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Relationship between Work and Family Conflict, Work-Autonomy and Work Exhaustion among IT Professionals

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationship between work-family conflict, work autonomy, and work exhaustion among IT professionals. A purposive sampling technique was employed to collect data from various IT organizations, software houses, and IT universities across Pakistan. The sample comprised 300 participants, including 150 males and 150 females. Three psychometrically validated instruments were used: the Work and Family Conflict Scale (Netemeyer et al., 1996), the Work Design Questionnaire (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Data were analyzed using SPSS. Regression analysis indicated that work-family conflict significantly predicted work exhaustion. Correlational analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between work-family conflict and work exhaustion, while work autonomy was weakly correlated with work-family conflict. Independent samples t-tests indicated significant gender differences: females reported higher levels of exhaustion and work-family conflict, whereas males reported greater autonomy. Additionally, participants working fixed eight-hour shifts exhibited higher levels of autonomy and lower levels of exhaustion compared to those working variable or extended hours. These findings have practical implications for designing workplace policies, support systems, and training programs to reduce work-related stress and promote employee well-being within the IT sector.

Keywords: *IT Professionals, work autonomy, work and family conflict, work exhaustion, working hours*

INTRODUCTION

In the ever-changing world of Information Technology (IT), with rapid rates of innovation and job requirements changing, the work experience for IT professionals must navigate multiple challenges for their health and performance in the occupation. The study considers three variables, work and family conflict, work autonomy, and work tiredness or exhaustion, that are vital in determining IT professionals' perceptions of their work.

Work autonomy and work and family conflict effects on job tiredness levels of IT professionals is outlined. The pressure from the demands of IT job responsibilities and project deadlines can increases the stress associated with family commitments and the potential for difficulties balancing both family and work expectations. The numerous days of distractions and potential absenteeism from family events associated with IT projects can add to feelings of anxiousness and mental fatigue. Both family and work pressures may negatively affect the quality of the home and work relationships, increasing the feelings of tiredness.

IT professionals may benefit from making as many decision as possible regarding their work or work tasks and with work autonomy, work exhaustion can be buffered. Work autonomy may improve job satisfaction and reduce stress levels. IT professionals may be motivated and engaged in their work, and when given work autonomy may manage their workloads, prioritizing tasks and activities by personal preferences can reduce potential work exhaustion, which positively impacts their health and well-being.

Additionally, within the IT industry, the degree of work-related autonomy provided to employees can have a significant impact on their experiences of work-related exhaustion. Work-related autonomy is defined as the latitude that individuals have with respect to their work assignments, work schedule, and decisions-making processes. Autonomy can promote empowerment and job satisfaction for employees, but too much autonomy based on a lack of systems of support can result in increased stress and burnout.

Work and Family Conflict

Work and family conflict is a phenomenon that has emerged in the dynamic landscape of modern work environments as a result of the complicated interplay between professional responsibilities and familial commitments.

Work-family conflict is described as a situation where the demands and expectations of one's work and family roles are incompatible with each other to some extent, resulting in conflict. (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict refers to a scenario where the demands and stress associated with one's job hinder fulfilling responsibilities towards their family, while family-work conflict describes a situation where the demands and stress from one's family obstruct fulfilling personal obligations. (Netemeyer et al., 1996). It illustrates the fine line that people have to walk while juggling the frequently conflicting responsibilities of partner, parent, and worker.

WFC occurs when obligations and preferences within the family sphere are impeded by the demands of work, and vice versa. Because they are frequently expected to be "always on," IT workers may find it difficult to switch off, which can result in guilt, neglect, and a decreased level of involvement in their families (Allen et al., 2012).

Work-related Autonomy

An essential component of organizational psychology is work-related autonomy, which includes the extent to which workers are free to choose how they want to carry out their jobs. "Organizations give people the power to organizing work schedules and determining the degree of autonomy, independence, and self-direction in work processes. (Oldham and Hackman, 1976).

Autonomy in work can be rewarding because it gives individuals, to some degree, ownership over the work tasks to be performed, as well as control over the timing of the tasks. However, autonomy and ownership can sometimes be a double-edged sword. While having more control and taking ownership of work may be great at times, increased levels of autonomy could also lead to longer working hours and blurring boundaries between work and home which can contribute to work-family conflict (Bakker et al.,

2014). On the other hand, Dijkstra et al. (2017) found, autonomy can also mean that the individual has the ability to manage their own workload and create a work schedule that allows for family time, which could lessen WFC.

Autonomy can have different components: having decision-making authority, decision-making authority over the task, authority to control when and how to perform the task and authority to allocate resources and to manage problems independently. Employees have high levels of autonomy in that they are able to make decisions about the work tasks or assignments without being overseen constantly or day to day, deciding how to complete the tasks, deciding on when they want to work, how to allocate job related resources.

Work Exhaustion

Work fatigue has become an everyday common challenge that affects the health and productivity of employees in an age where most workplaces are fast-paced and job demands are excessive. Similar to "burnout" work fatigue or work-related fatigue is defined as an overwhelming state of emotional, physical, and cognitive exhaustion resulting from physical and/or psychological extra-stress stemming from prolonged work situations and circumstances (Jackson and Maslach, 1981). Work fatigue is beyond feeling exhausted after a long day of work; to be work fatigued involves severe levels of exhaustion, emotional detachment, and a lack in feelings of accomplishment.

According to psychologists, this syndrome influence's cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal outcomes; in operational terms it shows itself as negative behaviors directed toward co-workers, clients, and work itself (Maslach et al., 2006). Based on research, work fatigue is not a personal issue, but rather some aspects of job-related activities are posting the challenge (Bouza et al., 2020).

Burnout syndrome is a response to sustained stress in a workplace which can result in chronic outcomes effects that can wreak havoc on one mind-body health (Martin, 2016). Research by (Ahola et al., 2017) has directly linked working longer hours and greater job requirements to fatigue and has shown how susceptible the information technology (IT) professionals faces these consequences. Adding to this, burnout can further intensify the impacts of work stress by creating the feeling of never getting ahead and draining whichever coping capabilities the employee has to deal with work demands (Blomme et al., 2018).

The research investigates the impact of work-family conflict and work autonomy on work exhaustion in IT workers, addressing an important occupational health and organizational psychology issue. IT professions typically have demanding workloads, and achieving work-life balance is incredibly difficult given our current digital society, often promoting fatigue and burnout. This study looks to study these dynamics to develop specific strategies for increasing job satisfaction and achieving work-life balance for IT employees. Understanding the impact of work-family conflict and autonomy on work exhaustion plays a critical role in developing effective programming interventions to reduce stresses along with designing a workplace culture that embraces autonomy. This study broadens existing literature to help inform actions taken to increase health and job satisfaction in the IT industry, where a proactive approach to crisis is needed to address unpleasant experiences.

METHOD

Objectives
The study has these aims;

- To explore the associations between the work and family conflict experienced by IT employees, work autonomous, and work exhaustion.
- To examine the predictive role that work and family conflict has for work exhaustion experienced by IT employees.
- Investigating how gender differs in work and family conflict, work-related autonomy, work exhaustion amidst IT professionals.
- To assess the effect of working hours on autonomy and work-related tasks exhaustion among IT professionals.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be notable correlation between work and family conflict, work-related autonomy and work exhaustion among IT professionals.

H2: Work-family conflict predicts work-exhaustion among IT professionals.

H3: Gender will be significantly different on work and family conflict, Work-related autonomy and work exhaustion among IT professionals.

H4: Working hours will be significantly different on work-autonomy and work exhaustion among IT professionals.

Sample

The study sample consist of N=300 IT Professionals (male=150, female=150) IT professionals taken purposively from different from different IT organizations, software houses and IT universities of Haripur.

Instruments

Measures such as Demographic sheet, Work and Family Conflict Scale. The Work Design Questionnaire and Maslach Burnout Inventory were used in the study for collecting data from sample.

Demographic Sheet

Demographic sheet was used for getting information about gender, working hours.

Work and Family Conflict Scale (WAFCS) (Netemeyer et al., 1996)

Netemeyer et al. (1996) developed the Work and Family Conflict Scale (WAFCS). This scale includes a five-item measure called the Job-Family Conflict Scale, which assesses the extent to which job responsibilities clash with family time. Respondents rate their level of agreement or disagreement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). Five statements indicate that involvement in professional duties makes it challenging to participate in family activities. The reliability coefficient of WAFCS, known as Cronbach's alpha, is α=0.88.

The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006)

The primary data collection tool utilized is the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ), developed by Morgeson and Humphrey in 2006. I'm specifically employing the WDQ scale to gauge job-related

autonomy, although it's commonly used for assessing various aspects of work design such as task diversity, autonomy, task relevance, feedback, and skill variety. It comprises twenty-one items rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Under the category of Work Scheduling, the autonomy of job scheduling will be evaluated using subscales from the WDQ, including work-method autonomy (three questions) and decision-making autonomy (three items). Each response on the scale is assigned a score ranging from 1 to 5. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the WDQ is α= 0.87.

Maslach Burnout Inventory (*MBI) *(Maslach & Jackson, 1986)

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), developed by Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter in 1996, will be utilized to assess work-related exhaustion. Maslach and Jackson (1986) originally created this inventory, which has become the most commonly used tool for identifying potential burnout risk. The MBI consists of 22 items rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from "Never" to "Every day." It measures three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of personal accomplishment. The Cronbach's alpha scores for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and sense of personal accomplishment are 0.90, 0.76, and 0.76, respectively, with an overall questionnaire reliability of 0.78 (Cronbach's α = 0.761).

Procedure

After approval of research titled "The relationship between Work and Family Conflict And Work-Related Autonomy and Work Exhaustion among IT professionals," received approval from the Department of Psychology for a B.S. in psychology degree requirement. Permissions were secured from relevant authorities to collect data from IT professionals. Informed consent was obtained from participants before administering questionnaires. Data was gathered via Google Forms and physical visits to IT settings. Confidentiality measures were ensured, and participants were debriefed post-questionnaire completion. SPSS version 20 was utilized for data analysis to investigate the relationships between these variables.

RESULTS

Table 1

Psychometric Properties of Demographic Variables

Variables	*N*	*%*
Gender		
1.Male	150	50.0
2.Female	150	50.0
Working Hours		
1.Eight hours per day	97	32.3
2. More than eight hours per day	116	38.7
3. Variable hours per day	87	29.0

Note. N =300 & %= Percentage

Table 1 is showing the psychometric properties of the demographic variables. Male and female participation statistical values are (n=150, 50.0%; n=150, 50%) respectively. For eight hours per day, more than eight hours per day and variable hours per day participants numerical values are (n=97, 32.3%; n=116, 38.7% & n=87, 29.0%) respectively.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation for Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1.Work and Family Conflict	-		
2.Work-Autonomy	.14*	-	
3.Work Exhaustion	.49**	.12*	-

Note. * p<.05, ** p<.01 & *** p<.001

Table 2 is illustrating the Pearson correlation between the variables under investigation. The results showed that Work and Family Conflict has positive correlation with Work Exhaustion (r = 0.49, <.01), And Work-Autonomy has insignificant weak positive correlation with Work and Family Conflict (r = 0.14, > .05).Similarly, Work Exhaustion demonstrated a positive correlation with Work and Family Conflict (r = 0.49, <.01).

Table 3

Linear Regression Analysis for the Effect of Work Exhaustion on Work-Family Conflict among IT professionals(N=300)

Variables	*B*	β	*SE*
Constant	28.45***		.987
Work-family conflict	.371***	.497	.038
R^2	.247		

*Note*** p<.001.R^2 = Variance, *B=Unstandardized Regression Coefficient,*β=*Standardized Regression Coefficient & SE=Standard Error*

Table 3 shows the regression analysis's findings between work exhaustion and work and family conflict. The R-squared value of .247 indicates that the predictor accounts for 19% of the variance in the outcome variable. Results indicated that a work-family dispute is a strong predictor of work fatigue (β=.497, <.001) among IT professionals.

Table 4

Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Values of Males and Females on Work and Family Conflict, Work related Autonomy *and* Work Exhaustion *among IT Professionals*

	Males (n=150)		Females (n=150)				
Variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(298)	p	Cohen's *d*
Work-Family Conflict	36.6	10.7	41.13	6.67	-4.37	.000	0.5
Work-Autonomy	31.8	8.87	23.24	12.81	6.76	.000	0.2
Work-Exhaustion	21.7	14.5	29.70	14.56	-4.72	.000	0.5

Note. n=No of Cases, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation & =Significance Level

Table 4 showed noteworthy mean variations on work-family conflict with *t* (298) =-4.37, <.05. The results indicated that females has significantly increased degree of familywork conflict *(M = 41.13, SD = 6.67)* compared to males (M = *36.6, SD = 10.7)*, t (298) = 4.37, <.001. Findings indicated noteworthy mean variations on work-autonomy with *t* (298) = 6.76, <.001.The results indicated that males reported significantly higher levels of autonomy *(M = 31.8, SD = 8.87)* than females *(M = 23.24, SD = 12.81)*. Results also showed noteworthy mean variations on work-exhaustion with *t* (298) =-4.72, <.001.The results indicated that female IT professionals reported significantly higher levels *(M = 29.70, SD = 14.56)* than males *(M = 21.7, SD = 14.5).*

Table 5

Mean Standard Deviation and One-way Analysis of Variance of Work-Autonomy *and* Work Exhaustion *across working hours among IT Professionals*

	Eight hours per day n=(87)		More than eight hours per day (n=116)		Variable hours per day n=(97)			
Variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*(2,297)	η^2
Work Autonomy	29.33	9.68	18.53	12.83	26.41	12.0	24.69***	.14
Work Exhaustion	25.63	15.07	37.09	13.02	23.85	15.3	36.31***	.15

Note. n=No of Cases, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, *** p<.001 &η^2=Eta Square

Table 5 is illustrating the mean, standard deviation and *F*-values for work autonomy and work exhaustion across working hours. Findings indicated mean differences across working hours on work autonomy with *F*(2, 297) = 24.69, *<.001*.Findings revealed that participants reporting 8 hours per day (M = 29.33, SD = 9.68) had significantly higher levels of work autonomy as compared to participants working more than 8 hours and variable hours per day. Findings also revealed significant mean differences across working

hours on work exhaustion with $F(2, 297) = 26.31$, $<.001$.Results showed that participants reporting 8 hours per day (M = 25.63, SD = 15.07) had significantly lower levels of work exhaustion compared to those reporting more than 8 hours and variable hours per day. The value of $\eta^2$was 0.15<.50 which indicated medium effect size.

DISSCUSSION

The study aims to evaluate the quantitative survey on the "Relationship between Work- and Family Conflict, Work-Autonomy, and Work Exhaustion among IT Professionals" and explore demographic differences on these variables. The difficulty of striking a balance between work and family obligations is known as work-family conflict, whereas work-autonomy gauges an individual's level of independence in making decisions and carrying out tasks. The symptoms of work burnout include fatigue and uncertainty about one's ability to perform. The validity and reliability of the constructs were confirmed before analysis.

First hypothesis predicted that among IT workers, work and family conflict, job-related autonomy, and work exhaustion will all have a substantial correlation. The study's alternative hypothesis is confirmed by the findings from Table 3, which demonstrated a substantial correlation between Work and Family Conflict, Work-Autonomy, and Work Exhaustion." IT Road Warriors: Balancing Work-Family Conflict, Job Autonomy, and Work Overload to Mitigate Turnover Intentions" was the title of a 2007 study by Ahuja et al. The results show that while greater job autonomy acts as a mitigating factor, reducing the negative impacts of work and family conflict and work overload on turnover intentions, higher levels of these factors are linked to increased intentions to leave one's job.

The second hypothesis posits that among IT professionals, work and family conflict is a predictor of work-exhaustion. Table 4's results showed that work and family conflict significantly predicts work exhaustion, supporting the study's alternative hypothesis. The interplay of work and family conflict, job-related autonomy, and work exhaustion among employees was the subject of a one-year longitudinal study by Chen et al. (2022). Their results, when subjected to structural equation modeling analysis, provide credence to the idea that a greater baseline level of work-family conflict is a reliable indicator of increasing work weariness six months later.

The third hypothesis puts forth that, among IT workers, there will be notable differences based on gender in terms of work and family conflict, job-related autonomy, and work exhaustion. The study's alternative hypothesis is confirmed by the results from Table 5 in the Values of the t-test gender differences, which showed that men reported higher degrees of autonomy and work-family conflict and exhaustion, respectively, and that women reported high levels of both. Significant gender disparities in work-family conflict were found in a study by Komal D et al. (2021) on "Gender Differences in Work Family Conflict and its Relationship with Work Performance." Compared to male employees, Indian female employees reported higher levels of work-family conflict.

In line with our hypothesis, Stojmenovska, D. (2023) conducted a study titled "Gender Differences in Job Resources and Strains in Authority Positions." The study's findings indicate that women in authority positions report lower levels of autonomy and are more likely to experience work-related exhaustion than men in similar roles. Importantly, among all gender/authority status groupings, women in authority positions are most likely to experience feelings of job burnout and tiredness.

The fourth hypothesis puts forward that there would be a considerable difference in working hours between IT professionals in terms of work-autonomy and work exhaustion. Table 6's results show that individuals who worked 8-hour days felt more autonomous and less exhausted than those who worked variable or longer hours. This study lends credence to our alternate idea. A study titled "The nonlinear

consequences of working hours for job satisfaction: The moderating role of job autonomy" was carried out in 2023 by Dong, R. et al. The findings demonstrated that the inverse U-shaped relationship between working hours and job satisfaction was indeed moderated by job autonomy. This shows that the detrimental impacts of lengthy work hours on job satisfaction may be mitigated by employment autonomy.

Another study by Chen, J.-D. et al., (2016) titled "The Associations Between Long Working Hours, Physical Inactivity, and Burnout" also supports our theory. The findings demonstrated a high correlation between working hours and burnout when working more than 40 hours per week and more than 60 hours per week. Setting a weekly limit of 40 hours for work could help avoid burnout.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Following are the shortcomings of research.

1. Sample size (N=300) was not standard sample size so, results cannot generalized to the whole population. A large number of populations should have been used.
2. The use of purposive convenient sampling may introduce selection bias. Utilize random sampling techniques to minimize selection bias.
3. Sample collected only from IT Professionals of Haripur. Samples should also be collected from other cities.

IMPLICATIONS

The study's findings on work and family conflict, work autonomy, and work exhaustion among IT professionals provide actionable insights for organizations. Strategies such as workload management, promoting work-life balance, improving communication, and fostering a positive work environment can mitigate exhaustion, enhance well-being, and improve job satisfaction and retention rates. Addressing these factors can also boost performance, engagement, motivation, and the quality of work. The study also emphasizes the necessity for more investigation to close gaps in the body of knowledge and guide organizational behaviors in the future.

CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the "*Relationship between Work and Family Conflict, Work-Autonomy and Work Exhaustion among IT Professionals*". Data was collected from IT professionals from different IT organizations, software houses and IT universities by using purposive sampling technique. It is concluded that regression analysis demonstrated that work and family conflict significantly predicts work exhaustion. Correlational results revealed positive relationships between work and family conflict and work exhaustion, while work autonomy showed a weak correlation with work and family conflict. In values of t-test gender differences were observed, females reporting higher levels of exhaustion and work and family conflict, and males reporting higher autonomy. Additionally, participants working eight hour days had increased levels of autonomy and lower exhaustion compared to those working variable or more than eight hours.

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