COMPETING ROLES: WORK-ROLE CONFLICT, FAMILY CONFLICT AND QUALITY OF WORK LIFE AMONG WORKING UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract. Working undergraduate students must divide their time and personal resources among employment, study and family responsibilities. This study examined whether work-role conflicts and family conflicts explain differences in the quality of work life of working undergraduate students. A quantitative correlational design was used. An online questionnaire was distributed to 270 students, and 252 usable responses were analysed. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression were applied. The regression results showed that family conflict significantly predicted quality of work life ($\beta = .298$, $p < .001$), whereas work role conflict was not a significant predictor ($\beta = .88$, $p = .109$). The model explained 40.1% of the variance in quality of work life. These findings indicate that pressures arising from family responsibilities were more influential than occupational conflict in explaining respondents' perception of their working lives. The study extends the use of Role Stress Theory and the Scarcity Hypothesis to working undergraduates and highlights the value of support from universities, employers, and families for students who combine several demanding roles.
Keywords: *quality of work life, work role conflict, family conflict, working undergraduate students, work family conflict, higher education*

Introduction

For many undergraduates, paid employment is part of the university experience. Students may work to meet living and educational expenses, obtain practical experience, or strengthen their future prospects. The benefit of employment, however, is accompanied by the need to coordinate work schedules with classes, assessment tasks, and responsibilities at home. As a result, working students frequently move between several roles that draw on the same limited pool of time and energy. Quality of work life offers a useful way to examine how these students experience employment. Quality of work life concerns the extent to which a person's working life supports well-being and effective functioning. It includes more than pay or physical conditions and may also reflect satisfaction, balance between work and non-work life, opportunities for development, and the support available in the work environment. For students who are employed, perceptions of work are likely to be shaped by demands that originate from both inside and outside the workplace. This study distinguishes between work role conflict and family conflict. Work role conflict refers to pressure created when employment competes with other responsibilities for time, energy or attention. Family conflict refers to interference arising when responsibilities for time, energy, or attention. Family conflict refers to interference arising when responsibilities at home make it more difficult to meet work-related demands. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) showed that conflict across work and family roles may develop through competing time demands,

accumulated strains, and incompatible behavioral expectations. The extent of such conflict may differ according to the individual's circumstances and the support of flexibility available in each role.

Role Stress Theory and the Scarcity Hypothesis offer the theoretical basis for explaining these pressures. One of the earlier theories, Goode (1960) argued that strain can arise when a person carries several obligations but cannot satisfy every expectation simultaneously. These arguments are especially relevant to working undergraduate students, who must repeatedly allocate personal resources among employment, study, family life, and recovery. Marks (1977) similarly discussed the limits placed on human time, energy, and commitment across multiple roles. These perspectives are relevant to working undergraduates because employment, academic study, family life and, and recovery all compete for finite personal resources. Although work–family conflict has been studied extensively among employees, comparatively less research has focused on working university students. Existing Malaysian studies have examined work–family conflict among adult part-time students (Abd Razak et al., 2019) and the relationship between work–school conflict and life satisfaction among working undergraduates (Yusri, 2021). International research has also investigated work–study boundary management and occupational outcomes among employed students (Tooley et al., 2026; Creed et al., 2023). Nevertheless, working undergraduates occupy a distinctive position because academic demands are added to their occupational and family responsibilities. It remains unclear whether work-role conflict or family conflict is more strongly associated with quality of work life among Malaysian working undergraduates. The present study therefore examines the influence of work role conflict and family conflict on the quality of work life of working undergraduate students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Puncak Alam. By analysing the two sources of conflict separately, the study seeks to identify which is more influential and to provide evidence that may help universities and employers support students who combines employment, education, and family responsibilities.

Literature review

Quality of work life

Quality of work life represents an individual's evaluation of the quality of the employment experience and the extent to which work supports well-being. Current approaches extend beyond wages and physical working conditions to consider psychological well-being, work-life balance, supportive relationships, and opportunities for growth. A favorable work experience can support motivation and engagement, whereas continuing pressure across several life domains may weaken satisfaction with work. For working undergraduates, employment is embedded within a broader pattern of academic and family responsibilities. Paid work may provide income, experience, and personal development, yet these benefits may be reduced when other demands become difficult to coordinate. Quality of work life is therefore and appropriate outcome for this study because it reflects how students evaluate work while managing obligations beyond the workplace. In one of the older studies, Medina-Garrido et al. (2017) showed that work-family balanced and employee well-being are important in understanding work outcomes. Their findings support the view that arrangements which improve well-being may also contribute indirectly to better work experience. In the case

of working students, useful support may come from employers, family members, and educational institutions.

Quality of work life is a dimensional concept describing how employee evaluate whether their works support physical safety, psychological well-being, personal development, work life balance and effective performance. Recent evidence indicates that quality of work life reflects both work place conditions and employees' broader experiences. Hammond et.al. (2023) found that safe environment, work-life balance, personal development and personal well-being were positively associated with employee job satisfaction. Their findings suggest that quality of work life extends beyond salary and physical facilities to encompass the psychological and social quality of employment. Similarly, Kato et.al. (2024) reported that community professionals with higher quality of work life expressed more favorable evaluations of their professional services, particularly when they experienced pride in their work. This relationship indicates that quality of work life is associated not only with service attitude but also with perceived service effectiveness. Collectively, these studies established quality of work life as an important connection between working conditions, employee well-being, job satisfaction and perceived performance. Quality of work life may be especially important for working undergraduates because they must manage employment demands alongside academic commitments, family responsibilities, and personal well-being.

Work role conflict

Work role conflict develops when occupational demands consume resources that are also needed for other responsibilities. Long or inflexible hours, heavy workloads, and competing expectations may make it difficult to perform several roles effectively. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based forms of conflict, demonstrating that interference can occur through more than one pathway. Among working undergraduates, employment may overlap directly with classes, examinations, assignments, or group work. Even without a timetable clash, fatigue after work may reduce the energy available for study and personal responsibilities. Work role conflict therefore concerns not only the amount or work performed but also the extent to which employment restricts resources needed elsewhere. The effects of work are not uniformly negative. Pak et al. (2022) found that work hours may contribute to both work-to-family conflicts and enrichment through energy-related processes. Beckel et al. (2023) also showed that telework does not automatically remove conflict between work and family because outcomes depend partly on how boundaries are managed. These findings suggest that flexibility, support, and individual circumstances may shape the effect of work role conflict on quality of work life. Another study by Headrick and Park (2024), work role conflict occurs when employment responsibilities interfere with students' academic responsibilities. Students experiencing greater conflict reported poor job satisfaction, well-being and academic preparedness. Nevertheless, with supervisor support and flexible work arrangement, these two will help the students to manage both roles successfully.

Family conflict

Family conflict arises when responsibilities at home interfere with the performance of work-related roles. Childcare, care for dependents, household tasks, and emotional

responsibilities may require immediate attention and can be difficult to reschedule. These demands are especially relevant to working students who are married, have children, or carry substantial responsibilities within the household. When family demands intensify, students may have less attention and energy available for employment and study. Allen at al. (2000) linked work-family conflict with a range of work, non-work, stress-related outcomes. French et al. (2018) further showed that social support is generally associated with lower work-family conflict. These findings indicate that the availability of support may be important in helping individuals manage competing obligations.

According to studies by Stevani et.al (2026) and Horan and Su (2025), both researches showed that family conflict arises when family responsibilities consume resources required for work, study, rest and well-being. Stevani et.al (2026) described family conflict as pressure created when working students must meet family responsibilities while also fulfilling employment and academic obligation. Family duties, particularly caregiving and financial responsibilities, compete with limited time, energy and attention. While Horan and Su (2025) treated family conflict as one part of combined work-family-school conflict. Family demands compete with employment, study, sleep, exercise, and other personal needs for limited time. Higher conflict was associated with reduce sleep and altered exercise behavior. Coping, time management, support from bosses and supervisors and healthy working ambience may help to reduce consequences.

Theoretical foundation and conceptual framework

Role Stress Theory proposes that strain emerges when individuals face multiple expectations that cannot all be fulfilled at the same time (Goode, 1960). The Scarcity Hypothesis complements this explanation by emphasizing the finite nature of time, energy, and commitment across roles (Marks, 1977). Applied to working students, greater investment in work or family responsibilities may have leave fewer resources for study, rest, and recovery. Based on these arguments, the study treats work role conflict and family conflict as separate independent variables and quality of work life as the dependent variable. The following hypotheses were tested: (H1): There is a relationship between work role conflict and the quality of work life of working undergraduate students; (H2): There is a relationship between family conflict and the quality of work life of working undergraduate students.

Materials and Methods

Research design, population and sampling

A quantitative correlational design was used to examine the relationship between work role conflict, family conflict, and quality of work life. The unit of analysis was the individual working undergraduate students enrolled at UiTM Puncak Alam. Convenience sampling was used to recruit eligible respondents who were accessible and willing to participate. Of 270 questionnaires distributed, 252 complete and usable responses were retained for analysis. Data were gathered through a structured self-administered questionnaire distributed electronically using Google Forms. The online format allowed respondents to complete the survey at a suitable time. Participation was voluntary and limited to undergraduates who combined study with paid employment.

Data analysis, reliability and internal consistency reliability

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the respondents' characteristics. Pearson correlation was used to examine the direction and strength of bivariate relationships. While multiple regression was used to assess the contribution of work role conflict and family conflict to quality of work life when both predictors were entered in the same model. Regression coefficients, significance levels, and R^2 were used to interpret the model and evaluate the hypotheses. Collinearity diagnostics were also reviewed to determine whether the predictors created multicollinearity problem. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha analysis. Reliability assessment indicates whether items intended to represent the same construct produce sufficiently consistent response (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). The alpha values were .709 for work role conflict, .723 for family conflict, and .813 for quality of work life. These values supported the use of the three measures in the subsequent analyses.

Results and Discussion

Respondent profile

The final sample consisted of 252 working undergraduates and represented in *Table 1* below. Women represented 67.5% of respondents (n=170) while men represented 32.5% (n=82). Most respondents were aged 20-35 years (90.5%, n=228); the remaining 9.5% (n=24) were aged above 35. The marital status distribution was almost even, with 50.4% married (n=127) and 49.6% single (n=125). Regarding children, 33.3% (n=84) reported zero or one child, 42.1% (n=106) reported two or three, 20.2% (n=51) reported four or five, and 4.4% (n=11) reported more than five.

Table 1. *Demographic profile of respondents (N=252).*

Items	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	82	32.5
Female	170	67.5
Age		
20 to 35 years	228	90.5
35 years and above	24	9.5
Marital Status		
Married	127	50.4
Single	125	49.6
Number of Children		
0 to 1	84	33.3
2 to 3	106	42.1
4 to 5	51	20.2
More than 5	11	4.4

Descriptive analysis

Based from *Table 2* below, Pearson correlation analysis showed that work-role conflict had a weak, nonsignificant positive relationship with quality of work life (r=.069), whereas family conflict had a moderate positive relationship with quality of work life (r=.467, p<.001). Work-role conflict and family conflict were weakly and negatively related (r=−.063), indicating little multicollinearity between the predictors. Based from the *Table 3*, 40.1% of the variance in quality of work life (R^2=.401) was explained by work role conflict and family conflict. The remaining 59.9% of the

dependent variable was explained by other independent variables which are not included in this study. From the analysis, it was also found that family conflict was the only significant predictor of the dependant variable (β =.284, p=<.001), while work role conflict did not have any predicting effect towards quality of work life (β =.067, p=.109). This pattern supported Horan and Su (2025), who found that combined work-family-school pressures affect employed students' sleep and health behaviours. It also complements Stevani et al. (2026), who identified time pressure, psychological strain, and emotional exhaustion among Indonesian working undergraduates balancing employment, study, and family responsibilities. Accordingly, family-related demands deserve greater attention in student-support interventions. However, the positive family-conflict association should be interpreted according to questionnaire coding. If higher scores indicate greater conflict and better quality of work life, reverse-scored items should be checked. Because the study is cross-sectional, these findings indicate statistical association rather than causality.

Table 2. *Correlation of the work role conflict, family conflict and quality of work Llfe*.

Variable	Work Role Conflict	Family Conflict	Quality of Work Life
Work Role Conflict	1		
Family Conflict	-.063	1	
Quality of Work Life	.069	.467**	1

*Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 3. *Interpretations of regression analysis.*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	β	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-	.326	.972	2.994	.003
Work Role Conflict	.088	.041	.067	1.610	.109
Family Conflict	.298	.051	.284	5.536	<.001
Adjusted R2			.391		
R2			.401		

Summary of hypotheses

Table 4 shows the finding of the summarized hypotheses. This study compared the influence of work role conflict and family conflict on the quality of work life of working undergraduates. The results show clear differences between the two predictors. Family conflict was statistically significant, whereas work role conflict was not. Within this sample, pressures originating from family domain were therefore more closely related to differences in quality of work life. H1 was not supported because work role conflict did not significantly predict quality of work life (β = .067, p =.109). This does not mean that employment was free from difficulty. Instead, the result indicates that differences in work role conflict did not explain a significant amount of variation in quality of work life once family conflict was also considered. Some respondents may have organised employment around their other commitments or may have viewed work pressure as an expected part of studying while employed.

Table 4. *Summary of hypotheses.*

No	Hypotheses	Statistical Evidence	Result
H_1	There is a relationship between work role conflict and the quality of work life of working undergraduate students.	(β= .067, p=.109)	Not Supported
H_2	There is a relationship between family conflicts and the quality of work life of working undergraduate students.	(β= .284, p=<.001)	Supported

This result can be intepreted in light of evidence that work demands do not produce identical effects for everyone. Pak et al. (2022) showed that work hours may generate both conflict and enrichment through energy-related pprocesses whereas Beckel et al. (2023) found that the management of work-family boundaries matters. Such variation may help explain why work role conflict was not significant in the present model. H2 was supported in this study. Family conflict significantly predicted quality of work life ($\beta = .284$, $p < .001$) and was the stronger predictor. Family responsibilites may include childcare, care for dependants, household work, and emotional commitments. Unlike some schedule work tasks, these responsibilities may arise unexpectedly and may be diificult to delay. This result was consistent with Allen et al. (2000), who documented a broad range of consequences associated with work-family conflict. This finding also supported the relevance of social support that were being highlighted by French et al. (2018). For working students, assistance from family members, employers, and other sources may affect how successfully several demanding roles are managed.

Role Stress Theory and Scarcity Hypothesis have provided a useful explanation for the stronger family effect. Individuals cannot satisfy unlimited obligations at the same time (Goode, 1960), and time, energy, and commitment are finite across multiple roles (Marks, 1977). When family responsibilities intensify, fewer personal resources may remain for work, study, and recovery. This model explained 40.1% of the variance in quality of work life, indicating that the two predictors were meaningful but not exhaustive. There are other possible variables that may influence quality of work life among working undergraduates. Future research may consider organisational and supervisor support, financial pressure, academic workload, work flexibility, resilience, and other psychological resources.

The findings suggested practical action for both universities and employers. Universities serving working students may consider flexible academic arrangements and accessible support that acknowledges employment and family responsibilities. Employers may assist through reasonable scheduling and supportive supervision. Because family conflict was the significant predictor, support should not focus exclusively on workplace demands. Several limitations should be considered. The cross-sectional design did not establish causality. The study was conducted at one of campus, which limits generalisation to other institutions. Convenience sampling may also reduce representativeness. Future studies could use samples drawn from several universities, probability-based procedures where feasible, and longitudinal designs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, family conflict was more influential than work role conflict in explaining the quality of work life of the working undergraduates who participated in this study. The findings show the importance of viewing working students as individuals who simultenously occupy employment, academic, and family roles. Coordinated support across these domains may help them sustain both well-being and continued participation in higher education.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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