brought about by flexible working arrangements directly increase the job satisfaction of working women, while the mutual positive penetration of the work and family spheres also has a direct impact on the job satisfaction of employees. However, boundary segmentation preferences affect the effectiveness of the implementation of flexible working arrangements policies, with the work-to-family interface gains from flexible working arrangements becoming less pronounced when work-family interface segmentation preferences are higher, and the lower the segmentation preferences are, the more the organization's provision of flexible working arrangements contributes to the positive impact of work-family enrichment (or family-work enrichment). Therefore, the government should actively introduce flexible working arrangement policies, while enterprises should pay attention to the characteristics of different employees when implementing flexible policies. Based on the principle of employees' willingness, enterprises should maximize the flexible demands of individuals to match the supply of organizations according to their own conditions, so as to improve employees' job satisfaction.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

This study analyzed the effects of flexible working arrangements, work-family enrichment, family-work enrichment and boundary segmentation preferences on job satisfaction of working women. However, the research model on the effect of flexible working arrangements on the job satisfaction of working women needs to be further improved. Possible moderating variables, such as manager support and significance of family identity, can be further explored in future studies, so as to help organizations develop more reasonable and humane human resource management strategies.

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