

Navigating Dual Roles: The Impact of Work-Family Conflict on Mental Health and the Essential Role of Counselling Services for Malaysian Professional Women

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, balancing work and family responsibilities has become increasingly challenging for professional women in Malaysia. This study explores the relationship between work-family conflict, mental health, and attitudes toward seeking professional counselling as a vital support mechanism. Although the impact of work-family conflict on mental health is well-documented, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on how counselling can moderate this relationship among Malaysian professional women. Addressing this gap is crucial, as it highlights the mental health challenges faced by this demographic. Utilising data from a sample of 362 professional women, the analysis of moderator variables revealed significant relationships concerning their mental health. A positive correlation was found between the need for counselling services and mental

health ($\beta = 0.263$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that greater reliance on counselling is associated with improved mental health outcomes. The relationship between work-family conflict and mental health was also significant ($\beta = 0.077$, $p = 0.009$), though its impact was relatively smaller in magnitude. Importantly, counselling services emerged as a significant moderator of the work-family conflict-mental health relationship ($\beta = 0.138$, $p = 0.019$), suggesting that counselling can alleviate the negative effects of work-family conflict on mental health. The moderation effect

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size ($f^2 = 0.09$) indicates a small to moderate practical significance. These findings underscore the importance of integrating counselling interventions into support programs for professional women. The implications for stakeholders, including practitioners, policymakers, and mental health advocates, are profound. By recognising the critical role of counselling services, targeted strategies can be developed to enhance the mental health of professional women in Malaysia, fostering improved outcomes and a healthier work-life balance that can benefit women in similar contexts worldwide. However, the cross-sectional design precludes causal conclusions, and self-report data may introduce response bias. Future longitudinal research is needed to establish temporal relationships.

Keywords: Conflict, counselling, effect size, mental health, moderation, professional women

INTRODUCTION

Professional women around the world, especially in Malaysia, find it difficult to juggle their commitments to their families and their careers. Research from the United States, like Smith and Johnson and Smith (2020), shows that women are under a lot of pressure to reach this balance. According to Chen and Wong (2019), research conducted in Singapore, the information technology (IT) industry has similar challenges. Similar issues in the European legal and medical fields are described by Müller et al. (2018). Furthermore, research on mental health conducted in the US by Jones and Smith (2020) and Spain by García-Ael et al. (2021) shows that women are under pressure to manage their personal and professional lives. Flexible work schedules and support initiatives can help women worldwide deal with these challenges (Chen & Wong, 2019; Garcia, 2023; Jones & Smith, 2020; Müller et al., 2018; Smith & Johnson, 2020).

Person-Centred Therapy (PCT), developed by Rogers (1961), provides a foundational framework for understanding how counselling can support professional

women experiencing work-family conflict. PCT emphasises three core conditions, unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence, that create a safe therapeutic environment for clients to explore their experiences and mobilise their innate self-actualising tendencies (Rogers, 1957). For professional women navigating dual roles, PCT offers a non-judgmental space to examine the tensions between work and family demands, validate their emotional experiences, and develop authentic, self-directed solutions. This study applies PCT as a theoretical lens to understanding how counselling services may moderate the relationship between work-family conflict and mental health outcomes. Ahmad and Omar's (2019) study on the hotel industry in Malaysia shows that work-family conflict is detrimental to mental health. Studies conducted worldwide, like those by Smith and Johnson (2020) in the US and Chen and Wong (2019) in Singapore, emphasise the need for assistance and expertise to address these problems (Kamaruddin et al., 2024; O'Neill & Follmer, 2020).