

Social Relationships, Well-Being, and Career Commitment: Exploring Cross-Domain Effects of Social Relationships

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Cette étude explore dans quelle mesure les relations sociales dans divers domaines de la vie sont liées au bien-être en général ainsi qu'aux exigences de carrière. Cette étude cherche à savoir si les effets de l'interaction des relations sociales sont nuisibles ou bénéfiques et s'ils mesurent les effets du stress sur un ou plusieurs domaines de la vie. Analysant des données d'enquête recueillies auprès de 1,436 avocats mariés de l'Ouest canadien. Les résultats suggèrent que la spécificité de domaine ne détermine pas forcément la nécessité de documenter les effets des interactions. Les résultats Ils suggèrent aussi que les ressources de soutien ou les activités intégratives ne sont pas forcément toutes bénéfiques et qu'au contraire, elles pourraient nuire au bien-être ainsi qu'à l'engagement de carrière.

This study explores the extent to which social relationships in different life domains are related to overall well-being and career commitment. This study investigates whether the interaction effects of social relationships are harmful or beneficial, as well as whether they moderate the effects of strain within the same domain or across domains. Survey data were analyzed from 1,436 married lawyers in Western Canada. The results suggest that domain specificity is not necessarily a key to documenting interaction effects. They also suggest that not all support resources or integrative activities are necessarily beneficial and instead may be detrimental to individuals' well-being and career commitment.

Support for this research was provided by a Research Grant from the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC). The opinions contained in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of LSAC. This paper was written while Dr. Wallace was supported by a Killam Resident Fellowship at the University of Calgary. I wish to thank Marisa C. Young for her helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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IN THE WORK literature, social support from family and coworkers has been found to be effective in coping with work-related stress and related to enjoying and being committed to one's work (LaRocco, House, and French 1980; Ng and Sorensen 2008; Thoits 1995; Van Daalen, Willemssen, and Sanders 2006). Supportive coworkers may provide emotional and instrumental assistance to one another, which are valuable resources in facilitating career success and positive work attitudes (Hakanen, Schaufeli, and Ahola 2008; Kay and Wallace 2010; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, and Fisher 1999). In the health literature, social support and integration may reflect the positive consequences of interpersonal relationships, where there is a plethora of studies that demonstrate the benefits for a variety of mental health outcomes (Haines and Hurlbert 1992; House, Umberson, and Landis 1988; Lincoln, Chatters, and Taylor 2003; Thoits 1995, 2011; Wellman and Wortley 1990).

At times, however, social relationships may also be characterized as sources of strain for individuals. Some social ties (e.g., with a spouse, friend, or coworker) can produce stressful demands that may outweigh the positive consequences of such relationships (Thoits 1995). Common forms of role strains may include excessive demands that exceed an individual's capacity to fulfill (i.e., role overload), incompatibility between the demands of multiple roles (i.e., role conflict), and interpersonal problems or difficulties that arise through interactions with others in complementary roles (i.e., role strain; Pearlin 1989). In contrasting these stressful relationships with supportive ones, this paper examines support, integration, and strain within and across three role sets that represent the work, family, and community domains.¹

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which social relationships in different life domains are related to overall well-being and career commitment. In doing so, two specific gaps in the literature are addressed. One is that most of the literature focuses on how social relationships may protect or buffer individuals from the harmful effects of strains, and this paper considers the possibility that social relationships may also exacerbate or amplify the harmful effects of strain for individuals. Second, this paper explores the possibility of crossover effects of social relationships across different domains, which is also largely ignored in the literature. Both of these gaps in the literature are discussed below.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS' MODERATING AND CROSS-DOMAIN EFFECTS

First, in both the work and health literatures, positive social relationships are believed to not only have direct effects on well-being that are independent of the strains individuals' experience, they are also hypothesized to

¹ It should be noted that only measures of integration in one's community were available in this data set.

buffer or moderate the effects of strains on individuals' well-being (House et al. 1988; Thoits 1995, 2011). The "buffering effect" refers to how interpersonal relationships may protect (or buffer) individuals from the harmful effects of stressors. Talking and sharing experiences with others may significantly reduce the psychological distress that arises in response to exposure to stressors (Thoits 1986). As a result, individuals may appraise the situation differently and effectively cope with the stressors they are encountering. The buffering effects of social relationships have been controversial for decades where some researchers find evidence of a buffering effect and others only find evidence of a main effect (LaRocco et al. 1980; Lin, Woelfel, and Light 1985; Stetz, Stetz, and Bliese 2006).

Most literature tends to focus on the beneficial or buffering effects of positive interactions in coping with stressful situations. However, not all moderating effects occur in the hypothesized direction (i.e., to reduce the harmful effects of stressors). Rather, some social interactions and relationships may make the situation worse for the individual where "reverse buffering" occurs. In such situations, the more support received results in the harmful relationship between the stressors and strain becoming stronger (Kaufman and Beehr 1986). Reverse buffering may occur when shared interactions and relationships with others confirms that the situation is as bad as it seems, or even worse (Fenelson and Beehr 1994). Alternatively, attempts to support an individual may be unhelpful if the person in need feels they are being judged, they are unable to openly sharing their concerns, or their feelings about the situation are dismissed or minimized (Lehman, Ellard, and Wortman 1986). This paper sets out to advance our understanding of the effects of social relationships by exploring the possibility that not all social interactions are necessarily beneficial in coping with stressful situations.

Second, this paper investigates potential crossover effects of social relationships across different life domains. There has been a growing body of theoretical and empirical work that has demonstrated that work and family, and more recently community, are interconnected domains (Voydanoff 2005). While work, home, and community are usually physically and temporally separate, their boundaries are highly permeable and individuals daily cross the borders between these domains as they manage and negotiate their different roles and related role expectations (Clark 2000). However, much of this research has focused on the extent to which the demands or *strains* in one domain affect role quality and/or performance in another domain (Barnett, Gareis, and Brennan 2009). Considerably less research has examined the extent to which positive relationships, such as *support* or *integration* in one domain, may be beneficial and reduce the harmful effects of strains in another domain (Hakanen et al. 2008). For example, individuals may receive support from their family in coping with work strains, or receive support from their coworkers in coping with family strains. In this study, the extent to which social support and social

integration moderate the effects of strain *within* their respective domains as well as *across* the different domains is explored.

In exploring the potential moderating and crossover effects of social relationships, a sample of Canadian lawyers from different legal work settings has been selected. The overwhelming nature of practicing law, in combination with a lack of social integration, may have significant consequences for lawyers on a personal basis in terms of feelings of distress, as well as important consequences regarding their commitment to their professional career (Keeva 2006; Wallace 2001). In addition, by focusing on a single occupation, it allows for controlling for certain work-related factors that may result from shared professional norms and expectations.

Three different aspects of social relationships are investigated that reflect support, integration, and strain. All three aspects of social relationships are examined in the work domain in terms of professional relationships and the family domain in terms of marital relationships. A third relationship domain, the community, is explored in terms of lawyers' social integration, both formal and informal. Well-being and career commitment represent two different outcomes that reflect the complexity and scope of potential crossover and moderating effects from these different domains (Barnett et al. 2009).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, the literature on the three different social relationships examined in this study, namely social support, social integration, and social strain, is reviewed. Next the data and methods used in this study are presented and the results of the analyses are summarized. This paper closes by discussing the findings of this study and their implications for research in this area.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS LIFE DOMAINS

Over the last few decades, it has been clearly established that work, family, and community are interconnected domains (Voydanoff 2001). That is, participation in social relationships in one domain may affect role quality and performance in another domain (Voydanoff 2005; Wallace and Young 2010). These different structural contexts contain incumbent roles, where each role is part of a larger role set or a constellation of roles around which important interpersonal relationships are formed (Pearlin 1989). Sociologists tend to focus on the social relationships formed within the boundaries of major social roles and role sets since they are likely to have significant effects on individuals as the roles of worker, spouse, and parent are so important to individuals' identities (Pearlin 1989). Social relationships in the family, workplace, or community may be supportive and the forms and functions of support may vary by the nature of the relationship from which support is drawn (House 1981). These institutionalized social roles are also typically enduring and as a result when interpersonal difficulties arise they can produce considerable chronic strain. Thus, relationships

in these different role sets may drain or generate resources or result in positive or negative spillover across different domains. Three different domains are examined in this study: work, family, and community. Three types of social relationships are examined in this study: social support, social integration, and social strain. Each type of social relationship is described in greater detail below in terms of how they are represented in each domain.

Social support from a variety of sources has been shown to be important in reducing feelings of distress in general as well as coping with the stresses of one's job. Feeling more connected to one's family, work, and community are different ways in which an individual may feel supported. Social support is defined as the understanding, encouragement, concern, and caring offered during stressful times (Thoits 1995, 2011). Social support is examined from two different sources in this study: professional relationships and marital relationships. Social support related to the professional domain refers to the extent to which lawyers' colleagues are supportive in coping with the stresses of their work. Marital support is examined by the extent to which the individual is satisfied with the quality of their marriage (Voydanoff 2004, 2005). It is hypothesized that more supportive professional and marital relationships will enhance lawyers' well-being and career commitment.

Social integration refers to "the existence, quantity, or frequency of specific relationships" (Umberson et al. 1996:841). It may reflect structural or affective interconnectedness with others and with social institutions as a result of social interaction and participation in relationships (Low, Keating, and Gao 2009; Voydanoff 2004, 2005). Professional integration may be indicated by lawyers' participation in a variety of professionally related social activities that often take place outside of regular work hours. For example, time spent in social activities related to client development, conferences, dinner meetings, and receptions are examples of different ways in which lawyers may be more socially integrated within their profession. Given the long hours and demanding nature of practicing law, many lawyers and their spouses likely experience a considerable "time crunch" as a result of the total work hours that has increased among dual-earner couples (Barnett et al. 2009; Jacobs and Gerson 2001). Marital integration is examined in terms of the amount of time the individual spends alone with his or her spouse talking or sharing an activity. Following Umberson et al. (1996), community integration captures individuals' involvement in formal and informal social activities. Informal community integration refers to the frequency with which individuals visit, talk on the phone, or go out for dinner with friends, neighbors, or relatives. Formal community integration refers to the extent to which individuals attend club or community group meetings or religious services. It is hypothesized that greater social integration will be positively related to lawyers' well-being and career commitment.

While social support refers to the positive, emotionally sustaining qualities of relationships, relationship *strain* refers to the negative or demanding aspects of these interactions (Umberson et al. 1996). Strain may reflect the imbalance between demands and the resources available to cope with those demands (Scharlach 2001). It may reflect interpersonal conflicts within role sets where individuals experience difficulties interacting with others in complementary roles, such as among coworkers or spouses (Pearlin 1989). Strain is considered in this study as it relates to the professional and marital domains. Professional strain reflects the tensions and stress associated with interacting with other members of the legal profession. The practice of law has become the “business” of law with professional relationships shifting away from collegiality to greater competitiveness (Kessler 1997; Nelson and Trubek 1992; Wallace 1997, 2001) that has added to the general feeling of pressure and psychological strain in the profession (Rhode 2000). In addition, the preoccupation with profit has exacerbated feelings of work-related strain, in part due to the lack of mutual respect among colleagues acted out as incivility toward one another (Wallace 2001, 2005). Marital strain is examined in terms of the tensions and strains associated with housework. The division of household labor is considered one of the most contested terrains for couples (Bianchi et al. 2000). Research continues to show that women spend twice as much time in household tasks compared to their husbands, even when they both hold full-time careers (Wallace and Young 2010). As well, husbands and wives often have different expectations and standards regarding the completion of household tasks that can cause stress and disagreement in the marital relationship. It is hypothesized that greater social strain will be harmful to lawyers’ well-being and reduce their career commitment.

DATA AND METHODS

Sample

The data are from the 2000 “Juggling It All Survey” that collected information on practicing lawyers’ work and family experiences and attitudes. The survey was distributed to all practicing lawyers in the Province of Alberta. Of the 5,921 lawyers contacted, 1,829 completed the survey yielding a 31 percent response rate. A comparison of the sample data to the provincial figures from the Law Society of Alberta using chi-square tests (available from author) indicates that similar proportions of lawyers are represented in the survey data by gender, practice setting (i.e., law firm, solo practice, private corporation, government), and city. For the purposes of this paper, the sample is restricted to lawyers who were married or living common law at the time of the study ($N = 1,436$).

The sample includes 953 (66 percent) men and 483 (34 percent) women. They have been married or living common law for approximately

14.5 years on average and 59 percent were parents at the time of the survey. Their average household income was \$173,974 (Canadian dollars) and they work about 51 hours a week at the office and at home, including evenings and weekends. Slightly more than half (55 percent) work in law firms, and the rest are employed in solo practice, government offices, or private corporations.

Dependent Variables

Well-being was measured by the mean score of seven items from Ross and Mirowsky's (1989) shortened version of the Centre for Epidemiology Studies' Depression Scale scale developed by Radloff (1977). Well-being is often operationalized by respondents' scores on measures of depression (Luhmann et al. 2012), where well-being and distress are considered opposition ends of a single continuum (Payton 2009). Respondents were asked to report how often, in the past week, they had experienced the following: had trouble getting or staying asleep, could not get going, had trouble staying focused on what they were doing, felt everything they did required effort, felt sad, felt lonely, or could not shake the blues. Responses included: never (coded 1), not very often (coded 2), often (coded 3), and most of the time (coded 4) ($\alpha = .85$). High scores indicate more distress in terms of reporting more depressive symptoms (poorer well-being) and low scores indicate less depressive symptoms (better well-being). Career commitment was measured by the mean score of six Likert items (Wallace 2001) that tap the extent to which respondents would like to continue working in the legal profession or a different occupation, plan to continue practicing law as long as possible, and would like to leave, are thinking of leaving or intend to leave the legal profession in the near future ($\alpha = .91$).

Independent Variables

Professional support was measured by the mean score of four Likert items that House (1981) used to assess emotional support. Respondents indicated how often the lawyers they usually talk to: listen to their work-related problems, empathize with their stresses, offer support and encouragement, and show concern. The response categories included: never (coded 1), not very often (coded 2), often (coded 3), and most of the time (coded 4), where a higher score indicates more support ($\alpha = .89$). Professional integration was measured by the number of times a month respondents attend professional activities (e.g., related to business or client development, conferences, meetings, or receptions) before 8:00 AM, over lunch, after 6:00 PM during the month, or on weekends (day or night). In order to normalize the distribution of this variable, it was coded 1 if less than once a month; 2 for once or twice a month; and 3 for more than twice a month. This measure taps the extent to which lawyers participate in social, work-related

activities related to their work outside of regular working hours. Professional strain was measured by the mean score of three Likert items developed for this study: I often observe a lack of respect displayed among lawyers, I find dealing with other lawyers is often very stressful, and I regularly encounter lawyers who are uncivil to one another. The response categories ranges from strongly disagree (coded 1) to strongly agree (coded 5), where a higher score reflects greater professional strain ($\alpha = .83$).

Marital support was measured by the Marital Quality scale from the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet, Bumpass, and Call 1988). Respondents were asked to indicate how happy they are with the following aspects of their relationship with their partner: the understanding they receive, the love and affection they receive, the amount of time they spend with their partner, the demands their partner places on them, their sexual relationship with their partner, and the way their partner spends money. The responses categories included: very unhappy (coded 1), somewhat unhappy (coded 2), neither happy nor unhappy (coded 3), somewhat happy (coded 4), and very happy (coded 5) ($\alpha = .84$). Marital integration was measured by a single item that asked "Over the past month, how often have you and your partner spent time alone with each other talking or sharing an activity?" and the responses included: almost never (coded 1), several times (coded 2), once a week (coded 3), several times a week (coded 4), and almost daily (coded 5). Marital strain was measured by the mean score of two Likert items from Twiggs, McQuillan, and Ferree (1999) that include: I feel I am never able to do the household chores the way my spouse wants them done; and I feel I never do as much housework as my spouse would like. The responses ranged from strongly disagree (coded 1) to strongly agree (coded 5) ($\alpha = .82$), where a higher score reflects greater marital strain.

Informal community integration was measured by the sum of three items following Umberson et al. (1996) where respondents are asked to indicate how often they usually do the following: visit with family or friends at their homes, talk with friends on the phone, go out to dinner with friends. Formal community integration was measured by the sum of three items following Umberson et al. (1996) where respondents are asked to indicate how often they usually do the following: attend club or community group meetings, attend church. Response categories for each item include: never (coded 0), less than once a year (coded 1), less than once a month (coded 2), once a month (coded 3), every couple of weeks (coded 4), once a week (coded 5), several times a week (coded 6), and almost daily (coded 7). A higher score reflects greater participation in community activities.

Control Variables

Sex was coded 1 for males and 0 for females. Number of children is the number of children currently living with the respondent under the age

of 18. The literature suggests that the number of children may be correlated with the strain and resources that parents experience (Jacobs and Gerson 2001). Household income (\ln) was measured by the natural logarithm of the total annual household earnings for the 1999 tax year, before taxes and other deductions are made. The natural logarithm was used to reduce the extreme positive skewness of income and reduce the impact of outliers. Work hours were measured by two items tapping how many hours in an average week respondents work at the office and at home (including evenings and weekends). Time in paid work may have implications for the time, energy, and resources individuals have in the work domain as well as family and community domains (Voydanoff 2004). Work overload was measured by four Likert items from Caplan et al. (1975) that reflect the extent to which respondents' feel their workload is too heavy, they have to work very quickly in their job to get everything done, they do not have enough time to get everything done in their job, and they often feel rushed in their job. The response choices range from strongly disagree (coded 1) to strongly agree (coded 5) ($\alpha = .78$). Age is the age of the respondent at the time of the survey.

Analysis

First, the main effects of lawyers' social relationships on well-being and career commitment (Model 1, Table 1) were estimated. Next, the buffer hypotheses were tested by determining whether the cross-product interaction terms between social support and strain and between social integration and strain have statistically significant effects on well-being and career commitment. To do this, a series of intermediate models (available from author) were estimated to derive the final models for each dependent variable that are presented in Model 2 in Table 1. Each cross-product interaction term (e.g., professional support-by-professional strain, professional integration-by-professional strain) was added to Model 1. All statistically significant interaction terms were then added simultaneously to Model 1 and the final results are contained in Model 2 of Table 1. Empirical support for the buffer hypothesis is indicated by statistically significant positive interaction coefficients for the distress model and negative interaction coefficients for the commitment model. A statistically significant negative interaction coefficient for distress and a statistically significant positive interaction coefficient for commitment suggest a "reverse buffering" or amplifying effect (Beehr 1995; Fenalson and Beehr 1994; Stetz et al. 2006; Wallace 2005), which is discussed in greater detail below.

It should be noted that examination of the zero-order correlations shows that none suggest collinearity problems (available from author). In addition, following Fox (1991), variance-inflation factors were estimated

Table 1
Regression Results for Lawyers' Well-Being and Career Commitment (N = 1,436)

| Variable | Distress | | Career commitment | |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| | Model 1 b (β) | Model 2 b (β) | Model 1 b (β) | Model 2 b (β) |
| Sex (male = 1) | -.138 (-.125)*** | -.138 (-.125)*** | -.096 (-.053)* | -.099 (-.054)* |
| Number of children | -.040 (-.062)* | -.036 (-.056)* | .021 (.020) | .023 (.022) |
| Household earnings (ln) | -.070 (-.080)** | -.076 (-.086)*** | .065 (.044) | .068 (.047) |
| Weekly work hours | .002 (.040) | .002 (.041) | .008 (.105)*** | .007 (.099)*** |
| Work overload | .107 (.161)*** | .108 (.162)*** | -.140 (-.127)*** | -.138 (-.125)*** |
| Age | -.003 (-.059)* | -.003 (-.058)* | .007 (.068)** | .007 (.068)** |
| Professional support | -.028 (-.037) | -.028 (-.037) | .122 (.099)*** | -.018 (-.014) |
| Professional integration | -.002 (-.003) | -.106 (-.173)** | .027 (.026) | .024 (.024) |
| Professional strain | .103 (.182)*** | .176 (.311)*** | -.178 (-.189)*** | -.176 (-.188)*** |
| Marital support | -.174 (-.279)*** | -.063 (-.100) | .098 (.095)*** | .096 (.093)*** |
| Marital integration | -.004 (-.016) | .044 (.160)* | -.019 (-.041) | -.018 (-.039) |
| Marital strain | .049 (.094)*** | .121 (.230) | -.040 (-.046) | .033 (.038) |
| Informal community integration | -.007 (-.043)* | -.006 (-.040) | .007 (.027) | .060 (.224)** |
| Formal community integration | -.005 (-.027) | .024 (.141) | .022 (.079)** | .023 (.082)** |
| Significant interactions: | | | | |
| Within domains | | | | |
| Marital support × marital strain | | -.041 (-.298)** | | |
| Across domains | | | | |
| Marital integration × professional strain | | -.015 (-.194)* | | |
| Formal community integration × professional strain | | -.009 (-.184)* | | |
| Professional integration × marital strain | | .040 (.250)** | | |
| Professional support × marital strain | | | | |
| Informal community integration × marital strain | | | | |
| Constant | 2.961*** | 2.554*** | 2.395*** | .053 (.208)* |
| Total R ² | .276*** | .288*** | .122*** | -.019 (-.321)** |
| | | | | 2.146*** |
| | | | | .129*** |

Notes: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

for all of the variables included in the analysis. These results (available from author) also suggest that multicollinearity among the predictors is not evident for any of the variables.

RESULTS

Main Effect Regression Results (Model 1)

Starting first with the control variables related to well-being, lawyers who are male ($\beta = -.125$), have more children ($\beta = -.062$), have higher household earnings ($\beta = -.080$), and are older ($\beta = -.059$) report less distress compared to those who are female, have fewer children, have lower household earnings, and are younger. A heavier workload is positively related to distress ($\beta = .161$), whereas the total number of hours worked per week is unrelated.

Turning next to the social relationship variables, in regard to the professional domain, only professional strain appears relevant to lawyers' well-being ($\beta = .182$), where more tense and stressful interactions with other lawyers results in greater distress. Social support and integration within the legal profession appear unrelated to lawyers' overall well-being. In regard to the marital domain, marital support is the most important predictor of lawyers' distress ($\beta = -.279$), where it appears critical in improving the overall well-being of lawyers. Marital strain is significant in contributing to lawyers' distress ($\beta = .094$), whereas marital integration, measured as time alone with one's spouse, is not. Last, informal community interaction in terms of engaging in social activities with friends and/or family is important in enhancing well-being ($\beta = -.043$), whereas formal community interaction is not.

In summary, both the profession and marital domains present strains that contribute to lawyers' distress, while the marital and community domains offer some support and integration that enhances their well-being.

Turning next to the equations for career commitment, women are more committed to their careers than men ($\beta = -.053$). Lawyers who work longer hours are more committed ($\beta = .105$), but those who perceive their workload is overwhelming are less so ($\beta = -.127$). Age is positively related to career commitment ($\beta = .068$), while the number of children and household earnings are not.

The most important predictor of lawyers' career commitment is professional strain ($\beta = -.189$), where more tense and stressful interactions with other lawyers significantly reduce career commitment. It is interesting to note that professional strain, in combination with work overload,

appears to have the most harmful effects on both lawyers' well-being and career commitment. Support from colleagues in coping with work-related stress is important in increasing lawyers' career commitment ($\beta = .099$) but professional integration is unrelated. In regard to the marital domain, only support from one's spouse is related to career commitment ($\beta = .095$), where the more satisfied the lawyer is with his or her marital relationship, the more committed they are to their legal career. Last, formal community integration is related to lawyers' career commitment ($\beta = .079$), whereas informal community integration is not. The more lawyers participate in club, community, or church activities, the more committed they are to their career.

In summary, strain encountered in the profession is the most important predictor of lawyers' career commitment. Support from colleagues and one's spouse appears important in enhancing career commitment, as well as involvement in formal community activities.

Interaction Effect Regression Results (Model 2)

Next, we turn to the results from the interaction tests of the buffer hypothesis. Of the 12 interactions tested, six were statistically significant. Two general patterns of findings are worth noting. First, only one of the six significant interaction terms involves support and strain within a single domain—namely the interaction between marital support and marital strain. Second, two of the six significant interactions are in the hypothesized direction that suggests buffering or protective effects, whereas four are in the opposite direction suggesting reverse buffering, or amplifying effects.

The two types of social relationships that appear to significantly buffer feelings of strain are professional integration ($\beta = .250$) and informal community integration ($\beta = -.321$) and both buffer lawyers' feelings of marital strain. The more lawyers engage in professional activities that integrate them into the legal profession, the less marital strain negatively affects their overall sense of well-being. Similarly, the more lawyers participate in informal community activities, the less feelings of marital strain reduce their career commitment. As noted above in regard to Model 1, marital strain was a significant predictor of lawyers' well-being but not their career commitment.

Turning next to the social relationships that are "reverse buffering," we see that both marital ($\beta = -.298$) and professional ($\beta = .208$) support increase the harmful effects of marital strain on distress and career commitment, respectively. As well, marital integration ($\beta = -.194$) and formal community integration ($\beta = -.184$) significantly enhance the harmful effects of professional strain on lawyers' overall distress. In Model 1, recall that professional strain was an important predictor of both well-being and

career commitment. The implications of these findings are discussed in greater detail below.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which social relationships in different life domains are related to lawyers' overall well-being and commitment to their legal careers. In doing so, this study also set out to explore whether the moderating effects of social relationships were harmful or beneficial, as well as whether they moderated the effects of strain within the same domain or across different domains. The discussion below first examines the main effect results, followed by a discussion of the findings regarding the buffering and amplifying effects of social relationships within and across domains.

The results of the main effects analyses (Model 1) show that strains from the profession and marital domains significantly reduce lawyers' overall well-being, while social relations in the marital and community domains offer supports that enhance their well-being. Strain and tension encountered in interactions with members of the legal profession is the most important predictor of lawyers' career commitment. Support from colleagues and one's spouse appears significant in enhancing career commitment, as well as involvement in formal community activities. Thus, a mixture of support, integration and strain from all three domains is relevant to both lawyers' general well-being as well as their commitment to their legal careers.

Others have also reported that rewarding relationships from nonwork domains, such as support from one's family and community integration, are important in understanding positive work attitudes (Voydanoff 2001). Lawyers who are more satisfied with the quality of their marital relationship, may find that their spouse supports their career, and listens and empathizes with the stresses of their work, which enhances their work attitudes. Participation in the community may provide opportunities to access and mobilize social capital that benefits one's career (Voydanoff 2001). There is limited research examining the social relationships across the three domains, particularly those involving the work and community domains. More research is needed that examines involvement in the community in the study of the work-family interface in terms of the relationships between these domains and how they may benefit or deplete one another.

Turning next to the tests of the moderating effects of support and integration within and across domains, two interesting patterns were noted. First, five of the six significant interaction terms involve support/integration and strain *across* the domains, whereas only one interaction is limited to variables within a single domain. It appears that domain specificity is not necessarily key to documenting interaction effects, which

has been proposed in the literature (e.g., van der Doef and Maes 1999). This suggests that it is also important to consider the cross-domain effects of support, integration, and strain.²

Second, two of the six significant interactions reflect buffering, or protective, effects, whereas four reveal reverse buffering, or amplifying, effects. The two types of social relationships that appear to significantly buffer feelings of strain are professional integration and informal community integration that reduce the harmful effects of lawyers' marital strain. As predicted and suggested by others, engaging in activities at work or in the community appears to offer a protective buffer in regard to marital strain. That is, social integration in these other domains may provide a respite or distraction from the stressful relationships and interactions the individual experiences at home (Martire, Stephen, and Atienza 1997).

The results also show that not all support resources or integrative activities are necessarily beneficial and instead may be detrimental to individuals' well-being and career commitment. Perhaps support from others may reaffirm the aversive nature of the strained relationships among colleagues or with one's spouse and as a result the individual's negative responses may be heightened rather than reduced (Kaufman and Beehr 1986). Talking with others or spending time with them may result in dwelling on the nature of the problem, revisiting tensions, or other negative experiences, where the supportive others may encourage the individual to see that conditions are as bad as or even worse than they thought (Carlson and Perrewé 1999; LaRocco et al. 1980; Ross and Mirowsky 1989; Wallace 2005; Westman 2005). Karasek, Triantis, and Chaudhry (1982) refer to this as the "stress-transfer effect" when social support exacerbates rather than reduces the effects of stressors or strains. They suggest that stress transfer is more prevalent when members of one's support systems are also feeling high levels of stress, particularly if it is due to the same factors. As an example, if the individual shares his or her experience about the strain they experience regarding the division of household labor with their spouse, and their spouse is also experiencing this situation as stressful, they may transfer feelings of strain to one another. As a result, the negative effects of their marital strain on their well-being may be amplified rather than reduced. Likewise in regard to professional support, if a lawyer's colleagues share high levels of professional strain, the colleague who provides understanding, empathy, and concern may legitimize and exacerbate negative feelings about the situation and its effects on their career commitment (Wallace 2005).

An important direction for future research is to explore the conditions under which stress transfer is likely to occur. One factor to consider may

² Refer to Voydanoff's extensive work on the cross-domain effects of work, family, and community (e.g., Voydanoff 2001, 2004, 2005). Her approach is somewhat different than the one proposed here where she examines the mediating, rather than the moderating, effects relationships between the domains.

be the extent to which members of one's support system are also exposed to high levels of the same strains and stressors. Another might be to examine the closeness of the individual with their colleagues or spouse. Rook, Dooley, and Catalano (1991) suggest that particularly close associates or spouses may feel the pain of one individual as if it were their own. Finally, Westman's (2001) work on stress and strain crossover is based on the core assumption that one's stress or strain has an impact on others in different settings and future research may explore the mechanisms that underlie the crossover process.

In addition, the purpose, content, or intent of supportive communication may be an avenue for future research in attempting to better understand the reverse buffer effects. Clark (2002) explores how individuals attempt to integrate, separate, and balance work and family in their communication with coworkers and family members. She found, for example, that feeling obligated to talk about one domain with people in another domain may have different associations with positive and negative work and family outcomes compared to talk that communicates understanding and meaning of one domain to another. As well, she suggests that certain types of communication may be more effective in preventing role conflict between the domains as individuals explain and plan their obligations and activities, whereas others may be more reactive as they share their experiences associated with conflicting roles. Along related lines, Crossfield, Kinman, and Jones (2005) compare the extent to which the frequency versus the quality of communication affects well-being in their study of the crossover of work stress among dual-career couples, again emphasizing the importance of examining the content of the communication involved in providing support to one another.

In addition, the interaction results for social integration were also mixed—some indicating buffering effects and others suggesting they enhance the harmful effects of stressors. The measures of integration in this study reflect the amount of time individuals spend in extra-professional activities outside of regular work hours, the amount of time individuals spend alone with their spouse and how frequently they participate in informal and formal community activities. While engaging in activities in another domain may offer the individual a healthy distraction from the source of their strain (e.g., as in the beneficial buffering effects of professional and informal community integration involving marital strain), in other situations, such social activities may be at the expense of effectively coping, or possibly reflect avoiding dealing with, the source of the problem. It is also possible that those who are more highly integrated, regardless of whether it is within or across domains, experience more time-based strain that can act as a secondary or chronic stressor thereby exacerbating the effects of strain for the person. Future research might examine the conditions under which social integration is an effective coping strategy that reduces the harmful effects of relationship strain and those where it

becomes a more damaging response that is detrimental to the individual's well-being.

In closing, several limitations of this study must be noted. The cross-sectional data presented in this study are based on subjective self-reports. Such data are susceptible to the effects of common method variance where relationships between variables measured with the same method, such as self-report surveys, may be artificially inflated. Second, this data set had limited measures of social integration in the community. It is unknown how support and strain from the community would function in this model. As Voydanoff (2005) points out, community participation or integration is associated with supportive resources as well as demands and obligations. It is also important to note that the analysis was limited to a single, high-status, professional occupation. Some of the findings may be limited to this particular occupation under study or professionals in general. For example, the extent to which work-related variables, such as work overload and professional strain, are so critical to lawyers' well-being and career commitment may be a function of holding a career that demands exceptional investments and dedication in education, training, and one's subsequent career. For others who hold "just a job," factors from other life domains, such as family or community, may be more consequential for their well-being and work commitment.

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