INVESTIGATION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE PRACTICES AS MODERATOR BETWEEN THE RELATIONSHIP OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND SATISFACTION AMONG FACULTY STAFF OF OMAN

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ABSTRACT

In the current competitive academic environment, work-family conflict among faculty members is very common. The higher educational institutes adopt various policies and practices to enable staff to overcome such work-family conflict. One common strategy is work-life balance practices (WLB). In the present study, the effects of work-family conflict and its employee outcomes are investigated with moderating role of WLB. By design, the study is cross-sectional and survey-based. The sampling method is used to collect data from selected HEI staff in Oman (n=138). The analysis is based on two stages including Confirmatory Factor Analysis for establishing reliability and validity of the measures involved; and path analysis for hypotheses testing. The key findings are that work-family conflict exert a negative and significant influence on satisfaction towards family life (β=-.214, P<.05); and satisfaction towards work-life (β=-.237, P<.05). Furthermore, WLB positively influences satisfaction towards family life (β=.323, P<.05); and satisfaction towards work-life (β=.275, P<.05). Additionally, moderation analysis
shows that WLB significantly moderate the work-family conflict and satisfaction relationship. Based on these findings, we conclude that WLB is important for faculty staff and must be offered.

**Keywords:** Work-Life Balance, Family, Work, Conflict, Faculty, Higher Education, Oman.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Interference of work activities in family life refers to work-family conflict; while, interference of family in work activities refers to family-work conflict (Kossek & Lee, 2017). In current competitive and busy modern life, a conflict between work and family are a common problem as modern men are too much occupied with the demands of the work. The outcome of this situation is that often individuals find it difficult to balance family, social, religious, and other responsibilities. A common organizational response to this challenge is offering work-life balance practices (WLB) which refers to such policies and practices offered by an organization so that staff can create a balance between the family and work domain (Clarke, Koch, & Hills, 2004). Put it differently, such activities enable an individual to perform the work and family responsibilities without any inter-confrontation. Common WLB practices include offering job sharing, flexible timings, teleworking, part-time work, and so on (Koon, 2020). In the present study, we investigate that up to what extent the offering of WLB practices influences satisfaction towards family and work-life while influenced by work and family conflict. In other words, we attempt to investigate if work-family conflict influence staff job and work satisfaction and up to what extent, the WLB practices are effective in reducing such negative influence.

**Problem Statement**

The study's focus is analyzing work-family conflict and its influence on satisfaction towards family and work while testing the WLB practices as a moderator in this relationship. The focus of the study is faculty staff among the HEI in Sultanate of Oman who are often subject to a high workload due to the staff shortage and other operational problems. The result is that often faculty members are over-occupied due to the high teaching, research, supervision, and administrative workload. In such a situation, it is difficult for staff to balance the needs of family and work adequately. Furthermore, offering WLB practices by HEIs was limited in Sultanate before the pandemic period. The pandemic period has highlighted that workers can perform their work from home which also requires further investigation. Thus, there is a need for investigation of this issue in order to better understand how HEIs can support staff and effectively design WLB practices in order to overcome work and family conflict.

**Research Objectives**

- To measure if staff satisfaction towards family life is predicted by work-family conflict.
- To measure if staff satisfaction towards work-life is predicted by work-family conflict.
- To test if WLB practices significantly moderate the work-family conflict and satisfaction towards work and family relationships.

**Significance of the Study**

The study makes two important theoretical contributions. First, it simultaneously tests two types of work-family conflict outcomes including satisfaction towards work and satisfaction towards family life. It is significantly different from previous studies which mostly focused on only one
type of outcome of work-family conflict. The second contribution of the study is that it tests the moderating role of WLB practices between work-family conflict thus adding our understanding about how its negative outcomes can be reduced. Another significance of the study is that it tests the work-family conflict and its outcomes in a new context (i.e. HEIs in Oman) which is significant since such studies are comparatively very few. The practical significance of the study is that management of the universities and higher educational institutes can use the findings to understand work-family conflict and WLB practices relationship. Such understanding can be used to offer better WLB practices to its faculty staff which can improve staff retention, job satisfaction, and other similar favorable outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-Family Conflict
The family-work conflict and work-family conflicts are the consequence of incompatible family and work roles. An individual's family responsibilities sometimes make it difficult for him/her to manage the work responsibilities and vice versa (Swarnalatha, 2017). The relationship is bi-directional means if an individual faces too much pressure from one domain i.e. family, it will affect his/her performance in the other domain i.e. work domain (Lee, 2018). Generally, the work-family conflict occurs due to the long working hours and high workload (Choo, Desa, & Asaari, 2016); and inflexibility in the work schedule (Bai, Gopalan, Beutell, & Ren, 2021). The work-family conflict results in unfavorable employee and organizational outcomes. For example, at the employee level, it leads to reduced satisfaction towards work and family life (Asbari, et al., 2020; Lari, 2020); and increased stress (Kremer, 2016). The unfavorable organizational outcomes include reduced productivity (Ajala, 2017); and higher staff turnover intentions (Lu, Hu, Huang, Zhuang, Guo, Feng, & Hao, 2017).

In the present study, we focus on two outcomes including satisfaction towards family and work. We utilize the ‘spill over’ theory (Staines, 1980) to hypothesize the relationship between work-family conflict and its employee outcomes. According to this theory, behaviors, attitudes, feeling, and emotions in one of the domains (work and family in this case) affect the other domain. In other words, it implies that work-family conflict may lead to family-work conflict and vice versa leading to negative employee outcomes such as dissatisfaction towards family, work, and so on. Thus, using the spillover theory and previous studies' findings, the following hypotheses are put forward.

H1: Work-family conflict exerts a significant influence on staff satisfaction towards family life.

H2: Work-family conflict exerts a significant influence on staff satisfaction towards work life.

WLB Practices as a Moderator
WLB consists of such arrangements made by an employer enabling an employee to manage the needs of the business as well as their personal life responsibilities (Barrera, 2007). WLB is gaining increased popularity since it can make individuals balance their family and work responsibilities adequately (Poulose & Sudarsan, 2018). The dimensions of balance between work and life include satisfaction, involvement, and balance in terms of time. Frone (2003) explains that the four aspects of work-life balance are a family-work enhancement, work-family enhancement, family-work conflict, and work-family conflict. The WLB thus creates a favorable situation for both the employees and the employer as an individual can adequately balance the dual role-related responsibilities (Rife & Hall, 2015). There is some debate about whether it is suitable to integrate the work and family domain as it may create some problem.
However, the argument in favor of integrating both domain is that it enables the management of family and work borders and results in easier transition. In the current study, we used the integrated approach using the 'spillover theory' since it enables a better understanding of the overall problem and its context. The lower permeability and higher flexibility between both domains lead to reduced conflict (Rastogi, Rangnekar, & Rastogi, 2016). However, a highly integrated approach between both domains can blur the boundaries of work and family life and may create a higher work-family conflict and subsequently unfavorable outcomes (Bray, Hinde, Kaiser, Mills, Karuntzos, Genadek, & Hurtado, 2018). Since WLB is reportedly producing desirable staff-related outcomes such as job satisfaction (Arief, Purwana, & Saptono, 2021; Taşdelen-Karçkay & Bakalım, 2017) and reduce work-family conflict (Anand & Vohra, 2019; Chan, Kallith, Brough, Siu, O’Driscoll, & Timms, 2016); therefore, we propose that it can function as a moderator in this relationship. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:
H3: WLB significantly moderates work-family conflict and satisfaction towards family life relationships.
H4: WLB significantly moderates the work-family conflict and satisfaction towards work-life relationships.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research Design
In the present study, a cross-sectional research design is adopted. By cross-sectional it means a single-time data collection from survey participants. Furthermore, the study is explanatory in nature means it is explaining the variation in the dependent variable with the help of independent variables.

Population and Sampling
All faculty members in HEIs which is estimated to be about 12000 staff form the population of the study. The sampling frame is based on selected HEIs selected for data collection. Using the calculator developed by Bartlett, Kotrlik, and Higgins (2003), the required sample size is 119.

Data Collection
Data is collected using the survey method which was administered through the Google forms tool. Survey link was distributed among the selected HEI staff who were recruited for the survey. A total of 245 surveys were distributed out of which 138 staff members responded with a response rate of 56.3%. The survey was designed based on adapted measures. Accordingly, Work-family conflict which is an independent variable is adapted from Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996) consisting of 5 items. WLB a moderating variable is adapted from Allen (2001) and based on 9 items. Satisfaction towards family life is the dependent variable and is measured by 5 items adapted from Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin, (1985). The dependent variable of satisfaction towards work-life is adapted from Hackman and Oldham (1975) and consists of 3 items.

Data Analysis
The AMOS is considered a suitable package for data analysis. The analysis included two stages. In the first stage, reliability and validity are established by performing the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and in the second stage, hypotheses are tested using path analysis.
RESULTS

Table 1
Demographic Information

| Gender   | Frequency | %         |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Male     | 91        | 65.94%    |
| Female   | 47        | 34.06%    |

| Qualification | Frequency | %         |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|
| Masters       | 71        | 51.45%    |
| PhD           | 38        | 27.54%    |
| Others        | 29        | 21.01%    |

In terms of gender, 91 participants (65.94%) were male and 47 participants (34.06%) were female. In terms of qualification, 71 participants (51.45%) hold master’s qualification; 38 participants (27.54%) hold Ph.D. qualification; and 29 participants (21.01%) hold other level qualification.

Assessment of the Measurement Model

We performed CFA for establishing reliability and validity. The results are as follows;

Table 2
Reliability and Validity

| Concept                  | Item   | Standardized Factor Loading | Cronbach Alpha | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted |
|--------------------------|--------|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Work-Family Conflict     | WFC1   | .715                        |                | .896                  | .943                      |
|                          | WFC2   | .768                        |                | .896                  | .943                      |
|                          | WFC3   | .823                        | .896           | .943                  | .943                      |
|                          | WFC4   | .896                        |                | .943                  | .943                      |
|                          | WFC5   | .755                        |                | .943                  | .943                      |
| WLB Practices Availability | WLB1   | .844                        |                | .932                  | .931                      |
|                          | WLB2   | .893                        |                | .932                  | .931                      |
|                          | WLB3   | .827                        |                | .932                  | .931                      |
|                          | WLB4   | .753                        |                | .932                  | .931                      |
|                          | WLB5   | .790                        | .844           | .843                  | .519                      |
|                          | WLB6   | .601                        |                | .843                  | .519                      |
|                          | WLB7   | .678                        |                | .843                  | .519                      |
|                          | WLB8   | .688                        |                | .843                  | .519                      |
|                          | WLB9   | .883                        |                | .843                  | .519                      |
| Satisfaction towards Family Life | FS1   | .757                        |                | .844                  | .519                      |
|                          | FS2   | .739                        |                | .844                  | .519                      |
|                          | FS3   | .669                        |                | .844                  | .519                      |
|                          | FS4   | .772                        |                | .844                  | .519                      |
|                          | FS5   | .658                        |                | .844                  | .519                      |
| Satisfaction towards Work Life | WS1   | .711                        | .798           | .796                  | .567                      |
|                          | WS2   | .837                        |                | .796                  | .567                      |
|                          | WS3   | .705                        |                | .796                  | .567                      |

\[ \chi^2 = 1887, \text{df}=753, \chi^2/\text{df}=2.50, \text{CFI}=0.94, \text{GFI}=0.95, \text{RMR}=0.04, \text{RMSEA}=0.06 \]

We performed the CFA to assess the measurement model involving establishing reliability and validity. The standardized factor loadings of above 0.60 for all items and AVE of above 0.50 indicate good convergent validity. Model fitness (\(x^2/\text{df}=2.50, \text{CFI}=0.94; \text{GFI}=0.95, \text{RMR}=0.04, \text{RMSEA}=0.06\)) is also within the required limit as per the guidelines set by Hu and Bentler (1999); and Browne and Cudeck (1992). The guidelines are given in bracket here (\(x^2/\text{df}<3, \text{CFI}>0.90, \text{GFI}>0.90, \text{RMR}<0.05, \text{RMSEA}<0.08\)).
We used the Fornell and Larcker criteria for establishing the discriminant validity. The bold values are the square root of AVE and other values are inter-variable correlation values. Since all diagonal bold values are greater than other values in its respective rows and columns, it is an indication of good discriminant validity as per the Fornell and Larcker criteria.

Path analysis is used for hypotheses testing. The result indicates that work-family conflict exerts a negative and significant influence on satisfaction towards family life ($\beta=-.214, P<.05$); and satisfaction towards work-life ($\beta=-.237, P<.05$), thus, we accept H1, H2. Moreover, work-life practices availability has significant positive effects on satisfaction towards family life ($\beta=.323, P<.05$); and satisfaction towards work-life ($\beta=.275, P<.05$).

**Moderation Analysis**

Moderation analysis is performed for checking the WLB as a moderator between the work-family conflict and satisfaction towards family and work life. Results indicate that the WLB moderate between work-family conflict ($\beta=.234, P<.05$) and satisfaction towards family; and satisfaction towards work-life ($\beta=.335, P<.05$).
On the basis of these results, we accept H3 and H4 indicating that WLB significantly functions as a moderator between work-family conflict and satisfaction towards family and work life. In other words, if WLB is present, it can reduce the negative effects of work-family conflict.

**Discussion**
In the present study, the aim was to test the work-family conflict effects on staff satisfaction towards work and family life. Additionally, WLB is tested as a moderator in the hypothesized relationship. Our findings indicate that work-family conflict negatively affects staff satisfaction towards family and work. These findings are similar to the findings of earlier studies which also report a negative influence of work-family conflict on staff behavior and attitude (e.g. Lu, et al., 2017; Ajala, 2017; Kremer, 2016). Furthermore, the result shows that WLB practices moderate the negative influence of work-family conflict. These findings further highlight the importance of WLB which should be offered to the staff as emphasized in earlier studies (e.g. Arief, et al., 2021; Anand & Vohra, 2019; Chan, et al., 2016).

**CONCLUSION**
The study tested a model based on the effects of work-family conflict on staff satisfaction towards family and work-life while moderated by WLB. Our findings indicate that work-family conflict negatively influences staff satisfaction towards work and family. Furthermore, WLB can reduce the negative influence of work-family conflict on staff satisfaction towards work and family. This is because WLB reduces the role conflict in the work and family domain and enable an individual to better meet the requirement of both domains. Our findings contribute to the literature on work-family conflict by highlighting its negative consequence for employees. Secondly, the findings contribute to the literature by testing the work-family conflict and its outcomes in a new context i.e. higher education of Oman. Third, it contributes to the literature of WLB by showing that it can reduce the negative employee outcomes.

**Limitations**
Small sample size and focus on only selected HEIs is the limitation of the study which can be overcome by future researchers using a bigger and more diverse sample. One avenue of future research can be understanding the work-family conflict from a female staff perspective as females experienced a more intensive nature of the work-family conflict. Another avenue of future research can be the use of a diverse types of strategies used by organizations to improve WLB.

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