Psychological well-being, work-family conflicts and life satisfaction among Malaysian women

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between aspects of psychological wellbeing and work-family conflicts and life satisfaction among Malaysian women in Kuala Lumpur. This quantitative study employs the survey method. A total of 253 respondents who have been selected using the purposive sampling technique are involved in this study. The instruments used are a combination of three instruments: the psychological well-being scale, the work-family / family-work conflict scale and the life satisfaction scale. There are 54 items in this instrument each using the five-point Likert scale. Data have been analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software and AMOS. The advanced statistical analysis methods, namely the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), are used. The CFA is used for the purpose of validating psychological wellbeing while the SEM is used to analyse the relationship between constructs. The findings showed a significant relationship between autonomous dimensions in the psychological well-being constructs and work-family conflicts. An analysis of the relationship between dimensions in psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction did not show the existence of a significant relationship. An analysis involving the overall relationship between the constructs showed a weak insignificant relationship. This study significantly highlights the importance of strengthening the aspects of women's psychological wellbeing in influencing the ability to manage work-family conflicts and finally allowing them to enjoy their life satisfaction.

Keywords: Life satisfaction, psychological wellbeing, wellness psychology, work-family conflicts, women

Introduction

Woman is the pillar of strength and stability for the family institution. There are many roles that the woman performs in the family. As a child, mother and wife, the responsibilities placed on their

shoulders is not an easy undertaking. This does not consider the workload of those who work to help improve the family economy and contribute expertise in economics, health, education and others. The performance and advancement of women in education is something to be proud of and surpasses that of men.

The achievements of Malaysian women are very encouraging. Data from the Ministry of Women Development (2013) noted that in the field of education, from 2009 to 2011, the female enrollment for first degree programs at Public Institutions of Higher Learning had consistently exceeded 62% annually and for the 2013/2014 academic session 68.02% of the 41,573 candidates who opted for the first-degree program were females. In the job market, the participation rate of women increased from 44.7% in 1995 to 49.5% in 2012. In terms of the employment structure, the percentage of women working in professional divisions also increased from 7.5% of working women in 2005 to 14.8% in 2012.

A study by the media and information company Nielsen, (2011) based in the US, found that women were more prone to depression than men. The study also found that Malaysian women ranked 16th. with 44% of women included in the group. Of the 27 million Malaysian population then, 13.5 million were women. The study which was conducted between February and April 2010 involved 6,500 women in 21 countries, and women in India topped the list with 87% feeling depressed.

Although the study did not reflect the overall emotions of women in the country, it was at least indicative of the situation. The study found that women were more prone to depression. Some of the contributing factors were the suspicion that the husband was in a relationship with another woman, the children were unsuccessful in school and were not working. Therefore, the women needed to find the best and most appropriate approach to deal with emotional stress before it escalated to a more serious stage. It is understood that women in any country, including Malaysia, shoulder heavy responsibilities, especially for those who are working. In addition to focusing on their careers at the workplace, they also take on the roles of the wife and mother at home.

Considering the experiences of women around the world and in Malaysia in particular, and based on statistics obtained from previous studies, a clearer picture could be drawn to illustrate the significance of their contributions in various fields. For this reason too, women endure a lot of stress as they have to fulfil multiple tasks and responsibilities in the household and at work. Previous studies (Siti Marziah et al., 2018; Siti Aisyah et. al., 2011; Noraini, 2006; 2002; 1996; 1999; Irwan & Nor Azaian, 2011), revealed that the impact of work-family conflicts on women's psychological well-being in Malaysia was significant.

Thus, in contrast to previous studies which examined the impact of work-family conflicts on women's psychological well-being, the aim of this research was to examine how the aspect of psychological well-being affected the balance between family achievement and career outcomes as measured by the levels of conflicts or work-family balance among Malaysian women in Kuala Lumpur. This study was aimed at guiding women to strengthen aspects of their psychological well-being in order to manage any role conflict at work and at home that actually existed if a woman was working and had a family. It was thus imperative and vital that women nurture their internal resilience by increasing their level of psychological well-being in order to deal with any conflict that may arise and thus achieve the necessary balance.

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Literature review

Studies involving psychological well-being and work-life balance among women in Malaysia had been pioneered by Noraini (1996; 1999; 2002; 2006) until recently. Noraini (2006) in her study proposed a model on the role and well-being of women built on roles, negative affectivity, conflicts and health. The study was conducted on 389 female respondents who were working and had families. The findings showed that predictions for women's well-being vary by age groups. Studies also showed that when considering women's well-being, focus should be on three important aspects of their lives - career, marriage and parenting. However, health depends on psychological stress, physical health and satisfaction in life.

In another study, Noraini (2002) hypothesized that work-family conflicts had a negative relationship with the well-being. The study involved 300 female respondents bearing the same criteria as respondents in the previous study, working females and having a family. It was found the that work-family conflict was a significant predictor of life satisfaction and stress symptoms, had a positive relationship with stress symptoms but showed a negative relationship with life satisfaction.

In a study conducted by Siti Aisyah et al. (2011) on respondents who were teachers, it was found that the level of work disruption on the family was higher than the level of family disruption on the career. Work-family conflicts had a negative influence on mental health and life satisfaction. Mohamad Idham et al. (2014) stated that work-life balance ran in tandem with stress. Therefore, the emphasis of this study was focused on giving suggestions on how to achieve the balance. One of the suggestions given was that employers should endorse policies that help employees to minimize workloads without affecting the productivity of the organization. The findings of the study indicated that work-life balance had a positive relationship with workload, role conflicts and interpersonal relationships.

A study conducted by Irwan and Nor Azaian (2011) found that family conflicts were associated with the race, age and the job sector. Given these characteristics, the survey found that Chinese and Indian respondents faced higher levels of conflicts compared to their Malay counterparts. Conflicts were at the highest for respondents in their 30s. Respondents from the informal employment sector faced higher conflicts than those in the more formal sector.

The study by Subramanian et al. (2015), found an increase in women's involvement in the field of work which thus led to two important outcomes: first, an increase into two persons working per family, and second, an increase in the number of female students over males in universities. However, due to the difficulties faced by female workers in achieving work and family balance, there was a 48% decrease in female workers' involvement in the job sector. The findings showed that women with higher education and higher incomes chose more flexible jobs in order to achieve the balance between work and family.

Previous studies conducted in Malaysia focused more on factors that influenced the levels of work-family balance, its effect on psychological well-being and life satisfaction. For researchers with a background in human resource, the focus was on work management; on how to reduce stress among workers in order to achieve the equilibrium and improve the psychological well-being of workers, especially women. However, the researcher was of the opinion that the study would contribute more to the psychological well-being if the findings pointed to appropriate ways in managing the current situation for workers, employers and governments in particular to act upon.

The study conducted by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) in identifying sources or points of conflicts between work and family roles was a library study. The findings indicated that the time

allocated to fulfil one role made it difficult to meet the needs of other roles (time-based conflict). Similarly, the constraints of engaging in one role made it difficult to meet the demands of another role (strain- based conflict). Certain behaviors required by one role also made it difficult to meet the needs of another role (behaviour-based conflict). This study produced a model of work-family conflict and suggestions for future research. One such suggestion included identifying the stress created by the roles at work and in the family that gave way to a conflict, identifying the self-perceptions of the role needs, assessing whether success in the career was related to the conflict and ultimately, examining whether support from significant people was instrumental in the existing conflict. This study also emphasized that the conflict reflected the belief that work and family were closely intertwined and that there was need for more research in seeking solutions to these conflicts.

Netemeyer et al. (1996) developed an instrument comprising 10 items aimed at measuring the conflict between work and family and the conflict between family and work. This study was aimed at understanding the influence each role had in every aspect of work and the family and the instruments produced would help the community to understand the interactions between the two roles. Ryff (1995; 2014) and Ryff and Singer (2006) developed a psychological well-being measuring instrument comprising six constructs based on the Lifetime Theory and several other theories that underlie these six constructs. Although many criticisms were expressed over the reliability and validity of the instrument items, the construction of the instrument had contributed greatly towards understanding the well-being aspects of human psychology as shown in recent studies. This instrument had been widely used to measure the levels of well-being in human psychology associated with a variety of factors that influenced it and its relationship to other aspects of humanity (Krukova, et. al., 2018; Madhusudanan & Nalini, 2017).

A qualitative study conducted by Hill et al. (1998) explored the impact of the virtual office on job aspects and work-family balance of the employees involved in the virtual office and traditional workers. It was shown that the virtualization increased productivity, morale, flexibility and working hours. The findings also showed that the virtual office had negative and positive impacts on the work-family balance and resulted in negative consequences when working as a team. However, based on the quantitative analysis conducted, the findings differed for morale, group work and duration of working.

White et al. (2003) studied the effects and implications of long-term work and the high achievement of work-family balance as well as on the psychological well-being of respondents. The findings showed that working for a long period of time was a source of negative effect that disrupted balance. The same was true of high achievements which also affected the balance negatively. However, the effect was different for couples where only one partner was working. For working couples, the negative effect was higher compared to couples where only one partner was working.

King (2005) examined the underlying theories of work-family conflicts. The study revealed that there were not many differences for men and women but women who had children under the age of three and a spouse who was not helpful in family matters were more likely to face conflicts. Women were also more likely to take leave to look after a sick child rather than the spouses. Other studies including Siti Hajar and Zaimah (2021) could focus on understanding the causes of conflicts and assessing whether the focus should be on the individual which contributed to their life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Based on previous studies (John, et. al., 2020; Fotiadis, et. al., 2019; Yang, et. al., 2018; Saraswati & Lie, 2020), it was found that the work-family conflict was a contributing factor to the

decline in an individual's psychological well-being which ultimately affected life satisfaction. Psychological well-being was found to be significantly lower among the women with low levels of happiness (Allahverdipour, et. al., 2021). This differed from the current study which focused on the aspects of psychological well-being of individuals who were capable of improving their individual work-life balance, perhaps a woman who possessed a high level of psychological well-being was able to reduce conflicts and achieve that equilibrium with esteemed confidence and competence and address work and family issues while improving self-satisfaction.

Research method

Population and sampling

The population is a group of objects, things, events or individuals with similar characteristics that would be researched upon. The population is also defined as a specific group, having a defined number of members and associated with the subject of study. The population for this study involved Malaysian working, family women living in Kuala Lumpur.
        A study sample is a group, a set or a subset specifically selected to represent the population in a study. It contains units or populations, or elements or respondents selected from a certain entire population. The study sample also refers to the number of respondents involved in the study. In this study, the sample comprised Malaysian women working in Kuala Lumpur who had been selected using the random sampling technique. The sample included 253 working, family women. Based on the rule of thumb in the application of advanced method of analysis, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), it is sufficient and acceptable to have a minimum of 200 respondents as the research sample (Hair, et. al, 2009)

Research instruments

The instrument used in this study consist of three sections. In the first part, the study made use of the existing instrument to measure psychological well-being. However, the instrument had to be modified to meet the requirements of the research. The instrument had to be translated into the Malay language and undergo the review process by experts. The number of sub-scales was reduced to four sub-scales from the original number of six. The number of items per sub-scale was reduced from 14 items to 10 items. Hence, the total number of items in the psychological well-being section was 40. The second part measured work-family conflicts and had been adapted from the study conducted by Netemeyer et al. (1996). The third section measured life satisfaction using the Life Satisfaction scale developed by Diener, et al. (1985).

Analysis of finding

Data obtained were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science software (SPSS version 20.0) and AMOS version 20.0. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to measure the relationship between the variables based on the research questions: 1) Was there a significant relationship between the dimensions of psychological well-being and work-family conflict?; 2) Was there a significant relationship between the dimensions of psychological well-being and the satisfaction level of the respondents?; and 3) Was there a significant relationship

between the aspects of psychological well-being, work-family conflicts and life satisfaction of the respondents?

Results and findings

The results of this study were analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The following analysis shows the relationship between dimensions in the construct of respondents' psychological well-being and work-family conflicts, as a response to the first research question. Based on Figure 1, the results showed that the chi-square test for the entire model-fit was χ^2 (241) = 833.065, cmin / df = 3.457. The ccomparative fit index (CFI) = .645 and GFI = 756 were low. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .099 where this value exceeded .08. However, the ratio of the minimum discrepancy to the degree of freedom was 3.46 which was between 2 and 5. In order to get the minimum value, the model needed to undergo a review. Consequently, the reassessment showed that the model did not meet the required specifications. Hence, a review of the model was necessary.
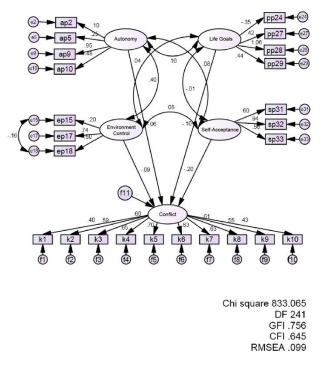

Chi square 833.065
DF 241
GFI .756
CFI .645
RMSEA .099

Figure 1. The hypothesis model of psychological well-being and work-family conflict

A review of the model being used indicated an increase in the value that enabled the model to be accepted as the fitting model. Item cleansing was done by removing some items with very low loading and also by performing an analysis on the modification index so as to get the fitting model. After the review was completed, the model fit value showed that the hypothesis model attained a chi-square for the overall model-fit at χ^2 (194) = 442,051, cmin / df = 2.279. The ccomparative fit index (CFI) = .828 and GFI = .861 were acceptable values although less than .9 (Barrett, 2007). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .071, which was smaller than the .08 value. The minimum discrepancy ratio (minimum discrepancy) to the degree

of freedom was between the values of 2 and 5. Items Ap9 and k1 had to be dropped and some modifications had been done to items k2, k3, k4, k5, k9 and k10.

The analysis of the model (Figure 2) showed a significant relationship between the autonomous dimension and work-family conflicts. The factor loading value for the relationship was .66 which was above the value of .50 indicating the existence of a relationship which was significant. The value of the relation between the other dimensions was low which was less than the minimum value of .50. This might have indicated the existence of a relationship but a weak relationship that was not significant.
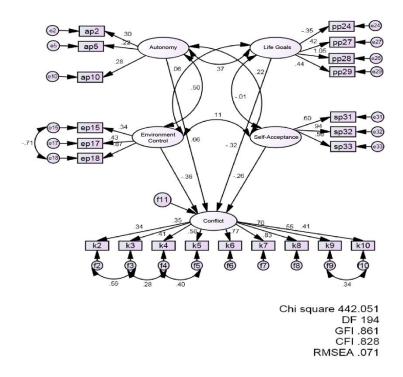

Figure 2. Model of psychological well-being and work-family conflicts (Review)

The findings of the study indicated that there was a significant relationship between autonomous dimensions in the constructs of psychological well-being and work-family conflicts among the respondents. According to Ryff and Singer (2006), autonomy was the level of self-determination and independency of individuals, having resilience to social pressure in thinking and behaving, control of the behavior and self-assessment according to one's personal standards. This indicated that women or individuals who had high autonomous dimensions were able to play an important role in enhancing work and family life balance and reducing conflicts between the two. The findings of a study conducted by Kluczyk (2013) suggested that family and work conflicts had no negative impacts on psychological health. In other words, the study did not find any link between psychological health and work-family conflicts. However, a study conducted by Wilkinson (2013) showed that there was a significant relationship between family-work conflicts, especially involving stress and the level of psychological well-being of both men and women albeit the effects on women were higher. Various studies also supported the existence of the relationship between psychological well-being and various dimensions of human life including work-family

balance for working and family members, marital satisfaction and public health (Dush et al., 2008; Frone, 2000; Krukova, 2018; Saraswati & Lie, 2020).

The analysis made in response to research question (2) showing the results of the data analysis on the four-dimensional psychological well-being model with the respondents' life satisfaction constructs. The relationship analysis is shown in Figure 3.
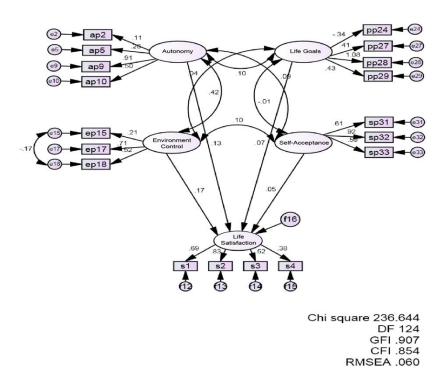

Figure 3. Hypothesis model for psychological well-being and life satisfaction

The initial analysis showed that the chi-square test for the entire -model-fit was χ^2 (124) = 236,644, cmin / df = 1.908. The ccomparative fit index (CFI) = .854 and GFI = .907 were good and acceptable. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .60 where this value was less than .08. The ratio of minimum discrepancy to the degree of freedom was between the values of 2 and 5. The evaluation on the model was found to have met the minimum value of a fitting model. Therefore, no review was required on the model.

The analysis on the relationships between dimensions in the construct of psychological well-being did not show a significant relationship between all dimensions and levels of life satisfaction. This could be seen in the factor loading values which were less than .50.

This finding contrasted with many findings from previous research that suggested a relationship between psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Wilkinson, 2013; Desrochers et al., 2012; John, et. al., 2020). Desrochers et al. (2012) in their study found that companies whose work environments were not based on a family-friendly environment resulted in lower employee satisfaction for both men and women. Similarly, findings from other research (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Duxbury & Diggins, 2001; Frotiadis et. al., 2019) also showed that an individual's psychological well-being was related to job satisfaction, relationship satisfaction between children and couples. The researcher was not able to locate any previous study to support the findings of

this study. This indicated the existence of a research gap where more advanced studies should be carried out.

In relation to research question (3), an analysis of the findings showed that the chi-square test for the entire model-fit was χ² (132) = 624,761, cmin / df = 4.733. The comparative fit indices (CFI) = .628 and GFI = 743 were low. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .122 where this value exceeded .08. However, the ratio of minimum discrepancy to the degree of freedom was 4.733 which is still between 2 and 5. In order to achieve the minimum value, the model had to undergo a review. As a result of the review, it was found that the model did not meet the required suitability. This indicated that there was no data matching between the model and the responses of the respondents. A preview of the model was thus required.

The analysis of the relationship between psychological well-being construct and work-family conflicts revealed a weak and insignificant negative relationship (r = −.21). The value of the relationship between psychological well-being and life satisfaction was r = .36, which was higher than the value of r for psychological well-being with work-family conflict. Although the relationship value did not meet the minimum value of .5, there was a weak positive relationship between the two. The analysis revealed a weak negative relationship which was not significant between conflicts and life satisfaction.
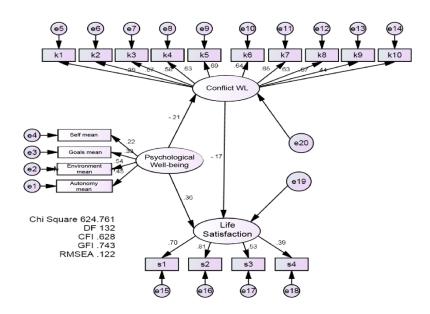

Figure 4. The full-pledged hypothesis model

Reassessments carried out on the model to obtain a good fitting model yielded values that supported the suitability and compatibility of the model with the data. Modification of the study findings showed that the chi-square test for the entire model-fit was χ² (110) = 262.944, cmin / df = 2.39. The ccomparative fit index (CFI) = .873 and GFI = .889 were good and acceptable. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .074, which was less than .08. The ratio of minimum discrepancy to the degree of freedom was 2.39 of which the value was between 2 and 5. The overall value indicated that the model was acceptable and complied with the suitability of the model. The results are shown in Figure 5.
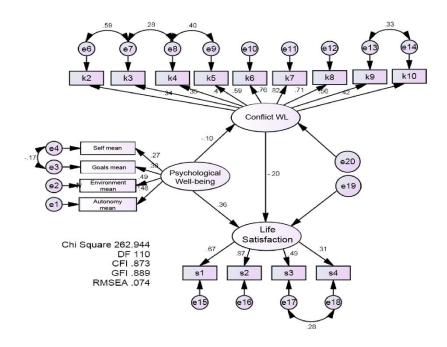
Figure 5. Full-pledged hypothesis model (review)

Discussion

The findings show that there is a low negative relationship between the psychological well-being and work-family conflicts and between conflicts with life satisfaction while there is a moderate positive relationship between psychological well-being and life satisfaction. The analysis conducted on the combination of the three constructs shows the existence of a connection among them. The negative relationship between psychological well-being and conflict indicates that a high level of psychological well-being can help to reduce the occurrence of work-family conflicts. This is for the reason that the higher the level of psychological well-being of a woman, the more likely they will be able to deal with issues arising from conflicts between work and family. This finding is supported by a study by Wilkinson (2013) that psychological well-being is influenced by work-family conflicts which also affect the life satisfaction of the individual. Noraini (2006) in a study expressed that the psychological well-being of Malaysian women is influenced by work-family conflicts and the roles they assume.

The combined analysis also shows that these three constructs are related to each other. This is in contrast to the findings from the analyses previously done on both constructs. This study shows that the well-being of women's psychology also involves the emotional state which is capable of influencing the balance in working life and family life and thus affects their levels of life satisfaction. The study by Bell et al. (2012) also presents findings that are consistent with the findings of this study and also the findings of the study mentioned. The only difference between the findings is the strength of the relationship between the constructs which are influenced by the respondents of this study who differ in terms of demographic and local cultural characteristics. Study by Tov and Diener (2007) also support the findings of this study.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship among the women's psychological wellbeing, work-family conflict and their life satisfaction. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that even though the findings of the study are different from the findings of previous studies, this study has contributed to research in the same field but from a different perspective where the study focuses on the influence of psychological well-being on conflict management or improving the balance in top-notch family-related issues for women who shoulder the larger roles in caring for and educating their children and other family members. Although there are many studies on the same issue, yet, with the increasing family roles and economic changes and roles in employment, this issue remains an important issue which calls for constant attention and appropriate actions.

Acknowledgement

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