

# The impact of work-family conflict on children's media use patterns: a chain mediation effect

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**Abstract:** This study examined how work-family conflict affects children's media use through family factors. Survey data from 359 parents revealed work-family conflict directly predicts media use ( $\beta = 0.210$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and operates through chain mediation via partner relationships, parenting stress, and parental attitudes (total effect = 0.574,  $p < 0.001$ ). Results suggest targeting family dynamics to promote healthy media use.

**Key words:** work family conflict; media use patterns; partner relationship; parenting stress; parental attitude

## 1 Introduction

Children's media use patterns has become an increasing concern in education research. Recent studies suggest that family factors, particularly parental influences, play crucial roles in shaping children's media use patterns [1]. Among these, work-family conflict has emerged as a significant yet understudied influence.

Drawing on ecological systems theory, we propose that work-family conflict affects children's media use through family relationship pathways [2]. Despite growing evidence linking work-family conflict to family dynamics, no study has comprehensively examined how these variables collectively influence children's media use. This study tests five hypotheses examining direct and mediated pathways:

H1: Work-family conflict increases media use.

H2: Parenting stress mediates how work-family conflict affects children's media use.

H3: Work-family conflict → Partner relationships → Parenting stress → Children's media use

H4: Work-family conflict → Parenting stress → Parental attitudes → Children's media use

H5: Work-family conflict → Partner relationships → Parenting stress → Parental attitudes → Children's media use

The framework of this study is shown in Figure 1.

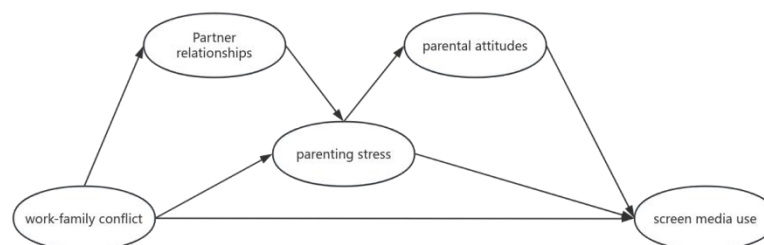


Figure 1. Research framework

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Participants

Using stratified sampling, we collected data from 359 parents of elementary school children (response rate: 87.7%) with diverse demographic backgrounds.

### 2.2 Measures

Five standardized scales were used:

- (1) Work-family conflict scale [3] (9 items,  $\alpha = 0.755$ )
- (2) Partner relationship scale (12 items,  $\alpha = 0.796$ )
- (3) Parenting stress index short form [4] (15 items,  $\alpha = 0.874$ )
- (4) Parental attitudes scale [5] (8 items,  $\alpha = 0.791$ )
- (5) Media use scale (9 items,  $\alpha = 0.859$ )

### 2.3 Statistical analysis

Path analysis and chain mediation testing were conducted using Mplus 8.3.

## 3 Results

Correlation analysis showed work-family conflict was significantly associated with partner relationships ( $r = -0.506$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), parenting stress ( $r = 0.545$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), parental attitudes ( $r = 0.348$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and media use patterns ( $r = 0.520$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Path analysis revealed work-family conflict significantly predicted partner relationships ( $\beta = -0.523$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), parenting stress ( $\beta = 0.222$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and media use patterns ( $\beta = 0.210$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Partner relationships negatively predicted parenting stress ( $\beta = -0.814$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which in turn predicted both parental attitudes ( $\beta = 0.585$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and media use patterns ( $\beta = 0.413$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Parental attitudes also predicted media use patterns ( $\beta = 0.254$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Bootstrap analysis identified three significant mediation paths as shown in Table 1. The total effect of work-family conflict on media use patterns was 0.574 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 1. Significant mediation effects of work-family conflict on media use patterns

Path	Effect size	S.E.	Blas-corrected 95% CI		
			Lower	Upper	<i>P</i>
WFC→PS→SMU	0.092	0.042	0.027	0.194	0.031
WFC→PR→PS→SMU	0.176	0.051	0.097	0.302	0.000
WFC→PR→PS→PA→SMU	0.063	0.019	0.013	0.144	0.038
Direct effect (WFC→SMU)	0.210	0.088	0.051	0.398	0.016
Total indirect effect	0.364	0.251	0.251	0.776	0.000
Total effect	0.574	0.096	0.406	0.536	0.000

Note: WFC = work-family conflict; PR = partner relationship; PS = parenting stress; PA = parental attitudes; SMU = media use patterns

## 4 Discussion

Work-family conflict significantly influences children's media use through multiple family pathways: directly (0.210), through parenting stress (0.092), through partner relationships and parenting stress (0.176), and through the complete chain

of partner relationships, parenting stress, and parental attitudes (0.063). These findings support ecological systems theory, highlighting the complexity of family processes.

The results suggest that interventions addressing children's media use should consider family dynamics, particularly parenting stress which appears central to all mediation pathways. Schools should develop family-focused interventions for stress management and provide structured after-school activities that reduce children's unsupervised media time. Future research should evaluate school-based interventions supporting families experiencing work-family conflict in managing children's media use.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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