Job Burnout and Couple Burnout in Dual-Earner Couples in the
Sandwiched Generation

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Abstract

We use existential theory as a framework to explore the levels of and relationship between job and couple burnout reported by dual-earner couples in the “sandwich generation” (i.e., couples caring both for children and aging parents) in a sample of such couples in Israel and the United States. This comparison enables an examination of the influence of culture (which is rarely addressed in burnout research) and gender (a topic fraught with conflicting results) on both job and couple burnout in this growing yet understudied group of workers who are reaching middle age and starting to face existential issues as part of their own life cycle. Results revealed significant differences in burnout type (job burnout was higher than couple burnout); gender (wives were more burned out than husbands); and country (Americans were more burned out than Israelis). Job-related stressors and rewards as well as parent care stressors predicted job burnout, and marital stressors and rewards as predictors of couple burnout. In addition, there was evidence for both crossover between the spouses and spillover between job burnout and couple burnout.
WORK AND MARRIAGE

The importance of both work and marriage for healthy functioning has been well documented empirically. It appears that satisfaction in one sphere of life is associated with satisfaction in the other, and stress in one is associated with stress in the other. Although only a few studies have compared the effects of work and marital stress, a large number of studies have documented a spillover of work stress to the family. The current article extends this research by examining the relationship between job burnout and the little studied phenomenon of couple burnout, in a group of working couples in the "sandwiched generation," that is, working couples who care for both children and aging parents.

WORKING, SANDWICHED-GENERATION COUPLES

Maintaining a job while managing family responsibilities has become a major issue for much of today's workforce. Working, sandwiched-generation couples are of particular interest because they seem likely to be among the most stressed of working couples, given their dual family-care responsibilities for both children and aging parents. Indeed, previous studies have found high levels of stress among those in the sandwiched generation. These couples are estimated to comprise between 9 and 17 percent of working-couple households in the United States having at least one adult aged 30 or over (Neal and Hammer 2007). A number of factors have contributed to the presence of these couples in the workforce. With the increase in life expectancy there are more old adults overall and a corresponding increase in the care needs of the aged. Skyrocketing
healthcare costs cause an increased reliance on families to provide this care. Later childbearing means that the care needs of the younger and older generations are more likely to overlap. In addition, with the population aging, the median age of the workforce is also rising. These various factors contribute to an increased probability that workers will face parent-care demands in addition to responsibilities for dependent children, as they themselves are aging.

Another demographic trend that exacerbates the stressors faced by sandwiched-generation couples is the growing participation of women in the workforce, which has led to such changes in the family as an increase in the number of dual-earner couples, the redistribution of traditional gender-role responsibilities, and an increase in the interdependency between work and family. As female labor participation has grown, so too has concern for the groups traditionally cared for by women—elders and children. As noted in the caregiving literature, women have been those most likely to care for children and aging parents.

JOB AND COUPLE BURNOUT

Of particular interest in this study is the phenomenon of burnout, both job and couple burnout. Burnout has been described as a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion, lowered sense of accomplishment, depersonalization, and disengagement. It is often the result of long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding and involve caretaking duties.

Emotional exhaustion has been shown to be the central, dominant, and most significant component of burnout and its only intrinsic dimension. As a result, it seems
very appropriate to study burnout, both job- and couple-related, in working, sandwiched-generation couples, who have caregiving duties for both children and parents.

The vast majority of studies on burnout, however, have focused on documenting the existence only of job burnout in various occupations, on the symptoms associated with it, the stressors causing it and the rewards reducing it, and its high cost for individuals and organizations. Very few studies have addressed couple burnout, despite calls for research that examines burnout in relationships other than those associated with service providers and recipients.

Different theoretical formulations have been offered in an attempt to explain burnout, including Psychoanalytic theory, Jungian theory, Social Exchange theory, Equity theory, and Existential theory. This last theory can be applied to both job and couple burnout.

EXISTENTIAL THEORY

According to existential theory, people need to believe that their lives are meaningful, that the things they do are significant, useful, and important. Victor Frankl (1976:154) proclaimed that "the striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man." And Ernest Becker (1973) argued that people's need to believe that the things they do are important is their way of coping with the angst caused by facing their own mortality. People need to feel heroic, to know that their lives are meaningful, that they matter in the larger scheme of things. According to Becker (1973), one of the most frequently chosen answers to the existential quest is work, and the other is love. Irvin Yalom (1980) added that deriving a sense of meaning in the sphere of work
helps people fend against their fear of death, whereas the merging with another person and deriving a sense of significance in love helps people fend against their fear of life.

People who expect to derive a sense of existential significance from either their work or their love relationship enter them with high hopes and expectations. When they feel that they have failed, that their work or their marriage is insignificant, that they make no difference, they feel helpless and hopeless and eventually burn out. On the other hand, when people feel that what they do is important, that they are significant and make a difference, they do not burn out, even when under highly stressful conditions. The loss of a sense of significance can explain the dynamics of both job and couple burnout.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB BURNOUT AND COUPLE BURNOUT

Most studies on burnout have focused on the work sphere; therefore, when work and marriage have been addressed, studies have tended to focus on the spillover of job burnout to the marriage. In addition, studies have tended to focus on the crossover of job burnout from husbands to wives. Only one study, to our knowledge, has addressed the relationship between job burnout and couple burnout. That study included graduate students in the United States, Great Britain, Israel, Finland, and Portugal who had similar educational levels and socio-economic statuses and who were old enough to have both a family and a job. Very similar correlations were found between job and couple burnout in all six samples.

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE

The influence of culture has not been addressed often in research on burnout, probably because of the assumption that burnout is universal and can be best explained
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by the stressors of a particular occupation or organization. This assumption has been challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds, but has rarely been tested directly.

In the rare cross-cultural studies of burnout focused on Israel and the United States, a consistent difference in burnout between Israeli and American workers has been revealed. In all cases, including nurses, teachers, managers and police officers, Israelis reported lower levels of burnout. This is surprising, because life in Israel is more stressful than life in the United States. From the time of its establishment, Israel has undergone six major wars and has been subjected to frequent terrorist attacks. In addition, Israeli workers are disadvantaged compared to their American counterparts who are more highly paid, work a shorter week, and whose working conditions and fringe benefits generally are better. Moreover, because Israel is a very small country with a very small population, there are far fewer opportunities for advancement and mobility. The existential perspective provided the main explanation offered for the differences in burnout between Israelis and Americans in these studies. Specifically, Israelis were described as having a greater sense of their life's significance as a result of their constant confrontation with existential threats.

There are other cultural differences, as well, between Israelis and Americans, such as Israelis' denser social networks. This difference probably reflects the more collectivistic orientation of Israelis compared to the greater individualistic orientation of Americans. Israel is also more family oriented, as expressed in greater emphasis on the family, higher fertility rates, and lower divorce rates. These cultural differences may
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influence the processes that lead to job and couple burnout, thus challenging the assumption of their universality.

THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER

While most studies of gender differences in burnout have reported higher levels of burnout among women, some have reported higher levels of burnout among men, and a few studies have found no gender differences in burnout. A study of sandwiched-generation couples enables a comparison between working husbands and wives with in both job and couple burnout.

HYPOTHESES

We examine six hypotheses in the study.

First, based on studies that compared work and marital stress and job and couple burnout, we predict similar levels of job burnout and couple burnout and a positive correlation between job and couple burnout.

Second, based on the Existential perspective and on the findings of previous studies that have compared levels of burnout among Israeli and American workers, we predict that Americans will report higher levels of burnout than Israelis.

Third, based on studies of gender differences in burnout, especially studies that used the Burnout Measure used in the current study and the fact that women traditionally carry the major burden of child and elder care, we predict that women will report higher levels of burnout than men.

Fourth, based on the Existential perspective on burnout and on existential issues that working couples caring for children and aging parents are facing, we predict that
sandwiched-generation couples will report lower levels of burnout despite the multiple stressors associated with their work, marriage, parenting, and caring for aging parents than the level found in the general population. We further predict that work's importance will correlate negatively with job burnout.

Fifth, based on previous research that has found burnout to be positively correlated with stressors and negatively correlated with rewards, and on studies that have found high levels of stress associated with being in the sandwiched generation, we predict that job-related stressors and rewards will be the primary predictors of job burnout and that marital stressors and rewards will be the primary predictors of couple burnout.

And, sixth, based on studies that have documented the crossover of burnout between husbands and wives, and on studies that have documented the spillover of job burnout to the marriage, we predict that crossover will be found between husbands' and wives' burnout and their correlates and spillover will be found between job burnout and couple burnout and their correlates.

METHOD

Procedure

To be eligible for participation in this study, couples had to meet the following criteria: the couple had been married or living together for at least one year; one person in the couple was working at least 35 hours per week, and the other was working at least 20 hours per week; there were one or more children 18 years of age or younger living in the home at least three days a week; and one or both members of the couple were spending a
minimum of three hours per week caring for one or more aging parents or in-laws. In Israel, a national representative sample (N=1,303 households) was interviewed by phone to identify sandwiched-generation couples. The telephone calls identified 148 such couples (11.4%). One hundred of these couples agreed to respond to the research questionnaire. They received 100 Israeli Shekels per couple for their participation.

In the U.S., sandwiched-generation couples who were part of a national sample ten years earlier (Neal and Hammer 2007) and who had also been identified by telephone were re-contacted and asked to participate again in the study. One hundred and one couples agreed and received $40 for their participation.

Participants

The characteristics of the Israeli working, sandwiched-generation couples who participated in the study were as follows. Their mean age was 45. They had been married for an average of 19 years and had been in their current job for a mean of 13 years. They were working, on average, 49 hours per week. The occupational breakdown was as follows: 44% were professionals, 23% were office workers, 33% were blue and pink collar workers.

The American sandwiched-generation couples who participated had an average age of 53 (this was not surprising, since these couples had been recruited for the original study 10 years earlier). They had been married for a mean of 29 years. They had been in their current job for 16 years, on average and worked an average of 45 hours per week. About 43% were professionals, 20% were office workers, 31% were blue- and pink-collar workers and 6% did not describe their job.
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Survey Instrument

A self-report questionnaire was sent by mail and completed by both members of each couple. The questionnaire included the following.

Demographic information: age, number of years with partner, number of hours worked per week, number and ages of children, number and ages of parents and/or parents in-law being cared for, their condition and number of hours of helping them.

Burnout Measure Short (BMS) (Pines 2005): a 10-item self-report measure of job burnout. Respondents indicate on a scale from 1= never to 7=always, the frequency with which they experience symptoms of exhaustion related to their work: physical (e.g., "weak/sickly," "tired"), emotional ("hopeless," "helpless") and mental ("insecure/like a failure," "disappointed with people").

Couple Burnout Measure (CBM) (Pines 1996): a 10-item measure of the frequency of experiencing the same symptoms of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion, except as related to the couple relationship (e.g., "disappointed with partner," rather than “disappointed with "people.""

Work Importance: a 10-item measure in which respondents indicate how true, from 1=not at all true to 7=very true, different statements are regarding their work's importance and significance (e.g., "I feel that my work is important," "I feel that my contribution is significant," "I love my work").

Stressors and rewards associated with work, spouse or partner, child care and parent care (Neal and Hammer 2007). Respondents indicate how stressed they are about different aspects of these four roles and how rewarding the roles were in the previous
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month on a scale from 1=not at all to 4=very. We created several subscales: work stressors (e.g., "having too much to do"); work rewards (e.g., "challenging or stimulating work"); marital stressors (e.g., "poor communication"); marital rewards (e.g., spouse is "a good listener"); parental stressors (e.g., "child having problems at school"); parental rewards (e.g., "feeling needed by your child"); parent-care stressors (e.g., "parent's memory or cognitive problems"), parent-care rewards (e.g., "feeling needed by the parent").

*Overall level of stress in the job and in the marriage/partnership:* Two single items (one for work, one for marriage) rated from 1=very low to 7=very high, were used. The work related question was: what is the general level of stress that characterizes your work? The marriage related question was: what is the general level of stress that characterizes your marriage/couple relationship?

*Focus Group Data*

A sample of sandwiched-generation couples in each country also participated in focus groups. Seventeen focus groups were held in the United States and two focus groups were held in Israel. The couples addressed the stressors they encountered in their various roles, and the things that helped them cope. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Professional coders reviewed each focus group and assigned codes to several sentences or a paragraph. The output came in the form of lists of quotes, which were analyzed to discover major themes.

**RESULTS**

*Quantitative Findings*
Hypothesis 1 predicted similar levels of job burnout and couple burnout and a correlation between job and couple burnout. A correlation analysis revealed a high correlation between job and couple burnout for the combined Israeli and American sample, thus providing support for this part of the hypothesis. Yet, while related, other results showed that job burnout was significantly higher than couple burnout, thus failing to support Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted cultural differences in burnout, and Hypothesis 3 predicted gender differences in burnout. An analysis compared husbands versus wives, and Israelis versus Americans. The findings revealed significant differences, as expected, for gender (wives were more burned out than husbands) and country (Americans were more burned out than Israelis). While burnout was higher in the American sample, levels of stress in work and in marriage were higher in Israel than in the U.S.

Hypothesis 4 predicted lower levels of burnout among the sandwiched-generation couples than in the general population, despite the stressors associated with their work, marriage, parenting and care for one or more aging parents. It also predicted a negative correlation between work importance and job burnout. As expected, findings showed significantly lower levels of burnout among the sandwiched couples than in the general population. In Israel, the mean job burnout of the sandwiched-generation couples (mean age 45) was 2.1, whereas in a younger national sample of Israelis (N=485, 35% age 45 or older) the mean was 2.8. In the United States, in a combined sample of over 3,000 respondents, the mean burnout was 3.2, compared to the sandwiched-generation couples' mean of 2.5. In further support of Hypothesis 4, job burnout was also negatively
correlated with work importance for both husbands and wives. In addition, husbands’ and wives’ job and couple burnout were correlated with their multiple roles.

_Hypothesis 5_ predicted that job related stressors and rewards would be the primary predictors of _job burnout_ and that marital stressors and rewards would be the primary predictors of couple burnout. The findings showed that work-related stressors and rewards contributed significantly to husbands' and wives' job burnout: the more stressors and the fewer the rewards, the more burnout. In addition, for both husbands and wives, the stressors associated with caring for an aging parent contributed significantly to job burnout. In addition, for wives the more important the work, the less burnout.

As for the predictors of _couple burnout_, spousal rewards, overall marital stress, and spousal role-related stressors contributed to both husbands' and wives' couple burnout: the more rewards the less couple burnout, whereas the more overall stress and the more spousal role-related stressors, the more couple burnout.

_Hypothesis 6_ predicted crossover between husbands' and wives' burnout and their correlates, and spillover between job and couple burnout and their correlates. In support of _Hypothesis 6_, the results showed significant _spillover_ effects from marriage to work: the higher a husband’s or a wife’s overall marital stress and the more marital stressors, the higher was his or her job burnout. The analyses also revealed significant _crossover_ effects of work stressors: The higher a husband’s or wife’s work stressors, the higher was his or her spouse’s job burnout. A significant _spillover_ effect was also found from work to the marriage: The higher a husband’s or wife’s job stressors, the higher was his or her couple burnout. In addition, a significant _crossover_ of work stressors was revealed: the
higher a husband’s or wife’s work stressors, the higher was his or her spouse’s couple burnout. Interestingly, the findings suggest that the more satisfaction a husband has from his marriage, the less likely is his wife to suffer from couple burnout but the wife’s marital satisfaction is not related to her husband’s level of couple burnout.

**Qualitative Findings**

While the focus groups conducted in the United States provided data for the development of the initial sandwiched-generation survey measures, focus groups conducted with dual-earner sandwiched-generation couples in Israel provided qualitative data on the major stressors these couples faced and the things that helped them cope with these stressors. These data shed light on some of the quantitative findings.

One theme that came up in both Israeli focus groups was the stress involved in caring for aging parents, stress that emerged in the quantitative analyses as one of the significant predictors of job burnout. The quotes presented next (with names altered) are from one of the Israeli focus groups. This group included five Israeli sandwiched-generation couples from the south of Israel: one lived in a city, one in a suburb, two in villages and one on a kibbutz.

Several focus group participants described parent-care stress as more difficult than the stress involved in raising children. For example, Gill (who lived in a suburb) noted that raising children "is easier because it is more understandable, more natural." Zina (who lived on a kibbutz) said: "The most difficult is that my parents are growing old…They were always there for me…It's difficult to see the regression, the beginning of insecurity. This is the hardest." Irvin, Zina's husband, added:
My mother calls three or four times a day and tells me the same things…and this is the way it is all week long. And sometimes it's unpleasant…even irritating…on the other hand, there are the children. Caring for my mother is worth more than a thousand words, or from preaching about how to…honor your parents.

These quotes point to the difficulties that characterize middle age—the changing roles of parent and child as one's parents become needy, and seeing oneself in the future depending on one's own children.

Another theme that emerged in both Israeli focus groups suggests that reaching midlife and caring for aging parents brought up existential issues. For example, Gill said:

I arrived at an age that I define as midlife. I am 49, and I think that the difficulty with the parents is that you are at the point, how to say it…that the best part is behind us…and the future that awaits us, especially when you look at the parents, well, it's not too heartening….When you see this insulting old age, it is actually very difficult…And the thing is that you are at a stage in which in terms of your career, you've made it. You have your achievements and the children and all the things, and you look at the future, and it's a bit hard, especially when you see this thing with the parents. If there is a thing that is hard, it's this.

Achievements and possessions did not diminish the existential issues. As Nathan (a villager) said, "I feel that I work very hard for no reason, for no reason. And I make a lot of money and I have two cars, a big house full of things, and I want to get rid of
everything." Sam (who lived in a city) agreed: "And you ask yourself: “What's the purpose here? So I succeeded? So what's next?"" Sima, Nathan's wife, summed up: "I always say, ‘We run, run. Where to? What awaits us in the end? A hole in the ground awaits us.’ And we are running. What is there to hurry for?"

Bringing up these existential issues made the group think beyond their own future to the future of their children. As Irvin stated, "I think about my children and the world that we are going to leave for them…And we are trying to keep connected to the sanity of the earth, of mankind." And Sam said:

I return to the meaning of life. We have now passed the half point, and we are moving towards the second half, and you sometimes ask yourself, so, really, ”What's the meaning of life?”…Our generation today lives for the children. We are sated; we have everything. The only thing left is to give it to the children.

Other quotes noted other advantages that come with reaching midlife and the mature perspective it offers, a perspective that helps cope with stress and provides greater freedom to move between roles. Nathan explained:

We are at a mature age where…your perspective on life is different…I can say, for example, that 10-15 years ago this pressure would have been much, much, harder to bear than it is today. Because with the years and with maturity…you know to give things their proper importance…If there's an emergency, especially in life-threatening situations, the family comes before work. This maturity has an advantage. Our age has many
disadvantages, but one of the advantages is that you have already the
ability and the insights to maneuver between the stressors. Not to say that
it doesn't disturb you, but it is, let's say, simpler to cope with.

Irvin added:

…independence and advancement at work enable us to maneuver our lives
better. Most times you also get more support at work, because if you need
to take care of your poor mother, they will support you more than if you
want to go to see some performance or such thing.

These quotes support the relevance of the existential perspective to burnout. They
help explain the low level of burnout reported by the sandwiched-generation couples,
despite the high stress they encounter in managing their multiple roles.

Other quotes, too, helped explain the low level of couple burnout. These quotes
suggest that couples’ caring for aging parents together has had a positive effect on their
marriage. For example, Sam said: “I think that it strengthens the marriage when both
partners support each other and go to visit the parents together…It gives me a good
feeling when I go with my wife to visit her parents, and she feels good when she comes
with me to visit my parents.” Zina agreed: “I know that Irvin helps me a lot, and I also try
to help him. There is consideration and understanding.” Nathan added an explanation:

I think that in a relationship, everything that you do together helps

strengthen you, because things are not emotionally charged. I don't have
the issues that a daughter has with her father, and Sima doesn't have my
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issues. And you don't need these issues to deal with an 81 year-old woman who behaves like a little girl.

Sima, Nathan’s wife, added:
I feel that the relationship is doing very well. I am very happy that he helps me with things. I need help with my father, and I am very happy to help him with things related to his mother. For me, this is…the wholeness of the family.

In summary, a strong marriage helped the couples deal with their many stressors, which, in turn, further strengthened their marriage. A final example is provided by Bath, Gill’s wife:

I think that I am overloaded, and the work is demanding, and I am confronted with stressors…from all sorts of directions, so it's true that I am taking this as a part of the things in life that make up my life. But here is where the thing about the relationship comes truly in. I mean, I can come to Gill and tell him and share things with him, and it gives me and Gill… sort of…the word is strength.

DISCUSSION

Drawing upon existential theory and using mixed methods, this study analyzed two types of burnout, job and couple burnout, in working, sandwiched-generation couples in both Israel and the United States. Of the six hypotheses tested, five were fully supported by the study's results, and one was partially supported. Hypothesis 1 was supported by a high correlation between job burnout and couple burnout. The correlation
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was higher than the correlation reported in the earlier 6-country study. The higher correlation can be explained by the fact that both the husband and the wife, responded to the job and couple burnout measures, rather than only one representative of each couple responding. This finding demonstrates the importance of studying couples.

It could be argued that the relationship between job and couple burnout was an artefact, the result of using similar measures. Observations of respondents’ reactions to the two measures, however, suggest that they had no problem differentiating between their experiences of burnout in the two spheres. An alternative explanation is related to the operation of spillover, which was indeed documented, between job and couple burnout.

The second part of Hypothesis 1 was disconfirmed. Rather than being similar in levels, job burnout was found to be higher than couple burnout. This unexpected finding may stem from the age of the study participants; the sandwiched-generation couples were in mid-life and mid-career, unlike the students in the earlier study, who were just starting their careers and intimate relationships. In addition, and as suggested by the qualitative data, dealing together with aging parents not only helped shift the focus away from work to family but also helped strengthen the marriage.

In support of Hypothesis 2, Israelis reported lower levels of both job and couple burnout than Americans, despite higher levels of stress in both their work and their marriage. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies and can be explained by the existential perspective, in Israelis' greater sense of significance as a result of the existential issues they confront on a daily basis.
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The findings of higher levels of both job and couple burnout among women supported Hypothesis 3. They also were consistent with earlier studies of gender differences in job and couple burnout in which women were found to have higher levels of job burnout and couple burnout. Other studies, however, have found that men reported higher levels of job burnout and showed men to be higher in depersonalization. Those studies another measure (the MBI), whereas the present study used the BMS, which focuses on emotional exhaustion, and the difference in the two measures may explain these contradictory findings. The fact that women traditionally carry the major burden of child and elder care responsibilities, which characterize the sandwiched generation, suggests otherwise, however.

The findings of lower levels of both job and couple burnout among the sandwiched couples compared to the general population, despite the multiple stressors associated with their work, marriage, parenting and care for aging parents, combined with the negative correlation between job burnout and a sense that one’s work is important, support Hypothesis 4. These findings as well as the focus group data point to the relevance of existential theory for explaining burnout. Participants’ comments suggested that these middle-aged couples, who were witnessing the aging of their parents, had started facing the inevitability of their own aging and mortality. Their heightened awareness of the existential significance of these issues helped them prioritize and cope more effectively with the stressors involved in their multiple roles, resulting in lower levels of job burnout. Moreover, the help that spouses gave and received from each other
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in caring for their aging parents gave their marriage more meaning, actually
strengthening it and reducing their couple burnout.

This study is important theoretically in another way, as well. Specifically, the
high levels of stress yet low levels of burnout reported by these sandwiched-generation
couples suggest that stress and burnout, two concepts that are often used interchangeably,
have different antecedents, correlates, and consequences.

The findings that job-related stressors and rewards are the best predictors of job
burnout, whereas marital stressors and rewards are the best predictors of couple burnout,
that supported Hypothesis 5, are not surprising. For wives, an additional predictor was the
work's perceived importance (the more important the work, the less burnout). This
finding is consistent with previous research that has documented the importance of self-
actualization at work for women. Other predictors of job burnout, for both husbands and
wives, were the stressors associated with parent care (the more stressors, the more
burnout), testifying to the importance of these stressors, in particular, in the life of
sandwiched-generation couples. The focus group data reinforce the importance of parent-
care stressors. Participants talked not only about the stress involved in the caring for their
aging parents but also about the pain in witnessing their parents' deterioration, knowing
that this fate awaits them, as well.

The negative correlations between burnout and the rewards associated with
different work and family roles correspond to results from studies showing that
combining multiple roles can actually enhance well-being. Such findings support the
notion of the importance of role quality in managing multiple roles. Similarly, they are
consistent with the findings that feelings of mastery in the roles of spouse, parent, and caregiver to a parent contribute to well-being.

The results demonstrating that the best predictors of each type of burnout were those associated with the stressors and rewards associated with that particular life sphere and the roles inherent in it are fairly intuitive. More interesting are the findings that supported Hypothesis 6 concerning crossover effects between husbands’ and wives’ job and couple burnout. The data analyses revealed significant crossover effects of work stressors (the higher a husband’s or wife’s overall job stress and work stressors, the higher his or her spouse’s job burnout) and couple stressors (the higher a husband’s or wife’s overall marital stress, the higher his or her spouse’s couple burnout). The findings varied somewhat by gender, however, with wives having a greater effect on their husbands' job burnout, and husbands having a greater effect on their wives' couple burnout. These gender based pattern may reflect the notion that paid work is men's core role and family roles are women's core role. Specifically, the findings revealed that husbands' job burnout was compounded by the stressors their wives experienced at work and was reduced by the rewards their wives experienced in their marriage. Wives' couple burnout was compounded by husbands' job stressors and reduced by the husbands' job rewards. These crossover effects are consistent with findings of earlier studies and testify to the importance of studying working couples and the effects of their multiple roles.

In further support of the Hypothesis 6, as well as the findings of earlier studies, the analyses revealed significant spillover from marriage to work and work to the marriage. Specifically, the higher a husband’s or wife’s overall marital stress and the
more marital stressors, the higher his or her job burnout, and the higher a husband’s or wife’s job stressors, the higher his or her couple burnout.

**Practical Implications**

The crossover and spillover effects documented in this study have obvious practical implications for treating job and couple burnout. They suggest that even when only one member of the couple experiences burnout in only one sphere, both partners and both spheres need to be viewed as susceptible to each type of burnout and be treated as such.

Furthermore, the notion that the underlying dynamic of burnout is different from that of stress suggests the importance of differential treatment of stress and burnout. This is the case at the organizational level as well as in the context of career and couple counselling for individuals and couples. When treating or attempting to prevent either job or couple burnout, rather than attempting to reduce stress, the focus should be on enhancing people's sense that their work and marriage are important and that they themselves are making a significant contribution. This goal can often be achieved without significant expense, which tends to characterise attempts to reduce stress on the organizational level, and which is a huge advantage in these times of shrinking budgets.

**Implications for Theory**

The study makes several contributions to theory and research on burnout. First and foremost, it demonstrates the importance of expanding the concept of burnout to include couple burnout, as well as job burnout, given the similarity in their definition, underlying dynamic, and antecedents, and the relevance of existential theory to both.
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The findings also support the notion that stress and burnout, two concepts which have often been used interchangeably, have different antecedents, correlates, and consequences and, thus, should be addressed separately.

Other contributions involve gender and culture. The findings that wives reported higher levels of both job and couple burnout than did their husbands lend support to earlier studies that have found similar gender differences in burnout. Future research is needed to clarify the circumstances under which these gender differences exist. The differences between Israelis and Americans challenge the general assumption that the dynamic of burnout is universal and demonstrate the importance of studying burnout cross-culturally.

The study also contributes to the steadily growing literature on the relationship between work and family, literature that is based on studies that have often suffered from sampling limitations, such as only limited inclusion of men and of culturally diverse populations. In addition, little research has examined the effects of combining work and family roles among dual-earner couples, despite the growing number of such couples in the workforce. Related to this last shortcoming, the focus of most work-family research has been on individual-level outcomes. The findings demonstrate the importance of studying both members of the couple when researching the work-family interface.

Finally, the study contributes to the limited knowledge about dual-earner couples in the sandwiched generation. With the increase in life expectancy, later childbearing, and more women in the workforce, there is an increased probability that workers will face parent-care demands simultaneously with responsibilities for dependent children. It
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is important to learn about these couples, to understand the stressors they confront and the best coping strategies for mastering these stressors.

Altogether, the findings demonstrate how studying working couples contributes to the understanding of the family system and the various ways in which the family system can affect and be affected by the work system. As such, the findings have important implications for sandwiched-generation couples, for work-family scholars, for policy makers, employers, organizations, and society at large.

Currently, few mechanisms are in place to help "sandwiched-generation" couples, either in the United States or in Israel and for supporting families. The findings of this study, besides focusing attention on these couples, provide information about couples’ stressors and job and couple burnout. This information can be translated into policy and practice recommendations for policy makers, employers, managers, human resources and employee assistance professionals, and for working, sandwiched-generation couples on how to cope better with multiple work and family roles.

Limitations of the Study

The most obvious limitations include a cross-sectional design self-report data. In addition, the United States and Israeli national samples were derived by telephone screening of households for eligibility. Thus, couples who were too poor to have a telephone were excluded. Finally, the findings can be generalized only to contemporary, 21st century Israeli and American working couples, with Western attitudes toward work and family.

Suggestions for Future Research
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Future research is needed to replicate the study in other cultures, especially cultures in which work and family are valued differently. Such studies should focus on such questions as how cultural context may shape the processes of job and couple burnout. Future research should also focus on the distinctive ways that both life course stage (i.e., midlife) and cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer) may shape the experiences of sandwiched generation couples as each may contribute to work-family experiences and expectations in distinctive ways. In addition, longitudinal studies of job and couple burnout are needed to follow couples before and after they become sandwiched to enable examination of change over time in the processes of job and couple burnout.

REFERENCES


