

The Relationship between Work-Family Conflict and Depression in Single Parents: Focusing on the Mediating Effects of Parenting Stress

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Abstract

This study confirmed that parenting stress mediated the relationship between work-family conflict and depression in single parents. To verify the research hypothesis, data from 137 single parents located in Jeollanam-do, Korea were analyzed. Research methods included analyses of descriptive statistics, correlations, and structural equation models using SPSS 17.0 and Amos 18.0. The results indicated a complete mediation of parental stress in the relationship between work-family conflict and depression in single parents. Based on these results, we suggest active intervention be implemented to improve the social welfare and policy directions that will reduce the depression of single parents.

Keywords: *Single parent, Work-family conflict, Depression, Parenting stress*

1. Introduction

Despite a significant correlation between work-family conflict and depression [3][4][9], there are limitations to understanding the contextual relationship between the two variables. In other words, while work-family conflict influences individual depression, there is a more direct, causal relationship within the relationship between work-family conflict and the depression of single parents. For example, one problem stemming from economic and housework activities—in other words, the work-family conflict—is parenting stress. The Ministry of Gender Equality & Family [8] provides important insight, reporting that single parents find it most difficult to be responsible for both mother and father roles. This causes parental stress due to engaging in both economic and parenting activities, otherwise known as the work-family conflict, which leads to parenting stress. Moreover, it can be gauged that depression increases when such parenting stress is not appropriately dealt with. Existing studies also support the relationship between work-family conflict and stress and between stress and depression. Nomaguchi and Johnson [10] asserted that work-family stress has a significant influence on the parenting stress, and Lee, Chun, Jeon, and Chung [7] reported that

Article history:

Received (July 01, 2016), Review Result (September 18, 2016), Accepted (October 22, 2016)

the parenting stress experienced by low-income mothers has a significant influence on depression.

The above literature suggests the need for research that addresses parenting stress as a mediating variable to better understand the relationship between work-family conflict and depression in single parents. In this context, this study examined the mediating effects of parenting stress in the relationship between work-family conflict and depression in single parent families. The results of this study are expected to provide the foundations for practical and policy-related considerations to decrease the depression experienced by single parents.

2. Materials & methods

This study addressed the mediating effect of parenting stress in the relationship between work-family conflict and depression in single parents. To this end, this study analyzed the data from 137 single parents residing in Jeollanam-do, Korea between March and July 2016. The data were analyzed using frequency analysis, reliability analysis, and structural equation model analysis using IBM statistics program SPSS 18.0 and Amos 19.0.

The measurement tools utilized in this study were as follows. To measure depression, this study utilized the Korean version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D), which was checked for validity by Chon, Choi, and Yang [2] and initially developed by Radloff [11]. The Korean CES-D is scored on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 = *very rarely* (below 1 day a week) to 4 = *almost every day* (5–7 days a week). The Cronbach's alpha for this tool was .936.

Work-family conflict was measured using the Multidimensional Measure of Work-Family Conflict developed by Carlson, Kacmar, and Wilham [1] and utilized by Kim [5]. This tool is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*. The Cronbach's alpha for this tool was reported at .956.

Lastly, parenting stress was measured using a panel study of Korean Children that was utilized by Lee [6]. This tool comprised a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*. This scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .939.

3. Results

The socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants are shown in Table 1: 59.1% were women; the largest age group was 40s (56.9%), followed by younger than 30s, (25.5%), and older than 50s (17.5%). Concerning participants' education, the majority had a high school education (63.5%), followed by university (19.0%), less than middle school (16.8%), and higher than graduate school (.7%). The largest employment type group was irregular workers (47.4%), followed by unemployed individuals (21.9%), other (16.1%), regular workers (10.9%), and self-employed (3.6%). Moreover, the number of children parents had was 2 (51.1%), 1 (24.1%), 3 (17.5%), and 4 or more (7.3%). Lastly, 75.2% of the participants reported that they were receiving government assistance.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics (N = 137)

Characteristic		Frequency (%)	Characteristic		Frequency (%)
Sex	Male	56 (40.9%)	Age group	30s or lower	35 (25.5%)
	Female	81 (59.1%)		40s	78 (56.9%)
				50s or higher	24 (17.5%)
Education level	≤ Middle school	23 (16.8%)	Employment type	Self-employed	5 (3.6%)
	High school	87 (63.5%)		Regular	15 (10.9%)
	University	26 (19.0%)		Irregular	65 (47.4%)
	Post-graduate	1 (.7%)		Unemployed	30 (21.9%)
				Other	22 (16.1%)
Number of children	1	33 (24.1%)	Government assistance	In receipt	103 (75.2%)
	2	70 (51.1%)		Not in receipt	34 (24.8%)
	3	24 (17.5%)			
	4 or more	10 (7.3%)			

Prior to the structural equation model analysis, we examined the goodness of fit of the structural model (Fig. 1): $X^2 = 16.951$ ($df = 11$, $p = .109$), $TLI = .978$, $GFI = .967$, $CFI = .988$, $RMSEA = .063$; as such, the sample data were deemed to be appropriate for the model's analysis. The standardized path coefficient between latent variables resulted in the following: work-family conflict → depression $-.137$ ($p = .058$), work-family conflict → parenting stress $.514$ ($p < .001$), parenting stress → depression $.627$ ($p < .001$). However, the work-family conflict → depression path did not indicate statistical significance. As such, a complete mediation effect by parenting stress was discovered in the relationship between work-family conflict and depression.

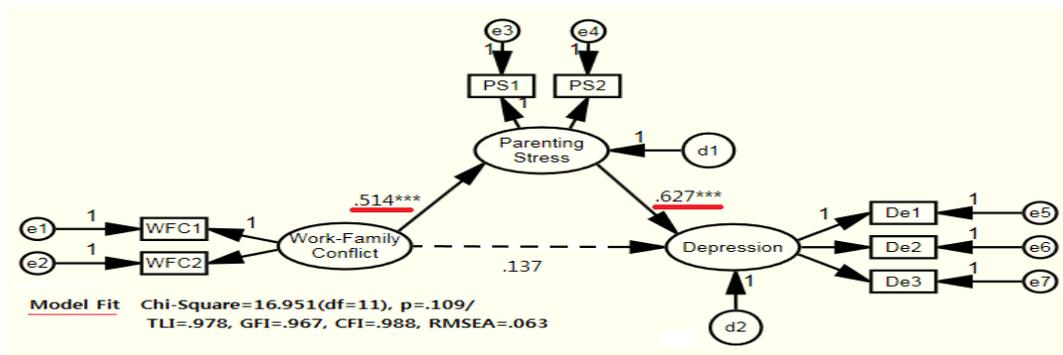


Figure 1. How parenting stress mediated the relationship between work-family conflict and depression.
 Note: path coefficient values were standardized.

4. Discussion

This study revealed that parenting stress mediated the relationship between work-family conflict and depression among single parents. The analysis revealed a complete mediation effect of parenting stress in the relationship between work-family conflict and depression among single parents. These results were in line with existing literature [7], [10]. However, these results differed from one existing study [3], which asserted that there was a significant influencing relationship between work-family conflict and depression. However, considering that the level of significance of the relationship between work-family conflict and depression was $.58$, it is difficult to conclude that the relationship between the two variables is not

significant. As such, further detailed studies are needed to examine the relationship between work-family conflict and depression.

Based on the above results, active interventions towards reducing the parenting stress of single parents need to be implemented by the government and social welfare sites. First, the government must provide long-term intervention addressing the dual roles of breadwinner and house worker, a common situation faced by single parents. To elaborate, if a single parent chooses to be the breadwinner and work, the government must provide housekeeping to relieve the single parents of their house work duties; on the other hand, if they choose to be at home with the child, the government must provide them financial assistance. In the short term, evening care facilities for children are required to resolve the issue of evening care for children, a problem that arises due to labor market participation by the single parents. Moreover, community-based case management systems should be implemented to support single parents, as well as active engagement in parental education and self-help groups.

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