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Life Satisfaction and Work-Family Conflict: The Mediating Role of Maternal Guilt and Shame in Working Mothers

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Abstract

Mothers who are employed either outside or within their homes have distinct obstacles in the current evolving economy. The purpose of this study is to better understand the interplay between maternal guilt and shame, work-family conflict, and overall life happiness. Our study uses a cross-sectional approach to examine the relationship between work-family conflict and mothers' sense of satisfaction with their lives, exploring the role that mothers' feelings of guilt and shame may have in mediating this relationship. The necessity for individualized therapies and institutional backing is highlighted by the preliminary data's suggestion that emotional reactions differ greatly between the two groups. The findings of this study highlight the significant psychological influence of work-family relations on mothers' mental health.

Keywords: *Life satisfaction; work-family conflict; maternal guilt; maternal shame; employment status; maternal well-being.*

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INTRODUCTION:

Background of the Study

Working moms face both difficulties and possibilities as a result of the complexity of modern life and the shift in social, economic, and family paradigms. Family roles and responsibilities have shifted as more women enter labor (Goldin, 2006). Women have long been expected to stay at home and raise their children, but in recent decades, many have entered the workforce or started their own businesses, juggling their personal and professional lives (Bianchi et al., 2006).

The work-family conflict is an unfortunate byproduct of the encouraging trend toward accepting multiple jobs. Work-family conflict, as described by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), is an example of inter-role conflict that arises when demands from the professional and personal spheres are at odds with one another. This tension has

grown as more women have entered the job; it is especially acute for working moms who must juggle domestic and professional obligations.

Conceptualization of Life Satisfaction Life satisfaction, a vital component of subjective well-being, concerns individuals' cognitive evaluations of their life as a whole (Diener et al., 1984). Instead of fleeting emotional states, life satisfaction stands as a more stable, global assessment of one's overall quality of life based on individually chosen criteria (Shin & Johnson, 1978).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), proposed by Diener et al. (1985), is one of the most widely utilized instruments for measuring life satisfaction. According to their research, life satisfaction is not merely the absence of dissatisfaction but is a distinct construct, rooted in the cognitive

assessment of one's life circumstances relative to subjective expectations and criteria.

Factors influencing life satisfaction can be myriad. While socioeconomic status, health, and relationships play significant roles (Dolan et al., 2008), the balance or conflict between work and family life has emerged as a pivotal determinant, especially for working parents (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

Understanding Work-Family Conflict

The concept of work-family conflict is rooted in role theory, which suggests that individuals play multiple roles in their lives, and these roles come with specific responsibilities, expectations, and behaviors (Kahn et al., 1964). When the demands or responsibilities of the work role interfere with the family role or vice versa, work-family conflict arises (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

There are two primary directions of work-family conflict:

- Work-to-family conflict: When work demands hinder the fulfillment of family responsibilities.
- Family-to-work conflict: When family demands obstruct work responsibilities (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

Multiple factors can exacerbate work-family conflict, including long working hours, job stress, unsupportive organizational culture, and the lack of clear boundaries between work and family life (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). For mothers, who often shoulder a disproportionate share of household and childcare responsibilities, this conflict becomes even more pronounced (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010).

Maternal Guilt and Shame: Definitions and Distinctions

Emotions play a central role in shaping human experience, and maternal emotions, specifically guilt and shame, can profoundly influence a mother's well-being and interactions with her family. While often

used interchangeably, guilt and shame are distinct emotional experiences. Guilt typically arises from a specific behavior or action that one perceives as wrong or harmful to others. It involves recognizing the discrepancy between one's actions and internal moral standards, leading to feelings of remorse and the desire to atone or make amends (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Shame, on the other hand, is more global and relates to the self rather than a specific behavior. Individuals experiencing shame might feel that they, as a whole person, are flawed or inferior. Shame is often associated with feelings of worthlessness, powerlessness, and a desire to hide or escape (Lewis, 1971).

In the context of work-family dynamics, maternal guilt might manifest when a mother perceives that her work commitments prevent her from fulfilling her parental duties. In contrast, shame might arise when a mother feels that she is inherently a 'bad mother' because of her perceived failures, regardless of the specific actions leading to those feelings (Borelli et al., 2017).

Prior Work on Work-Family Dynamics and Maternal Emotions

As women's participation in the workforce surged during the latter half of the 20th century, the narrative of the 'supermom'—a woman proficiently juggling her professional ambitions and familial duties—became popular. However, this narrative, while empowering, also set unrealistically high standards, often leading to feelings of guilt and shame when mothers felt they couldn't measure up (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

A study by Nomaguchi et al. (2005) found that working mothers reported higher levels of guilt and stress related to their parenting roles compared to non-working mothers, especially when they perceived their work as interfering with family life. The emotional toll of this conflict can lead to reduced life satisfaction, with maternal guilt and shame playing potential mediating roles (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2016).

Research by Borelli et al. (2017) highlighted that mothers who experienced higher levels of work-family conflict also reported more frequent feelings of shame related to their parenting. This relationship held even when controlling for other factors like overall job satisfaction and perceived social support.

However, a gap in the literature exists when differentiating between employed and self-employed mothers. Given the distinct challenges faced by self-employed mothers, understanding their unique emotional experiences is crucial for comprehensive insights into the broader phenomenon of maternal emotions amidst work-family dynamics.

Objectives of the Study

The central aim of this research is to delve into the emotional experiences of maternal guilt and shame amidst the challenges of work-family conflict and to discern their impact on life satisfaction among employed and self-employed mothers. Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To investigate the frequency and severity of work-family conflict among moms who are employed and self-employed.
2. To comprehend the subtleties of the parental guilt and humiliation felt by these moms and their assumed causes.
3. To determine if mother guilt and shame may operate as a mediator in the connection between life satisfaction and work-family conflict.
4. Based on the findings, to give suggestions for employers, policymakers, and family support networks to improve the mental health of working moms.

METHODOLOGY:

Sample:

For this study, 500 participants were categorized into two groups based on their

employment status: employed and self-employed mothers.

The inclusion criteria for groups were:

- Mothers with at least one child below the age of 12.
- Mothers who have been employed in a formal organization for a minimum of 2 years.
- Mothers who have been self-employed for a minimum of 2 years.

Tools used:

Two primary instruments were utilized:

1. Diener et al. (1985) created the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) to gauge an individual's happiness with life in general. Its validity and reliability are generally accepted.
2. Haslam et al. (2015) created the Work-Family Conflict Scale, which consists of 10 questions and is able to measure both work-related and family-related problems.

In addition to the aforementioned scales, questions were designed to assess maternal feelings of guilt and shame. These were derived from existing scales with slight modifications to suit the context of the research (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

Data Collection Procedure

Participants were approached through their respective organizations (for employed mothers) and via local business associations and online platforms (for self-employed mothers). After explaining the purpose of the study and ensuring confidentiality, participants were handed the questionnaires.

Informed consent was sought, ensuring participants were aware that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any repercussions.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data was analyzed using SPSS software ((IBM SPSS Statistics 25).

1. **Descriptive Analysis:** Mean, median, mode and standard deviation were reported for the scores of life satisfaction, work-family conflict, and maternal sentiments of guilt and shame, providing an overview of the most important components of the data.
2. **t-Test:** A t-test was used to find variations in life satisfaction, work-family conflict, and feelings of guilt

and shame among employed and self-employed moms.

3. **Regression Analysis:** To determine whether work-family conflict contributed to mothers' feelings of guilt and shame, a mediation analysis was conducted.

The direction and magnitude of correlations between variables were examined by use of regression analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Scales

Measure	Employed Mothers	Self-Employed Mothers
Life Satisfaction		
- Mean	3.6	4.1
- Median	3.5	4.0
- Std. Deviation	0.8	0.7
Work-Family Conflict		
- Mean	4.5	4.3
- Median	4.4	4.2
- Std. Deviation	0.9	0.8

This table offers a summary of the central tendencies and variations in life satisfaction and work-family conflict scores for both groups. It suggests that self-employed

mothers report slightly higher life satisfaction than their employed counterparts.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Maternal Guilt and Shame

Emotion	Employed Mothers	Self-Employed Mothers
Maternal Guilt	3.8	3.5
Maternal Shame	3.3	2.8

Presenting the emotional dimensions under study, the table shows mean scores for maternal guilt and shame. It appears

employed mothers may experience these feelings with a slightly higher intensity than self-employed mothers.

Table 3: t-Test Results for Differences between Groups

Measure	t-Value	Significance (p-value)
Life Satisfaction	-4.52	<0.001
Work-Family Conflict	2.45	0.015
Maternal Guilt	3.18	0.002
Maternal Shame	4.10	<0.001

Statistically significant disparities between employed and self-employed moms on a variety of variables are shown in the table

above. Differences in life satisfaction, work-family conflict, and maternal emotions were statistically significant between the groups

Table 4: Correlations among Variables for Employed Mothers

Measure	Life Satisfaction	Work-Family Conflict	Maternal Guilt	Maternal Shame
Life Satisfaction	1	-0.63	-0.52	-0.47
Work-Family Conflict	-0.63	1	0.65	0.59

Highlighting the relationships between variables for employed mothers, the table indicates strong inverse correlations between life satisfaction and work-family conflict, and both maternal guilt and maternal shame. These relationships suggest as conflict and guilt increase, life satisfaction tends to decrease.

Table 5: Correlations among Variables for Self-Employed Mothers

Measure	Life Satisfaction	Work-Family Conflict	Maternal Guilt	Maternal Shame
Life Satisfaction	1	-0.60	-0.49	-0.42
Work-Family Conflict	-0.60	1	0.62	0.55

This table mirrors the preceding but for self-employed mothers. The patterns of correlation are similar to employed mothers, though the strengths of relationships vary slightly, indicating distinct dynamics in this group.

Table 6: Regression Analysis - Predictors of Life Satisfaction

Predictor	B	Beta (β)	t-value	Significance (p-value)
Constant	5.6	-	-	-
Work-Family Conflict	-0.52	-0.45	-4.58	<0.001
Maternal Guilt	-0.40	-0.36	-3.90	0.001
Maternal Shame	-0.37	-0.32	-3.49	0.001

Outlining the impact of various predictors on life satisfaction, this table underscores the significant negative influence of work-family conflict, maternal guilt, and shame on a mother's contentment with life. The predictors, with their respective weights (Beta values), reveal the magnitude of their impacts.

RESULTS:

Work-Family Conflict and Life Satisfaction: An Overview

Table 1's descriptive data reveal that women who work for themselves had a somewhat higher average level of life satisfaction (4.1) than employed mothers (3.6). In contrast, self-employed moms reported a lower level of work-family conflict (4.3) than their employed counterparts (4.5). This suggests that, on average, self-employed moms are happier with their lives and have fewer issues balancing work and family.

The Role of Maternal Guilt and Shame

In the context of motherhood and the workplace, maternal feelings were crucial. According to the averages in Table 2, employed mothers scored higher than self-employed mothers on the shame and guilt scales.

Employed mothers

Upon deeper analysis, employed mothers exhibited a significant correlation between increased feelings of guilt and higher levels of work-family conflict (as evidenced in Table 4). Furthermore, a rise in guilt and shame was associated with a drop in life satisfaction levels. The t-test results (Table 3) confirmed that these emotions were significantly more pronounced in employed mothers than in self-employed mothers, indicating the additional emotional burden they may carry in trying to balance their formal work roles with motherhood.

Self-employed mothers

For self-employed mothers, while there were feelings of guilt and shame, they were somewhat muted compared to their

employed counterparts (Table 5). The flexibility and autonomy associated with self-employment may provide these mothers with better coping mechanisms or opportunities to balance work and family, thus experiencing these emotions with less intensity. However, the inverse relationship between maternal guilt and life satisfaction was still evident, though slightly less pronounced than in employed mothers.

DISCUSSION:

The findings point to the importance of maternal emotions and the evident effect of work-family relationships on life satisfaction as the key takeaways. As a result of the tension between their professional and domestic responsibilities, working moms were more likely to feel guilty and ashamed of themselves. Employed mothers may have a harder time juggling both duties because of the set hours and obligations of traditional employment.

In contrast, self-employed mothers exhibited a slightly better life satisfaction index, which could be attributed to the flexibility their work mode affords them. However, it's essential to note that while the intensity differed, feelings of guilt and shame were still present in both cohorts, underlining the universal challenges of motherhood and professional pursuits.

Comparing Employed and Self-Employed Mothers

While both groups faced work-family conflicts, the nature and intensity of these conflicts differed. Employed mothers, bound by fixed work hours and less autonomy, perhaps faced more daily challenges in integrating their family responsibilities with their work. Their heightened feelings of guilt and shame could stem from perceived inadequacies in fulfilling both roles to their desired levels.

On the other hand, self-employed mothers, despite having better scores in life satisfaction, were not immune to the

dilemmas of balancing work and family. Their challenges might be more about setting boundaries, given the blurred lines between work and personal life. The flexibility of self-employment is a double-edged sword; while it provides autonomy, it might also lead to over-extension, with work permeating family time.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The research has several critical takeaways for organizations, policymakers, and support systems catering to working mothers:

1. **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Given the apparent benefits of flexibility in enhancing life satisfaction, companies should explore introducing more flexible work options for employed mothers, such as flextime, work-from-home opportunities, or compressed workweeks.
2. **Counseling and Support Services:** Organizations could provide counseling services specifically tailored for mothers, helping them navigate feelings of guilt and shame, and equipping them with strategies to manage work-family conflicts.
3. **Training Programs:** For self-employed mothers, workshops on time management, setting boundaries, and integrating work and family can be beneficial.
4. **Policy Reforms:** At a broader level, governments should consider policies that support mothers in the workplace. This could include longer maternity leaves, provision of paternity leave, ensuring safe and accessible childcare facilities, and establishing legal frameworks that promote workplace flexibility.
5. **Awareness Campaigns:** There's a need to challenge and change societal norms that place undue pressure on mothers to be 'perfect' in both their professional and maternal roles. Awareness campaigns can help

in highlighting the challenges faced by working mothers and fostering a more supportive community.

While the challenges of balancing work and family are multifaceted and deeply personal, systemic interventions, both at organizational and policy levels, can significantly alleviate the associated stresses.

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