

## **Effect of Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict in Predicting Work-Family Conflict Among Teachers**

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The present research aimed to investigate the relationship between role ambiguity, role conflict, and work-family conflict (WFC) among colleges and university teachers. Moreover, it aimed to see the predicting role of role ambiguity and role conflict to WFC as well as the role of gender and marital status on study variables. A sample of 200 teachers with equal participation of both the genders was approached by using convenient sampling technique. Role Ambiguity Scale, Role Conflict Scale, both developed by Rizzo et al (1970), and Work-Family Conflict Scale (Netemeyer, Boles, & Mcmurrian, 1996) were used for data collection. All the scales and subscales have the satisfactory alpha reliabilities. Results demonstrated that work-family conflict was positively related with the WFC and family to work conflict. Besides, work-family conflict was positively related with role ambiguity and work to family conflict was positively associated with role ambiguity and negatively related with role conflict. In addition, role ambiguity positively predicted WFC and role conflict negatively predicted the WFC. Male teachers scored significantly high on role ambiguity as compared to female teachers and married teachers scored significantly high on role ambiguity as compared to unmarried teachers. At the end, the results were discussed in terms of implications for practice and research.

*Keywords:* Work-family conflict, teachers, role ambiguity, role conflict

Work-family conflict (WFC) is considered as an inter-role conflict, suggesting that satisfying the expectations of family roles make it hard to fulfill the aspirations of work roles and the other way around (Beigi, Shirmohammadi, & Kim, 2015). Aazami, Akmal, and Shamsuddin (2015) have demonstrated that work and family are two

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major notable areas in individual's life. However, deficiency of proper balance between family and work can lead to unfavorable consequences including stress, strains, and psychological distress. Work-family conflict, now a days, is a major area of concern for both men and women who work outside their house. Currently, the academicians all over the world are expected to cater to diverse academic and nonacademic roles at different levels; as a result, they have to fulfill various role demands that impede their work performance. Besides, the rampant shifts in the functioning of academic institutions brought a paradigmatic shift in the lives of academicians across the globe (Teichler, Arimoto, & Cummings, 2013). Because of this, lack of concentration level to home related activities occur and the family members especially children are therefore ignored by both the working parents. Ultimately, conflict between their family life and work arises. Individuals experiencing WFC seem to be blocked, and are unable to complete their goals, because of which they feel anxious, depressed, and sometimes even feel guilty (Bergs, Hoofs, Kant, Slangen, & Jansen, 2018). They may experience sleep problems and poor physical and mental wellbeing (Eshak, 2018; Neto, Chambel, & Carvalho, 2018; Yoo & Lee, 2018). They find it difficult to enjoy their lives in a true sense, and by this they always try to interact with other individuals to gain their attention and reduce their tensions (Zamir, 2007).

WFC is common among many faculty members. They face challenges to keep balance between family related jobs and responsibilities and multiple work related assignments and demands (Beigi et al., 2015). WFC is delineated as a kind of "inter-role conflict" in which the role demands from both the family and work are not compatible with each other. These explanations suggest a bi-directional relationship between these two critical domains. WFC mostly appears when 'work related demands' obstruct home responsibilities and/or when family obligations obstruct and hamper work activities. Hence, previous literature is replete with the evidences that suggested that both WFC and FWC are related with each other and are inversely associated with employees' satisfaction (Netemeyer, Boles, & Mcmurrian, 1996). Gutek, Searle, and Klepa (1991) reported a duplex conflict between work and family, where WFC appears when a person's work interferes with one's family roles like (wide-ranging and nonflexible working hours, work overload, poor working environment, stress from job, and interpersonal conflict at work etc.) and FWC arises when a person's family roles interfere with work roles, for instance, liabilities related to elder care, presence of very small children at home, uncooperative family members and/or

presence of conflicts within family members. Both role conflict and role ambiguity are the forms of role stress and are helpful to explain burnout among professionals (Tarrant & Sabo, 2010; Tunc & Kutanis, 2009).

Previous literature has shown that WFC is associated with role ambiguity and role conflict. Whereas, role ambiguity arises when an employee does not evidently comprehend his role expectations and is unsure about the nature of his/her job. In addition, when roles are not clearly defined or not clear to the person or roles have been changed with the time, the employee usually faces role ambiguity (Srivastav, 2007). When there is uncertainty in the role which has to be performed by the employee and lack of understanding about their job, the person might experience role ambiguity that ultimately leads to high amount of stress relating to their job (Netemeyer, Johnston, & Burton, 1990; Sager, 1994). Furthermore, role ambiguity is the degree to which employees are unclear about their work functions and tasks in an organization. There are many reasons for the role ambiguity. For instance, many supervisors sometimes fail to give proper and understandable strategies and instructions to their subordinates, and it ultimately leads towards ambiguity about what the employee is supposed to do. While about the role conflict, Theorists have drafted out a comprehensive definition of role conflict stating that, a person has to take on several roles in his life, like one has to benefit their jobs, families and friends, so clash in these roles leading to stress is called role conflict. If two roles are incompatible with each other than we face a greater likelihood of occupational stress. Role ambiguity mostly occurs when an individual tries to practice in a setting where different expectations regarding role performance are present (Zimmerman, Wagoner, & Kelly, 1996). Moreover, high role conflict and role ambiguity are not only associated with hostility and poor job satisfaction but also related with aggression among teachers (Acorn, 1991; Kanchika et al., 2015). The only way to get away with this kind of situation is by not leaving such a demand that causes incompatibility in one's role. Secondly, any chance of miscommunication should be removed between the employees and potential conflict in work demand should be avoided.

Many related studies revealed that role conflict and job stress are found to have a direct and positive relationship (Netemeyer et al., 1990; Sager, 1994). Rizzo et al. (1970) proposed that inappropriateness of requirements and expectations in one of the roles, of a person, leads to an element of confusion for a single role about how to gratify hope and expectations. There are other views of how the role conflict arises. Besides, the type of organization also plays a

role in role conflict and role ambiguity (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017). Atkinson and Huston (1984), however, demonstrated that the divergence in masculine and feminine roles is the cause of this conflict. Usually women carrying a dual career overburdens herself and becomes a victim of this problem (Cooper & Davidson, 1982). Zheng and Wu (2018) identified three dimensions of WFC including behavior-based, time and strain-based conflict. Studies demonstrated that job demand, family responsibilities, work hours, and work overload have been the significant predictors of WFC (Uzoigwe, Low, & Noor, 2016). WFC potentially affect the individuals' turnover intention (Hatam, Jalali, Askarian, & Kharazmi, 2016). Sager (1994) suggested that ambiguity related to role that has to perform and role conflict is both positively related to each other. When the employees experience ambiguity in their roles, they also experience role conflict. Brown and Peterson (1993) supported the positive relationship of role ambiguity and role conflict. Role conflict and role ambiguity are important sources of WFC (Greenhaus & Butell, 1985). However, few past studies have found negative relationship between these two variables (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017).

To identify the role of common demographic variables associating with the study variables, past research demonstrated that WFC was higher in participants who were married and significant association was found between gender and WFC. Besides, studies have also shown that WFC is inversely related to organizational commitment (Hatam et al., 2016). In another study with Iranian faculty, results demonstrated a positive association between work hours in a week, “work-interference with family (WIF)”, “family-interference to work (FIW)”, and faculty time spent with family. WIF inversely associated with job satisfaction. However, work hours positively associated with job satisfaction. Besides, a FIW and time spent with family did not influence job satisfaction. In addition, spouse employment acted as a moderator between work family - interference and job satisfaction (Beigi et al., 2015). Chan, Jiang, and Fung (2015) demonstrated that work conflicts negatively predicted job satisfaction among young workers. However, for older workers that scenario was different. In addition, “time-based work interference into family” and “strain-based family interference into work” negatively affected job satisfaction, family satisfaction and employee wellbeing (Aazami et al., 2015).

WFC is a vital area of concern to the industrial and organizational field. Numerous studies have been done on WFC and work role

stressors independently. There is a lack of researches that have integrated these constructs in a unified model. In addition, many published works revolve around factors that help to understand WFC. However, there are few studies that have shown the causal factors of WFC. In today's modernized societies WFC is an emerging phenomenon and hotly debated area; as it has been established that there exists a relationship between WFC and FWC with job satisfaction. This conflict not only lowers the individual's life satisfaction but also diminishes the job satisfaction (Anafarta, 2011; Burke & El-Kot, 2010). The research on role demands has gained much attention for last two decades and various prominent types of role demands (i.e., role conflict & ambiguity) in teaching profession have been identified. It is because of the fact that academicians are sometime unable to reconcile the inconsistent and incompatible demands not only from students but also from parents and administration, that's why they face role conflicts. Moreover, it also happens that sometimes, employees do not have vivid and distinct instructions about the nature of tasks and their responsibilities and as a result they experience confusion, role ambiguity and conflict (Gold & Roth, 2013). Besides, the role of work-family conflict on occupational stress and psychological health has been widely studied (see e.g., Sugawara et al., 2017). However, its relationship with conflict and role ambiguity has been understudied. This study examined whether and how role ambiguity and role conflict affect work-family conflict among teachers. Moreover, there is scarcity of research on WFC among individuals associated with the field of education. Teachers are termed as the builders of a nation, and if they end up facing such kind of conflicts then ultimately our present and future would be at stake. Mostly it happens that family working members complain about their job dissatisfaction that they do not give proper time to their family. As a result of this, we see spousal conflicts which ultimately disrupt the peace and tranquility of their home. In addition, past researchers pointed out the need for further empirical research that would suggest how individuals associated with academia can handle both the work and family demands with confidence (Beigi et al., 2015).

### **Objectives**

1. To determine the relationship of WFC with role ambiguity and role conflict among teachers.
2. To examine the predictive role of role ambiguity and role conflict for work-family conflict among teachers.

3. To assess the differences based on gender and marital status on WFC, role conflict, and role ambiguity among teachers.

### Hypotheses

1. Work-family conflict is positively related with role ambiguity and role conflict among teachers.
2. 'Family-to-work conflict' and 'work-to-family conflict' are positively associated with each other.
3. Role ambiguity and role conflict would predict the work-family conflict among teachers.
4. Female and married teachers will show more WFC, role ambiguity, and role conflict as compared to male and unmarried teachers.

### Method

#### Sample

The sample of the present study comprised of 200 teachers taken from the government colleges and public universities of Islamabad, Pakistan. Age ranged from 23-65 years ( $M = 39.47$ ,  $SD = 9.86$ ). Both male and female teachers were included as research participants. Participants were approached through convenient sampling technique. Besides, both married and unmarried teachers were taken having diverse levels of job experience ranging from 1-30 years and with different levels of education from masters to PhD; Masters ( $n = 112$ ), M.Phil ( $n = 41$ ), and PhD ( $n = 47$ ).

#### Measures

**Work-Family Conflict Scale.** Work-Family Conflict Scale (Netemeyer et al., 1996) was used to assess WFC. It is a commonly used scale to assess the WFC. Alpha coefficient of this scale is  $\alpha = .88$ . It is a 5-point Likert scale having ten items. Respondents were asked to point out their level of agreement on each item. All items are positively phrased. High scores on this scale depict more WFC, whereas, low score show low WFC.

**Role Ambiguity Scale.** Role Ambiguity Scale was administered to assess the role ambiguity. This is one of the widely used measures to gauge the role ambiguity in organizational settings. It has six items and has been devised by Rizzo et al. (1970). It is a reliable and valid measure that has been extensively used in studies to assess the role ambiguity (Fields, 2002). It is a 7- point Likert-scale. High scores on

the scale reflect high role ambiguity and vice-versa and all items are positively scored. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale is .72 (Conley & Woosley, 2000).

**Role Conflict Scale.** Role Conflict Scale (Rizzo et al., 1970) was used to assess the role conflict among teachers. It is considered as a reliable and valid measure, with satisfactory Cronbach alpha value is .83 (Conley & Woosley, 2000). It has eight items to be scored on a 7-point Likert scale. Higher scores on the scale show high role conflict and vice versa. There are no negative items and all items are positively phrased so there is no reverse scoring.

### Procedure

The teachers for the present research were individually approached during office hours at their work places. After taking the informed consent, the purpose of the study was shared with the respondents. They were requested to give their responses and not leave any question unanswered. They were told about the confidentiality of the data. They were also assured that the information would be used for research purpose only. At the end they were thanked for their cooperation.

## Results

To achieve the objectives of the study, correlation, regression, and *t*-test were applied on the data. The results are tabulated below:

Table 1

*Psychometric Properties of the Measures Used in the Study (N = 200)*

Scales	Item	M	SD	Range		Skew.	
				Potential	Actual		
Work-Family Conflict Scale	10	32.37	9.10	.90	10-50	12-50	-.20
Work-to-Family	5	15.47	4.79	.85	5-25	6-25	-.18
Family-to-Work	5	16.90	5.05	.86	5-25	6-25	-.22
Role Ambiguity Scale	6	32.60	5.92	.77	6-42	9-42	1.37
Role Conflict Scale	8	31.53	8.93	.76	8-56	9-51	-.19

Table 1 demonstrates the psychometric characteristics of the instruments used in the study. All the scales and subscales have the satisfactory alpha reliabilities. The skewness values show that the data is normally distributed.

Table 2

*Correlation Matrix for WFC, Role Conflict, and Role Ambiguity among Teachers (N = 200)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1 Work-Family Conflict	-	.93**	.92**	.52**	-.14
2 Family-to-Work		-	.71**	.48**	-.10
3 Work-to-Family			-	.48**	-.15*
4 Role Ambiguity				-	.02
5 Role Conflict					-

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

The results in Table 2 demonstrate that both domains of Work-Family Conflict Scale including “Family to Work” and “Work to Family conflict” are positively associated with each other. In addition, FWC is positively related with role ambiguity; while, WFC is significantly positively related with role ambiguity and inversely related with role conflict.

Table 3

*Effect of Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict on WFC (N = 200)*

Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
Constant	10.85**	3.57	3.81,17.88
Role ambiguity	.52**	.09	.62,.99
Role conflict	-.15*	.06	-.27,.03
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.29	<i>F</i>	40.98**

Note. CI = confidence interval.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Results in Table 3 demonstrate that role ambiguity positively predicts WFC and role conflict negatively predicts the WFC. Overall the model explained the 29 percent variance. Simple linear regression is used for this analysis.

Table 4 depicts that, on independent *t*-test analysis, there is significant difference among both genders on role ambiguity. Male teachers significantly score high on role ambiguity as compared to female teachers. On the other hand, nonsignificant gender differences are found on WFC and role conflict. The values of effect size suggest that there is low to medium effect.

Table 4

*Gender Differences on the Variables of WFC, Role Ambiguity, and Role Conflict (N = 200)*

Variables	Male Teachers (n = 100)		Female Teachers (n = 100)		t(198)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			UL	LL	
WFC	33.12	9.22	31.63	8.97	1.16	.25	4.03	-1.05	.16
Role Ambiguity	33.61	5.16	31.60	6.47	2.43	.02	3.64	.38	.35
Role Conflict	33.86	9.20	32.20	8.66	1.06	.29	1.15	-3.8	.15

*Note.* WFC = Work-family conflict; UL = upper limit; LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval.

Table 5

*Group Differences on Marital Status of Employees WFC, Role Ambiguity, and Role Conflict (N=200)*

Variables	Unmarried (n = 33)		Married (n = 167)		t(198)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			UL	LL	
WFC	32.00	9.63	32.44	9.03	.26	.79	3.88	-2.98	.04
Role Ambiguity	30.39	7.53	33.04	5.48	2.37	.02	4.85	.45	.34
Role Conflict	31.12	8.94	31.61	8.96	.29	.77	3.85	-2.88	.04

*Note.* WFC = Work-family conflict; UL = upper limit; LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval.

Table 5 demonstrates that there is significant difference among married and unmarried teachers on the variable of role ambiguity. Married teachers scored high on role ambiguity as compared to unmarried teachers. However, non-significant differences are seen on WFC and role conflict in relation to marital status of the employees.

## Discussion

The current research was aimed to investigate the relationship among WFC, role ambiguity and role conflict in teachers of different government colleges and public universities of Islamabad and to know whether these two work role stressors (role ambiguity and role conflict) are the predictors of WFC. Stress at work can strongly

influence one's life. The employees observe dissatisfaction due to the imbalance in work and family life. A typical teacher has an inflexible job schedule with an additional work load of incomplete tasks which they bring home that result in a disturbed family life. Through this conflict the quality of a person's work life and personal/family life get disturbed. On the other hand, negative experience at work can also adversely affect quality of life at home. At the same time, it reflects that work stress observed by one family member can be transmitted to another member. Hence, in order to have a productive output and achieve satisfaction, both work and family lives need to be actively maintained. The sample comprised of teachers, with equal participation of both the genders. The sample was approached by using convenience sampling technique. WFC, Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict Scales were used for data collection. All the scales and subscales showed satisfactory alpha reliabilities. The skewness values showed that the data is normally distributed (Table 1).

Work-role stressors are the conflicting and ambiguous situations with the job expectations. When it is not clear that what steps and actions should be taken to meet the potentials, goals and expectations of a particular role, role ambiguity occurs there. And on the other hand, role conflict occurs when for the satisfaction of a single role there are mixed and unsuitable or non-compatible messages, that results in role conflict. Here for this research, the two parts of the antecedent of work-family conflict, from the sub type that is work-role stressors has been selected to see whether these two variables (role ambiguity and role conflict) are the reason behind work-family conflict among the teachers in different government institutions of Pakistan. Studies disclose that the reasons behind role ambiguity is that when the person is unclear about the behavioral expectations that leads to an increase of uneasiness with the person's own (vs. work group) routine, group performance, less participation, concern in the group, unfavorable attitudes toward role senders, lower satisfaction from the job, increased depression, tension and anxiety that ultimately is associated to turnover intention (Caplan & Jones, 1975). The person is unclear about the roles that have to be performed in family as well as in work, this eventually leads them to experience WFC. Ambiguity in all these scenarios will lead the individuals to have an unbalanced life both in work and family. Role ambiguity is there when the person is unaware of the steps that are to be followed in meeting expectations of the role at work. Job stress and tensions are the basis of role ambiguity and role overload. The individuals experiencing ambiguity, conflicts and workload on its extreme in their work roles, many likely experience negative emotions fatigue, tension, neck and lower back

pain, emotional dissonance, and unhealthy eating habits (Baur et al., 2018; Elfering, Hafliger, Celik, & Grebner, 2018; Shukri, Jones, & Conner, 2018).

We have hypothesized that WFC is positively associated with “Family-to-Work Conflict” and “Work-to-Family Conflict”. In addition, work-family conflict is positively related with role ambiguity and role conflict among teachers. Besides, to see the association between the above mentioned variables, findings showed that all these three variables are positively related with each other. In addition, work-family conflict is positively related with role ambiguity and work to family conflict is positively related with role ambiguity (Table 2). Findings are in line with past research. Enormous empirical evidences are available to support our findings. For instance, in a study, positive relationship has been reported between the study variables (Beigi et al., 2015; Hatam et al., 2016).

We have also hypothesized that, role ambiguity and role conflict would predict the WFC among teachers. Results demonstrated that role ambiguity positively predicted WFC and role conflict negatively predicted the WFC. Overall, the regression model explained the 29 percent variance (see Table 3). These findings are supported by past empirical literature. For instance, past studies have identified different predictors of WFC. It includes job demand, family responsibilities, work hours, and work overload as significant and most important predictors of WFC (Chan et al., 2015; Jiang, & Fung, 2015; Uzoigwe et al., 2016; Zheng & Wu, 2018). Moreover, previous literature also demonstrated that WFC and FWC potentially affect the individuals' turnover intention (Hatam et al., 2016).

Another objective was to see the difference among male and female teachers on study variables, results showed that male teachers significantly scored high on role ambiguity as compared to female teachers (Table 4). Furthermore, mean difference between male and female teachers on role ambiguity, WFC, and role conflict showed that married teachers significantly scored high on role ambiguity as compared to unmarried teachers (Table 5). These findings are partially supported by the past studies. For example, past research showed that WFC was significantly higher in married participants and significant association was found between gender and WFC. In means that gender and marital status may moderate the relationship and married individuals may experience more conflicts as compared to unmarried individuals. Similarly, in another study, it was found that two careers married couple experience additional work-family conflict and role ambiguity than single career couples (Usman, Ahmed, & Ahmed, 2011).

Studies have shown that the role conflicts are mostly found among female teachers, but contrary to this the findings of this research have shown that the male in our culture are considered the bread earners laying a lot of responsibilities on their shoulders. This sometimes makes it difficult for them to manage the conflicting situations and ambiguities that they experience in their duty hours as well as when they are in their family roles. The married teachers on the other hand are sometimes not able to manage the dual role and responsibilities towards their family and work. Sometimes, teachers end up abandoning other responsibilities and missing out opportunities outside the work life. If this issue is not addressed at the right times this can lead to ambiguity in work and family. The combination of these two work roles has an enormous impact on the life of a common man. Professional women suffer a great deal of role conflict. Extending this belief, we can clearly see that the married women in comparison to men and unmarried women face a lot of conflicting role demands. In addition, due to the variant nature of the family and domestic roles a greater amount of inter-role conflict is evident (Aryee, 1992). Overall, our results widen our understanding and extend our comprehension about work-family conflict.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

This study has certain limitations that have to be addressed; the first one was that only the colleges and universities of Islamabad were targeted for data collection and it does not represent the entire female and male working faculty of Pakistan. Therefore, it is hereby proposed that a comparative study with different universities and colleges of Pakistan can give generalizable results. Self-reported measures were used that increase risk of biases that may affect the responses of the participants. Further the sample size chosen was small that affects the generalizability of data. So to enhance the generalizability of findings comparatively a larger sample size is helpful. This was the cross-sectional study; hence we cannot infer the causality from these findings. In that regard, longitudinal study can observe stability and change of these constructs over the time. As the role ambiguity and role conflict are potential sources of aggression among teachers (Kanchika et al., 2015), so it is essential to address this issue. In further studies it is important to focus our attention on the connection among work-family conflict and culture. Further in Pakistani society the cultural beliefs, norms and values that are close in terms to the issues of work and family can provide a context and help to better comprehend work-family conflict. Furthermore, role of social support

and coping mechanism should be investigated in future research. The findings of current study would be helpful in prompting further research not only among the individuals related to academia but also among those individuals associated with other professions in Pakistan. In addition, the future researchers ought to work on indigenous measures to make it more comprehensible for this population.

### **Implications**

This study is significant in the sense that it establishes an association between WFC, role conflict and related ambiguities among teaching faculty members. Teachers would have to comprehend the outcomes of WFC in their lives and should put an effort to minimize it. Based on these findings, college and university authorities and most importantly government ought to formulate the policies that can evaluate the cost of WFC and associated negative outcomes. Most importantly, remedies can be devised which would allow them to stay away from the harmful effects the role stressors can have on work and on one's family. The ambiguities and conflicts are major source of WFC among teachers of university and colleges. To avoid WFC, there is a need to understand this phenomenon and introduce such interventions that may help in managing the conflicts and supportive management teams should be introduced at primary, secondary or tertiary levels of education in our country with immediate effect.

It has been largely established that employees who had conflicting and ambiguous work roles and those who perceive that they cannot handle their workload would experience fatigue, tension, and negative emotions. Study has the implications for organizational sectors, educational institutes, and human resources management organizations. For instance, I/O professionals can develop understanding and get insight into how workers and especially personals related to academia experience WFC. Besides, the findings of our research suggest that organizations ought to explore the nature and frequency of WFC in their organization and plan, devise, and introduce family friendly policies for employees, so that they may lead a balanced and conflict free life. The purpose of these policies should be to mitigate the level of employees' role ambiguity and WFC that would ultimately reduce the stress and job tension. Moreover, social support may also be helpful to reduce the work role conflict (French, Dumani, Allen, & Shockley, 2018). Michel, Michelson, Pichler, and Cullen (2010) presented a case where he established that

lacking social or instrumental support from work and family predicts work-family conflict and work role stressors, so given this we can see that the need to establish a firm link among the stressors and the conflict from work and family arises as this part yet remain under researched. Future research would benefit by finding the mediating role of WFC between occupational stress and psychological health (Sugawara et al., 2017).

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