

# Investigating Supervisory Support and Work-Family Conflict in the Malaysian Public Sector: The Role of Personal Resource as Mediator

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to examine the impact of supervisory support on work-family conflict (WFC), both directly and indirectly through the influence of self-efficacy. A self-administered survey was used to acquire quantitative data from 618 individuals serving as public administrators across four government organisations in the Malaysian public sector. This study employed SEM-PLS to analyse and validate the hypotheses of the research model. The findings indicate that there is no statistically significant correlation between supervisory support and WFC. The findings further validate that self-efficacy serves as a crucial mediating factor. The results also indicate that public sector organisations should take into consideration individual self-efficacy in order to provide the support that is viewed as essential for employees to manage the conflict between work and family responsibilities. The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of human resource management by examining the correlation between supervisor support, individual characteristics, and employee WFC. This study also examined its theoretical and practical consequences, and puts forth recommendations for further research.*

**Keywords:** Supervisory support; Self-efficacy; Work-family conflict; Conservation of Resource (COR) theory; Public sector; Malaysia

**JEL Classification:** M1, I3, M00

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of work-family conflict (WFC) has gained considerable prominence in contemporary society over the past two decades. Globalisation and technological advancements have accelerated the complexity and volume of work responsibilities and family expectations, contributing to heightened experiences of WFC. The rise of dual-career families and the increased participation of women in the workforce, particularly in traditionally demanding roles, have further reduced the time available for familial interactions (Shukri, 2015). Consequently, WFC has emerged as a critical area of concern. WFC is defined as “a type of inter-role conflict that arises when the demands and expectations of the work and family domains are incompatible with one another” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Kahn et al. (1964) conceptualise WFC as a state of incongruity stemming from conflicting demands between work and family obligations. This understanding is rooted in role conflict theory, which posits that individuals have limited time, energy, and attentional resources. Balancing multiple roles inevitably strains these resources, culminating in conflict (Witt & Carlson, 2006). Manifestations of WFC include time-based conflicts, characterised by extended and irregular work hours or inflexible schedules, strain-based conflicts caused by unsupportive supervisors, and behaviour-based conflicts, where the behavioural expectations in one domain clash with those in another.

While WFC has been studied extensively around the globe, its contextual underpinnings within specific sectors or regions remain underexplored. For instance, public sector employees in Malaysia face unique WFC challenges due to sector-specific factors, such as hierarchical organisational structures, rigid work policies, and societal expectations regarding family roles. Malaysian public servants, particularly those in roles involving high public interaction or administrative duties, often encounter time-based conflicts arising from long working hours and strain-based conflicts due to limited autonomy and high workloads. While significant research has been conducted on WFC at the individual level, there is a notable lack of studies exploring its antecedents and outcomes within organisational and cultural contexts (Liao et al., 2019). Molina (2021) underscores the importance of identifying the precursors of WFC to construct a comprehensive framework of contributing factors.

Similarly, Obrenovic et al. (2020) argue that WFC often arises from a lack of individual or contextual resources, highlighting the critical role of organisational and supervisory support in addressing this issue. Key factors such as social support, organisational policies, and personal coping mechanisms have been recognised as essential in reducing WFC (Poggesi et al., 2019; Wayne et al., 2019).

In the Malaysian public sector, supervisory support has emerged as a crucial resource in mitigating WFC. Effective supervisory support addresses work-related demands, enhances employee confidence in managing work-family responsibilities, and fosters resilience. Coping resources such as optimism, self-esteem, and self-efficacy also empower employees to manage conflicting demands (Deuling & Burns, 2017). However, the mediating role of self-efficacy in the work-family interface remains underexplored (Yan et al., 2022). Alias et al. (2020) highlight the need for further research to investigate how self-efficacy mediates the relationship between supervisory support and WFC, as existing findings in this area are limited.

This study contributes to addressing these gaps by examining the relationship between supervisory support and WFC among employees in the Malaysian public sector. It specifically focuses on the mediating role of self-efficacy in this relationship. The study proposes that supervisory support directly reduces WFC and indirectly mitigates it by enhancing employees' self-efficacy, thereby boosting their confidence in balancing professional and personal responsibilities. It provides new insights into practical strategies for alleviating WFC and improving employee well-being in the public sector.

## **2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development**

The concept of WFC is commonly explained through the lens of role theory, as outlined by Kahn et al. (1964). According to this theory, individuals are faced with various roles in both their work and family domains, each with its own set of expectations and beliefs. When these expectations and beliefs clash, it can lead to conflict. The phenomenon of WFC is indicative of the competition that arises when individuals must allocate their limited resources to fulfil both their job and family responsibilities (Achour et al., 2017; Zainal et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research examining strategies for mitigating WFC using a resource-oriented lens (Liao et al., 2019). The COR theory is a significant paradigm in the field of work-family studies that

offers a more suitable perspective for evaluating the work-family domain. This theory focuses on the function of resources in order to enhance our understanding of the work-family interface.

According to the COR hypothesis, individuals are driven by the motivation to get, safeguard, and sustain resources that may be effectively utilised to handle both professional and familial obligations (Harun et al., 2022). In addition, Hobfoll (2001) delineates four distinct categories of resources, namely items, situations, personal qualities, and energy, which hold significant value for an individual. The aforementioned resources possess significant value as tools that can be effectively employed by individuals to confront and overcome issues that arise within their surroundings (Kalliath & Kalliath, 2014). The COR theory encompasses two fundamental principles, namely resource loss and resource gain. The detrimental impact of resource loss on individuals outweighs that of resource gain, as work-family friction is widely recognised as a significant contributor to the stress process (Harun et al., 2022).

Conversely, the acquisition of resources is increasingly recognised as a critical factor, as individuals allocate resources to safeguard against resource depletion, recuperate from setbacks, and amass additional resources. According to the COR theory, individuals are more likely to allocate their resources towards acquiring extra resources when they sense support and possess supplementary personal resources, such as self-efficacy (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Thus, in the context of this research, it can be inferred that individuals who possess additional resources, such as support systems, are likely to experience an increase in their own self-assurance. Consequently, they are more inclined to allocate these resources towards fulfilling their work-related responsibilities, while simultaneously effectively managing their familial commitments (Lee et al., 2023).

### ***2.1 Supervisory support and work-family conflict***

Supervisory support refers to the perception of employees on the extent to which their immediate supervisor appreciates their contributions and shows concern for their well-being (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). When employees perceive supportive behaviours from their supervisor, they are more likely to efficiently handle and successfully fulfil their professional responsibilities, while simultaneously meeting

their family obligations. Previous studies have shown strong empirical evidence about the negative impact of supervisory aid on WFC (Beutell, 2010; Talukder, 2019). The likelihood of individuals successfully handling their conflicting domain tasks is enhanced by the greater help provided by supervisors in the workplace. For instance, when people feel supported by their supervisor, such as through the availability of flexible work options or on-site childcare services, they are more likely to acquire additional resources, such as time and energy, that can be used to fulfil their family obligations.

According to Halbesleben (2006), a supervisor's supply of organisational support can effectively reduce the stress caused by WFC by creating a work atmosphere that is more understanding and accepting. In accordance with the principles of COR theory, the availability of supervisory support is acknowledged as an asset that employees may need to efficiently handle job demands and reduce WFC. Empirical evidence in the current literature indicates that supervisors have a crucial role in reducing WFC among workers. Previous studies have confirmed a negative correlation between supervisory support and WFC (Achour et al., 2017; Ferri et al., 2018). Therefore, this study puts forth the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>1</sub> There is a negative relationship between supervisory support and work-family conflict

## ***2.2 Supervisory support and self-efficacy***

The provision of supervisory support in the workplace encompasses the demonstration of recognition, appreciation of values, and the expression of praise by supervisors towards their subordinates. It can be observed that employees' perception of support from their superiors plays a crucial role in guiding, motivating, and sustaining their efforts towards accomplishing work tasks (Chen et al., 2016). Consequently, those with elevated levels of self-assurance demonstrate a greater inclination towards proactive behaviour and adeptness in managing unforeseen circumstances, thereby exerting an impact on their emotional well-being.

However, there is a dearth of research examining the correlation between supervisor support and psychological capital (Ahmed et al., 2017). Past studies suggest that resources and support variables, such as

supervisory support, may have a positive impact on individual psychological capital, specifically on self-efficacy (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2019). In a study conducted by Islam and Ahmed (2018), it was discovered that supervisory support exerts a noteworthy positive impact on an employee's self-efficacy. In a similar vein, Abdullah and Marican (2020) observe a favourable correlation between supervisory support and self-efficacy among employees in the public sector. Drawing upon the COR theory and the aforementioned empirical evidence, the present study posits the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>2</sub> There is a significant positive relationship between supervisory support and self-efficacy

### ***2.3 Self-efficacy and work-family conflict***

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's personal beliefs about their ability to effectively carry out a particular behaviour or action. Bandura (2006) identifies four separate categories of self-efficacy in individuals: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological and emotional states. Self-efficacy beliefs refer to an individual's evaluations of their abilities to effectively plan and execute the required actions to get certain performance results (Bandura, 2006). This viewpoint aligns with the concepts of social cognitive theory, as it proposes that self-efficacy has a substantial impact on how individuals perceive and handle conflicts that arise from different life roles.

Clayton et al. (2017) identify a negative association between WFC and self-efficacy, while Hennessy and Lent (2008) find that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy in balancing work and family duties are more likely to have less WFC. Thus, it can be deduced that a substantial level of efficacy in managing WFC would be associated with less conflict and heightened job satisfaction. The current analysis indicates that persons with a strong self-belief tend to have lower expectations of conflict across their professional and family domains. In line with previous academic research and empirical data, the current study puts up the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>3</sub> There is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and work-family conflict

#### **2.4 The mediating role of self-efficacy**

This study posits, within the framework of COR theory, that supervisory assistance has the potential to mitigate employees' WFC by leveraging personal resources, such as self-efficacy. According to the COR theory, conflict arises when individuals encounter three specific circumstances: (1) the loss of resources, (2) the perceived risk of losing resources, or (3) the incapacity to acquire resources despite investing in them. According to the COR theory, individuals facing stress resulting from WFC are prone to resource depletion, including self-efficacy (Hobfoll, 2001). Self-efficacy is regarded as an individual resource and has been conceptualised as "one's beliefs in his/her capability to succeed in a specific situation or task" (Bandura, 2006). The perception of employees' high self-confidence is closely associated with the provision of support from their supervisor, a key component of the personal resource construct (Zhang et al., 2018).

This study posits that the presence of degenerative circumstances, such as WFC, heightens an individual's susceptibility to resource depletion. It has been observed that individuals, upon perceiving the potential loss of resources, tend to activate defensive mechanisms that include the utilisation of alternative resources and impede the acquisition of additional resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Given that self-efficacy is a malleable concept that is enhanced by the allocation of resources rather than a fixed concept, it is plausible that the provision of supervisory support could potentially bolster employees' self-efficacy.

Understanding the mediating role of self-efficacy is critical for public sector organisations in emerging economies due to the unique challenges they face, such as resource constraints, workforce skill gaps (Vitapamoorthy et al., 2021), and institutional inefficiencies (Mohd Kamil et al., 2022). Self-efficacy, as a psychological construct, significantly influences employee motivation, resilience, and performance (Radzuan et al., 2020). By fostering a sense of self-efficacy among employees, public sector organisations can enhance their capacity to adapt to dynamic environments (Hashim, 2020), innovate in service delivery (Mohd Kamil et al., 2022), and achieve organisational objectives despite systemic challenges.

The COR theory posits that the attainment of a particular resource, such as supervisory support, can have a favourable impact on the accessibility of other resources, such as self-efficacy. Within this framework, the provision of

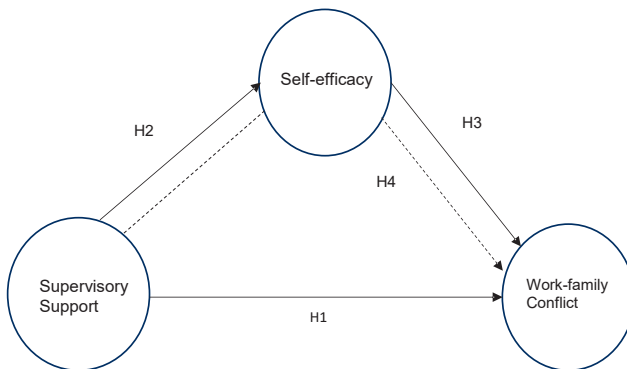
supervisory assistance has the potential to augment the self-efficacy beliefs of employees. This is achieved by cultivating a perception of competence and control in effectively handling the demands associated with their work responsibilities (Liu et al., 2015). As employees develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy, they may see a decrease in the loss of resources and, as a result, experience a reduction in WFC. It is anticipated that an increase in supervisory support will lead to a higher level of self-efficacy, which in turn will serve as a protective factor against WFC. Individuals who possess higher levels of self-efficacy tend to exhibit a greater sense of assurance when it comes to fulfilling their job and family obligations. As a result, they are more adept at properly balancing their responsibilities in both domains, hence minimising the perception of conflict. Consequently, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>4</sub> Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between supervisory support and work-family conflict

### 2.5 Research model

Figure 1 presents an overview of the proposed research model for this study. COR theory has been employed to understand the relationships between (1) supervisory support and WFC, (2) supervisory support and self-efficacy, (3) self-efficacy and WFC, and (4) the mediating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between supervisory support and WFC.

**Figure 1:** Research model



### **3. Methods**

This study employed partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the research hypotheses, a method renowned for its robustness and reliability (Hair et al., 2014). PLS-SEM offers high statistical power and is particularly effective for resampling procedures, such as bootstrapping, to ensure reliable significance testing (Hair et al., 2012). The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS software version 3.2.7.

The public sector in Malaysia is broadly divided into federal, state, federal statutory bodies, state statutory bodies, and local authorities (A. Abdullah et al., 2014). This study focused on federal government employees working in government organisations in Putrajaya, specifically public administrators within four federal ministries. The target population consisted of professional and managerial-level employees, specifically administrative and diplomatic officers in the grade range of M41 to M54, selected through purposive sampling to ensure data relevance. The criteria for selection were clearly communicated to the human resources departments of the ministries to align the sample with the study objectives.

To enhance response rates and mitigate non-response bias, a total of 1,140 questionnaires were distributed through the HR departments, accompanied by a cover letter detailing the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Respondents were also provided with researchers' contact details to address inquiries and build trust. Out of the 714 responses received, 96 were excluded due to incomplete data, resulting in 618 valid responses and a response rate of 54.2%. Non-response bias was addressed by comparing the demographic distribution of respondents with available population data, ensuring representativeness. While purposive sampling improved the relevance of data, it limited the findings' generalisability to the broader public sector.

Demographic characteristics of the participants, encompassing variables such as gender, age, race, education level, marital status, and tenure. The survey participants consisted predominantly of females, accounting for 61% of the total, while males constituted 39%. The majority of respondents are of Malay descent (87.9%), followed by Chinese descent (6.1%), and Indian descent (5%), while the remaining 1% is composed of individuals from other ethnic backgrounds. The majority of participants (58.7%) fell within the age range of 30 to 39 years. A significant proportion (26.1%) were aged

between 40 and 49 years. A smaller percentage (12.8%) were aged between 20 to 29 years. Lastly, a minority (2.4%) were aged 50 and above. The data also reveals that a majority of the participants (74.1%) are in a marital relationship, while a significant proportion (22.5%) are not married. The remaining respondents (3.4%) are either divorced or separated. In terms of education level, 64.7% of individuals possessed a Bachelor's degree, 33.5% held a Master's degree, and 1.8% a PhD degree. The majority of participants reported a tenure ranging from six to nine years, comprising 34.6% of the sample. This was closely followed by those with tenure exceeding 10 years, accounting for 33.2%. A smaller proportion, 20.9%, reported a tenure between three and five years, while only 11.3% indicated a tenure between one and two years.

**Table 1:** Demographic profile

Demographic variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	241	39.0
	Female	377	61.0
Age	20 – 29 years	79	12.8
	30 – 39 years	363	58.7
	40 – 49 years	161	26.1
	Over 50 years	15	2.4
Race	Malay	543	87.9
	Chinese	38	6.1
	Indian	31	5.0
	Others	6	1.0
Marital Status	Single	139	22.5
	Married	458	74.1
	Separated	6	1.0
	Divorced	15	2.4
Education	Bachelor's degree	400	64.7
	Master's degree	207	33.5
	PhD	11	1.8
Tenure	1 - 2 years	70	11.3
	3 - 5 years	129	20.9
	6 - 9 years	214	34.6
	Over 10 years	205	33.2

## **4. Measurement**

### **4.1 *Work-family conflict***

WFC was measured by an 18-item scale derived from Carlson et al. (2000). The questionnaire consists of two subscales: WFC (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91) and FWC (Cronbach's alpha = 0.87). The scale was anchored by a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The WFC measure has been translated and validated in another study using a Malaysian sample (Hassan et al., 2010). Examples of items include 'The behaviours I perform that make me effective at work do not help me be a better parent and spouse' and 'I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I must spend on family responsibilities'.

### **4.2 *Self-efficacy***

The measurement of self-efficacy was conducted using a six-item scale that was taken from Rigotti et al. (2008). The items 'When faced with a work-related problem, I am typically able to identify multiple solutions' and 'I consistently achieve the goals I set for myself in my job' were assessed using a scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The variable has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.90.

### **4.3 *Supervisory support***

This study employed a 16-item version of the supervisory support scale, which was derived from Kottke and Sharafinski (1988), to evaluate employees' perception of support from their supervisor. The Likert-type scale used in this study assessed statements such as 'My supervisor values my additional efforts' and 'My supervisor demonstrates a high level of care for me'. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The internal consistency reliability coefficient was 0.98.

## **5. Results**

Table 1 displays the mean, standard deviation, and intercorrelations among the main factors examined in the study. The association exhibits statistical significance at the 0.05 level. The data indicates that there is a positive

correlation between supervisory support and WFC. However, this correlation is not statistically significant ( $r = 0.02, p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, there exists a strong positive relationship between the level of support provided by supervisors and an individual's belief in their own abilities (self-efficacy), as indicated by a correlation coefficient of 0.51 and a significance level of  $p < 0.01$ . Furthermore, there exists a noteworthy and adverse link between self-efficacy and WFC ( $r = 0.19, p < 0.01$ ). In addition, the correlation analysis reveals that gender, age, married status, education, and tenure are strongly connected and have a significant impact on WFC. The only factor that has a positive correlation with self-efficacy is age ( $r = 0.11, p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistics and correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	1.61	0.49								
Age	2.18	0.67	-0.08*							
Race	1.19	0.56	0.09*	-0.08*						
Marital status	1.83	0.56	0.07	0.33**	-0.12**					
Education	1.37	0.52	-0.08*	0.42**	-0.04	0.08*				
Tenure	2.9	0.99	0.01	0.63**	-0.04	0.30**	0.40**			
WFC	3.19	1.01	-0.17**	0.20**	-0.01	0.11**	0.13**	0.09*		
Supervisory support	4.44	0.55	0.03	0.02	0.03	-0.02	0.06	-0.07	0.02	
Self-efficacy	4.76	0.6	0.02	0.11**	0.02	0.04	0.11**	0.04	-0.19**	0.51**

Note: N = 618. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$

The measurement model was examined utilising the SEM-PLS approach. Following Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the data is considered valid if standardised factor loadings lie within the acceptable limit. Based on Hair et al. (2017), any item that has a factor loading of 0.708 or higher will be retained, whereas those with factor loadings below 0.5 will be discarded. After conducting the analysis, it was determined that elements Support2 and Support12 from the supervisor support construct were excluded due to their loadings being below 0.5 as shown in Table 3. In addition, any item with a factor loading between 0.5 and 0.7 will also be excluded if it has the potential to enhance the value of the average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, the study successfully demonstrated convergent validity. The composite reliability values for all constructs range from 0.915

(self-efficacy) to 0.968 (work-family conflict). Thus, it may be argued that the scale items demonstrated sufficient internal consistency.

**Table 3:** Composite reliability and convergent validity

Variables	Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
Supervisory support	Support1	0.675	0.939	0.947	0.559
	Support10	0.744			
	Support11	0.783			
	Support12	deleted			
	Support13	0.764			
	Support14	0.807			
	Support15	0.713			
	Support16	0.721			
	Support2	deleted			
	Support3	0.738			
	Support4	0.755			
	Support5	0.718			
	Support6	0.711			
	Support7	0.754			
Support8	0.785				
Support9	0.79				
Self-efficacy	SE1	0.746	0.889	0.915	0.642
	SE2	0.811			
	SE3	0.788			
	SE4	0.817			
	SE5	0.822			
	SE6	0.823			
Work-family conflict	WFC1	0.629	0.967	0.968	0.632
	WFC2	0.65			
	WFC3	0.708			
	WFC4	0.715			
	WFC5	0.778			
	WFC6	0.77			
	WFC7	0.758			
	WFC8	0.783			
	WFC9	0.793			
	FWC1	0.808			
	FWC2	0.846			
	FWC3	0.864			
	FWC4	0.878			
	FWC5	0.855			
	FWC6	0.862			
	FWC7	0.845			
	FWC8	0.842			
	FWC9	0.862			

Notes: CR = composite reliability; AVE = variance extracted. Support2 and Support12 were deleted due to low loading

In addition, discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion. In Table 4, the analysis revealed that all inter-correlation values were below 0.9, as indicated by Hair et al. (2017). Thus, the discriminant validity is proven effectively.

**Table 4:** Heterotrait monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Variables	Self-efficacy	Supervisory support
Supervisory support	0.569	
Work-family Conflict	0.207	0.098

The structural model analysis was performed by using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 re-samples. The initial report presented the outcome of the direct correlation between supervisory support and WFC, followed by the subsequent result of the indirect hypothesis. The results of the direct hypothesis analysis are presented in Table 2. The analysis using structural equation modelling indicates that there is no significant relationship between supervisory support and WFC ( $\beta = 0.03, t = 0.627, p > 0.001$ ). Therefore,  $H_1$  is not supported. Supervisory support has a positive relationship with self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.528, t = 15.88, p < 0.001$ ), and self-efficacy has a negative relationship with WFC ( $\beta = -0.238, t = 5.992, p < 0.001$ ). This supports  $H_2$  and  $H_3$ .

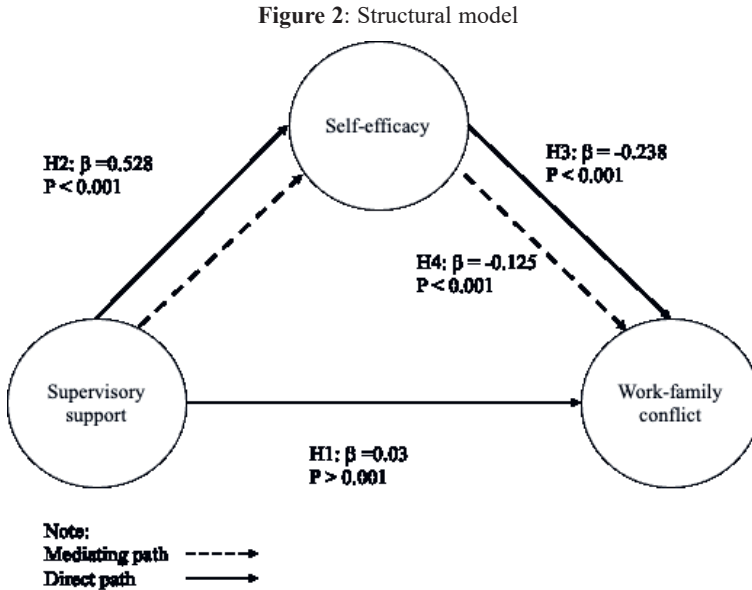
**Table 5:** Structural model analysis

Variables	$\beta$	t-value	p-values	Results
$H_1$ : Supervisory support $\rightarrow$ Work-family conflict	0.03	0.627	0.531	Not supported
$H_2$ : Supervisory support $\rightarrow$ Self-efficacy	0.528	15.88	0.00**	Supported
$H_3$ : Self-efficacy $\rightarrow$ Work-family conflict	-0.238	5.992	0.00**	Supported
$H_4$ : Supervisory support $\rightarrow$ Self-efficacy $\rightarrow$ Work-family conflict	-0.125	5.411	0.00**	Supported

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 5 shows that there is a relationship between supervisory support and WFC ( $\beta = -0.125, t = 5.411, p < 0.001$ ), and this relationship is influenced by self-efficacy. Therefore, the data strongly supports  $H_4$ . Nevertheless, the impact of supervisory assistance on the WFC pathway was

not statistically significant. Thus, the complete mediation of self-efficacy was taken into account (Hair et al., 2017).



Hair et al. (2017) identify four criteria for analysing structural models in PLS-SEM: coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), importance of the path coefficient, effect magnitude ( $f^2$ ), and predictive relevance. The study results presented in Table 3 demonstrate that the  $R^2$  values for supervisory support ( $R^2 = 0.05$ ) and self-efficacy ( $R^2 = 0.278$ ) account for merely 5% and 27.8% respectively of the WFC experienced by employees. Previous research identifies other factors such as role conflict (Latip et al., 2022), psychological capital (Yan et al., 2022) and work demands as well as family factors (Jayasingam et al., 2023; Neo et al., 2022) as significant contributors to WFC. These variables may interact with supervisory support and self-efficacy or independently affect employees' experiences of WFC.

Furthermore, the effect size ( $f^2$ ) quantifies the predictive significance of independent constructs on the dependent variable. The  $f^2$  values are 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, corresponding to minor, medium, and high effects, respectively (Hair et al., 2017). Hence, the impact of supervisory support ( $f^2 = 0.001$ ) and self-efficacy ( $f^2 = 0.043$ ) on WFC is minimal and significant, respectively. The predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) of the model was assessed using

cross-validated redundancy through blindfolding in PLS-SEM. All dependent variables have  $Q^2$  values more than zero ( $Q^2 > 0$ ), which indicates that the model has accurate predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017).

**Table 6:** Results of  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$  and  $f^2$

Variables	$R^2$	$Q^2$	$f^2$	Effect size
Supervisory support	-	-	0.001	Small
Self-efficacy	0.278	0.277	0.043	Large
Work-family conflict	0.05	0.047	-	

### 5.1 Common method bias (CMB)

Common method bias (CMB) is a critical concern in survey-based research (Hair et al., 2014; Podsakoff et al., 2003), and this study addresses it using both procedural and statistical approaches. Procedurally, anonymity and confidentiality were assured to respondents, a pilot test was conducted prior to data collection, and clear instructions were provided to facilitate survey completion (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Statistically, Harman's single-factor test was performed to assess common method variance. An exploratory factor analysis of all 56 items using SPSS version 25 identified seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, with the first factor accounting for 25.29% of the variance. Since this value is below the 50% threshold, CMB is not considered a significant issue in this study.

## 6. Discussion

The present study reveals that there is no substantial relationship between supervisory support and WFC. The finding aligns with the outcomes of prior investigations conducted by Sousa et al. (2018). A plausible explanation for this outcome is that supervisors in the public sector primarily focus on employees' work performance and are less involved in addressing family-related issues. As a result, the support provided by supervisors may not significantly influence employees' experiences of WFC.

Furthermore, public sector officers often benefit from flexibility in working hours, which may reduce their reliance on supervisory support to manage WFC. Some employees, depending on their positions, are allowed to select working hours that best suit their personal and family needs, enabling

them to balance work and family responsibilities more effectively on their own. Employees also employ strategies, such as effective time management and support from family members, to navigate their dual responsibilities.

This research provides further evidence that self-efficacy is inversely correlated with WFC, aligning with prior studies by Smoktunowicz et al. (2017). Employees with high self-efficacy, characterised by confidence in their ability to manage both work responsibilities and familial obligations, are more likely to mitigate WFC. According to COR theory, individuals with abundant personal resources tend to exhibit greater self-assurance and competence in fulfilling both work and family duties. De Clercq et al. (2018) argue that self-efficacy serves as an intrinsic resource that boosts self-motivation and task performance. Employees with high self-efficacy are better equipped to handle WFC, especially in managing everyday challenges. In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy may struggle with more significant, uncontrollable conflicts, leading to feelings of disappointment and helplessness.

This results revealed a favourable correlation between supervisory support and self-efficacy. According to Eisenberger et al. (2002), when employees experience support from their supervisors in the workplace, it leads to a sense of empowerment, thereby enhancing their confidence in performing professional tasks. Supervisors can practically foster self-efficacy among employees through several targeted initiatives. For instance, mentoring programmes can provide employees with guidance and personalised development, while regular feedback sessions create opportunities for constructive dialogue and skill refinement (McGilton et al., 2022). Workshops aimed at building self-efficacy, such as problem-solving or leadership training, can also equip employees with the tools they need to excel.

The results reveal that self-efficacy fully mediates the relationship between supervisory support and WFC. This suggests that self-efficacy plays a key role in this dynamic. According to COR theory, supervisory support enhances self-efficacy, helping employees protect their key resources. However, WFC is known to deplete resources (Singh et al., 2018). Halbesleben et al. (2014) find that self-efficacy acts as a psychological resource that helps employees cope with the negative effects of WFC. Employees with higher self-efficacy are more confident in managing challenges and protecting their resources.

### **6.1 Theoretical implications**

This study's findings have significantly contributed to the current literature on WFC and have enhanced our comprehension of the COR theory hypothesis. The current study has undertaken empirical research and has found that there is no statistically significant correlation between supervisory support and WFC. Although previous research has consistently shown a strong correlation between supervisory support and WFC (Roshan & Arulrajah, 2021), the results of this study suggest that supervisory support does not have an impact on employee WFC. This discovery suggests that the support offered by the supervisor is restricted to work-related issues and does not immediately enhance the employee's capacity to fulfil their family responsibilities. Talukder (2019) found that individuals who perceive a supportive work environment are more likely to successfully fulfil their given responsibilities and strengthen their dedication to the business.

This study shows that self-efficacy acts as both a precursor and a mediator in the relationship between supervisory support and WFC. Empirical evidence supports the conclusion that self-efficacy fully mediates the association between supervisory support and WFC. Previous research has continuously shown a strong connection between self-efficacy and WFC (Smoktunowicz et al., 2017). However, this study adds a new discovery by revealing that self-efficacy completely mediates the association between supervisory support and WFC. This study implies that those who have a high level of self-confidence in their ability to complete a specific task are likely to feel less stressed when trying to manage their work responsibilities and family commitments. According to Wayne et al. (2019), employees with self-efficacy are more likely to acquire additional resources that help them efficiently balance their job commitments and family obligations without depleting their resources.

The third notable contribution of this research is to offer empirical evidence on the mediating processes of self-efficacy in the studied relationship. Only a few studies have supported the claim that self-efficacy is positively associated with WFC. As far as we know, there is currently no study that has investigated the function of self-efficacy as a mediator in the connection between supervisory support and WFC. Hence, the results of our study suggest that supervisory support does not have a significant influence on WFC. Therefore, it can be deduced that self-efficacy plays a crucial role

in reducing employee conflict that arises from the overlap of work and family duties in the workplace.

## **6.2 *Practical implications***

This study outlines various practical implications pertinent to multiple stakeholders in the public sector, including public service departments. It is essential for federal government organisations to focus the assessment of supervisors' leadership competencies and their demonstration of supporting behaviours in the workplace. Consequently, the execution of a thorough training programme and the incorporation of supportive behaviour in the performance evaluation process can promote the attainment of this goal. Moreover, targeted measures, such as mentoring programmes (Dodanwala et al., 2022; Obrenovic et al., 2020), periodic feedback sessions, and workshops, can be instituted to bolster employee self-efficacy. Mentoring programmes enable managers or senior workers to offer instruction, encouragement, and assistance for confidence enhancement to their teams. Moreover, courses centred on self-efficacy skills, including stress management (Latip et al., 2022), time management, and effective communication, can provide employees with the necessary tools to adeptly navigate work and family obligations.

Furthermore, it is significant that governmental bodies possess the ability to establish alternative work arrangements, which are particularly beneficial for a diverse workforce that includes dual-earner couples, single parents, and employees caring for ill or elderly relatives (Yildiz et al., 2021). The adoption of alternate work arrangements, including flexible hours, job sharing, and remote work programmes (Hui & Lee, 2024; Lee et al., 2023), may alleviate WFC faced by public sector employees. These efforts are anticipated to lessen the tension or reduce the conflict between professional and personal obligations by promoting a better balance between work and personal life.

## **6.3 *Limitation and suggestions for future research***

This research recognises multiple limitations. The study analysed the influence of supervisory support and WFC on self-efficacy via direct and indirect pathways, excluding other personal resources such as coping

behaviour, self-esteem, resilience, and optimism (Zakaria et al., 2018). Future study should investigate these elements to gain a more comprehensive grasp of the COR hypothesis's mediating role in personal resources. A key limitation of this study is its generalisability, as it focuses solely on public sector employees, limiting its applicability to the private sector. Future research should encompass diverse sectors and geographic regions, including international contexts, to validate and expand these findings.

Another limitation is the reliance on pre-pandemic data, which may not reflect the evolving dynamics of work-family conflict and supervisory support during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The shift toward home-based enterprises and remote work (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Spagnoli et al., 2020) has blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life. Research shows that family-supportive supervisory behaviours, such as emotional and instrumental assistance, help employees manage WFC (Crain et al., 2014). However, the pandemic introduced new challenges, including increased workloads and the heightened need to balance professional and household responsibilities, especially in remote work settings.

These observations underscore the necessity for future research to examine the interplay between remote work and supervisory assistance in relation to WFC and self-efficacy. A replication of this study in a post-pandemic situation would be beneficial, especially in elucidating how supervisory assistance can alleviate WFC in settings with indistinct work-family boundaries. Moreover, future research should aim to incorporate a broader range of predictors to improve the explanatory power of models examining WFC. Doing so will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics underlying WFC and offer more actionable insights for organisations to mitigate this conflict effectively. Investigating these processes within the public sector may yield more insights into the changing nature of work and its effects on employees' personal resources and general well-being.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study adds to the current body of research and improves our understanding of the relationship between supervisory support, self-efficacy, and WFC. The study's findings verified that self-efficacy serves as a pivotal mediator in the research model. Furthermore, it has been found that the

support provided by supervisors plays a crucial part in inspiring those with a strong belief in their own abilities to effectively manage the conflict between their job and home responsibilities. Thus, this study emphasises the importance for government organisations to recognise and value the need for creating a positive work environment and encouraging individual self-confidence. The factors possess the capacity to alleviate the degree of tension encountered by employees in balancing their career and family obligations.

### **CRedit author statement**

**Meor Rashidan Abdullah:** Conceptualisation, Design of methodology, Data collection/ curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Original draft preparation and editing

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