

## **WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT, COPING STRATEGIES, AND FLOURISHING: TESTING FOR MEDIATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*One way to reduce work-family conflict on the well-being is to have the ability to coping with demands effectively. Building upon the Cognitive Coping Theory and Self-determination Theory, this research tested the model combining of work-family conflict, coping strategies, and flourishing. The hypotheses are examined through correlation and path analysis of 173 adult learners using Partial Least Square (PLS) 3.0. Based on the findings, work-family conflict was found to have a significant relationship with problem-focused coping, emotional focused coping, and flourishing. The results further showed that the relationship between work-family conflicts and flourishing was mediated only by problem-focused coping. In general, the findings suggest organisations to offer emotional support and managerial understanding to their employed adult learners to help in reducing stress and lessening work-family conflict. Besides that, the management of distance education is crucial to improve student retention and completion rates, by providing emotional support to the adult learners until they survive the initial “online learning-curve hump.”*

**Keywords:** work-family conflict, coping, well-being, adult learners, online learning

### **INTRODUCTION**

Enrolment in online university courses has been steadily rising in the past few years. Allen and Seaman (2014) have reported that in the United States, students enrolling in a minimum of one online university course have increased (1.6 million

in 2002 to 7.1 million in 2012). On the other hand, in Europe, the increase of students taking online courses was 15%–20% in 2012 (Carlsen et al., 2016). Looking at Asia, this region boasts the highest number of adult open and distance learners in the world; there are more than 70 open universities and an increasing number of dual-mode providers (Jung, 2011). This increase occurred due to the Internet providing quick access to an immense supply of resources and allowing saving time and cost in managing teaching. Not only that, online learning attracts learners because it is flexible and convenient.

Online learning positively affects students, like providing more access to educational opportunities; nonetheless, low student retention is still a big issue in online courses and programmes regardless of the worldwide growth of online and distance education (DE) (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter, 2018). As explained by Ekstrand (2013), this situation can create problems like affecting educational planning and the value of investment in distance online learning by learners, educational institutions, corporations, and government agencies. Additionally, the dropout rate for online courses is presumed to be 10%–20% more compared to traditional courses (Carr, 2000; Frankola, 2001). Quitting online courses and online programmes is a persistent and common challenge in online learning (Hart, 2012; Park & Choi, 2009). Su and Waugh (2018) reported that negative factors like stress and poor management skills are usually noted as the causes for low retention and completion rates in online courses.

Harrell and Bower (2011) and Bunn (2004) mentioned that individual characteristics can be applied to determine the perseverance of online students. Majority of online students tend to be part-timers (Ivankova & Stick, 2007), live outside the campus, employed full time, and are usually adults with families (Bocchi et al., 2004). Even though the flexibility and convenience of online programmes attract students (Bocchi et al., 2004), the profile of employed adult learners is typically unlike those enrolled in a full-time programme and attending an institution. Employed adult learners are usually older (Diaz, 2002) and tend to be geographically removed from the learning resources, information sources, learner peers, and tutors in comparison to their on-campus peers (Whittington & McLean, 2001). Not only that, full-time learners are generally seeking qualifications that will give them access to the working world, whereas adult learners do not. Instead, they are most often concerned with promotion or a change in career direction as they are already in the working world.

Scholars have investigated issues faced by employed adult learners engaged in online learning. These learners have been reported to do their assignments during their personal time because of workload pressures in their workplace and/

or Internet access problems at work. However, studying in their personal time can cause conflict and affect their home life and family, which consequently contribute to attrition statistics (Thalheimer, 2004). Kember (1989) explained that family circumstances like number and age of dependents, housing conditions, and the pressures of responsibilities such as earning to support the family, can all significantly affect an adult learner's decision to stop studying. Not only that, Kember reported that levels of income, gender, work demand, and geographic distance from the institution cause attrition. According to Netemeyer et al. (1996), work-family conflict is created due to participation in a work (or family) role which makes it hard to take part in the other role. This concurs with stress theory, whereby work-family conflict, as an inter-role conflict, is a form of stressor or demand that each person goes through. At times, this situation is explained as work interfering with family and vice versa. In line with Lee et al. (2018), work-family conflict was shown to lower job satisfaction, life satisfaction, work performance, and organisational commitment, while raising job stressors and depression, burnout, absenteeism, and intent to turnover.

Adult learners do experience stress and feel conflicted when they try to balance their work and study priorities. They feel isolated because of a lack in collegial or organisational support and a perceived lack of control and frustration. Such situations can cause adult learners to not complete their course, albeit performing well in their distance studies (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) had described coping as thoughts and behaviours used to deal with internal and external demands of circumstances deemed as stressful by individuals. On the other hand, Furman et al. (2017) described coping as a process that forms in the context of a circumstance seen as personally significant and exceeding one's resources for coping. This behaviour is crucial for those employed in the paid labour force while at the same time juggling the roles of paid worker, partner, parent, homemaker, and including face-to-face students pertaining to their experiences of work-family conflict and well-being.

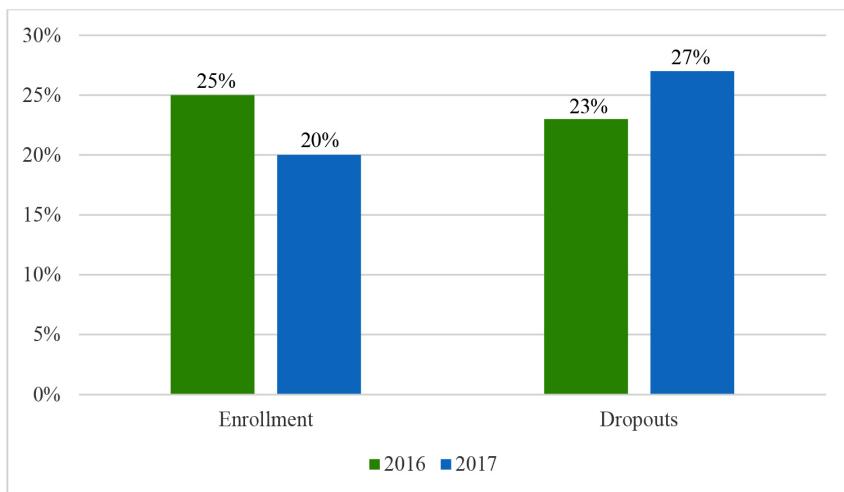
Moreover, complicated and multifaceted learning tasks like managing the technology, course website, course content, and becoming an online learner can potentially increase the learner's anxiety level. Learners feel overwhelmed with the unfamiliar modes of learning and experience despair along with a sense that online learning is difficult, causing the total shut down of the learning process. When facing such a situation, the only option seemingly available would be to drop out. Successfully going through this experience strongly hinges on learners' relevant abilities, circumstances, motivations, and personal attributes. Reschly et al. (2008) mentioned that one likely connection through which positive emotions are associated with well-being is via their effect on coping. Their results showed

that positive emotions were mediated by coping behaviour. In general, if a learner frequently experiences positive emotions, it will broaden his or her thinking and actions, resulting in continuous personal resources, and at the same time, there could also be broadening and growth in robust coping resources (Fredrickson, 2004). Therefore, coping resources will boost functioning during and recovery from experiencing difficulties, thus, creating well-being and future positive emotions. Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) performed a comprehensive review of the literature on positive emotions. They reported that even though evidence associating positive emotions to success across life domains, like marriage, friendship, earnings, work performance, and physical health exists, evidence that positive emotions causes delayed success was also noted.

## **Problem Statement**

Diaz (2002) opines that attrition amongst adult learners, especially those employed, as less of an indication of academic non-success by the learner, and probably more of their decision based on a realistic assessment of opposing personal or work-related priorities. This author's view is based on online learners being more mature, better educated, and for those already working, better able to plan regarding continuing or dropping the course according to key academic and life experiences. Nonetheless, being persistent and completing their studies is crucial for students. Albeit managing various conflicts, adult learners can put effort towards coping with work and family demands and achieve flourishing. Based on statistics from one of the public universities in Malaysia, the percentage of enrolment has dropped from 25% to 20% (as compared to 2016) while the percentage of dropout increased from 23% to 27% (see Figure 1).

This scenario has revealed that quitting online courses remains a big challenge in this particular university. The emphasis of research on DE in Malaysia has been on: (1) students' online reading strategy (Jusoh & Abdullah, 2015); (2) challenges in learning English by adult distance learners (Sai et al., 2013); (3) exploration of social presence in online forums (Zaini & Ayub, 2013); (4) effects of an online writing platform on students' performances in narrative writing (Annamalai et al., 2013); and (5) adult distance education students' personality styles (Mat Zin, 2012). However, not much is known regarding the interaction between work-family conflict, coping strategy, and flourishing (well-being). As such, it is worthwhile to conduct a study to investigate if work-family conflict influences flourishing among adult learners, as well as examine whether coping strategies mediate the relationship between work-family conflict and flourishing among adult learners.



*Figure 1.* Enrolment vs. dropout rate (full-coloured illustration is available in digital version)

### Significance of the Study

Looking at theoretical contribution, this study aimed to give empirical support for the proposed theoretical relationships based on the research framework. Furthermore, the aim was also to reduce the knowledge gap by examining the mediation by coping strategies in the relationship between work-family conflict and flourishing among adult learners in DE within the Malaysian context.

Next, as a practical contribution, this study's goal was to suggest several workplace policies for organisations to support their workers, who are adult learners enrolled in online learning programmes, in matters concerning their promotion or change in career direction. Apart from that, preferably, employers can create work-life balance policies and programmes for adult learners to manage work and family conflicts. This current research is part of a larger series of studies conducted to aid in the development of a persistence model that can assist DE institutions. The research outcomes will benefit the management of Malaysian DE institutions in strengthening their strategies to lower attrition, and enhance retention, completion, and graduation rates of adult learners.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Work-Family Conflict

The primary domains for most adults are work and home. In an ideal world, these two domains exist side by side and do not spill over into one another and create complications. However, not everybody experiences this. For example, issues from one domain could spill over into the other, causing work-family conflict (Howard et al., 2004). Work-family conflict is a type of inter-role conflict whereby the pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in certain aspects. This means participation in the work (family) role becomes harder due to participation in the family (work) role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict can be bidirectional. Work issues can spill over into the home domain and vice versa (Brough et al., 2005; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Work issue is defined as work-based conflict while home issue is family-based conflict. Furthermore, work-based conflict can be categorised into time-based, behaviour-based, and strain-based conflict (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Time-based conflict happens when work's time demands, or scheduling interferes with or causes conflict in the home domain. Next, behaviour-based conflict occurs when work roles (e.g., impose rules) and home roles (e.g., being nurturing) oppose one another and create problems and conflict. Finally, strain-based conflict takes place when work demands and tensions follow a person home and negatively affect the quality of home life, leading to strain and conflict (Brough et al., 2005; Netemeyer et al., 1996).

### Coping Strategies

Coping is the behavioural and cognitive efforts used to manage stressful and demanding situations. Considered an individualised three-fold process, coping is identified by thoughts and actions specific to the stressful encounter. Contextual in nature, coping strategies are a composite of the situation and the individual's assessment of the situation and his or her capability in managing it is secondary. Coping is not evaluated as being good or bad, right or wrong, successful or unsuccessful, but only as the actions done to handle the situation. Building on this past work, Folkman and Lazarus (1980), and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) collapsed the original typology into two dominant forms of coping strategies namely problem-focused and emotion-focused. First, problem-focused coping involves resolutely facing sources of stress such as trying to actively find a solution for the problem or change the situation. Second, emotion-focused coping involves evading causes of stress through withdrawal and escapism (e.g., via fantasy or substance abuse). Whereas problem-focused is used to proactively modify the situation to lessen or remove the stress if possible (e.g., fight, compromise), emotion-focused

coping is applied to manage the stressful emotions and decrease their impact by changing feelings and opinions about the situation (e.g., meditation, exercise, distraction). Although problem-focused coping is a more adaptive coping strategy (Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 2012; Shin et al., 2014), individuals have been observed using both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping styles in different aspects of the same situation.

## **Flourishing**

The difference between the hedonist and eudaemonist approaches concerning well-being has been discussed in a more integrative manner by a number of prominent academics in the field. Kashdan et al. (2008) mentioned that these two approaches are not entirely dissimilar while suggesting that no pertinent benefits exist pertaining to following the common trend, which comprises separating them into two independent dimensions. Similarly, Henderson and Knight (2012) suggested that these conceptions “should not be treated categorically, nor considered mutually exclusive, but rather that hedonia and eudemonia operate in tandem, in a synergistic fashion” (p. 201). In addition, Seligman (2011) tried to combine the two conceptions by assuming that hedonist and eudaemonist approaches signify different but vital aspects of the general well-being construct. Seligman (2011) integrated several elements from both approaches and formed a new flourishing theory of well-being. Therefore, the term “flourishing” was propounded to explain the desirable state in which both hedonist and eudaemonist components of well-being concurrently exist within a person (Huppert & So, 2013). Regardless of the increasing interest in the concept of psychological flourishing, purpose-made instruments are not available to evaluate it (Diener et al., 2010; Hone et al., 2014; Huppert & So, 2013). According to Diener et al. (2010), flourishing is defined as to high levels of well-being. He developed a new psychometric scale to assess psychological flourishing, i.e., the Flourishing Scale (FS). This new concise tool was created based on current theories of human flourishing and psychological and social well-being like universal human psychological needs, meaning, and purpose in life, involvement in activities, optimism, positive social relationships, self-esteem, and feelings of competence (Diener et al., 2010). As such, FS can correspond more closely to non-hedonistic philosophical theories of well-being and precisely represent the items, including content, which goes beyond psychological well-being.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

This study’s theoretical framework was based on Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) Cognitive Coping Theory. Stress is identified as a transaction between an

individual and his or her environment in this theory, in which the individual's perception of a stressful event is the mediating variable of how he or she can handle it. Stressful transactions (i.e., harmful, threatening, or challenging) need coping, which will manage the level of distress (emotion-focused coping) or handle the problem causing the distress (problem-focused coping). Irrespective of the coping mechanism selected, there will be an event outcome that is either favourable, unfavourable or there will be no resolution. Positive or negative emotional responses are formed due to the event outcomes. This model foresees that problem-focused coping will reduce problems that might cause stress.

Cognitive Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and Self-determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2002) both theorised that fulfilling three psychological needs, i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness, is crucial to the personal growth of a person. Autonomy is related to student's ability to participate in specific activities of his or her own choosing, whereas competence is wanting to effectively interact with one's environment. On the other hand, relatedness concerns the need to be recognised by and associated with other people. SDT posits that when students can choose to take part in a specific activity, they would have a better chance of finishing it.

## **Development of Research Framework and Hypotheses**

Coping involves responding after cognitive appraisal that something is taxing a person's resources (e.g., a challenge, danger, or loss). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), people perform the primary appraisal process when they face a potential stressor, in which they ask themselves if a situation will threaten their well-being, followed by a secondary appraisal process, whereby they evaluate their capability to successfully manage the stressor. In problem-focused coping, strategies are employed to directly tackle the source of stress; it is inclined to be dominant when people believe they can take action about a stressor. Carver et al. (1989) stated that active coping is the core of what Lazarus and Folkman (1984) termed as problem-focused coping. Acting coping comprises initiating direct action to lessen a stressor, devising the steps to improve the stressors, and suppressing opposing activities to pay attention to the stressors (Carver et al., 1989). Commonly, problem-focused types of coping are positively associated with psychological consequences (Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996). Such coping behaviours have been linked to better well-being (Brown et al., 2005; Ingledew et al., 1997; McCrae & Costa, 1986), reduced family-work conflict (Kirchmeyer, 1993; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Rotondo et al., 2003), and lesser work-family conflict (Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003). In Brink and De La Rey's (2001) study, a positive relationship with work-family conflict was reported. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress

theory elucidates how active coping can diminish strain. When steps are taken to efficiently manage one's work (e.g., preparing daily to-do lists) and family (e.g., planning meals in advance) responsibilities, the person will have more time and energy for both family and work activities. Problem-focused coping can also give an individual a sense of control over the stressor, which is a crucial predictor of health and well-being and lower levels of strain (Bond & Bunce, 2003; Loscocco & Spitz, 1990; Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996).

H<sub>1</sub>: Work-family conflict is positively related to problem-focused coping

Passive coping is a form of emotion-focused coping, comprising behavioural disengagement (stop trying to handle a stressor), mental disengagement (cease thinking about the goal the stressor is linked with), and denial (pretend that the stressor does not exist) (Carver et al., 1989). Usually, passive coping is negatively associated with well-being (Brown et al., 2005; Ingledew et al., 1997; McCrae & Costa, 1986) and positively with work-family and family-work conflicts (Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Rotondo et al., 2003) since a person is not actively trying to lower the stressors he or she is facing (e.g., work and family duties that collide in the context of resource availability). For instance, when a nanny hired by a person resigns, the person could display mental disengagement (e.g., fantasising about better times) rather than actively searching for another nanny, causing increased levels of strain. Moreover, passive coping applied at home and work could possibly decrease the time available for work and family-related duties, leading to more time-based work-family conflict. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained that emotion-focused types of coping, especially denial and avoidance, can harm a person's health by not allowing him or her to realistically tackle an issue that can be alleviated using problem-focused coping. Additionally, emotion-focused coping can cause strain by being unable to stop harmful conditions in the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Therefore, it can be assumed that when confronted with competing work and family demands, emotion-focused coping behaviours interfere with more effective forms of coping, causing increased levels of strain and time-based work-family conflict.

H<sub>2</sub>: Work-family conflict is positively related to emotional-focused coping

Even though coping strategies are different in terms of types of stressors, majority of the previous studies only noted the differences between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Baker & Berenbaum, 2007). Problem-focused coping concerns attempts made to change the problematic person-environment transaction, while emotion-focused coping is described as trying to control upsetting emotions (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Folkman

et al. (1987) compared 75 younger and 161 older couples' methods of coping and discovered that it was more probable for younger adults to apply problem-focused coping, while older adults were more inclined to employ emotion-focused coping. In coping and health literature, it is a common suggestion that emotion-focused coping strategies can cause mental health issues like depression and anxiety (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007). Penley et al. (2002) performed a meta-analysis on the relationships between health outcomes and problem- and emotion-focused coping. In their study, there were certain irregular findings regarding the relationships between numerous emotion-focused coping strategies and health outcomes. However, they also determined that problem-focused coping was always positively correlated with overall health outcomes. Nevertheless, other scholars (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Cox & Ferguson, 1991) proposed that conceptualising coping into two categories could be oversimplified and lead to unreliable results of their relationships with physical and mental health outcomes.

H<sub>3</sub>: Problem-focused coping is positively related to flourishing

H<sub>4</sub>: Emotional-focused coping is negatively related to flourishing

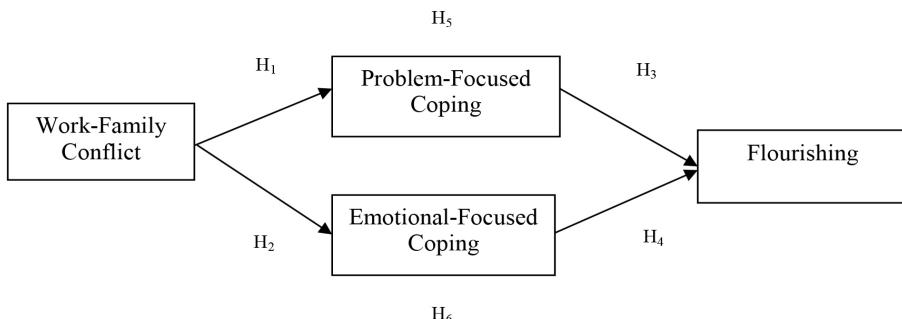
Looking at work-family conflict family-work conflict, and well-being, the SDT proposes that married working women who see themselves as a perfect home manager and attempt to place all their attention and commitment to their careers, are in general autonomously motivated to perform their multiple roles (as a wife, mother, and employee) well (Prendergast, 2008). Thus, these women will try out many coping strategies to accomplish their responsibilities at both home and work to balance their lives. Based on the SDT, the more the imbalance between work and family, the more ways to manage it will be searched to enjoy better well-being. Various strategies are applied by adults to handle work-family conflict and family-work conflict. In a qualitative study by Gregory and Milner (2009), a group of managers were interviewed, and they disclosed that their coping strategies encompass many sacrifices and some of them claimed to be "juggling" in life. Other forms of coping strategies include focusing on work, work role definition, apply or snub work-life policies and arrangements, taking time off, socialising, being problem-oriented, avoiding, adapting, forming work-non work walls, obtain family support, and delegating (Shaffer et al., 2011).

H<sub>5</sub>: Problem-focused coping mediates the relationship between work-family conflict and flourishing

H<sub>6</sub>: Emotional-focused coping mediates the relationship between work-family conflict and flourishing

## Research Framework

Figure 2 shows the proposed research framework, which consists of an independent variable (work-family conflict) and dependent variables (flourishing), and mediating variables (coping strategies).



*Figure 2. Research framework*

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

Schwarz and Oyserman (2001) stated that in the field of behaviour and psychology, requesting people to answer questions or react to statements regarding what they like or how they behave appears to be the most favoured approach. Moreover, asking people directly for information concerning a construct is well established in social sciences research (Schwarz & Oyserman, 2001). The individuals themselves are the best source of information about themselves. As such, to find out what they believe in or how they are feeling, we just need to ask them. Howard (1994) reported that self-report is an appropriate method to examine human characteristics. Thus, self-report approach was employed in this research. All the variables were measured at the individual level.

### Sampling Technique

This research used purposive sampling technique. This technique confines to specific type of people who can provide the desired information, either because they are the only ones who have it or conform to some criteria set by the research

(Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In this study, the researcher has selected the students who conform to the inclusion criterion as follows:

1. At least in second year of the programme;
2. Already married; and
3. Having at least one child

These inclusion criteria would help to increase the likelihood that work-family conflict was a relevant issue to the individual and to increase accuracy in response to the work-family conflict questions.

## **Procedure and Participants**

The researcher utilised undergraduates' online students from one of the public universities in Malaysia which offers an online programme. Specifically, 215 students to send a link to the survey at least two weeks. The online students were full-time working adults and fill up the survey themselves. In the web page, we impressed upon the online students that their participation was voluntary, and their responses would be kept confidential. Students received extra credits in their courses for completed and returned surveys. The data were then reduced further by selecting for the analysis only those respondents who were married or who had at least one child (i.e., eliminating respondents who both were single and had no children). This was done to increase the likelihood that work-family conflict was a relevant issue to the individual and to increase accuracy in response to the work-family conflict questions. This selection process yielded a sample of 173 individuals whose responses were used in the analyses. Data was gathered for two weeks in April 2018. The total sample of 173 individuals consisted of 61% females and 39% males. The respondents were 100% at least in second year of their programme, 100% were married, and 100% having at least one child. The average age was 37 years, while the average tenure with their organisation was six years. The respondents were all employed in full-time jobs. Varying professions and organisational levels were represented (operational, supervisory, managerial) from many different organisational types (manufacturing, service, government/non-profit).

## **Measures**

All items were measured using 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Respondents' work-family conflict were used using ten items developed by Netemeyer et al. (1996). Sample items included, "The demands

of my work interfere with my home and family life" and "Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties." Cronbach's alpha in the present study was 0.80. Respondents' coping strategies were used using 17 items developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Specifically, coping strategies has two dimensions: (1) problem-focused coping (nine items); and (2) emotional-focused coping (eight items). Sample items included, "I come up with several alternative solutions to the problem" and "I say to myself this is not real." Cronbach's alpha in the present study was 0.83. Respondents' flourishing was used using eight items developed by Diener et al. (2009). Sample items included, "I lead a purposeful and meaningful life" and "People respect me." Cronbach's alpha in the study was 0.86.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics of the Latent Constructs

The mean value of all the four latent variables range from 3.681 to 4.281 with the standard deviation ranging from 0.763 to 0.896 on a 5-point Likert-type scale (see Table 1). However, mean values of all the variables were found to be above the midpoint 2.50. Problem-focused coping scored the highest with a mean value of 4.281, while emotional-focused coping showed the lowest mean value at 3.681. The dispersion values reported through standard deviation indicates that the highest value showed by flourishing at 0.836, and lowest value showed by work-family conflict at 0.763.

Table 1  
*Results of descriptive analysis*

Variables	No of items	Mean	Std. dev.
Work-family conflict	10	3.900	0.763
Problem-focused coping	9	4.281	0.780
Emotional-focused coping	8	3.681	0.816
Flourishing	8	3.714	0.836

### Common Method Variance

Harman's single factor order test was performed using SPSS by running an exploratory factor analysis to determine the common method bias. The unrotated factor solution was examined to find out the distinct factors that might elucidate the variables' variance. Based on the factor analysis, four factors emerged and from the total variance of 65.9%, the factor with the highest variance accounted

for only 29.3%. Hence, this finding exposed that the first factor accumulated less than 50% of the total variance explained. Furthermore, no indication was present for a single factor emerged from the exploratory factor analysis or a single variable that accounted for most of the covariance among items. Thus, according to the guidelines in Podsakoff et al. (2003), common-method variance (CMV) was not an issue in this study.

### **Assessment of Measurement Model**

To evaluate the measurement model, two types of validity were scrutinised, namely convergent and discriminant. Convergent validity is generally determined via examination of indicator loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). In this study, as recommended in the literature, the indicator loadings and composite reliabilities were both higher than 0.7, whereas AVE was higher than 0.5 (see Table 2).

After convergent validity, the discriminant validity was tested (see Table 3). However, the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) has been criticised to be undependable in spotting the absence of discriminant validity in typical research conditions (Henseler et al., 2015). Thus, the authors have recommended a different method, based on the multitrait-multimethod matrix, to examine discriminant validity by applying the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations. They revealed the excellent performance of this approach through a Monte Carlo simulation study.

Therefore, in this research, discriminant validity was examined using this new approach and the findings (see Table 4). Two ways to use heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) to evaluate discriminant validity exist, i.e., as a criterion or as a statistical test. In the first way, if HTMT value is bigger than HTMT.85 value of 0.85 (Kline, 2011) or HTMT.90 value of 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001), then there is a discriminant validity issue. On the other hand, the second way is based on Henseler et al. (2015) to test the null hypothesis ( $H_0: \text{HTMT} \geq 1$ ) against the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1: \text{HTMT} < 1$ ) and if the confidence interval value is one (i.e.,  $H_0$  holds) a lack of discriminant validity is implied. As listed in Table 4, all the values were more than the HTMT.90 (Gold et al., 2001) and HTMT.85 (Kline, 2011) values. Furthermore, the HTMT Inference showed that the confidence interval value was not 1 for any of the constructs, signifying that discriminant validity has been determined.

**Table 2**  
*Result of the measurement model*

Constructs	Items	Loadings	AVE <sup>a</sup>	CR <sup>b</sup>
Work-family conflict	1. The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life. 2. The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil family responsibilities. 3. Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my job puts on me. 4. My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfil family duties. 5. Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities. 6. The demands of my family or spouse/partner interfere with work-related activities. 7. I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home. 8. Things I want to do at work don't get done because of the demands of my family or spouse/partner. 9. My home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime. 10. Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties.	0.857 0.908 0.873 0.877 0.926 0.917 0.908 0.889 0.887 0.890	0.823	0.933
Problem-focused coping	1. I come up with several alternative solutions to the problem. 2. I make a plan and follow it. 3. I give my best effort to do what is necessary to solve the problem. 4. I work on changing policies that caused the situation. 5. I decide what I think should be done and explain this to the people who are affected. 6. I try to work more efficiently. 7. I meet with my manager and discuss the situation which caused the stress. 8. I take things one step at a time. 9. I talk with people who are involved in the situation which caused the stress.	0.904 0.910 0.862 0.868 0.809 0.849 0.843 0.839 0.894	0.800	0.923

(continued on next page)

Table 2: (continued)

Constructs	Items	Loadings	AVE <sup>a</sup>	CR <sup>b</sup>
Emotional-focused coping	1. I watch TV.	0.860	0.778	0.913
	2. I hope a miracle will happen.	0.892		
	3. I avoid being with people in general.	0.825		
	4. I refuse to believe it has happened.	0.836		
	5. I have fantasies about how things will work out.	0.867		
	6. I eat snacks.	0.861		
	7. I avoid being in the situation if I can.	0.858		
	8. I say to myself this is not real.	0.908		
Flourishing	1. I lead a purposeful and meaningful life.	0.881	0.855	0.947
	2. My social relationships are supportive and rewarding.	0.938		
	3. I am engaged and interested in my daily activities.	0.922		
	4. I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others.	0.914		
	5. I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me.	0.913		
	6. I am a good person and live a good life.	0.877		
	7. I am optimistic about my future.	0.841		
	8. People respect me.	0.827		

Notes: AVE = (summation of the square of the factor loadings) / {(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}; CR = (square of the summation of the factor loading) / {(square of the summation of the factor loading) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}

Table 3  
*Results of discriminant validity analysis*

Constructs	(1) Work-family conflict	(2) Problem-focused coping	(3) Emotional-focused coping	(4) Flourishing
(1) Work-family conflict	0.685			
(2) Problem-focused coping	0.450	0.228		
(3) Emotional-focused coping	0.576	0.539	<b>0.414</b>	
(4) Flourishing	0.636	0.559	0.533	<b>0.526</b>

Table 4  
*Results of HTMT*

Constructs	(1) Work-family conflict	(2) Problem-focused coping	(3) Emotional-focused coping	(4) Flourishing
(1) Work-family conflict				
(2) Problem-focused coping	0.465 CI. <sub>.90</sub> (0.302, 0.548)			
(3) Emotional-focused coping	0.630 CI. <sub>.90</sub> (0.431, 0.638)	0.709 CI. <sub>.90</sub> (0, 0.558)		
(4) Flourishing	0.366 CI. <sub>.90</sub> (0.552, 0.811)	0.562 CI. <sub>.90</sub> (0.332, 0.618)	0.485 CI. <sub>.90</sub> (0.422, 0.732)	

### Assessment of Structural Model

Upon confirmation of measurement model, structural model was assessed to test the conceptual model consisting six different theoretically driven hypotheses. Several parameters including coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) and path coefficient were estimated, as suggested by (Hair et al., 2010).  $R^2$  assesses model's predictive power (Hair et al., 2010).  $R^2$  values 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 are respectively described as substantial, moderate and weak (Hair et al., 2014).

The results of the present study suggest that work-family conflict explained 31.9% of the variance in problem-focused coping, and 31.0% of the variance in emotional-focused coping. Meanwhile, work-family conflict, problem-focused coping, and emotional-focused coping explained 69.9% of the variance in flourishing. Using the benchmarked values suggested by Hair et al. (2010), therefore all the exogenous

variables in the present study were able to substantially explain the variance in the endogenous variables (see Table 5).

Four hypotheses were postulated for the direct relationship between work-family conflict and the coping strategies (problem-focused coping and emotional-focused coping). Out of four hypotheses tested, the results showed that only three hypotheses were supported. Specifically, work-family conflict was found to have a significant relationship on both problem-focused coping ( $\beta = 0.484, p < 0.01$ ), emotional-focused coping ( $\beta = 0.352, p < 0.01$ ). Also, problem-focused coping was found to have a significant relationship on psychological flourishing ( $\beta = 0.116, p < 0.01$ ). However, contrary to the expectations, the results suggest an insignificant relationship between emotional-focused coping and flourishing ( $\beta = 0.057, p < 0.01$ ). As such, H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>3</sub> were supported, whereas H<sub>4</sub> was not supported.

Table 5  
*Results of hypothesis testing (direct effect)*

No	Hypothesis	Std beta	Std. error	t-value	Decision	R <sup>2</sup>
H <sub>1</sub>	Work-family conflict --> Problem-focused coping	0.484	0.065	7.440***	Supported	0.319
H <sub>2</sub>	Work-family conflict --> Emotional-focused coping	0.352	0.076	4.646***	Supported	0.310
H <sub>3</sub>	Problem-focused coping --> Flourishing	0.116	0.053	2.182**	Supported	0.699
H <sub>4</sub>	Emotional-focused coping --> Flourishing	0.057	0.074	0.009	Not Supported	

Notes: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$  (2.33), \*\* $p < 0.05$  (1.645), \* $p < 0.1$  (1.28) (based on one-tailed test)

Two mediating hypotheses were tested using indirect effect approach with bootstrapping method (1000 resamples) as recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2004; 2008). The results of indirect effect indicate that problem-focused coping significantly mediates the relationship between work-family conflict and flourishing ( $\beta = 0.082, p < 0.01$ ). However, contrary to the hypotheses, emotional-focused coping did not significantly mediate the relationship between work-family conflict and flourishing ( $\beta = -0.006, p < 0.01$ ). Overall, the results of indirect effect suggest that H<sub>5</sub> was supported and H<sub>6</sub> not supported (see Table 6).

**Table 6**  
*Results of hypothesis testing (indirect effect)*

No	Hypothesis	Std beta	Std. error	t-value	Decision
H <sub>5</sub>	Work-family conflict * problem-focused coping --> Flourishing	0.082	0.049	1.676**	Supported
H <sub>6</sub>	Work-family conflict * emotional-focused coping --> Flourishing	-0.066	0.060	1.086	Not Supported

Notes: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$  (2.33), \*\* $p < 0.05$  (1.645), \* $p < 0.1$  (1.28) (based on one-tailed test)

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the connection between work-family conflict and flourishing among adult learners. Besides that, coping strategies were studied to find out its mediating effect on the relationship between work-family conflict and flourishing among adult learners.

Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis findings revealed that work-family conflict had a significant relationship with both problem-focused and emotional-focused strategies. From this finding, it is possible to claim that the work-life balance policies are in line with what is demanded by the adult learners. For instance, the adult learners have been permitted to adjust their work schedule in order to accommodate their study needs such as taking a few hours of time off to meet the supervisor. They might be given the few options by their supervisors by either allowing them to have considerable leeway in setting arrival and departure times at work as long as they meet the minimum requirement of working eight hours per day. Similarly, the adult learners need flexible working hours to send their children to school or baby sitter. Their supervisor might have considered to change their working hours from 10 am to 6 pm, instead of working from 9 am to 5 pm. Hence, H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> were supported.

Additionally, it was determined that problem-focused coping had a significant relationship with flourishing. Based on this result, it can be assumed that the adult learners managed to take control of their stress as well as come up with several alternative solutions to the problem. Besides, the adult learners are believed to work more efficiently when they picked the most important task, arranged the time management to different task and managed to follow it. As a result, adult learners have become competent and capable in the activities that are important to them. This scenario would lead towards increasing their level of flourishing. This

finding is in line with Yusoff et al. (2011), training first year medical students on coping strategies will help to improve their stress or conflict condition. Similarly, Abdullah et al. (2010) reported that students' overall adjustment and academic achievement was found to be significantly predicted by their coping strategies. Therefore, H<sub>3</sub> was supported.

On the contrary, this study determined that emotional-focused coping did not have a significant relationship with flourishing. This result could be due to reason that the organisations do not establish managerial support groups and to consider adult learners' specific situation. Adult learners typically possess limited control over changing their day-to-day job responsibilities. Hence, without the emotional support and peer/superior/managerial understanding of job contexts and personal situations would be challenging for them to handle job-related stress and improve their well-being. It is possible to assume that the adult learners don't have a proper channel in their organisation for them to share problems, idea, or interests within the colleagues. The working culture might not be helping them to deal with stress and conflicts. For instance, the supervisors and colleagues might not be supportive in term of giving advice and providing suggestions. Thus, H<sub>4</sub> was not supported.

The mediation analysis produced mixed results. Firstly, it was shown that only problem-focused coping significantly mediated the relationship between work-family conflict and flourishing. It is possible to assume that the adult learners have successfully employed their problem-focused coping strategy in managing stress or conflicts. For instance, once they have decided what should be done, they meet and explain their plan to their supervisor or manager as well as discuss the situation which caused their stress. This type of coping strategy indicates that the adult learners managed to plan for the next course of action or looking for information by referring to the counsellor. Supported by Lee and Syaid (2017) and Al-Dubai et al. (2011), Malaysian students are not exempted from meeting the counselling or seeking for psychological service to manage their stress and conflict. As such, H<sub>5</sub> was supported.

On the other hand, mediation analysis also revealed that emotional-focused coping did not significantly mediate the relationship between work-family conflict and flourishing. This result could be due to adult learners not attempting to regulate the emotions the situation causes, for instance, through relaxation, meditation, or by avoiding information. Such strategies are employed when they want to evade the situation. Nonetheless, adult learners did not get emotional support and understanding when they had to face specific problems from work and life. Therefore, H<sub>6</sub> was not supported.

## **CONCLUSION**

Empirical support for the proposed research framework between work-family conflict and flourishing (well-being) mediated by coping strategies amongst adult learners has been provided in this study. The theoretical contribution was from the context of the mediating variable, namely coping strategies.

The first practical contribution is that organisations are recommended to improve the work-life balance policies and programmes that concern problem-focused coping for the adult learners. This could be done by identifying the adult learners, analyse their characteristic and the specific barriers they face in participating in adult learning programme. In addition, the organisation could design a policy to ensure the skill training which covered on how to balance work and studies, the adult learner's life, and the adult learner's working life. The employed adult learners within a positive reinforcement to espoused organisational work-life balance policy will probably face less stress and work-family conflict, resulting in improved well-being.

The next contribution was the proposal of some practical solutions to the management of Malaysian DE to decrease the dropout rate. These suggestions were related to emotional-focused coping like actively supporting, encouraging, gently coaxing, and following up on struggling learners, which will aid in retaining wavering learners in the online programme. To support learners until they can overcome the initial “eLearning learning-curve hump” could require a potentially high level of resource and effort from the course facilitators and programme administration staff. However, the benefit would be the number of learners dropping out at the early stage will reduce. When the learners master the system and gain confidence, they will more likely complete the course.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

There were several limitations in this study. One limitation was that the data were self-reported, thus, Harman's single factors test was carried out to approximate the possible threat to the interpretation of the findings. Next, since this was a cross-sectional research, the findings could vary if it was done using a longitudinal approach. Lastly, since a low number of sample and participants were used in this research, it would be beneficial if future researchers applied a comparative method to examine the interaction between work-family conflict, coping strategies, and flourishing (well-being) amongst employees in different Malaysian open distance learning (ODL) institutions. Future research should consider conducting in-depth interview and focus group sessions with adult learners to investigate if other

factors could enhance the display of work-life conflict, coping strategies, and flourishing in the private higher education sector in Malaysia. Longitudinal studies are known to provide strong inferences and better evidences in any research model; thus, this study can benefit by being conducted in a longitudinal approach. For instance, researchers can carry out a comparative study between public and private universities to determine the more dominant culture. Additionally, future studies can find out if the outcomes of this study can be generalised beyond the higher education institutions within the Malaysian context.

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