

The Impact of Work-Life Balance on Stress: The Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation Among Working Professionals: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance and emotion regulation are crucial factors influencing stress levels among working professionals. This review explores the interplay between these constructs, focusing on the mediating role of emotional regulation in the relationship between work-life balance and stress. Drawing from various theoretical frameworks, including Role Theory, Boundary Theory, and the Process Model of Emotion Regulation, the review examines how individuals manage their roles, boundaries, and emotions to maintain well-being and productivity in demanding occupations. Poor work-life balance is associated with increased stress, burnout, and health issues, while effective emotional regulation can mitigate the impact of stress and promote resilience. The review highlights the importance of understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying stress management and the need for interventions that support work-life balance and emotional regulation skills. By investigating the mediating role of emotion regulation across diverse high-stress professions, this review aims to provide insights into the complex dynamics of stress, work-life balance, and emotional well-being in the modern workplace.

Keywords: *Work-life balance, Stress management, Emotion regulation, Working professionals, Mental well-being, Job satisfaction*

Today, the workplace is changing more rapidly than ever before, presenting both challenges and opportunities. Advancements in technology have greatly enhanced flexibility in the workplace. However, external factors have also fused the lines separating work and personal life, making it increasingly difficult for employers to disconnect. The resulting imbalance often creates excessive stress, which reduces job satisfaction, mental health, and the overall quality of life. Despite many individuals searching for work-life balance, their concern for professional success forces them into a situation where they must work long hours and have poor work-home integration (Chandra, 2012, p. 1041). Employees tend to feel more negative emotions (such as anger and frustration) than positive ones (such as happiness and enthusiasm; Basch & Fisher, 2000) and the negative emotions they experience are frequently more intense (such as rage, fear, and loathing; Dasborough, 2006). Emotion regulation is a concept that has sparked interest in explaining individual differences. The capacity to control one's own feelings and

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emotional reaction is known as emotional regulation (Gross, 1998). While emotional dysregulation is a component of many diseases, including anxiety and depression, it is generally believed that adaptive emotion regulation supports mental health and adaptive functioning (Chambers et al., 2009).

Stress is a part of our lives, and we deal with it on an ongoing basis. Scientists concur that most people are capable of handling modest levels of stress and that this can even be advantageous. However, rising stress levels can quickly result in inadequate workforce morale, decreased productivity, and declined job fulfilment (Stranks, 2005). Increasing productivity and workload are crucial components for reducing stress. An improved approach to scheduling work hours aids stress and tension management. Stress will ultimately decrease in a productive workplace where workers feel in charge of their workload, have the freedom to plan their own schedules, and are surrounded by work-life balance (Deery & Jago, 2015). Researchers are becoming more interested in the function of emotional regulation in the workplace as they perform numerous studies on occupational stress and well-being. Numerous studies on emotion regulation have also been conducted in the field of lifelong development psychology. According to (Lindstrom, 1994 & Taylor, 1995), a healthy organization is one with low stress levels and high levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The connection between stress and job satisfaction has been extensively researched in pertinent literature.

Recent studies have begun to investigate the possible connection among these three significant psychological and occupational constructs: work-life balance, stress and emotional regulation. Although work-life balance is frequently regarded as a crucial component in stress reduction, emotional control may operate as a buffer or mediator in this interaction. It is crucial to comprehend how emotional regulation affects or mitigates the relationship between stress and work-life balance when creating efficient treatments and support networks, especially for professionals in high-pressure industries.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance, also referred to as WLB, emerged in the vernacular in 1986, although it has been used informally for several years prior. Work-life balance programs were implemented as early as the 1930s. WLB is supposed to be positive when there is a minimum role conflict at work or at home. Yet, the role in compatibility between the work and non-work domains leads to conflict, which results in a person experiencing lack of balance. WLB can be defined as the ratio of your time spent on paid work to your time spent with family engaging in leisure activities. In the past two decades, remarkable developments have been experienced within the family and work spheres. The traditional female worker has dramatically changed, in terms of both quantify and wage relative to men. Concurrently, men have assumed traditional female caregiving responsibilities, and both parents are spending more time raising children. Early perspective on the link between work and home held that they were separate, unrelated, and unaffected by one another. Blood and Wolfe (1960), who were pioneers of this perspective, applied this concept to blue collar workers. "They explained that for workers in unsatisfying or un-involving jobs, segmentation of work and home is natural process." In the segmentation theory, work and family operate as separate entities; there is no interaction between work life and family life. Segmentation theory considers work and family as distinct entities and experiences in one will not affect or influence experience in the other (Young and Kleiner, 1992). "For example, a person in a

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very stressful job might feel overwhelmed by work and as such might want to build a wall to separate work from the family unit.”

Theoretical framework for understanding work-life balance includes Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964) and Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000). Based on Role Theory, a person experiences several roles in life. For instance, they may be employees, parents, spouses, or caregivers, and tend to have multiple roles competing for their attention. When one role's expectations intrude into another, a person undergoes role conflict which results in stress and imbalance. Work-life balance exists when a person can meet expectations from both sets of roles without consideration for effort and sacrifice. Conversely, Boundary Theory posits that individuals define both psychological and physical boundaries separating work and non-work areas of their lives. These boundaries can be left loose or tight depending on the context of the individual or organization. Individuals who are good at managing these boundaries are likely to experience higher work-life balance and lower stress levels (Clark, 2000). Conversely, when work intrudes into personal life, individuals suffer emotional exhaustion and a reduced sense of well-being. These theories support each other in explaining how competition for roles and boundaries can influence work-life balance as well as job satisfaction, stress and emotional well-being.

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation is the process by which we attempt to control the emotions we experience, the timing of those emotions, and the way in which we display them (Gross, 1998). While the study of emotion regulation is a relatively recent development in emotional research, the concern for managing emotions is far from new. Emotion regulation has been examined in relation to psychological defense mechanism (Freud, 1936/1959), stress and coping strategies (Lazarus, 1966), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), and self-regulation (Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989). To improve the caliber of their interactions with coworkers, employees and the companies where they work will be significantly impacted by how successfully this is accomplished. But there are now other ways to conceptualize and operationalize emotion regulation (ER), especially when it comes to interpersonal relationships, in the subject of organizational science.

The fundamental approach regarding emotional regulation can be traced back to Gross' Process Model of Emotion Regulation from 1998. This model separates strategies into two categories: regulation by antecedents and regulation by response. Antecedent-focused strategies, like cognitive reappraisal, take place prior to the emotional response, while response-focused ones, such as expressive suppression, are utilized after the emotion has been evoked. Expressive suppression is the only response-focused strategy available. According to Gross (2002), cognitive reappraisal is usually less adaptive than suppression; however, the results tend to indicate less stress and more well-being.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of cognitive appraisal and coping, which highlights how individual interpretation shapes emotional responses, also lends support to the framework. This paradigm suggests that people's emotional experiences are influenced by their coping mechanisms and how they assess stressors. Therefore, emotional control plays a key role in how people manage work-related stress and preserve psychological resilience.

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Stress

The contemporary science that was derived from the term stress since it has both advantages (eustress) and disadvantages (distress) was introduced by Hans Selye. He is regarded as the father of contemporary stress. A person who is under stress is defined as someone who is responding in a typical way to a demanding and obstructive environment as a risk or hazard and restricted resources (Selye, 1976). Stress is the emotion we get when we start to doubt our abilities to handle a problem. Unreasonable expectations and dissatisfaction result from stress, which can be caused by either a lack of assessment or an inaccurate evaluation of people and the surroundings (Denise. A, 2002). According to Jung (2013), job stressors such as role overload, role incapacity, and role limit, as well as the mediating effect of mood regulation on the other hand, somewhat linked to incapacity, role limitation, and unbelief.

Theoretical framework for understanding stress includes a biological viewpoint by Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) model (1956). Which postulates that stress reactions occur in three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. Burnout anxiety, and depression are among the physiological and psychological breakdowns that result from prolonged stress exposure without proper coping mechanisms.

Role of Emotion Regulation as a Mediator

Emotion regulation works as a mediator when examining the relationship between stress and work-life balance, assisting in clarifying how and why stress is experienced differently. Individuals may feel overwhelmed even with good work-life balance due to poor emotional management. Research indicates that the ability to regulate emotions can mitigate the impact of stress when individuals can remain calm and rational under pressure (John & Gross, 2004; Troy et al., 2010). Hence, emotion regulation is crucial from a psychological perspective regarding the degree of stress one can endure, particularly in demanding work and life situations.

Rationale for the Study

The Current study investigates how many different aspects of professional life – specifically, people in a variety of demanding occupations, including the defense sector, healthcare, corporate, business, and teacher–find it increasingly difficult to balance their personal and professional obligations. Among working professionals aged 18 years and above, this study aimed to explore the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between stress and work-life balance. This study focuses on a variety of high-stress professions and is intended to produce insights that are deep psychological knowledge and broad in relevance by concentrating on a variety of high-stress professions. The purpose of this study is to investigate how stress and work-life balance are mediated by emotion regulation. Put another way, the study will look at whether those who are better at controlling emotions are less likely to feel stressed, even if they don't have a good work-life balance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature examines the relationship between various components is crucial to fully comprehending how stress impacts working professionals and possible solutions. Three main topics are covered in this study: stress, emotion regulation and work-life balance. This review is divided into three sections for clarity: (a) work-life balance and stress (b) emotion regulation and stress (c) work-life balance and emotion regulation.

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Work-Life Balance and Stress

Stress is frequently one of the first symptoms that people experience when they are unable to balance their personal and professional lives. An imbalanced routine causes mental and physical exhaustion, whether the worker is a military officer on duty all the time, a business employee chasing deadlines, a nurse working night shifts, or a teacher juggling family and school responsibilities. Workplace stress can lead to terrible outcomes. There are numerous workplace reasons that involve a complex interplay of psychological, physical, and social factors. Since stress affects people differently, it is challenging to quantify. People's health and happiness are strongly correlated with stress (Blaug, Kenyon, & Lekhi, 2007). According to research, occupational stress has a significant effect on employees' mental and physical health (Kinman & Jones, 2003; Kumari, Verma, & Verma, 2012), and this effect may extend to teachers as well.

According to studies, occupational stress has a substantial negative financial impact on organizational performance and comes at a tremendous cost to workers' well-being (Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, & Guzman, 2010; Menon & Raithatha, 2012). Employees are less likely to experience stress and frustration if they can effectively manage their tasks and feel happy at work. Restoring calm and work-life balance is facilitated by an integrated strategy to stress reduction that regulates workload, role ambiguity and work conflict (Deery & Jago, 2015). In 2023, Nika and Bashir The authors of this study examined the effects of optimism and burnout on the relationship between occupational stress and mental health in workers from China and Cabo Verde to lessen the blind spots caused by earlier research on WEIRD nations. The good and negative aspects of mental health were used to define it for the study. The authors used a variety of statistical methods, such as regression analysis and SEM, to test the study's relational hypotheses. The analysis's findings demonstrated that while an individual's psychopathological symptomatology increased, increased occupational stress was linked to a decrease in their psychosomatic health level. Poor work-life balance has been linked to long-term stress, burnout, and even health issues, according to research. Professionals who can balance work and personal responsibilities, however, report feeling more satisfied, less stressed, and better able to deal with day-to-day difficulties.

Work-Life Balance and Emotion Regulation

Our lives depend heavily on emotions, and while controlling them is vital in general, their importance is increased in professional settings where a variety of behavioral and emotional norms are in place in addition to a range of job demands originating from both horizontal and vertical interpersonal relationships. Employees bring their emotions, work-related attitudes, and opinions about their boss, coworkers, and clients to work every day. In today's organizations, it is crucial to be able to effectively manage these emotions to ensure that professionalism and excellent customer service are displayed while also preserving one's own wellbeing (Yordanova & Dineva, 2022). Emotion regulation is the management of emotions and responses, whereas work-life balance is the management of time and duties. These two ideas are intimately related to each other. Poor work-life balance can have a detrimental effect on people's emotional health, resulting in impatience, frustration, and emotional tiredness. The impact of job satisfaction on work related outcomes, like the intention to stay or quit the company, as well as desirable behavior ingrained in contextual performance, determine its relevance (Bowling and Hammond, 2008).

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Emotion Regulation and Stress

Gross (1998), based on researcher's findings, the capacity to control and react to emotional events in a healthy and flexible way is known as emotional regulation. It has a significant impact on how people view and manage stress. Increased stress, mood swings, and a higher risk of burnout are all linked to poor emotion regulation (John & Gross, 2004). In assessing stress and developing coping mechanisms, emotion regulation is essential. An individual's emotional reaction to stressful conditions can be changed with the use of emotion control techniques, leading to good coping. A negative emotional reaction may be triggered when a stressor is interpreted as a threat, which may intensify the stress response (Yunus & Chaudhary, 2023).

Studies regularly demonstrate that those with excellent emotion regulation skills are better able to manage stressful events in both their personal and professional lives (John & Gross, 2004). Emotional control helps professionals develop stronger coping strategies, which enable them to remain emotionally stable and productive even under extreme stress (Troy et al., 2010). Furthermore, the association between stress and mental health outcomes has been found to be moderated by emotional regulation, a protective feature. Others with strong emotion regulation skills, for example, react to stressful situations with fewer depressive symptoms than others with weaker regulation skills (Troy & Mauss, 2011).

CONCLUSION

This review explores the interplay between work-life balance, emotion regulation, and stress among working professionals. Drawing from Role Theory, Boundary Theory, and the Process Model of Emotion Regulation, the review examines how individuals manage their roles, boundaries, and emotions to maintain well-being and productivity in demanding occupations. Poor work-life balance is associated with increased stress, burnout, and health issues, while effective emotional regulation can mitigate the impact of stress and promote resilience. The review highlights the importance of understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying stress management and the need for interventions that support work-life balance and emotional regulation skills across diverse high-stress professions. This study indicates that healthier work-life balance reduces stress amongst working individuals, influenced by emotion regulation which plays a primary role in stress management. Enhancing balance alongside emotional regulation will lead to greater well-being and productivity among employees, which is essential for contemporary organizations.

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Conflict of Interest

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