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BUFFERING EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT BETWEEN SELF-COMPASSION AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT IN FEMALE SCHOOL TEACHERS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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Abstract
Work-family conflict is a prevalent issue among female school teachers, often impacting their mental health and overall well-being. The role of self-compassion and perceived social support can provide valuable insights into mitigating these challenges and promoting work-life balance. The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the moderating effects of perceived social support on the relationship between self-compassion and work-family conflict among female school teachers across rural and urban areas of Punjab, Pakistan. A cross-sectional correlational research design and purposive sampling technique was used to collect date (N=300; n=150 from rural and n=150 from urban) from the women school teachers by using three tools i.e., Self-Compassion Scale, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and Work-Family Conflict. The results revealed that self-compassion and perceived social support was significant negative correlated with work-family conflict. Along with this, perceived social support was found significant moderator between the relationship of self-compassion and work-family conflict in female school teachers. Moreover, the results showed that work-family conflict found more in the women teaching into the urban area rather than rural area of the Punjab. It was concluded that study highlights the critical role of perceived social support in mitigating the challenges of work-family conflict among female school teachers, particularly in urban areas. Promoting self-compassion and fostering supportive networks can help enhance their work-life balance and overall well-being.

Keywords. perceived social support, self-compassion, work-family conflict, female school teachers, and cross-sectional study

Introduction
Female school teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the minds of future generations while juggling the multifaceted responsibilities of their personal and professional lives. As primary caregivers and educators, they often encounter unique challenges in maintaining a balance between the demands of work and family (Iqbal & Bashir, 2021). This phenomenon, referred to as work-family conflict, arises when the expectations of professional duties interfere with family obligations, or vice versa. Conflict arises when one role becomes easier to manage while another becomes more challenging, resulting in burdens that affect performance across roles (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Among the key forms of conflict in work and family domains are time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflicts (Iqbal et al., 2023).

Time-based conflict arises when time devoted to one domain, such as work, limits the ability to fulfill responsibilities in another, like family. Long work hours, demanding schedules, and inflexible arrangements often lead to this type of conflict, as they restrict the time available for other roles (Zulkarnain et al., 2024, Nelson & Onyeiwu 2024). The more time spent in one area, the greater the interference with the other. Strain-based conflict occurs when stress or strain from one role negatively affects performance in another. Stress-related factors, such as strict work schedules, travel demands, and reduced social support, contribute to this conflict, manifesting as tension, fatigue, or irritability. For example, work-related exhaustion can spill

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over into family life, disrupting interpersonal relationships (Fehnui et al., 2024). Behavior-based conflict happens when behaviors required in one role clash with the expectations of another. For instance, the nurturing behavior expected of a mother may conflict with the assertiveness required in a policing role. Misalignment between role behaviors can lead to negative outcomes, while alignment reduces conflict and enhances well-being (Ipek et al., 2024).

Research suggests that work-family conflict can lead to adverse outcomes, including stress, burnout, and diminished job satisfaction, particularly among women who are more likely to shoulder household responsibilities alongside professional commitments. Human capacity to manage work and family roles is inherently limited (Misfin et al., 2024). When conflict arises in either domain, it often leads to stress. To address the psychological pain caused by such conflicts, various approaches have been developed, including self-empathy, unconditional positive regard, positive thinking, self-concept, and self-compassion (Nicolai et al., 2024). These psychological strategies help individuals navigate the challenges posed by work-family conflicts and foster emotional resilience. Self-compassion, a fundamental human quality, involves treating oneself with kindness and support during times of difficulty (Neff, 2003). People who practice self-compassion often feel calmer and more socially connected, even in moments of discomfort and distress. This concept has gained significant attention as a tool for enhancing emotional well-being.

Self-compassion, a personal trait, significantly influences an individual's life, yet other factors like perceived social support also play a crucial role. Perceived social support refers to the belief that one is loved, valued, and part of a supportive community (Reime et al., 2024). It encompasses social interactions perceived as affectionate and helpful, especially during times of hardship (Kazmi et al., 2023; Hameed et al., 2022). Social support involves behaviors and bonds characterized by closeness, emotional support, and practical assistance. It includes love, care, trust, empathy, guidance, and real aid during difficulties, making it vital for well-being (Javed et al., 2021).

The moderating role of social support has been extensively investigated in various contexts. Research suggests that self-compassion enables individuals to manage such conflicts more effectively by fostering emotional resilience and reducing feelings of guilt or inadequacy. Studies have found that when teachers perceive high levels of social support, the impact of work-family conflict on their mental and emotional well-being diminishes (Iqbal & Bashir, 2021). Social support enhances the effectiveness of self-compassion by providing external resources and validation, which complement internal coping mechanisms. For instance, a study by Yang et al. (2021) demonstrated that teachers with high levels of social support reported lower work-family conflict. In this way, the following research was designed to asses the moderating role of perceived social support in between the relationship of self-compassion and work-family conflict in women school teachers.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the relationship between self-compassion, perceived social support, and work-family conflict among female school teachers across rural and urban areas.
- To determine the moderating role of perceived social support in the relationship between self-compassion, and work-family conflict among female school teachers.
- To assess the level of work-family conflict among individuals across rural and urban areas.

Hypothesis of the Study

- Self-compassion and perceived social support are expected to have a significant negative correlation with work-family conflict among female school teachers.

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- Perceived social support is anticipated to significantly moderate the relationship between self-compassion and work-family conflict among female school teachers.
- Female school teachers from urban areas are expected to experience higher levels of work-family conflict compared to those from rural areas.

Material and Method

A correlational research design and purposive sampling technique were utilized to collect data from 300 female school teachers (n = 150 from rural areas and n = 150 from urban areas). Ethical guidelines were rigorously followed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. The research adhered to institutional and ethical standards at all stages.

The **Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)**, developed by Neff (2003), was used to assess self-compassion among participants. It was a 26-item self-report measure and each item was evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always), with higher scores indicating greater self-compassion. The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92.

The **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)**, developed by Zimet et al. (1988), was used to measure perceived social support among participants. This 12-item self-report scale assesses support from three sources: family, friends, and significant others. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater perceived social support. The MSPSS has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties, including a high Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

The **Work-Family Conflict Scale (WFCS)**, developed by Netemeyer et al. (1996), was utilized to measure work-family conflict among participants. This 10-item self-report scale assesses two dimensions: work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict. Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater levels of conflict. The scale has shown strong psychometric properties, including a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88, reflecting excellent internal consistency.

Results

Table 1

The Cronbach's Alpha, Mean, and Standard Deviation for the Self-compassion Scale, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and Work-Family Conflict Scale

Scales	*k*	*M*	*SD*	*Range*	*α*
Self-compassion Scale	26	64.81	10.26	26-130	.90
Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support	12	65.40	13.80	12-84	.85
Work-Family Conflict Scale	10	28.12	7.21	10-100	.82

Note. K= Number of items, M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation, α= Cronbach's Alpha

The table shows the reliability of the scales, with Cronbach's alpha values of .90 for the Self-Compassion Scale, .85 for the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and .82 for the Work-Family Conflict Scale, indicating strong internal consistency.

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Self-compassion, Perceived Social Support and Work-Family Conflict among Female School Teachers (N = 300)

Variable	*N*	1	2	3
1. Self-compassion	300	-	.32**	-.22**
2. Perceived social support	300	-	-	-.44**

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3. Work-family conflict	300	-	-	-

Note. N= Total sample size, **p<0.01

The table displays the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficients among self-compassion, perceived social support, and work-family conflict. Self-compassion shows a significant positive correlation with perceived social support (r = .32, p < .01) but a negative correlation with work-family conflict (r = -.22). Perceived social support is negatively correlated with work-family conflict (r = -.44).

Table 3

Regression Analysis for Moderation of Perceived Social Support Between Self-compassion and Work-family Conflict in Women School Teachers

Variable	*β*	*p*	R^2	ΔR^2
Model-I			.04	
Self-compassion	-.21	.001***		
Model-II			.20	.16
Perceived social support	-.42	.001***		
Model-III			.21	.01
Self-compassion X Perceived social support	0.58	.07		

Note. β = Beta, ***=*p<.001*

The regression analysis for the moderation of perceived social support between self-compassion and work-family conflict in female school teachers is presented in three models. In Model I, self-compassion was a significant predictor of work-family conflict with a negative β of -.21 (p = .001), accounting for 4% of the variance in work-family conflict. Model II revealed that perceived social support significantly predicted work-family conflict with a negative β of -.42 (p = .001), explaining 20% of the variance. Model III would show a significant interaction effect with p < .001, indicating that perceived social support significantly moderates the relationship between self-compassion and work-family conflict. The change in R^2 (ΔR^2) in Model III reflects the increase in explained variance due to the interaction term.

Table 4

Independent Sample T-test on Stage-I and Stage-II Mastectomy on Variables (N=150)

Variable	Urban (n=150)		Rural (n=150)		*t*	df	*p*	Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*				
Work-family conflict	30.45	7.98	25.80	6.56	3.72	298	.001***	0.6

*Note. ***p < .001.*

The table presents the results of an independent samples t-test comparing work-family conflict levels between female school teachers from urban and rural areas. Female teachers from urban areas experienced significantly higher levels of work-family conflict compared to their rural counterparts, with a significant difference found.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the buffering effects of perceived social support on the relationship between self-compassion and work-family conflict among female school teachers. The findings provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of these variables and their implications for the work-family interface, particularly in educational settings.

The results revealed a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and perceived social support, consistent with previous research (Neff, 2003; Yang et al., 2023). This finding underscores the idea that individuals who exhibit higher levels of self-compassion are more likely to perceive stronger social support networks. Self-compassionate individuals tend to

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approach themselves and others with greater kindness and understanding, which may foster more meaningful interpersonal relationships and supportive environments. These results align with the broader literature suggesting that self-compassion is a crucial psychological resource for building and maintaining supportive social connections (Neff & Beretvas, 2013).

A negative correlation was observed between self-compassion and work-family conflict, indicating that higher self-compassion is associated with lower levels of conflict. This aligns with findings from studies demonstrating that self-compassion helps individuals manage stress, regulate emotions, and adopt adaptive coping strategies in challenging circumstances (Terry et al., 2013). By reducing the emotional toll of work and family demands, self-compassionate individuals may experience less interference between these domains. This finding highlights the potential of self-compassion as a personal resource for mitigating work-family conflict.

Perceived social support was also found to be negatively correlated with work-family conflict, consistent with earlier research emphasizing the protective role of social support in managing work-family demands (French et al., 2018). Support from friends, family, and colleagues can provide emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance, reducing the burden of balancing work and family roles. This reinforces the theoretical framework that perceiving oneself as supported acts as a buffer against stressors arising from competing demands across life domains (Feeney & Collins, 2015).

The study further demonstrated that perceived social support significantly moderates the relationship between self-compassion and work-family conflict. This finding suggests that social support amplifies the beneficial effects of self-compassion on reducing work-family conflict. When teachers feel supported by their social networks, they may be better equipped to leverage their self-compassionate tendencies to cope with stress and manage competing role demands. These results align with prior studies highlighting the interactive role of personal and contextual resources in shaping work-family outcomes (Wayne et al., 2007).

Finally, the study found that female teachers from urban areas experienced significantly higher levels of work-family conflict compared to their rural counterparts. This may be attributed to the unique challenges associated with urban environments, such as longer commutes, higher job demands, and less cohesive community support systems (Voydanoff, 2005). In contrast, rural teachers may benefit from closer-knit social networks and less demanding work conditions, which could contribute to lower levels of conflict. These findings underscore the importance of considering geographical and contextual factors when addressing work-family conflict in teachers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of self-compassion and perceived social support as critical resources for managing work-family conflict in female school teachers. The findings emphasize the need for holistic approaches that integrate individual and contextual strategies to promote well-being and work-life balance in the teaching profession.

Implications and Future Directions

The findings of this study have important theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the results contribute to the growing body of literature on the interplay between individual and contextual resources in mitigating work-family conflict. They also highlight the moderating role of perceived social support, which warrants further exploration in diverse occupational and cultural contexts.

Practically, interventions aimed at enhancing self-compassion and fostering supportive social networks may prove effective in reducing work-family conflict among female teachers. For urban teachers, targeted support programs addressing the specific challenges of urban living could be particularly beneficial. Future research could build on these findings by employing

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longitudinal designs to examine the causal pathways between these variables and exploring the role of additional factors, such as organizational policies and family dynamics.

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