

A Qualitative Examination of Workaholic Partner’s Perspective Taking

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INTRODUCTION

Workaholism is defined as a multidimensional construct characterized by an inner pressure or compulsion to work, persistent thoughts about work, negative emotions when not working or prevented from working, and excessive work behaviors. Workaholism has been said to negatively impact the family unit (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, & Burke, 2009).

Perspective taking is “the spontaneous tendency of a person to adopt the psychological perspective of other people.” (Davis, 1983, p. 169). We probed perspective taking to explore the relationship between workaholism and the family unit.

CURRENT STUDY

The present study utilizes a qualitative methodology to examine one possible factor in the relationship between workaholism and family outcomes: spousal perspective taking.

We examined the degree to which spouses attempted to take their workaholic partner’s perspective in order to understand why he/she worked so excessively, and how perspective taking attempts resulted in positive and/or negative outcomes for the spouse and/or workaholic.

The result of the initial coding (e.g. positive and negative outcomes of spousal perspective taking) is presented in this poster. Future iterations of coding will focus on the factor(s) influencing these divergent outcomes.

METHODS

Participants

- 55 spouses of workaholics were interviewed. 49 were female and 6 were male.
- Participants were recruited via social media.
- Eligibility for the study (e.g. their spouse exhibited characteristics typical of workaholics) was determined through an online screening questionnaire.

Procedure

- All 55 interviews were conducted via Skype and were audio-based.

Qualitative Analysis

- An iterative, inductive approach was used to code interview responses into relevant themes.
- An initial list of codes/preliminary themes was created that shows the positive and negative outcomes from perspective taking for a workaholic spouse.

RESULTS

Negative Outcomes of Perspective Taking	Number of outcomes	Positive Outcomes of Perspective taking	Number of Outcomes
Critical	8	Understanding	33
Frustration	10	Support	8
Ineffective	6	Increased Communication	5
No understanding	10	Reduced Negative Feelings	15
Annoyed	2	Caring/Compassionate	13
Not Sympathetic	2	Appreciation	10
Angry	2	Support	10
Avoiding	4	Less demanding	2
Stressed	5	Reality Check	3
Unfair	2	Don't Copy Spouse	3
		Increased Communication	5

Outcomes of Perspective Taking

- 47 participants stated that they perspective take when thinking about their workaholic spouse.
 - 8 participants stated that they did not perspective take when thinking about their workaholic spouse.
- Participants stated 102 positive outcomes and 60 negative outcomes from perspective taking (including repeated outcomes).

Positive Outcomes

- 31 unique positive outcomes were stated.
- 81 of the positive outcomes were stated as positive for the participant
- 15 of the positive outcomes were stated as positive for the workaholic spouse.

Negative Outcomes

- 24 unique negative outcomes were stated.
- 52 of the negative outcomes were stated as negative for the participant
- 10 of the negative outcomes were stated as negative for the workaholic spouse.

DISCUSSION

Findings

- The initial findings show that perspective taking results in a mix of positive and negative outcomes.
- This study shows that there were more positive outcomes of perspective taking than negative for the participants.

Challenges

- Recruiting participants via social media presented a learning curve as it was a new recruitment method utilized by our lab.
- The participants were relied on to explain their thoughts of themselves and what may have been their spouse’s perspective.

Future Research

- Future studies can gain knowledge on the effects of perspective taking on the participant and/or the workaholic.
- The overall goal of this study was to take a unique examination of workaholism through qualitative means by exploring spousal perspective taking.

CONCLUSION

- Perspective taking yielded both positive and negative results from both the participants and the workaholics measured.
 - In general, participants state a positive outcome (e.g. it makes them understanding) from perspective taking as opposed to a negative outcome (e.g. it makes them critical).
- The outcome of understanding was the most likely positive outcome measured when perspective taking
- The outcome of frustration along with the outcome of no understanding were the most likely negative outcomes measured by subjects when perspective taking