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## Alcohol and Its Relationship to Family Work Conflict

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# Work-Family Conflict and Alcohol Use by Iowa Parents in Non-Professional Jobs

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## Introduction

Work-family conflict (WFC) occurs when the demands of work interfere with family or vice versa (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). WFC is a known stressor associated with negative emotional states (Williams & Alliger, 1994), psychological strain (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011), and both job and family dissatisfaction (Shockley & Singla, 2011). The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between WFC and alcohol use in a sample of non-professional couples who are parents.

According to tension reduction theory, people consume alcohol for its tension-reducing properties (Cappell and Greeley, 1987). It follows that people will be more likely to drink when they experience strain or negative emotions. Consistent with this theory, research has shown that work-family conflict is associated with increased alcohol consumption (Frone, Russell, & Barnes, 1996; Wang, Liu, Zhan, & Shi, 2010; Wolff, Rospenda, Richman, Liu, & Milner, 2013). Based on tension reduction theory and prior research, we predicted that both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict would be related to increased drinking.

According to a social learning perspective, individuals are more likely to drink in response to stressful stimuli if they do not have appropriate coping responses or if they believe that alcohol enhances positive mood or reduces negative emotions (Cooper, 1990). For example, Liu, Wang, Zhan, and Shi (2009) found that the relationship between daily work stress and alcohol consumption was stronger for people high in neuroticism. Therefore, we predicted that the positive relationship between work-family conflict and drinking would be stronger for individuals high in neuroticism.

## Method

**Participants:** 85 non-professionals employed full-time with dependent children. The average age was 34, 51% were men, they had an average of 2.29 children, and averaged 42 hours of work per week.

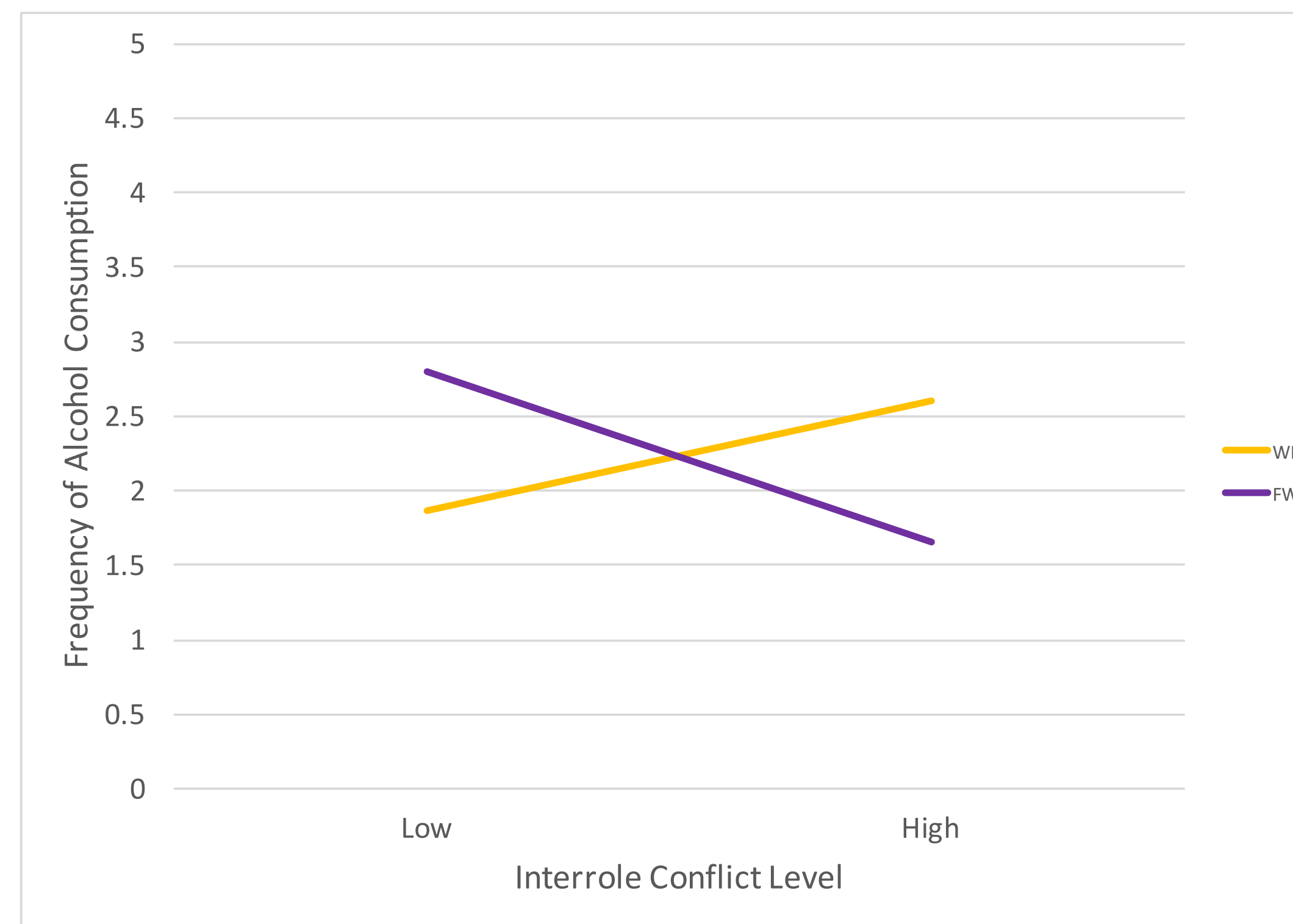
**Procedure & Measures:** Participants responded to a paper survey.

**Controls:** Participants reported their gender, age, and age of dependent children.

*Frequency of Alcohol Use and Frequency of Binge Drinking* were measured with two items adapted from the CDC. The frequency item asked how often any alcohol was consumed over the previous 12 months ranging from never to every day. The frequency of binge drinking item asked how many times 4 (women) or 5 (men) or more drinks were consumed ranging from never to every day.

*Work-to-Family and Family-to-Work Conflict* were each measured with four items using a response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Gutek et al., 1991)

*Neuroticism* was measured with four adjectives (e.g., moody) used in the MIDUS study, rated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a lot).



## Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Frequency of drinking	3.40	2.03							
2. Frequency of binge	1.85	1.79	.74						
3. Age	33.95	6.18	.15	.04					
4. Gender	0.50	0.50	.27	.19	.16				
5. Age of oldest child	10.21	6.05	.12	-.03	.80	.03			
6. Age of youngest child	6.20	4.93	-.03	-.06	.72	.00	.02		
7. Work-to-family conflict	2.65	0.83	.18	.04	-.01	.10	.18	-.15	
8. Family-to-work conflict	2.17	0.71	-.30	-.29	-.12	-.06	-.06	-.07	.18

Note.  $p < .05$  for  $r > .21$

## Regression Model of Frequency of Alcohol Use

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	.015	.059	.801
Gender	.929	.415	.028
Age of oldest child	.074	.062	.238
Age of youngest child	-.096	.067	.158
Work-to-family conflict	.372	.207	.076
Family-to-work conflict	-.567	.212	.009

Note. Intercept = 2.23

## Regression Model of Frequency of Binge Drinking

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	-.009	.061	.878
Gender	.632	.405	.123
Age of oldest child	.030	.065	.645
Age of youngest child	-.056	.069	.424
Work-to-family conflict	.079	.201	.697
Family-to-work conflict	-.552	.209	.010

Note. Intercept = 1.91

## Results

**Analysis:** The data were analyzed using multiple moderated regression. Initially, separate models were run with WFC and FWC as predictors. The addition of the interaction terms involving neuroticism did not increase the explained variance in either the quantity or frequency of alcohol consumed. We re-ran the analyses eliminating the model terms for neuroticism and including both directions of conflict in the same model.

**Results:** The control variables explained significant variability in the frequency of consumption ( $R^2 = .13$ ) but not in the frequency of binge drinking ( $R^2 = .05$ ). Adding WFC and FWC to a model containing the control variables significantly increased the explained variance in the frequency of drinking ( $\Delta R^2 = .09$ ) and in the frequency of binge drinking ( $\Delta R^2 = .08$ ). As shown in the tables to the left, contrary to prediction, WFC was not related to either of the alcohol consumption criteria. FWC was negatively related to both alcohol measures, a direction opposite to that predicted.

## Discussion

Contrary to tension reduction theory and prior research, we did not find any relationship between WFC and alcohol consumption. We did find a relationship between FWC and the frequency of alcohol consumption, but the relationship was opposite to that expected. That is, greater FWC was associated with less frequent drinking. Finally, a personal vulnerability to negative emotional states did not moderate the relationships with interrole conflict.

The results call into question the robustness of prior reported relationships between WFC and alcohol consumption. Moreover, the negative relationship we observed between FWC and drinking suggests factors other than tension may be responsible for this relationship. One factor may be family values that hinder drinking (Wang et al., 2010). A complementary explanation for the negative relationship could be greater busyness in a person's family time, resulting in less time or convenience to consume alcohol as well as more time being spent in a care position of dependent children that could be negatively impacted if inebriated.

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