

THE EXPERIENCE OF WORK-LIFE INTERACTION IN THE NORTHERN CAPE MINING INDUSTRY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to investigate how Afrikaans and Setswana employees in the Northern Cape mining environment experience the interaction between their work and personal lives and to determine which major strategies employees use to deal with work-life interaction (WLI). A non-probability purposive voluntary sample of 25 mineworkers was taken in the Northern Cape Province. Male and female participants were stratified in terms of language (Afrikaans and Setswana) and interviews were conducted with them. Interview questions focused on the main interacting dimensions in the lives of mineworkers and major strategies that employees use to deal with WLI. Content analyses were used to analyse the data. Several preceding factors (like work pressure, heavy workload, stress, and family obligations) that led to definite consequences (e.g. lack of quality time for self and family, physical and emotional strains, and low levels of productivity), as well as coping strategies (e.g. prioritising, time management, communication, and planning) were explored during the interviews. Although there were similarities, it seemed that there were definite differences between gender and language groups regarding their experiences of WLI.

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1 Introduction

The challenges employees face in meeting the demands surrounding the work and family fields, have become more frequent and increasingly complex (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Apart from meeting normal deadlines, further mental and emotional efforts are frequently expected from employees in the workplace and the various roles that employees hold (i.e. that of spouse, parent, friend or caretaker) are seldom taken in consideration (Geurts, Rutte & Peeters, 1999). Employees have to juggle welfare activities and relationships outside work, while at the same time striving to meet rising demands in the workplace (Mageni & Slabbert, 2005). Individuals also experience more inter-role conflict as they try to cope with the demands of work and personal life (Olsen-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). As a result, work-life conflict can happen in both directions – work

demands can interfere with life and life demands can interfere with work (Olsen-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006).

Factors like globalisation, economic growth and equal employment opportunities have contributed to increasing the pressure on the interaction between work and personal life (Kerrane & Buckley, 2004). Globalisation has amongst others impacted on the flexibility of work time schedules, causing employees to work long hours, overtime and during weekends. Consequently, employees are also confronted with certain demands regarding their personal lives. Numerous of their everyday problems stemming from job responsibilities clash with home or family responsibilities (Geurts *et al.*, 1999). The difficulty of trying to maintain a positive and balanced interaction between work and personal life often puts strain on the individual. This, in turn can have negative implications for the organisation in terms of turnover, absenteeism, reduced performance and regarding the

employees' own personal life (poor physical and psychological health, diminished life, marital and family satisfaction and dissatisfaction with leisure activities) (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003).

WLI for males and females may differ, especially when they are married. The continuous rise world-wide as well as in South Africa, in the number of married women entering the labour market affects family life extensively (Smit, 2001). The dual-earner family is now an accepted social phenomenon. Findings reveal that there is still a great imbalance in work-life due to the continuing limitations of general childcare facilities and restraints imposed on mothers by inferior part-time and non-standard work opportunities (Houston, 2005). Research shows that working married women continue to do more household tasks than men (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006). Fathers also have increased pressure, because while they seek to be more involved in family life, they can be blocked when becoming established in linear career trajectories, which provide no flexibility (Houston, 2005).

A major limitation of WLI research in South Africa is that international models and measuring instruments are applied to the South African context. However South Africa experiences unique circumstances in the workplace, like the diverse multicultural work environment (Mageni & Slabbert, 2005). Because individuals are socialised in dissimilar cultures, languages and communities, their value and belief systems are often incompatible, (Kotze, 2005). Furthermore, factors leading to and consequences of WLI can be dissimilar for different language groups. South African employees in general, but particularly individuals from different language groups, can use different types of strategy to deal with WLI issues compared with each other or to other countries. It therefore seems important to investigate the experience of the interaction between work and personal life for different language groups.

This study focuses on the WLI of individuals working in the mining industry in the Northern Cape (South Africa), where Afrikaans and Setswana are the two dominant spoken languages. The work in a mine is gruelling (Singer, 2002)

and those working in physical environments naturally require some degree of physical fitness and strength (Wynn, 2001). Employees are also exposed to harsh working conditions that include working with explosives, testing geological formations, operating load-haul-dump machines, scraper winches, heavy-duty machines and maintain mining machinery in conventional mines. Individuals working in this industry have to face various demands and unpleasant working conditions, including long working hours, occasionally unsafe working conditions, highly unionised environments and enormous pressure to perform (Calitz, 2004). With more than one hundred miners killed every year in the South African mining industry, this industry has proved to have the highest rates of fatal occupational injuries (McGwin *et al.*, 2002). These and other death and injury-causing accidents have resulted in considerable physical and emotional trauma to mineworkers in such a way that the Chamber of Mines has had to develop safety systems management programmes within mines to assist employees with coping effectively with the demands and pressures that adversely affect quality of life, health and productivity following traumatic mining incidents (Badenhorst & Van Schalkwyk, 1992; Chamber of Mines of South Africa, 1989).

Based on the problems outlined above, the objective of this research was to investigate how Afrikaans and Setswana employees in the Northern Cape mining environment experience the interaction between their work and personal lives and to determine which major strategies employees use to deal with WLI.

2

Theoretical background

In most studies, work and family are visualised as two conflicting domains – work conflicts with family interests and vice versa. Thus, the most broadly cited definition of work–family conflict states that it is a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

However, the majority of individuals believe that in general, work–life balance includes a variety of dimensions, with work and family regarded only as the most ordinary aspects. Additional dimensions that may also play an important role in an individual's life, include social interaction, friendships, physical and emotional health, fitness, spirituality, intellectual enrichment, and community involvement. Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) define work–life balance as the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in, and equally satisfied with his or her work and family role.

Although work–life balance is a generally accepted term, there are complications with the concept of balance. Using the term “balance”, ignores the possibility that both domains may also influence each other in a constructive way by transferring positive attributes. Lewis and Cooper (2005) state that work–family balance represents a vague concept where work and family life are integrated or harmonious in some way or where work–family balance is seen as a lack of conflict or interference among work and family roles. Achieving balance also implies that one must take away from one area and add to another. Another problem with the term “balance” is that it suggests that work is not part of an individual's life but something separate. This conceptualisation can lead to temporary answers for work–family conflict issues (Lewis & Cooper, 2005).

A large percentage of employed workers have serious difficulty combining obligations in the work and home domain (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). According to Geurts and Demerouti (2003), the type of work–home conflict can be based on role characteristics that affect time, strain or behaviour in one domain, but which are incompatible when trying to fulfil the role in the other domain (work vs. home). These three types of work–home conflicts are further defined as 1) time-based conflict (i.e. when work and home roles compete for time); 2) strain-based conflict (i.e. when strain in the one role affects performance in another role); and 3) behaviour-based conflict (i.e. when role behaviour in the one domain may be in conflict with expectations of behaviour in the other domain) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Several antecedents of WLI have been identified and include personality characteristics such as neurosis, extraversion, personal coping and Type A behaviour (a set of characteristics that include being impatient, excessively time-conscious, highly competitive etc.), family characteristics (i.e. family–work conflict has been particularly related to several demanding aspects of the family situation) and job characteristics (i.e. the amount of time required by the job) (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). The aforementioned researchers found that factors at work like long working hours, pressure at work and a high quantitative workload (e.g. having various tasks to accomplish with insufficient time), could have an influence on individuals' personal lives. According to Grzywacz and Marks (2000), environmental barriers at work (e.g. pressure at work) and at home (e.g. differences between spouses) are connected with higher levels of negative overflow between work and family. However, environmental assets from work (e.g. decision autonomy, support from co-workers and supervisors) and home (e.g. spousal support) are linked with higher levels of positive overflow between work and family.

Poor interaction between work and personal life can also have negative consequences in several areas. Physical (e.g. headache, back pain, upset stomach, tiredness, light-headedness and pain in the chest or in the heart area), psychological (e.g. stress and burnout), behavioural (e.g. increased use of stimulants such as coffee, cigarettes and alcohol) and organisational consequences (e.g. turnover, absenteeism and reduced performance) have been noted (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). Furthermore, Geurts *et al.* (1999) found that burnout, sleep deprivation and mental distancing were some of the consequences individuals had to face when there was conflict between the work and family domains.

As mentioned before, South Africa is a diverse country with eleven official languages. Therefore, it is probable that different language groups will differ with regards to WLI. Indeed, a recent study by Rost (2006) found that, based on language, there were differences between the levels of negative work–home interference. It appears that Afrikaans and African groups

experienced significantly higher levels of negative work-home interference, compared to English-speaking employees. Marais and Mostert (2007) found that English, Afrikaans and Tswana speaking individuals experienced different levels of negative and positive interaction between work and home.

Relatively few empirical studies were done on the role of coping strategies that individuals use to deal with the interaction between work and personal life (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). Beutell and Greenhaus (1983) found that active attempts to change the structural and/or personal definition of one's roles were more effective in dealing with work-home conflict than more passive and reactive role behaviour. Kirchmeyer (1993) reported similar findings, and showed that the type of coping strategy played an important role. Strategies that were aimed at changing one's own attitude about what demands could realistically be met in both domains, seemed to be more effective in coping with high demands from both domains than strategies aimed at changing the attitudes or behaviours of others. Furthermore, prioritising, delegating, the support of spouses, and the positive nature of managerial experience were some of the main strategies individuals used to cope with WLI (Stoner *et al.*, 2005).

3 Method

3.1 Research Design

For the purposes of this research, a qualitative design was used to describe the essence, or the lived human experience, of WLI. The objective was to investigate the experience of WLI among employees working in the mining environment.

3.2 Participants and procedure

The participants were mineworkers working in an open-cast mine in the Northern Cape Province. A non-probability purpose voluntary sample was used and 25 individuals were interviewed. The population was stratified in terms of language (Afrikaans vs. Setswana)

and gender (males vs. females) and consisted of six Afrikaans males, seven Afrikaans females, six Setswana males and six Setswana females. Although the sample was not stratified in terms of marital and parental status (two variables that can play an important role in the experience of WLI), an effort was made to ensure variation of employees who were married vs. employees who were single, as well as employees who had (young) children vs. employees who had no or older (18+ years) children. Another variable that was considered was participants' socio-economic status. Therefore, employees were included from negotiation level (employees who were on the lower income level), middle management and management level.

A letter with information regarding the research was given to the HR manager. The information included a problem statement and reasons for the research. The HR manager was also selected as intermediary and signed a letter of consent to act as mediator in the research. The mediator's role was to act as 'go between' and to identify employees who were willing to participate in the research. The criteria for selection of participants were 1) employees working and living in the Northern Cape Province; 2) employees whose first language was either Afrikaans or Setswana; 3) employees who had been working in a mining environment for at least two or more years; 4) employees willing to participate in the research and who gave written, informed consent after they had been informed about the purpose and procedures of the research; and 5) employees who were able to understand and communicate in either English or Afrikaans and were prepared to have tape-recorded interviews with the researchers.

Before the interview was conducted, the use of the tape-recorder had been explained to the participant. The participant was put at ease and informed that the interview was only for research purposes and that he/she would remain anonymous in the study. The majority of the participants were female (52 per cent), African (48 per cent) married (72 per cent), and had children (88 per cent). Concerning their educational qualifications, 64 per cent of the participants had post-matric certificates. Most participants (64 per cent) had been working in

the mining industry between one and ten years, and were on the negotiation level (60 per cent) of the socio-economic levels.

3.3 Data collection

The data collection for this research consisted of a pilot study, qualitative interviews and field notes. The trustworthiness of the research and data was also an important aspect to consider.

Pilot study

Before the interviews were conducted, an interview schedule was compiled and evaluated for appropriateness by an experienced qualitative researcher with a knowledgeable background of WLI. Pilot interviews were held with two participants in order to come to grips with a number of the practical aspects such as obtaining permission, getting in touch with participants and conducting the interviews. After these interviews, the questions that were asked during the interviews were refined and adjusted, and problems experienced were clarified.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held with the participants. The interview was held at a private location where the participant felt most comfortable. Attention was given to the atmosphere of the room (e.g. no cell phones, telephones, interruptions). Each participant was asked two non-directive questions:

- How do you experience the interaction between work and all facets in your personal life?
- Which strategies do you use to deal with the interaction between work and personal life?

The interviewers made use of paraphrasing (stating the participants words in another form with similar meaning), minimal verbal responses (occasional nodding and verbal responses such as “uh-hm, yes, I see”), clarification (clarifying unclear statements e.g. “You seem to be saying...”), reflection (reflecting on something important the person had said, in order to get him to expand on the idea), and summarising (reviewing the participant’s ideas, thoughts and feelings, verbalising them to see if she truly

understood what the participant was saying) techniques during the interviews. Directly after an interview, impressions of the interview were written down, which contained both empirical observation and interpretations. The field notes assisted in remembering and exploring the process of the interview and helped to reduce the loss of data during the research.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a measure to ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research. Four main measures were used to ensure trustworthiness, including credibility (examination of the truth value of the findings), applicability (transferability of the findings), consistency (ensuring dependability of the findings) and neutrality (not being biased, but objective throughout the study). This was achieved by means of an audit, keeping of the raw material, giving a full description of the research method, applying the same procedure throughout, triangulation, peer examination and the code-recode procedure, as well as by keeping an appropriate distance in order not to influence the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not revealing the identity of participants or instances where data was collected anywhere in the research. Only the researchers involved in this study had access to the participants’ information. After the audio-taped interviews were transcribed, the participants’ names were omitted from that point on.

3.4 Data analysis

The data was transcribed verbatim and checked by independent researchers. Content analysis was used to analyse the data separately for each group. The following steps were used (Giorgi, 1985; Kerlinger, 1986):

- The first step was to universalise the context that needed to be analysed (for example the entire set of verbal answers of the participants), to be defined and to be categorised.
- The second step was to determine the sub-units of the analysis, namely words and themes. The coder read the transcribed

notes in order to form an overall picture. Afterwards, the coder once again read it in order to determine the themes. The words used by the participant were the smallest analysis that could be made. A sub-theme is usually a sentence and is more difficult but also more useful to analyse. Sub-themes can be combined in order to determine the themes. The analysis of the information was continued until repeated themes were identified.

- The third step was to free the data from unnecessary information and to determine the meaning of the rest of the sub-units by linking them to the whole picture.
- The fourth step consisted of the conversion of the concrete language of the participants into scientific language and concepts. The precise words of the participants were used in support. Based on gained insights, integration and synthesis was then done.
- A co-coder was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the content analysis. In general, the identified themes and sub-themes correspond well with each other. In cases where themes or sub-themes differed, the opinion of a third independent researcher was sought. Data was analysed separately for the four groups (Afrikaans males, Afrikaans females, Setswana males, and Setswana females), to determine if there were any differences in the experience

of WLI for different language and gender groups.

3.5 Ethical aspects

If the participant felt uncomfortable at any time or was unwilling to proceed with the interview, he/she had the right to stop and terminate his/her involvement in the research. Participation in the research was voluntary and the participants were informed accordingly. No participant was forced in any way to continue an interview when he/she was unwilling. All interviews were recorded, but were only available to the researchers involved in the study. The original data or observations remained unchanged. After the conversation had been transcribed, the tapes were terminated. The information given by the participants during the interviews was kept anonymous and confidential at all times.

4

Results

The results obtained for the different language and gender groups are shown in table format. The tables consist of main themes identified in the interviews. Each main theme has sub-themes supporting the main theme. The total frequency of responses supporting each theme and sub-theme is revealed in the last column. The themes of the Afrikaans-speaking males are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
The experience of work–personal life interaction of Afrikaans-speaking males

Theme and sub-themes		Frequency (N = 6)
Theme 1	Experiences in the working environment	
	a) Heavy workload and occasional pressure	4
	b) Pressure from difficult employees	3
	c) Expected behaviour at work resulting in emotions being withheld	2
	d) Positive aspects of work	2
Theme 2	Causes and consequences from work to personal life	
	a) Work demands	2
	b) Strain-based consequences for the individual	5
	c) Strain-based consequences for the family	4
	d) Time-based consequences for the family	3
	e) Consequences for hobbies, school and church	2

Theme 3	The interaction between work and personal life	
	a) Strive to keep work and personal life separate	4
	b) Problematic to keep a balance between work and personal life	5
Theme 4	Strategies to manage and cope with WLI	
	a) Communication	3
	b) Planning	2
	c) Self-awareness	3
	d) Exercise and hobbies	2
	e) Strategise	3
	f) Supportive spouse, healthy marriage and family life	2

Theme 1: Experiences in the working environment

Twenty-first century companies are extremely competitive, expensive and demanding and as a result, employees and management are under constant pressure to reach higher targets (Rothmann, Steyn & Mostert, 2005). This was also true for Afrikaans-speaking males, who felt that their work environment consisted of a high workload, and who experienced pressure and stress from time to time. They also experienced pressure from employees who could be difficult and negative, responsibilities towards work and expected exceptional behaviour from the employer at all times which resulted in the withholding of emotions. The participants' work had to meet high expectations, which resulted in a heavy workload and occasional pressure for the majority of participants. Occasional pressure occurred in reaching deadlines of certain projects. It was then that the workload got heavier and individuals had to work overtime: *"It is a high intensity work that we are doing, there is no time for failure. You are always busy. It is priority jobs that you work with, project work, no time to spare. You have to put in what is expected of you"*; *"It is the biggest frustration at work, because you have pressure from the top and from the bottom"*.

In addition to a high workload and pressure, the participants who were supervisors or foremen, constantly had to deal with problematic subordinates who put them in a difficult situation by putting pressure on them to satisfy their various needs. At the same time that the subordinates (the artisans) put pressure on

them, they experienced pressure from their line managers from the top: *"I cannot express personal feelings at work. I try to always have the same personality at work. It is difficult to always be the same, everyone has their ups and downs"*. The employer expected exceptional behaviour at all times. Outbursts were not allowed and they had to push their personal feelings aside. This resulted in the individual venting his frustrations on his wife or children at home after work. Work did however also hold positive aspects for these participants. Supportive colleagues and better shift hours were some of the positive aspects of the work environment that were mentioned by two of the participants.

Theme 2: Causes and consequences from work to personal life

Specific demands of work had consequences for the individual and influenced aspects of their personal lives. The majority of participants worked on projects with deadlines that have to be met at all costs. The consequence is long working hours and working over weekends. Therefore, individuals did not spend a lot of time at home, and missed their children's activities: *"We sometimes get projects that are finalised in a short period, then you get projects that can go on for two or three years. I have seen that such big projects affects my family life"*. Work also had an influence on their hobbies, other interests, school and church: *"My farm suffers under the work, I do not always have the time for it"*; *"The farm suffers the most, then the school and everything that goes along with it"*.

Work demands did not only have psychological, but also physical strain-based consequences for the individual. *"It (work demands) influences in terms of stress ... physical tension. Sometimes when emotions bottle up, you feel it in your shoulders, your back and your mind. There is a constant knocking feeling in your thoughts that says there is something wrong, and sometimes your blood pressure even goes up"*. Both the demands of their work and personal life made it difficult to separate the two domains and divide attention between them.

Theme 3: The interaction between work and personal life

Most of the participants stated that, ideally, it was best to keep the two domains separate from each other. However, to do that in practice was not simple and very challenging to accomplish. This was confirmed in statements such as *"You can't separate the two"* and *"one struggles to keep a balance"*. The main purpose of keeping the two domains separate was not to burden their family with problems from work, and to be able to give their families their undivided attention after work. This was clear from statements such as *"It is best not to bring your work problems to home, your family does not deserve it"*; *"It is important to maintain a balance and not to bring stress from your personal life to work"*; and *"You try to leave problems at work at the end of the day, but it is not always that easy"*. To manage this interaction, the participants were asked how they coped with that interaction and which strategies they used. These strategies are discussed in the next theme.

Theme 4: Strategies to manage and cope with WLI

In order to cope with the interaction between their work and personal lives, participants used certain strategies, including good communication, planning, self-awareness, exercise and hobbies. It is necessary to have supportive spouses and healthy marriages and family lives. For some of the participants communication was very important. They felt that they had to communicate with their

spouses about their experiences at work: *"You have to communicate with your wife after a bad day, otherwise communication gaps may develop in your marriage"*. The support of a spouse, a healthy marriage and family life also played an important role in coping with the interaction: *"On the other hand, if you have a healthy marriage and a healthy family life, then it is possible for you to manage and control these things"*. Self-awareness also played a role in coping, because knowing their limits and listening to their bodies helped them to manage conflicting aspects between their work and personal lives. This was confirmed by statements such as *"To manage this interaction, you have to be honest with yourself"*; *"Know your limits and when to start delegating"* and *"How you handle it depends on yourself and your mindset"*.

Regular exercise and hobbies were also coping mechanisms for some of the participants, e.g. *"Handle the interaction by doing exercise after work, go to the gym or jogging to get rid of your frustrations ... then you feel better afterwards"*. Strategising and planning were important, where you have to plan in order to get everything done: *"Planning is very important and plays a vital role"*; *"Work according to a programme every day"*; *"You have to do good planning at work"*.

The themes of the Setswana male participants are presented in Table 2 and discussed below.

Table 2

The experience of work–personal life interaction of Setswana-speaking males

Theme and sub-themes		Frequency (N = 6)
Theme 1	Experiences in the working environment	
	a) Working with difficult people and their problems	4
	b) Pressure and stress	3
	c) No support of colleagues	2
	d) Positive aspects	2
	e) Importance and value of work	3
Theme 2	Personal aspects	
	a) Not living in same town as family	1
	b) Sport, personal activities, exercise	1
	c) Extended families	1
Theme 3	Interaction between work and personal life	
	a) No problem with interaction	4
	b) View of interaction	1
	c) Interaction sometimes difficult	2
Theme 4	Influence of personal life on work	
	a) Lack of concentration at work	3
Theme 5	Consequences of work on personal life	
	a) Lack of quality time with family	4
	b) Not able to switch off after work	1
Theme 6	Strategies to cope with WLI	
	a) Time management	1
	b) Not taking work home and not working overtime	2
	c) Planning	3
	d) Support and understanding of spouse	2

Theme 1: Experiences in the working environment

Aspects of the work environment that had an influence on Setswana males included pressure at work, stress, as well as positive aspects of the work environment. Working with difficult people was considered exhausting and a strain: *“Work circumstances are strenuous as it is difficult to work with people”*; *“People can be demanding sometimes and then you still have to treat everyone the same”*. Subordinates felt that managers occasionally put pressure on them, which was very stressful at times: *“Sometimes you have pressure from the top and from people*

working under you”; *“Work is stressful and has a lot of pressure”*. In an Afrikaans community, a language barrier often exists between different language groups, and was experienced as a lack of support from colleagues: *“There is no support of some colleagues in terms of language ... it is a problem”*.

Positive aspects of their work environment like work satisfaction, a good work environment, supportive managers, and respect from their fellow colleagues made it bearable. This was confirmed by statements such as *“I enjoy my work”*; *“I can positively say that I have good work colleagues, my manager is a very nice person, a good person, he is a good leader. So apart from*

the other obstacles that you experience, it is a nice experience to deal with people, especially older than you, if they give you the ultimate respect. Obviously there are other organisational frustrations, but it is beyond your control".

The importance and value of work was another theme that some of the participants emphasised. For them, work came first and they wanted to prove that they were capable and could accept responsibility. These participants made comments such as *"I want to make a success out of my work, then I will be happy"*; *"I have a commitment towards work and put pressure on myself to perform"*.

Theme 2: Personal aspects

Participants' personal circumstances had a positive and negative influence on the interaction between work and family life and included aspects such as not living in the same town as your family, sport (e.g. soccer practices after work), choir practice (singing in the church choir required practice after hours during the week), exercise (e.g. going to the gym and jogging), extended families (being the sole breadwinner of the family), and the nature of their community and work environment (mainly Afrikaans community). Not staying in the same town as your spouse was not a problem for one of the participants: *"The house situation not a problem, I choose to stay alone, so that the wife can stay and look after the house"*. Extra curricular activities like sport, church and choir formed part of their personal lives, which they had to give attention to: *"Personal life includes sport, church and choir"*.

Extended family had an influence on the participants, especially when they were the sole breadwinners of the family. That responsibility put constant pressure, especially financially, on participants: *"I constantly have to give my family money. Even though my brother and sisters are working, they are not responsible with their money. So when they don't have any money left for the month, I have to help them, because I am the 'responsible' one for the family"*.

The influence of individuals' cultural and linguistic socialisation on their belief and value systems, and the influence thereof on their working environment has been noted (Claassen,

Schepers & Roodt, 2004; Kotze, 2005). This was also true for Setswana individuals, who felt that the nature of the community had an effect on them. Many of them also felt claustrophobic in a "white" community, as can be seen in the following statements: *"People at work is the people of the community, a small community, and this is frustrating"*; *"...like where I was, race wasn't such a big thing, but here you become so aware of it. Here I am not supposed to go to (name of a bar mentioned), I want to drink beer and play pool, but I can't go to that place, because it is a 'white only area'- here you must go there to where the blacks go"*.

Theme 3: Interaction between personal life and work

The majority of participants felt that they did not have a problem with the interaction between their personal lives and their work: *"I feel there is a good balance between work and home"*. They also felt that, in order to be satisfied with their work and home, they had to maintain a balanced life. If it went well in one domain, it would flow over to the other domain: *"If it goes well at home it will also go well at work"*. One participant was of the opinion that work and personal life had to be in equilibrium in order to result in effective interaction between work and personal life: *"You don't think about what is going on at home, because the moment you think about problems at home, you cut in on the work domain, loosening that somehow and it becomes a lumpy situation. It functions like an equilibrium, where one person gains, the other one loses"*.

However, two participants revealed that sometimes it could be difficult to maintain a balanced life. They found it challenging to keep the two parts of their lives separate and not to talk about work at home and vice versa: *"Interaction between work and personal life ... there are huge difficulties"*; *"It is difficult to separate work from home and not to talk about work at home and vice versa"*.

Theme 4: Influences personal life has on work

The main influence that the participants' personal lives had on their work was a lack of

concentration while doing their work. Thinking of personal problems while working influenced their work negatively and their productivity levels dropped: *"If it goes bad in your personal life, you can't work"*; *"... personal life influences your concentration at work"*; *"Your concentration is not on work because of problems in your personal life"*. Not only did their personal lives influence their work, but their work also influenced their personal lives, which resulted in certain consequences. The following theme concentrates on these consequences.

Theme 5: Consequences of work on personal life

A major consequence that the participants mentioned was the lack of quality time with their families. A heavy workload and long hours were the biggest detractors on time spent with family: *"If the pressure at work gets heavy, you sometimes forget to go home after work"*; *"If work gets too much, I'll do it over weekends or during leave time"*. One participant mentioned constant thoughts regarding work that needed to be done, not switching off after work and literally dreaming about work: *"Sometimes the workload is so heavy, it stays the whole time in your head, you can't sleep or think, but just worry about it"*; *"...When it's hectic at work I constantly think of work, even when I am at home"*.

Theme 6: Strategies to cope with interaction

Some strategies participants used were time management, not taking work home, not working overtime, planning, and the support and understanding of spouses. One of the participants regarded time management as very important: *"Time management is important because you have two parts in your life that is important"*. They also felt that it was important to manage time so that they could fit both domains of their lives: *"You should manage your time by not taking work home."* Not taking work home and not working overtime were strategies that worked for two of the participants. Planning, scheduling and prioritising were also important strategies that participants mentioned: *"Work according to a schedule"*; *"Planning and prioritising are important"*. Having the support of their wives and families, who understood their work situations, helped them to cope with interaction between work and personal life: *"Work has no consequences on personal life, because my wife understands the work situation in the mine, and understands when I have to work late"*; *"My wife is very supportive"*.

The results for the Afrikaans-speaking females are discussed in the following section.

Table 3

The experience of work–personal life interaction of Afrikaans-speaking females

Theme and sub-themes		Frequency (N = 7)
Theme 1	Experiences in the working environment	
	a) Heavy workload	1
	b) Enjoyment of work	2
Theme 2	Demands personal life	
	a) Children	5
	b) Domestic obligations	4
Theme 3	c) Consequences for self and no time for housework	2
	WLI is difficult and is a struggle to keep the domains apart	
	a) Difficult to balance all three domains	4
Theme 4	b) Try to keep work and personal life separate	5
	Consequences of work on the personal life	
Theme 4	a) Influences of husband, children, marriage and domestic duties	6

Theme 5	Coping strategies	
	a) Supportive husband	3
	b) Planning and time management	5
	c) Housekeeper	2
	d) Communication	3
	e) Personality	3
	f) Experience	1
	g) Rest and quality time with family	2

Theme 1: Experiences in the working environment

This theme differs from the previous work environments of the Afrikaans and Setswana-speaking males. Afrikaans-speaking females did not experience too many stressors at work, as can be seen in the following expressions: *"I do not necessarily experience stressors at work, but I am just not in the mood for work sometimes"*. The only stressor they had at work was a heavy workload now and then, but apart from that, they enjoyed their work very much: *"I have a heavy workload and do not get everything done in time"*; *"I enjoy the work very much"*; *"I experience no problems at work, because I enjoy it"*.

Theme 2: Demands in the personal life

The challenges employees face in meeting the demands of the work and family sphere have become more frequent and increasingly more complex (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaren, 2005). Afrikaans-speaking females experienced that young children required much attention and needed a great deal of help with their homework: *"Children's homework requires a lot of attention and help, take a lot of time, especially over weekends"*. Participants also felt that their children, family, and household should be their first priority: *"After work, family comes first. I can't work late any more, so working late is now an issue for me"*. Apart from work and family, women had domestic obligations as well. They had to clean and cook when they arrive at home after work: *"Sometimes when you get home, you are tired, you have to pay attention to housework, your kids and your husband. Then you never get the things done that you wanted to do in the first place"*.

The demands experienced had consequences for the individual. They constantly worried about and wanted to be caring for their children, husband and household. As a result, they often neglected themselves in the process: *"I have less time for myself, my child comes first"*. Some aspects of the participants' personal lives occasionally had an influence on their work. Conflict with a spouse or children resulted in them being emotional at work: *"Sometimes you and your children have a fight over a small thing that turns into a big thing and then you go to work with that mood"*.

Theme 3: Interaction is difficult – struggle to keep domains apart

High demands are made on the commitment and the time of dual-earner couples and participation in the labour market of both husband and wife can have an enormous influence on their marriage and family life (Smit, 2001). The continuous rise in the rate of married women entering the labour market worldwide as well as in South Africa, affects the family life extensively (Smit, 2001). In this study, participants felt that interaction between work and personal life was difficult, because time and attention had to be divided between work, house and family: *"Interaction is hectic, it is difficult to accommodate everyone"*; *"It is not easy to separate work from personal life"*. Being a working mother was very difficult. Balancing all three domains (work, family, and house) was complicated for these participants. They had to give undivided attention to their work, families and households. In the attempt to separate these domains, it happened that work occasionally had consequences on their personal lives.

Theme 4: Consequences work has on personal life

When participants got home after a day's work, they were tired. Therefore, it was difficult to attend to all their household duties and obligations: *"Sometimes I take out my stress on the kids"; "... work has an influence on your house, kids and marriage"*. The result was unnecessary conflict with family members. In the process, the children, husband or domestic duties were often neglected. To cope and manage this interaction, the participants revealed certain strategies, which helped them to cope with this interaction.

Theme 5: Coping strategies

A supportive husband at home, who helped with the kids and domestic duties while the wife was at work made it easier for some of the participants: *"It helps to have a supportive husband at home who helps with the household and the kids"*. Their husbands fully understood their work situations. The majority of participants highlighted planning and time management as coping strategies. In order to cope with the interaction they had to manage their time. They coped by planning in advance: *"Planning is important";*

"Plan and prioritise things at work to cope". In addition, having a housekeeper lightened the domestic responsibilities: *"It helps having a fulltime housekeeper"*.

Communication also played a vital role for some of the participants. It helped when they talked about their frustrations and what they were feeling to someone, either their husbands or a friend: *"I will talk to someone when I had a bad day, I wouldn't take it home"; "... communication is very important"; "Talk things through, before leaving, don't leave things unresolved"*. Three of the participants felt that their type of personality helped them to cope with interaction: *"I don't take work stress home, because I am not that kind of person"; "I handle everything by being a responsible person"; "I do not take everything seriously."*

Years of experience taught them how to handle certain situations and people: *"Manage stress through experience"*. Two of the participants felt that rest and quality time with family did wonders: *"Our family love to go away together, maybe going camping... it helps to clear your head"*. Going away for a few days with the family had a relaxing effect.

The results for the Setswana-speaking females are discussed in the next section.

Table 4

The experience of work–personal life interaction of Setswana-speaking females

Theme and sub-themes		Frequency (N=6)
Theme 1	Experiences in the working environment	
	a) Pressure at work and working with difficult people	3
	b) Support from colleagues	3
	c) Value and importance of work	3
	d) Personality type	4
Theme 2	Personal life	
	a) House	3
	b) Extended family	1
	c) Children	1
	d) Household obligations / domestic duties	2
	e) Certain aspects of personal life influences other aspects	2
	f) Husband	1

Theme 3	Influences of work on personal life	
	a) Taking work home when having pressure at work	3
	b) Work influences individual	2
	c) Taking emotions of work out on husband	1
	d) Less time with children. because of work	1
	e) People bothers the individual at home with work related issues	1
Theme 4	Personal life's influences on work	
	a) Circumstances at home	2
	b) Divorce	1
Theme 5	Interaction	
	a) Live separate from children	2
	b) Keep work and home separate	3
	c) Interaction difficult because of work and demands of personal life	2
Theme 6	Coping mechanisms for WLI	
	a) Housekeeper and parents	3
	b) Supportive spouse	3
	c) Communication	2
	d) Time management and prioritising	3

Theme 1: Experiences in the working environment

The working environment for the Setswana-speaking females consisted of work stress and pressure, support from colleagues, importance of work and personality type required in the work environment. Working with the community and difficult people at work put pressure on some of these participants: *"Working with the community is very demanding"*. Participants experienced that members of the community came to them after work to talk about work-related issues. The result was that they seldom got the chance to switch off after work. However, having a support system at work made the pressure more bearable: *"My planner and foreman are very nice, they have a lot of patience, they support me in everything I do"*. Knowing that there were colleagues who would always help them, was comforting. Some of the participants mentioned the value and importance of work. Work was their first priority, and then family and all the rest. They had to have a job in order to have a family: *"I have to put work first, above sick child or crisis at home"*.

Having a certain type of personality was also an advantage. Participants felt that they worked

in a difficult working environment and therefore had to have a certain temperament in order to survive. Adaptability was a characteristic that they highlighted: *"If your personality fits with your work, it will be better"*; *"...adaptability towards the work environment is difficult in the beginning, but you get used to it"*. The next theme focuses on aspects of the participants' personal lives, which had an influence on their work.

Theme 2: Personal life

In the community of the participants, there was a housing shortage, because of great new developments in the mine area. Families did not get houses and most of them had to stay in single quarters. Therefore, some of them were forced to let their children stay with their parents in a nearby town: *"The thing is we do not have a house now, we are living at the Hostel in Sesheng. The children are at home, the one is staying with my mom and the other one is staying with my mother in law. So most of the time it is only my husband and me, but it is not so bad"*. Being the only breadwinner for their families could be very stressful, especially when family members constantly asked for money: *"Both of my parents are still alive. I have five brothers and*

one sister, so I am the breadwinner. Every week I have to go home, to check on them, because none of them are working. Of my family I am the only that has a job”.

Participants also felt a responsibility towards their children, husband, and domestic duties. Research shows that even when working, married women still do more household tasks than men (Kossek *et al.*, 2006). Their children needed much attention, where they had to cook and spend time with their husbands as well as attend to domestic duties: *“I do not always have time for my studies as I have planned, because my children are very demanding and need a lot of attention”*; *“I have to work, I have to make certain I look after my job, and at home I have to try my best to keep my husband happy”*; *“After work when I go home I have to clean the house and cook for my husband, after that it is already late and the children have gone to bed”*.

Theme 3: Influence of work on personal life

Married couples with or without children, or single parents, are likely to be confronted with conflicts in their work and family domain (Karatepe & Baddar, 2006). Taking work home to finish influenced time spent with family: *“When my workload is heavy, I will take it home to finish.”* Emotions built up when constantly thinking of problems at work: *“Problems at work stay in your head, although I try very hard not to let it influence me”*. One of the participants revealed that she would take it out on her husband if she had a bad and stressful day at work: *“Sometimes I’ll just be moody towards my husband.”* Talking to a spouse or a friend helped to get rid of these emotions: *“It is difficult, you know, if you haven’t put something out of your mind, it will still ring in the back of your mind. I usually feel that way. When that happens I have to speak to someone”*.

Theme 4: Personal life’s influences on work

The participants pointed out that circumstances at home and getting divorced could have consequences for work. Home circumstances like a financial crisis influenced their work negatively,

because it was difficult to concentrate, which resulted in unnecessary mistakes: *“Sometimes a family crisis influences your work, you cannot concentrate when you are emotional at work, the whole time you are thinking of the crisis at home”*. Other aspects, like going through a divorce, could also have an influence (e.g. worrying at work and not feeling well): *“While I was in the middle of my divorce, I tried my best not to let it influence my work, but sometimes I felt emotional at work, worrying, and even felt dizzy at times”*.

Theme 5: Interaction

The purpose of this theme is to understand how the participants experienced their WLI. The overall response of the participants was that they did not have a problem with their WLI and tried to keep the domains separate from each other: *“I do not take personal problems to work, but keep them separate”*; *“I keep my work and house apart, and have no problem with interaction between the two”*. However, sometimes it was difficult because of the demands of their personal lives and their work. For example, sometimes they were forced to work overtime, although they also had responsibilities at home: *“If you work overtime, you have to catch up again at home, it is difficult because you have responsibilities and duties at home, after work”*.

Theme 6: Coping mechanisms for WLI

The mechanisms or strategies the participants used included a housekeeper, supportive parents and spouses, communication, time management, and prioritising. Having a housekeeper, lightened their domestic responsibilities: *“For me it is not so difficult, because I have someone who is always at home, looking after the children and house.”* Using this support system, they had more time to spend with their husband and children in the evenings because someone had already attended to the cleaning duties. It also seemed to help when children stayed with the participants’ parents during the day, and some of them lived with their grandparents permanently: *“My parents look after my children.”*

The support and understanding of their husbands was a great contribution to coping with the interaction: *“Husband understands*

pressure at work"; *"I have a supportive husband, he helps with duties at home"*. The importance of communication with either their work colleagues or their spouses was identified as a way of coping: *"Talking to my husband about something that has upset me at work, makes me feel better. Or sometimes I will talk to a planner about something that is bothering me at work"*. They also emphasised the importance of time management and prioritising their daily activities and duties: *"A person has to prioritise and manage his time, if you cannot do time management, everything will fall on the ground"*; *"Even though the interaction is difficult, you can manage it by prioritising things at work and at home"*; *"I work according to a programme to get everything done at work"*.

4

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate how Afrikaans and Setswana-speaking males and females experienced the interaction between their work and personal lives and which strategies they used to deal with this interaction. Based on the results of the qualitative interviews, it seems as if the four groups experienced the working environment differently.

Afrikaans males, Setswana males and Setswana females experienced pressure and stress at work, where the sample of Afrikaans females did not have a similar experience. Specific work demands also had consequences for the individuals and influenced aspects of their personal lives. For the Afrikaans and Setswana males, long working hours and working over weekends influenced time spent with their families (e.g. they were not able to attend their children's sport and school activities). This substantiated the findings of Geurts and Demerouti (2003), that factors at work such as long working hours and pressure at work could have an influence on individuals' personal lives.

Work demands also had strain-based consequences for the Afrikaans males, including physical and psychological strain. The Afrikaans females experienced tiredness after a day of work, which made it difficult for them to attend to all their household duties. This resulted in

unnecessary conflict with their families and spouses. Taking work home influenced time spent with family for the Setswana females (e.g. the time it took to complete work could have been spent with the children and husbands or to attend to domestic duties). Furthermore, all of the groups, except the Setswana males, revealed that when they had a bad day at work and emotions built up, they were irritated when they got home and then took out those emotions on their spouses and families. This confirmed the findings of Geurts and Demerouti (2003) that a poor interaction between work and personal life can lead to several negative consequences, including physical consequences (e.g. headache, back pain, upset stomach, tiredness, light-headedness and pain in the chest or in the heart area), and psychological consequences (e.g. stress and burnout). It can also have negative consequences for the organisation (e.g. turnover, absenteeism and reduced performance) (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003).

Personal demands also had an influence on the participants' work. However, the four groups experienced different demands in their personal lives. For the Setswana males and females, personal problems at home (e.g. getting divorced and financial crisis like being the sole breadwinner of the family) influenced their work negatively in that it was hard to concentrate on their work, and personal problems contributed to unnecessary mistakes being made. A lack of concentration also resulted in low productivity levels at work. According to Geurts and Demerouti (2003), the difficulty of trying to create a positive and balanced interaction between work and personal life often puts strain on the individual and can have several negative implications for the organisation (i.e. reduced performance). Afrikaans females experienced that young children required a lot of attention and help with their homework. They could also not work overtime, because they had to attend to their motherly duties at home. Family characteristics (i.e. family-work conflict) have been particularly related to several demanding aspects of the family situation (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). Afrikaans males did not experience too much of a spill-over from their home lives to their work. They felt that it was

mainly the work environment that influenced their home lives.

Marais (2006) found that Setswana-speaking individuals experienced higher levels of positive home-work interference than Afrikaans-speaking individuals. Although the majority of Setswana individuals responded that they did not experience any problems with the interaction between their personal lives and their work, some found it difficult at times to maintain a balance between the two domains. These few individuals revealed aspects like extended families, being the sole breadwinner for their family, housing problems, and living and working in mainly an Afrikaans community, as factors affecting them personally. In general, the Setswana participants felt that they did have balanced lives and were successful in keeping their work and personal lives separate from each other. However, it seemed that overall, the Afrikaans individuals struggled to keep the two domains apart. Both Afrikaans males and females emphasised the difficulty of keeping their personal lives and work separate from each other. Participants explained that unhappiness in one domain would flow over to the other. When they had stress and pressure at work they would be irritated at home and pick unnecessary fights with family members. The same was true when they were having problems at home.

The experience of WLI also differed for males and females. The Afrikaans females revealed that it was difficult being a working mother. According to Smit (2001), WLI may differ for males and females, especially when they are married. Females found it complicating to balance all three domains (work, family and house), all of which needed undivided and continuous attention. Apart from their work and families, they had to attend to household duties as well, including cleaning, cooking, doing laundry and helping the children with their homework, where the Afrikaans males did not have those same obligations. This supported the findings of Kossek *et al.* (2006) that even when working, married women still do more household tasks than men. However, some of the female participants confirmed that their spouses were very supportive, and helped with household duties and children when they had to work.

The results indicated that all four of the groups made use of relatively similar strategies such as prioritising, planning, keeping to a schedule, communication with spouse or family and exercising (mainly for stress relief after work). Stoner *et al.* (2005) support these findings that prioritising, delegating and the support of spouses are some of the main strategies individuals use in order to cope with WLI. Afrikaans and Setswana females mentioned the benefits of having a supportive husband, who took over the household duties while they were at work. Afrikaans males were the only group that mentioned the importance of self-awareness when coping with work life interaction. Strategies that were aimed at changing one's attitude about what demands in both domains could realistically be met seemed to be more effective in coping with high demands from both domains than strategies aimed at changing the attitudes or behaviours of others. Changing one's own role definition or attitude has been highlighted as one of the more successful strategies in dealing with work-home conflict (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1983; Kirchmeyer, 1993).

5

Limitations

The main limitation of this study was mainly the language barrier between the researcher and participants. The researcher who conducted the interviews was Afrikaans-speaking. The result was that the interviews were held in either Afrikaans or English, which was the Setswana participants' second language. Though the respondents participated very well, a loss of relevant data could have occurred, because the Setswana participants did not have the opportunity to communicate in their mother tongue. This was evident because some of them struggled at times to express their feelings and thoughts. The use of qualitative research also had certain limitations. According to Botha (2001), data-gathering by means of qualitative interviewing is time-consuming and requires substantial expertise in both subject matter and human interaction. Therefore it is often difficult, and by implication expensive (Botha, 2001). The

occurrence of subjectivity during the research could have had an influence on the results obtained. Qualitative research requires critical self-reflection in order to become aware of subjective interpretation. This means breaking away from naïve realism and losing one's subjectivity in the process (Van Niekerk, 2002). Another limitation is that data were analysed and themes were extracted separately for each group. As a result, different themes emerged in the four different groups, making it difficult to compare the experiences of groups.

6

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research. It is strongly recommended that interviews are conducted in the participants' mother tongue, or that a translator is used. This will prevent language barriers and avoid misunderstanding. It is also recommended that in future interviews, participants from other language groups be included in order to examine if they experience WLI in the same way as the participants of this study. This study can be expanded using a quantitative research design, where questions are formulated based on the current results and data analysed in a more objective manner. In this way, hypotheses regarding the relationships to the antecedents and consequences of WLI can be examined in a more structured way. The strategies used by participants to deal with the interaction between work and life can then also be examined and their effectiveness determined.

Recommendations for the organisation. Having a language barrier is a huge obstacle for an organisation. The results prove that there is a language barrier between Afrikaans- and Setswana-speaking employees in this organisation. Effective communication is essential for organisations. The organisation must therefore address this problem and implement a strategy for effective communication amongst employees of diverse language groups.

Many of the participants experienced fatigue and stress as a result of interference between work and family life. The organisation will benefit by implementing efficient wellness

programmes that promote work–life balance for employees. Organisations must consider offering Employee and Family Assistance Programmes (EFAP). EFAPs vary from EAPs (Employee Assistance programmes) in that the EFAP is also available to the partner and dependants of employees. EFAPs offer evaluation, counselling and recommendation as well prevention services. They are usually used on a voluntary and confidential basis to identify potentially serious problems in their early stages. A number of the areas that are addressed by EFAPs include job stress, anxiety, depression, interpersonal conflicts, legal and financial problems, traumatic incident, family relationships including domestic abuse, emotional problems, grief and bereavement, self-esteem issues, and life changes (Duxbury & Higgins, 2001). In doing so, the employees will become aware of the consequences when there is an imbalance between their work and personal lives.

In most European countries, national governments have been quite active in developing legislation (e.g. more flexible working hours, facilitation of leave arrangements, and childcare facilities) that is aimed at supporting the work/non-work interface for employees (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). Furthermore, Duxbury and Higgins (2001) propose four sets of initiatives to reduce work–life conflict and improve overall quality of life namely 1) increase the number of supportive managers within the organisation; 2) provide flexibility around work; 3) increase employees' sense of control; and 4) focus on creating a more supportive work environment. The organisation could consider the strategy to offer employees more flexibility as to where and when they work, depending on their working arrangements. However, it is extremely difficult to implement flexible work arrangements in organisations where the focus is on hours and attendance, rather than productivity and performance (Duxbury & Higgins, 2001). This means that organisations that want to increase work–life balance need to initiate new performance measures that focus on objectives, results and productivity (i.e. move away from a focus on hours to a focus on productivity). This is possible if they reward productivity and not hours (Duxbury & Higgins, 2001).

Organisations may contribute to the positive attitudes of their employees by showing additional respect for their non-work domains. Organisations' commitment to employees (mainly of those who find their non-work domains important) is mainly dependent on how organisations respond to the non-work domains of employees (e.g. bearing in mind employees' personal lives when making vital decisions about careers, accommodating employees, individual non-work needs, having a flexible approach with respect to employees work schedules) (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003).

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