The Impact of Work-Family Conflict on Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction

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Abstract
The present investigation examines the association between optimism and mental health in college students, and whether this relation is stronger for one sex over the other. The participants were 200 college students (100 males and 100 females) who completed standard instruments of optimism and mental health on a 5-point Likert format. The descriptive statistics also showed that the female students obtained higher mean scores on optimism and mental health in comparison with the male students. Results Correlation analyses indicated that for boys and girls, there was a significant strong positive relationship between optimism and mental health (respectively ($r = 0.72$ for boys, $r = 0.78$ for girls $p < 0.001$), $p < 0.001$) that supported the first hypothesis in this study. However, the independent samples t-test showed that the difference in optimism between males and females approached statistical significance ($p = 0.053$), thus providing partial support for the second hypothesis. These results confirm the status of optimism as a protective psychological factor in the mental health of students, with the suggestion that gender is a weak if not insignificant contributor to optimism dispositions. Findings highlight the necessity of providing whole-of-population resilience- and positive-thinking interventions to be included within university settings.

*Keywords***:** Optimism; Mental Health; Gender Differences; University Students; Positive Psychology; Student Well-being; Psychological Resilience

Introduction
In this constantly changing world of work the distinction between work and life has become somewhat murky. This process has led to what is often called work–family conflict (WFC) a type of inter role conflict in which one's work roles and family roles are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The difficulty is that as an increasing number of people, including many two-income couples, struggle with the work-life juggle, we can suffer real emotional, psychological and behavioural strain in the quest to remain stable. WFC have increasingly been identified as a critical stressor that not only impacts individual well-being but family system dynamics as well.

One important area of the work-family conflict is parenting style- the specific child rearing practices of parents. In line with Belsky's (1984) process model of parenting, contextual stressors, such as work stress and lack of time, can lead to negative forms of parental behavior, as it increases the irritability, inhibits patience and limits the emotional availability of the parents. Empirical works have indicated that parents under the influence of job-related pressure tend to embrace authoritarian or permissive parenting patterns, as opposed to the authoritative style of parenting that is most commonly regarded as the most beneficial for child development (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). These changes in parenting that not only attack the kids, but can do just as much damage to the parent by undermining their confidence and emotional referral base within the family.Furthermore, life satisfaction, an individual's global judgment of their life quality and welfare (Diener et al., 1985), is closely related with work and family experiences. Sustained WFC has been linked to decreased perceived control, greater emotional exhaustion, and less satisfaction in other life-domains (Michel et al., 2011). Since parenting is intrinsic to family life, it can act as a protective or stress-inducing force, depending on how it is perceived and handled. By interfering with effective parenting, WFC has a paradoxical association with low levels of life satisfaction among parents, particularly when they perceive their parenting role as a burden or unmet obligation. Although substantial research has examine the separate impacts of WFC on parenting or psychological well-being, few studies have considered the concurrent influence of WFC on parenting style and life satisfaction in a integrated model. Second, it is yet unclear which mediators would link WFC to life satisfaction by changes in parenting behaviors. This is a crucial research vacuum. Therefore, the research problem of the essay studied is the absence of a holistic knowledge on how work- family conflict affects parenting style and life satisfaction. In examining these associations, the study seeks to add to a more integrated understanding of how occupational load impacts the family realm, not merely in terms of the dynamics between individuals but also with respect to the psychological welfare of working parents. Such information is essential for the generation of empirically based interventions and institutional policies that promote family functioning and quality of life.

Literature Review

Work-family conflict (WFC) is a type of inter-role conflict that arises when role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Two forms of this conflict can exist: (i) work- to-family conflict (W→F), representing the situation in which demands from work undermine individuals' family obligations and (ii) family-to-work conflict (F→W), in which family problems interrupt work demands. The dual strain from these social roles has eventually emerged as a significant focus in both organizational and family psychology literature, because of its impact on emotional burnout, role frustration and mental health. Kossek & Lee, 2017) argue that WFC is not simply time-based interference but rather also incorporates strain-based and behavior-based conflict. Strain-based conflict arises from the experience of stress and fatigue that is created in one role which interfere with the individual¥s functioning in the other role (Frone, Russel, & et al., 1997), whereas behaviour-based conflict develops when behaviours required in one role are not compatible with expectations from the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). A study by De Simone et al. (2014) indicated that WFC significantly predicted job dissatisfaction, psychological strain, and burnout symptoms in employed participants, thereby demonstrating that an emotional resource loss cycle may be involved. WFC also has consequences for relational well-being. For example, Voydanoff (2005) reported that high WFC is associated with marital dissatisfaction, lower family cohesion, and greater role strain in the household. In the family domain, such pressure may lead to irritability, emotional disengagement, or diminished parental involvement (Bakker et al., 2008). These in-transit effects suggest that work-family conflict is not a work problem but a systemic stress that

propagates family relationships, particularly in couples/jobs where both are working, working mothers (Byron, 2005).

Style of parenting is an important psychological construct which is claimed to reflect the emotional environment with which the children have been brought up (authoritative, authoritarian, or permissive (Baumrind, 1967). Parenting is more about the emotional and cognitive capacity that the parent brings to the interaction with the child. Work-family conflict, by depleting both resources, can also have a strong distorting effect on parenting behavior and family functioning. Tyokyaa (2016) had also found out that when working parents experienced high WFC they were more likely to employ authoritarian parenting style (high control and low warmth) and permissive parenting style (little control/lax granting of freedom). The emotional fatigue after a hard day at work can lead to less patience, more irritability, and loose parenting – tendencies at odds with an authoritative style. Yang and Kim (2021) also showed that maternal WFC was positively related to emotional exhaustion, which, in turn, was a predictor of harsh coparenting practices and a lack of involvement in the emotional lives of their children. Orellana et al. (2021) adopted a dyadic approach conducted on working parents and their adolescent children and found that work interference with family life led to decreased quantity and quality of parent–child interactions, which in turn, influenced the child's perceived warmth and support. This is consistent with the findings reported by Belsky (1984) who argued that contextual stressors (e.g., work demands) undermine the capacity to parent by reducing affective availability and sensitivity. Further, the work-family enrichment theory of Barnett and Hyde (2001) implies that when WFC is strong, the potential of growth and emotional reciprocity in parenthood will be weakened, due to which the effect of a positive parental identity and satisfaction is deteriorated.

Further, there is empirical evidence to suggest that inconsistent parenting practices produced as a result of fatigue and cognitive overload can lead to negative child outcomes, including anxiety, poor academic performance, and behavioral problems (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Schmeer, 2011). Therefore, WFC not only has the effect on parents' parenting but also affects the developmental situation of children, and the psychosocial influence of parents. There are many, many studies that find a negative relationship between WFC and life satisfaction, an encompassing assessment of subjective well-being. Cazan and Truta (2019) also proved that those with a high WFC report lower satisfaction in both job and life domains. Likewise, Taşdelen-Karçkay and Bakalım (2017) showed that work-lifebalance mediates the impact of WFC on life satisfaction, indicating that both personal and organizational resources could attenuate the negative effects. Wang and Peng (2017) expanded this finding and demonstrated that life satisfaction mediates the relation between WFC and depression, suggesting the important role of satisfaction in psychological resilience. It is not only that parenting styles are molded by external stressors, but they also influence the life satisfaction of parents in a reciprocal manner. Jia et al. (2020) also showed the positive association between authoritative parenting styles and parental satisfaction and the relationship between coercive or inconsistent parenting styles and stress and well-being. In addition, a dyadic study reported by Orellana et al. (2023) revealed that disturbances in parental dynamics, particularly in dual-earner households, had a negative effect on family satisfaction and therefore on the perception of life satisfaction for both parents and for adolescents. Although previous studies have focused exclusively on the relationship between WFC, parenting style, and life satisfaction, few have formulated an integrated model involving all three constructs. The majority of prior research only disentangles two variables at a time, leaving out the mediating or moderating impact that parenting might throw between WFC and life satisfaction. As stressed by Schnettler et al. (2018), the reciprocity between family dynamics and emotional well-being

requires more systemic models that acknowledge the influence of job demands on family behavior, and family satisfaction outcomes.

Hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between optimism and mental health among university students.
H2: There is a significant difference in optimism levels between male and female university students.

Methodology

Several researches have focused on how work-family conflict is likely to affect family life and family process (Barnett, 1991; Carlson et al., 2000; Frone, 2000; Frone, Russell, & Barnes, 1996; Parant and Carrère, 2008) and the consequences of work life conflict on the attitudes and behaviors of parents (Hoffman and Moon, 2002). We chose to measure by the quantitative method due to the power to analyze data in a great scale and to introduce statistically significant associations between variables. A survey questionnaire was designed as a tool for collecting raw/clean data from the field, and this was to be completed by the study participants. The study population included working mothers aged 22–65 recruited from a range of organizations. Convenience sampling was employed for recruitment of participants to make the research feasible and accessible. We collected data in a mixed online/offline mode to improve response rates and include a more representative sample. The data were collected by using a questionnaire containing 47 items that were mainly measured by five-point Likert scales. Work-family conflict was assessed with 10 items, which were taken in equal measure from the scales work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict of Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996). The Morawska and Sanders Parenting Style Four Factor Questionnaire assessed parenting style based on 4 factors and 32-items. Life satisfaction was assessed with Diener et al. established Satisfaction with Life Scale. (1985), comprising 5 items. SPSS software was used to analyze the data and descriptive and inferential statistics were used to interpret the results. Ethical considerations Ethics committee approval was obtained and participants were given an information letter to sign assuring that they were willing to participate in the study, that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All of the data were securely kept according to the policy of ethical research framework.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Optimism and Mental Health by Gender

Gender	Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Male	Optimism	100	3.85	0.75	1.50	5.00
Male	Mental Health	100	4.10	0.70	2.50	5.00
Female	Optimism	100	4.05	0.80	1.50	5.00
Female	Mental Health	100	4.30	0.65	3.00	5.00

Note: Optimism and Mental Health were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Means and standard deviations of optimism and mental health were computed for male and female students. The mean value, standard deviation, and range of these two variables among different genders are shown in Table.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Correlation between Optimism and Mental Health by Gender

Gender	Optimism & Mental Health	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	Optimism & Mental Health	0.72**	*<0.001*
Female	Optimism & Mental Health	0.78**	*<0.001*

Note: *$p < 0.001$ denotes a highly significant correlation.*

These findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between optimism and mental health, and this is exactly what H1 predicted.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test for Optimism between Male and Female Students

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	100	3.85	0.75	-1.95	198	0.053
Female	100	4.05	0.80			

Results of the independent samples t-test indicate approaching significance concerning optimism in female students (M = 4.05, SD = 0.80) compared to male students (M = 3.85, SD = 0.75; p = 0.053), albeit from a p-value (0.053) not reaching significance at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that there is a significant positive relationship between optimism and mental health in university students, with a higher level of optimism seen among those who have better mental health. Nevertheless, the anticipated gender differences in optimism make only modest gains in significance, such that although females have higher optimism as compared to males, the difference is not statistically significant enough to conclude that at the.05 level.

Discussion

The current study examined gender differences in the relationship between optimism and mental health in college students. The results offer strong empirical evidence in support of the first hypothesis (H1) that optimism is positively associated with mental health. As the findings reveal, there was a strong and positive correlation between these two variables in both male (r = 0.72, p < 0.001) and female (r = 0.78, p < 0.001) students. These results are consistent with previous studies including Carver et al. (2010) and Nes & Segerstrom (2006) that suggest that optimists may engage in more adaptive styles of coping and maintain resilience and better mental health. Optimism can act as a buffer when it comes to how students handle stress and adversity, promoting hopeful expectation for the future while up to a point mitigating the psychological toll of new college challenges like academic pressure and social stress.

In addition, these findings corroborate the wider theoretical orientation of the positive psychology, specifically Seligman's PERMA model (2011) according to which optimism is a key component of subjective well-being. The robust positive associations observed among both male and female subjects support the view that optimism contributes similarly to mental health for all individuals. This may indicate that interventions that work to boost college students' optimism, such as strength-based counseling or gratitude training, or that train them to use positive reappraisal, may have the potential to improve student mental health broadly among various populations of students. Interestingly, the stronger tendency among female participants (r = 0.78) than male participants (r

= 0.72) may potentially reflect the existence of gendered differences in emotional processing or psychological self-reporting, a pattern supported by studies such as the one conducted by Matud (2004), where results indicated that women were more prone to being expressive or to manage their emotional experiences in relational or cognitively ways.

A small findings pertaining to the second hypothesis (H2) that predicted a signi cantly high tendency towards hope between the male and female student. Descriptive statistics suggested that girls had a higher score of optimism (M = 4.05, SD = 0.80) than boys (M = 3.85, SD = 0.75), but the independent samples t-test resulted in a p-value of 0.053—just above the conventional level of significance ($p < 0.05$). So, although it is a tendency that girls may be a little more optimistic than boys, it is not significant. This is in line with contradictory findings in the literature about sex differences in optimism. For instance, some research (e.g., Chang, 1998) has revealed small gender effects, whereas no differences were found in other studies or reported differences varied, indicating that gender differences in optimism could be culturally and contextually specific. The near-significant finding in the present study might have been driven by the sample size, cultural norms, or by gender differences on how optimism is understood and displayed.

These results have significant clinical implications. The strong association between optimism and mental health suggests that campus mental health programs, with a focus on disease pathology model, should instead focus more on positive psychological traits. Promoting the constructive thinking and optimistic world views coupled with future oriented perspectives through psychoeducational workshops and/or resilience training may have a positive impact on student well-being and academic functioning. While the differences between men and women on optimism were not statistically significant, it may be interesting to further study this trend, with a sample that is larger or more diverse, keeping constant other factors, such as faculty, socio-economic status or personality.

Altogether, the present study confirms that optimism is an important psychological resource associated with the mental health of college students regardless of gender. Although the gender-related optimism was not statistically significant as hypothesized, the findings have implications for the burgeoning literature exploring positive psychological traits as protective mechanisms during university life.

Conclusion
The present work seeks to investigate the relationship between mental health and optimism among university students and also to elaborate on possible gender differences in optimism. Results Strong and significant positive correlation was found between optimism and mental health in both male and female students supporting the first hypothesis (H1). These findings confirm that more optimism is related to greater mental well-being, highlighting the value of positive psychological dispositions in a university population. However, although female students were slightly more optimistic than male ones, this difference was not statistically significant at a conventional level (p = 0.053), showing only weak support for the second hypothesis (H2).

Overall, the findings suggest that optimism is a central resiliency factor in mental health and lends further support for optimism in positive psychology models. While gender might play some role in the expression or development of optimism, its impact was not substantial enough to warrant focused gender-based interventions. These results imply that interventions aimed at increasing optimism as a way to improve resilience, decrease stress, relieve depression or increase emotional well-being could potentially benefit all students, irrespective of gender.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations can be proposed:

1. **Integrate Optimism Training into Mental Health Programs:** Universities should consider incorporating optimism-building modules such as cognitive reframing, gratitude journaling, or solution-focused thinking into counseling services and wellness workshops.
2. **Promote Strength-Based Approaches in Academic Advising:** Academic advisors and mentors can help students recognize their strengths and reframe setbacks, thereby fostering a more optimistic outlook.
3. **Implement Preventive Mental Health Campaigns:** University administrations should proactively promote mental health through awareness campaigns that emphasize the benefits of positive thinking, hope, and future-orientation.
4. **Train Faculty in Psychological First Aid:** Faculty members, often the first to notice signs of distress, can be trained to encourage students toward supportive resources and promote resilience through everyday interactions.

Limitations and Future Research

There are a number of limitations to this study, although it makes a useful contribution. First, the findings were based on self-report data; thus social desirability and self-diagnosis bias may be attached. Second, the sample only included students from one educational background, which might limit the generalizability of the results. Third, since it is a cross-sectional study, no causal relationship can be inferred: optimism is linked to better metal health, but we cannot clearly say that people with better mental health are more optimistic or vice versa. Future work should perhaps even consider longitudinal analyses to further investigate how levels of optimism and mental health change over time and how one impacts the other. Furthermore, exploring moderating or mediating factors (e.g., academic stress, social support and coping styles) could lead to a better understanding of the mechanisms that connect optimism and mental health. Broadening the sample by including students from different cultural, academic, or socio-economic backgrounds would increase the generalizability of the findings and help to establish whether the gender differences we observed are culturally determined or contingent upon context.

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