

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES, AND WORK–LIFE BALANCE: EXAMINING GENDER DIFFERENCES

Hammad Ali Khan^a, Inam-ur-Rehman^b, & Dr. Asbah Zia^c

^a BS Psychology Student, Department of Psychology, DHA Suffa University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan. Email: hammadalikhan10@gmail.com

^b Lecturer, Department of Psychology, DHA Suffa University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan. Email: inam.rehman@dsu.edu.pk

^c Associate Professor, Department of Allied and Health Sciences, Iqra University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan, Email: dr.asbah@iqra.edu.pk

* Corresponding Author: Dr. Asbah Zia, Associate Professor, Department of Allied and Health Sciences, Iqra University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan. Email: dr.asbah@iqra.edu.pk

KEYWORDS:

Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Management Styles, Work Life Balance, Gender Differences

CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Khan, H. A., Inam-ur-Rehman., Zia, A. (2026). Emotional intelligence, conflict management styles, and work–life balance: examining gender differences. Pakistan Journal of Positive Psychology, 3(7), 183-190.

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the present study was to find the relationship among emotional intelligence, conflict management styles and work-life balance of organizational employees. It also sought to see if there are gender differences in these psychological and work-related factors. The following hypotheses were formulated: Emotional intelligence will positively and significantly link with conflict management styles and work-life balance of employees. Further, it was hypothesized that work-life balance of employees would be significantly related to conflict management styles. Also, there would be difference in emotional intelligence, conflict management and work-life balance among employees across gender. The type of research design used was quantitative with correlational method. A sample of N=163 organizational employees across various public, private and semi-private organizations in Karachi, Pakistan. The subjects were 100 male and 63 female, obtained by convenience sampling. Three standardized questionnaires were used: the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10), the Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH) and Hayman's Work-Life Balance Scale (WLB). Participants were approached from different public and private organizational settings in Karachi. Participants were told what the study was about and they were asked to participate in the study freely. The research instruments were administered with informed consent. The measures were completed by participants in English after which the obtained data were entered and analyzed via SPSS. The result found significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and the conflict management styles ($r = .589$, $p < .001$). Emotional intelligence, however, did not associated significantly with work-life balance ($r = .141$, $p = .072$) and the conflict management styles did not associate significantly with work-life balance ($r = -.026$, $p > .05$). There were also no significant differences for emotional intelligence ($p = .335$), conflict management styles ($p = .258$), or work-life balance ($p = .127$) between the two gender groups.

I. INTRODUCTION

As a social environment, the workplace demands employees to handle aspects of their work with others, from managing their relationships to balancing competing demands and dealing with emotional experiences while interacting with them. Differences in expectations, communication, work roles, and pressures may lead to conflict between workers and affect workers' psychological health and their capacity to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Arslan, 2018). Emotional intelligence, conflict management styles and work-life balance are significant

psychological and organizational constructs for the understanding of employees' functioning in this context. Contrary to this, emotional intelligence involves the skills needed to identify, understand, manage, and appropriately employ emotions, while conflict management styles are the behaviors that employees exhibit during conflict situations (Mayor et. al, 2008). Work-life balance is the ability of a person to manage his or her work and personal responsibilities without letting the demands in one area of life overpower the other. The relationship between these constructs could thus be especially relevant to understanding employee reactions to job problems and their concern for personal health (Guest, 2002). Emotional intelligence was first described by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as the ability to perceive and manage one's own and others' emotions, discern among emotions and apply emotional information to guide thinking and action. Emotionally intelligent people, therefore, are more likely to perceive emotional signals, manage their emotional responses, acknowledge other people's emotions, and respond to interpersonal situations. These skills have a special significance in the organizational workplace where workers need to communicate, cooperate, mediate conflict, and deal with challenging situations. The theoretical basis for the present study is then mainly from Salovey and Mayer's ability model of emotional intelligence (1990). The suggestion is that emotional information could be perceived, understood, regulated and used to facilitate adaptive behavior. In the workplace, these skills can aid workers to handle conflict situations in a positive way instead of becoming impulsive, or turning away from challenging situations. The theoretical framework used in the present thesis also suggests that emotional intelligence can impact on conflict management as well as on employees' coping styles in relation to the demands of the job.

People have different goals, values, personalities, responsibilities, and perceptions about the situations at work, which makes conflict inevitable in an organization. Conflict management styles are the patterns of response people have to conflict between people (Thomas, 1992; Himes, 2008). Staff who have a stronger emotional awareness may be able to recognise the level of emotion in a conflict and choose appropriate action to de-escalate the situation. Awareness of others' emotions can aid in empathy, communication, negotiation, and collaborative problem solving; emotional regulation can help an individual to control anger, frustration, and anxiety; (Thakore, 2013). Emotional intelligence, therefore, might be especially relevant in the role of employees in resolving conflict in the workplace in a positive way or in a negative way (by avoiding it or by forcing it). There is empirical support for the relationship between EI and conflict management (Goleman, 2005). A recent study conducted in Pakistan by Ahmed et al., (2024) found a correlation between emotional intelligence and conflict management, emphasising the significance of emotional intelligence in managing conflicts effectively. In a similar manner, Ali et al (2023) found emotional intelligence to be positively associated with conflict management when they conducted a study on 215 secondary school heads in KPK. Studies amongst employees in Pakistan have also revealed that emotional intelligence can act as a buffer in the negative emotional processes that can lead to task and process conflicts becoming relationship conflict. A study conducted on 462 workers of various organizations in Pakistan indicated that those who were emotionally intelligent workers were more capable of managing negative emotions of workplace conflict. These results indicate that EQ is a potential psychological tool in coping with interpersonal issues in the workplace.

The second construct that is important is work-life balance, which relates to how well people are able to balance the demands of their professional and personal lives. Work-life balance is particularly important in work settings that are demanding which include long working hours, deadlines, workload and interpersonal pressures, which can limit the time and psychological resources available for personal responsibilities (Crompton & Lyonette, 2008). Staff who have developed the ability to control their emotions are likely to be better able to handle stress in the workplace and reduce the likelihood of having negative emotional experiences at home. Emotional intelligence can, therefore, help in keeping a psychological distance between work and personal life (Khallash & Kruse, 2012). Theories also have significance for conflict management and work-life balance. However, the conflict that does not get resolved in the workplace can create emotional stressors that carry over outside of working hours and another approach that can be taken to reduce interpersonal conflict is by solving the problem and compromising (Jang & Zippay, 2011; Ueda, 2012). On the other hand, a prolonged avoidance or forcing can prevent that the conflict related stress can be resolved, and may instead become chronic and spill over into work life. The present thesis also suggests that conflict management styles can affect work-life balance as workplace conflict can spill over into emotional distress in the personal life. By analysing the relationship between conflict management and emotional intelligence, a wider context of factors related to employees' work-life balance can be obtained (Kim, 2014).

In this context of Pakistan, this investigation is of great importance. The conflict management and emotional intelligence have been discussed in some specific occupational groups such as teachers, heads of school and managers of university libraries in existing Pakistani studies. For instance, Yasin and Khalid investigated the conflict management styles in the Pakistani professionals, and they also took into account gender differences in conflict management. The study conducted by Kashif and his colleagues (2021) explored the correlation among conflict management styles and organizational environment among the university teachers of Pakistan. Most of the current literature from Pakistan has been written on specific occupations or on individual relationship between the variables in workplace and not on the emotional intelligence, conflict management patterns and work-life balance among the working people belonging to different types of organizations. Another gap relates to gender gaps. Gender may be relevant because of the potential difference in social expectations, family roles and responsibilities, interpersonal roles, and work roles that employees may have. Gender has been a part of existing research in Pakistan regarding conflict management but the evidence is limited and inconsistent across the occupational context. Importantly, there is comparatively limited evidence exploring the differential functioning of male and female employees at baseline with regard to emotional intelligence, conflict management styles, and work-life balance in a diverse sample of employees from Pakistan. Thus, having gender as a comparative dimension could be more comprehensive of employee functioning.

The present study aimed to bridge this gap by investigating the association between emotional intelligence and conflict management styles and work-life balance of the employees of an organization. The reason for the current research is that it is important to understand the relationship between the emotional capacities of an employee and their attitude towards workplace conflict and how this relationship affects work-life balance. While some studies have been conducted in emotional intelligence and conflict management areas, there is limited research that has explored the intersection of the three concepts (emotional intelligence and conflict management and work-life balance) in a diverse organizational sample in Pakistan. Moreover, a cross analysis of gender differences can provide useful clues as to whether the psychological and work experiences are different among male and female employees. The results of such studies could help organizational psychologists, HR professionals, managers and policymakers design employee support programs, train employees on emotional intelligence, create healthy conflict-management programs and implement healthy work-life integration. This study thus falls under the ambit of organizational psychology as it has integrated three interrelated aspects of employee functioning in the context of Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management styles of employees?
2. What are the factors that contribute to the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-life balance among employees?
3. Is there a significant relationship between conflict management styles and work-life balance of employees?
4. Is there any significant difference in emotional intelligence, conflict management styles, and work-life balance between men and women?

Research Objectives

1. To explore the correlation between emotional intelligence and conflict management styles of employees.
2. To explore the correlation between emotional intelligence and work-life balance among workers.
3. To investigate the correlation between conflict management styles and work-life balance of the employees.
4. To explore gender differences in emotional intelligence, conflict management styles and work-life balance for employees.

Hypotheses

- H1: Emotional intelligence will positively and significantly influence the conflict management style of employees and their work-life balance.
- H2: Work-life balance of employees would be significantly related to conflict management styles.

H3: There would be difference in emotional intelligence, conflict management and work-life balance among employees across gender.

II. METHOD

Participants

A correlational research design was used in the present study to find the association between study variables. A sample of 163 organizational employees from public, private and semi-private organizations in Karachi, Pakistan were selected as sample. Convenience sampling was used for the recruitment of the participants as per their relevance to the objectives of the study. The sample included 100 males and 63 females. Representatives from various industries and work roles were recruited from the education, health care, corporate, banking and tertiary service sectors, with different representatives from each sector. All the participants both male and female were those who were working in an organization in Karachi, Pakistan and had working experience of at least six months. There were a number of invitations sent out to staff from public, private and semi-private agencies and various occupations. Those who were unemployed, self-employed, freelancer, interns and trainee were not considered.

Measures

Participant's background and work related characteristics were obtained by using the demographic form. Information provided age, gender, marital status, family structure, years of work experience, job position, organization sector/type and average working hours per week. **[I]** Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10): BEIS-10 (2010) is a 10 item composite measure of emotional intelligence, which includes five dimensions: appraisal of own emotions, appraisal of other's emotions, regulation of own emotions, regulation of other's emotions, and utilization of emotions. The responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) and higher scores represent higher levels of emotional intelligence. The internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$) was reported as good. **[II]** Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH): The DUTCH (2001) is comprised of 20 items which measure 5 conflict management styles: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Responses are scored on a 5-point scale from 1 "Not at all" to 5 "Very much". Reliability of DUTCH scale is about $\alpha = .75$ were reported in previous studies, and the full scale in this sample had excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .923$). **[III]** Hayman Work-Life Balance Scale (HWLBS): Hayman's (2005) works 15 item scale measures the work-life balance on three factors: work interference with personal life, personal life interference with work and work/personal life enhancement. Items are measured on a 5 point likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Scores higher mean more positive work-life balance. This scale showed good internal consistency reported $\alpha = .87$.

Procedure

Data was gathered by conducting an online survey on Google Forms. The survey began with an introduction to the study which included the purpose and objectives of the study and an informed consent statement. All participants were told that participation was voluntary, their responses would be kept confidential, and they could discontinue from the study at any time without any consequences. The potential participants were reached via LinkedIn and WhatsApp, and via professional networks. A link for the online survey was sent to potential organizational employees. The demographic form was completed first, followed by the BEIS-10, DUTCH and Hayman's Work-Life Balance Scale. The questionnaire took about 10–15 minutes to complete, in general. The data collected were then checked for completeness and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). All the data were kept securely, and were only used for academic research. The data collected were analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). To describe the demographic characteristics and study variables, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used. The internal consistency of the three standardized measures was determined by calculating cronbach's alpha coefficients. The hypothesized relationship of the variables in this study was tested by computing Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Independent-samples t-tests were performed for the differences between male employees and female employees in terms of emotional intelligence, conflict management styles and work-life balance.

III. RESULTS

Table I: Demographic Characteristics of Organizational Employees (N = 163)

Variables	Category/Statistic	n	%	M (SD)
Age	20–29 years	58	35.6	31.84 (6.72)
	30–39 years	71	43.6	
	40–49 years	27	16.6	
	≥50 years	7	4.3	
Gender	Male	100	61.3	
	Female	63	38.7	
Marital Status	Single	88	54.0	
	Married	75	46.0	
Family Structure	Nuclear	91	55.8	
	Joint	72	44.2	
Work Experience	6 Months - 1 Year	24	14.7	
	1 - 3 years	48	29.4	
	3 - 5 years	52	31.9	
	6 - 10 years	24	14.7	
	> 10 years	15	9.2	
Job Position	Entry level	72	44.2	
	Middle level	57	35.0	
	Senior level	34	20.9	
Organization Sector	Public	49	30.1	
	Private	92	56.4	
	Semi-private	22	13.5	
Working Hours/Week	≤40 hours	36	22.1	
	41–45 hours	61	37.4	
	46–50 hours	47	28.8	
	>50 hours	19	11.7	

Table II: Reliability of Study Scales (N = 163)

Measure	Items	Cronbach's α
BEIS-10	10	.91
DUTCH	20	.92
HWLBS	15	.87

Table III: Pearson Correlation (N = 163)

Variables	1	2
1. Emotional Intelligence	--	
2. Conflict Management Styles	.589***	--

*** $p < .001$

Emotional intelligence was significantly and positively related to conflict management styles, $r = .589$, $p < .001$. Therefore, H1a was supported.

Table IV: Pearson Correlation (N = 163)

Variables	1	2
1. Emotional Intelligence	--	
2. Work-Life Balance	.141	--

Emotional intelligence showed a weak positive but non-significant relationship with work-life balance, $r = .141$, $p = .072$.

Table V: Pearson Correlation (N = 163)

Variables	1	2
1. Conflict Management Styles	--	
2. Work-Life Balance	-.026	--

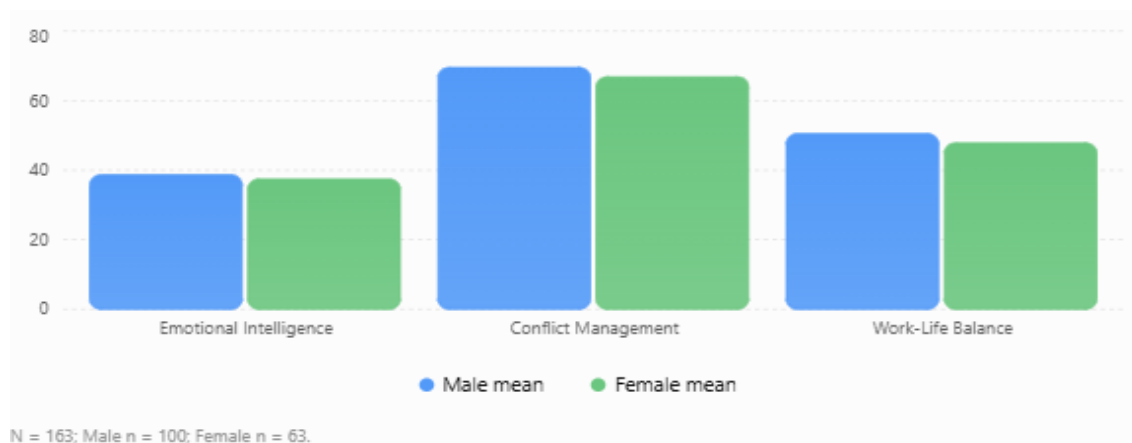
Conflict management styles were not significantly related to work-life balance, $r = -.026$, $p > .05$.

Table VI: Gender Differences (N = 163)

Variable	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	t(161)	p	Cohen's d
Emotional Intelligence	38.67 (8.18)	37.44 (8.28)	0.927	.335	.15
Conflict Management Styles	69.52 (15.20)	66.83 (14.04)	1.135	.258	.18
Work-Life Balance	50.50 (10.89)	47.83 (10.78)	1.533	.127	.25

Note. t = independent-samples t-test; M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Levene's test was non-significant for all variables; therefore, equal variances were assumed.

No statistically significant gender differences were found in emotional intelligence ($p = .335$), conflict management styles ($p = .258$), or work-life balance ($p = .127$).

Figure I: Gender Differences in Study Variables

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and conflict management style ($r = .589$, $p < .001$). This indicates that workers with the ability to comprehend, acknowledge and control their emotions can deal with workplace conflicts more effectively. The finding is in line with Salovey and Mayer (1990) model as well as Ali et al. (2023) who noted that emotional intelligence is significantly related with conflict management among the heads of secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Also, the study conducted with 462 Pakistanis working in various professions revealed that emotional intelligence helped control negative emotions in conflict situations at work. This is especially important in the workplace in Pakistan where respect for hierarchy and professional relationship may affect the way workers may express disagreement. An emotionally intelligent worker, for instance, may be in disagreement with an older employee, but express it in a respectful manner rather than an angry one. Being aware of your emotions, then, could facilitate problem solving, compromise and better workplace relationships. In contrast, emotional intelligence was not significantly related to work-life balance ($r = .141$, $p = .072$). This could be due to other factors that are not only emotional skills that determine work-life balance, but role of long hours at work, commuting, financial stresses, and family responsibilities. For instance, an employee might be able to control their emotions at the job but have less time for children and parents or performing household duties due to overtime or workload. There was also no significant correlation for conflict management and work-life balance ($r = -.026$, $p > .05$). It is possible to settle a dispute at work without it having a negative effect on one's balance due to working too much or family

responsibilities. Therefore, there is a need for organizational support, including reasonable working hours, manageable workloads and supportive supervisors for maintaining work-life balance. Lastly, emotional intelligence, conflict management and work-life balance were not significantly different between women and men. This implies that the present sample of men and women workers faced similar demands in the workplace in general. The finding also suggests that gender is not the only factor explaining these variables and that individual experiences and organizational conditions might be more significant.

Limitations and Recommendations, and Implications

The study was constrained by the small sample of 163 employees, convenience sampling and the fact that it focussed on working employees from Karachi which may not apply to other cities and regions in Pakistan. There were also more male subjects than female. Larger and more representative samples of cities and occupational groups should be used in future studies. Workload, working hours, the support from supervisors, and job stress and family responsibilities are also important factors that should be studied as they can play a greater role in work-life balance. Interviews or longitudinal studies may be used to further elucidate the ways in which Pakistani employees cope with the demands of work and family. The results indicate that emotional intelligence and conflict-management training can be conducted in organizations in Pakistan to enhance their employees' ability to manage conflicts in the workplace. But its about more than employee training if you want to improve work-life balance. Factors such as reasonable working hours, manageable workloads, supportive supervisors, flexible working arrangements and family friendly policies are also considered. These practices can be of special interest to those who have duties towards children, spouses, parents or extended family.

V. CONCLUSION

According to the study, emotional intelligence is a factor in managing conflict in the workplace, but it may not be enough to have a healthy work-life balance. In Pakistan, in the workplace, the employee can handle the conflict well, but still have problems due to workload, working hours, family related work and financial pressures. There was no significant connection with work-life balance in conflict management. Moreover, there was no significant difference between male and female employees in terms of emotional intelligence, conflict management and work-life balance.

Disclosure Statement

The authors reported no potential conflict of interest.

Funding

The author received no funding from any organizations.

VI. REFERENCES

- Ali, M. A., Shah, M., & Gul, M. (2023). Relationship of emotional intelligence of secondary school heads of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with conflict management. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 7(7).
- Ahmad, S., Ahmad, S., Ibrahim, M., & Khan, S. A. (2024). Understanding the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management: A case of university library managers in Pakistan. *IJoLIS*, 9(1).
- Arslan, M. (2018). Organizational cynicism and employee performance: Moderating role of employee engagement. *Journal of Global Responsibility*, 9(4), 415–431. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGR-05-2018-0014>
- Davies, K. A., Lane, A. M., Devonport, T. J., & Scott, J. A. (2010). Validity and reliability of a brief emotional intelligence scale (BEIS-10). *Journal of Individual Differences*, 31(4), 198–208. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000028>
- De Dreu, C. K. W., Evers, A., Beersma, B., Kluwer, E. S., & Nauta, A. (2001). A theory-based measure of conflict management strategies in the workplace. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 22(6), 645–668.
- Crompton, R., & Lyonette, C. (2006). Work-life “balance” in Europe. *Acta Sociologica*, 49(4), 379–393.
- Guest, D. E. (2002). Perspectives on the study of work-life balance. *Social Science Information*, 41(2), 255–279.

- Hayman, J. R. (2005). Psychometric assessment of an instrument designed to measure work life balance. *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, 13(1), 85–91.
- Himes, J. S. (2008). *Conflict and conflict management*. University of Georgia Press. The book and its 2008 University of Georgia Press publication are verified.
- Jang, S. J., & Zippay, A. (2011). The juggling act: Managing work-life conflict and work-life balance. *Families in Society*, 92(1), 84–90.
- Khallash, S., & Kruse, M. (2012). The future of work and work-life balance 2025. *Futures*, 44(7), 678–686.
- Kashif, M. F., Altaf, F., & Mannan, T. (2021). Relationship between conflict management styles of teachers and organizational environment of universities. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 5(2), 25–33. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021\(5-II-sep\)1.03](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021(5-II-sep)1.03)
- Kim, H. K. (2014). Work-life balance and employees' performance: The mediating role of affective commitment. *Global Business and Management Research: An International Journal*, 6(1), 37–51.
- Mayer, J. D., Roberts, R. D., & Barsade, S. G. (2008). Human abilities: Emotional intelligence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 59(1), 507–536. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.59.103006.093646>
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9(3), 185–211. <https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG>
- Thomas, K. W. (1992). Conflict and conflict management: Reflections and update. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 13(3), 265–274.
- Ullah, R. (2021). The buffering role of emotional intelligence in conflict transformation. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 33(2), 223–244. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-03-2021-0050>
- Yasin, T., & Khalid, S. (2015). Organizational cynicism, work related quality of life and organizational commitment in employees. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, 9(2), 568–582.