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Trait emotional intelligence and work–family conflict in fathers

Laura Biggart *, Philip Corr, Margaret O'Brien, Neil Cooper

University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK

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ABSTRACT

The influence of trait emotional intelligence (Trait EI) on work–family conflict is important for individual difference effects in regulating emotion in work–family life. Trait EI's influence on perceptions of work interfering with family (WIF) life, and family life interfering with work (FIW) performance, is of special relevance and was examined in 179 employed fathers. It was hypothesised that Trait EI would negatively predict both WIF and FIW in a model containing known WIF/FIW antecedents. In addition, of the four Trait EI factors (Self-control, Emotionality, Sociability and Well-being), Trait EI Emotionality would predict WIF, Trait EI Self control would predict FIW, and Trait EI Sociability would predict both WIF and FIW, all negatively. Results confirmed the first and third hypotheses: regression analyses revealed that Trait EI was negatively associated with levels of WIF and FIW, as was Trait EI Self-control, indicating that fathers who are able to regulate their emotions experience less work–family conflict. Neither Trait EI factors of Emotionality nor Sociability significantly predicted WIF or FIW. The implications of these findings for work–family balance are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) reflects individual differences in identifying and managing emotion in self and others. The broad concept of EI has undergone extensive empirical investigation (Matthews, Roberts, & Zeidner, 2004) and there is growing consensus on two models: (a) the “ability model”, measuring maximal performance (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000) and (b) the “trait model”, measuring typical performance (Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

Trait EI, or emotional self-efficacy, as delineated by Petrides, Pita, and Kokkinaki (2007), assesses an individual's belief in their emotional abilities and is defined as “A constellation of emotional self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies” (p. 287). Trait EI has four factors: Self-control, indicating emotion regulation, impulsiveness and stress management; Emotionality, indicating emotional expression, trait empathy, emotion perception and quality of relationships; Sociability, indicating emotion management (influencing others), assertiveness and social awareness; and Well-being, indicating optimism; self-esteem beliefs and trait happiness.

Work–family balance has been identified as a major problem in modern society (Kanter, 1977) and work–family conflict has become an important area of individual differences research, defined

by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) as a form of inter-role conflict between the competing demands of work and family roles. Specifically, three types of conflict were proposed: time, strain, and behaviour-based conflict, each occurring bi-directionally from work-to-family and from family-to-work. Factors influencing conflict have included organisational and family characteristics, but less research has considered dispositional factors, such as Trait EI, which could offer insight for predicting work–family conflict.

Work–family studies have focused on negative affect, coping and personality (Aryee, Luk, Leung, & Lo, 1999; Bruck & Allen, 2003; Carlson, 1999; Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004). This study extends previous research, focusing on emotional aspects of personality. It is proposed that work and family experiences, which involve highly salient roles for fathers (Thoits, 1991), should prove problematic, as demands from each domain compete for their attention. Recent findings suggest high Trait EI individuals employ better emotional responses in dealing with and managing stressful effects of emotional dissonance experienced at work (Mikolajczak, Menil, & Luminet, 2007).

Previous dispositional research on work–family conflict using the big-5 model revealed that neuroticism is positively related to work–family conflict (Bruck & Allen, 2003), and is a predictor of both directions of work–family conflict (Wayne et al., 2004) and a moderator for family interfering with work (Blanch & Aluja, 2009). High neuroticism is associated with being less likely to control impulses and less able to cope with stressful situations (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Agreeableness, encompassing co-operation and empathy, has been positively associated with family interfering with work (Kinnunen, Vermulst, Gerris, & Makikangas, 2003).

* Corresponding author. Address: Centre for Research on the Child and Family, Faculty of Social Sciences, Elizabeth Fry Building, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK. Tel.: +44 1603 592068; fax: +44 1603 593552.

E-mail address: l.biggart@uea.ac.uk (L. Biggart).

Fathers' work–family life has been less extensively studied (Mitchell et al., 2007), even though they face greater expectations from employers to be work focused. Fathers, therefore, may be under more pressure than mothers to minimise expressing family concerns at work (Thompson, Thomas, & Maier, 1992). This would suggest that Trait EI Self-control may be particularly relevant in reducing family interfering with work (FIW), whilst the Trait EI factor of emotionality more relevant to reducing work interfering with family (WIF).

A number of known work–family conflict antecedents were included in this study to examine unique Trait EI incremental validity. Work related antecedents tend to predict WIF, whilst family related antecedents tend to predict FIW. Job demands and control are found to influence work–family conflict positively and negatively respectively (Gronlund, 2007), producing psychological pre-occupation whilst physically at home. Work hours reduce the physical time available for family involvement (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). Partner work hours are shown to positively influence the degree of father involvement (Barnett & Baruch, 1987) thus providing an indicator for family demands. Although, perhaps counter intuitively, gender equity attitudes or fathers' reported higher share of responsibility for childcare tasks is related to less work–family conflict (Allard, Haas, & Hwang, 2007). Organisational support from colleagues and boss and partner support are shown to be negatively related to WIF and FIW respectively (Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994).

Dispositional antecedents of work–family conflict include negative affect, which has consistently been found positively to influence work–family conflict (Michel & Clark, 2009), and was included to control for participants' state affectivity. Social identity theory suggests social roles, such as father or worker, are an important part of identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social role salience guides the level of time and emotion invested by an individual in that domain. High work salience is found positively to relate to FIW with the opposite direction for high family salience (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000).

The underpinning theory for our hypotheses is Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive appraisal theory which suggests that perceptions of emotional factors, such as Trait EI and negative affect, are likely to influence self-reporting on potentially threatening situations such as work–family conflict. Therefore, high Trait EI individuals should perceive less threat due to their perception of having good emotional coping resources. There are four hypotheses for this study. First, that Total Trait EI will be negatively associated with work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW). Secondly, that Trait EI Emotionality will be negatively associated with WIF, because better emotional expression and emotional identification, should improve communicating with one's family (Edwards, 2006). Thirdly, that Trait EI Self-control will predict lower levels of FIW, as belief in their ability to moderate mood, handle stress and resist impulse should be a coping resource in the face of work–family strain. Fathers' belief that they can regulate their emotions should minimise emotional 'swamping' of cognitive functions in the face of work family tension and maximise chances of problem solving. It is also expected that fathers will be influenced by workplace norms to display less emotion at work and not let family interfere with work. Finally, it is hypothesised that Trait EI Sociability will be negatively associated with both directions of work–family conflict, as the ability to negotiate and influence others should help foster work–family solutions.

Hypotheses:

- (1) Total Trait EI will predict lower levels of WIF and FIW in addition to known antecedents;
- (2) Trait EI Emotionality will predict lower levels of WIF;

- (3) Trait EI Self-control will predict lower levels of FIW;
- (4) Trait EI Sociability will predict lower levels of WIF and FIW.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Co-resident fathers were recruited from: schools ($n = 161$) and employers ($n = 18$; mean age = 40 years, $SD = 6$ years; age range: 23–57 years). Fathers had a mean number of two children (range 1–4 children; mean age of the youngest child = 6 years, $SD = 3$ years). Ninety-one percent ($n = 163$) were employed full-time (over 30 h per week), with 3% ($n = 6$) working part-time (under 30 h per week) and 6% ($n = 10$) unidentified. Eighty-two percent ($n = 146$) were on permanent contracts with 16% self-employed and 2% on temporary or fixed-term contracts. Fifty-three percent ($n = 94$) were employed in the private sector and 36% ($n = 65$) were employed in the public sector and 11% ($n = 20$) unidentified. Sixty-five percent of fathers had responsibility for staff.

2.2. Materials and procedure

In 2008, 3000 children from 11 schools in the UK were given an envelope to take home to their father containing the questionnaire, a short letter outlining the study and requesting fathers to fill in the anonymous questionnaire and return it to the researcher with a freepost envelope. Fathers were also recruited from three employers, via their intranet page, describing the study and requesting fathers to participate anonymously by clicking a link to the online questionnaire.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Demographic variables

Occupation was coded into two groups: professionals/managers (managers and senior officials, professional, associate professional and technical) and non-professionals/non-managers (administrative and secretarial, skilled trades, personal service, sales and customer services, process, plant and machine operatives and elementary) through the Standard Occupational Class 2000 codes (Office for National Statistics, 2000a, 2000b). Fifty-eight percent of fathers were professionals or managers.

2.3.2. Dispositional measures

Negative affect (NA) was measured by the PANAS-NA scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), using a 10-item scale, ($\alpha = .85$). Respondents recorded how they felt in the last week on a 5-point scale (e.g. upset, from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*)).

Work and family salience were measured using a 5-point scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with three items for each domain (work salience $\alpha = .67$, family salience $\alpha = .65$) (e.g. *the most important things that happen to me involve my family*) (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003).

Trait EI was measured by the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form (TEIQue SF) (Petrides & Furnham, 2006) with 30 items ($\alpha = .89$) using a 7-point scale, from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). Four factors include: Well-being (six items, $\alpha = .81$) (e.g. *I feel that I have a number of good qualities*); Self-control (six items, $\alpha = .72$), (e.g. *I tend to get involved with things I later wish I could get out of*); Emotionality (eight items, $\alpha = .69$) (e.g. *I often find it difficult to see things from another person's viewpoint*); Sociability (six items, $\alpha = .73$) (competence) (e.g. *I'm usually able to influence the way other people feel*).

Work-family conflict was measured by Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) work-family conflict scale based on Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) model, with 18 items, ($\alpha = .85$) using a 5-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with nine items for each direction: WIF ($\alpha = .79$) (e.g. *My work keeps me from family activities more than I would like*) and FIW ($\alpha = .78$) (e.g. *The time I spend on family responsibilities often interferes with my work responsibilities*).

2.3.3. Work variables

Work hours measure work time demands of actual average hours worked per week including overtime, excluding commuting time.

Job demands and control were measured using items from the job content questionnaire (Karasek, 1979). Job demands (nine items, $\alpha = .78$) measure the psychological work-load (e.g. *I am free from conflicting demands that others make*). Job control is a combined measure of job autonomy (three items, $\alpha = .75$) (e.g. *my job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own*) and level of skill (six items, $\alpha = .83$) they have (e.g. *my job requires me to be creative*). Items are measured on a 4-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

Work support (three items, $\alpha = .76$) is measured using the items developed by (Van Daalen, Willemsen, & Sanders, 2006): support gained from the boss, colleagues and the organisation using a 5-point scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) (e.g. *my supervisor accommodates me when I have family business to take care of*).

2.3.4. Family variables

Partner support (three items, $\alpha = .80$) measures the support gained from the fathers' partner about work problems (e.g. *my partner is willing to listen to my work problems*) (Van Daalen et al., 2006) using a 5-point scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Partner's work hours were measured as actual average hours worked per week including overtime, excluding commuting time.

Gender equity attitude was recorded using one item with a 5-point scale from 1 (*mostly myself*) to 5 (*mostly my partner*) from Al-lard et al. (2007), (e.g. *in your family who has the main responsibility for the children's care and upbringing?*).

2.4. Data analysis

Variables were screened for normality and outliers in line with assumptions for multivariate analysis. To reduce the impact of extreme skewness and kurtosis, transformations were carried out on: work hours and family salience (square root); work support, partner support, Trait EI Self-control and Emotionality (reflect and square root and reflected back); negative affect (inverse). Remaining outliers were replaced with the next highest score for: work hours (three cases), partner hours (one case) and Trait EI Emotionality (two cases).

WIF and FIW were dependent variables in OLS regression analysis. For each dependent variable, two steps of explanatory variables were progressively entered into a regression model: (1) FIW or WIF controlling for each direction of conflict; negative affect controlling for influences of state affectivity on response; (2) Trait EI variables; work variables; and family variables. To test for common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), Harman's one factor test using unrotated principal component factor analysis revealed the presence of seven distinct factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, rather than a single factor. Three factors together accounted for 48% of the total variance and the first (largest) factor did not account for a majority of the variance (15%).

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1 Age	40.05	6.09	1.00																
2 Occupation	18.57	6.56	.04	.85															
3 Negative affect	44.43	9.67	-.03	.10	.32***														
4 Work hours	33.98	6.27	-.19*	.05	.12	.78													
5 Job demands	45.89	4.50	-.17*	.10	.15	.13	.85												
6 Job latitude	10.72	2.89	-.15	-.16*	-.15	-.01	-.05	.76											
7 Work support	10.94	2.83	-.07	-.00	.01	-.04	-.03	.33**	.80										
8 Partner support	22.22	13.40	.11	-.07	-.22	-.23**	-.09	-.09	.14	.30***									
9 Partner work hours	2.35	0.85	.06	-.00	-.15	-.19*	-.11	-.03	-.04	-.15*	.04								
10 Gender equity	13.14	1.91	.03	-.13*	-.11	.02	.02	.06	-.02	-.02	.65								
11 Family salience	149.00	23.00	-.17*	.37***	.03	.06	-.03	.18*	.17*	.02	.23**	.06							
12 Trait EI total	32.83	5.84	-.01	-.52***	.02	-.02	-.05	.17*	.21**	-.01	.31**	.89	.81						
13 Trait EI Well-being	28.94	6.06	-.16*	-.47***	-.07	-.00	-.06	.22**	.05	-.03	.09	.77***	.60***	.71					
14 Trait EI Self-control	37.99	7.58	-.09	-.21**	.04	.06	-.05	.08	.22**	.04	.17*	.29**	.79***	.48***	.69				
15 Trait EI Emotionality	29.00	5.86	-.23*	-.26**	.06	.14	.04	.16*	.07	-.03	-.03	.75***	.46***	.44***	.46***	.73			
16 Trait EI Sociability	26.69	6.45	-.02	.38***	.30***	.39***	.27***	.33***	-.20**	-.26**	-.16*	-.22**	-.36***	-.34***	-.37***	-.31***	.79		
17 WIF	22.06	5.30	-.10	.41**	.11	.28**	.20**	.25**	-.26**	-.08	-.04	-.20**	-.39**	-.38**	-.36**	-.31**	-.20**	.60**	.78
18 FIW																			

Note: Alphas along main diagonal, $n = 179$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

3. Results

Means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients and reliabilities are shown in Table 1. There were no significant correlations between age, occupation, sector, child age or work salience with either WIF or FIW. There were no significant correlations of work hours, partner work hours or gender equity on FIW. These variables were not included in the regression analyses. Total Trait EI negatively correlated with both WIF and FIW (WIF, $r = -.36$,

$p < .001$; FIW, $r = -.39$, $p < .001$) Trait EI Self-control (WIF, $r = -.37$, $p < .001$. FIW, $r = -.36$, $p < .001$) and Trait EI Emotionality (WIF, $r = -.31$, $p < .001$. FIW $r = -.31$) correlated moderately with WIF and FIW. Trait EI Sociability correlated weakly with WIF and FIW (WIF, $r = -.15$, $p < .05$. FIW, $r = -.20$, $p < .01$). WIF correlated highly with FIW ($r = .60$, $p < .001$), therefore each direction of work–family conflict was controlled for in each regression to evaluate the discrimination of the criterion variables: WIF and FIW. Alpha reliabilities were generally acceptable ranging between .65

Table 2
Regression analysis 1 – with Trait EI total.

Predictor	WIF (control FIW)			Predictors	FIW (control WIF)		
	β	R^2	R_a^2		β	R^2	R_a^2
<i>Step 1</i>		$R^2 .38$	$R_a^2 .37$			$R^2 .39$	$R_a^2 .38$
K	15.32***			K	13.35***		
FIW	.55***			WIF	.54***		
Negative affect	-.15*			Negative affect	-.12**		
<i>Step 2</i>		$R^2 .56$	$R_a^2 .52$			$R^2 .44$	$R_a^2 .40$
K	32.85*			K	35.78**		
FIW	.33***			WIF	.38***		
Negative affect	.10			Negative affect	.15*		
Trait EI total	-.15*			Trait EI total	-.17*		
Work hours	.11			Job demands	.12		
Partners' work hours	-.13			Job latitude	.06		
Job demands	.22**			Work support	-.02		
Job latitude	.13			Partner support	-.14*		
Work support	-.16*			Family salience	-.06		
Partner support	-.01						
Family salience	-.12						
Gender equity	-.03						

Standardised coefficients shown for final model.
WIF = work interfering with family; FIW = family interfering with work.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Regression analysis 2 – with Trait EI factors.

Predictor	WIF			Predictors	FIW		
	β	R^2	R_a^2		β	R^2	R_a^2
<i>Step 1</i>		$R^2 .18$	$R_a^2 .15$			$R^2 .17$	$R_a^2 .15$
K	203.48***			K	158.56***		
Trait EI Self-control	-.25*			Trait EI Self-control	-.22*		
Trait EI Emotionality	-.16			Trait EI Emotionality	-.15		
Trait EI Sociability	.10			Trait EI Sociability	.04		
Trait EI Well-being	-.14			Trait EI Well-being	-.16		
<i>Step 2</i>		$R^2 .57$	$R_a^2 .51$			$R^2 .44$	$R_a^2 .40$
K	103.81**			K	75.02*		
FIW	.32***			WIF	.37***		
Negative affect	.11			Negative affect	.16*		
Trait EI Self-control	-.13			Trait EI Self-control	-.11		
Trait EI Emotionality	-.10			Trait EI Emotionality	-.05		
Trait EI Sociability	.03			Trait EI Sociability	-.04		
Trait EI Well-being	.01			Trait EI Well-being	.00		
Work hours	.10			Job demands	.12		
Partners' work hours	-.15*			Job latitude	.06		
Job demands	.23**			Work support	-.01		
Job latitude	.12			Partner support	-.15*		
Work support	-.16*			Family salience	-.08		
Partner support	-.01						
Family salience	-.12						
Gender equity	-.01						

Standardised coefficients shown for final model.
WIF = work interfering with family; FIW = family interfering with work.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

and .85, although family salience and Trait EI Emotionality were both low at .65 and .69 respectively.

3.1. OLS regressions

Table 2 shows standardised regression coefficients and coefficients of determination, adjusted (R^2) increments at each variable input. After controlling for work–family conflict direction (FIW) and negative affect $R_a^2 = .37$, $F(2,122) = 37.43$, $p < .001$ significant main effects in the prediction of WIF were found for FIW (.33, $p < .001$), Trait EI total ($-.15$, $p < .05$), job demands (.22, $p < .01$), work support ($-.16$, $p < .05$), with a coefficient of determination $R_a^2 = .52$, $F(11,124) = 13.32$, $p < .001$. The F change in model fit for WIF was $R_a^2 = .15$, $F(9,113) = 5.10$, $p < .001$. After controlling for work–family conflict direction (WIF) and negative affect for predicting FIW, $R_a^2 = .38$, $F(2,155) = 49$, $p < .001$, significant main effects were found for WIF (.38, $p < .001$), negative affect (.15, $p < .05$), Trait EI total ($-.17$, $p < .05$), partner support ($-.14$, $p < .05$), with a coefficient of determination, $R_a^2 = .40$, $F(8,149) = 14.90$, $p < .001$. The F change in model fit for FIW was $R_a^2 = .02$, $F(8,149) = 2.5$, $p < .001$.

Table 3 shows a second OLS regression using four Trait EI factors as controls, to evaluate their unique contribution to both WIF and FIW. This showed that only Trait EI Self-control has a main effect on WIF ($-.25$, $p < .05$) $R_a^2 = .15$, $F(1,124) = 6.4$, $p < .001$ and FIW ($-.22$, $p < .05$) $R_a^2 = .15$, $F(1,157) = 7.98$, $p < .001$). However, this effect disappears once the other variables enter the equation.

4. Discussion

Results support the first hypothesis, namely that Total Trait EI would predict both WIF and FIW, in the context of known antecedents adding to growing evidence of the criterion validity of the Trait EI framework. However, the second hypothesis was not supported, namely that Trait EI Emotionality would predict lower levels of WIF; and nor was the fourth hypothesis supported, namely that Trait EI Sociability would predict lower levels of WIF and FIW. The third hypothesis was supported showing that Trait EI Self-control did predict lower levels of FIW and also WIF.

This study examined one major personality factor that may influence fathers' work–family relations, Trait emotional intelligence. Results suggest that fathers who have high global Trait EI find this disposition helpful in reducing levels of work–family conflict in both directions. Results suggest that it is specifically the belief of emotional self-control that appears helpful in reducing both FIW and WIF. However, this interpretation requires further examination, as the effect of Trait EI Self-control disappeared in association with other antecedents known to influence work–family conflict. These findings confirm previous research examining personality variables and work–family conflict, which have all found a negative relationship between neuroticism, impulse control and emotional stability and WIF and FIW. Future research examining the workplace as an emotional environment where self-control is favoured and rewarded would illuminate distinct contributions of environment and individual differences to work–family conflict.

The second hypothesis proposing that Trait EI Emotionality would predict lower WIF was not supported, although there was an impact of Emotionality and Sociability factors on WIF and FIW when combined with all Trait EI factors, as seen from the predictive influence of global Trait EI; however, further examination of distinct Trait EI factors with work–family conflict could be clarified with use of the TEIQue long form.

Apart from the influence within global Trait EI, Trait EI Sociability showed no significant influence on either direction of work–family conflict. This is surprising as the ability to influence others

should be expected to improve work–family conflict (Edwards, 2006). Intrapersonal facets of Trait EI may have more influence upon work–family conflict than interpersonal facets. It is possible that emotional self-perceptions play a part in the appraisal-coping cognitive process of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), but this needs further investigation. If individuals perceive stressors differently, then assessment of situational variables will be influenced, consequently controlling for dispositional differences may be warranted for future examination of work–family conflict.

Further longitudinal research could examine whether Trait EI Self-control influences the impact of work–family conflict on job satisfaction for men compared to women, as Kafetsios and Zampetakis (2008) found different effects of ability EI on job satisfaction for men and women. It was not possible to examine gender differences for Trait EI effects on work–family conflict in this study and these findings may be worth repeating in a mothers' and fathers' sample to help clarify both gender differences in Trait EI in applied settings, as this issue is not clear in the current literature (e.g. Mandell & Pherwani, 2003).

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