



Trait mindfulness and work–family balance among working parents: The mediating effects of vitality and sleep quality

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the relationship between trait mindfulness and work–family balance among a sample of working parents. Sleep quality and vitality are tested as mediators of this relationship. Results indicate that those with greater mindfulness report greater work–family balance, better sleep quality, and greater vitality. As expected, the relationship between mindfulness and work–family balance was mediated by sleep quality and vitality. Results support the usefulness of further examination of the benefits of mindfulness in the work–family context.

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“Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake.”

—William James (1911/1924)

The concept of mindfulness is centuries old. Originally stemming from Buddhist tradition, it has only more recently come into prominence within Western society (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Mindfulness has been defined as, “intentionally paying attention to present-moment experience (physical sensations, perceptions, affective states, thoughts, and imagery) in a nonjudgmental way, thereby cultivating a stable and nonreactive awareness” (Carmody, Reed, Kristeller, & Merriam, 2008 p. 394). Mindfulness is a unique state of consciousness from that of typical cognitive processing because a person allows sensory input and simply notices it rather than comparing, evaluating, or ruminating about it (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). The mindfulness term has been used to refer to a variety of related constructs and practices. Following the lead of Glomb, Duffy, Bono, and Yang (2011) we use the term *mindfulness treatment* to refer to mindfulness-based therapeutic programs (e.g., MSBR) and *trait mindfulness* to refer to dispositional individual differences in mindfulness.

To date, much of the research regarding mindfulness has focused on mindfulness-based treatment interventions (e.g., Brown et al., 2007). Research shows that mindfulness treatment influences the immune system, stress hormones and health behaviors in salutary ways (Greeson, 2009). A more recent line of research has investigated mindfulness as a psychological state. Although mindfulness may vary from moment to moment within a person, there is considerable evidence of individual differences in mindfulness, suggesting that it is a state-level construct that can also be assessed at the trait level (Brown, Kasser, Ryan, Linley, & Orzech, 2009; Dane, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2008). Trait mindfulness has been negatively associated with psychological distress, rumination, and social anxiety while positively correlated with clarity of emotional states, mood repair, and relationship satisfaction (e.g.,

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Carmody et al., 2008; Chambers, Lo, & Allen, 2008; Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leysen, & Dewulf, 2008). Mindfulness-based treatment interventions have been shown to improve mean scores in reports of trait mindfulness therefore demonstrating that mindfulness is amenable to change through training (Carmody et al., 2008; Chambers et al., 2008).

Perhaps due to mounting evidence documenting the positive effects of mindfulness on a wide variety of outcomes in other disciplines, the study of mindfulness is beginning to garner attention among industrial–organizational psychology/organizational behavior scholars (Dane, 2011; Glomb et al., 2011). Both Dane and Glomb et al. provide a thorough review of mindfulness as well as an introduction to the potential value of examining mindfulness and its contributions to work-related outcomes such as task performance. The purpose of the current study is to extend both the study of mindfulness and that of work–family balance. Specifically, we test the potential benefits of trait mindfulness among a sample of employed parents within a mediated framework. The outcomes we investigate are, work–family balance, sleep quality, and vitality. We propose that the latter two variables serve as mediating mechanisms by which trait mindfulness relates to work–family balance.

Our study makes several unique contributions to the literature. First, as mentioned earlier, mindfulness can be trained and therefore become a part of an individual's life, incorporated into daily chores, activities, and role performance (Dane, 2011; Kostanski & Hassed, 2008). By investigating an individual difference variable that is amenable to training and change, we bring to light a new tool that may help working parents achieve good health and work–family balance. Second, the work–family literature has been dominated by research that has focused on work–family conflict or more recently on work–family enrichment (see Hammer & Zimmerman, 2011 for a review). The construct of work–family balance has emerged as a unique and useful addition to the work–family literature (Greenhaus & Allen, 2010). We contribute to this growing focus of research inquiry. Third, it has been suggested that parenting may be the most physically and mentally demanding role that individuals encounter during the lifespan (Janisse, Barnett, & Nies, 2009). By focusing on working parents, we address a population that is at high risk for energy drain and poor sleep quality. Fourth, by investigating vitality and sleep quality, we incorporate two mediating mechanisms that have received limited attention within the work–family literature.

Trait mindfulness and work–family balance

In recent years researchers have developed theory with regard to integrative rather than causal relationships between work and family that feature the construct of work–family balance (e.g., Greenhaus & Allen, 2010; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Valcour, 2007). Although varying uses and definitions of the work–family balance term exist, we define work–family balance as an overall appraisal regarding one's effectiveness and satisfaction with work and family life (Greenhaus & Allen, 2010). Unique from constructs such as work–family conflict and work–family enrichment, balance is not a linking mechanism between work and family because it does not specify how conditions or experiences in one role are causally related to conditions or experiences in the other role (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Rather, balance represents an overall interrole phenomenon. Several studies provide psychometric evidence that supports viewing conflict, enrichment, and balance as three distinct constructs (Allen, Greenhaus, & Edwards, 2010; Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009).

As a relatively new construct in the work–family literature, there has been limited research investigating the predictors and outcomes of balance. Time spent in various activities is one predictor. Specifically, longer work hours have been associated with less satisfaction with work–family balance and more quality time spent with children positively associated with perceived balance (Milkie, Kendig, Nomaguchi, & Denny, 2010; Valcour, 2007). Another predictor is job characteristics. Specifically, job complexity and control over work time have been positively associated with satisfaction with work–family balance (Valcour, 2007). Outcomes associated with work–family balance include job satisfaction, organizational commitment, family satisfaction, family functioning, and life satisfaction (Allen et al., 2010; Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009).

Based on self-regulation and role balance theories, there are several reasons to hypothesize that trait mindfulness relates to work–family balance. In their theory of role balance, Marks and MacDermid (1996) note that positive role balance is the tendency to approach every typical role and role partner with an attitude of attentiveness and care. The present moment alertness that is a part of mindfulness should enable individuals to fully immerse themselves with care and attentiveness while engaged in each role. This practice should facilitate perceived balance across roles.

Mindfulness has been associated with increased concentrative capacity and attentional control (Brown et al., 2007). For example, fMRI research has shown that self-reports of trait mindfulness relate to amygdala activation in ways that suggest more mindful individuals have greater affect regulation ability (Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, & Lieberman, 2007). As described earlier, mindfulness is defined as a present-centered, clear, non-judging, non-reactive and receptive form of awareness (Brown et al., 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, and Freeman (2006) suggest that by consciously bringing awareness and acceptance to present moment experiences, individuals are enabled to use a wider and more adaptive range of coping skills. Through attending to information contained in the present and creating space between emotions and reactions to them, clarity and self-regulated functioning are improved.

As noted by Marks and MacDermid (1996), the habit of bringing full attentiveness to each role helps to dissipate the perceived problem of role management, facilitating effective personal resource allocation. Moreover, with focused attention on the role at hand, individuals may more perform effectively (Dane, 2011). The quality of the experience in each role is likely to be enhanced, facilitating overall perceptions of role balance. Thus, we propose that individuals more predisposed to mindfulness will be more likely to report work–family balance.

Hypothesis 1. There is a positive relationship between trait mindfulness and work–family balance.

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