Factors Affecting the Work-life Balance of Academic Staff of Public Universities in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study investigates the family-related and work-related factors influencing Work-Life Balance among academic staff at public universities in Sri Lanka. A structured questionnaire was administered to 400 participants, selected through two-stage stratified proportional random sampling. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach was employed to identify the key factors affecting Work-Life Balance. The structural model results reveal that family responsibilities and support are significant family-related factors impacting Work-Life Balance. In contrast, work-related factors such as interpersonal relationships, satisfaction with workload and working conditions, and supervisor support significantly influence Work-Life Balance. These findings highlight the importance of recognizing and addressing the role of family support and positive work-related factors in promoting Work-Life Balance and overall well-being among academic staff. By creating a supportive environment that acknowledges these factors, individuals and organizations can take steps to foster Work-Life Balance and improve overall quality of life.

Keywords: *family related factors, work related factors, public university, structural equation modeling, work-life balance*

1. Introduction

Work-life balance plays a crucial role in the retention and recruitment of academic staff within universities. Institutions prioritising work-life balance are more likely to retain talented employees and attract recruits (Allen et al., 2013). A supportive work environment that values work-life balance can be a significant factor in employee retention efforts, particularly in an increasingly competitive academic job market (Bai, Lin, & Wang, 2020). Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for academic staff's well-being and job satisfaction (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Employees who experience a better balance between work and personal lives report higher job satisfaction, lower stress levels, and greater overall well-being (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Allen et al., 2013).

Work-life balance is not only beneficial for individual employees but also for the overall effectiveness of universities. Academic staff who experience a better balance between work and personal lives are likelier to be engaged, motivated, and productive (Kinman & Jones, 2008). This, in turn, contributes to a positive organizational culture, higher morale, and better collaboration among colleagues (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

By understanding work-life balance factors, institutions can design targeted interventions to support academic staff and create a more supportive work environment (Jayasinghe, 2015). This may include policies related to flexible work arrangements, parental leave, childcare support, and wellness programs. Addressing work-life balance issues in academia has broader social and economic implications. Ensuring academic staff can

effectively balance their work and personal responsibilities contributes to a more equitable distribution of labor, supports sustainable workforce participation, and enhances the overall quality of life for individuals and their families (Allen et al., 2013).
Like elsewhere, state universities in Sri Lanka face challenges in retaining talented academic staff and attracting recruits. A supportive work environment that values work-life balance can significantly affect employee retention and recruitment efforts (Allen et al., 2013; Jayasinghe, 2015). Balancing work and family life properly and positively contributes to overall job satisfaction. Maduwansha and Peiris (2021) investigate the factors influencing the job satisfaction of academic staff in public universities in Sri Lanka, and they found that work-life balance is the most significant factor on overall job satisfaction.

Research problem and Objective

Research has shown that maintaining a healthy work-life balance is crucial for the well-being and productivity of employees (Allen et al., 2013). Academic staff face unique challenges due to the demands of teaching, research, administrative responsibilities, and the pressure to publish (Kinman & Jones, 2008). In the Sri Lankan context, these challenges may be compounded by cultural norms, societal expectations, and organizational policies that influence work-life balance (Jayasinghe, 2015). Based on the above understanding, the study formulates the research problem: What factors affect the work-life balance of academic staff in Sri Lanka. The main objective of this study was to identify the significant factors affecting the work-life balance of academic staff of public universities in Sri Lanka.

Significance of the study

This study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by examining the specific factors influencing the work-life balance of academic staff in public universities in Sri Lanka. By identifying and understanding these factors, we can develop targeted interventions and policies to support academic staff in achieving a better balance between their professional and personal lives. This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to our understanding of work-life balance dynamics within the context of higher education in Sri Lanka. Practically, the findings will inform the development of policies and programs aimed at supporting academic staff and improving organizational effectiveness in public universities.

2. Literature Review

Family Support

Family support encompasses various forms of assistance, encouragement, and understanding family members provide to individuals in their pursuit of work-life balance. This support can be emotional, instrumental, and informational (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). Emotional support involves expressions of care, empathy, and understanding, while instrumental support refers to practical assistance with tasks or responsibilities. Informational support includes advice, guidance, and relevant information to help individuals navigate work and family challenges. Research has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of family support on work-life balance outcomes among academic staff. Studies have found that higher levels of family support are associated with greater satisfaction with work-life balance, reduced work-family

conflict, and improved overall well-being (Huffman, Culbertson, Wayment, & Irving, 2015; Nomura, & Horie, 2018). Family support buffers the negative effects of work-related stressors and enhances individuals' ability to manage their professional and personal roles effectively. Therefore, in this study, it is hypothesized that.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Family support positively impacts the work-life balance of public universities' academic staff in Sri Lanka.

Family Responsibilities

Family responsibilities, including childcare, eldercare, and household chores, can significantly influence the work-life balance of academic staff (Allen et al., 2013). Studies have shown that academic staff with greater family responsibilities often experience challenges in managing their time effectively between work and family domains (McNally et al., 2018). Organizational support, such as flexible work arrangements, parental leave policies, and childcare assistance, is crucial in facilitating work-life balance for academic staff with family responsibilities (Peeters et al., 2007). Institutions that provide adequate support for balancing work and family roles are likelier to have satisfied and productive academic staff (Riley et al., 2016). Gender dynamics can intersect with family responsibilities, as women often bear a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities compared to men (Shockley et al., 2017). Thus, based on the above discussion, it can be devised the following hypothesis for testing:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). Family responsibilities hurt the work-life balance of the academic staff of public universities in Sri Lanka.

Family Engagement

Family engagement plays a significant role in shaping the work-life balance of academic staff. Shockley and Allen (2013) suggest that strong family support and involvement can help academic staff effectively manage their work and personal responsibilities, leading to greater satisfaction with work-life balance. Similarly, a study by Grawitch et al. (2015) found that academic staff who perceive high levels of family engagement experience lower levels of work-life conflict and higher levels of work-life balance.

Supportive relationships with spouses or partners have positively influenced family engagement and work-life balance (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). Academic staff with supportive relationships with their children and extended family members may experience greater family engagement and better work-life balance (Kossek et al., 2010). Organizational policies that support family-friendly practices, such as flexible work arrangements and parental leave, can facilitate family engagement and enhance work-life balance among academic staff (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). While family engagement can positively impact work-life balance, academic staff may face challenges in achieving optimal family engagement, such as conflicting work demands and limited support from supervisors or colleagues (Ferguson & Carlson, 2019).

Hypothesis 3 (H3). Family engagement hurts the work-life balance of public universities' academic staff in Sri Lanka.

Satisfaction towards Work Load

Workload is one of the primary factors influencing the work-life balance of academic staff.

High workloads, including teaching, research, administrative duties, and service obligations, can lead to work-life imbalance (Allen et al., 2013; Kinman & Jones, 2008). Effective workload management strategies are crucial in promoting work-life balance among academic staff. Hill et al. (2001) suggested that providing autonomy and control over work schedules, clarifying job expectations, and offering resources and support can help academic staff better manage their workload and maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.

Hypothesis 4 (H4). Satisfaction positively impacts workload and work-life balance among the academic staff of public universities in Sri Lanka.

Satisfaction towards Working Conditions

Research suggests that working conditions play a crucial role in shaping the work-life balance of academic staff. Poor working conditions, such as excessive workload, lack of autonomy, and inflexible schedules, can negatively impact an individual's ability to effectively manage their work and personal life (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Shockley & Allen, 2013). Providing academic staff autonomy and flexibility in their work can positively influence their work-life balance. Flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting and flexible scheduling, allow employees to manage their workloads and personal responsibilities better, leading to greater job satisfaction and well-being (Hill et al., 2001; Kossek et al., 2010).

Hypothesis 5 (H5). There is a positive impact of satisfaction towards working conditions on work-life balance of the academic staff of public universities in Sri Lanka.

Work Responsibilities

Excessive work responsibilities can contribute to stress and burnout among academic staff, affecting their ability to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Heavy work responsibilities may encroach upon academic staff's time for family and individual pursuits, leading to strained relationships and reduced satisfaction in non-work domains (Allen et al., 2013). Work-life imbalance resulting from overwhelming work responsibilities can adversely affect academic staff's physical and mental health, ultimately impacting their overall well-being (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Offering flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting, flexible hours, and compressed workweeks, can help academic staff better manage their responsibilities while accommodating personal needs (Shockley & Allen, 2013).

Hypothesis 6 (H6). There is a negative impact of work responsibilities on work-life balance of the academic staff of public universities in Sri Lanka.

Coworker Relationships

Strong coworker relationships can facilitate collaboration and teamwork, essential to achieving work-life balance. A supportive and collaborative work environment, characterized by positive interactions and mutual respect among colleagues, can help alleviate work-related stress and enhance overall well-being (Allen et al., 2013; Kinman & Jones, 2008). When academic staff members have supportive coworkers willing to assist with workload management and offer flexibility in scheduling, they can better balance their professional responsibilities with personal commitments (Shockley & Allen, 2013; Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

Hypothesis 7 (H7). Coworker relationships positively impact the work-life balance of the

academic staff of public universities in Sri Lanka.

Supervisor Support

Many studies have highlighted the significance of supervisor support in facilitating a healthy work-life balance for academic staff. For instance, Allen, French, and Shockley (2015) found that perceived supervisor support positively predicted work-life balance among university employees. Similarly, a study by Hammer and colleagues (2009) revealed that supervisor support for work-life balance initiatives was associated with greater satisfaction with work-life balance among academic staff.

Kossek and colleagues (2012) found that supervisors who supported employees' personal lives were associated with lower levels of work-family conflict. Similarly, Byron (2005) demonstrated that supervisor support for work-life balance was linked to greater job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions among academic staff. Supervisor support for work-life balance can manifest in various forms, including emotional, instrumental, and informational support. Kossek et al. (2010) highlighted the importance of supervisors providing practical support, such as flexible work arrangements and workload management, in promoting work-life balance among academic staff. A study by O'Driscoll, Poelmans, and Spector (2011) emphasized the role of organizational culture in shaping supervisors' attitudes and behaviors towards supporting employees' work-life balance.

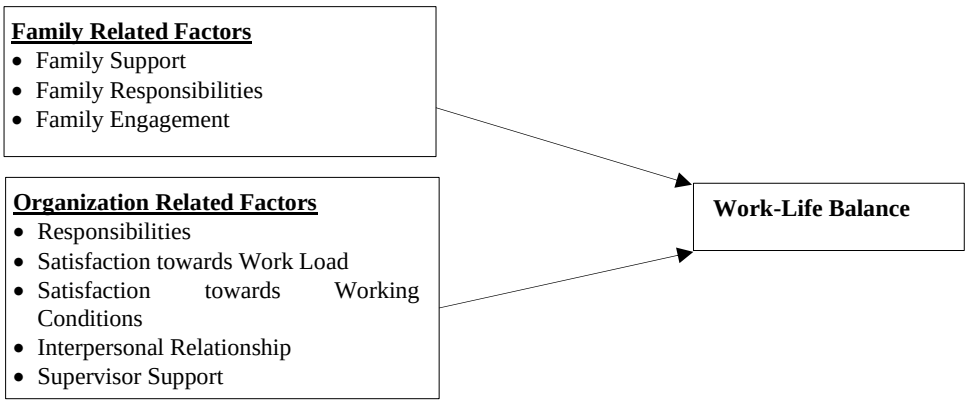
Hypothesis 8 (H8). Supervisor support positively impacts work-life balance of the academic staff of public universities in Sri Lanka.

3. Materials and Methods

Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework was used to find the inferences related to our objective (Fig.1).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study



Sampling Frame

The population for this study was all the lecturers of the 17 public universities in Sri Lanka and the total number of lecturers is approximately 6727 (University Grants

Commission, 2022). The sample consists of both male and female academics, including professors, senior lecturers, and lecturers from all public universities in Sri Lanka. The sample of this study is limited to full-time faculty members in the Sri Lanka public universities. Therefore, a minimum number of sample size was derived using the formula suggested by Krejcie, R.V., & Morgan, D.W., 1970). Considering the above minimum sample size, this study used a sample size of 400 university lecturers. The identified sample size was proportionately distributed among 17 universities and then the sample size was further divided among professors, senior lecturers and lecturers within the university. The two-stage stratified proportional random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data relevant to this study were obtained through a self-enumeration method using a structured questionnaire. Self-enumeration is a more economical and efficient way of gathering data, whenever meeting the respondents individually during a short period is impossible. Since university academic staff are generally very busy with their work, meeting all the academics individually is not flexible. The questionnaire was designed to measure variables gathered from the literature review. In the questionnaire, each respondent was asked to rate his or her agreement on each statement within the scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" as the minimum level (1) to "strongly agree" as the maximum level (5). The questionnaire was pre-tested using a sample size of 45. The final questionnaire, which was in a Google form, was emailed to academic staff (Professors, Senior lecturers and Lecturers)

The demographic data of the respondents were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to identify the factors affecting the work-life balance of academic staff at public universities in Sri Lanka. The data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 3 software.

4. Result and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Sample

Table 1. Percentage Distribution among Categories within Demographic Variable

Variable	Categories	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	47
	Female	53
Age	Less than 36 Years	39
	36 Years - 45 Years	31.5
	46 Years - 55 Years	21
	56 years above	8.5
Marital Status	Married	77
	Unmarried	20.25
	Divorced/widowed	2.75
Highest level of education	Bachelor's Degree	12.75
	Masters Degree	40.25
	Doctoral Degree	47
Current position	Lecturer	38.5

	Senior Lecturer	49.75
	Professor	11.75
Teaching experience	Less than 5 Years	25.5
	5 Years - 9 Years	28.5
	10 Years - 14 Years	17
	15 Years - 19 Years	9.5
	20 Years - 24 Years	9.75
	25 Years - 29 Years	5
	30 years above	4.75

The demographic profile of the 400 university academics who participated in the study is given in Table 1. Results in Table 1 indicate that most university academics are females (53%) irrespective of other variables. Most of the academics at the universities are married (77 %). Most university academics in the sample have completed their doctoral degree (40.25%), the highest educational qualification, and most have worked as senior lecturers (49.75%). The highest percentage of university academics is recorded in the 5 - 9 years teaching experience (28.5%).

Reliability of Latent Constructs

Table 2. Reliability values: Cronbach Alpha.

Latent Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha
Family Engagement	0.974
Family Responsibilities	0.904
Family Support	0.965
Interpersonal Relationship	0.976
Responsibilities	0.967
Satisfaction towards Work Load	0.942
Satisfaction towards Working Conditions	0.908
Supervisor Support	0.972
Work-Life Balance	0.964

The reliability of all structural measurements is estimated using Cronbach's alpha reliability, which explores the internal consistency and the properties of the measuring scale. Table 2 summarizes Cronbach's alpha for each of the measured constructs. Suppose alpha is at or above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010), as the table shows. In that case, all the alpha coefficients are above 0.7, thus indicating good internal consistency for those variables. Therefore, it can be concluded that all the latent constructs were characterized by good internal consistency allowing further analyses.

Validity of the Data

The convergent validity is verified mainly by computing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), outer loadings, and the construct reliability (CR) for all variables. Table 3 shows the individual outer loadings for each construct.

Table 3 Outer loadings of the measurement model

Construct	Indicator	Outer loadings	Construct	Indicator	Outer loadings
Family Engagement	FE_1	0.957	Supervisor Support	SS_1	0.944
	FE_2	0.948		SS_2	0.947
	FE_3	0.951		SS_3	0.953
	FE_4	0.950		SS_4	0.947
	FE_5	0.950		SS_5	0.947
Family Responsibilities	FR_1	0.791	Satisfaction towards Working Conditions	WC_1	0.872
	FR_2	0.874		WC_2	0.886
	FR_3	0.847		WC_3	0.891
	FR_4	0.885		WC_4	0.803
	FR_5	0.846		WC_5	0.823
Family Support	FS_1	0.969	Work-Life Balance	WLB_1	0.932
	FS_2	0.936		WLB_2	0.937
	FS_3	0.920		WLB_3	0.945
	FS_4	0.929		WLB_4	0.926
	FS_5	0.926		WLB_5	0.931
Interpersonal Relationship	IR_1	0.959	Satisfaction towards Work Load	WL_1	0.921
	IR_2	0.958		WL_2	0.906
	IR_3	0.957		WL_3	0.897
	IR_4	0.954		WL_4	0.897
	IR_5	0.950		WL_5	0.881
Responsibilities	RES_1	0.948			
	RES_2	0.951			
	RES_3	0.926			
	RES_4	0.940			
	RES_5	0.937			

The results of Table 3 indicate that all the outer loading values are greater than 0.7. Table 4 shows each construct's Average Variance Extracted values and Composite Reliability Values.

Table 4. Average Variance Extracted and Composite Reliability Values.

Construct	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Family Engagement	0.979	0.905
Family Responsibilities	0.928	0.721
Family Support	0.973	0.876
Interpersonal Relationship	0.981	0.913
Responsibilities	0.975	0.884
Satisfaction towards Work Load	0.955	0.811
Satisfaction towards Working Conditions	0.932	0.733
Supervisor Support	0.978	0.898
Work-Life Balance	0.972	0.873

According to Table 4, all the AVE values are greater than 0.6, and all the composite reliability measures are greater than 0.7. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no problem with convergent validity requirements.

The inter-construct correlation estimates between each construct were compared with the square root of AVE of each construct to assess discriminant validity. The square root of AVE of all constructs should be higher than the inter-construct correlations estimate between that construct and all other constructs.

Table 5. Comparison of Square Root AVE values and Inter Construct Correlation values.

	Family Engagement	Family Responsibilities	Family Support	Interpersonal Relationship	Responsibilities	Satisfaction towards Work Load	Satisfaction towards Working Conditions	Supervisor Support	Work-Life Balance
Family Engagement	**0.951**								
Family Responsibilities	0.716	**0.849**							
Family Support	-0.258	-0.606	**0.936**						

Interpersonal Relationship	-0.269	-0.593	0.807	**0.956**					
Responsibilities	-0.326	-0.608	0.655	0.682	**0.940**				
Satisfaction towards Work Load	-0.235	-0.567	0.779	0.743	0.684	**0.900**			
Satisfaction towards Working Conditions	-0.237	-0.601	0.809	0.781	0.692	0.790	**0.856**		
Supervisor Support	-0.235	-0.589	0.792	0.820	0.673	0.771	0.785	**0.948**	
Work-Life Balance	-0.368	-0.722	0.857	0.846	0.716	0.819	0.855	0.829	**0.934**

Table 5 compares the inter-construct correlations estimates with the square root of AVE for all constructs. Diagonal entries (in bold in Table 5) are the square root of AVE for all constructs, and sub-diagonal entries are the inter-construct correlation estimates among constructs. Table 5 indicates that the square root of AVE for each construct was higher than the correlations between that construct and other constructs. It confirmed that the discriminant validity of the model.

Model fit Indices

Table 6. Model fit Indices of the fitted Model.

Model fit Index	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.050
d_ULS	2.582
d_G	1.304
Chi-Square	2619.579
NFI	0.899
R Square	0.881
R Square Adjusted	0.878

Table 6 presented the fitted model's goodness-of-fit indices, revealing that the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.050 falls below the critical threshold of 0.1, indicating a satisfactory fit. Furthermore, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.899 approaches the desired threshold of 0.9, suggesting a firm fit. Collectively, these indices demonstrate that the model meets the criteria for a well-fitting structural model. Also, the adjusted R-square value of 0.878 indicates that the fitted model can explain 87.8% of university academic staff's initial variability in Work-Life Balance.

Collinearity Diagnosis

Table 7. Collinearity Diagnosis: VIF Values.

Construct	VIF Values	Tolerance values
Family Engagement	2.395	0.418
Family Responsibilities	3.928	0.255
Family Support	4.263	0.235
Interpersonal Relationship	4.152	0.241
Responsibilities	2.424	0.413
Satisfaction towards Work Load	3.540	0.282
Satisfaction towards Working Conditions	4.182	0.239
Supervisor Support	4.167	0.240

The present study used the variance inflation factor (VIF) for collinearity diagnosis. According to Table 7, all the variance inflation factor (VIF) values are less than 5. This confirmed that no serious collinearity issues existed among the model's predictors. Tolerance values for all the observed variables shown in the second column of the same table report values greater than 0.2, indicating the non-existence of multicollinearity.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 8. Results of regression weights of the fitted model

Path	Path coefficient	Standard Deviation	T-value	P-values	Decision
Family Engagement → Work-Life Balance	-0.006	0.023	0.263	0.793	Not Supported
Family Responsibilities → Work-Life Balance	-0.203	0.038	5.281	0.000	Supported
Family Support → Work-Life Balance	0.197	0.045	4.344	0.000	Supported

Interpersonal Relationship → Work-Life Balance	0.200	0.049	4.107	0.000	Supported
Responsibilities → Work-Life Balance	0.009	0.031	0.276	0.782	Not Supported
Satisfaction towards Work Load → Work-Life Balance	0.147	0.050	2.916	0.004	Supported
Satisfaction towards Working Conditions → Work-Life Balance	0.215	0.047	4.584	0.000	Supported
Supervisor Support → Work-Life Balance	0.100	0.051	1.988	0.044	Supported

Examining the effects of family-related factors on Work-Life Balance reveals a statistically significant negative correlation between family responsibilities and Work-Life Balance, as evidenced by a beta coefficient of -0.203 ($p = 0.000$). This suggests that an increase in family responsibilities is associated with a decrease in Work-Life Balance. Conversely, a significant positive relationship between family support and Work-Life Balance is observed, with a beta coefficient of 0.197 ($p = 0.000$). This indicates that an increase in family support is associated with an improvement in Work-Life Balance. However, the analysis also reveals that family engagement does not significantly impact Work-Life Balance, as indicated by a non-significant beta coefficient of -0.006 ($p = 0.793$). These findings collectively suggest that family responsibilities have a detrimental impact on Work-Life Balance. In contrast, family support has a salutary effect, while family engagement appears neutral.

An examination of the effects of work-related factors on Work-Life Balance reveals a statistically significant positive correlation between interpersonal relationships and Work-Life Balance, as indicated by a beta coefficient of 0.200 ($p = 0.000$). This suggests that interpersonal relationships have a significant positive impact on Work-Life Balance. Furthermore, Table 8 shows a statistically significant positive correlation between Satisfaction towards Work Load and Work-Life Balance, with a beta coefficient of 0.147 ($p = 0.004$). This indicates that satisfaction with workload significantly positively influences work-life balance. Additionally, Table 8 reveals a statistically significant positive correlation between Satisfaction towards Working Conditions and Work-Life Balance, with a beta coefficient of 0.215 ($p = 0.000$). This suggests that satisfaction with working conditions substantially positively impacts work-life balance. Moreover, Table 8 also indicates a statistically significant positive correlation between Supervisor Support

and Work-Life Balance, with a beta coefficient of 0.100 (p = 0.047). This suggests that Supervisor Support has a significant positive influence on Work-Life Balance. However, the analysis also reveals that work responsibilities do not significantly impact Work-Life Balance, as evidenced by a non-significant beta coefficient of 0.009 (p = 0.782). These findings collectively highlight the importance of positive work-related factors, such as interpersonal relationships, satisfaction with workload and working conditions, and supervisor support, in promoting Work-Life Balance. At the same time, work responsibilities appear to have a neutral influence.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the complex relationships between family-related and work-related factors and their impact on Work-Life Balance. The findings suggest that family responsibilities have a detrimental effect on Work-Life Balance, whereas family support has a salutary effect, and family engagement appears to have a neutral influence. On the other hand, work-related factors such as interpersonal relationships, satisfaction with workload and working conditions, and supervisor support significantly impact Work-Life Balance. In contrast, work responsibilities do not have a statistically significant impact. These results have important implications for individuals, organizations, and policymakers seeking to promote Work-Life Balance and improve overall well-being. By recognizing the importance of family support and positive work-related factors, individuals and organizations can create a more supportive environment that fosters Work-Life Balance and promotes overall well-being. Furthermore, these findings highlight the need for future research to explore the complex interplay between family-related and work-related factors and their impact on work-life balance and to develop evidence-based interventions and policies that support individuals in achieving a better balance between their work and personal lives.

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