

## The Mediating Effect of Work-Family Conflict on the Relationship Between Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction

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**Abstract: Problem statement:** Based on the literature review, few studies have tested the mediating effect of work-family conflict on the relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction. **Approach:** This study tested a mediation model consisting of job satisfaction as the dependent variable, locus of control as the independent variable and work-family conflict as the mediator. Data were gathered from 159 single mother employees, aged 45 and below and having at least one child, using self-administered questionnaires. The data were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression analyses. **Results:** Results of correlation analysis revealed that locus of control was related to work-family conflict and job satisfaction and work-family conflict was related to job satisfaction. Results of a series of multiple regression analyses indicated that work-family conflict partially mediates the relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction. During the screening process of potential recruits, employers should take into consideration locus of control as one of the important dispositional characteristics of candidates. Employers should look into the possibility of designing training programmes to assist employees in taking more control of events in their work situations. **Conclusion:** Single mother employees who believe that they are in control of the events that happen in their lives seem to be more satisfied with their jobs and seem to experience less work-family conflict.

**Key words:** Work-family conflict, job satisfaction, locus of control, single mother employee

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the changes in the workforce demographics, which have implications on human resource development, is the increase in the participation of married women and single mothers in employment. In Malaysia, the labor force participation rate of single mothers was 4.1% for widowed and 2.8% for divorced/separated in 2007<sup>[1]</sup> compared with 4.0 and 2.4% in 2005<sup>[2]</sup>. Besides the increase in single mothers entering the work force while continuing to maintain the majority of the family responsibilities<sup>[3]</sup>, there is a growing interest in the interface of work-family roles. This interest has also in large measures been fuelled by the growing concern shown by policy makers regarding the well-being of employees in both the work and family domains<sup>[4]</sup>. When the demands of participation in one domain are incompatible with the demands of participation in the other domain, interrole conflict results<sup>[5]</sup>. According to Kahn *et al.*<sup>[5]</sup>, work-family conflict is a type of interrole conflict in which pressures in the work role are incompatible with pressures in the family role.

Previous research has shown that work-family conflict leads to various negative outcomes, including job dissatisfaction<sup>[6-10]</sup>. Thus, taking into account the reality of working life today and the stress-producing nature of work-family conflict, we are forced to reconsider the resources that might help either alleviate work-family conflict or, increase the level of job satisfaction. Locus of control is one of the resources that might help to reduce work-family conflict and increase job satisfaction<sup>[11]</sup>.

Most of the studies on locus of control have concentrated on its direct effect on job satisfaction. Based on the literature review, there is still lack of studies examining the indirect effects of locus of control on job satisfaction. This study tested a mediation model consisting of job satisfaction as the dependent variable, locus of control as the independent variable and work-family conflict as the mediator. It examined both the direct and indirect of effects of locus of control on job satisfaction.

**Conservation of Resources Theory:** The mediation model in this study was developed based on the

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Conservation of Resources (COR) theory<sup>[12]</sup>, as well as the study of previous researchers. The COR theory proposes that individuals seek to acquire and maintain resources to reduce stress. Stress is a reaction to an environment in which there is the threat of a loss of resources, an actual loss in resources, or lack of an expected gain in resources. Resources include objects, conditions, personal characteristics and energies. Personal characteristics like locus of control are resources which buffer one against stress. Loss of these resources, or the threat of such a loss, may cause the experience of stress. Work-family conflict is a form of stress which is a reaction to an environment in which there is the threat of a loss of resources.

Based on the COR theory, interrole conflict could lead to strain because resources are lost in the process of juggling both work and family roles. The potential or actual loss of these resources results in job dissatisfaction. Once employees are confronted with high levels of conflicts in the work-family interface, they are likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs. Grandey and Cronpanzano<sup>[13]</sup> have used the COR theory to examine the relationship between work-family conflict and its resulting strain.

**Relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction:** Research has shown that people with an internal rather than external locus of control tend to be more satisfied with their jobs<sup>[11,14-16]</sup>. Across professions, locus of control is a relatively well-established influence on how employees perceive their situations and whether or not they experience stress as a result. Individuals for whom control resides in external phenomena, such as a boss or chance, are more likely to experience higher levels of stress or job dissatisfaction in response to a difficult situation than those who perceive control to reside within themselves<sup>[17]</sup>. Thus empirical evidence seems to support the relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction and the following hypothesis was tested.

**H1:** There is a significant correlation between locus of control and job satisfaction.

**Relationship between locus of control and work-family conflict:** Several studies have examined the relationship between locus of control and work-family conflict. Noor<sup>[11,18]</sup> investigated the effects of locus of control on work-family conflict and found that individuals with an external locus of control (those who attribute the causes of events in their lives to factors other than themselves) reported experiencing more

work-family conflict. Similarly, Andreassi and Thompson<sup>[19]</sup> found that internal locus of control was negatively related to work-family conflict. Previous research findings seem to support the relationship between locus of control and work-family conflict and the following hypothesis was tested.

**H2:** There is a significant correlation between locus of control and work-family conflict.

**Relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction:** Many researchers have demonstrated a significant negative correlation between work-family conflict and job satisfaction<sup>[20-26]</sup>. Similarly, in a more recent study, Yildirim and Aycan<sup>[27]</sup> reported that work-family conflict decreased employees' job satisfaction. Based on previous research, it is expected that work-family conflict lead to lower job satisfaction among single mother employees and the following hypothesis was tested.

**H3:** There is a significant correlation between work-family conflict and job satisfaction.

**Work-family conflict as a mediator in the relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction:** Noor<sup>[11]</sup> in her study found that locus of control as a personality characteristic acted on women's perceptions of work-family conflict, thereby enhancing or reducing their levels of job satisfaction. In other words, locus of control could help reduce employees' job satisfaction because it could reduce the employees' perceptions of conflict. Based on the COR theory<sup>[12]</sup> as well as previous findings, one could argue that changes in the level of locus of control could lead to changes in the levels of work-family conflict as well as the levels of job satisfaction and thus the following hypothesis was tested.

**H4:** Work-family conflict mediates the relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Sample and procedure:** The sample of this present study consisted of single mothers working in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The sampling technique adopted was purposive sampling. Single mother employees who meet the following criteria were identified: (a) Married, (b) working full-time and (c) has at least one child staying at home. These criteria were established to ensure that the women in the sample had quite similar

responsibilities in terms of family and work roles. Data were collected from a sample of 159 single mother employees using self-administered questionnaires through the drop and collect method. The questionnaire was administered in the Malay language. Before its administration, the questionnaire was translated into Malay and was validated by back-translation to ensure that both versions were equivalent.

**Measurement:**

**Job satisfaction:** Job satisfaction was measured using five items. Three of the items were adopted from the instrument developed by Hackman and Oldhman<sup>[28]</sup> and two by Clark<sup>[29]</sup>. The subjects of this study were requested to respond using five-point scaled response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Examples of items are: “I am generally satisfied with the kind of work I do in this job” and “I frequently think of quitting this job”. The reliability coefficient (alpha) of this job satisfaction scale was 0.81.

**Locus of control:** Locus of control was measured using 9 items from the Spheres of Control scale developed by Paulhus<sup>[30]</sup>. The scale consists of three separate spheres of behavior, namely personal efficacy, interpersonal control and sociopolitical control (10 items per sphere). This study is limited to measuring employees’ personal efficacy. The subjects of this study were requested to respond using five-point scaled response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Examples of items are: “When I get what I want it’s usually because I worked hard for it” and “I can learn almost anything if I set my mind to it”. Out of the 10 items, one item was deleted from the scale used in this present study because of lack of variance and low item-total correlation based on reliability test via internal consistency method. The item deleted was, “On any sort of exam or competition I like to know how well I do relative to everyone else”. The reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.64.

**Work-family conflict:** Work-family conflict intensity was measured using the interrole conflict scale developed by Pleck, Staines and Lang<sup>[31]</sup>. This scale consists of eight items based on the three most prevalent aspects of work-family conflict, namely excessive work time, schedule conflict and fatigue or irritability. Five-point scaled response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) were

used. Examples of items are: “My work schedule often conflicts with my family life” and “The demands of my job make it difficult to be relaxed all the time at home”. The reliability coefficient (alpha) of this work-family conflict scale was 0.89.

**Statistical analysis:** Descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the main characteristics of the subjects and the distribution of subjects according to the intensity of work-family conflict experienced. Correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between work-family conflict, locus of control and job satisfaction. A series of regression analyses was employed to test the hypotheses of the study. Judd and Kenny<sup>[32]</sup> recommended the use of a series of regression models to test mediational hypotheses. Testing for mediation requires the estimation of the three following regression equations: First, regressing the mediator on the independent variable; second, regressing the dependent variable on the independent variable and third, regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator<sup>[33]</sup>.

The following are the four conditions for establishing mediation: (1) The independent variable significantly affect the dependent variable; (2) The independent variable significantly affect the mediator; (3) The mediator significantly affect the dependent variable; (4) The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable shrinks upon the addition of the mediator to the model. If the independent variable does not affect the dependent variable upon regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator, then full mediation is established. If otherwise, the test supports partial mediation.

**RESULTS**

The respondents’ age ranged from 31-45 years (M = 37.13, SD = 6.07) with 62.3% aged 36-45. They had an average of about 9 years of working experience (M = 9.41, SD = 6.41) (Table 1). Among the respondents, 36.5% had 5 years or less of experience while 30.2% had 6-10 years of experience in their present jobs. The mean income for the respondents was RM 1942.28 (SD = 1296.37). 57.9% of the respondents had only one to two children and on the average, the respondents had 2-3 children (M = 2.48, SD = 1.34). The mean score for work-family conflict on a five-point scale was 2.84(SD = 0.87), locus of control 3.62 (SD = 0.44) and job satisfaction 3.88 (SD = 0.68) (Table 2).

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Age (years)			37.13	6.07
≤ 30	31	19.5		
31-35	29	18.2		
36-40	45	28.3		
41-45	54	34.0		
Working experience (years)			9.41	6.41
≤ 5	58	36.5		
6-10	48	30.2		
11-15	24	15.1		
16-20	19	11.9		
≥ 21	10	6.3		
Income (RM/month)			1942.28	1296.37
400-1000	35	22.0		
1001-1500	38	23.9		
1501-2000	33	20.8		
≥ 2001	50	31.4		
Number of children			2.48	1.34
1-2	92	57.9		
3-4	53	33.3		
>5	14	8.8		

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the variables

Variable	1	2	3	Mean	SD
Work-family conflict	-			2.84	0.87
Locus of control	-0.27**	-		3.62	0.44
Job satisfaction	-0.35**	0.31**	-	3.88	0.68

Note: \*\*: p<0.01, \*\*\*: p<0.001

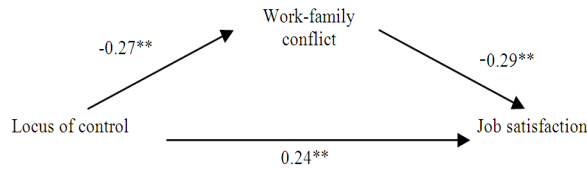


Fig. 1: Results of multiple regression analyses with WFC as a mediator of the relationships between locus of control and job satisfaction

Correlational analysis results revealed that there were significant correlations between locus of control and work-family conflict ( $r = -0.27, p < 0.01$ ) and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.31, p < 0.01$ ). Work-family conflict was significantly related to job satisfaction ( $r = -0.35, p < 0.01$ ) (Table 2). The results show that an increase in locus of control leads to a decrease in work-family conflict and an increase in job satisfaction. A decrease in work-family conflict leads to an increase in job satisfaction. These results support H1-H3.

A series of regression analyses were used to test the role of work-family conflict as a mediator in the relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction. Applying the four conditions for establishing mediation, it was found that work-family

Table 3: Results of multiple regression analysis

Criterion variable	Predictor variable	Beta	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F
Job satisfaction	Locus of control	0.31**	0.09	17.23**
	Work-family conflict	-0.35**	0.12	21.65**
Work-family conflict	Locus of control	-0.27**	0.07	11.94**
	Work-family conflict	0.24**	0.16	16.45**
	Locus of control	-0.29**		

conflict partially mediates the relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction since the independent variable affected the dependent variable upon regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator (Table 3). Thus, these results support H4.

The results indicate that locus of control could directly help increase job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$ ) and that the locus of control could reduce the work-family conflict of single mother employees ( $\beta = -0.27, p < 0.01$ ) which in turn could help increase job satisfaction experienced by the single mother employees ( $\beta = -0.29, p < 0.01$ ) (Fig. 1).

## DISCUSSION

The single mother employees in this study experienced moderate intensity of work-family conflict as shown by the mean score. This can be attributed to the fact that a third of the women studied were above 40 years old. It is therefore very likely that the women in this category have reached a life stage whereby with older children the demand for family roles have declined. The intensity of work-family conflict experienced is hence not very high.

The findings that locus of control is a significant and positive predictor of job satisfaction has also been reported by Kircady *et al.*<sup>[15]</sup> and Noor<sup>[11]</sup> as well as other researchers<sup>[14,16,17]</sup>. The findings of this study show that the women employees with internal locus of control experience higher levels of job satisfaction. With regard to locus of control and its association with work-family conflict, this study found that an increase in locus of control led to a decrease in work-family conflict. These findings are consistent with the findings of Noor<sup>[11,18]</sup>. The significant effect of locus of control and work-family conflict also supported the results of a study by Andreassi and Thompson<sup>[19]</sup>. In other words, women employees who believe that they are in control of the events that happen in their lives seem to be more

satisfied with their jobs and seem to experience less work-family conflict.

The significant relationships between work-family conflict and job satisfaction are consistent with the results reported by Bhuian *et al.*<sup>[20,22,26]</sup> whereby individuals who reported higher intensities of work-family conflict tended to experience lower levels of job satisfaction. Similar findings have also been reported by Namasivayam and Zhao<sup>[23,24,27]</sup>.

With regard to the mediating effect of work-family conflict in the relationship between locus of control and job satisfaction, the results show that single mother employees with internal locus of control tend to experience lower intensity of conflict and this would in turn increase their levels of job satisfaction. Similar findings have been reported by Noor<sup>[11]</sup>.

The findings of this study have important implications for organizations. The findings demonstrated that locus of control is an important individual resource that is related to employees' experiences of work-family conflict and job satisfaction. During the screening process of potential recruits, employers should take into consideration locus of control as one of the important dispositional characteristics of candidates. Employers should look into the possibility of designing training programmes to assist employees in taking more control of events in their work situations. Future research should also examine other personality factors that could reduce employees' exposure to work-family conflict and hence increase their job satisfaction. For example, egalitarian gender role orientation and self-esteem are likely to reduce work-family conflict. There is also a need for future researchers to test this mediation model among women employees with partners besides single mother employees and then compare the results.

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, a significant limitation of the present investigation is the small sample size that was utilized. The results reported here may only be generalized to single mothers meeting the selection criteria (full-time working, aged 45 years and below, and having at least one child). Caution must be exercised in generalizing the findings from this sample to other single mother employees in the study area, as well as to other groups of women employees such as those with partners and working part-time, as well as those without children. Second, the inferences drawn from this study are limited by self-report data and cross-sectional characteristics of the data.

## CONCLUSION

Single mother employees who believe that they are in control of the events that happen in their lives seem to be more satisfied with their jobs and seem to experience less work-family conflict.

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