

Study on the Relationship Among Perception Changes to Pre COVID-19, Leisure Satisfaction, Work-Family Conflict, and Life Satisfaction of Married Working Women

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Abstract

The outbreak of COVID-19 has significantly impacted various facets of individuals' lives, including perceptions, leisure activities, work-family balance, and overall life satisfaction. This study aims to explore the intricate relationships among changes in perceptions due to COVID-19, leisure activity satisfaction, work-family conflict, and life satisfaction of married working women. Employing path analysis, we examined a dataset of 1,973 married working women drawn from the 8th Korean Women and Families Panel Survey. The findings indicate that while changes in perception associated with COVID-19 did not directly affect leisure activity satisfaction and life satisfaction, they did significantly decrease work-family conflict, indirectly leading to heightened life satisfaction. Additionally, leisure activity satisfaction emerged as a mitigating factor for work-family conflict, contributing to enhanced life satisfaction. These results emphasize the importance of understanding the interplay between external factors, individual perceptions, and well-being, offering insights for devising tailored strategies. The study holds significance in guiding policies and interventions to enhance the quality of life for married working women in the context of evolving pandemic challenges.

Keywords: COVID-19, Perception Changes, Leisure Activity, Work-Family Conflict, Life Satisfaction, Married Working Women

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence and global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 brought unprecedented challenges and disruptions to societies around the world. Beyond its direct health impacts, the pandemic has triggered significant changes in various aspects of individuals' lives, from their daily routines to their perceptions and overall well-being. One area of interest is the interplay between the alterations in individuals' perceptions since the pre COVID-19 era, their leisure activity satisfaction, work-family conflict, and overall life satisfaction.

Perceptions play a pivotal role in shaping how individuals experience and respond to changes in their environment [1]. The pandemic has prompted shifts in people's perceptions of risk, safety, social interactions, and personal priorities [2]. These changes have had cascading effects on how individuals allocate their time, engage in leisure activities, manage their work and family responsibilities, and ultimately evaluate their life

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satisfaction. As such, understanding the complex relationship between these variables is crucial for comprehending the multifaceted impact of the pandemic on individuals' lives.

Leisure activities have long been recognized as a significant contributor to individuals' well-being [3]. Engaging in enjoyable and fulfilling leisure pursuits not only offers a means of relaxation and stress relief but also contributes to a sense of accomplishment and life satisfaction. However, the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, such as lockdowns and social distancing measures, have altered the landscape of leisure activities, leading to changes in preferences, accessibility, and opportunities for engagement [4].

Additionally, the pandemic's disruption of work-family balance has been a major concern for many married working women [5]. Remote work, altered school schedules, and caregiving responsibilities have blurred the lines between professional and personal life, making it challenging to maintain a harmonious equilibrium between work and family obligations. This upheaval has the potential to impact individuals' leisure experiences and overall life satisfaction, as the ability to effectively manage and allocate time to various domains of life becomes more complex.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore the intricate relationships between the changes in perceptions since the pre COVID-19 era, leisure satisfaction, work-family balance, and life satisfaction. By analyzing data obtained from 2021 Korean Longitudinal survey of women and families, this research seeks to shed light on how individuals' experiences and evaluations of their lives have evolved in the wake of the pandemic. The findings from this study are anticipated to provide valuable insights into strategies that can be employed to enhance well-being and life satisfaction in the face of ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic and its aftermath.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Lazarus and Folkman's 'Stress and Coping Theory' emphasizes the role of cognitive appraisal in individuals' responses to stressful situations [6]. The pandemic-induced changes have led to heightened stress levels as individuals navigate uncertainty, health concerns, and changes in daily routines [7]. How individuals perceive and appraise these stressors can influence their choices in leisure activities, work-family balance strategies, and overall life satisfaction. The pandemic has disrupted traditional leisure patterns, leading to a reevaluation of leisure pursuits and potentially altering the relationship between leisure satisfaction and overall life satisfaction [8].

Numerous previous studies provide support for the notion that leisure activities can have a positive impact on both work-family balance and individuals' overall well-being [9] [10]. These studies suggest that leisure activities can serve as a means of alleviating work-related stress and fostering stronger family bonds. Additionally, when individuals are able to manage their schedules and utilize leisure time flexibly, it has been argued that this can lead to improved work-family balance, increased job and family satisfaction. Furthermore, research highlights that engaging in leisure activities that evoke positive emotions can contribute to better physical health, and this positive impact on health can extend to fostering work-family balance [11].

The pandemic's impact on work-family dynamics may influence overall life satisfaction. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the conflict between work and household responsibilities for married women [12]. Measures like remote learning, telecommuting, and restrictions on outdoor activities have increased the time families spend at home, leading to more household chores and intensified childcare burdens [13]. This has heightened stress and conflicts within families. A survey by the Korea Women's Development Institute in 2020, titled "COVID-19 and Family Life," revealed that women, especially dual-income married women, faced more difficulties with childcare responsibilities compared to men [14]. On the other hand, research exploring the link between perceptions shaped by COVID-19 and work-family conflict and depression among married working women suggests that those more sensitive to pandemic-induced perception changes exhibited a relatively modest rise in depression stemming from work-family conflict, compared to their less sensitive counterparts [15]. This implies that women perceiving higher COVID-19 risks might have embraced flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, and the challenges of work-family conflict as natural aspects of fulfilling their roles as mothers and wives. These divergent research outcomes collectively underscore that the

pandemic has magnified work-family conflict challenges for married women. Shifting perceptions due to the pandemic appear to shape how women confront and manage such conflicts, with their level of risk perception influencing the adoption of flexible work strategies and their interpretation of familial roles.

3 METHODS

3.1 Study Participants

This study examined 1,973 employed married women from a pool of 9,175 households participating in the 8th Korean Women and Families Panel Survey. The survey, initiated by the Korean Institute of Women's Policy Studies in 2006, has been tracking representative women aged 19 to 64 through eight waves until 2020. Notably, the 8th wave introduced new items to gauge the influence of COVID-19 on women's lives.

3.2 Research Instrument and Validity

Perception changes compared to pre-COVID-19 were measured using an 8-item scale. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ('Not at all') to 5 ('Very much'), indicating higher scores for greater perception changes. The reliability (Cronbach's α) of this scale was .869. Items included 'Increased fear about the future', 'Heightened distrust of people around me', 'Higher tendency to rely on myself', 'Increased focus on hygiene and health', 'Greater fear of diseases', 'Increased reliance on family', 'Heightened perception of the need for adhering to social norms', and 'Increased awareness of nature conservation and ecosystems'.

Leisure Activity Satisfaction was assessed using two items. One asking about the sufficiency of leisure activity over the past year, and the other inquiring about overall satisfaction with leisure activities. Each item was measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very insufficient) to 7 (very sufficient).

Work-Family Conflict was measured using four items. 'Long working hours interfere with household life', 'Irregular working hours interfere with household life', 'Having a lot of housework makes it difficult to work at my job', and 'Satisfaction with spousal division of household labor.' These items were assessed on a 4-point Likert scale with reverse scoring, where higher scores indicated greater conflict. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) for this scale was .584.

Life Satisfaction was assessed with a single item asking about overall happiness in daily life. Respondents were asked to rate their happiness on a scale of 1 to 10, where higher scores indicated greater levels of happiness.

3.3 Data Analysis

The study employed SPSS Statistics 20.0 and Amos 21.0 for data analysis, including frequency analysis for participants' general characteristics, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis for major variables. Hypothesis testing was conducted using a path analysis model to derive results.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The participants' age distribution revealed that the majority were in their 40s (38%) and 50s (34%), while those in their 20s and 30s accounted for 11.4%. In terms of education, 26% had a university degree or higher, 17.3% graduated from a vocational college, and 56.7% had a high school diploma or lower, comprising over half of the sample. Regarding monthly income, 57.5% earned less than 2 million won, 37.9% earned between 2 million won and 4 million won, and 4.6% earned over 4 million won.

Table 1. General characteristics of subjects(N=1,974)

Variable	Category	Number	Percent
Age	20~39	226	11.4
	40~49	751	38.0
	50~59	677	34.3
	60 and above	320	16.2
Education	High school diploma and below	1,135	56.7
	Vocational college graduate	341	17.3
	University degree or higher	513	26.0
Monthly income	Less than 2 million won	1,135	57.5
	2 million~4 million won	749	37.9
	Over 4 million won	90	4.6

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Major Variables

Perception changes in relation to pre-COVID-19 were reported with a high average score of 4.07 on a 5-point scale. Leisure activity satisfaction showed a high average score of 8.33 in relation to a maximum score of 14. Work-family conflict, measured on a 4-point scale, had an average score of 2.09, while Life satisfaction, measured on a 10-point scale, exhibited an average score of 6.73. The skewness and kurtosis values, all of which were lower than 2 in absolute terms, indicated that the assumption of a normal distribution was satisfied (refer to table 2 for details)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of major variables (N=1,974)

Variable	Mean(SD)	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perception changes to pre COVID-19	4.07(.57)	1.25	5.00	-.51	.32
Leisure activity satisfaction	8.33(1.87)	2	14	-1.06	.701
Work-family conflict	2.09(.55)	1.00	4.00	.06	-.31
Life satisfaction	6.73(1.29)	2	10	.11	.02

4.3 Correlation Analysis of Major Variables

Perception changes to pre COVID-19 and Work-family conflict ($r = -.058$, $p < .05$), Leisure activity satisfaction and Work-family conflict ($r = -.191$, $p < .01$), and Work-family conflict and Life satisfaction ($r = -.224$, $p < .01$) showed negative correlations. On the other hand, Leisure activity satisfaction and Life satisfaction ($r = .314$, $p < .01$) exhibited a positive correlation. The correlation coefficients among the main variables were all below 0.7, indicating the absence of multicollinearity issues.

Table 3. Pierson's correlation analysis (N=1,974)

Variable	1)	2)	3)	4)
1) Perception changes to pre COVID-19		-.016	-.058*	-.010
2) Leisure activity satisfaction	-.016		-.191**	.314**
3) Work-family conflict	-.058*	-.191**		-.224**

4) Life satisfaction	-0.10	.314**	-.224**
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*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<.001

4. 4 Path Analysis Model Results for Research Hypotheses

This study employed a saturated model with 0 degrees of freedom, indicating a perfect fit to the data. As a result, it was unnecessary to assess model fit indices [16]. Referring to Figure 1 and Table 4, it can be observed that Perception changes to pre COVID-19 significantly exerted a negative influence on Work-family conflict ($\beta = -.061$, CR = -2.760, $p < .01$). Leisure activity had a significant negative effect on Work-family conflict ($\beta = -.192$, CR = -8.680, $p < .001$). Moreover, Leisure activity had a significant positive impact on Life satisfaction ($r = .281$, CR = 13.123, $p < .001$). Work-Family Conflict demonstrated a significant negative influence on Life satisfaction ($r = -.171$, CR = -7.985, $p < .001$). However, Perception changes to pre COVID-19 did not significantly affect Leisure activity ($r = -.016$, CR = -.716, $p > .05$) and Life satisfaction ($r = -.016$, CR = -.736, $p > .05$). Therefore, Hypotheses 2, 4, 5, and 6 were accepted.

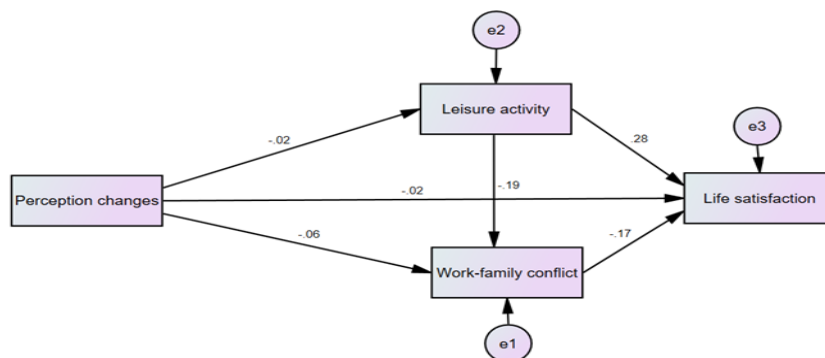


Figure 1. Path Analysis Model Results

Table 4. Path Analysis Model Results (N=1,974)

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta(B)$	SE	CR (p)	Results
H1	Perception change -->Leisure activity	-.016(-.053)	.074	-.716	N
H2	Perception change--> Work-family conflict	-.061(-.059)	.021	-2.760**	Y
H3	Perception change --> Life satisfaction	-.016(-.035)	.048	-.736	N
H4	Leisure activity --> Work-family conflict	-.192(-.057)	.007	-8.680***	Y
H5	Leisure activity --> Life satisfaction	.281(.194)	.015	13.123***	Y
H6	Work-family Conflict --> Life satisfaction	-.171(-.400)	.050	-7.985***	Y

By consulting Table 5, we find that the direct effect of Leisure activity on Life satisfaction is 0.281. Moreover, we can infer that the indirect effect of Leisure activity on Life satisfaction through Work-family conflict is $(.192) \times (.171) = .033$. Therefore, the overall (total) effect of Leisure activity on Life satisfaction is 0.314.

Table 5. Total, Direct, Indirect Effects

Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total; effect
Leisure activity --> Work-family conflict	-.192***		-.192***
Work-family conflict --> Life satisfaction	-.171***		-.171***
Leisure activity --> Life satisfaction	.281***	.033**	0.314**

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<.001

5. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted with the aim of providing foundational data for the establishment of practical strategies to support the well-being and enhance the life satisfaction of married working women, by examining the complex relationships between the changes in perception due to COVID-19, leisure activity satisfaction, work-family conflict, and life satisfaction.

The major findings of this study are as follows. Firstly, the changes in perception due to COVID-19 did not directly have a significant impact on leisure activity satisfaction and life satisfaction. However, it significantly reduced work-family conflict and indirectly increased life satisfaction. These results demonstrate that despite the increased domestic labor time and caregiving burdens for married women during the COVID-19 crisis, the way in which they perceive and respond to the crisis can lead to different outcomes in terms of work-family conflict and life satisfaction [14]. These results suggest that married working women who have a higher awareness of COVID-19 risks might have taken a more proactive approach to reducing work-family conflict by embracing flexible work arrangements while naturally fulfilling their roles as mothers and wives.

Furthermore, similarly to findings from other studies [9][10], leisure activity satisfaction reduced work-family conflict and increased life satisfaction. This result underscores the importance of recognizing the significance of leisure activities and utilizing leisure time appropriately, which not only helps in relieving the burden of work-family conflict but also enhances individual well-being and quality of life. In essence, maintaining a balance between work, leisure, and family life is a key factor in enhancing overall quality of life.

In conclusion, the significance of the research findings lies in elucidating the intricate interplay between the impact of COVID-19-induced shifts in perception among married working women and their subsequent implications on leisure activities, work-family conflict, and life satisfaction. This study underscores that even in times of crisis, individual perceptions and responses can yield diverse outcomes in terms of leisure, work-family dynamics, and overall satisfaction. Furthermore, the results provide valuable insights for understanding the influence of the crisis on married working women's roles and the potential proactive measures they may adopt to mitigate work-family conflict while fulfilling their responsibilities. The findings also emphasize the pivotal role of leisure activities in alleviating work-family conflict and enhancing life satisfaction, reiterating the importance of recognizing and effectively utilizing leisure time. Lastly, by confirming the adverse impact of work-family conflict on life satisfaction, the study underscores the need for policies and initiatives aimed at supporting work-family balance and flexible work conditions for married working women. These findings offer practical guidance for crafting real-world policies and strategies, guiding towards enriched well-being and a harmonious life for married working women.

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