

Exploring Affective Rumination: Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms in Work–Family Conflict

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Abstract

The main objective of this research is to identify the role that affective rumination plays in work-family conflict. Moreover, does workload solely cause work-family conflict? Will neuroticism moderate the relationship between affective rumination and work-family conflict? The study found that workload is not the sole factor contributing to work-family conflict; other behavioural and emotional constructs may also be involved. Affective rumination acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between workload and work-family conflict. Neurotic personalities are more vulnerable to affective rumination, leading to increased work-family conflicts. The data collection process consisted of two paper-and-pencil surveys, with a three-week time lag between the two rounds. Convenience sampling has been conducted, and the sample consists of private organisations in Lahore and Karachi. The results indicated that a high neurotic personality trait will increase the chances of work-family conflict. Neurotic personalities are vulnerable to affective rumination; the greater the rumination, the more anxiety will be felt by neurotic personalities, which in result enhances the chance of generating increased work-family conflicts. The findings suggest that workload affects work-family conflict, with affective rumination playing a mediating role, especially among individuals with high levels of Neuroticism. This study will help policymakers and academic researchers understand the impact of workload and neurotic personality on work-family conflict which will bring the design of more balanced policies or work-life balance. This study will contribute to the literature by providing insight into the cognitive process of building stress in an employee.

Keywords: Rumination, Negative affect, Work-family conflict, Neurotic personality trait, Workload

Introduction

The increase in dual-career couples and the decrease in single-earner families mean that traditional gender roles and boundaries for work, housework, and childcare are changing rapidly (Byron, 2005; Molino et al., 2016). Increasingly, employees find themselves struggling to balance their responsibilities between work and family (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2010). Work-family conflict was defined by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p.77) as:

A form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by participation in the family (work) role.

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This definition suggests that interference between two domains can occur in both directions, namely, work-to-family interference (WFI) and family-to-work interference (FWI) (O'Driscoll, 2004).

Since the work–family the work-family conflict construct was assembled (Byron, 2005), a large body of literature has examined its sources and consequences (Allen et al., 2000; Byron, 2005). Many meta-analyses studies (Allen et al., 2000; Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2010) have gone through the relation between work–family conflict and its consequences, such as job and life satisfaction, burnout, and absenteeism (Allen et al., 2000), these studies underline the adverse effect of work family conflict for employees and their respective organizations, till date no study has considered the countless causes of work family conflict (Byron, 2005). The previously researched antecedents of WFC can be categorised into three main domains: work domain variables, non-work domain variables, and individual and demographic variables (Byron, 2005; O'Driscoll, 2004). In the present research the psychological causes of work domain variables like work load will be considered as a mean of job stress which are great predictors for WFC literature (Byron, 2005), affective rumination and individual variable such as neurotic personality trait on WFC will be considered because regarding personality there has been a call for more research of personality trait with in WFC interface (Eby et al., 2005; Michel et al., 2010) neuroticism (personality trait) variable have received less attention in WFC interface than other antecedents of WFC (Michel et al., 2010).

Personality refers to the dynamic mental structures and harmonised mental processes that determine individuals' emotional and behavioural adjustments to their environments (Michel et al., 2010). Individuals with high neuroticism experience emotional instability and demonstrate characteristics of worrying, fear, guilt, sadness, anger, embarrassment, and disgust. They are also they will less likely to control their impulses and are unable to cope with stress efficiently (Bruck & Allen, 2003). Within work-family literature, neuroticism has received a tremendous amount of empirical attention as an antecedent of WFC (Michel et al., 2010). The present paper will investigate the moderated effect of Neuroticism on the indirect relationship between workload and work-family conflict. Direct impact on the relationship of affective rumination and WFC as personality variable is notably a prominent antecedent of WFC it has received much lesser attention empirically than other antecedents (Michel et al., 2010) and examining the effect of personality as moderator in WFC literature is even lesser (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2010).

Rumination is a cognitive process which refers to a fixation with and recurring thoughts of an event or common theme. In contrast, negative work rumination or affective rumination refers to a preoccupation with earlier negative work experiences and a failure to switch off from work-related contemplation, which may occur during non-work hours (Demskey et al., 2018). Work-related rumination is typically framed as a negative phenomenon, because it slows down unwinding after work (Cropley et al., 2012; Vahle-Hinz et al., 2017). Negative work rumination, also known as affective rumination, refers to a preoccupation with earlier negative work experiences and an inability to switch off from work-related thoughts during leisure time (Cropley et al., 2012; Demskey et al., 2018). Affective rumination prolongs work-related activation during time away from work, which hinders employees' recovery and, in turn, depletes their cognitive and energetic resources (Calderwood et al., 2018).

The under-investigating model is derived from the conservation of resources theory. Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) has been proposed as an integrative stress theory that considers both environmental and internal processes with relatively equal emphasis. The basic rule of Conservation of Resource theory is that individuals strive to obtain, retain, protect and foster those

things that they value (Hobfoll, 2001), and resource loss or the threat of resource loss is the main ingredient in the stress process because of which individual will suffer from psychological stress (Hobfoll, 2001). Moreover, resources are scarce, as individuals have omitted an amount of resources in the form of time and energy (Marks, 1977). When individuals especially with anxiety and neurotic personalities are faced with hostile situations like work overload they may find themselves struggling which may result in loss of energy resource (Raja et al., 2017) and this loss may further enhance the losses experience by individual altogether; that is studies advocate that if anything negative happens in the work (family) domain, it will have an adverse spillover effect on the family (work) domain leaving individual unable to perform their respective roles (Raja et al., 2017).

This study makes several contributions. First, the effects of rumination are not utterly apparent (Vahle-Hinz et al., 2017). We will investigate its adverse impact in light of negative consequences. Second, investigation on affective rumination has so far mainly been based upon cross-sectional studies (Vahle-Hinz et al., 2017). In the present study, we use a two-wave longitudinal design to investigate the outcome of affective rumination. Lastly, Neuroticism has only been investigated as an antecedent for WFC (Michel et al., 2010), whereas we investigated Neuroticism as a moderator in our study.

The present study is rare in the Eastern cultural context, particularly in Pakistan. To date, no study has investigated the mediating effect of negative rumination in relation to work-family conflict. The work-family conflict and job stressors study has been conducted primarily in banks (Hashim, 2018). More institutions and sectors should be included.

Hypothesis

Mediating Role of Affective Rumination

In recent years, rumination has attracted attention, particularly in the occupational stress literature (Vahle-Hinz et al., 2017). Negative work rumination is related to several health-related problems such as cardiovascular diseases, negative mood, and sleep disturbances (Demsky et al., 2018). It has also been labelled as a means of explaining the relationship between several work stressors and strain outcomes, including negative work experiences (Frone, 2015), work-family conflict, and health issues (Davis et al., 2017). Affective rumination is a cognitive process (Cromptley et al., 2012), and cognition has been largely overlooked in the conceptual models of work-family conflict (Davis et al., 2017). Repetitive thoughts (affective rumination) may explain direct and long-term psychological and physiological responses to stressors and can focus on any form of work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Stressors heighten arousal, making it challenging to concentrate on anything except the cause of stress. People who engage in affective rumination "re-create" negative experiences in their minds based on memories of past events and anticipated future events. Negative thoughts can themselves enable chronic stress by reactivating negative emotional and physiological responses long after the event has come to an end (Davis et al., 2017). There is empirical support showing that negative work experiences predict higher levels of negative work rumination (affective rumination) (Frone, 2015). Consistent with COR theory, according to which adverse life events have a far greater impact than positive life events, as a result, loss-related events mark an impact and stress will be the consequence or the antecedent for enhancing stress-related anxieties (Hobfoll, 2001).

H1: There is a positive relationship between employee perception of workload and affective rumination.

Striking changes have occurred during the past few decades not only in the workforce but also in work itself (Geurts et al., 2003), which increases demands in jobs for employees, which consequently becomes a cause for an increase in psychological strain, as a result of experiencing work-family conflict. Geurts and Sonnentag (2006) emphasised the role of recovery during evenings, weekends and vacations to prevent the hazardous effects on health. This recovery is referred to as psycho-physiological unwinding, during which drained resources can be replenished; if not, then the outcome is detrimental both physically and emotionally (Berset et al., 2011). Cognitions can keep stressors and their consequences alive long after the original event happened. Work-family conflict is interlinked with job stressors (Hashim, 2018), and one of the job stressors is workload.

H2: Affective rumination positively relates to work-family conflict.

According to the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), workload may not only drain employees but also consume a significant amount of their time for task completion, which in turn depletes employees of their mental resources (Che et al., 2017). A mentally drained employee tends to struggle with coping with stress and may experience work-family conflict. Hence, we postulate that affective rumination is a cognitive mechanism which serves as a bridge for arousing the psychological impact of workload on work-family conflict.

H3: Affective rumination mediates the relationship between workload and work-family conflict.

Moderating Role of Neuroticism

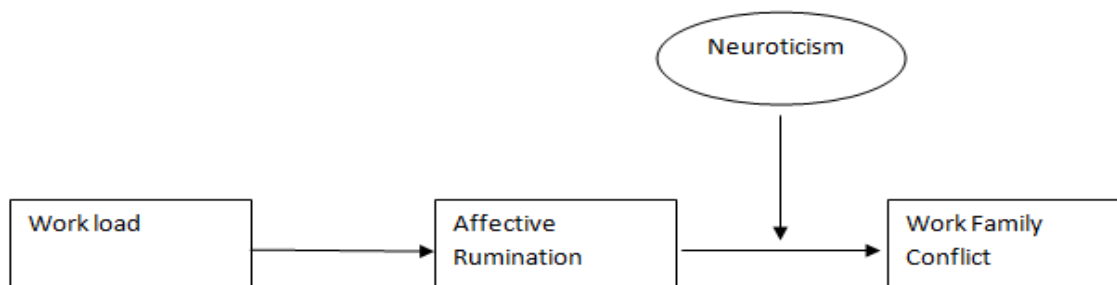
Neuroticism is typically defined as the inclination to experience frequent and intense negative emotions in response to various sources of stress. These negative emotions are broadly constructed to include anxiety, irritability, fear, sadness, anger, and so many others. Negative emotionality is the pervasive perception that the world is a dangerous and threatening place, accompanied by beliefs about one's inability to manage or cope with challenging events (Barlow et al., 2014). These convictions are often manifested in terms of a heightened focus on criticism, whether self-generated or from others, as a means of confirming a general sense of inadequacy and perceptions of a lack of control over salient events (Barlow et al., 2014).

Neuroticism has been shown to moderate the relationship between daily stressors and their reactivity as well as the link between negative cognitions and depressive indicators (Perkins et al., 2015; Slavish et al., 2018). Given that high scorers on Neuroticism tend to have difficulty coping with high-risk jobs. However, high scorers on Neuroticism are not only highly receptive to threat but also prone to experiencing negative psychological states in the absence of a current threat stimulus. The fundamental aspect of Neuroticism is the tendency to self-generate and amplify negative thoughts. It is reasonable that a propensity to generate negative affect would be a distraction when attempting to work effectively on a job. However, it also explains the appetite for rumination and abstract 'angst' in threat-free situations that is such a prominent feature of the neurotic mind (Perkins et al., 2015). In the present study, we use the neurotic personality trait as a moderator between affective rumination (a cognitive mechanism of negative thinking) and work-family conflict. Hence, the hypothesis is as follows:

H4: The positive relationship between affective rumination and WFC is moderated by neuroticism such that this positive relationship will be stronger with high level of neuroticism.

H5: The indirect positive relationship between workload and WFC through affective rumination is moderated by neuroticism, such that this relationship will be stronger with a high level of neuroticism.

Figure 1: Proposed Model



Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

The researcher recruited participants from various departments of the University of Lahore, as well as from different commercial banks operating in Pakistan and hospitals located in Karachi and Lahore. University of Lahore's departments included but not limited to Lahore Business School, Computer Science, Department of Physiotherapy, Pharmacy, Software Engineering etc. and different commercial banks included but not limited to Habib Metro Bank and UBL etc. different hospitals included but not limited to Nawaz Sharif Social Security Hospital, Ganga Ram hospital and Institute of clinical psychology, etc. The data Collection process consisted of two paper-and-pencil surveys, distributed to these employees with a three-week time lag between the two rounds. The three-week time lag was sufficient to minimise recall bias among employees. We requested each respondent directly, without involving the HR department, and arranged an appointment for data Collection. On the day of the appointment, the author personally visited the respondent and administered the questionnaire in person.

Respondents were selected based on the fact that they are full-time employees of the organisation. Anonymity was ensured to the participants, as their information would not be shared with anyone after they completed the survey.

The T1 survey included the independent variable of workload, as well as the mediators Affective Rumination and Neuroticism as moderators. The T2 survey included the dependent variable of work-family conflict. Respondents of T1 and T2 were the same; a total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, from which 126 usable responses were collected at both time intervals from the same respondents. The respondents were working in the same organisation where they were employed at the time of T1 data Collection. The response rate was 63%.

Measures

English is the medium of education in all high schools and universities in Pakistan, and it is also an official working language. As English is well understood in Pakistan, so we did not translate our questionnaire into Urdu. Using universal measures in English also provides a better opportunity to compare our findings with those of past research that used English measures (i.e., primarily conducted in the West).

All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "5 for strongly agree" to "1 for strongly disagree".

Work Load (T1)

The independent variable, workload, was measured using 5-item subscales developed by Sprigg et al. (2007). The sample items were 'Is your work mentally demanding?', 'Do you find that work piles up faster than you can complete it?' This scale had an alpha of 0.71.

Neuroticism (T1)

The moderator Neuroticism was measured on a 10-item scale developed by Back et al. (2009). The sample items are 'Please indicate the extent to which the following attributes apply to you: Anxious', 'Please indicate the extent to which the following attributes apply to you: Calm', etc. This scale had an alpha of 0.67.

Affective Rumination (T1)

The mediator Affective Rumination was measured using a 5-item scale developed by Cropley et al. (2012). The sample items were 'Are you troubled by work-related issues when not at work?', 'Are you annoyed by thinking about work-related issues when not at work? Etc. This scale had an alpha of 0.75.

Work Family Conflict (T2)

The dependent variable of work-family conflict was measured using a 10-item scale developed by Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian (1996). The sample items were 'Things I want to do at home do not get done because of demands my job puts on me', 'The demand of my family or spouse/partner interferes with work-related activities'. This scale had an alpha of 0.78.

Findings and Analysis

The SPSS statistical package, version 20, was used for data analysis and to test the study's hypothesis. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the variables of the study in terms of their mean and standard deviation. Correlation analysis was used to estimate the relationship among the variables (Table 1). The statistical analysis results show that the correlation between workload and neuroticism ($r = 0.190$) is positive and significant. The correlation between Affective rumination and work-family conflict ($r = 0.192$) is also positive and significant. In general, no unexpected results are shown in the bivariate correlation.

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation, Reliabilities and Correlations

	Mean	SD	Age	Gender	Work Load	Affective Rumination	Neuroticism	Work Family Conflict
Age	1.53	0.80						
Gender	1.57	0.51	.061					
Work Load	3.39	0.82	.287**	.162	(0.73)			
Affective Rumination	3.21	0.63	.132	.058	.080	(0.75)		
Neuroticism	3.17	0.57	.226*	.041	.190*	.066	(0.66)	
Work Family Conflict	3.42	0.50	.158	.093	.043	.192*	.037	(0.71)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Although we used independent data sources (i.e., self) to measure the predictor and criterion variables included in our study, we examined the discriminant validity of variables assessed through same source by conducting a series of confirmatory factor analyses using IBM SPSS AMOS version 20. We compared a four-factor unconstrained model with a two-factor model and single-factor model for every possible pairing of variables from the same source. The results of these CFAs are presented in Table 2, which show that in every case the unconstrained multiple-factor model was a better fit than the single-factor model.

Table 2: Discriminate validity with comparison of alternative models

	CMIN/df	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
Hypothesized unconstrained Four factor model	1.6	0.82	0.83	0.72
Two factor model (merged WL & Neuro, AR&WFC)	1.8	0.76	0.74	0.72
One factor model (all items combined)	1.9	0.75	0.70	0.08

N=126, WL: Workload, Neuro: Neuroticism, AR: Affective Rumination, WFC: Work Family Conflict.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, $p < 0.001$

Regression analysis results are shown in table 3. According to which H1 that is There is a positive relationship between employee's self-perception of workload and affective rumination is rejected ($R^2 = 0.006$, $\beta = 0.08$, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 1 statistically does not substantiate as independent variable (work load) brought minor change in mediator variable (Affective Rumination). Hypothesis 2 states that Affective rumination positively relates to work family conflict, support was found for the hypothesis ($R^2 = 0.037$, $\beta = 0.192$, $p < 0.01$), hence hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	R^2	β	t	Sig
H1	WL $\rightarrow$ AR	0.006	0.080	0.894	0.373
H2	AR $\rightarrow$ WFC	0.037	0.192	2.173	0.032*

Table 4: Mediation

Hypothesis	Relationships	Effect	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	
H3	WL → AR → WFC	Direct effect	0.0171	0.317	0.7516	-0.089	0.124
	WL → AR → WFC	Indirect effect	0.0092			-0.007	0.039

Table 5: Moderation

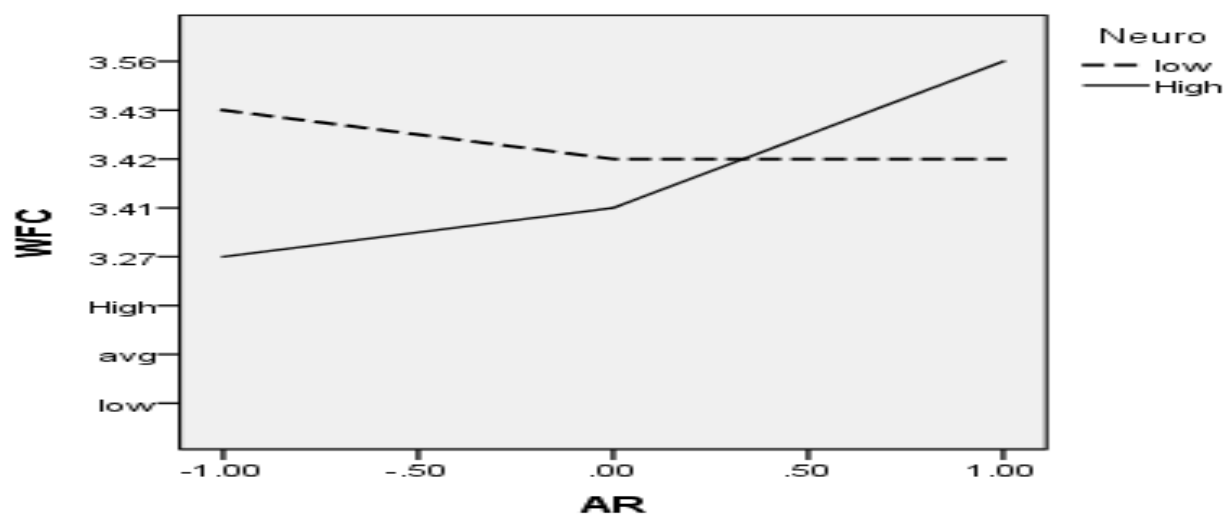
Independent	Mediator	Level of Moderator	Conditional indirect effect	95% confidence interval (CI)
Workload	Affective Rumination	High Neuroticism	0.0047	[0.071, 0.389]
		Low Neuroticism	0.9411	[-0.216, 0.200]

Figure 1: Interaction between Affective Rumination and Work Family Conflict on Neuroticism
As shown in Table 4, the mediator Affective rumination has an insignificant indirect effect on the path from Workload to Work-family conflict. As Hypothesis 3 suggests that affective rumination

positively mediates the relationship between workload and work-family conflict, H3 is rejected for the analysis. To test the moderating effect of Neuroticism, we ran Hayes Process macro model 1, in which the interaction term is significant ($p = 0.0417$, LLCI = 0.0021 and ULCI = 0.4). Therefore, hypothesis 4 is accepted. We also plot the effect of affective rumination on work-family conflict at high and low levels of neuroticism in Fig. 1. The graph indicates that the spillover of affective rumination into work-family conflict is more substantial to the extent that employees have a neurotic personality. The more neurotic a person is, the more affective rumination they experience, which results in a greater level of work-family conflicts.

Finally, the test for the moderated mediation effect in Hypothesis 5 is run using Hayes' Process macro model 14. Establishing moderated mediation requires determining whether the indirect positive effect of workload on work-family conflict through affective rumination differs at various levels of the moderator. The p-value obtained is 0.492 at [0.0009, 0.4095]; hence, H5 is accepted. Overall, the results suggest that neuroticism serves as a buffer against the positive indirect effect of workload on work-family conflict through affective rumination.

Figure 2: Interaction between Affective Rumination and work Family Conflict on Neuroticism



Discussion and Future Implications

This study makes an important contribution to finding precedents and the aligned cognitive processes that result in work-family conflicts for both males and females in general. The results suggested that workload alone does not provoke work-family conflicts among employees. There might be other measures that can work together to create something substantial enough to generate work-family conflicts, as tested affective rumination has been shown to affect the relationship between workload and work-family conflict. Without the presence of affective rumination, the relationship between workload and work-family conflict is insignificant. Workload, as perceived as being over-loaded on the job, is significant; hence, other criteria, such as affect and behavioural symptoms (Ilies et al., 2007), also contribute to making workload unbearable for employees, triggering detrimental behaviour at off-job hours or at home. We also examined the mediating effect of affective rumination; the results suggested that, due to increased workload, an employee might not engage in new negative thinking about work during their non-work hours. It varies from

case to case or employee to employee. The effect of other conditions, such as PsyCap, is not studied in this research. However, in future studies, it may be beneficial to investigate the buffering effects on workload for affective rumination. Whereas affective rumination does have significance in work-family conflict, as it can make employees exhausted by repeatedly thinking about past events (Cropley & Zieventsa, 2011), this may lead to an outburst (Hofboll, 2001) as family-work conflict or work-family conflict.

Between the relationship of affective rumination and work-family conflict, neuroticism as a personality trait is buffered. The results indicated that a high neurotic personality trait will increase the chances of work-family conflict. Neurotic personalities are vulnerable to affective rumination; the greater the rumination, the more anxiety will be felt by neurotic personalities, which in result enhances the chance of generating increased work-family conflicts. We only tested the neurotic personality trait; in the future, personality type A or personalities with an internal locus of control (Michel et al., 2010) can also be studied.

Conclusion

We analysed how workload affects or creates work-family conflicts, and compelling rumination as a mediator in the context of a neurotic personality trait. Workload is a self-perception of work among employees, and work-family conflict is measured through a single source. Affective rumination is measured as a cognitive bridge that amplifies the adverse effect, which in turn contributes to spillover in the form of work-family conflict. Also, neurotic personality trait is used as a moderator between affective rumination and work-family conflict, and we obtain complete moderation.

In summary, workload is not the only precedent for work-family conflict; it might also include other behavioural or emotional constructs. Moreover, we acquired partial mediation through affective rumination. It signifies the relationship between workload and work-family conflict.

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