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# Buffering Role of Perceptions of Work-Life Balance on the Relationship Between External Obligations and Health

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# Buffering Role of Perceptions of Work-Life Balance on the Relationship Between External Obligations and Health

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## ABSTRACT

The study proposed that perceptions of work-life balance (WLB) among employed college students is a critical antecedent of student health. We also predicted and found evidence suggesting that how students perceive their life demands influences WLB, with WLB being enhanced for those perceiving life-demands positively and being undermined for those with negative views of their life demands. In this online study of 119 working college students, we found that WLB completely mediated the effect of external obligations on health. Specifically, health outcomes were higher among employed students when they perceived their external obligations as providing balance in their lives.

## INTRODUCTION

Working college students are experiencing increased demands as they attempt to work an increasing number of hours while often juggling a fulltime course load. According to King and Bannon (2002) almost 50% of college students work 25 or more hours per week, resulting in a weekly investment of 60 to 80 hours on school and work. Consequences of these high demands include decreased academic performance (Markel & Frone, 1998), increased tendency to experience depression (Butler, Grzywacz, Bass, & Linney, 2005) and higher levels of alcohol consumption (Butler, Dodge, & Faurote, 2010). In contrast, Work-Facilitation Theory (Butler, 2007) has demonstrated that work and school demands are not always in conflict with one another; thus, at times, work can facilitate school success.

This study extends these two theoretical frameworks by suggesting that employed student roles, beyond those of work and school, be examined to determine whether these external role obligations (e.g., volunteering, extracurricular activities, civic engagement) serve as demands or resources.



## HYPOTHESES

**Hypothesis 1:** Increased external obligations will be associated with decreased WLB

**Hypothesis 2:** Increased external obligations will be associated with decreased health

**Hypothesis 3:** WLB mediates the relationship between outside obligations and health

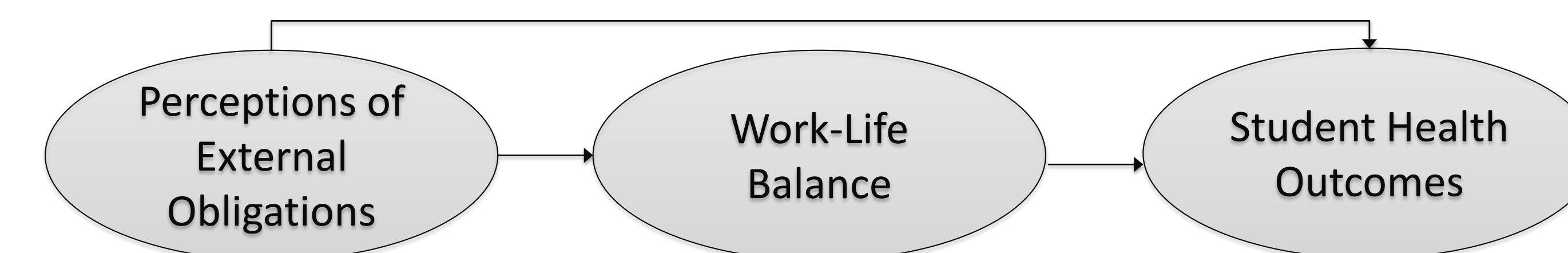
## METHOD

### Participants

- 119 working college students
- 88 female (73.95%)
- 113 white (95%)
- Worked and average of 21.68 hours per week (SD=11.12)
- 106 full-time students (89.4%)

### Variables

- Perception of External Obligation: A 4-item measure of external obligations was created for this study with ( $\alpha = .82$ ).
- WLB: The 5-item Hill, Hawkins, Ferris and Weitzman's (2001) Work-Life Balance Scale ( $\alpha = .83$ )
- Health: SF-20 (Ware, Sherbourne, & Davies, 1992), a shortened version of the SF-36



## RESULTS

**Hypothesis 1:** An increase in external obligations was associated decreased WLB,  $\beta = .220$ ,  $p = .019$

**Hypothesis 2:** An increase in external obligations was associated with decreased health,  $\beta = .346$ ,  $p < .001$

**Hypothesis 3:** WLB mediated the relationship between outside obligations and health Sobel = 2.78,  $p = .005$

## DISCUSSION

From a conservation of resources model (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) WLB appears to serve as a resource that can ameliorate the negative effects of excessive outside obligations on health. Therefore, one way in which schools and employers can take to improve the health of their students and employees is to help their students and employees achieve WLB. Future research needs to delve into how other outside obligations affect WSC and if all obligations decrease health or if different, types of obligations have different influences on health.

## REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

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