

Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice for Couples to Reduce Work-Family Conflict and Promote Wellbeing: A Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial

Dual-earner couples with childrearing responsibilities experience higher levels of work-to-family conflict (WFC) compared to other workers. WFC, defined as the pressures and demands of work interfering with family life, can lead to marital conflict and various mental health issues, including burnout, psychological distress, and depression. More than half of dual-earner couples report experiencing WFC, yet many do not receive family-friendly support from employers, who often are not sympathetic to their needs. Given dual-earner couples represent a vastly growing family structure and their detriment impedes fertility rates and economic growth, identifying effective solutions to alleviate WFC and promote wellbeing is of paramount importance. This project aims to broaden the work-family research paradigm by not only focusing on the impairments of multiple role responsibilities but also incorporating the foundational elements of marital, family, and psychosocial functioning that contribute to thriving families. Drawing on the spillover-crossover model and mindfulness-to-meaning theory, we propose a mindfulness-based strengths practice (MBSP) program that combines mindfulness techniques with a focus on character strengths, applied to work-family context. This program is designed to help dual-earner couples mitigate the detrimental impact of WFC, enabling them to thrive within the work-family interface. MBSP encourages dual-earner couples to focus on the present moment, regulate thoughts and emotions, and leverage partner strengths to navigate challenges. We hypothesize that MBSP will have stress-attenuating, stress-buffering, and wellbeing-amplifying effects on dual-earner couples' WFC and wellbeing. A dyadic, three-group, four-wave, cluster randomized controlled trial will be conducted on 180 dual-earner couples with childrearing responsibilities (360 participants). Participants will engage in an 8-week MBSP web-based training program, which will be compared against an active control receiving a healthy lifestyle program and a waitlist control. Effectiveness will be evaluated through measures on individual and interpersonal mindfulness, character strengths, WFC, marital satisfaction, family satisfaction, and subjective wellbeing, assessed at pre-intervention, interim, immediately post-intervention, and 6-month follow-up. Linear mixed modeling will be conducted to compare changes in outcome variables across groups and structural equation modeling will test the hypothesized actor-partner interdependence model. Completion of this project will yield significant contributions: (1) theoretical advancements by determining whether mindfulness and character strengths effectively reduce WFC and promote wellbeing for individuals and their partners; (2) methodological contributions by generating experimental intervention data that rigorously test the theoretical assumptions underlying existing correlational research on WFC; and (3) practical implications through the development of a feasible, effective, and sustainable MBSP program tailored for dual-earner couples.