

Role of Self-Compassion in Work-Family Conflict and Psychological Well-Being among Working Men and Women

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This study aimed to examine the moderating role of self-compassion in the relationship between work-family conflict and psychological well-being. A sample of 300 working men and women was selected from various telecommunication organizations of Islamabad, Pakistan, using purposive sampling technique. The age of sample ranged from 23 years to 56 years ($M = 32.66$, $SD = 5.24$). Work-Family Conflict Scale (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000), Psychological Well-Being subscale of Mental Health Inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983), and Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003) were used and results revealed that work-family conflict is a significant negative predictor of psychological well-being. Moreover, self-compassion was found to buffer the negative impact of work-family conflict on psychological well-being. The importance of incorporating self-compassion as a successful intervention for managing the impact of work-family conflict has been discussed.

Keywords. Self-compassion, work-family-conflict, psychological well-being, buffering effect, coping

Work and family play an important role in an individual's life. With the increased demands at work and changing gender roles, employees, today, are more concerned about how to maintain a balance between the demands of work and family roles. They can face difficulties in keeping a balance between the demanding roles in the spheres of work and family which has been referred to as work-family conflict (Leineweber, Baltzer, Hanson, & Westerlund, 2013). Being originated

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from role theory (Merton, 1957), this construct has been playing important role in research in the area of work-family interface. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), WFC is “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible” (p. 77). This definition hints at a bidirectional nature of relation between the domains of work and family (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997) which means that demands at work can effect an individual’s family-life and the family-life can also interfere with the work-life.

Most studies about work-family conflict have recognized that it is a significant threat for the health and well-being of an individual (Winefield, Boyd, & Winefield, 2014) and job-related outcomes (Zaman, Haque, & Nawaz, 2014). Certain outcomes related to job, such as organizational commitment (Rehman, 2015) and job satisfaction (Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002) have been reported to get affected by work-family conflict. Similarly, various health issues have been linked with work-family conflict, such as physical ailments (Lu, 2007); depression and anxiety (Obidoa, Reeves, Warren, Reisine, & Cherniak, 2011); decreased life satisfaction (Adams, King, & King, 1996); and lowered Psychological Well-Being (PWB; Panatik, Badri, Rajab, Rahman, & Shah, 2011). In short, the research evidence strongly suggests that work-family conflict is related to the employee-health and well-being. According to Deci and Ryan (2008), the construct of PWB includes both the hedonic perspective (i.e., positive affective states like happiness) and the eudaimonic perspective (i.e., optimum level of effective functioning in one’s individual or social life).

As the negative impact of work-family conflict (WFC) on psychological well-being (PWB) has been well documented, now with the emergence of positive psychology, the focus of researchers has shifted on identifying the possible moderator variables *vis-à-vis* well-being and WFC. For instance, certain personality variables have been found to buffer the adverse effects of WFC on exhaustion and depression (Kinnunen, Vermulst, Gerris, & Mäkikangas, 2003). Social support and coping have also been found to moderate the interaction of WFC and strain outcomes (Brough & O’Driscoll, 2005; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999). The present study is an attempt to increase the variety of buffering variables in connection to WFC and well-being by highlighting the role of Self-Compassion (SC).

SC is a newly emerging positive construct, which has been defined as treating oneself with care and compassion in the face of

difficulties, some personal failures or inadequacies (Brach, 2003; Salzberg, 1997). According to Neff (2003a, 2003b), SC consists of three main modules including a) self-kindness versus self-judgment; b) common humanity versus isolation; and c) mindfulness versus over-identification. SC has been found to be positively related to an individual's well-being (Neff & Faso, 2015). Compared to Neff's (2003a) perspective, Gilbert's (2005) social mentalities theory asserts that an individual adopts the soothing/calming system of compassion through a healthy bond with parents or a significant other, which then promotes the development of self-soothing behaviour, empathy, a healthy tolerance for distress, and a motivation to care for themselves and ultimately others (Gilbert, 2009).

Rationale of the Study

Pakistan is a developing nation with a wide range of industries contributing to its growth, out of these, telecommunication is a prominent sector boosting growths of above 30% annually (as cited in Mansoor, Fida, Nasir, & Ahmad, 2011). Naturally, this thriving industry is not without competition, which is most often accompanied by stress (Pelfrene, 2003). Job stress is a major predictor of low job performance (Akgunduz, 2015) and overall deterioration of mental health of employees (Schonfeld, Bianchi, & Luehring-Jones, 2017), therefore it is important to identify protective factors that can potentially moderate and buffer the impact of stress, across either by work related competition or WFC.

The research on self-compassion is growing fast as it is strongly associated with mental health (e.g., Barnard & Curry, 2011). Empirical evidence also supports the strong relationship between SC and PWB (Imtiaz, 2013; Neely, Schallert, Mohammed, Roberts, & Chen, 2009; Neff, 2011). Researchers have highlighted it as an important moderator to reduce stress and the effectiveness of SC as a tool for coping is well established (Samaie & Farahani, 2011; Sirois, Molnar, & Hirsch, 2015). However, there is little to no empirical evidence that relates self-compassion with WFC specifically. Therefore, this study builds on the premise that SC can buffer the stress produced by WFC which is threatening to the PWB at individual level. As no research has been found in Pakistan that studies the role of SC in relation to WFC and PWB, this research tries to bridge the gap in the existing body of knowledge/literature.

Objectives

The leading objectives of the current study were to explore the relationship between work-family conflict (WFC), psychological well-being (PWB), and self-compassion (SC). Further, it also aimed to study the role of self-compassion in connection to work-family conflict and psychological well-being. It is thought that self-compassion acts as a buffer to reduce stress and conflicts.

Hypotheses

- Work-family conflict negatively predicts psychological well-being of working men and women.
- Self-compassion plays a moderating role in the relationship between Work-family conflict and psychological well-being in working men and women.

Method

Research Design

It was correlational research.

Sample

A sample of 300 working married individuals (men = 170; women = 130) of an age group ranging from 23-56 years ($M = 32.66$, $SD = 5.24$) was selected from various telecommunication organizations of two cities of Pakistan (i.e., Islamabad and Rawalpindi). Purposive sampling technique was used to approach the participants in their offices. 77.3 % respondents belonged to joint family system whereas 22.7 % belonged to the nuclear family system. Participants reported having 1-5 children ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.06$). Duration of marriage ranged from 2 to 18 years. Following inclusion criteria was adopted:

- Being married and living with their families
- Having at least one child
- As the instruments used in the study were in English language, individuals who can understand and felt comfortable with English language-based questionnaires.
- The married individuals who were staying away from their families were not included in the sample.

Assessment Measures

Work-Family-Conflict Scale (WFCS). This 18-item scale was developed by Carlson, et al. (2000) which measures both work interfering

with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW) dimensions. There are six subscales, each consisting of three items. Time-based work interference with family (T-WIF) consists of items 1, 2, and 3, time-based family interference with work (T-FIW) consists of items 4, 5, and 6, strain-based work interference with family (S-WIF) consists of items 7, 8, and 9, strain-based family interference with work (S-FIW) consists of items 10, 11, and 12, behavior-based work interference with family (B-WIF) consists of items 13, 14, and 15, and behavior-based family interference with work (B-FIW) consists of items 16, 17, and 18. Scoring is done on a five point Likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Scores are computed by adding the scores on all subscales. Higher scores on each subscale show high level of WFC. Satisfactory reliabilities of the scale have been reported by authors ranging from .79 to .87 (Carlson et al., 2000). In present study that alpha coefficients of this scale and its subscales were ranged from .62 to .77.

Mental Health Inventory (MHI). This measure was developed by Veit and Ware (1983). It consists of 38 items and two sub-scales. These two subscales are the global subscales namely psychological distress and psychological well-being. For the present study Psychological Well-Being Subscale was used. It is further divided into three subscales namely general positive affect, emotional ties, and life satisfaction. It is a six point Likert scale ranging from *all of the time* (1) to *none of the time* (6). Higher scores on Psychological Well-Being Scale indicate high degree of PWB. The authors note strong reliability of the two subscales ranging from .92 to .96 (Veit & Ware, 1983). In present study the alpha reliability coefficients of this scale and its subscales were reported to be ranged from .67 to .92.

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS). This scale was originally developed by Neff (2003a) and it consists of 26 items with six subscales including Self-Kindness (items no. 5, 12, 19, 23, and 26), Self-Judgment (items no. 1, 8, 11, 16, and 21), Common Humanity (items no. 3, 7, 10, and 15), Isolation (items no. 4, 13, 18, and 25), Mindfulness (items no. 9, 14, 17, and 22), and Over-Identified (items no. 2, 6, 20, and 24). The alpha reliabilities of these subscales as noted by the original authors are .78, .77, .80, .79, .75, and .81, respectively. It is a Likert scale comprising five points ranging from *almost never* (1) to *almost always* (5). Scores are computed by adding the total scores. Self-judgment, over-identified and isolation are negatively worded items. A higher score on the scale shows

a higher level of SC. In present study the alpha coefficients of this scale and subscales were ranged from .77 to .95.

Procedure

First of all, permission from the heads of various telecommunication organizations was sought to access participants at their workplace and, subsequently, the participants were briefed regarding the nature and objectives of the present research. All ethical considerations were followed during the process of data collection. Clear instructions were written at the beginning of each questionnaire, but verbal instructions were also given, so that the participants can ask anything if they feel any ambiguity in this connection. After data collection, the data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-20) to test the hypotheses of the study.

Results

To see the relationship between work-family conflict (WFC), psychological well-being (PWB) and self-compassion (SC) in working men and women, Pearson product moment correlation analysis was run and results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Relationship Between Work-Family Conflict, Psychological Well-Being and Self-Compassion in Working Men and Women (N = 300)

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1.WFC	.57**	.50**	.58**	.58**	.67**	.57**	-.61**	-.46**	-.42**	-.62**	-.60**	-.54**	-.53**	-.58**	-.49**	-.53**	-.52**
2. TWIF	-	.03	.43**	.04	.23**	.13*	-.29**	-.20**	-.21**	-.30**	-.39**	-.39**	-.33**	-.39**	-.25**	-.37**	-.31**
3. TFIW	-	-	.09	.36**	.16**	.24**	-.30**	-.20**	-.21**	-.30**	-.24**	-.20**	-.23**	-.20**	-.25**	-.15**	-.22**
4. SWIF	-	-	-	.13*	.23**	.01	-.42**	-.29**	-.30**	-.43**	-.44**	-.40**	-.37**	-.42**	-.34**	-.40**	-.37**
5. SFIW	-	-	-	-	.28**	.28**	-.37**	-.25**	-.27**	-.37**	-.33**	-.25**	-.30**	-.30**	-.32**	-.28**	-.29**
6. BWIF	-	-	-	-	-	.41**	-.42**	-.38**	-.27**	-.42**	-.40**	-.34**	-.36**	-.36**	-.34**	-.32**	-.37**
7. BFIW	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.31**	-.26**	-.20**	-.32**	-.27**	-.26**	-.22**	.26**	-.17**	-.27**	-.24**
8. PWB	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.71**	.78**	.98**	.84**	.73**	.74**	.75**	.74**	.70**	.76**
9. LS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.50**	.65**	.54**	.44**	.46**	.56**	.46**	.45**	.49**
10. ET	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.70**	.66**	.61**	.56**	.56**	.60**	.54**	.59**
11. GPA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.83**	.72**	.74**	.74**	.73**	.69**	.75**
12. SCS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.88**	.91**	.86**	.87**	.84**	.88**
13. SK	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.71**	.82**	.65**	.76**	.68**
14. SJ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.68**	.86**	.66**	.84**
15. CH	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.62**	.82**	.63**
16. IS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.61**	.83**
17. M	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.63**
18. OI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. WFC= Work-Family-Conflict Scale; T-WIF = Time-Based Work-Interference with Family Scale; T-FIW = Time-Based Family-Interference with Work Scale; S-WIF = Strain-Based Work-Interference with Family Scale; S-FIW = Strain-Based Family-Interference with Work Scale; B-WIF = Behavior-Based Work-Interference with Family Scale; B-FIW = Behavior-Based Family-Interference with Work Scale; PWB = Psychological Well-Being Scale; ET = Emotional-Ties Scale; GPA = General Positive Affect Scale; SCS = Self-Compassion Scale; SK = Self-Kindness Scale; SJ = Self-Judgment Scale; CH = Common Humanity Scale; IS = Isolation Scale; M = Mindfulness Scale; OI = Over-Identification Scale.

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

Table 1 showed that the WFC has a significant negative relationship with psychological wellbeing and self-compassion. Results also showed that psychological wellbeing was positively related to self-compassion. The subscales of these scales were also significantly related to the respective scales showing construct validity of the scale. Results of Table 1 were in expected direction and hypothesis about the relationship of these variables was proved.

To see whether self-compassion plays a moderating role in the relationship between Work-family conflict and psychological well-being in working men and women, moderation through hierarchical regression analysis was conducted and results are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Moderation through Hierarchical Regression Indicating Interaction effect of Work-Family Conflict and Psychological Well-Being Predicting Self-Compassion (N = 300)

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	95% CI	
	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Constant	26.42**	50.56**	49.53	51.59
Work-family conflict	-.23**	.45**	.40	.49
Self-compassion	.47**	-.22**	-.34	-.10
Work-family conflict x SC		-.01**	-.01	-.00
<i>R</i> ²	.72	.73		
<i>F</i>	392.67**	375.53**		
ΔR^2		.01**		
ΔF^2		17.14**		

Note. SC= Self-compassion

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

In the current study role of SC as moderator variable in the relationship between work-family conflict and psychological well-being was explored. For this purpose, moderation analysis was done through Process macro. The results revealed that work-family conflict is negatively predicting psychological well-being and self-compassion acts as a significant moderator in this relationship. This supports hypothesis no. 2 of the study.

Further conditional effect of work-family conflict on psychological well-being at different levels of self-compassion was also determined (See Table 3).

Table 3

Conditional Effect of Work-Family Conflict on Psychological Well-Being at Different Levels of Self-Compassion (N=300)

Self-Compassion	Effect	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
61.28	-.02	-.25	.799	-.18	.14
81.22	-.23	-4.30	.000	-.33	-.12
101.17	-.43	-5.75	.000	-.58	-.28

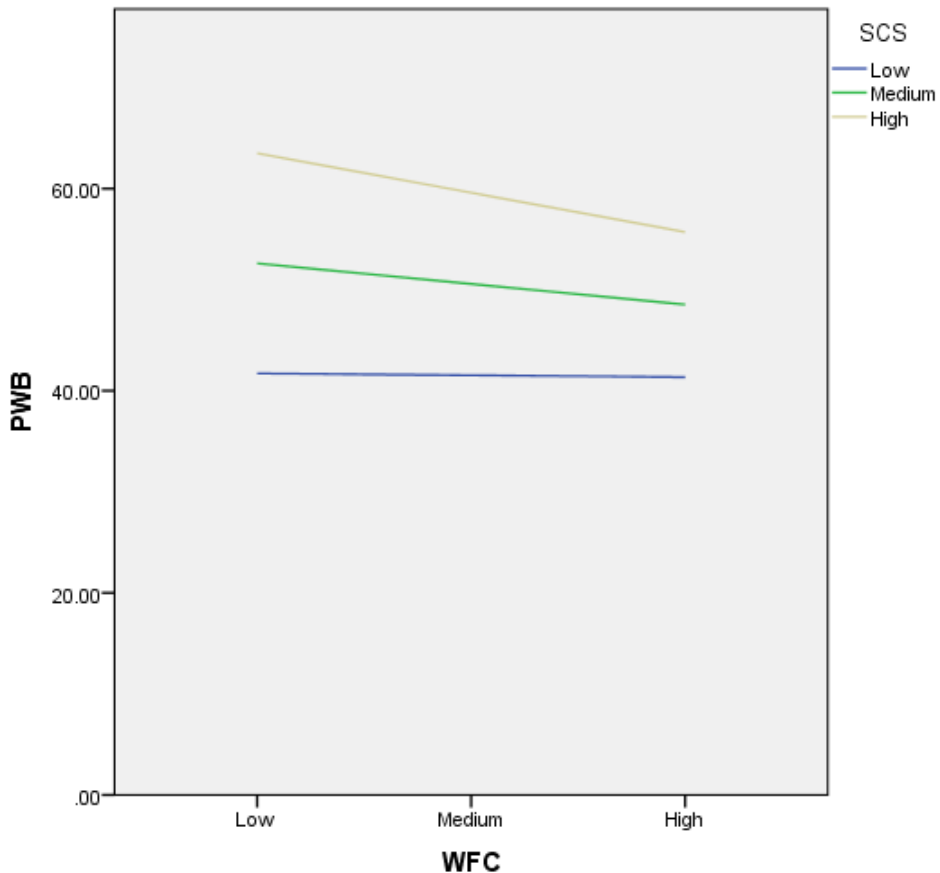


Figure 1. Moderation by Self-Compassion on Relationship Between Work-Family Conflict and Psychological Well-Being

Modgraph revealed significant relationship between work-family conflict and psychological well-being. When work-family conflict (WFC) is high, psychological well-being (PWB) is low; however, individuals having high levels of self-compassion (SC) are also scoring

high on psychological well-being even in the presence of work-family conflict.

Discussion

This research was undertaken in order to explore the relationship of Work-Family Conflict (WFC), Psychological Well-Being (PWB), and Self-Compassion (SC) in working men and women in telecommunication sector of Pakistan. The telecommunication industry of this country is undergoing rapid changes and development with ever growing competition, where organizations are exerting enormous pressure on employees (Mansoor et al., 2011), which inevitably leads to a disbalance in work and family life of the employee. Therefore, this study intended to explore the moderating role of SC in the relationship between WFC and PWB among employees of Pakistani telecommunication sector. Reliabilities of the scales and subscales were found to be satisfactory. Consistent with the previous literature (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011), WFC was found to be negatively related with PWB highlighting that WFC is a negative construct and is threatening for employee's PWB. A study by Mathews, Wayne, and Ford (2014) revealed similar results that WFC is negatively related to an employee's well-being. WFC was also negatively related to SC which is also supporting the existing literature. Neff (2011) explained that SC acts as a coping mechanism and it enables an individual to handle the daily stressors and conflicts related to work and family life in a better way. Another research revealed that WFC and SC are negatively related, and SC is an important aspect to protect people from experiencing more WFC (Lilius, Kanov, Dutton, Worline, & Maitlis, 2011). Further, the findings revealed significant positive relation of SC with PWB which again is supporting the existing literature (Abbasi, 2014; Saricaoglu & Arslan, 2013).

One of the significant objectives of this study was to investigate the role of Self-Compassion (SC) in relationship between Work-Family Conflict (WFC) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB). Moderation analysis was done through Process macro, which found that SC was acting as a moderator in relationship between WFC and PWB. This finding is consistent with the previous literature focusing a moderating role of SC in connection with stressors and their negative outcomes (Samaie & Farahani, 2011). Overall, the present findings suggest that SC helps in interpreting stressors as less of a personal threat and therefore treat them less harshly when they are unable to meet the demands of either work or family domain. These findings highlighted that higher self-

compassion can buffer the negative impact of work-family conflict experienced by working men and women. However interestingly, the results also showed that at the lowest level of self-compassion there is no significant relationship between WFC and PWB (see Table 2). This is also visible in the graph which shows a horizontal line indicating no relationship between WFC and PWB (see Figure1).

Several studies have recognized a strong relationship between SC and PWB (Neely et al., 2011; Neff, 2011, 2015; Wei, Liao, Ky, & Shaffer, 2011; Yarnell & Neff, 2013). In this study too, the correlation coefficient between Self-Compassion (SC) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) was considerably stronger than the one between Work-Family Conflict (WFC) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB), therefore, these results suggested that given the strong association of SC with PWB, the people who have very low levels of SC are likely to have poor PWB regardless of WFC. In other words, a person who is unable to foster self-compassion will fail to treat themselves better and with kindness which would substantially harm their psychological wellbeing (Tarber, Cohn, Casazza, Hastings, & Steele, 2016).

Limitations and suggestions. Several limitations were present in the study that should be highlighted while reading the results. Due to time constraints, the researchers abstained from translating the questionnaires from English into Urdu, therefore the participants who were not having command on English could not participate in the study which suggested that in future researchers may use Urdu language instruments which would help the results to have greater generalizability in the Pakistani population. Extending the work on other samples such as teachers, doctors, nurses would help in validating the present findings. Future researchers can also to study the factors contributing in work-family conflict if both husbands and wives work in same organization.

Implications. Despite these limitations, the present research contributes well in the existing literature by highlighting the buffering effect of self-compassion in the relationship of WFC and PWB which was a gap in the existing literature. Keeping in view the findings of the study, it is essential to enhance SC in employees to improve their well-being and to enable them to better cope with WFC. Intervention programs focusing on enhancing self-compassion in the workforce could be started by organizational psychologists to reduce the harmful effects of stressors like WFC on the psychological well-being of employees of telecommunication sector. This will not only be beneficial for the

individuals but also for the organizations. Overall, the study suggests that individuals with a higher level of SC are in a better position to employ effective coping strategies, while facing difficulties, which may reduce the effects produced by stressors.

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Received February 13, 2016

Revisions Received February 9, 2019