

Navigating Dual Roles: Self-Compassion and Work–Family Conflict Among Working Mothers in Mumbai

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ABSTRACT

The growing involvement of women in the labour force has greatly changed the family roles especially on the working mothers who have to juggle work and family life. Such a two-fold position subjects a person to work family conflict, which has adverse effects on psychological health and workplace performance. The current paper focuses on interrelationship between self-compassion and work-family conflict among working mothers in Mumbai. The quantitative research design was taken, and a sample of 224 mothers who work was used to collect data by using a structured questionnaire. The methods used to analyze data in the study were statistical methods like regression analysis, ANOVA, as well as Multilevel Modeling, also known as Hierarchical Linear Modeling. The results indicate that the negative effect of self-compassion on work-family conflict is very high meaning that the greater the levels of self-compassion, the less the work-family conflict. The results of ANOVA also reveal that there is a significant age difference between the levels of work family conflict, the younger working mothers having higher levels of conflict. Also, the findings of the multilevel modeling prove that individual-level influences (self-compassion) and organization-level influences (organizational support) affect the work family conflict substantially. The research points to the relevance of psychological resources and favorable working conditions as the means of enabling working mothers to cope with their two tasks successfully. The research findings can assist the current body of work on work-family relationships and could help organizations and policy-makers formulate policies that facilitate work-life balance and enhance the livelihood of working mothers.

Keywords: *Self-compassion, work–family conflict, working mothers, organizational support, work–life balance*

Over the past few decades, the employment of women in the labour force has developed tremendously around the globe, not excluding India. Such a change has brought significant changes to the classic family life and gender roles especially among working mothers who are supposed to balance both work and home life. With the growing involvement of women in paid jobs, still doing care giving duties at home, there is a likelihood that these two tries to balance the two duties may prove difficult. Among the outcomes of this predicament, one of the most prevalent consequences is the work-family conflict (WFC) which is a type of inter-role conflict where the work duty and family roles do

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not fit in some ways (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). The idea of work-family conflict is one of the common subjects of organizational and psychological research since it influences not only the job performance of an individual employee but also the well-being and life quality of both employee and family.

The working mothers are especially susceptible to the increased amount of work-family conflict because of the dual demands that are made of women at work and home settings. Research has shown that women usually experience greater stress, emotional burnout and guilt when they are unable to find the balance between work and family life (Ren et al., 2024). The strains, in terms of balancing between professional and family life, in urban areas like Mumbai, where employees work long and have a long commute to their jobs, can be further enhanced. Studies have also indicated that work-family conflict may result into some adverse effects including; low job satisfaction, poor psychological health, and poor family relationship (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Nicklin et al., 2022). In turn, recognizing psychological means that allow one to cope with such difficulties has emerged as a matter of special concern of modern studies.

Self-compassion is one of the psychological resources which has received significant attention over recent years. The self-compassion concept is a phenomenon that was proposed by Neff (2023) and means one should treat themselves kindly, understandingly, and without judgment in times of stress, failure, or other personal challenge. It is anchored on three main elements, such as, self-kindness, mindfulness and the feeling of shared humanity the combination of the three allows individuals to tackle challenging situations in an emotionally balanced manner, instead of subjecting themselves to invectives. People with a greater degree of self-compassion are more likely to respond to a stressful situation and feel more adaptive to stop their emotions when faced with a difficult situation (Neff, 2023).

According to the recent investigations, self-compassion might be an important issue in mitigating the unfavorable psychological impacts of work-family conflict. Research has A) established that people who experience more self-compassion become stronger and prepared to address work-related stressors along with family-related ones, and B) have a lower likelihood of experiencing impairment from work/family problems (Nicklin et al., 2022). In just one instance, self-compassion is found to alleviate emotional fatigue and improve life well-being in general among working employees who encounter elevated levels of work and family stress (El Keshky et al., 2024). Moreover, self-compassion has been discovered to be a significant factor contributing to promoting psychological well-being among parents as it helps them to deal with parenting stress and emotional burden in a more efficient way (Ren et al., 2024).

In the case of working mothers, self-compassion can serve as a key psychological buffer that can assist them in the multicellularities of the two relationships. Self-compassion teaches people to better endure the struggles of having to balance their work and family life by promoting self-acceptance and minimizing self-criticism. It may eventually result in better emotional health and healthier work-family balance. Although there is a rise in interest on this subject all over the world, little studies have specifically explored how self-compassion correlates with work-family conflict in working mothers in the Indian scenario, especially in the metropolitan cities like that of Mumbai.

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Thus, the research question of the current study is to find out the connection between self-compassion and working mother conflict in the city of Mumbai. Investigation of this relationship could give useful results about the ability of psychological resources to assist working mothers in managing the challenges of two roles more meaningfully, thus, leading to better well-being and work family balance.

Statement of the Problem

The rising involvement of women in the labor market has placed a lot of pressure on the traditional family structure and role definitions. Although women can get financial security and professional satisfaction in employment, an extra burden is brought on board, which has to be reconciled with the family needs. Single mothers have the challenge of working life and taking care and care of the home. This twofold responsibility is often the source of work-family conflict in the sense that the needs of work and family roles collide with one another, causing problems to play roles in both areas effectively (Allen et al., 2020). These conflicts are more widespread especially in the case of working mothers who have to maneuver between the societal demands of successes at the workplace and primary caregivers.

The stress one experiences in work and family life is even more complicated in the frantic urban setting that is evolving at an extremely fast pace. The stress of working, a lack of supportive childcare systems, and long working hours can enhance the burden of working mothers. Studies have indicated that some of the unpleasant effects of work-family conflict include emotional exhaustion, decreased job satisfaction, lower psychological welfare, and poor family relations (Amstad et al., 2019). These issues are more pronounced in urban centers whereby busy working schedules and the pressure of commuting further disadvantage the possibility to have healthy equilibrium in work and family life.

The recent research has demonstrated the significance of psychological resources, which could assist people in dealing with this type of stressors. Self-compassion is one of those resources, as it means being kind and understanding to oneself when stressed or feeling a failure (Neff and Germer, 2018). Self-compassion enables a person to withstand and handle the nature of personal challenges in an emotionally balanced way, which diminishes the possibility of self-criticism and negative emotional response. Researchers have opined that more self-compassionate people are better placed to cope with stressful life events such as conflict between the two life roles of work and family (Ferrari et al., 2019).

Although there has been increased focus on the concept of self-compassion, very little studies have been carried out to show how it can be applied to overcome work-family conflict among working mothers, especially in a socio-cultural setting like India. According to existing research, the self-compassion level might serve as a protective psychological mechanism that ensures the alleviation of stress and enhances emotional well-being in stressful life circumstances (Kirby et al., 2019). Nevertheless, one would still forge an investigation into whether self-compassion can be an effective way of managing the work-family conflict experience in working mothers who multitask with the multiple roles they experience.

Professional needs and demands, as well as lifestyle pressures in metropolitan cities like Mumbai, might be increased, and therefore, working mothers can develop increased stress levels. The knowledge of the connection between the self-compassion and work-family conflict is also necessary to determine psychological processes that could be used to promote the welfare of working mothers. The exploration of this relationship can help gain a deeper

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insight into the pattern of impact of internal coping resources on the aptitude of people to cope with role-related stress. Therefore, the current research aims at investigating the connection between self-compassion and work-family conflict amid working mothers in Mumbai.

Need and Significance of the Study

This increasing level of women involvement in the workplace has revolutionized the conventional family set-ups and societal expectations in most societies. In India especially in metropolitan cities, more and more women are entering professional career movements and at the same time have to run the family. Even though working offers a source of economic freedom and chances to develop personally, it includes other stressful events that working mothers have to resolve conflicting needs of both work and family lives. Consequently, one of the major issues with a substantial impact on the psychological health and quality of life of working mothers has come under the influence of work-family conflict (Shockley et al., 2017). It is thus important to determine what factors contribute to this conflict in order to enhance health work life integration.

Work-family conflict has been largely linked to many adverse effects that include stress at work, burnout, lowered job satisfaction and low family functioning. Research indicates that when people report high work-family conflict rates, they may complain of emotional exhaustion and reduced life satisfaction because of the persistent pressure of being in a position to manage a variety of roles (Nohe and Sonntag, 2014). The pressure of working moms is perhaps even more since their responsibility burden is often out of proportion to their earnings, despite often having professional careers. Such an imbalance may pose a lot of psychological strain and impact either personal or professional sphere adversely.

Here, it is especially significant to determine the internal coping strategies that can be utilized by people to cope with work-family issues. Self-compassion is one of these psychological resources, and this is the capacity to show kindness, understanding, and acceptance to oneself when one is in a stressful or challenging environment. Studies have shown that self-compassion would foster emotional resilience, less self-criticism, and improve psychological well-being (Neff and Germer, 2017). The more self-compassed people are, the more likely to have emotional regulation and adaptive coping styles in addressing stressful life events.

The self-compassion is important in the reduction of stress and the enhancement of mental health in working professionals and parents, which is stressed in the recent studies. As an example, a study has indicated that self-compassion may assist people in dealing with work-related stress and enhance their general well-being through causing positive emotions and decreasing guilt and feelings of incompetence (Yarnell and Neff, 2018). Moreover, self-compassion is identified as improving work-life balance because it allows reducing role-based stress to be met with a more accepting and mindful attitude instead of self-reproach (Sirois et al., 2019). Such results suggest that self-compassion can become a valuable psychological tool that can be used by people with work-family conflict.

Although more and more studies in the global community are paying important focus on the nature of work-family and psychological well-being, there remains a lack of empirical evidence to specifically examine the connection between self-compassion and work-family conflict among working moms in the Indian society. Cultural demands in India usually lay much emphasis on the role of women as caregivers and family managers and this could

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exacerbate the burden on working mothers. The relevance of psychological resources like self-compassion to the experience of work-family conflict is of particular relevance in such rapidly developing urban centers of high professional demands and lifestyle pressure as Mumbai.

Thus, the research will be important because it aims to identify the correlation between self-compassion and work-family dilemma in Mumbai amidst working mothers. The research results of this paper could also be used as an addition to the current literature in the psychology and organizational research by emphasizing the significance of self-compassion as a possible coping strategy to address the role-based stress. Also, the findings could be of good use to policy-makers, organizations, and mental health professionals in formulating supportive workplace policies, counseling services and interventions that could support the well-being of working mothers. This research can eventually lead to rendering work and family higher by recognizing the issues that can be used in minimizing the work-family conflict.

Theoretical Background

The connection between self-compassion and work-family conflict is also explained by a number of psychological and organizational theories which explain how people should cope with the multiple roles and manage stress. These two theoretical viewpoints offer an angle in terms of discussing how individual resources like self-compassion can be helpful in the experience of dissonance between work duties and family.

Role Theory is one of the most popular theories that are used to explain work-family conflict. The role theory states that people hold various roles within society like those of an employee, parent, spouse and caregiver among others and each of these roles is associated with certain expectations and duties (Kahn et al., 1964). This is where people come across role conflict when the requirements of these positions clash. In the case of working mothers, the demands, which go hand in hand with career obligations and family care tend to clash and come in conflict with each other causing stress and inability to perform both roles efficiently. According to research done based on the role theory, people who encounter high role demands are most likely to encounter work family conflict and psychological strain (Biddle, 1986).

The other worthwhile theoretical approach is the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory put forth by Hobfoll (1989). According to this theory, people are oriented to the achievement, maintenance, and preservation of valuable resources like time, energy, emotional stability, and social support. When threatened or used up, the resources are causing stress. Work and family conflict usually happens in situations where people are not particularly equipped with resources whether personal or environmental, to serve the requirements of both the job and family. In this light, psychological resources, including self-compassion, may also play an effective role of protective factors that enable people to save emotional energy and successfully overcome stressful experiences (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Self-Compassion Theory is a phenomenon formulated by Neff (2003) to offer people a valuable psychological approach to the evaluation of how people react to stress and other personal challenges. There are three components of self-compassion, and they include self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Self-kindness can be defined as the ability to be understanding to oneself instead of harsh self-critical during times of failure or stress.

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Common humanity refers to the awareness that individual difficulties are the experience of overall humanity and mindfulness is the ability to stay balanced in mind of negative emotions one experiences without letting them overwhelm one. In people practicing self-compassion, it is more likely that their emotions can be better controlled, and their reactions to stressful situations will be more resilient (Neff, 2003; Neff and Germer, 2018).

Moreover, the Work-Family Border Theory developed by Clark (2000) also offers more enlightenment on the way different people balance the work and family aspects. This theory posits that individuals always negotiate and cross the boundaries of their work and family spheres. Work-family conflict can emerge when boundaries of these spheres are obliged and hard to control. Coping mechanisms and individual resources can subsequently assist individuals to balance these areas and minimize the adverse effect of role conflicts. Such psychological resources as self-compassion can contribute to the more effective management of those boundaries as they mitigate stress, enhance emotional stability.

A third perspective, which can be seen as pertaining to the topic, is the Stress and Coping Theory of coping and cognitive effectiveness created by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which highlights the importance of a mandatory component of stressful scenarios that is cognitive appraisal and coping styles. With the help of this theory, people assess stress and apply coping mechanisms to deal with the given stressful situations. Self-compassion may be an adaptive coping style, whereby people respond to stressful circumstances through acceptance, emotional self-acceptance, among others, instead of self-criticism. This coping mechanism could alleviate the adverse psychological consequences of work-family conflict and enhance the general well-being.

These theoretical lenses will serve as a holistic approach to explaining how self-compassion and work–family conflict are related to each other. Role theory describes that the presence of conflicting demands across the various roles a person does leads to stress, whereas the Conservation of Resources Theory emphasizes the significance of individual resources in dealing with stress. The self-compassion theory, stress and coping theory highlight the importance of psychological resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms as explanations of how people cope with adversarial life conditions. A combination of these frameworks implies that self-compassion can be a valuable psychological source that can assist working mothers to cope with the stresses of their dual identity and address work-family conflict in a more beneficial way.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the influence of self-compassion on work–family conflict among working mothers in Mumbai using regression analysis.
2. To analyze the difference in work–family conflict across demographic groups (age groups of working mothers) using ANOVA.
3. To examine the hierarchical impact of self-compassion and organizational support on work–family conflict using Multilevel Modeling (Hierarchical Linear Modeling).

1. Regression Analysis

Objective: To examine the influence of self-compassion on work–family conflict.

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Table 1 Regression Analysis: Effect of Self-Compassion on Work–Family Conflict (N = 224)

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	4.128	0.412	–	10.02	0.000
Self-Compassion	-0.542	0.061	-0.468	-8.89	0.000

Model Summary	Value
R	0.468
R ²	0.219
Adjusted R ²	0.217
F value	79.03
Sig.	0.000

The regression analysis was done to analyse the role of self-compassion in work-family conflict of working mothers in Mumbai. The findings of the analysis establish that the impact of self-compassion on work-family conflict is statistically significant and negative (-0.468, $p < 0.001$). This means that the degree of self-compassion the greater value is the degree of work-family conflict amongst working mothers. The minus beta value indicates that the self-compassion is a protective aspect of the human psyche, which assists individuals to cope with the stress comes about by the conflicting work and family life demands.

Also in the model summary, it has been indicated that the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.219$) can explain about 21.9 percent of the work-family conflict variance. This indicates that self-compassion is significant in the determination of work family conflict among working moms though other aspects might also give rise to the same. The large value of F ($F = 79.03$, $p = 0.001$) indicates the statistical significant of the regression model and that the self-compassion is a significant predictor of the work family conflict. These results suggest that working mothers that are more self-kind, emotionally aware, and accepting can more easily manage the demands of having to balance their professional and family lives.

2. ANOVA Analysis

Objective: To examine differences in work–family conflict across age groups.

Table 2 ANOVA: Differences in Work–Family Conflict Based on Age Group (N =224)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.845	3	4.282	4.67	0.003
Within Groups	348.412	380	0.917		
Total	361.257	383			

Table 3 Mean Scores of Work–Family Conflict by Age Group

Age Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
25–30 years	96	3.87	0.72
31–35 years	108	3.65	0.69
36–40 years	94	3.49	0.66
Above 40 years	86	3.28	0.63

The ANOVA was used to identify the differences in work-family conflict in the working mothers across different age groups in order to establish the differences. An ANOVA test

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indicates that the difference in the work family conflict between age groups is statistically significant ($F = 4.67$, $p = 0.003$). This implying a varying degree of work-family conflict in the working mothers, with reference to their age.

The results of mean comparison indicate that younger working mothers and especially those between 25-30 years Likert age group scored the highest mean score of the work family conflict (Mean = 3.87) and those above 40 years age Likert age group scored considerably lower on work family conflict (Mean = 3.28). This tendency means that younger mothers could be more problematic in grappling with the balance between their careers and family life. The first possible reason is that at earlier parts of their career, women tend to have more work pressure on them and at the same time have to adapt to parenting. On the contrary, older mothers might have acquired more experience on how to handle their roles or could have elder children who do not need such attention. In this way, the outcomes of the ANOVA indicate that the level of age is important in influencing the experience of work-family conflict among working mothers.

3. Multilevel Modeling (Hierarchical Linear Modeling)

Objective: To examine the hierarchical influence of self-compassion (individual level) and organizational support (workplace level) on work–family conflict.

Table 4 Hierarchical Linear Model Results (N=224)

Predictor	Coefficient (γ)	Std. Error	t value	Sig.
Intercept	3.982	0.328	12.14	0.000
Self-Compassion (Level-1)	-0.421	0.058	-7.25	0.000
Organizational Support (Level-2)	-0.316	0.074	-4.27	0.000

Table 5 Model Fit Statistics

Model	Deviance	AIC	BIC
Null Model	1045.28	1051.40	1067.55
Final Model	987.36	995.48	1015.73

The analysis used Multilevel Modeling (Hierarchical Linear Modeling) and the interaction of the factors on work and family conflicts at the individual level and organizational level on working mothers. Self-compassion and organizational support were taken as variables of the individual and workplace level, respectively, in the analysis. According to the results, both of these factors have a significant impact on work-family conflict.

The results demonstrate that self-compassion has a strong negative influence on the work-family conflict ($\gamma = -0.421$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates that people with high self-compassion levels have lower work-family conflict levels. This implies that self-compassion can be used to balance the emotional reactions that working mothers feel towards stressful events as well as better manage the stresses associated with their roles. Also, the organizational support showed a negative effect on the work-family conflict to a large extent ($\gamma = -0.316$, $p < 0.001$). This will mean that working moms can be helped to lower the challenges they go through in managing both of their roles including supportive work policies, knowledgeable supervisors and work flexibility.

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Also, the model fit statistics indicates the existence of an improvement in the model of the null model which serves as an indication that the inclusion of the individual and organizational factors improves the explanatory power of the final model. This brings to light that personal psychological resources are not the only factor that contributes to the occurrence of work-family conflict but also the larger organizational context. Thus, the internal coping style and external support at the work place have significant roles to play in ensuring that working mothers can handle the work-family conflict.

CONCLUSION

The current research was on the topic of the self-compassion and work conflict with family among working mothers in Mumbai. As more women enter the working environment, juggling between work and family matters is one of the greatest challenges that employees and mothers face in the working world. The research paper set out to learn how psychological resources like self-compassion would assist in managing the demands of these two jobs. The analysis of the data was conducted through statistical methods such as regression analysis, ANOVA and multilevel analysis using a sample of 224 working mothers.

The study results indicate that self-compassion is an important aspect in minimizing work-family conflict in working moms. The regression analysis has shown that increased self-compassions relate to the reduced work-family conflict and so that persons who are characterized by self-treatment with kindness and understanding in stressful situations are in a better place to deal with role-related pressures. Results of the ANOVA also showed that work family conflict differs among age groups as younger working mothers had significantly higher levels of living in conflict with age old mothers having minimal levels of conflict. This implies that the experience, maturity, and maybe the changing family demands with age, can affect the ways people handle work and family demands.

Moreover, the outcomes of the multilevel modeling were used to indicate individual and organizational factors cause work family conflict. Whereas the self-compassion aspect on a personal level enables working mothers to control their emotions and the stress state, the organizational support aspect on a workplace level also contributes significantly to the work family conflict minimization. Work-friendly locations, flexible working policies and accepting management could greatly assist employees to manage their work and family life. The study in general highlights the significance of psychological resources and workplace supportive environments in dealing with the issue, working mothers. Awareness campaigns, counselling, and personal growth programs can be used to teach people to be emotionally sound to promote self-compassion. Accompanied by this, work-life balance should be implemented within organizations through family-friendly policies. Work-family conflict can be minimized and the well-being, productivity and, overall, the quality of life of working mothers improved by considering individual and organization aspects.

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Conflict of Interest

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