

Balancing Work and Caregiving: Experiences of Parents of Children with Autism

Elan A. Martin, Miguel Leonardo Dela Cruz Alcantara, Chris L. Trudeau, Susan Saephan, David A. Medina Zepeda, Jocelyn D. Muñoz Lozano, Ciobha A. McKeown, Ph.D., Catherine Warren, Ph.D.



Background

Work-Life balance refers to “engagement in multiple roles with an approximate equal level of attention, time, involvement, or commitment” (Sirgy & Lee, 2018)

- Three components (Greenhaus et al., 2003):
 - Time balance (i.e., equal time associated with work and family domains)
 - Involvement balance (i.e., equal engagement in work and family domains)
 - Satisfaction balance (i.e., equal satisfaction across work and family domains)

Work-Family Conflict relates to role demands (e.g., overload, conflict, ambiguity) causing conflict between the *Work* and *Family* domains (Bakar & Salleh, 2015)

- Caretakers of autistic children may face strain when engaging in support services
- Caretakers of autistic children have reported increased work-family conflict, decreased recovery, and low perceived workplace support (Matthews et al., 2011)
- Established link between engagement in support services and optimal child development (Hurtb et al., 1999).

Methods

Sample

100% female, majority age 31-35 years

- **Race**
44% White, 31% Hispanic, 25% Black, 25% Multi-Racial, 19% Indigenous, 13% Asian
- **Employment Status**
43% Full-Time, 21% Part-Time, 29% Stay-at-Home Caregiver, 6% Work-from-Home

Procedure

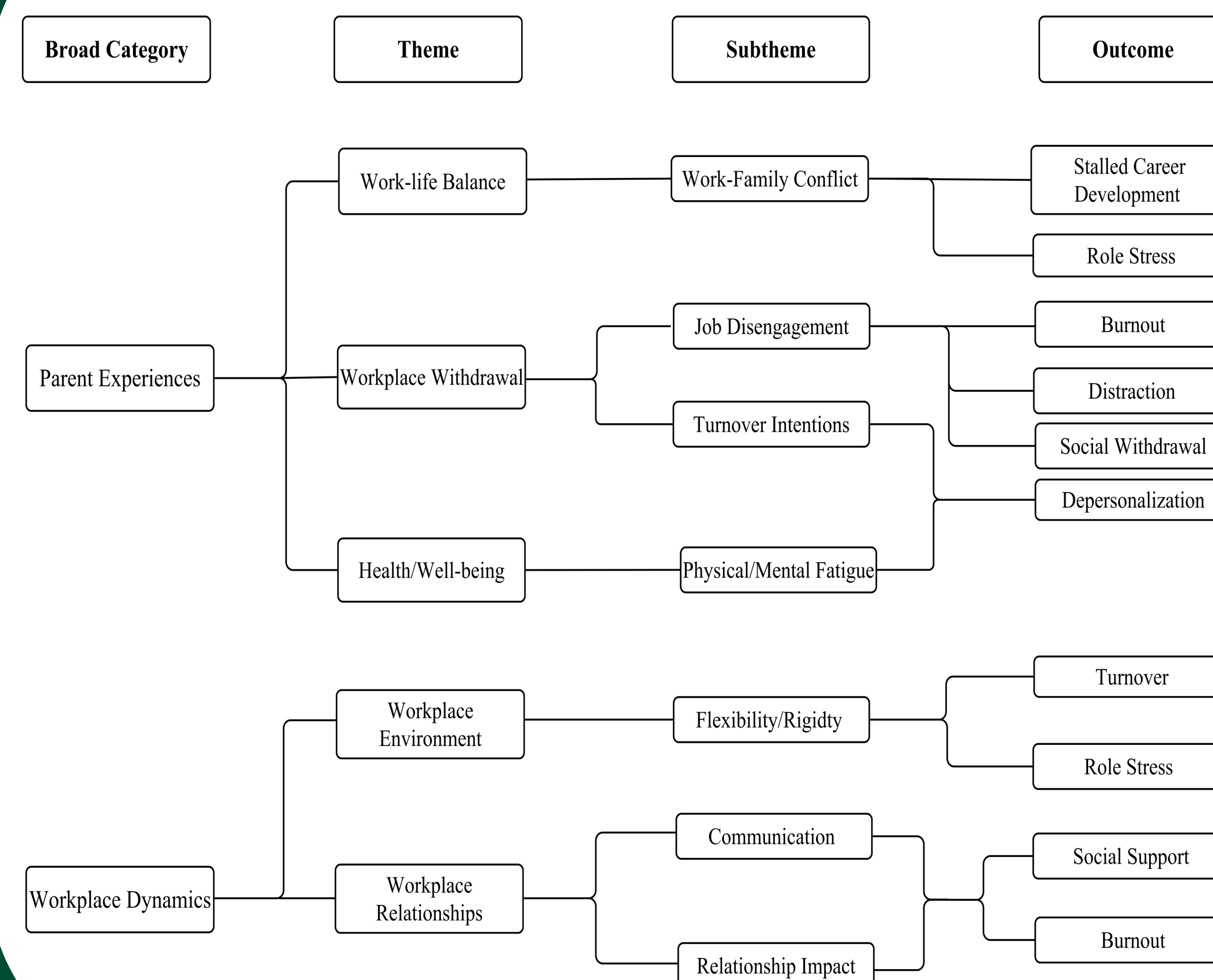
- 16 participants were retained from those recruited from local behavior analytic agencies, school districts, and regional centers

Data Analysis

- Reflexive thematic analysis was utilized with an inductive and latent-level approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019)
- NVivo was used for coding and theme development

Research Question: What are the lived experiences of parents of children with autism in the workplace who are actively engaged in support services for their child?

Thematic Analysis Results



Findings: This study indicates parents of children with autism participating in support services face distinct challenges in achieving work-family balance, often leading to heightened work-family conflict.

Thematic Quotes

Parent Experience

- Work-Family Conflict: *"I find it extremely difficult to work consistently and have those financial means and have a proper work life balance that would allow me to make sure my [child is] getting the care [my child] needs."*
- Stalled Career Development: *"My work didn't really have anybody to cover me... I was just always behind. I was always rushing... I was stressed out 24/7... that's why I was like, okay something has to change... My life isn't going to change, so my career has to..."*
- Role Stress: *"It has been a struggle trying to figure out my place... carve this identity... preserve my identity — separate from the kids ... I have grown to accept that is my career. My kids are my career."*

Workplace Dynamics

- Flexibility/Rigidity: *"It just pretty much limits me to work opportunities... I have to be able to leave work and get [my child], there's just not another option. [It] limit[s] the roles I can take on because our life does not work unless I have that flexibility."*
- Workplace Environment: *"I've been very frank with [management] that this is not equitable, and it burdens working-class parents. And [management] is essentially saying 'We don't care that it burdens working-class parents.'"*

Discussion and Next Steps

Discussion

- Two major themes: parent experiences and workplace dynamics
- Role stress, burnout, and limited work support collectively hinder parents' ability to balance their work-life
- Beneficial role of supportive workplace environments and relationship

Future Directions

- Evaluation of workplace interventions to better combat work-family conflict for parents
- Investigate coping strategies that can be used to help work and family demands