

SPACE LIFE SCIENCES SYMPOSIUM (A1)  
Behaviour, Performance and Psychosocial Issues in Space (1)

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THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS OF WORK-FAMILY INTERACTIONS: RETIRED  
COSMONAUTS' REFLECTIONS

**Abstract**

Anecdotal evidence and qualitative research attest to the importance of family communication during space flight. Space farers have noted the difficulty of not being there to help deal with situations that happen (e.g., car accident, illness of family member). Family members have wondered whether they should share information, and if they do not, will the partners who know them so well think there is something wrong? All of these examples reflect family life overlapping into the work setting. The space career in turn overlaps into family life with extended absences, long hours of work and training, and worry about the potential risks. Understanding which types of work-family interactions occur, how they are resolved, and how positively or negatively the resolution is perceived may provide insight on the reciprocal effect of work and family in space careers; information that may be useful in future training. The current study builds on the qualitative research by creating a coding scheme to quantify work and family interactions, a method known as Thematic Content Analysis. Mentions of work and family interactions obtained in interviews with 20 retired male cosmonauts were coded for the tone of the interaction (positive: work or family facilitates the other role; negative: work or family interferes with the other role, and neutral: no positive or negative effect), who is involved in the interaction, the resolution or outcome of the interaction (work role adjusted for family; family role adjusted for work; situation continues or ends, neither work nor family adjusted), and tone of the outcome (positive, negative, both positive and negative, neutral). Analyses about their active space careers indicate that the majority of the work-family interactions were ones in which work overlapped into family life; the tone was primarily negative (i.e., work hindered or interfered with the family situation); interactions typically involved the nuclear or extended family in conjunction with RKS; the most common resolution was that family adjusted to work, and the mood or tone about this outcome was usually negative. These data reflect retired cosmonauts' recollections of work-family interactions during their career. Possibly, the negative examples were more salient than the positive ones, and were better remembered. This may also reflect their perception of how work and family interacted during their space careers. For example, the participants felt that more could have been done to prepare their families for what they could expect while their husband was in space.