PRIMARY RESEARCH

Influence of Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC) on mental health and life satisfaction of employees: Moderating role of family support

Areeba Nisar[1], Ammar Hassnain [2*]

[1,2] FAST School of Management, National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, Islamabad, Pakistan

Abstract

Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC) is a phenomenon experienced by almost every employee and the worldwide, even at the top level. The detrimental effects of WFC on professional and personal life have been the focus of research for quite some time. Many relevant variables that affect this relationship have also been studied by scholars. Mental health is a growing concern in the new day society, and life satisfaction is amongst the pointers of the worth of life and is important to understand what makes a person happy and content with their life. Our research is based on how the provision of family support in accordance with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory during WFC, while affecting mental health and life satisfaction of employees, moderates the relationship between our independent variable of WFC, and dependent variables of mental health and life satisfaction, and that too in an eastern context (i.e., Pakistan). Quantitative survey technique has been used in the research, and data from simple random sample was collected in cross-section (N=220). Pearson correlation was calculated between predictors and the outcome variables. Moderated regression analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses. The additional variance of each outcome was also observed. The results revealed that WFC negatively affects the mental health and life satisfaction of employees, and the provision of family support moderates the relationship between WFC, and mental health but is otherwise in the case of life satisfaction. This research provides a new perspective for managers to look after their employees, which is essential to achieve optimal performance from juniors in today's environment.

INTRODUCTION

It is a common observation that Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC) poses multiple challenges for employees and their families. WFC is the center of attention in modern-day society due to its adverse effect on one's job experience, personal life, and wellbeing (Bowen & Zhang, 2020). Dragano and Lunau (2020) stated that those aspects which lead to stress at work can be classified into factors linked with work and social relations involving customers, family, colleagues, or supervisors. WFC is a contributing aspect impacting employees satisfaction with life (Yucel, 2017). The environment in which employees are working has a significant effect on their well-being, professionalism, and job satisfaction (Stefanovska-Petkovska, Petrovska, Bojadziev, Schaeffer, & Tomovska-Misoska, 2019). The wellbeing of the employees can be seriously affected by the consumption of the employees' physical and mental resources and may demonstrate repercussions on their personal and family domains (G. Yoo & Lee, 2018). Less involvement of men in household chores leading to an imbalance in workload may increase distress among female partners, thereby generating an increase in marital or family conflict (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Research are being conducted on the WFC being associated with adverse effects on the employees' work understanding, private life, and personal comfort (Bowen & Zhang, 2020). Mental health is a growing concern in the

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*corresponding author: Ammar Hassnain
†email: ammarhassnain@gmail.com

new day society because the worsening of mental health is witnessing a radical increase daily, and WFC may also be a contributor. Life satisfaction is amongst the pointers of the worth of life, and if studied along with the aspects of mental health would validate how well people prosper (Veenhoven, 1996). Bjelica and Jovanović (2016) have stated if employees experience satisfaction in their lives, it could lead to improved performance in work and non-work domains. Noor (2002) stated that family support is considerably significant in dealing with WFC. Lim and Lee (2011) concluded that family support might assist in managing pressure as well as instituting self-esteem.

Numerous studies have been conducted to study the effect of work-family conflict (while analyzing both its dimensions, either work-to-family or family-to-work), (e.g., (Amah, 2021; J. Yoo, 2022; Zayed, Kabbash, El-Sallamy, & Abdo, 2021) etc) on mental health and life satisfaction, keeping in view the balance in work-life domains. However, there is a remarkable scope in studying the impact of family support, which moderates the relationship between WFC; with mental health and life satisfaction in an underdeveloped country like Pakistan. Since the society of Pakistan has different socio-economic, cultural, and political environments and thus would render contrasting results from the previous research conducted in this respective field. Drawing on the cross-national differences in WFC, a few scholars believe that the role of culture is important in understanding the impact of WFC in organizations and exploring the role of WFC in Asia is more significant where work demands and high workloads are perceived differently (Yang et al., 2012).

Based on the research gaps, this study would be a significant addition to the literature and research. Moreover, the role of family support as a moderator between independent and outcome variables has been studied to identify how this social resource helps under unfavorable conditions. This study got an academic lead from Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which emphasizes preserving existing resources because if lost, individuals become susceptible to physical and mental disorders (Hobfoll & Jackson, 1991). The research will also act as an aid for practitioners to adopt the right strategies to avoid WFCs and improve employees' mental wellbeing, and help them in coping with stressful situations. This research will assist employers as well as employees in taking essential care of their mental health in addition to physical health, therefore, enabling them to perform better at their jobs and consequently improving their job performance.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS
Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC) and Mental Health

WFC is defined as: "a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and the family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). WFC contributes to multiple stress-related effects on professional life also (Mulazim, Hashmi, & Abbas, 2022). Zheng and Wu (2018) have mentioned three dimensions of WFC as time-based conflict, behavior-based conflict, and strain-based conflict. Time-based conflict is when allotted time to perform a role in one domain (either work or home) leaves insufficient time to participate in the other (Van Daalen, Willemsen, & Sanders, 2006). Strain-based conflict occurs when stress is faced in one domain and interferes with an efficient presentation of a role in the other area. If an individual does not regulate his behavior to obey the requirements in the respective domain, it results in behavior-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). To face conflict in both work and family domains is a serious issue for employees, consequently leading to the phenomenon where the conflict in one domain inevitably affects the other domain (S. Fiaz & Qureshi, 2021).

Mental health is stated as: "a state of wellbeing in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community" (Organization, 2004). Psychological health may be viewed as an elementary human need that affects the overall individual quality of life (Stuber et al., 2021). An unfavorable psychological environment is likely to render low levels of mental health safety (Obrenovic, Jianguo, Khudaykulov, & Khan, 2020). Charles (2019) has mentioned that use of social media is regularly blamed for problems related to mental health in young adults and teenagers. Mental health in an organization is a challenge with grave economic and human costs (Gritzka, MacIntyre, Dörfel, Baker-Blanc, & Calogiuri, 2020). Some scholars have described that mental health not only renders its affects personal health but also has an economic impact (Patel et al., 2018).

Cartwright and Cooper (2009) enlightened that work-related aspects that lead to stress and disorders have been for a long time, and hence a significant number of work stressors are identified. D. S. Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) has mentioned that work-family is a much-examined topic in the modern day as it leads to unwanted outcomes related to employees' work life, family, fitness, and security. Mental health can be seen as an elementary human need that affects the overall discrete quality of life (Stuber et al., 2021). Work-family stability is difficult to endure in up-to-

date business societies due to growing stresses at work and in domestic surroundings (Obrenovic et al., 2020).

H1: WFC has negative influence on employees' mental health.

Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC) and Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction refers to "A judgmental process in which individuals assess the quality of their lives on the basis of their own unique set of criteria" (Shin & Johnson, 1978, p. 478). Life satisfaction with life for an individual can be their cognitive judgment that depends upon the individual (Waterman, 1993). Life satisfaction is affected by multiple factors such as work and family, where experience in one domain influences the other (Bai, Gopalan, Beutell, & Ren, 2021). The term 'quality of life' while defining life satisfaction means the presence of conditions that are necessary to have a good life or practice of good living as such (Veenhoven, 1996). Few researchers concluded that finding the extent to which people are content with the current situation is not enforced by anyone from the outside but evaluated with a benchmark sets for/by himself (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The current economic situation and the increase in the level of inflation in Pakistan have put unavoidable pressure on employees to work overtime to fulfill their financial needs (Soomro, Breitenecker, & Shah, 2018), which may lead to dissatisfaction with life. Most of the previous studies have come to the collective conclusion that higher levels of WFC are linked with poorer levels of satisfaction towards life (e.g., (Rupert, Stevanovic, Hartman, Bryant, & Miller, 2012; Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004), etc.). The result of research on the interceding role of value accomplishment in the relation between WFC and life satisfaction towards life concluded prevention of attainment of values due to high WFC lowers satisfaction towards life (Perrewé, Hochwarter, & Kiewitz, 1999).

H2: WFC has a negative influence on employees' life satisfaction.

### Moderating Role of Family Support

Family support has been defined as: "a set of strategies directed to the family unit in order to ultimately benefit the family member with disabilities" (Hecht, Reynolds, Agosta, & McGinley, 2011, p. 12). Few researchers have deliberated that emotional support, physical support, material or instrumental support, and informational support are some types of family support (Kyzar, Turnbull, Summers, & Gómez, 2012). King, Mattimore, King, and Adams (1995) described that employees observe family support in two ways, socio-emotional support related to the inter-

est of family members in the job of the employee and instrumental support linked to assisting the employee in his daily chores. Support from family is a derivative of social support theory that deals with the resources switched between two persons like information, giving appraisals, assistance through instruments as well as an emotional concern (Etzion, 1984). Emotional support such as listening or giving suggestions from a different perspective, can also eliminate WFC (Wayne, Randel, & Stevens, 2006). It was proved by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p. 77) that the adverse impact of WFC is increased when work or family behaviors are quite significant for an individual's self-perception. Few researchers concluded that support from family weakens the relationship between WFC and exhaustion as well as cynicism (Huynh, Xanthopoulou, & Winefield, 2013). Abbas and Raja (2014) stated that when an individual is faced with hindrance-related stressors, such as role conflict, he invests his resources in coping with those stressors. COR theory suggests that inter-role struggle paves the way toward strain, as resources are misplaced in the progression of balance between work and family behaviors (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). In sum, it is professed that if family support (a social resource) is provided to the individual, it might help him cope with the lost resources and improve his resources, like the mental wellbeing and life satisfaction.

H3: Family support moderates the negative relationship of WFC with Mental Health, such that its presence will weaken the impact of WFC on employees' mental health.

H4: Family support moderates the negative relationship of WFC with Life Satisfaction, such that its presence will weaken the impact of WFC on the life satisfaction of employees.

Theoretical framework
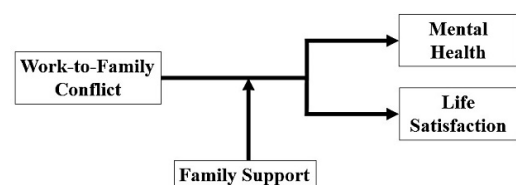
FIGURE 1. Theoretical framework

METHODS

Sample and Data Collection Procedures

The population of the research was the potential individuals who have worked or are currently employed in the public and private sectors in Rawalpindi and Islamabad (two main cities of Pakistan). Quantitative technique was used by doing a field survey. 300 questionnaires were distributed

in different organizations as a cross-sectional time horizon, out of which 220 answered questionnaires were received back. The respondents were made mindful of the objective of the study. Feedback was acquired from both public and private sectors organizations (68.6% responses from the private sectors). Effort was also made to acquire feedback from a sufficient number of females (52.7%).

Measures
An English questionnaire was prepared, comprising a total of 30 items. 5-point Likert scale was used, represented as 1 = 'strongly disagree', and 5 = 'strongly agree'.

Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC)
A 9-item scale developed through the three research papers written by Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996), Stephens and Sommer (1996), and Ernst Kossek and Ozeki (1998) was used. This scale tapped three facets of WFC, time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based work interferences with family. Example item includes "My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like." Cronbach α value came to .84.

Mental Health
Mental health was analyzed through a scale established by Goldberg (1978) as General Health Questionnaire. GHQ-12 was used, which reflects the choice of the best items from the originally derived GHQ-60. Hence, the scale consisted of 12 items and helped the respondents to respond about how they feel about their mental health while dealing with WFCs. Example questions include "Been able to concentrate on whatever you're doing." 6 items were reversely coded, which further validated the authenticity of the research. Cronbach α value came to .85.

Life Satisfaction
A 4-item scale by Diener et al. (1985) was used to measure life satisfaction. Respondents respond about how satisfied they are with their lives while going through WFCs. An example item included, "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing." Cronbach α value came to .79.

Family Support
A 5-items scale developed by Westring and Ryan (2011) was used to measure family support. Respondents responded about their perception regarding family support while they were experiencing WFCs. An example question includes "My family helps me if I need emotional support." Cronbach α value came to .82.

Control Variables
Independent sample One-way ANOVA test was used to compare mean values between male and female respondents. The mean value of mental health level in males was 3.18 as compared to that of females, which was 2.95, and the results are significant as $p < .05$. These results indicate that females in Pakistan feel more mental stress as compared to males. The mean value of mental health level in the public sector is 2.89 as compared to that of the private which is 3.14, and the results are significant as $p < 0.05$. Hence, it is determined that employees working at public sector organizations in Pakistan feel more mental stress than employees of private organizations.

RESULTS
Correlation Analysis
Table 1 displays Pearson correlation (zero-order bivariate correlations), calculated between all the variables. Correlations between WFC with mental health and life satisfaction were not exactly as hypothesized.

TABLE 1. Correlation and reliabilities

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	-								
2. Organization Type	.01	-							
3. Marital Status	-.06	.17**	-						
4. Age	-.23**	-.23**	-.28**	-					
5. Work Experience	-.22**	-.21**	-.23**	.85**	-				
6. Work-to-Family Conflict	.09	-.10	.06	-.09	-.18**	(.82)			
7. Family Support	-.05	.17**	.13	-.13	-.01	-.27**	(.82)		
8. Mental Health	-.02	.12	.21**	-.16**	-.06	.18**	.29**	(.85)	
9. Life Satisfaction	.01	.07	-.05	-.09	-.01	-.31**	.48**	.14*	(.79)

Note: $N = 220$, *$p < .05$, **$p < 0.01$

The WFC has been found to be positively related to employees' mental health (r =.18 $p<$.01); however, it is negatively related to employees' life satisfaction (r = -.31, $p<$.01). In contrast, family support was found positively related to both employees' mental health (r = .29, $p<$.01) and life satisfaction (r = .48, $p<$.01), exactly as hypothesized. All these relationships are significant; hence, these results support to our Hypothesis 2, 3, and 4.

Regression and Moderation Analysis

Table 2 signifies the regression results for the impact of WFC and family support on mental wellbeing and life satisfaction. These results have revealed that WFC was negatively linked to mental wellbeing (β = -.37, $p<$.001; ΔR^2 = .27, $p<$.001), and this relationship is significant. Moreover, WFC clarified 27% additional variance in mental health. These results render support to our hypothesis 1 that WFC has a negative influence on employees' mental health. However, family support has been found to be positively related to mental health (β = .31, $p<$.001; ΔR^2 = .27, $p <$ .001) and explained 27% additional variance in mental health. All of the results are significant.

Results have also revealed that WFC was negatively related to employees' life satisfaction (β = -.20, $p<$.001; $\Delta R2$ = .24, $p<$.001), and this relationship is significant. Moreover, WFC described 23.6% additional variance in employees' life satisfaction. These results provide support to our hypothesis 2, WFC has a negative influence on employees' life satisfaction. Family support was positively related to employees' life satisfaction (β = .42, $p<$.001; ΔR^2 = .24, $p<$.001) and explained 23.6% additional variance in employees' life satisfaction. All these results are significant.

The interaction term of Work-to-family conflict x family support is significant for mental health (β = -.16, $p<$.05; ΔR^2 = .02, $p<$.01). These results render support to our hypothesis 3 that family support will moderate the negative relation of WFC with mental health, such that presence of family support will weaken the influence of WFC. However, the interaction term of WFC: x family support has not been significant for employees' life satisfaction (β = -.025, p > .05; ΔR^2 = .001, p > .05). These results do not support our hypothesis 4 that family support will moderate the negative relationship of WFC with employees' life satisfaction, such that presence of family support will weaken the effect of WFC.

TABLE 2. Regression results for Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC), family support, and interaction term with mental health and life satisfaction

	Mental Health		Life Satisfaction	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Gender	-.14*	.01***	.00	
Organization type	.19**		.05	
Age (in years)	-.26*		-.34**	
Work Experience (in years)	.38**		.29*	
Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC)	-.37***		-.20***	.24***
Family Support	.31***	.27***	.42***	
Work-to-Family Conflict x Family Support	-.16**	.02**	-.02	.01

Note: *N* = 220, *p*<0.001*** *p*<.01**, *p*<.05*

Figure 2 shows the moderation of family Support between WFC and employees' mental health. Individuals who experience low family support while experiencing high WFC render a comparatively low level of mental health as compared to when low family support is provided in the state of low WFC. This indicates that provision of family support makes a visible difference (even if not a huge difference) while the levels of WFC vary from high to low. If family support is high when WFC is low, the levels of mental health are seen to increase significantly. In contrast, the level of mental health increases a little to be observed when family support is high amongst a high level of WFC. It can be deduced that family

support does moderate the relationship between WFC and mental health.
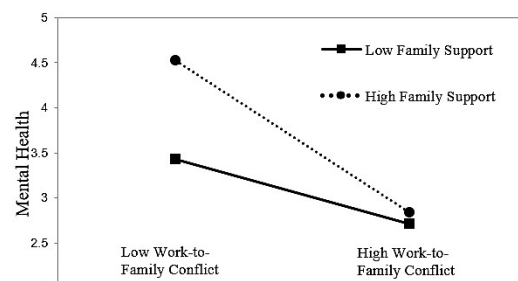
FIGURE 2. Moderation of family support between Work-to-Family Conflict (WFC) and employees' mental health

Still, it is observed that the impact of family support is much more obvious when it is high amongst low levels of WFC. Although the influence does also persist for high levels of WFC, it is not much significant.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The main aim of the study was to discover the answers to the questions linked to the effects of WFC on the important but usually overlooked aspects of employee wellbeing, which are mental health and life satisfaction. Although a number of researches have been conducted to examine the dimensions of WFC on various facets of humanity, but scope of studying family support as a moderating variable was exclusively fulfilled by this research.

Discussion

This research was carried out to enhance the understanding of the effects of WFC on mental health and life satisfaction of employees from employees' perspective. We kept family support as a moderator on the relationships between WFC and the outcomes. We assumed that the relationship between WFC and its negative outcomes would be weaker when the employees get support from their families. Our assumption regarding role of family support as a moderator is in consonance with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which deduced that the resource loss in one domain is likely to be recouped from resource gain in another domain. We believe that when individuals are encountered with loss of recourse in terms of WFC, family support would work as a resource gain, and has the potential to offset the negative impact of WFC.

As per the findings of the current study, WFC is positively related to employees' mental health. Hypothesis 1 was strongly supported by the results. It is evident from findings that employees experiencing WFC would face an adverse impact on their mental wellbeing; hence, affecting the overall quality of life of the employees, in line with the opinion of Stuber et al. (2021).

The WFC has also been found to be negatively related to the life satisfaction of employees. Hence, hypothesis 2 was strongly supported by the results of this research. Increased exposure of employees to the WFC would significantly decrease their level of life satisfaction, adversely impacting the value of life, in line with the research led by Veenhoven (1996).

It is evident from the results that family support, if provided, reduces the impact of WFC on the mental health of employees; thus, rendering support to our hypothesis 3.

Therefore, family support is significantly important in dealing with WFC according to researchers like Krys, Świdrak, Kwiatkowska, Kosakowska-Berezecka, and Vedøy (2018). Moreover, family support does not reduce the impact of WFC on the life satisfaction level of employees, and the results do not support our hypothesis 4. There may be numerous factors other than work conflicts which can impact the family domain and levels of life satisfaction. Our findings are in line with opinion of researchers like Shin and Johnson (1978, p. 478) that life satisfaction is a process judged by the individual where he assesses his quality of life based on of their unique set of criteria. According to some scholars, aspects that relate to satisfaction in life are important to study to understand what makes a person happy, content, and satisfied (Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012).

Contribution to scholarship

The purpose of current research is to enhance the understanding of the effects of WFC from the perspective of the employees. Findings of this study provide a new direction for organizational and management levels in controlling the adverse effect of the work area on the family dominion, thereby reducing the conflict. This research may also be used to develop and improve leader-subordinate relationships. Moreover, researchers are conducting studies to identify the moderators that can assist employees facing WFC coping with their mental health and life satisfaction. Current research focuses on the concept of family support concerning COR theory and that too in the context of East (Pakistan). Our results not only augment the findings of the previous research carried out in similar cultures but also offers external validity to the findings and theories of the research done in the Western context.

Implications for Managers

The current research has practical implications for managers working at different levels. This research provides the managers with a vivid insight that WFC would adversely affect the mental wellbeing and life satisfaction of workers, hindering them in their optimal performance. Instead of overburdening the employees without keeping in mind their family domain, managers of today need to be empathetic and behave in an interactive way to address their concerns (M. Fiaz, Su, Ikram, & Saqib, 2017). Managers can also conduct collaborative meetings with their employees regularly which may help to reduce feelings of stress and dissatisfaction at work. Moreover, managers may also guide them in ways to remain cool, calm, and emotionally stable when experiencing stressful work conditions. They may

assign routine tasks to their subordinates keeping in view their stress endurance levels, i.e., those employees with low-stress endurance may be assigned less stressful tasks as compared to those with greater stress endurance, which may be given challenging and demanding tasks. Employees must be encouraged to report if they are experiencing a great level of WFC that is not resolved by the mutual intervention of the family members. Counseling sessions may also be arranged to let the employees express their concerns about the pressure of work and how it affects their family life, mental health, and life satisfaction.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

Every study has a few limitations; therefore, this study also has some limitations. Firstly, the collection of data was a challenging task as the subject of the research tapped the emotional aspects of the respondents, to which the response may be a little biased due to the fear of negative perception in terms of family life. Secondly, this research was cross-sectional. Longitudinal studies may be conducted in the future to assess the consequence of WFC on the mental health and life satisfaction of workers before and after the provision of family support. This will help in the comparison of variations in the perceptions of employees about the nature of the conflict. Thirdly, sample size 220 does not fully represent the entire population of Pakistan. Multiple cultures are found in Pakistan; therefore, future research may be conducted while studying different ethnicities and social and linguistic groups as per demographic regions of Pakistan. Fourth, the scales used in this research have been framed by previous renowned researchers in the setting of western countries. Though, the scales have been

tested various times by a large number of researchers and are reliable; however, confirmatory factors analysis for the development of scales has not been done, especially in the context of Pakistan. Future researchers may establish their scales to cater to eastern settings. Lastly, this study got the academic lead from COR theory, which states that in unfavorable environments, resources of individuals are likely to be lost, primarily necessitating effort to prevent further resource loss (D. Carlson, Ferguson, Hunter, & Whitten, 2012). In this research, we tried to find out the role of only a social resource, i.e., family support which acts as a buffering agent against the harmful effects of wok-to-family conflict. Resources exist in other forms also, e.g., objects, psychological, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies, etc (Alarcon, Edwards, & Menke, 2011). Researchers may also explore more moderators, which can help against detrimental effects of WFC; e.g., psychological capital, psychological entitlement, emotional stability, self-esteem, perseverance, peer support, etc.

CONCLUSION

It is a widely accepted fact of human life that the stability between work and personal life significantly contributes to a happy, successful, and healthy life (Guest, 2002). Main reason which leads to the rise in the WFC in Pakistani society is that even in modern-day society, women still do most of the household work in families. It is crucial to cope with the dimensions of WFC, and it is one of the grave challenges in present day society (Molina, 2021). Social support lessens the WFC which may directly or affect the influence of the stress factors. Moreover, family support is proven effective in improving mental health and increasing life satisfaction; therefore, it should be provided in all circumstances.

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