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Deviant behavior in retail, when sales associates “Go Bad”! Examining the relationship between the work–family interface, job stress, and salesperson deviance



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ABSTRACT

The unique role of retail sales associates combined with retailers desire to establish relational selling, make associates vulnerable to work–family conflict (WFC). Unfortunately, research examining how retail sales associates cope with a WFC is limited. This research investigates relationships between WFC, job stress, and three dimensions of salesperson deviance: organizational, interpersonal, and frontline. Findings indicate that WFC has a significant direct effect on all three deviant behaviors, as well as job stress. Interestingly, the relationship between job stress and deviant behavior is not significant. This finding adds to the debate regarding job stress as a mediator between WFC and deviant behavior or outcome variable.

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1. Introduction

Retailers as an axiomatic necessity of business must maintain strong bonds with their consumers (Anderson et al., 2007). This axiom becomes even more important when economic conditions increase competition among retailers for continued consumer support (Vida et al., 2000). Research and retailers have long recognized the importance of service delivery by retail sales associates. Quality service delivery can establish and develop strong bonds between the retailer and the consumer (Darian et al., 2005). However, these stresses to outperform the competition which impact the retailer, can also impact their sales associates.

A significant body of research within industrial/organizational psychology and management has recognized the continued erosion of the boundaries between work and family. A review of 190 work–family studies, published in IO/OB finds that a preponderance of research reflects a negative impact of work–family conflict on job performance (Eby et al., 2005). Demographic changes in family make-up and an increasingly diversified workforce make understanding the impact of work and family stresses on employees more

important and more complicated (Foster, 2005). Increased retail competition driven by high market saturation and economic uncertainty, press work–family-conflict (WFC) and its potential negative impacts to a high industry and research priority. This research examines the relationships between WFC, job stress, and the negative outcomes represented in deviant retail sales associate behavior.

Sales associate “boundary spanning” positions within the retail organization make them particularly vulnerable to WFC. Conflicting demands between customers and company lead to a variety of role stresses (Boles et al., 1997; Goolsby, 1992; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Wetzels et al., 2000). Retailers who increasingly emphasize relational selling and strong customer orientation add additional strain on work/family boundaries for sales associates. Further, sales associates are encouraged beyond relational selling to establish long-term personal relationships with their customers (Ryding, 2010). These customer relationships can require increased accessibility with sales associates resulting in incremental time-demands beyond regular work hours (Beverland, 2001; Gruen et al., 2000; Johlke and Iyer, 2012). Sales associates are pressed to work non-traditional work schedules with shifting weekday and work time assignments before being asked to manage increased demands. Additionally, retail sales associates are often required to work during periods intimately associated with family events such as; religious observances, week-ends, holidays, and more (Esbjerg et al., 2010). These additional psychological strains and increasingly demanding characteristics of

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the sales function may lead to greater conflicts between work and family responsibilities.

To date, a number of studies have examined the direct and indirect relationships between sales associates' WFC and emotional exhaustion, satisfaction, and propensity to leave in the retail context (Boles et al., 1997, 2003; Netemeyer et al., 2004). Unfortunately, very few studies have investigated the empirical link between WFC and salesperson work behaviors (Bhuiyan et al., 2005; Darrat et al., 2010; Maxwell, 2005; Netemeyer et al., 1996). This gap is significant as sales associates interact internally with members of the retail organization but also externally with the retailer's customers. Therefore, according to Caruana et al. (2001), sales associate service with internal customers, measured by desired behavior or undesired deviant behavior, affects retailer performance metrics such as shrinkage. Retailer sales performance is impacted through sales associate interactions with external customers' and the associate's ability to develop customer relationships, closing sales, cross-selling, and up-selling (Jelinek and Ahearne, 2006).

Retail sales associates often operate with a high level of autonomy which provides ample opportunity to engage in unobserved deviant behavior. A recent study suggested that 40% of sales associates admit to engaging in deviant workplace behaviors and more troubling, 66% feel that their deviant conduct will not result in any significant negative career impact (Darrat et al., 2010). While traditional models argue that job stress plays a facilitating role between WFC, workplace behavior and negative performance (Frone et al., 1992; Thoits, 1991), others assert that WFC has only a direct negative influence on performance (Netemeyer et al., 2005). Therefore, this study will examine in the retail setting, (1) the relationship between work–family interface and salesperson deviance and (2) investigate the role of job stress in this relationship.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Work–family conflict (WFC)

Work–family conflict has been widely researched outside of marketing. Pioneering research into WFC grew out of research on inter-role conflict conducted by Kahn et al. (1964). Their research investigates the pressures fathers experience from participating simultaneously in multiple, and competing roles. Their research demonstrates that pressure to comply with the demands of one role makes engaging the demands of the competing role increasingly difficult (Kahn et al., 1964). The conflict between work and family is provided as a specific example of this inter-role conflict. Leveraging a variety of extant literature, WFC is expanded to include three major sources of conflict; time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Further integration of the literature results in the development of the widely accepted definition of WFC:

“...a form of inter-role conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family related responsibilities...” (Netemeyer et al., 1996, p. 401).

WFC is not strictly the domain of married couples. WFC can also impact married and surrogate parents with or without children at home, with employed or unemployed spouses, and with single employees. In fact, it has been suggested that single employees might be even more vulnerable to WFC due to a relative lack of coping resources (Thoits, 1991). Therefore, for this

research, we follow the direction outlined in the literature defining family as

Anyone who is formally or informally considered a sanctioned family member including; spouses, significant others, parents, children, grandchildren, siblings, and children of siblings (Boyar et al., 2003, p. 179).

2.2. Work–family conflict and job stress

Although a certain degree of friction between work and family is expected in any occupation, sales and particularly relational selling as exemplified in retail sales, is uniquely vulnerable to WFC. The demands of the sales role often require that the boundaries between the work and family domains are obscured (Maxwell and Ogden, 2006).

Role expectations for the retail sales associate have witnessed a dramatic increase. Retail sales associates need to contend not only with increased administrative demands but also increased customer service responsibilities (Wetzels et al., 2000). Retailers with high expectations, rigid standards, and stringent time constraints, can aggravate sales associate stress through increased conflict between work beliefs and non-work activities. Balancing increasing job demands and non-work obligations makes the role of the sales associate increasingly stressful (Wilson, 1997).

Inter-role conflict and identity theory, suggest that WFC has a direct effect on job stress. This is due to the competing demands of multiple roles associated with work and family on time and cognitive/emotional resources (Frone et al., 1992; Thoits, 1991). We argue that WFC has a unique ability to amplify stress levels for retail sales associates because of the relative importance they place on both work and family roles. Therefore, the following relationship is hypothesized:

H₁. WFC is positively related to salesperson job stress.

2.3. Coping with work–family conflict and salesperson deviant behavior

Surprisingly, sparse attention has been given to how sales associates cope with WFC in the retail sales environment and its possible negative behavioral outcomes. Coping represents changes in cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage taxing external/internal demands on personal resources (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In the current context, coping refers to the methods or behaviors employed by sales associates to manage WFC. These behaviors attempt to alter the retail work situation to relieve employee role conflict.

Sales associates encountering incongruities between work and family roles are forced to manage family, organizational, and customer relationships successfully or risk losing their jobs. However, very few studies have investigated the potentially dysfunctional effects of coping with WFC through deviant behavior (Darrat et al., 2010). Sales associate deviance may be specific to the retail industry as it employs both problem- and emotion-focused coping (Stahl and Caligiuri, 2005).

WFC has been shown to be positively related with sales associate intentions-to-leave (Boles et al., 1997, 2003; Netemeyer et al., 2004). Departure from the retailer represents a sales associate engaging in a long term coping strategy to ameliorate the negative impact of the work–family incongruence, which results in increased employee turnover and reduced retailer performance (Babakus et al., 1996; Moncrief et al., 1997; Schneider, 1987). However, studies suggest that most sales associates tend to engage in more transitory coping mechanisms (Burke, 1998; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Dissatisfied sales associates with a lack of alternative employment options may decide to remain with the retailer until an acceptable alternative presents

itself. A lack of mobility options for these employees can increase their dis-satisfaction, thus increasing the likelihood of deviant behavior. Sales associates who feel they have been deprived of their expected family time, due to work demands, may resort to deviant behavior.

Voluntary and/or involuntary deviant behaviors which run counter to a retailer's established practices that are undertaken by a sales associate, which can result in damage to the retailer, other employees, or both (Broadbridge, 2002; Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Jelinek and Ahearne (2006) introduced a classification of deviant salesperson behavior which distinguishes between three different forms of behavior. Deviant behavior directed at the retailer is classified as deviant organizational behavior, while deviant behavior directed at other members of the retailer including co-workers is deviant interpersonal behavior, and deviant behavior targeted at customers and employees of other partner firms with the retailer is deviant frontline behavior (see Table 1).

Non-attendance behaviors, absenteeism, arriving to work late or leaving early, are considered organizational deviance behaviors. These contribute to dysfunctional norms, cause disruption to staffing, and increase expenses (Boyar et al., 2003). However, the sales associate's boundary spanning position allows for negative sales associate behavior to be directed not only at the retailer, but also toward co-workers and customers. One form of sales associate coping through deviant behavior is interpersonal aggression (Fox and Spector, 1999), by venting their work-related frustrations with the retailer toward co-workers and/or customers.

Sales associates experiencing an increasing imbalance in favor of their work role at the expense of their family role are increasingly likely to retaliate against the retailer by engaging in deviant behavior (Darrat et al., 2010). Frustrated sales associates may attribute their dissatisfaction to standards and expectations set by the retailer and seek to retaliate against the perceived source of the problem which could be co-workers, customers, or the retail organization (Martinko et al., 2002). Thus, we hypothesize the following relationships:

H₂. WFC is positively related to salesperson deviant organizational behavior.

H₃. WFC is positively related to salesperson deviant interpersonal behavior.

H₄. WFC is positively related to salesperson deviant frontline behavior.

2.4. Coping with job stress and salesperson deviant behavior

Job stress can result in sales associates engaging in self-initiated coping mechanisms. Empirical investigations into employee related

job stress coping mechanisms provides insight into the strategies employees, who value their work roles, engage to mitigate discrepancies between personal and professional lives (Broadbridge, 2002; Haar, 2006; Penley et al., 2002). Emotion-focused coping regulates emotions resulting from elevated stress due to situations which must be endured, for example, job stress (Stahl and Caligiuri, 2005).

According to the role stress model (Behrman and Perreault, 1984) and coping theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), elevated stress levels are associated with increased deviant behaviors as a reaction to perceived injustice by sales associates from the retailers (Jackson and Schuler, 1985). One such method may be for sales associates to withdraw from their non-work and/or work obligations (Dubinsky et al., 1986), which would be represented as absenteeism. Absenteeism may provide immediate relief, but may inflate future work demands, thus generating an increasingly negative performance cycle. Salesperson performance can also be measured by items such as expense control, satisfaction with fellow workers, supervision, company policies, and advancement opportunities (Behrman and Perreault, 1984; Comer et al., 1989). Thus, we hypothesize the following relationships:

H₅. Salesperson job stress is positively related to organizational deviance.

H₆. Salesperson job stress is positively related to interpersonal deviance.

Sales associates may also attempt to relieve their job stress by engaging in deviant behavior beyond the organization and their co-workers. Job stress may drain sales associates cognitive and emotional resources (patience, understanding, etc.) resulting in negative interactions with customers (Babin et al., 1999; Kahn, 1990). The boundary spanning nature of the retail sales position makes it a particularly sensitive role within the retail organization. Frontline sales associates must daily engage in interactions with customers which can create substantial role stress (Boles et al., 1997). Research has confirmed the negative impact of job stress on service employees' customer-directed extra-role performance (CDERP) (Netemeyer et al., 2005). CDERP represents extraordinary service efforts sales associates make on behalf of their customers during the employee–customer interface (Netemeyer et al., 2005). For the unfortunate retailer, sales associate role stress can result in the engagement of deviant frontline behavior with customers. This can result in a variety of catastrophic service failures. Customers may be ignored, unassisted, treated rudely, and/or abused. Certain sales associate deviant behaviors such as in-attention, can compound damage to the retailer by increasing shrinkage and reducing sales thus severely impacting profitability. Sales associates may also choose to cope with job stress by resorting to customer oriented deviant behaviors such a deceptive selling tactics or

Table 1
Typology of salesperson deviance (Jelinek and Ahearne, 2006).

Deviant organizational behavior	Deviant interpersonal behavior	Deviant frontline behavior
"Fudged" an expense report.	Cursed at other co-workers and colleagues.	Made the sales organization look bad to people who do not work at the organization.
"Worked" from home but really did not do much work at all.	Criticized other co-workers and colleagues.	Told customers some of the things that are bothersome about the sales organization.
Put off work-related duties to attend to personal things.	Blamed other co-workers and colleagues when things went wrong at work.	Complained to family/friends about the sales organization.
Ran personal errands when should have been doing work.	Accepted credit for work of other people.	Said rude things about the sales organization or manager.
Used company resources (paper, supplies, fax, copier) for personal purposes.	Said hurtful things to other co-workers and colleagues.	Used deceptive selling tactics when selling to prospects or customers.
Ignored input from sales manager on how to do the job.		Acted out work-related frustrations in front of a customer.
		Did not follow specific customer rules or etiquette.

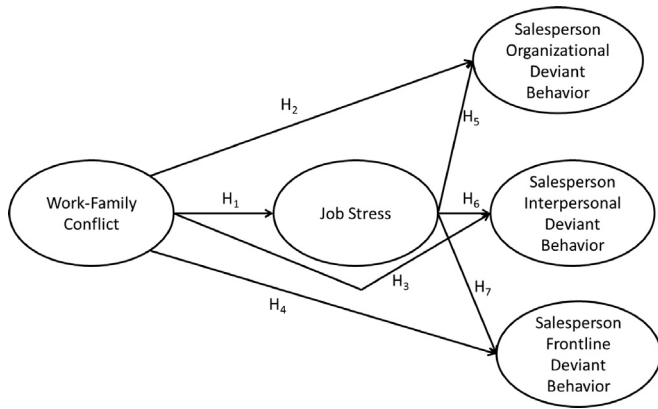


Fig. 1. Research model with hypotheses noted. All hypotheses are in a positive direction.

unethical closing practices, thus inflicting long-term damage on the retailer. Thus, we hypothesize the following relationship:

H₇. Salesperson job stress is positively related to salesperson deviant frontline behavior.

The proposed model is summarized in Fig. 1.

3. Methodology

An empirical test of our hypotheses was undertaken through the collection of survey data. The data was gathered using pencil and paper questionnaires completed by active retail sales associates located in the Southeastern United States. The resulting sample was comprised of 147 retail sales associates representing a variety of retail service formats, such as department stores specialty retail stores, and factory outlets. The sample did not include food retailers or restaurants. Participants were provided with a screening question related to hours scheduled to insure full-time status of a minimum of 30 h weekly. A complete demographic description of the sample can be found in Table 2.

Gathering data from survey respondents associated with sensitive behaviors such as deviance can often result in low response rates and/or inaccurate responses (Robinson and Greenberg, 1998). Several steps were adopted to minimize these adverse conditions during data gathering. First, the survey was carefully worded to reduce the threatening nature of certain items, which has been shown to reduce low-base reporting (Peterson, 2002). Next, voluntariness (Fox and Spector, 1999) and confidentiality (Aquino et al., 1999) have been demonstrated to reduce a respondent's reluctance to disclose information. Therefore, it was stressed with each respondent from introduction, to survey engagement, that their participation was voluntary and would remain confidential. Additionally, the consent document was kept separate from the survey and was the only material which contained any respondent identifying information. No identifying information remained with the survey instrument to be when submitted. It has been argued that these additional efforts are necessary to successfully elicit reporting of deviant behaviors (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Respondents were also encouraged to complete the survey outside of the workplace. Finally, the most sensitive measures related to engagement in deviant behaviors were framed in a time period comprised of the past year. Providing a retrospective time frame of twelve months has been suggested as a method to alleviate respondent unease toward disclosing information regarding sensitive behaviors (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998).

Table 2
Demographic composition of the sample respondents.

Demographic variable	Percent
Gender	
Male	38
Female	62
Marital Status	
Married	25
Unmarried	75
Income	
< \$15,000	7
\$15,000–39,999	73
\$40,000–59,999	12
\$60,000–79,999	6
\$80,000–99,999	2
Ethnicity	
Caucasian	65
African American	25
Hispanic	8
Asian/Pacific islander	2
Education	
Less than high school	2
High school	8
Some college	65
College degree	24
Advanced degree (Masters, JD, etc.)	1
Average age	28 years old

3.1. Measures

Measures used in this research were adopted from previously operationalized scales. Work–family conflict (WFC) is a five item scale introduced by Netemeyer et al. (1996). Job stress is a 4 item scale developed by House and Rizzo (1972). Both were measured using a seven-point Likert scale anchored by (1) “strongly disagree” and (7) “strongly agree”. Interpersonal deviance was introduced by Jelinek and Ahearne (2006), while both organizational and frontline deviances were introduced by Bennett and Robinson (2000). Interpersonal is a four item scale, while frontline and organizational deviance scales contain three items. All deviance scales are measured using a seven-point scale anchored by (1) “never” and (7) “always”. The deviance scales received minor modifications to adapt them to a retail setting.

3.2. Analysis

The data in this study was analyzed using structural equation modeling with AMOS 19.0, following the two-step approach (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). First a measurement model was fit using confirmatory factor analysis. The resulting measurement model failed to demonstrate fit within the standard measures of acceptability. Using modification indices, regression weights, and the standardized residual covariance matrix, two items (one from WFC and one from interpersonal deviance) exhibited high levels of collinearity with other measures and were consequently deleted according to established practice (Bentler and Bonett, 1980). The items were redundant within their scales thus allowing the remaining items to adequately represent the domain of each construct. Re-fitting the data in the measurement model resulted in an acceptable level of fit as demonstrated by the following indices: $\chi^2(106) = 148.1, p\text{-value} = 0.004; \chi^2/df \text{ ratio} = 1.397$. Absolute and incremental measures of fit also exhibited acceptable values; GFI=0.90, NFI=0.88, IFI=0.96, TLI=0.95, CFI=0.96, and RMSEA 0.05 (Kline, 2010). These purified measures were consequently used as input for the structural model.

Next, the reliability and validity of the multi-item scales was assessed. All of the individual scales exceeded the recommended minimum standards for construct reliability (values greater than 0.60) and variance extracted (greater than 0.50) (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). The measurement model was tested to ensure the minimum requirements for discriminant validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Confirmatory analysis and reliability analysis results (AVE and composite reliability estimates) are summarized in Table 3. Furthermore, the confidence interval around the correlation estimates between each pair of constructs does not include 1, which is another indicator of discriminant validity.

With the demonstration of acceptable fit in the measurement model, the structural model was fit to test the structural paths as indicated by the hypotheses (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The goodness-of-fit indices for the structural model also indicated an acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(109)=237.56$, $p\text{-value}=0.000$, $\chi^2/df\text{ ratio}=2.179$, $GFI=0.89$, $IFI=0.94$, $TLI=0.92$, $CFI=0.94$, and $RMSEA\ 0.06$ (Kline, 2010).

An examination of the path weights associated with each hypothesis reveals that all are significant with the exception of H_5 – H_7 . Hypothesis 1, representing the path from WFC to salesperson organizational deviance is accepted ($p \leq 0.05$), thereby suggesting that when work conflicts with family responsibilities, sales associates will engage in deviant behaviors toward the organization. Hypothesis 2 was also significant ($p \leq 0.05$), which posits a positive relationship between WFC and interpersonal deviance. That is, sales force cohesion also suffers in the presence of work–family conflict. Likewise, Hypothesis 3, representing the path from WFC to frontline deviant behavior is significant ($p \leq 0.05$), which suggests that work–family imbalance may lead to deteriorating customer relationships. Hypothesis 4, representing the path from WFC to job stress was also significant ($p \leq 0.05$), suggesting that work–family conflict contributes significantly to a salesperson’s job stress. Interestingly, all structural paths from job stress to the three dimensions of salesperson deviance (H_5 – H_7) were not significant ($p \geq 0.05$), however H_7 was significant at ($p \leq 0.10$). A summary of the structural results is provided in the research model is found in Fig. 2.

Finally, examining the squared multiple correlations (SMC) provides information regarding the proportion of variance explained by the predictors of the constructs in question. Approximately 65% ($SMC=0.649$) of the variance associated with job stress is explained by its lone predictor, WFC. In addition, the three measures of deviant behavior also exhibit high levels of explained variance with approximately 13% interpersonal ($SMC=0.129$), 19% of frontline ($SMC=0.182$), and 23% of organizational explained ($SMC=0.226$) by their predictor.

4. Discussion

The results from this research indicate that WFC has significant direct effects on sales associates organizational, interpersonal and frontline deviance behaviors. That is, sales associates tend to handle the WFC frustrations by retaliating against the perceived source of the imbalance, which can be the retailer, co-workers, and/or customers. This deviance is considered a type of transitory

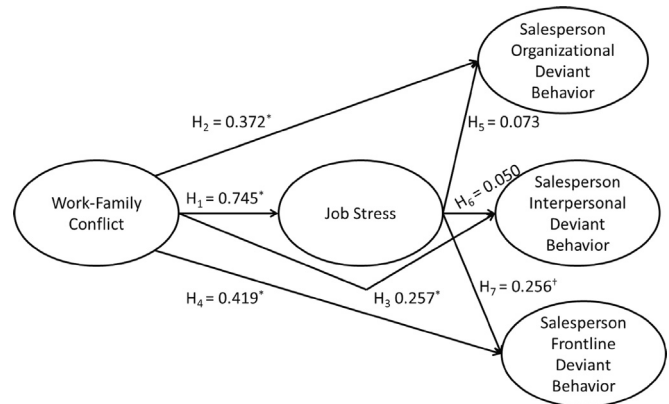


Fig. 2. Structural model results. All figures represented are unstandardized loadings. †Significant at 0.10 level. *Significant at 0.05 level.

Table 3
Confirmatory factor analysis and reliability analysis.

Item (SMC)	Unstd. Ldg. ^a	Mean	Std. dev.	AVE	Comp. rel.
Work Family Conflict		3.45	1.56	0.60	0.85
The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life.	0.73				
The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities.	0.72				
My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfill family duties.	0.89				
Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities.	0.72				
Job Stress (0.649)		3.05	1.58	0.57	0.83
My job tends to directly affect my health.	0.73				
At the end of the day, my job leaves me “stressed-out”	0.83				
Problems associated with work have kept me awake at night.	0.77				
I feel fidgety or nervous because of my job.	0.66				
Salesperson Organizational Deviant Behavior (0.226)		2.38	1.22	0.56	0.79
How often did you run personal errands when you should have been doing work?	0.82				
How often did you use store resources (paper, supplies, fax, copier) for personal purposes?	0.66				
How often did you put off work-related duties to attend personal things?	0.75				
Salesperson Interpersonal Deviant Behavior (0.129)		2.04	1.22	0.52	0.83
How often did you curse at coworkers and colleagues?	0.76				
How often did you criticize coworkers and colleagues?	0.76				
How often did you say hurtful things to coworkers and colleagues?	0.82				
Salesperson Frontline Deviant Behavior (0.182)		1.81	0.96	0.53	0.61
How often did you tell customers some of the things that are bothersome about the store you work for?	0.67				
How often did you use deceptive tactics while selling to prospects or customers?	0.62				
How often did you make the store look bad to people who do not work at the store?	0.68				

^a All loadings are significant at or below 0.05 level; SMC—Squared Multiple Correlation.

escapist behavior (Burke, 1998) used as a coping mechanism to manage the competing role demands (Broadbridge, 2002; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Dis-proportionate demands on the work role will likely spill-over and place a strain on personal obligations. It is conceivable that sales associates would attempt to compensate for heightened work demands through deviant behaviors such as executing non-work activities (e.g., personal errands) while remaining on company time or engaging deceptive selling techniques to force a premature sale. The positive relationship between WFC and job stress was also confirmed. Therefore, job induced tensions at home likely follow sales associates to their job, leading to a cycle of ever increasing stress in search of remediation through deviant behavior.

The lack of significance at ($p \leq 0.05$) associated with job stress and the mediating relationship between WFC and any of the three dimensions of salesperson deviance was not anticipated. A possible explanation for this result may lie within the retail environment and those employed in it. Research has demonstrated that realistic job previews (RJP) serve to frame job expectations (Premack and Wanous, 1985). In general this would refer to formal RJP presented by the firm. Research has demonstrated that retail sales work expectations are widely known by potential employees and yet are not perceived positively (Broadbridge, 2003). In addition, RJP have also been demonstrated to increase self-selection for employment (Breugh, 1983). Therefore, given that associates have a prior understanding of the time expectations in retailing and their continued self-selection for retail sales, would tend to indicate an acknowledgment that work–family conflict will be a result of employment (Henly et al., 2006). For this reason, it is possible that job stress caused by work–family conflict is an employee expectation which is being met, thus making it an outcome of employment. In this way, the results would confirm Netemeyer et al. (2005) that conflicts in the work–family interface experienced in high-stress customer service positions directly impact employee behavioral outcomes. As such, our findings offer the potential for additional research which would further the understanding of job stress as an outcome variable as opposed to a mediating variable.

Within the structural model the path from WFC to frontline deviant behavior represents the highest loading. The path from job stress to frontline deviant behavior while not significant at $p \leq 0.05$, is significant at $p \leq 0.10$ in the direction hypothesized. In combination these results indicate that WFC and job stress both lead to the most damaging of deviant behaviors for retailers which is with their customers. As noted earlier, retailers are fighting in a highly competitive and saturated market for customers. Increasing WFC and job stress with sales associates negates all efforts undertaken to develop strong relationships with customers further undermining the retailer in the marketplace.

Resources both cognitive and emotional used by sales associates in the high-stress retail sales work environment, often represent the same resources utilized in their family role. Resources such as patience and understanding are also endemic in creating interpersonal relationships necessary for successful buyer–seller relationship (Kahn, 1990). Therefore, one possible variable which could mediate the relationship between work–family conflict and salesperson deviance could be emotional exhaustion. Previous research has demonstrated emotional exhaustion mediates relationships between work–family conflict and employee turnover intentions (Boles et al., 1997), as well as work–family conflict and employees' emotional displays (Zhao et al., 2014). This seems especially true in environments where frontline employees spend most of their time facing customer complaints/concerns and/or failing to close sales. Consequently, it could reasonably be hypothesized that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between work–family conflict and

salesperson deviance. The high levels of work–family conflict prevalent in the retail environment could deplete the associate's coping resources leading to exhaustion. The resulting emotional exhaustion could be seen by sales associates as unjustified and personally costly resulting in a reduced level of service offered to customers and other forms of salesperson deviance (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Lam and Chen, 2012). Consequently, retail sales associates in an effort to reduce conflict between high-stress work environments and their family environments, may choose to spend less of their valuable cognitive and emotional resources at work as a coping mechanism. This form of coping would result in sales associates engaging in deviant behaviors.

Meta-analytic evidence also indicates that a persistent negative relationship exists between WFC and job satisfaction (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998). Therefore, when a retail sales associate experiences WFC causing them to be dissatisfied with their job, retaliation against the organization and its customers may result. Research demonstrates that dissatisfied employees are more likely to engage in deviant organizational behaviors negatively affecting individual performance and/or organizational effectiveness (Bolin and Heatherly, 2001; Lau et al., 2003). Therefore another potential construct which could mediate the relationship between work–family conflict and deviant behavior is job dissatisfaction. Research indicates that job dissatisfaction may play a role in driving salesperson deviance (Darrat et al., 2010). Job stress may influence retail sales associate job dissatisfaction thus inciting deviant behaviors such as lashing out at the retailer and/or its affiliates.

This study did not intend to test these alternate variables as mediators between the relationships of work–family conflict and deviant behaviors. However, the findings offer direction for future research which could help demonstrate that emotional exhaustion and/or job dissatisfaction, mediate the relationship between work–family conflict and salesperson deviant behaviors. Furthermore, job stress, as it relates to the retail sales environment, is better viewed as an outcome variable as opposed to a mediating variable.

5. Limitations and future research

One limitation of this study is the make-up of the sample. The respondents represent a limited geographical area and are relatively young, thus limiting the generalizability of the study. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, our primary intent was to shed light on the understudied relationship between the work–family interface and salesperson deviant behavior. Future researchers should replicate this study with more diverse and representative samples.

Another potential shortcoming of this study is the use of a relatively untested dimension of front line deviance (Jelinek and Ahearne, 2006). Some problems were encountered with the scale (i.e., comparatively low means and composite reliability values) which indicate that further investigation and refinement of the front line deviance scale may be warranted. The other two deviance dimensions, interpersonal and organizational (Bennett and Robinson, 2000) are relatively new to marketing, but have been widely utilized in management research.

A potential limitation is the use of self-reporting by the sales associate on the deviance scales, as the associates may have been hesitant in reporting such behaviors. However, a finding that sales associates underreported deviance behaviors would only reinforce the findings as the paths between the variables would be proportionally stronger.

Finally, future research could investigate the use of relationship monikers within the work environment. The reference to retail sales associates as being members of a work “family” or “team”

may increase the work–family friction through role conflict. The inclusion of the associate into a “relationship” role at work (e.g. work–family) may force them to choose which family to best support. This may lead to increased stress thus exacerbating the relationships demonstrated in this research.

6. Managerial implications

Our results have important managerial implications. First, managers require training to raise their awareness that their sales associates are not only members of the organizations, but also members of a family. Membership carries demands and responsibilities which are unique to the role the associate engages. Managers ignore this reality at the peril of contributing to deteriorating relationships between the sales associate and the organizations, but also between the sales associate and the customer. The result is damage to the retailers' organizational goals both at the employee level and through sales and goodwill with consumers.

Second, retailers can implement family-friendly policies signaling support to sales associates for their family member role. Programs such as mentoring, child care, family leave, flextime, maternity/paternity leave, and on-site job counseling for work–family matters, can contribute to a positive image for a retailer in the minds of employees (Levering and Moskowitz, 2003). Not only do these programs help alleviate work/family strains, leading more satisfied sales associates, but likely have a positive impact on recruitment efforts.

Finally, retail managers need to examine sales associate role requirements. Setting unreasonable sales objectives can increase pressures ratcheting up stress on an already demanding work schedule. To help mitigate these negative influences, retailers could adopt compensation systems which in addition to sales, reward customer relationship management using indicators such as customer satisfaction ratings. Furthermore, retail managers could work with their sales associates to identify which aspects of the job create the most work/family friction. Strategies could then be adopted which adapt work activities to reduce family friction, while maintaining high work standards. These can often be implemented through small changes but have major impacts. For instance, flexible scheduling of break times for sales associates which allow for engagement in family activities (e.g. lunch with spouse, picking children up from school, dentist appointments, etc.), while still allowing for optimal coverage during busy sales periods. Simple changes like this can help sales associates feel trusted and empowered to make balanced work–family decisions cultivating a supportive organizational culture for the retailer. This supportive atmosphere can have further benefit for the retailer's customer as well as their affiliates.

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