



The relationships between family-work interaction, job-related exhaustion, detachment, and meaning in life: A day-level study of emotional well-being

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to provide an integrative overview of the associations between employees' daily emotional well-being (positive and negative affect) and family-work interaction, job-related exhaustion, detachment, and meaning in life. Service sector employees in Spain ($N = 105$) filled out a general measure and daily survey measures over five working days. Results showed that daily family-work conflict, job-related exhaustion and search for meaning in life predicted employees' negative affect at night; conversely, daily detachment and presence of meaning in life had a negative relation with negative affect at night. In contrast, employees' family-work facilitation, detachment, and presence of meaning in life predicted positive affect at night. Moreover, detachment moderated the relationship between family-work conflict and negative affect, and between the presence of meaning in life and positive affect. These findings have practical implications for individuals and organizations and suggest possible avenues for future research.

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La relación entre interacción familia-trabajo, agotamiento relacionado con el trabajo, distanciamiento y significado de la vida: estudio del bienestar emocional a nivel diario

RESUMEN

El objetivo de la presente investigación fue proporcionar una visión integradora de las relaciones entre el bienestar diario emocional de los empleados (afecto positivo y negativo) y la interacción entre la familia y el trabajo, el agotamiento relacionado con el trabajo, el distanciamiento y el significado de la vida. Trabajadores del sector de servicios en España ($N = 105$) completaron un cuestionario general y cuestionarios diarios durante cinco días laborables. Los resultados mostraron que el conflicto familia-trabajo, el agotamiento relacionado con el trabajo y la búsqueda de sentido en la vida predecía a nivel diario el afecto negativo de los empleados por la noche. Por el contrario, el distanciamiento y la presencia de significado en la vida tenían una relación negativa con el afecto negativo por la noche. Por otra parte, la facilitación familia-trabajo, el distanciamiento y la presencia de sentido de la vida predecían el afecto positivo por la noche. Además, el distanciamiento moderaba la relación entre el conflicto familia-trabajo y el afecto negativo y entre la presencia de sentido de la vida y afecto positivo. Estos resultados tienen implicaciones prácticas para los individuos y las organizaciones y sugieren posibles vías de investigación futura.

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Palabras clave:

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It is important to identify mechanisms which can help employees to mentally switch off from work stress, and contribute to recovery and well-being (Bakker, Rodríguez-Muñoz, & Derks, 2012; Demerouti, Bouwman, & Sanz-Vergel, 2011; Moreno-Jiménez, Garrosa, Corso, Boada, Rodríguez-Carvajal, 2012; Sonnentag, Unger, & Nägel, 2013). Rather than one specific activity, it is likely that common, underlying attributes, which are related to the employee's personality and overall well-being, are generated through ongoing recovery experiences. In fact, people may differ with regard to the specific activities they experience as recovery. Among such experiences, psychological detachment has awakened much interest, revealing its effects on employee health and well-being (Hahn & Dormann, 2013; Moreno-Jiménez, Mayo et al., 2009; Sonnentag, 2012). Attention is also being paid to theoretical models introducing meaning in life in the organizational setting as a personal resource. Researchers focus on clarifying and identifying the social and sociocognitive factors that emerge during this process, which are also related to employee well-being and recovery experiences (Steger & Dik, 2010). From this perspective, and based on Positive Occupational Health Psychology (POHP) (Bakker et al., 2012), the objective of this study was to explore employees' daily emotional well-being and its association with family-work interaction, job-related exhaustion (JRE), detachment, and meaning in life, by means of an integrative overview including both positive and negative spirals.

The present study contributes to the literature on family-work interaction, JRE, detachment, and meaning in life in several ways. First, we present an integrative model of well-being by merging the literature on positive and negative variables such as family-work interaction, recovery, and meaning in life. In addition, we included detachment, and its possible role as moderator, in order to more fully understand how these processes unfold for employees. This allows for the simultaneous study of how these variables contribute to daily well-being, as well as their possible interaction effects with meaning in life. Second, we examined meaning in life as a personal resource that protects and promotes growth and personal well-being (Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008; Lent, 2004). Researchers have pointed out the importance of this variable for well-being, daily decision making, and taking action (Maddi, 1970; Steger & Kashdan, 2013), or that of self-transcendence (Seligman, 2002) on the creation of meaning. From this point of view, people must engage in a variety of compensatory strategies to maintain stable levels of meaning (Hicks, Schlegel, & King, 2010). These compensatory efforts are consistent with the theory that meaning in life is a stable resource used to maintain well-being and stave off despair (Frankl, 1963). However, the current study of meaning in life requires further investigation regarding its stability or instability. According to Steger and Kashdan (2013), meaning in life from a daily perspective has not yet received sufficient attention, despite the relevancy of its possible influence on fluctuations in well-being, as well as the consequences of its instability on negative emotions. Third, we studied fluctuations in emotional well-being by analyzing positive and negative affect (PA and NA, respectively) at day-level. The advantage of daily survey methods is that they allow the analysis of on-the-job activities as they occur, within specific time frames and in the natural context in which they occur (Fisher & To, 2012; Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, & Zapf, 2010; Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Ohly, 2013). Finally, we explored the existence of positive and negative spirals between the variables, in order to add an integrative stress-well-being overview to the study and we observed the dynamic within-subject processes involving affect at night from the perspective of previous studies (Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti, Moreno-Jiménez, & Mayo, 2010).

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources theory (COR) provided a useful framework for the present study. This theory proposes that

stress takes place when a person is threatened with resource loss, or fails to gain resources after expending effort. In the context of the family-work interaction, COR theory has been applied with the assumption that people lose resources when attending to family and work responsibilities (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). From this point of view, detachment and meaning in life could be considered as ways to restore exhausted resources or to gain new resources. More specifically, meaning of life helps with committing to daily activities and problem solving, and can provide a new, positive health perspective from which to determine the mechanisms that make people feel better at work and protect them from psychosocial risks. For example, detachment restores the energy resources available prior to the stress and meaning of life can help the person to gain new ways of approaching a stressful situation and committing to a certain course of action (Sonnentag, Unger et al., 2013; Steger et al., 2008). Based on the argument that detachment has a positive impact on intra-individual well-being processes (Sonnentag, 2012) and that meaning in life is an indicator of well-being (Steger, Shin, Shim, & Fitch-Martin, in press), we proposed daily detachment and meaning in life as positive variables that promote positive affect while protecting employees from the negative effects of family-work conflict and JRE on emotional well-being. In accordance with previous literature, we used a daily diary methodology for this study for two reasons (Fisher & To, 2012; Sonnentag, Binnewies et al., 2013). First, to reduce the bias and error that are inherent in global retrospective reporting of transient experiences. Second, in order to study within-subject processes as they unfold over time.

Family-work interaction, job-related exhaustion and well-being

Since authors first defined the term "work-family conflict," most empirical evidence has revealed numerous negative effects of such conflict on employee well-being (i.e., JRE and emotional cost) both in the work and family domain (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007; Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti, Mayo, & Moreno-Jiménez, 2011). For example, women report more sleeping problems than men, even when performing the same job. In addition, employees report differences in the distribution of family responsibilities and work obligations (Maume, Sebastian, & Bardo, 2009). Moreover, women's difficulties in balancing this relationship have an impact on workplace absenteeism (Demerouti et al., 2011). Additionally, the growing need to find a balanced model of family to work dynamics has become a central issue that has been poorly explored (Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti, Mayo et al., 2011). Hence, we look at two aspects of family-work interaction: Family-Work facilitation (FWF), which refers to the positive interaction between family and work, and Family-Work Conflict (FWC), which refers to the negative interaction. In the case of JRE, which implies excessive work leading to employees feeling exhausted, it is positively related to FWC (Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts, & Pulkkinen, 2006; Noor, 2003). Building on these earlier studies, this investigation examines positive and negative reactions from the family domain that are transferred to the work domain, an effect known as spillover (Noor, 2003).

Focusing exclusively on the negative aspects of family and work dynamics limits the possibility of adopting a comprehensive view of its study. Many researchers increasingly focus on the positive aspects of the "work-family interface", leading to the emergence of new approaches such as positive spillover (Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006), work-family facilitation (Frone, 2003) and work-family enrichment (Nicklin & McNall, 2013). Following this approach, in addition to FWC, the present study includes the positive family-work interaction as a precursor of employee emotional well-being. The following hypotheses were elaborated:

Hypothesis 1. Day-level FWF after work will be (a) negatively related to NA at night and (b) positively related to PA at night.

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