The authors' adopted a family resource view of nonwork obligations and examined these obligations' relationships to dimensions of employees' organizational commitment. Complex interactions were found between employees' marital status, number of children, and having relatives nearby as related to the continuance dimension, but not the affective dimension, of commitment. In particular, results were strongest when the focus was on employees' perceptions of whether they would experience a high personal sacrifice if they were to leave their organizations. These findings are discussed in the context of developing family-friendly human resource programs that may help employees feel less “trapped” in organizations. © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Introduction

Downsizing, rightsizing, reengineering, outsourcing, mergers, and acquisitions—the late 20th century was hard on employee-organization linkages. When these forces are coupled with the enhanced diversification of the workforce, with alternative working arrangements, and with a growing tension between work and nonwork obligations, the state of employees’ organizational commitment is in serious flux. Nevertheless, both academic researchers (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997) and practitioners (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; DuBois, 1997) have drawn the conclusion that establishing and maintaining employee commitment is vital to organizational effectiveness.

As workforce numbers of women with young children have increased, along with the demands of eldercare, and the need for dual-family incomes; kinship responsibility, financial requirements, and other family responsibility constructs have been introduced. Also, in response, flexible schedules, childcare services, and other family-responsive human resource policies have been initiated. Not surprisingly, relationships between family-friendly programs and valued work-related outcomes have received increasing attention in organizational studies and human resource management (e.g., Campbell, Campbell, & Kennard, 1994; Grover & Crooker, 1995; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997). In fact, in a recent review and meta-analysis, Kossek & Ozeki (1999) argued that

"a growing number of organizations offer employees dependent care resource and referral programs, flexible work arrangements, and other human resource policies aimed at helping them balance work and family responsibilities (p. 8)."

Kossek & Ozeki go on to submit, however, that
“reports indicate that they [i.e., such programs] are often underutilized by employees, frequently unsupported by prevailing corporate cultures, and may not reduce work-family conflict or improve organizational effectiveness (p. 8).”

We think that this disconnect may be attributable, at least in part, to the ways in which nonwork obligations have been operationalized, studied, and managed. Our purpose here is to investigate alternative ways to examine employees’ nonwork obligations as related to their organizational commitments.

**Family Responsibility**

Several constructs have been introduced to define and to operationalize family responsibility. One example is the kinship responsibility construct developed by Blegen, Mueller, & Price (1988). Defined as an individual’s obligation to relatives in the community in which the individual resides, the Kinship Responsibility Index (KRI) represents an additive composite based on four components: marital status, number of children, number of relatives living within a 50-mile radius, and number of spouse’s relatives living within a 50-mile radius. Blegen et al. suggested that KRI components related significantly to several work-related concepts, although their findings were generally weak, accounting for less than 10% of the variance in organizational commitment and turnover. Other conceptualizations of family responsibility have been introduced and linked to work variables. Price and his colleagues (Brooke, Russell, & Price, 1988; Price & Mueller, 1981; Price & Mueller, 1986) have developed other versions of kinship responsibility; Sussman and Slater (1972) developed a kinship relations construct; and Litwak & Kulis (1987) have looked at what they call kinship support. Other researchers have adopted a financial obligations type of approach. For example, Brett, Cron, and Slocum (1995) suggested that an overall financial requirements measure can be defined by components that influence an individual’s need to work (such as marital status, spouse’s employment status, young children, percent of total household income derived from the individual’s job, and perception of ability to find a comparable job). They found a positive relationship between organizational commitment and job performance for employees with low financial requirements but not for employees with high financial requirements. Rothausen (1995) advanced a similar concept referred to as employees’ accountability defined as financial, emotional, or physical care; and extended to relatives and nonrelatives. Whereas an index of such accountability correlated highly with a kinship responsibility score, neither employees’ accountability nor kinship responsibility showed much relationship with employees’ job satisfaction or intent to quit.

A trend that can be identified from this prior work is that researchers have viewed employees’ family responsibility to be an additive sum of various obligations such as having children, a spouse or significant other, and parents and/or in-laws nearby. Yet, the composites derived from simply summing such obligations have shown weak or no relationships with work-related variables of interest. We submit that nonwork obligations may well operate in more complex ways than those revealed by the additive composites. For example, in the treatment of Kinship Responsibility Index (KRI) components, financial responsibility may increase with the presence of children but may not increase with the presence of a spouse, relatives nearby, or spouse’s relatives nearby. In other words, one’s spouse, parents, in-laws, or others may represent resources to an individual rather than obligations. Thus, we would expect that whether a component represents an added responsibility may depend on the presence or absence of another component.

**A Resource View**

In the context of work-family research, a family resource view can be used to describe relationships between obligations. For example, Small & Riley (1990) used a “fixed pie” logic to argue that time, psychological energy, and physical energy are fixed resources such that whatever is devoted to work is not available for meeting family demands or vice-versa. Using this perspective, Tenbrunsel, Brett, Maoz, Stroh, & Reilly (1995) suggested that
tension between work and family was strongest with the presence of children at home. Based on data from working couples with children, they concluded that work involvement was limited by time devoted to the demands of family. Following this logic, we would expect that as financial responsibility for others in the family increases, the need to remain with an organization increases, as does the need to reduce time or energy devoted to family demands; however, we would expect that the pressure to continue with the organization depends on the presence or absence of family resources. For example, having children may increase personal costs associated with childcare, resulting in a greater need to continue with an organization. Such personal costs, however, may be defrayed by the presence of spouse's relatives nearby if they provide childcare assistance and thereby reduce the pressure to continue. Alternatively, if those relatives require greater care themselves, they will constitute another obligation rather than a resource. Such a family resource view of various components differs from a “summed” family responsibility view in that adding more components may increase or decrease one's overall nonwork obligations depending on the specifics of the situation. The point is that from a family resource view, we would expect that interactive KRI components would capture experienced personal costs beyond a simple additive combination.

Organizational Commitment

Employees’ work-related attitudes come in multiple forms and are often defined in terms of satisfactions, involvements, or commitments. In particular, organizational commitment has been defined in terms of a bond or linkage that employees feel with their organizations. Where this bond comes from, however, is another question. Two primary sources of organizational commitment are (1) attitudinal or affective, and (2) calculative or continuance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1984). Affective commitment describes an alignment that employees feel between their organization and their personal value systems and desires. In brief, they are committed to the organization to the extent that they feel psychologically “in sync” with what it stands for, its culture, and so forth. Alternately, continuance commitment describes a state whereby employees are bound to their organization to the extent that they “have to be” due to the benefits associated with staying versus the personal costs associated with leaving. Some researchers have further broken down continuance commitment in terms of: (1) low perceived alternatives defined in terms of an employee’s perception that few alternative jobs are available; and (2) high personal sacrifice defined in terms of an employee’s perception that leaving an organization would result in financial hardship or other suffering (Allen & Meyer, 1990; McGee & Ford, 1987).

Whereas both affective and continuance commitment have been found to relate significantly to many work-related outcomes such as lower turnover and absenteeism (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Tett & Meyer, 1993), only affective commitment has related positively to valued outcomes such as job performance (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989) and citizenship behaviors (Organ & Ryan, 1995). In fact, in some instances, continuance commitment has actually shown negative relationships with performance (e.g., Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Meyer et al., 1989). After reviewing the available research, Meyer & Allen (1997) concluded that considerable evidence . . . suggests that employees with strong affective commitment to the organization will be more valuable employees than those with weak commitment . . . [and] that employees with strong continuance commitment might be poorer performers, engage in fewer citizenship behaviors, and exhibit more dysfunctional behaviors than those with weak continuance commitment. (p. 37)

Clearly it is important to differentiate the basis of employees’ commitments to their organization and then to better understand the relationships between nonwork obligations and these commitments. We think that relationships between nonwork obligations and commitments are strongest with continuance.
commitment and particularly with high personal sacrifice, in that the sacrifice subdimension of continuance commitment is directly related to personal costs associated with leaving an organization. In contrast, we think that nonwork obligations, in and of themselves, would not likely be related to affective commitment. Rather, we suspect that the correspondence between employees’ nonwork obligations and human resource policies would have to be considered. Consequently, for this investigation we advance the following research questions:

**Research Question 1.** Do interactive components of the KRI (i.e., one’s marital status, number of children, proximity to relatives, and proximity to in-laws) explain a significant increase in continuance commitment variance beyond that explained by their linear relationships? We hypothesize that such relationships would not emerge as related to affective commitment.

**Research Question 2.** Because the high personal sacrifice subdimension of continuance commitment is directly related to personal costs associated with leaving an organization, will the relationships between interactive components of the KRI and continuance commitment be related to this subdimension?

**Methods**

**Samples**

**Sample 1.** Anonymous mail-in questionnaires were received from 1,252 employees (25% response rate) at 16 communication companies. Job titles of respondents included outside technician (36%), inside technician (27%), clerical worker (14%), support staffer (11%), and service representative (6%). Thirty-two percent were women (M = .33, SD = .47). Ages ranged from 18 to 65 years (M = 43.69, SD = 9.12). Organizational tenure ranged from 1 to 43 years (M = 20.21, SD = 9.35).

**Sample 2.** Questionnaires were administered to 470 employees (0% refusal rate) by undergraduate students in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Students were trained to use an anonymous sampling technique and instructed to administer questionnaires to employees with various job titles. Twenty-eight percent of respondents were nonprofessional employees (classified by job titles), and 72% were professional employees. Fifty-five percent were women (M = .55, SD = .49). Ages ranged from 19 to 63 (M = 37.90, SD = 11.15). Organizational tenure ranged from 1 to 37 years (M = 8.83, SD = 8.44).

**Questionnaire and Measures**

The questionnaire included measures for a variety of work and family variables, of which we describe those relevant to our hypotheses.

**Kinship Responsibility Index.** The KRI yields additive scores based on four components:

- marital status (0 = otherwise, 1 = married),
- number of children (0 = no children, 1 = one child, 2 = two or more children),
- relatives living within 50 miles (0 = none, 1 = one or more), and
- spouse’s relatives living within 50 miles (0 = none, 1 = one or more).

Components and codes used in the study were identical to those used by Blegen et al. (1988). Scores based on a simple-sum of components ranged from 0 (low responsibility) to 5 (high responsibility). The coefficient alpha estimate of internal consistency for the simple-sum measure was .58/.49 (Sample 1/Sample 2).

**Organizational Commitment.** Commitment was assessed with items developed by Meyer & Allen (1984; see Allen & Meyer, 1990 for a complete list of items). Based on the two-dimensional model, affective commitment was measured by eight items (e.g., “I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization”; reverse coded), and continuance commitment was measured by eight items (e.g., “Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire”). Based on continuance items, the low perceived alternatives subscale contains four items (e.g., “One of the
few serious consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives”), as does the high personal sacrifice subscale (e.g., “It would not be too costly for me to leave my organization now”; reverse coded). Responses were based on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Scores were computed as average responses (1 = weak commitment, 7 = strong commitment). The coefficient alpha estimates for each of these measures were: affective commitment = .85/.84 (Sample 1/Sample 2), continuance commitment = .82/.77, low perceived alternatives = .67/.62, high personal sacrifice = .73/.69.3

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations (zero-order rs) for variables in Sample 1 and Sample 2 are presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively. Based on KRI components, Sample 1 employees were, on average, significantly more likely to be married, have children, have relatives nearby, and have spouse’s relatives nearby when compared to Sample 2 employees (t(1625) ≥ 3.47, ps < .01). KRI scores were, on average, significantly higher for Sample 1 employees when compared to Sample 2 employees (t(1625) ≥ 9.13, ps < .01). Affective commitment scores were, on average, significantly lower for Sample 1 employees when compared to Sample 2 employees, but continuance commitment, low perceived alternatives, and high personal sacrifice scores were on average significantly higher (t(1625) ≥ |6.58|, ps < .01). In contrast, Sample 1 correlations between commitment and KRI scores did not differ significantly from Sample 2 correlations (zs ≤ 1.14, ps > .05). The absolute r difference between all Sample 1 and 2 correlations was, on average, .06. In sum, the analyses suggested that although Samples 1 and 2 differed in terms of mean levels of nonwork obligations and organizational commitments, the correlations between variables of interest were comparable. We therefore replicated the tests for the hypotheses across samples.

Component Analyses

Two-step hierarchical regression analyses were performed to examine relationships between KRI components and commitment dimensions. In each analysis, a commitment dimension (affective commitment, continuance commitment, low perceived alternatives, high personal sacrifice) was first regressed onto KRI components (marital status, number of chil-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Children</td>
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<td>4. Spouse’s relatives</td>
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<td>.61</td>
<td>.40</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.74</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Affective commitment</td>
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<td>1.25</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Continuance commitment</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.82</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Low perceived alternatives</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. High personal sacrifice</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.10</td>
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<td>.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Note. Listwise N = 1207. Coefficient alphas appear in the diagonal. *0 = otherwise, 1 = married. *0 = no children, 1 = one child, 2 = two or more children. *0 = no relatives within 50 miles, 1 or more = relatives within 50 miles. #Kinship Responsibility Index, 0 = low, 5 = high. 1 = weak, 7 = strong. *p ≤ .05 (2-tailed). **p ≤ .01 (2-tailed).
dren, relatives nearby, spouse’s relatives nearby). Next, two-way interactions between KRI components were simultaneously entered into the equation (e.g., Marital Status X Children). As summarized in Table 3 for Sample 1, the only significant linear effect in the first step was for number of children in the analysis with high personal sacrifice (standardized beta weight = .10, \( p < .01 \)). Exempting that one analysis, \( R^2 \)s for (the linear combination of) first-step predictors were nonsignificant (\( F_s \leq 1.73, ps > .05 \)). Several second-step predictors produced significant interaction effects in analyses with continuance commitment subdimensions. Four significant interactions were found in the analysis with high personal sacrifice: Marital Status X Relatives (beta = –.37, \( p < .01 \)), Marital Status X Spouse’s Relatives (beta = .22, \( p < .05 \)), Children X Relatives (beta = .25, \( p < .05 \)), and Children X Spouse’s Relatives (beta = –.39, \( p < .01 \)). In addition, two significant interactions were found in the analysis with low perceived alternatives: Marital Status X Relatives (beta = –.24, \( p < .01 \)) and Children X Spouse’s Relatives (beta = –.35, \( p < .01 \)). Importantly, \( R^2 \) increments for second-step predictors in these analyses were significant and ranged from 1% to 2% (\( F_s(10, 1196) \geq 2.56, ps < .05 \)).

The two-step analyses were rerun with Sample 2 data and produced consistent results (see Table 3), although a significant linear effect for number of children (beta = .18, \( p < .01 \)) and a significant interaction effect for Children X Relatives (beta = .56, \( p < .01 \)) were detected in first and second steps in the analysis with low perceived alternatives. In addition, a significant linear effect for marital status was found in the analysis with affective commitment (beta = .16, \( p < .01 \)).

The component analyses suggested that linear relationships between KRI components and commitment dimensions were limited to number of children and high personal sacrifice (based on both samples), although partial support was found for associations between number of children and low perceived alternatives (Sample 2), and marital status and affective commitment (Sample 2). In support of question 1, several components interacted in relation to continuance commitment, in which associations for marital status or number of children were dependent on the presence or absence of relatives nearby or spouse’s relatives nearby. Importantly, interactive components were associated with continuance commitment variance not explained by components considered in a linear combination (based on \( R^2 \) increments). Also, in support of question 1,
interactive components were not found in relation to affective commitment. In partial support of question 2, component interactions were primarily limited to high personal sacrifice.

Subgroup Analyses

To further examine the nature of significant component interactions found in both samples, separate regression functions for employee subgroups (e.g., employees with no relatives nearby vs. employees with relatives nearby) were plotted based on continuance commitment subdimensions using Sample 1 data (see Figures 1 to 4). The regression functions for employees with no spouse’s relatives nearby and employees with spouse’s relatives nearby based on the Children X Spouse’s Relatives interaction from the low perceived alternatives analysis are shown in Figure 1. As indicated in the figure, having children had a positive influence on low perceived alternatives for employees with no spouse’s relatives nearby (unstandardized $B$ weight = .16, $p < .05$), whereas the influence on employees with spouse’s relatives nearby was small but negative ($B = -.02, p > .05$). Thus, the relationship between having children and low perceived alternatives was dependent on the presence or absence of spouse’s relatives; the relationship was strongest when spouse’s relatives were absent.

### Table III: Samples 1 and 2 Regression Analysis for Kinship Responsibility Index (KRI) Components.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression</th>
<th>Organizational Commitments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$S_1$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Marital status</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Children</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Relatives</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Spouse’s relatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
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<td>5. Marital Status X Children</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Marital Status X Relatives</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Marital Status X Spouse’s Relatives</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Children X Relatives</td>
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<td>9. Children X Spouse’s Relatives</td>
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<td>10. Relatives X Spouse’s Relatives</td>
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<td>R² change</td>
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<td>E change</td>
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<td>R²</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Listwise Ns = 1207/420 for Sample 1/Sample 2. $S_1$ = Sample 1; $S_2$ = Sample 2. Unless otherwise indicated, Table values are standardized beta weights. For Sample 1, step 1 $R^2$s for $E$ values are 4 and 1202. Step 2 $R^2$s for $E$ values are 10 and 1196. For Sample 2, step 1 $R^2$s for $E$ values are 4 and 415. Step 2 $R^2$s for $E$ values are 10 and 409. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. 

TABLE III: Samples 1 and 2 Regression Analysis for Kinship Responsibility Index (KRI) Components.
The regression functions for employees with no relatives nearby and employees with relatives nearby based on the Marital Status X Relatives interaction from the high personal sacrifice analysis are presented in Figure 2. As shown in the figure, being married, as opposed to not being married, had a positive influence on high personal sacrifice for employees with no relatives nearby ($B = .30, p < .05$), but a small negative influence on employees with relatives nearby ($B = -.06, p > .05$). That is, the relationship between being married and high personal sacrifice was dependent on the presence or absence of relatives. As in the previous interaction, the relationship was strongest when relatives were absent.

Plots of the regression functions for employees with no relatives nearby and employees with relatives nearby based on the Children X Relatives interaction from the same analysis are presented in Figure 3. As indicated in the figure, having children had a positive influence on high personal sacrifice for employees with relatives nearby ($B = .15, p < .05$), whereas the association for employees with no relatives nearby was less positive ($B = .11, p > .05$). That is, the relationship between having children and high personal sacrifice was dependent on the presence or absence of relatives; in this case the relationship was strongest when relatives were present.

The regression function for employees with no spouse's relatives nearby and employees with spouse's relatives nearby based on the Children X Spouse's Relatives interaction from the analysis are shown in Figure 4. As indicated in the figure, the influence of having children was positive on high personal sacrifice for employees with no spouse's relatives nearby ($B = .27, p < .05$), but less positive on employees with spouse's relatives nearby ($B = .09, p > .05$). Thus, the influence of having children on high personal sacrifice was related to the presence or absence of spouse's relatives, in which the relationship was strongest when spouse's relatives were absent.5

FIGURE 1. The relationship between number of children and low perceived alternatives for employees with spouse's relatives nearby and no spouse's relatives nearby. Responses for low perceived alternatives ranged from low (1) to high (7). Functions are based on Kinship Responsibility Index (KRI) codes and Sample 1 data.
The subgroup regression analyses for significant components interactions were rerun with Sample 2 data. The results were consistent with those for Sample 1 data, and importantly, the signs associated with regression functions for subgroups did not change.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine how various combinations of nonwork obligations, in the form of kinship responsibilities, related to different dimensions of employees’ organizational commitment. We anticipated that component interactions would emerge and explain more variance in commitment than would simple linear relations. Further, we expected that these relations would be most pronounced with respect to continuance commitment and its subdimensions. We found support for such interactions, and as hypothesized, they were strongest for the high personal sacrifice subdimension of continuance commitment. With one exception, the obtained interactions can be interpreted from a family resource perspective. Specifically, interactions between number of children and spouse’s relatives nearby (Figures 1 and 4), wherein relationships between having children and low perceived alternatives, and between having children and high personal sacrifice, were stronger when spouse’s relatives were absent. This suggests that having spouse’s relatives nearby may serve as a family resource that weakens the relationship between having children and continuance commitment—that is to say, personal costs associated with childcare may be reduced by childcare assistance provided by spouse’s relatives. The family resource interpretation may also apply to the interaction between marital status and relatives nearby.
Children

Two or more

None One Two or more

Relatives

No Relatives

High Personal Sacrifice

0 1 2

FIGURE 3. The relationship between number of children and high personal sacrifice for employees with relatives nearby and no relatives nearby. Responses for high personal sacrifice ranged from low (1) to high (7). Functions are based on Kinship Responsibility Index (KRI) codes and Sample 1 data.

(Figure 2), although in this case, the relationship between being married (as opposed to not being married) and high personal sacrifice was stronger when there were no relatives nearby. Apparently, having relatives nearby acts as a family resource that reduces the impact of being married on high personal sacrifice. In other words, being married may be associated with the view that having relatives nearby serves as a family resource if faced with leaving an organization (e.g., temporary relief from costs associated with a sudden loss of income). Future studies examining a variety of situations in which relatives are viewed in this way—as resources rather than as obligations—would provide valuable support regarding the correctness of this resource perspective.

Human Resource Implications

Our findings suggest that relationships between employees’ nonwork obligations and commitments to their organization are a complex puzzle and less straightforward than previously studied. Equally important, most of the relationships we did find were associated with continuance commitment and its subdimensions. This expected trend could be a source for concern, as it may signal the “trapping effect” of continuance commitment as described by Meyer et al. (1989), in which employees feel that they must continue with an organization due to the personal costs associated with leaving. Because continuance commitment has shown either limited or even negative relationships with valued work-related outcomes (Meyer & Allen, 1997), this raises several concerns for human resource professionals. In short, the challenge is to decipher what can be done to offset the costs of nonwork obligations in relation to continuance commitment, while at the same time realizing the benefits from enhanced affective commitment.
Fortunately, there appear to be several vehicles for meeting the twofold challenge noted above. While we are unaware of any study that has directly examined the impact of family-friendly human resource policies on multiple forms of commitment, indirect evidence suggests several viable strategies. Recall that if employees feel “trapped” in an organization, they are not likely to go the extra mile and perform exceptionally well—either in the context of their normal job responsibilities or through extra-role behaviors (e.g., citizenship behaviors). Such “trapping” is likely to be the result of exaggerated compensation systems (e.g., higher salaries, retirement vesting options, medical benefits), as opposed to family-friendly policies (e.g., flextime, childcare assistance). This suggests that human resource professionals should better utilize “whole package” programs to secure and retain high-valued talent. For example, whereas having competitive compensation systems will remain an important component of any whole package system, there is probably little to be gained from devoting extra resources toward being the “top payer” in the industry. Rather, providing employees access to child/eldercare services, more flexible cafeteria-style benefit programs, and flexible working hours will not only pay dividends by increasing their affective commitment (as shown by Kossek & Ozeki’s 1999 review), but will also avoid the pitfalls associated with “buying people” and overemphasizing continuance commitment. Other family-friendly programs that might be expected to produce similar effects would include alternative work schedules, telecommuting, virtual teaming, and other nontraditional working arrangements. Naturally, the possibilities here are limited by the nature of the work that employees perform and by their interdependence.

FIGURE 4. The relationship between number of children and high personal sacrifice for employees with spouse's relatives nearby and no spouse's relatives nearby. Responses for high personal sacrifice ranged from low (1) to high (7). Functions are based on Kinship Responsibility Index (KRI) codes and Sample 1 data.
with other parties (e.g., customers, other work units).

In summary, the message from our work is clear—employees’ nonwork obligations should be viewed as complex and multi-faceted, not as a simple sum. Notice that we have not even begun to explore the implications of more diffuse family arrangements. We (as have others) limited our inquiry to the combined effects of having obligations to children, a spouse, parents, and in-laws. Yet, given the percentage of marriages that end in divorce (along with the number of people who start second families), the number of single-parent households, same-sex partnerships, and so forth—family obligations will come in many sizes, shapes, and configurations. Helping employees to meet these obligations, and thereby helping to minimize work and family conflicts, will require equally flexible and complex human resource policies.

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Nonwork Obligations and Commitments


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2. In agreement with Blegen et al. (1988), assessing coefficient alpha may not be appropriate for the KRI (simple-sum) scores because relationships between some components may be monotonic. For example, the number of relatives nearby may never increase or decrease as the number of spouse’s relatives nearby increases.

3. Factor analyses (unrestricted maximum-likelihood extraction) were performed on the commitment items. Factor structures were consistent with those reported in prior studies (tabled results are available from the first author).

4. Although higher-order component interactions are possible, the reasoning underlying their presence is beyond the scope of the present study.

5. Three-way interaction terms with gender added to significant two-way interaction terms were examined to check for gender differences (Sample 1 data). Keyed to Figures 1 to 4, positive regression functions for men were stronger than for women in Figures 1 and 2. Positive regression functions for men and women were similar to functions in Figures 3 and 4 (figures are available from the first author).