

The Effect of Work-Family Conflict towards Job Satisfaction and Emotional Well-Being: Problem-Focused Coping as Mediator

(Kesan Konflik Kerja-Keluarga terhadap Kepuasan Kerja dan Kesejahteraan Emosi: Daya Tindak berfokuskan Masalah sebagai Pengantara)

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ABSTRACT

Inability to cope with conflicting demands of work and family has become an important topic among the employees in organisation. However, studies on inability to cope with conflicting demands on work, family and distance learning among the distance learners in Malaysia have received little attention. In this article, a sample of distance learners (N=173) were utilized to examine the relationship between work-family conflict towards problem-focused coping, job satisfaction and emotional well-being, and to examine the mediating effect of problem-focused coping between work-life conflict towards job satisfaction and emotional well-being. The research model was tested upon Coping Theory and Self-Determination Theory. Results of Partial Least Square (PLS) demonstrated that work-family conflict has a positive influence only on problem-focused coping, and subsequently problem-focused coping was found to mediate the relationship between work-life conflicts towards job satisfaction and emotional well-being. Based on the findings, this research suggests the employers to enhance work-life balance policies and programmes especially for employed distance learners, and the management of distance education to improve student retention and completion rates by providing supports to the distance learners.

Keywords: Work-family conflict; problem-focused coping; job satisfaction; emotional well-being

ABSTRAK

Ketidakupayaan untuk menghadapi tuntutan kerja yang bertentangan dengan keluarga telah menjadi topik penting dikalangan pekerja dalam organisasi. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian tentang ketidakupayaan untuk menampung permintaan yang bercanggah dengan kerja, keluarga dan pengajian jarak jauh dikalangan pelajar jarak jauh di Malaysia telah mendapat sedikit perhatian. Dalam artikel ini, sampel pelajar jarak jauh (N = 173) telah digunakan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara konflik kerja-keluarga terhadap daya tindak berfokuskan masalah, kepuasan kerja dan kesejahteraan emosi, dan mengkaji kesan perantaraan daya tindak berfokuskan masalah antara konflik kerja-keluarga terhadap kepuasan kerja dan kesejahteraan emosi. Model penyelidikan diuji berdasarkan Teori Pengendalian dan Teori Penentuan Diri. Keputusan Partial Least Square (PLS) menunjukkan konflik kerja-keluarga hanya mempunyai pengaruh positif terhadap daya tindak berfokuskan masalah, dan seterusnya daya tindak berfokuskan masalah didapati mengantara hubungan antara konflik kerja-keluarga terhadap kepuasan kerja dan kesejahteraan emosi. Berdasarkan keputusan, penyelidikan ini mencadangkan majikan untuk meningkatkan dasar dan program keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan terutamanya untuk pelajar jarak jauh yang bekerja, dan pengurusan pendidikan jarak jauh untuk meningkatkan tahap pengekalan dan penyelesaian pelajar dengan menyediakan sokongan kepada pelajar jarak jauh.

Kata kunci: Konflik kerja-keluarga; daya tindak berfokuskan masalah; kepuasan kerja; kesejahteraan emosi

INTRODUCTION

According to Bardett and McKinney (2004), job satisfaction is one of the concepts in the employee and organisational research field that has been thoroughly examined. Moreover, scholars have shown a keen interest in job satisfaction due to its humanitarian, hypothetical, and fiscal significance to an organisation (Stanton et al. 2002). Locke (1976) has defined job satisfaction as ‘a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences.’ Research has been mostly done involving upper-level administrators and full-time, lower-level workers. Comprehending the elements that influence job satisfaction is critical, as high job satisfaction and work performance have been associated in past studies (Judge et al. 2001; Kinicki et al. 2002). On the other hand, emotional well-being concerns the positive aspects experienced, incorporated and lived by a person and displayed in his or her surrounding (Kofodimos 1993). The emotional well-being of an

employee involves feeling optimism, confidence, happiness, clarity, vitality, self-worth, achievement, having a meaning and purpose, engagement, having supportive and satisfying relationships with others and understanding oneself, and responding effectively to one's own emotions. Even though research on job satisfaction and emotional well-being are extensive, not many emphasised on employed distance learners.

Work and family are two significant domains in an individual's life and various investigations have been conducted worldwide about the association between work and family (Hamid et al. 2004). This relationship also affects distance learners and scholars have examined work-family conflict issues for employees enrolled as distance learners engaged in online learning. For example, distance learners are inclined to finish their assignments during their free time because of workload pressures or Internet access issues at their workplace (Panchabakesan 2011; Siabi-Mensah, Badu-Nyarko & Torto 2009). Studying during their personal time can potentially create conflict and affect the employees' family life, and could contribute to attrition statistics (Thalheimer 2004). Kember (1989) explained that family circumstances like the number and age of dependents, housing conditions and the pressures of responsibilities such as earning an income to sustain the family, can all impact a distance learner's decision to stop studying. Furthermore, Kember also determined that level of income, gender, work demand, and geographic distance from the institution contributes to attrition. Work-family conflicts are those that appear because of participation in a work (or family) role, which makes it difficult to perform in the other role (Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrian 1996). Lee et al. (2018) reported that work-family conflict lowered job satisfaction, life satisfaction, work performance, and organisational commitment while increasing job stressors and depression, burnout, absenteeism, and intent to turnover.

Commonly, distance learners feel pressure and face conflict when they try to balance work and study priorities. Not only that, they can feel isolated because of low organisational support and an apparent lack of control and frustration. Such situations can compel distance learners into noncompletion despite having a good performance in their studies (Ozga & Sukhmandan 1998). Moreover, complex and multiple learning tasks like negotiating the technology, course website, and course content, and becoming an online learner can cause increased anxiety in the learners. When learners are overcome by modes of learning that they are unfamiliar with and experience despair because they think online learning is difficult, a virtual shutting down of the learning process occurs. When this happens, the decision to discontinue their studies may appear to be the only choice. As described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is thoughts and behaviours utilised to handle internal and external demands of situations considered stressful by individuals. Besides that, coping is also described as a process that forms in the context of a situation deemed personally important and exceeding one's resources for coping (Furman, Joseph & Miller-Perrin 2018). This behaviour is vital for people employed in the paid labour force who simultaneously juggle the roles of paid worker, partner, parent, homemaker, and including face-to-face students concerning their experiences of work-family conflict and well-being.

Studies on stress due to the burden of academic activities, work schedules, and other social responsibilities among distance learners have not received much attention in the Malaysian context. Instead, research on DE in Malaysia were mostly on students' online reading strategy (Jusoh & Abdullah 2015), challenges faced by adult distance learners to learn English (Sai & Belaja 2013), exploring social presence in online forums (Zaini & Ayub 2013), online writing platform's effects on students' performance in narrative writing (Annamalai, Eng & Abdullah 2013), and personality styles among adult DE students (Mat Zin 2012). Nevertheless, a study to test the interaction between work-family conflict, coping strategy, job satisfaction and emotional well-being among distance learners in Malaysia has not been conducted yet. Supported by statistics from one of the public universities in Malaysia, the percentage of enrolment has dropped from 25% to 20% (as compared to 2016) while the percentage of dropout increased from 23% to 27% (see Figure 1).

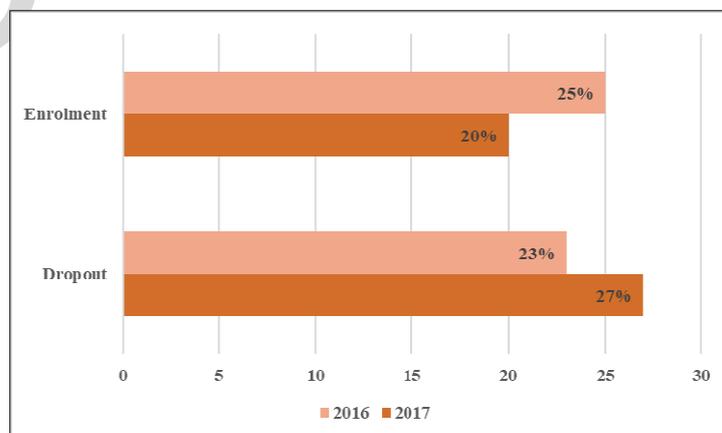


FIGURE 1. Enrollment vs dropout rate

Diaz (2002) sees the rate of attrition among distance learners, particularly those in employment, as less of an indication of academic non-success by the learner, and perhaps more of their decision or choice based on a realistic assessment of competing personal or work-related priorities. He bases this view on the fact that online learners tend to be more mature, better educated and, in the case of those in the workforce, better able to plan to continue or drop the course based on significant academic and life experience. As such, it is worth to conduct a study to investigate whether work-family conflict influences the problem-focused coping, job satisfaction and emotional well-being among distance learners, as well as to examine whether problem-focused coping mediate the relationship between work-family conflict towards job satisfaction and emotional well-being among distance learners. In terms of theoretical contribution, the present study aims to provide an empirical support for the proposed theoretical relationships on the research framework.

The aim of this study was to fill the knowledge gap by examining the mediating variable, problem-focused coping, in the relationship between work-family conflict, job satisfaction and emotional well-being amongst distance learners in DE within the context of Malaysia. As a practical contribution, this study aimed to propose several workplace policies for employers to support their workers enrolled as distance learners who undergo online learning through promotion or a change in career direction. Additionally, employers can create work-life balance policies and programmes for distance learners to manage work and family conflicts/problems. This study is part of a larger series of studies conducted to design a persistence model that can assist DE institutions. Results from this study will be useful to the management of Malaysian Distance Education institutions in strengthening their strategies to decrease attrition and improve retention, completion, and graduation rates of adult learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

JOB SATISFACTION

Job satisfaction is among the most extensively researched topics in work psychology and is linked to various key subjects like turnover intention (Tett & Meyer 1993) and health (Faragher, Cass & Cooper 2005). It is an attitude that demonstrates the degree to which an individual like or dislikes his or her job (Brief 1998). Like other attitudes, job satisfaction possesses both affective and cognitive components (Schleicher, Watt & Greguras 2004). Job satisfaction's affective component concerns the emotions or feelings (like excitement, contentment or joy) a person has towards his or her job. Meanwhile, the cognitive component involves one's thoughts or beliefs (such as the job offers challenge, autonomy or variety) regarding the job (Bowling 2014). According to Bowling (2014), the two main ways to conceptualise job satisfaction are global and facet job satisfaction approaches. Firstly, Global Job Satisfaction concerns workers' overall attitude towards their jobs whereas Facet Job Satisfaction is about workers' attitudes regarding specific aspects of their job, like pay, supervision, and communication (Bowling 2014). Next, the global approach identifies only a general score, while the facet approach recognises that workers can be content with some aspects of work but displeased with others. Bowling and Hammond (2008) elucidated in their meta-analysis that studies have invariably revealed that Global Job Satisfaction is not equal to the sum of individual facets and therefore must be regarded as different measurements. Thus, facet job satisfaction will provide a clearer picture of the connection between different aspects of job satisfaction and outcomes like well-being.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Emotional well-being concerns a person's experience of well-being. As explained by Diener (1984), both positive and negative emotions and satisfaction with one's own life determine the unique level of emotional well-being. Past studies have exposed that emotional well-being is associated with improved health and lengthier lifespan (Diener & Chan 2011). The positive association between emotional well-being and academic achievement can be described using Barbara Fredrickson's (2004) Broaden-and-built Theory. This theory states that experiencing positive emotions stimulates creative thinking and leads to a spread of attention and the broadening of behavioural resources (broaden-effect). Hence, emotional well-being is directly related to experiencing positive emotions. The expansion of the behavioural and cognitive repertoire subsequently encourages the development of long-lasting, effective coping strategies (built effect), which support resilience and therefore functions as a longitudinal resource against stress (Fredrickson 2004). On the other hand, emotional well-being is also considered as a key benefit of physical activity amongst teenagers. Frequently engaging in physical activity has been linked with high self-esteem and a low level of anxiety symptoms in adolescents (Calfas & Taylor 1994; Sothorn et al. 1999). Nevertheless, only several studies investigated changes in emotional factors like self-esteem, depression or anxiety before and after physical activity interventions aimed at teenagers (Steptoe & Butler 1996; Paluska & Schenk 2000).

PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING

Owusu-Boateng (2010) has stressed that coping strategies to lower stress are crucial to prevent the adverse effects of prolonged stress. Coping strategies concern the specific efforts individuals take to overcome, lower or minimise stressful events. As described by Gnilka et al. (2019), coping is multi-faceted and includes different strategies, whereby some are more efficient than others. On the other hand, Chao (2012) has identified two significant approaches to manage stress i.e. social support and coping strategies. Social support like getting support from family members and friends aids people in managing stress. Maykrantz and Houghton (2018) have stated that coping strategies consist of two key functions. The first concerns handling problems that stress a person while the second focuses on governing the emotions associated with those stressors.

According to Folkman (2008, 2010), people employ two types of coping strategies in a challenging circumstance. First is problem-focused coping to solve the problem (when it is presumed that something can be done). Second is emotion-focused coping to directly regulate distress (when nothing can be done, and the failure must be accepted). An example would be staying up throughout the night to study for an exam, which could be an apt coping strategy when not too much new information has to be learnt (problem-focused). In contrast, if a student failed to study regularly during the semester, it would be wise for him or her to go to sleep, recover, and admit his or her possible failure in the exam (emotion-focused). Both these strategies aim to lower distress, however, based on Folkman's proposal, there is another suitable option when efforts to handle a stressful situation fail, and that is meaning-focused coping. Referring to the same example from earlier, accepting the failure could be the first step taken by the student towards his or her plan in retaking the class. Thus, meaning-focused coping could assist students in reformulating the perceived demand and to see it as a challenge instead of a threat. Students rely on their own beliefs, values, and existential goals to sustain coping and emotional well-being while facing troubling times.

Literature review has revealed that very limited discussion exists on sources of stressors for distance learners and the way they adopt problem-focused coping to reduce the effect on their emotion. Moreover, coping can be a vital variable to include concerning the consequence of work-family conflict. Perrone and Worthington (2001) determined that coping mediated the relationship between work-family conflict and marital quality, i.e. the better an individual coped with work-family conflict, the higher his or her marital quality. On the other hand, a conceptual model of work-family interface based on the theoretical and empirical literature was put forth by Voydanoff (2002). She explained that coping strategies mediated the relationship between work-family interface and outcomes, such as work and family satisfaction. Thus, the research gap, pertaining to the mediating role of problem-focused coping among distance learners must be filled.

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Working and studying at the same time can lead to work-school conflict, just like how combining work and family has been demonstrated to cause work-family conflict (Denning et al. 2018). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) were the first to conceptualise work-family conflict as a specific form of stress, whereby they described it as a type of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually conflicting in certain aspects. Based on this description, work-school conflict can be defined as the extent to which work demands affect a student-worker's ability to fulfil his or her school-related demands and responsibilities or the interference of school activities with their work schedule. Students typically endure several stressors. Among them are continuous assessment, pressure to score good marks, time constraints, unclear assignments, heavy workload, uncomfortable classrooms, and relationship with family and friends (Cooper, Downing & Brownell 2018). Additionally, for distance learners, they face work demands along with social and family responsibilities. The combination of work commitments, family responsibilities, and school obligations can be complicated and tiring. Eventually, those who are struggling and juggling the myriad of workload and responsibilities can experience tension and health-related problems.

The effect of work on family and vice versa is documented well in the literature. In their study, Rivers, Thompson and Jeske (2018) investigated the influence of work-home inter-role conflict using structural equation modelling and determined that increased burnout is a direct outcome of work-home conflict. Demerouti et al. (2014) on the other hand, reported that there are psychological and physical costs linked with performing multiple roles. Not only that, workers who experienced work-family conflict were shown to report lower levels of job, family, and life satisfaction, increased levels of burnout, and declining health (Karim, Bibi & Aftab 2016). Nevertheless, multiple roles could also be beneficial. For example, to accrue extra income and receive social support from one's family, co-workers, and supervisors. If work responsibilities interfere with family responsibilities and vice versa, it can be assumed that work and school activities will mutually influence each other. This implies that the antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict interface could function as a basis for comprehending work-school conflict. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate whether work-family conflict influences the well-being among distance learners, as well as to examine whether

problem-focused coping mediate the relationship between work-family conflict and well-being outcomes among distance learners.

RESEARCH MODEL

Figure 2 shows the proposed research model based on Cognitive Coping Theory and Self-Determination Theory consisting of an independent variable (work-family conflict), two dependent variables (job satisfaction and emotional well-being), and mediating variable (problem-focused coping).

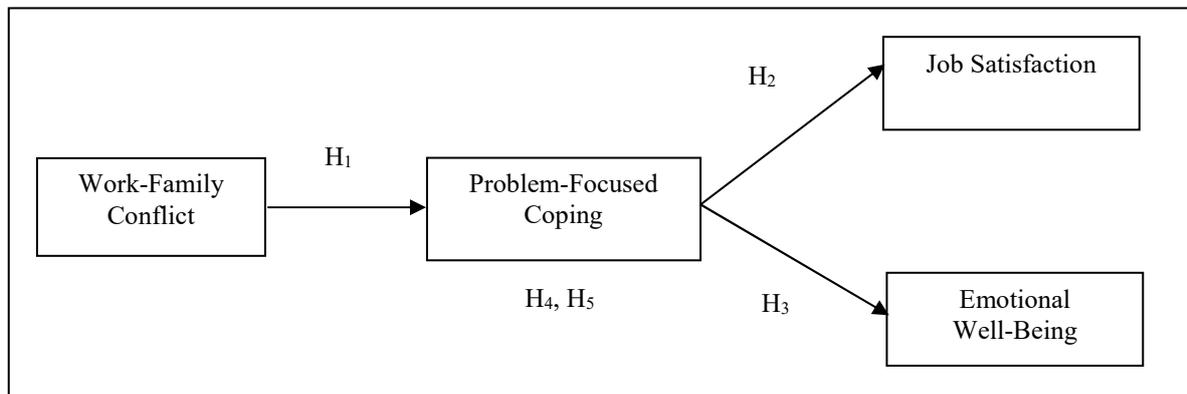


FIGURE 2. Research model

UNDERLYING THEORIES AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Theory of coping forms the theoretical framework of this study. The coping process has five steps. First is the event the individual goes through, such as missing a digital file a few hours before it's due. The next step involves the individual assessing the significance of the event. For instance, does the event threaten or endanger him or her, or is it of no importance? According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model, there are two kinds of appraisal. One is primary appraisal that concerns the assessment of the event itself, i.e. is it irrelevant, benign (positive and good), or stressful? A stressful appraisal involves harm, threat, and challenge. After this stage, the individual performs secondary appraisal, whereby he or she evaluates the available choices to manage the stressful event and what can be carried out to cope with it. In the third step of coping, the focus is on how to manage the stressor and the stress it causes. As such, the individual selects a coping strategy that is either problem or emotion focused. In problem-focused coping strategy, the individual employs adaptive strategies to handle the stressful event being experienced, which include taking steps to manage the problem, making an effort, dealing with emotions, or seeking assistance. In addition, it is probably applied when a person believes he or she has the situation under control and can therefore manage the source of the stress by drawing on internal options (e.g., resilience or willpower) or external options (e.g., assistance from peers or experts). On the other hand, emotion-focused coping takes place when the individual uses non-adaptive strategies like avoidance, declining aid, accusing others, anger, giving up, or not cooperating to solve the problem. This strategy is employed when a person assumes, he or she has inadequate control over the situation and as such cannot deal with the source of the problem. The fourth step pertains to the event outcome that concerns the effectiveness of using strategies chosen during the secondary appraisal. This outcome could be a favourable resolution that leads to a positive emotion or it can be an unfavourable one that causes a negative emotion. The final step is the emotional outcome. This last step is related to those who employed a problem-focused coping strategy and consequently experienced several positive emotions such as feeling good, staying healthy, and aiming for a positive sense of well-being.

A connection exists between Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman 1984) and Self-determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan 2002), whereby a person driven to balance his or her life will find a way to solve the conflict between work and family. SDT also suggests that intrinsic motivation is retained by fulfilling basic psychological requirements for autonomy and competence. The necessity for autonomy concerns the experience of behaviour as volitional and reflectively self-endorsed. For instance, students are autonomous when they readily allocate time and energy for their education. Requiring competence, on the other hand, is regarding the experience of behaviour as effectively enacted. For example, students are competent when they believe they can meet their schoolwork challenges. Thus, competent but not autonomous students will not sustain intrinsic motivation for learning. Besides the requirement for autonomy and competence, SDT postulates that fulfilling the need for relatedness enables the internalisation process. People are inclined to internalise and accept the

values and practices of others whom they feel or want to feel connected to as their own and from contexts in which they experience a sense of belonging. In the classroom, relatedness is strongly linked to students sensing that their teacher genuinely likes, respects, and values them. Students who have reported such relatedness are more disposed to display identified and integrated regulation for the hard tasks involved in learning. Meanwhile, students who feel disconnected or excluded by teachers will more likely move away from internalisation and hence respond only to external contingencies and controls.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT, PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING, JOB SATISFACTION AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING

Past research has shown that work-family conflict decreased job satisfaction, life satisfaction (AlAzzam, AbuAIRub & Nazzal 2017), work performance, and organisational commitment while increasing job stressors and depression, burnout, absenteeism, and intent to turnover (Byron 2005; Smith et al. 2018). Yang et al. (2018) performed a meta-analysis of over 130 empirical studies from 1977 to 1998 and discovered that work-family conflict was an antecedent for three categories of outcomes namely work-related, non-work-related, and stress-related. Work-related outcomes of work-family conflict comprise job satisfaction, intent to turnover, organisational commitment, absenteeism, job satisfaction, career satisfaction, and career success. On the other hand, non-work-related outcomes encompass life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, family satisfaction, family performance, and leisure satisfaction. A person's ability to fulfil family demands like caregiving, including child and elder care affects the satisfaction with his or her job (Kossek, Noe & DeMarr 1999). Studies have shown that work-family conflict is negatively connected with job satisfaction. Moreover, past research has revealed that work-to-family (WIF) conflicts impart a stronger effect on job satisfaction compared to family-to-work conflicts (FIW) (Kossek & Ozeki 1998). Hence, based on this idea, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁ Work-family conflict has a positive influence on problem-focused coping

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND JOB SATISFACTION

Past research has shown that work-family conflict decreased job satisfaction, life satisfaction (AlAzzam et al. 2017), work performance, and organisational commitment while increasing job stressors and depression, burnout, absenteeism, and intent to turnover (Byron 2005; Smith et al. 2018). Yang et al. (2018) performed a meta-analysis of over 130 empirical studies from 1977 to 1998 and discovered that work-family conflict was an antecedent for three categories of outcomes namely work-related, non-work-related, and stress-related. Work-related outcomes of work-family conflict comprise job satisfaction, intent to turnover, organisational commitment, absenteeism, job satisfaction, career satisfaction, and career success. On the other hand, non-work-related outcomes encompass life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, family satisfaction, family performance, and leisure satisfaction. A person's ability to fulfil family demands like caregiving, including child and elder care affects the satisfaction with his or her job (Kossek et al. 1999). Studies have shown that work-family conflict is negatively connected with job satisfaction. Moreover, past research has revealed that work-to-family (WIF) conflicts impart a stronger effect on job satisfaction compared to family-to-work conflicts (FIW) (Kossek & Ozeki 1998). Hence, based on this idea, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₂ Work-family conflict has a negative on job satisfaction

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Work-family conflict causes negative emotional effects, whereby these emotions will negatively influence workers' satisfaction with their jobs and marriages. Thus, experiencing negative emotions partially explains the intra-individual impact of work-family conflict on role satisfaction. Since emotions are ephemeral by nature (Lazarus & Cohen-Charash 2001), they should affect the satisfaction judgments in proximity to when they are felt, which follows the mood-congruency theory predictions in regard to the immediate activation effects of positive and negative emotions. People with high levels of work-family conflict have more depressive symptoms (Zhang et al. 2017), more marital issues (Barling & Macewen 1992; Higgins et al. 1992), poorer health status (Frone et al. 1997), and reduced life satisfaction, well-being, and quality of family life (Aryee et al. 1999; Stoeva et al. 2002). As such, a high level of work-family conflict is related to various physical and psychological health issues. Findings from past studies reveal a negative relationship between work-family conflict and mental health in general. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H₃ Work-family conflict has a negative influence on emotional well-being

THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING BETWEEN WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT
AND WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) reported that workers can possess the capability to handle challenging situations, control stress, demands, and solve problems and/or with positive thinking and emotional expression, to manage stressful circumstances. For instance, Lloyd, Bond and Flaxman (2017) stated that problem-focused coping is more effective in handling work-related stressors. Likewise, Ding et al. (2015) discovered that problem-focused coping is applied more often to manage daily work problems. Substantial mediating effects of problem-focused coping on psychological distress have been determined (Szymanski & Lewis 2016). Besides that, Luo et al. (2016) reported a similar mediating effect of problem-focused coping on the relationship between job performance and well-being. These authors observed that frequent application of problem-focused coping was linked to higher job performance and improved well-being. Thus, based on this idea, the ensuing hypotheses were formulated:

H₄ Problem-focused coping mediates the relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction

Problem-focused coping is a behavioural coping that encompasses seeking assistance and taking direct action in difficult circumstances. It emphasises on determining the problem, planning, forming alternate solutions, weighing those alternatives in terms of cost and benefit, selecting an alternative, and acting. Problem-focused coping attempts to apply control and resolve issues (Lazarus & Folkman 1984) and is employed in circumstances whereby a person assesses the situation as one that can be altered. Furthermore, this coping strategy was effective in handling alterable stressors (e.g., conflict in relationships) or in lowering their negative impact on health and well-being as well as higher work engagement, job satisfaction, and family satisfaction (Folkman & Moskowitz 2004; Penley, Tomaka & Wiebe 2002). As such, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H₅ Problem-focused coping mediates the relationship between work-family conflict and emotional well-being

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

This research was conducted using purposive sampling technique. It is considered the most appropriate method for this study as it examines work-family conflict, problem-focused coping, job satisfaction and emotional well-being among distance learners. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), purposive sampling involves the choice of subjects who are in the best position to provide the information, either because they are the only ones who have it, or conform to some criteria set by the research. In this study, the researcher has selected the distance learners that conform to the inclusion criterion as such: a) they were at least in 2nd year in the programme; b) they already married; and c) they were having at least one children. These inclusion criterion would help to increase the likelihood that work-family conflict was a relevant issue to the individual and to increase accuracy in response to the work-family conflict questions.

PROCEDURE AND PARTICIPANTS

The target population in this research was undergraduates' online students from one of the public universities in Malaysia. For determining the minimum sample size for actual data collection, this study referred to the rule of thumb as suggested by Hair et al. (2010) which recommended that the minimum requirement for sample size is to have at least five times as many observations as the number of variable items to be analysed. However, a more acceptable sample size is to have 10:1 ratio which means ten respondents to one observed variable item. In this study, the total number of items to measure all variables is 27. Hence, the acceptable minimum sample size is 5 multiplied by 27 items, that is, 135 respondents.

A questionnaire was created using the Survey Monkey, an online survey collection tool. For those who refuse to participate in this study, they are not affected to possible risks to future relationships with their lecturer involved in this research, and fear repercussions, such as lower grades, fewer learning opportunities, or lower evaluative outcomes.

During the actual data collection, 300 sets of questionnaires were emailed to the respondents. Out of 300 sets of questionnaires, only 258 sets of questionnaires were received from the respondents. However, out of the 258 sets of questionnaires, only 173 questionnaires were useable. The other 71 sets of questionnaires were

discarded for reasons of (a) uncompleted data (31 cases), (b) questionnaires answered by respondent who's not yet married (33 cases) and (c) questionnaires answered by respondent whose are married but no children (7 cases). As a result, only 173 cases were useable for data analysis, and these responses is higher than the minimum cases required (135) as suggested by Hair et al. (2010). Thus, Hair et al.'s (2010) criterion of collecting the more acceptable sample size, which is 5 participants per variable item has been met.

The total sample of 173 individuals consisted of 61 percent females and 39 percent males. The respondents were 100 percent married and were 100 percent having at least one children. 100 percent of the respondents were at least at 2nd year in their programme. The average age was 37 years, while the average tenure with their organisation was six years. The respondents were 100 percent employed in full-time jobs. Varying professions and organisational levels were represented (operational, supervisory, managerial) from many different organisational types (manufacturing, service, government/non-profit).

MEASURES

The survey consisted of measures designed to capture the four variables in this study; work-family conflict, problem-focused coping, job satisfaction, and emotional well-being. All the items employed a five-point Likert scale format (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Netemeyer's et al. (1996) five items scale ($\alpha = 0.80$) was used to assess work-family conflict which refers to form of interrole conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) nine items scale ($\alpha = 0.83$) was used to assess problem-focused coping, that involves actions (cognitive or behavioural) intended to improve or resolve the stress-eliciting situation. Kofodimos's (1993) seven items scale ($\alpha = 0.82$) was used to measure job satisfaction that describes how content an individual is with his or her job. Finally, Kofodimos's (1993) six items scale ($\alpha = 0.86$) was used to measure emotional well-being that refers to the degree of psychological health of the individuals.

ANALYSES

The Cronbach's alpha scale reliability values for the nine focal constructs consisted of a range of 0.78 to 0.93, which was beyond the minimum acceptable level of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein 1994). We used Harman's one-factor test to check for the presence of common method bias. Harman's one-factor test resulted in ten factors accounting for 66.9% of the variance, of which the first factor accounted for about 18.9%. Because a single factor did not occur, and no factor accounted for most of the variance, the single method of data collection was not viewed as a substantial risk (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

The researcher considered the structural equation model (SEM) with PLS approach to attain the research objectives and analyse the measurement and structural model. Based on Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-stage analytical procedures, the measurement model (validity and reliability of the measures) was tested, followed by an examination of the structural model (testing the hypothesised relationship). Next, to test the significance of the path coefficients and loadings, a bootstrapping approach (5000 resamples) was employed (Hair et al. 2014).

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE LATENT CONSTRUCTS

The four latent variables' mean value ranged from 3.68 to 4.28 while for the standard deviation it was 0.76 to 0.90, based on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Nevertheless, all the variables' mean values were higher than the midpoint value of 2.50. The highest mean value belonged to Job Satisfaction (4.28), whereas Problem-Focused Coping presented the lowest mean value (3.68). On the other hand, dispersion values reported via standard deviation showed that the highest and lowest values were by Emotional Well-Being with 0.90 and Work-Family Conflict with 0.76, respectively (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Results of descriptive analysis

| Variables | No of items | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|------------------------|-------------|------|--------------------|
| Work-Family Conflict | 5 | 3.90 | 0.76 |
| Problem-Focused Coping | 9 | 3.68 | 0.78 |
| Job Satisfaction | 7 | 4.28 | 0.81 |
| Emotional Well-Being | 6 | 3.71 | 0.90 |

ASSESSMENT OF MEASUREMENT MODEL

To evaluate the measurement model, two types of validity were scrutinised, i.e. convergent validity and followed by discriminant validity. The convergent validity of the measurement is generally determined using the indicator loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). In this research, all the loadings and composite reliabilities were higher than 0.7 while AVE was higher than 0.5, as recommended in prior studies (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. Results of measurement model

| Constructs | Factor loadings, AVE, and CR |
|---|------------------------------|
| <i>Work-Family Conflict</i> | |
| | AVE = 0.74; CR = 0.88 |
| 1. The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life. | 0.86 |
| 2. The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil family responsibilities. | 0.86 |
| 3. Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my job puts on me. | 0.87 |
| 4. My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfil family duties. | 0.83 |
| 5. Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities. | 0.81 |
| <i>Problem-Focused Coping</i> | |
| | AVE = 0.75; CR = 0.89 |
| 1. I come up with several alternative solutions to the problem. | 0.82 |
| 2. I make a plan and follow it. | 0.88 |
| 3. I give my best effort to do what is necessary to solve the problem. | 0.89 |
| 4. I work on changing policies that caused the situation. | 0.80 |
| 5. I decide what I think should be done and explain this to the people who are affected. | 0.88 |
| 6. I try to work more efficiently. | 0.83 |
| 7. I meet with my manager and discuss the situation which caused the stress. | 0.90 |
| 8. I take things one step at a time. | 0.86 |
| 9. I talk with people who are involved in the situation which caused the stress. | 0.90 |
| <i>Job Satisfaction</i> | |
| | AVE = 0.77; CR = 0.88 |
| 1. I feel challenged by my work. | 0.88 |
| 2. I have good relationship with my co-workers. | 0.86 |
| 3. I have special skills and talents that enable me to excel at my work. | 0.87 |
| 4. I have fun at work. | 0.86 |
| 5. I contribute to society through my work. | 0.82 |
| 6. I get recognition and respect at my work. | 0.98 |
| 7. My job is a good fit with my ability and values | 0.86 |
| <i>Emotional Well-Being</i> | |
| | AVE = 0.74; CR = 0.86 |
| 1. I take every day to rest, relax and take care of myself. | 0.88 |
| 2. I have a special hobby or pursuit that I enjoy and make time for regularly. | 0.86 |
| 3. I attend to my spiritual development. | 0.87 |
| 4. I am living my life in accordance with my values. | 0.86 |
| 5. I find opportunities for intellectual or cultural stimulation outside work. | 0.72 |
| 6. I actively seek to understand and improve my emotional well-being. | 0.98 |

After examining the convergent validity, discriminant validity was tested next (see Table 3). Nonetheless, there exists a criticism that the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion does not reliably spot the absence of discriminant validity in common research conditions (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt 2015). As such, Henseler et al. (2015) proposed an alternate method, grounded on the multitrait-multimethod matrix, to evaluate discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations. Furthermore, they proceeded to validate the superior performance of this approach via a Monte Carlo simulation study.

Hence, discriminant validity was also tested using this new recommended approach and the findings (see Table 4). There are two ways HTMT can be employed to evaluate discriminant validity, namely, as a criterion or statistical test. In the first approach, if HTMT value is higher than HTMT.85 value of 0.85 (Kline 2015) or HTMT.90 value of 0.90 (Gold, Malhotra & Segars 2001), then there is an issue of discriminant validity. For the second criteria, it is according to Henseler et al. (2015), whereby the null hypothesis (H_0 : HTMT \geq 1) is tested against the alternative hypothesis (H_1 : HTMT $<$ 1). If the confidence interval contains the value one (i.e., H_0 holds), this implies a lack of discriminant validity. As displayed in Table 3, all the values passed the HTMT.90 (Gold et al. 2001) and HTMT.85 (Kline 2015) values. Moreover, the HTMT Inference revealed that the confidence interval did not show a value of 1 on any constructs, therefore, implying discriminant validity has been determined.

TABLE 3. Results of discriminant validity analysis

| Constructs | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| (1) Work-Family Conflict | 0.86 | | | |
| (2) Problem-Focused Coping | 0.53 | 0.84 | | |
| (3) Job Satisfaction | 0.59 | 0.35 | 0.75 | |
| (4) Emotional Well-Being | 0.45 | 0.24 | 0.36 | 0.75 |

Note: Diagonals (in bold) represent the squared root of average variance extracted (AVE) while the other entries represent the correlations.

TABLE 4. Results of heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT)

| Constructs | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|-----|
| (1) Work-Family Conflict | | | | |
| (2) Problem-Focused Coping | 0.40 CI _{.90} (0.30, 0.55) | | | |
| (3) Job Satisfaction | 0.56 CI _{.90} (0.43, 0.64) | 0.32 CI _{.90} (0.34, 0.56) | | |
| (4) Emotional Well-Being | 0.38 CI _{.90} (0.29, 0.53) | 0.45 CI _{.90} (0.32, 0.62) | 0.39 CI _{.90} (0.31, 0.56) | |

ASSESSMENT OF STRUCTURAL MODEL

The structural model signifies the correlation between constructs or latent variables that were hypothesised in the research model. The goodness of the theoretical model is proven by the variance explained (R^2) of the endogenous constructs and the significance of all path estimates (Chin 2010). Together, the R^2 and path coefficients show how well the data support the hypothesised model (Chin 1998).

Three hypotheses were proposed for the direct relationship between work-family conflict, problem-focused coping, job satisfaction, and emotional well-being. Out of three hypotheses tested, the results showed that only one hypothesis was supported. Specially, work-family conflict was shown to have a positive influence on problem-focused coping ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$), which provides support for H_1 . However, the remaining two hypotheses, namely H_2 ($\beta = 0.06$, $p > 0.01$) and H_3 ($\beta = -0.07$, $p > 0.01$) were not supported.

Additionally, two hypotheses were proposed for the mediating effect of problem-focused coping between work-family conflict on job satisfaction and emotional well-being. To examine the mediation effect, the Sobel test was applied to investigate if the indirect influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator variable is significant. Besides, the method recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) was employed to evaluate if problem-focused coping has a mediation effect. As result, H_4 and H_5 were supported (see Table 5).

TABLE 5. Results of hypothesis testing

| Hypotheses | Path | Std Beta | Std. Error | t-value | Decision |
|------------|--|----------|------------|---------|---------------|
| H_1 | Work-Family Conflict → Problem-Focused Coping | 0.26 | 0.10 | 2.63** | Supported |
| H_2 | Work-Family Conflict → Job Satisfaction | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.83 | Not Supported |
| H_3 | Work-Family Conflict → Emotional Well-Being | -0.07 | 0.06 | 0.09 | Not Supported |

| | | | | | |
|----------------|--|------|------|--------|-----------|
| H ₄ | Work-Family Conflict → Problem-Focused Coping → Job Satisfaction | 0.54 | 0.04 | 8.20** | Supported |
| H ₅ | Work-Family Conflict → Problem-Focused Coping → Emotional Well-Being | 0.12 | 0.05 | 4.18** | Supported |

Note: **p < 0.01

Apart from that, “blindfolding” procedure was also performed to measure the predictive relevance (Q²) of the model fit. The Q² “represents a measure of how well-observed values are reconstructed by the model and its parameter estimates” (Chin 1998). Models with Q² greater than zero imply that the model has predictive relevance. Omission distance of seven was utilized as Chin (1998) indicates that values between 5 and 10 are feasible (see Table 6). The goodness of fit (GoF) of the model was also calculated to assess the performance of the model (see Table 7).

TABLE 6. Blinding folding results

| Construct | CV red | CV comm |
|------------------------|--------|---------|
| Problem-Focused Coping | 0.44 | 0.70 |
| Job Satisfaction | 0.36 | 0.71 |
| Emotional Well-Being | 0.23 | 0.75 |

TABLE 7. Goodness of Fit (GoF)

| Construct | AVE | R ² |
|------------------------|------|----------------|
| Work-Family Conflict | 0.80 | - |
| Problem-Focused Coping | 0.90 | 0.54 |
| Job Satisfaction | 0.84 | 0.43 |
| Emotional Well-Being | 0.81 | 0.39 |
| Average | 0.84 | 0.45 |
| GOF | 0.62 | - |

DISCUSSION

This research aimed to investigate the link between work-life conflict towards problem-focused coping, job satisfaction, and emotional well-being. In addition, problem-focused coping was examined for its mediating effect on the association between work-life balance and well-being outcomes.

Results from the PLS analysis exposed that work-family conflict was found to have a positive influence on problem-focused coping. This finding supports the earlier idea by Lo, Stone and Ng (2003) and Rotondo, Carlson and Kincaid (2003). From this finding, it is possible to claim that despite juggling with conflicts, distance learners still managed to direct efforts to cope with work and family demands. For example, they come out with several alternative solutions to a problem, plan, and then follow it. In fact, the online learners took an initiative to create a WhatsApp group that enabled them to communicate more frequently and faster on the latest update. Nevertheless, they still had to refer to the Learning Management System (LMS). Thus, the ability of distance learners to cope effectively would reduce their work-family conflict.

In contrast to the proposed hypothesis, the result of this study showed that work-family conflict was not significantly related to job satisfaction. In other words, the work family conflict faced by the distance learners does not, in any way, affect their job satisfaction. The insignificant relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction could be rationalized based on the respondents in this study which are distance learners. With the mean age of 37 years and the average of six year working the current organization, we may assume the decisions to pursue part-time (long distance) education are their own choice as a way to develop their own career path. In addition, as pursuing part-time education is such a big move in ones' life, we may also assume that they are already physically and mentally prepared to face the challenge ahead them. Thus, even though they have to struggle to meet up the demand from their family and works as they are working and studying at the same time, with their experience and determination, they may face the work-family conflict patiently and wisely. Consequently, their job satisfaction is not affected at all by the conflict they are facing.

Additionally, in contrast to the proposed hypothesis, the result of this study showed that work-family conflict did not significantly influence emotional well-being. The insignificant relationship between

work-family conflict and emotional well-being could be justified based on the respondents in this study are distance learners. With the result of 100 percent respondents are married and having at least one child, we may assume that the decisions to pursue part-time (long distance) education could make them as inspiration and to instil motivation to their children. In addition, as they are geographically remote from the institution, we may also assume that they already get themselves familiar with multiple learning tasks such as negotiating the technology, course website, course content. Thus, even though they have to struggle with family conditions such as the number and age of dependents, housing conditions and responsibility for earning an income to support the family, with their strong discipline and determination, they may face the work-family conflict calmly. As a result, their emotional well-being is not affected at all by the conflict they are facing.

Result from the mediation analysis showed an interesting finding whereby problem-focused coping mediated the relationship between work-family conflict and well-being outcomes (job satisfaction and emotional well-being). This result implies that distance learners who face higher levels of work-family conflict can apply more problem-focused coping skills. Prior to employing a coping mechanism, a person will highly likely experience a conflict. As a result, they tend to employ problem-focused coping in the event they feel capable of controlling their well-being.

CONCLUSION

The result of the findings contributes to the literature in term of the significant of indirect relationship via problem focus coping between work-family conflict, job satisfaction and emotional well-being. These findings is different from past studies as it was conducted among distance learners in DE within Malaysian context. The implication is that distance learners who face higher levels of work-family conflict can apply problem-focused coping skill to improve their job satisfaction and emotional well-being. The findings are also harmonized with the concept of coping, which is behaviours utilised to handle internal and external demands of situations considered stressful by individuals.

Next, looking at the practical contribution, the first is suggesting to employers to enhance work-life balance policies and programmes related to emotional-focused coping, especially for employed distance learners. As described by Ogden (2004), emotional-focused coping uses behavioural and/or cognitive strategies like receiving emotional support from friends and family and positive reframing. Because adult learners typically do not have much control over changing their day-to-day job responsibilities, emotional support and peer/superior/managerial understanding of job contexts and personal situations would be extremely useful in managing job-related stress and enhancing overall employee well-being. Adult learners who work in a family-supportive setting and with positive reinforcement to espoused organisational work-life balance policy, are believed to experience a reduced level of stress and less work-family conflict, which leads to a higher level of well-being.

The second practical contribution is to recommend solutions to the management of Malaysian Distance Education to decrease dropout. These strategies are linked to emotional-focused coping like actively supporting, motivating, gently persuading and following up on learners who appear to be struggling that will aid in retaining vacillating learners in the course. Providing support to learners until they survive the initial 'eLearning learning-curve hump' could involve an apparently high level of resource and effort from course facilitator and associated programme administration staff, but the payoff is that less learners will quit at the early stage. As they master the system and build confidence, they will more likely to continue studying.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has several limitations. Firstly, this study's data were self-reported, therefore, Harman's single factors test was conducted to approximate the possible threat to the interpretation of the results. Second, because this is a cross-sectional study, results could be different if it is conducted via longitudinal approach. Third, since low number of sample and participants used for the research, it will be useful for future researchers to consider using a comparative approach to study the interaction on work-family conflict, problem-focused coping, job satisfaction and emotional well-being among distance learners from different ODL institutions in Malaysia.

Future research should conduct an in-depth interviews and focus group sessions with adult learners to examine other factors might improve the exhibition of work-family conflict, problem-focused coping, job satisfaction and emotional well-being in private higher education in Malaysia. In any research model, longitudinal studies provide strong inferences and better evidences and if this study could benefit from being examined in a longitudinal study. Scholars can conduct a comparative study between public and private universities to examine which culture is more dominant. Future studies should also explore whether the findings of this study have generalizability beyond higher education institutions within the Malaysian context.

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