The impact of stress, coping and life satisfaction on work-life balance in the Irish workplace.

Amanda Reilly

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology at Dublin Business School, School of Arts, Dublin.

Supervisor: Dr Keith Schofield

Head of Department: Dr Sinead Eccles

March 2014

Department of Psychology

Dublin Business School
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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Dr Keith Schofield for his assistance and guidance throughout this process. I would also like to thank Dr Patricia Frazer, Dr John Hyland, Pauline Hyland and Margaret Walsh for their patience and help in the data analysis and research classes.

I would like to offer my special thanks to my boyfriend, family, friends and fellow classmates for their encouragement, support and advice this year, without whom, this study would not have been possible.
Abstract

This study explored the impact of stress, coping and life satisfaction on work-life balance (WLB) in the Irish workplace. A self-developed online questionnaire was distributed to colleagues and peers, who in turn distributed them to friends. 170 questionnaires were completed, (123= females, 47= males). A quantitative within subjects, mixed quasi-experimental correlational design was used. Overall results suggest the correlation between stress and coping, and stress and life satisfaction were significant. Regression analysis revealed that although perceived stress was a significant predictor of WLB, neither coping nor life satisfaction were significant predictors. There was no significant gender difference in relation to coping. However, a significant gender difference was evident in perceived stress scores, with female scores slightly higher than for males.
Introduction, Literary Review and Hypotheses

The following literature review will investigate research in the area of work-life balance (WLB), coping, perceived stress and life satisfaction life among the Irish workforce. It will comprise of six sections. Section one will focus on WLB and the importance of this concept in modern society. The second section will focus on stress and its effect on individuals. Next the author will provide the reader with coping mechanisms and how different mechanisms affect stress. Section four will look at life satisfaction and illustrate its association with coping, stress and WLB. A summary of the main findings, research gaps and rationale will be outlined in section five. Finally, the research hypotheses will be provided in section six.

1. Work-life balance

The interface between work and non-work roles is becoming increasingly popular and relevant in today’s society. Some individuals are returning to education while working full-time others are caring and managing a family outside working hours. The family structure is changing, with more women returning to work after maternity leave and performing work and family roles, similar to men (Borg, Xereb, 2008 as cited in Spiteri & Xuereb, 2012). WLB is also an important issue for organisations due to the increase in global competition, interest in personal lives, family values and aging workforce (Lockwood, 2003, as cited in Gunavathy, 2011).

Rantanen, Kinnunen, Mauno, and Tillemann, 2011 cite a number of definitions of WLB, for example “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict” (Clark, 2000 p. 751). An alternative definition is defined by Greenhaus (2003, p. 513) “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work and family role”. It is also the individual’s perception of compatibility between work and non-work activities which promotes growth in line with an individual’s
current life priorities (Kalliath & Brough, 2008 as cited in Chimote & Srivastava, 2013). Due to the complexity there is a lack of agreement on how WLB should be defined, measured and researched, thus investigating what represents WLB and what factors or variables facilitate or hinder it are still not fully known. Hence, a growing interest and concern have been expressed by academics, practitioners, individuals and organisations alike in relation to the concept of WLB and it is a work in progress.

Understanding how work time operates and how it impacts on the balance of work and non-work life is of fundamental importance. Burke and Greenglass (1987) suggest several reasons for the growing interest in this area (as cited in Cooper & Robertson, 2001). They propose that the changing family dynamics, the rise in the link between careers and family lives, women’s involvement in the work place and individuals work ambition all contribute to the link between job and off-the job experiences. Along with these performed roles, some individuals also have academic roles to fulfil. Often times the conflict between these competing roles will place a strain on individuals, which may impede on life satisfaction, increase perceived stress and hinder coping mechanisms.

The relationship between work and non-work life experiences are complex, as such several theoretical perspectives have been developed. Zedeck and Mosier (1990) have distinguished five models of the association between work and non-work experiences (as cited in Cooper & Robertson, 2001). The ‘segmentation hypothesis’ predominant in the 1950s and 1960s suggests that work and family life are distinct and have no influence on each other. The ‘spillover model’ on the contrary assumes that the impact of experiences in the job context will affect attitudes and behaviours in other non-work life areas. Jackson, Zedeck and Summers (1986, as cited in Cooper & Robertson, 2001) propose that this can be a positive or negative spillover of attitudes. While the ‘spillover model’ is an intra-individual process between domains, another model ‘crossover model’ is an inter-individual theory that exists
between two closely related individuals, such as partner or spouse (Westman, 2001 as cited in Burke & Major, 2014). This theory suggests that one partner’s positive or negative states of well-being transfers over to the other. Furthermore, Westman suggests that cross over may also apply to emotions, moods, feelings and dispositions. Westman and Vinokur (1998) postulated there are three mechanisms that describe the crossover process; direct crossover, indirect crossover and common stressors (as cited in Burke & Major, 2014). ‘Direct crossover’ proposes that the positive or negative experience transferred between partners is derived from empathetic reaction. For example, work stress in one partner may transfer an increased level of stress in the other. ‘Indirect crossover’ effects occur when another variable mediates the process. This suggests stress may influence individual and a partner’s ability to cope with stress. Common stressors in the same environment may affect both partners if the effect is genuine. This theory contradicts the suggestion on how social support plays an important role in aiding coping, which will be analysed later in this study. One explanation for this, is one partner (for example, husband) may perceive the wife’s concern about their stress as a reinforcer of their inability to cope themselves.

An alternative perspective on WLB is based on the idea of compensation, where it is assumed that individuals invest different amounts of energy into work and non-work life, people may obtain satisfaction from one aspect of life to compensate for lack of satisfaction in another area. Zedeck and Mosier (1990) proposed a fourth model which states that the individual’s involvement in one role can help enhance a second role. This is called the ‘instrumental model’. For example, work provides income which will help provide family with necessities in life and also non-material things such as emotional support (as cited in Cooper & Robertson, 2001). The final model proposed by Zedeck and Mosier (1990) is the ‘conflict approach to the job/off-job relationship’. According to this approach, success in one role involves sacrifice in another. Engaging in multiple roles will lead to conflict between
individuals differing roles. Due to the finite resources, such as time and energy, this will create stress and impede on psychological well-being. Gutek, Searle and Klepa (1991) have named this the ‘rational view’ as it assumes the level of conflict is directly proportionate with the amount of time or energy used in each area of life. While Lobel (1991, as cited in Cooper & Robertson, 2001) refer to it as the ‘utilitarian approach’ because of the competing roles with different reward: cost ratios.

According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) other sources of conflict exist between role norms and expectations. An individual may behave in a certain way in the workplace due to expectations in their role. In the workplace the individual may be expected to be aggressive, ambitious and task driven in order to be successful in their role. However, at home they may be expected to be supportive, loving, compassionate and understanding to fulfil and achieve a positive family life. The changeover from one role to the next may cause tension within the individual, as he/she is expected to change behaviour to suit the particular environment. Liu, Kwan, Lee and Hui (2013) purport that behaviour-based work-family conflict occurs when individuals can not alter their behaviour from work to non-work life environments.

Another source of conflict may be strain-based conflict triggered by emotional interference between roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For example, job conditions such as work overload, poor interpersonal relations, lack of opportunity to exercise control can bring about negative emotions, such as decreased self-esteem and belief in competence levels. These negative emotional reactions from the work environment can result in the expression of irritable behaviour outside work and vice versa (Menaghan, 1991 as cited in Cooper & Robertson, 2001).

Contemporary views on WLB consist of the ‘overall appraisal’ and ‘components approach’. The ‘overall appraisal’ approach refers to an individual’s assessment concerning
his or her life situation (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007 as cited in Rantanen et al., 2011). For example, WLB has been defined as “global assessment that work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains” (Voydanogg, 2005, p. 825 as cited in Rantanen et al., 2011). WLB is assessed by asking questions such as “how successful do you feel in balancing your work and personal/family life?” While the ‘components approach’ to WLB proposes that WLB consists of various parts that precede balance and give it meaning. Such as, time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance (Greenhaus, 2003 as cited in Rantanen et al., 2011). Frone (2003) suggests that WLB consists of work-family conflict and work-family facilitation. He offered a ‘four-fold taxonomy of work-family balance’ where balance is defined as “low levels of inter-role conflict and high levels of inter-role facilitation” (p. 145). This categorisation is based on bi-directionality, suggesting that participation in non-work life or family life may interfere with or improve performance in the work role, similarly participation in work life may interfere or improve performance in the non-work life role (family life) (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985). In addition, Frone (2003) posits that WLB (low conflict, high facilitation) is also hypothesised as bi-directional, explaining the four-fold taxonomy as: work-to-family/non-work conflict, family/non-work-to-work conflict, work-to-family/non-work enhancement and family/non-work-to-work enhancement.

Some theorists would also propose that WLB and imbalance are neither depicted as beneficial or unfavourable for psychological well-being or quality of life. For example, Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) question whether an equal balance of time, involvement and satisfaction is better for an individual instead of an imbalance towards work or non-work life. Their study revealed that those with the highest quality of life invested more in the non-work or family role, while those who invested more time in work had lower quality of life. Thus, indicating the concept of WLB is not a simple goal to achieve. Furthermore, perhaps
work-life creates life-satisfaction to some individuals, while other individuals are happier with non-work life. Others may perceive or believe they have a ‘balanced life’, but research results may display the contrary. This current study aims to investigate which is the case in the sample surveyed among the Irish workforce.

2. Stress

According to Jones, Burke and Westman (2013) work demands create a lack of WLB which has a negative effect on individuals and employers alike. In an attempt to juggle their multiple roles, individuals may suffer from the strain of these demanding roles, resulting in stress related illnesses which are prevalent in Ireland. Smith (2000) reports that stress levels are widespread, leading to an increase in levels of illness, absenteeism and attrition (as cited in Jones, Burke & Westman 2013). Condon (2013) cites the medical director at St Patrick’s Mental Health Services in Dublin, stating that one in five physical complaints in Dublin/Ireland are linked to mental health issues. Stress is defined as a “negative emotional experience accompanied by predictable biochemical, physiological, cognitive, and behavioural changes that are directed either toward altering the stressful event or accommodating to its effects” (Taylor, 2003, p. 179).

Marks, et al., (2005) posit stress is regarded as a principal cause of psychological distress and physical illness and the ability to cope is thought to be the key to human happiness. It has been defined by psychologists as “the response to the stressor (for example, environmental stress, such as problems in work) as stress or distress (for example, the feeling of tension before an important deadline/meeting), and it involves biochemical, physiological, behavioural and psychological changes” (Ogden, 2004, p234). An alternative definition is a “transaction between people and the environment” or a ‘person environment fit’ (Lazarus & Launier, 1978). This suggests that having a good environment fit an individual will
experience no or low levels of stress, while having a bad environment fit will result in higher levels of stress (Marks et al., 2005). The key to this is the way individuals cognitively appraise the situation, cognitive appraisal determines how stressful experiences may be perceived as stressful to some individuals and not to others. For example, one person may find the loss of a job highly stressful, while another may see it as an opportunity to try something new in life. The former may perceive it as a threat, while the latter sees it as a challenge they are happy to take on. How the potential stressor is perceived and appraised determines whether the situation will be experienced as stressful. A differentiation is made between primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal is where the event may be perceived as either non-threatening or potentially harmful to a person’s self-esteem and secondary appraisal, is the appraisal of personal resources, such as asking oneself ‘how I will cope?’ (Ogden, 2004).

The principal stress theories are as follows; stress as a response, stress as a stimulus and stress as a transaction. The response approach proposes that there are two major components to the physical response to stress; the nervous system and the endocrine system (Carlson, 2010). The nervous system is a complex network of interconnected nerve fibres which provide input to the brain and spinal cord through sensory receptors and output from the brain or spinal cord to organs (Taylor, 2003). When an individual perceives an event or situation in their environment as stressful or threatening, for example juggling work and home life roles, the sympathetic system is aroused. This leads to increased blood pressure, increased heart rate, increased sweating and constriction of blood vessels.

Taylor, et al., (2000) developed a new theory called “tend-and-befriend”, which they propose is typically characteristic of females (as cited in Taylor, 2003). The theory suggests that humans respond to stress with social affiliation and nurturing behaviour. It states further that when responses to stress evolved, males and females faced different adaptive challenges.
It proposes that female responses evolved to protect themselves and their offspring. They affiliated themselves with others and sought social contact during stress. This may explain why women tend to speak to others for support and why they cope differently to men, which may depend on underlying biological mechanisms.

Recent research indicates that environmental factors have a great impact on the stress level experienced by individuals (Arnold et al., 2005). It is widely recognised that although stress is universally experienced there are significant differences in how individuals respond to potential stressors, thus it is influenced by personality, biological mechanisms and perception of the situation. Gender differences are also evident in relation to managing stress. 68% of women claimed it is extremely important to manage stress, while only 52% of men reported this. In addition 51% of women that they are not doing enough to manage stress, compared to 63% of men. In relation to coping and stress management strategies, this survey revealed that women are more likely than men to report using a numerous strategies such as; spending time with family or friends (44 % versus 32 %), praying (41 % versus 22 %), getting a massage or visiting a spa (14 % versus 5 %) and seeing a mental health professional (5 % versus 1 %) (APA, 2011).

Research indicates that work-family/life conflict stress is also linked to reduced mental and physical health, including increased body mass index (BMI), cholesterol, alcohol use and depression (Wang et al., 2010, as cited in Burke and Major, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to look at this variable along with coping and life satisfaction in relation to stress.

3. Coping

Managing multiple roles is a challenge most individuals face and coping mechanisms will now be discussed in this paper. Cramer (1998) differentiated coping from other defense mechanisms employed by individuals as he believed coping strategies suggest there is an
intention of managing or solving a problem, whereas defence mechanisms become apparent without conscious intention (as cited in Burke & Major, 2014). Individuals with better resources tend to cope better under stress. Coping relies on several factors including; individual personality, health, energy, positive belief, problem solving skills, social skills, social support and material resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Their ‘Psychological Appraisal Theory’ posits that stress occurs when there is variance between perceived stress and perceived ability to cope. They defined coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demand that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (as cited in Brannon & Feist, 2000). Dubois et al., (1992) conducted a study examining stress and support variables across several contexts which revealed that both stress and low levels of support contributed to psychological distress (as cited in Hess & Copeland, 2001). According to Frone (2003) high social support at work is related to low work-family/life conflict and high social support at home is related to low family/life-work conflict, indicating this is an important buffer in aiding coping.

Alternative methods of coping include; perceiving and believing that you can alter a stressful situation and feeling confident about regulating your own emotional distress are two ways of coping (Brannon & Feist, 2000). Thus, low self-efficacy and self-esteem are also constituted as stress-provoking factors. Individual differences exist as individuals will deal with and interpret stress in different ways on separate occasions, depending on how the situation is appraised.

Roth and Cohen (1986), differentiate between two basic forms of coping; approach and avoidance. In ‘approach coping’ individuals confront the problem, gather information and take direct action. In contrast individuals minimise the importance of the problem in ‘avoidance coping’ (as cited in Ogden, 2004). Conversely, ‘problem and emotion focused’
mechanisms which emerge during childhood, reveal types of coping strategies instead of opposing styles. This involves attempts to take action to reduce the stressor or to increase the resource available to manage it, such as devising a timetable and following it (Ogden, 2004). Consistent with Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) work, coping in the work-family/non-work area has been conceptualised as either problem or emotion focused. Emotion-focused coping emerges in adolescence/adulthood, which is attempting to deal with the emotions evoked by the stressful event (as cited in Marks et al., 2005). Individuals apply behavioural strategies (talking to friends, exercise or watching television or turning to alcohol or cigarettes) and cognitive strategies (thinking positively about the problem, several other factors influence coping mechanisms, such as personality, age, gender and available resources) to regulate their emotions (Odgen, 2004). A study conducted by Surujlal et al., (2013) on a sample of student athletes, revealed that as individuals learned to cope with adversities, their perceived stress levels decreased resulting in an increase in life satisfaction. Thus, research conducted in this study will help identify these factors and identify potential individual differences in vulnerability to stress. If individuals find they cope better when faced with life stressors, they will feel happier and more satisfied with life.

4. Life Satisfaction

As the concept of WLB/work-life conflict is an increasingly popular notion within business/organisational literature and is one upon which organisational psychologists place high importance, it is necessary to investigate its impact on an individual’s life-satisfaction. According to Clark (2000) it is usually agreed that WLB is crucial for an individual’s psychological well-being, self-esteem, life-satisfaction and a successful balance between work and non-work roles produces a sense of harmony in life.
Life-satisfaction is the “overall cognitive evaluation of a person’s life based on comparisons between self-generated standards and the person’s perceived life circumstances” or it can be described as the cognitive component of subjective well-being (Diener, Scollon & Lucas, 2004 as cited in Darling, Coccio & Senatore 2012). Clark (2000) posits that an overall sense of harmony or balance in life is an indication of satisfaction in life. While Suldo and Huebner (2004) postulates positive life-satisfaction can improve individual resilience and protect against adverse life experiences (as cited in Darling et al., 2012).

The extent to which individuals perceive they have lived up to their standards will determine their life satisfaction. As individuals apply different emphasis on different components such as health, wealth or relationships, life satisfaction will be subjective to individuals. Evidence indicates that coping style has a strong link with life satisfaction (Welbourne et al., 2007 as cited in Yushuan, 2011). The ‘crossover model’ mentioned earlier in this study, may also provide positive effects in the non-work life domain. According to research conducted by Demerouti et al., (2005) men’s life satisfaction crosses over and positively effects that of their partner/wives. In addition, this has an impact on the partner’s depression levels and symptoms over time (as cited in Burke & Major, 2014).

Furthermore, as life-satisfaction is based on self perception, individual differences on judging contentment will exist. According to Oishi et al., 1999 there are also individual, cultural and methodological differences in the information people use to judge life satisfaction. For example, achievement-oriented individuals judge life-satisfaction levels on success they achieve (as cited in Snyder and Lopez, 2009). Sensation seekers judge their life satisfaction on how much excitement they have in life. Moreover, chronically happy people report being very satisfied at a global domain, such as education, even though they may only be mildly satisfied with specific domains in that area, such as textbooks and lectures.
This study aims to further investigate the link between life satisfaction and WLB from the sample of participants in the Irish workforce.

5. Rationale

As individuals spend most of their adult lives in the workplace; addressing WLB or examining work-life conflict (WLC) and life-work conflict (LWC) is of great importance. Organisations that implement WLB programmes in the workplace may well be more successful in recruiting and retaining good employees (Kumar & Chakraborty, 2013). Organisations who are supportive of these initiatives display their support to employees, which in turn facilitates individual support from employees, commitment and dedication to the organisation (Casper & Harris, 2008 as cited in McCarthy, Cleveland, Hunter, Darcy & Grady, 2013). They perceive that effective WLB policies reduce absenteeism, turnover and improve loyalty and staff retention, while the individual perceives that it results in job satisfaction, job security, autonomy, stress reduction and health (Chimote & Srivastava, 2013).

Modern technology may impact individuals attempt to balance work and non-work life for individuals, as the communication age is upon us and smart phones are widely used by employees to continue work in the evenings and on weekends. Consequently individuals are now connecting to ‘work-life’ even when they are home. However, some research indicates the advances in technology that allow work from home have an impact on non-work life and therefore work-life balance (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2014). Although communications and information technology has its advantages, it has also been criticised for blurring work and non-work/family boundaries (Valcour & Hunter, 2005 as cited in Park & Jex 2011). An advantage would include parents being able to coordinate their work and family roles especially required at times when a child is sick or an employer offers flexible working hours.
and conditions through their use of technology. Conversely, disadvantages include individuals experiencing more work and non-work/family distractions in performing work-related tasks at home or non-work related roles at work due to frequent use of smart phones, iPads or laptops. These interferences have been linked to psychological strains such as emotional exhaustion, depressive symptoms and low life satisfaction (Van Steenbergen, Ellemersm & Mooijart, 2007 as cited in Parks & Jex, 2011). Research suggests that WLB initiatives such as compressed work hours and working from home may not be beneficial to all employees (Batt & Valcour, 2003 as cited by Wang & Verma, 2012). Some companies are beginning to realise this and are implementing change. For example Volkswagen is stopping their BlackBerry server from sending emails to employees after working hours in order to halt working outside work hours (BBC News Technology, 2011). This is one example of an employer led initiative which may reduce work-life conflict.

According to Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) there is a positive relationship between WLB and according to Marks and MacDermid (1996) the quality of life and to other indicators of well-being (as cited in McCarthy et al., 2013). Research on gender differences and coping, conducted by Matud (2004) postulates, women scored higher than men in chronic and daily stressors and coping styles differ between genders. Women are more emotion-focused while men are more rational (Matud, 2004). This indicates differences between genders exist, which provides scope for further investigation in this study.

Various WLB theories have been speculated in the field of organisational psychology, such as the ‘spillover model’ mentioned earlier which proposes that the impact of experiences in the job context will affect attitudes and behaviours in other non-work life areas (Jackson et al., 1986 as cited in Cooper & Robertson, 2001). Some are not relevant in the current economic climate, where the majority of adults with/without family are required to work to sustain a relatively affordable life for them or their families. Contrary to the ‘segmentation
theory’ mentioned earlier, work life and non-work life are inter-connected and inter-dependent. Individuals who spend more time in work, dealing with clients, deadlines and daily work pressures can affect their personal lives creating work-life conflict. While non-work life can also be demanding if the individual has children, is studying, is caring for a sick or elderly relative or is under financial strain causing life-work conflict.

These factors may impede on the individuals ability to attend work or concentrate at work. According to Karthik (2013) WLB not only enhances efficiency and productivity in the work-place, it also enhances satisfaction in both professional and personal capacity. As an organisations performance depends on its employee’s performance and other factors, it is a necessity to look at these different factors relating to both work and non-work life.

Although researchers have studied concepts such as conflict and facilitation, few studies have specifically addressed life satisfaction and satisfaction with the balance between work and non-work life roles (Valcour, 2007 as cited in Grawitch, Maloney, Barber, & Moosehegian, 2013). Life satisfaction represents an individual’s global evaluation of his/her overall life situation (Diener & Diener 1995). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the link between life satisfaction and the balance between work and non-work life and whether it predicts work-life conflict or life-work conflict.

Previous research also focused on WLB practices in the workplace as predictors of individual outcomes only. The aim of this study is to expand on this by examining the internal factors as predictors of WLB, such as investigating individual satisfaction with life, perceived stress and coping mechanisms. It will also explore gender difference and investigate if individuals with responsibilities outside work, such as family or academic commitments have difficulties balancing their multiple roles. Overall results should highlight the urgency of addressing areas such as coping and stress management inside and outside work, which may provide useful information for policy-makers leading to new regulations
regarding WLB. It is important that solutions are found to promote WLB and wellness among the workforce, which may reduce conflict between work and non-work roles as well as playing an important role in recruiting and retaining good-quality employees.

This research contributes to the existing literature as it indicates how topical WLB, perceived stress, coping and life satisfaction are among the Irish workforce. It demonstrates that stress related illnesses impinge on efficiency at work, individual health and life satisfaction. It highlights the need for coping and stress deterrent interventions in the workplace and at home.

6. Research Gaps

- Many studies highlight the benefits of WLB, but few look at the variables that may affect it. The following variables will be applied to this study; coping, perceived stress and life satisfaction.
- Two perspectives on WLB exist. One is organisational and another is individual (employee) perspective. The latter will be investigated in relation to the three variables mentioned above.
- Gender differences will be examined to find out if this exists in relation to levels of perceived stress and coping.
- Open ended questions were asked on individual coping mechanisms and non-work roles to retrieve qualitative information from the sample population.

7. Research Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore the relationship between coping, perceived stress and life satisfaction in relation to WLB. Moreover, the researcher is interested to see if coping, perceived stress and life satisfaction are predictors of WLB, WLC and LWC. The researcher
also aims to investigate if gender difference is prevalent in how individuals cope, experience stress and implement a WLB.

8. Hypotheses

It is hypothesised that-

H1: There will be a significant difference between males and females in relation to coping, and perceived stress.

H2: There will be a positive relationship between coping and perceived stress experienced by individuals.

H3: There will be a negative relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction

H4: The psychological variables; life satisfaction, coping and perceived stress will predict the total WLB score (including WLC and LWC score). Furthermore, life satisfaction and coping will have a positive effect on WLB, WLC and LWC, while perceived stress will have a negative effect on WLB, WLC and LWC.
Methodology

Materials
The materials used in this study included a self-administered online questionnaire created in Google Docs which included the psychometric measures and demographic data. This questionnaire was distributed through peers and colleagues by snowball and convenience sampling.

The first section of this questionnaire introduced the researcher and provided information on the study and the opportunity for participants to withdraw from the study before proceeding any further. Those who continued with the online questionnaire were providing informed consent (see Appendix 1). The next section of the questionnaire contained the psychological questions and additional demographic data pertaining to age, gender, work role, marital status and family (number of children). It also asked participants whether they are aware of the concept of WLB, whether they had outside work, family and a qualitative question on what they felt helps with coping (see Appendix 3). A pilot study was not proposed as the researcher used standardised tools that have been used previously. The data was collected between the 7th January and the 28th January 2014.

The self-developed questionnaire included the following psychometric measures; WLC LWC scale (Neteymeyer, Boles & McMurray, 1996) to assess WLB. This is a seven point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The scores are added together for the five items with each WLC LWC. Higher scores on the WLC indicate a greater degree of work conflicting with family life/ non-work life, while a higher LWC score indicates family/non-work life conflicting with work. Life satisfaction was measured using the (SWLS) a five item scale that measures the subject’s judgemental component (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, S, 1985). Perceived stress was measured using the (PSS) which is a ten item questionnaire, with a five point Likert scale, designed to measure stress through
subjective appraisals of events over the previous month (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983). While the coping was assessed using the Brief COPE scale (Carver, 1997). This is a self-report questionnaire which measures the individual’s response about how the individual has been coping with the stress in their life. It contains four items per scale and is a shorter form of the COPE inventory (Carver, Scheier, Weintraub, 1989).

This research involved minimal risk. However, the risks that applied were the possible inconvenience to the participants in being invited to take part and the actual taking part. To ensure accurate responses and to adhere to ethical guidelines, all participants were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of the survey. They were given the option to withdraw before or during the survey, but responses were not revoked after submission. As the study addressed sensitive subjects, participants were informed of this in advance in the coversheet attached to the survey. Participants were debriefed and provided with contact details for Samaritans and AWARE support services should any difficult feelings arise from the survey. The researcher and supervisor’s contact details were also provided should the participants have any further questions about the study.

Participants

The sample for the study was a purposive sample of 170 individuals from the Irish workforce over the age of eighteen. There were 47 males and 123 females included in the research. The youngest participant was 18-25 years old and the oldest was 46+ years old. There were 162 full-time employees and 8 part-time employees in the research. 115 of those employed are in a non-managerial role, while 55 are in a managerial role. Non-probability sampling methods were used to select participants. Firstly, the convenience sampling method was applied, as the sample was obtained from the company where the researcher works and from a peer group selection. Secondly, the snowball sampling method was also applied, as colleagues and peers
asked friends to complete the questionnaire. In order to gain access to the sample, permission was received from the work-place (see Appendix 2). Those below eighteen, those who do not hold a full-time or part time job and those who do not provide consent, were excluded from participation.

**Design**

This study applied a quantitative within subjects, mixed quasi-experimental correlational design. The researcher used self-report measures to collect the necessary data. The following variables within the selected sample were analysed; the predictor variables for the correlational aspect of the study include;

- Perceived stress (in relation to WLB, coping mechanisms, life satisfaction).
- Coping (in relation to life satisfaction, stress and WLB).
- WLB (in relation to life satisfaction, stress and coping).

The criterion variables include;

- Coping – subscales: active coping, acceptance, emotional support, planning, positive reinforcement, humour and instrumental support.
- Life satisfaction
- WLB
- Perceived stress

The independent variable for the quasi-experimental aspect of the study was gender, while the dependent variables were coping, life satisfaction, perceived stress.

The Demographic variables were;

Age, gender, working part time or full time, marital status and family (number of children).
Procedure

The psychological scales applied to this study were obtained from the Arts department of Dublin Business School (DBS) and from the researchers own search. These were presented in both the research proposal document and ethics review application form in October 2013 before the study commenced. Ethical approval for this research was provided by DBS ethics review board and the author proceeded with research in accordance with DBS’s ethical guidelines. The questionnaire booklets were typed on Microsoft word and then set up online using ‘Google Docs’. The online questionnaire and a cover letter were emailed to work colleagues, friends and distributed on the social network Facebook. When all questionnaires were completed, the scores for the various scales were input and calculated using SPSS 21 on a Dell Inspiron computer running a Microsoft Windows 2007 operating system.
Results

The results of the descriptive statistics will be presented and discussed first, followed by the results of the inferential statistics which consisted of psychometric and demographic variables. A brief summary of the qualitative questions included in the questionnaire will conclude this section.

As some of the data violated some assumptions of normality, non-parametric data analysis methods were applied to these variables (cope, life satisfaction and WLB) while parametric tests were applied to those that did not violate the assumptions (perceived stress). The results were obtained by conducting the following inferential statistics; Independent Samples T-test, Mann-Whitney U, Pearson’s correlation, Spearman’s Rho and regression tests.

The following descriptive statistics were applied to the data to report central tendencies; means, standard deviations, minimum, maximum scores. From the sample group of 170 participants, 71.7% (N=123) were female and 28.3% (N=47) were male. There were six different age categories in the questionnaire (see Figure 1). Participants consisted of; full-time (95.3%) and part-time workers (4.7%), managers (32.4%) and non-managers (67.6%), single (70.6%) and married (29.4%) and parents (25.9%) and non-parents (74.1%). The majority of the participants were full-time workers, non-managers, single and not parents.

Cronbach’s Alpha was used to test the reliability and internal consistency of the psychometric scales, which demonstrated that 92% (see Table 1) of the variability in the cope score test is considered true score variance or reliable ($\alpha=.92$) and 87% of the variability in the PSS, LSF and WLC LWC test is considered reliable ($\alpha=.87$).
Figure 1. Pie chart displaying age groups of participants.
Histograms indicate that the curve was close to normal for perceived stress for females and close to normal distribution, but slightly negatively skewed for males (see Figure 2 and 3). The majority of females (23) perceived stress scores were 18 out of a possible 40, while the highest score was 38. The majority of males also scored between 15 and 18, with the highest score at 38-39.

The mean results for each variable revealed that participants were slightly satisfied with life with an average of 22.8 out of a possible 35. The mean coping score was 58.2. The higher the total cope score per subscale, the greater the use of that particular coping method/subscale. For example, the total ‘planning’ cope score is on average 5.3 out of a possible 8. The WLB total mean was 30.96, which is made up of the subscale WLC ($M= 19.04$) and LWC ($M= 11.92$). This result suggests work causes slightly more conflict than non work-life for this sample of participants. The mean perceived stress score is 17.27 implying that the sample of participants in the workplace suffers medium levels of stress.
Figure 2. Histogram displaying perceived stress scores for female participants

Histogram displaying the perceived stress scores for female participants

- Mean: 18.18
- Std. Dev: 7.165
- N: 123
Figure 3. Histogram displaying perceived stress scores for male participants

Histogram displaying perceived stress scores for male participants

Mean = 14.87
Std. Dev. = 7.353
N = 47
Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of Coping subscales and Cronbach’s alpha for total cope score.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Active Coping</th>
<th>Acceptance Coping</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Positive Reframing</th>
<th>Humour</th>
<th>Instrumental Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Deviation</strong></td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cronbach’s Alpha for Total Cope Score</strong></td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants displayed different coping styles in the responses (see Table 1). The most popular coping style implemented was planning, followed by positive reframing and acceptance.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of psychometric variables; work-life balance, life satisfaction, perceived stress, coping*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WLB (WLC)</th>
<th>(LWC)</th>
<th>LSF</th>
<th>PSS</th>
<th>Cope (7 Cope subscales)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td>30.97</td>
<td>(19.04)</td>
<td>(11.93)</td>
<td>22.77</td>
<td>17.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mode</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Deviation</strong></td>
<td>11.57</td>
<td>(8.26)</td>
<td>(6.6)</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>7.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WLB = Work-Life Balance  
PSS= Perceived stress  
WLC= Work-life conflict  
7 Coping subscales= active coping, acceptance, emotional support, planning, humour, positive reinforcement & instrumental support  
LWC= Life-work conflict  
LSF= Life satisfaction
Hypothesis 1

It was hypothesised that there would be a difference between gender in relation to coping and perceived stress. An Independent Samples T-test was conducted to compare perceived stress scores between genders. Levene’s test for equality of variances showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. No significant effect was found \( p = .89 \). The results revealed females (\( M= 18.18, SD= 7.18 \)) had higher levels of stress than males (\( M= 14.87, SD= 7.35 \)). The 95% confidence limits show that the population mean difference of the variables lies somewhere between .86 and 5.75. An Independent Samples T-test found that there was a statistically significant difference between stress levels of males and females (\( t(168) = 2.67, p = .008 \)). Therefore, the proposed hypothesis can be accepted. However, as cope and the total cope subscales (see Table 2) were not normally distributed a Mann-Whitney U was conducted to test the hypothesis that there will be a significant difference between male and female coping subscale scores. Females had a mean rank of 89.43 and 87.16 (7 subscale scores), compared to males with a mean rank of 75.20 and 81.16 (7 subscale scores). The Mann-Whitney U revealed that the females and male groups did not differ significantly in their total cope scores (\( z = -1.69, p = .092 \)) or their total cope subscale scores (\( z = -.71, p = .477 \)). Therefore, the research hypothesis can be rejected.

Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3

A Spearman’s rho tested the second and third hypotheses to investigate whether a significant correlation exists between the variables; (1) coping and stress and (2) stress and life satisfaction. A Spearman’s rho correlation found that there was a strong positive significant association between perceived stress and coping (\( rs(170) = .30, p < .001 \)) (see Table 3). There was a moderately strong negative association between perceived stress and life satisfaction (\( rs(170) = -.39, p < .001 \)), thus hypothesis is accepted. Further analysis was
conducted to investigate the correlation between other variables, as follows. There was a weak positive significant association between coping and work-life balance \(rs(170) = .29, p < .001\). While there was a weak negative significant association between coping and life satisfaction \(rs(170) = -.20, p < .001\). A spearman’s rho correlation also found that there was no significant association between life satisfaction and work-life balance \(rs(170) = -.02, p > .001\). Therefore, the research hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3 *Inferential statistics of the correlation between perceived stress and work-life balance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman’s rho</th>
<th>Perceived Stress Total</th>
<th>Total Cope*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cope*</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>.300**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total cope = Coping subscales; active coping, acceptance, emotional support, planning, positive reinforcement, humour and instrumental support.
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Hypothesis 4**

Multiple regression was used to test whether the psychological variables; coping, perceived stress and life satisfaction were predictors of WLB and its subscales; WLC and LWC. The results of the regression indicated that the three predictors explained 17.3% of the variance \((R^2 = .17, F(4,165) = 9.84, p < .001)\). Results established that perceived stress significantly predicted WLB \((\beta = .39, p = .000, 95\% \text{ CI} = .33, .92)\) (see Figure 4). Therefore, the research
hypothesis is accepted. However, the coping subscales did not significantly predict WLB ($\beta = .32, p = .075, 95\% CI = -.04, .90$). Furthermore, nor did life satisfaction ($\beta = .14, p = .078, 95\% CI = -.03 .53$). Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4. Multiple regression displaying the correlation between the variables; work-life balance total, life satisfaction, perceived stress, coping and coping subscales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WLB Total</th>
<th>LSF Total</th>
<th>PSS Total</th>
<th>Cope Total (7 cope subscales)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLB Total</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.398</td>
<td>-.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>-.398</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total</td>
<td>(1.000)</td>
<td>(1.000)</td>
<td>(1.000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 cope subscales</td>
<td>(.310)</td>
<td>(-.071)</td>
<td>(.327)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (1-tailed)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLB Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>.436</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total</td>
<td>.436</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 cope subscales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(\beta)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLB Total</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 cope subscales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WLB = Work-Life Balance  
PSS= Perceived stress  
WLC= Work-life conflict  
LWC = Life-work conflict  
LSF = Life satisfaction  
R2 = .17  
\(\beta\) = beta  
* = level of significance, p <0.05
Analysis of the multiple regression indicated that the three predictors explained 12.3% of the variance ($R^2 = .11$, $F(4,165) = 6.18$, $p < .001$). Results established that perceived stress significantly predicted WLC ($\beta = .27$, $p = .006$, 95% CI = .09, .52) (see Figure 5). However, neither life satisfaction; ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .742$, 95% CI = -.24, .17) coping ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .45$, 95% CI = -.30, .13) nor the coping subscales significantly predicted WLC ($\beta = .33$, $p = .084$, 95% CI = -.042, .66).
Table 5. *Multiple regression displaying the correlation between the variables; work-life conflict total, life satisfaction, perceived stress, coping and coping subscales.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WLC Total</th>
<th>LSF Total</th>
<th>PSS Total</th>
<th>Cope Total (7 cope subscales)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLC Total</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.126</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>.286 (.273)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.398</td>
<td>-.207 (-.071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.538 (.327)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total 7 cope subscales</td>
<td>.286 (.273)</td>
<td>-.207 (.071)</td>
<td>.538</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (1-tailed)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLC Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.000* (.000*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.003 (.179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total 7 cope subscales</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLC Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.16 (.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total 7 cope subscales</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLC Total,</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total 7 cope subscales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5. Scatter plot displaying the regression analysis between LWC and PSS.
Table 6. *Multiple regression displaying the correlation between the variables: life-work conflict total, life satisfaction, perceived stress, coping and coping subscales.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LWC Total</th>
<th>LSF Total</th>
<th>PSS Total</th>
<th>Cope Total (7 cope subscales)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWC Total</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>.207 (.193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.398</td>
<td>-.207 (-.071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>-.398</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.538 (.327)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total</td>
<td>.207 (.193)</td>
<td>-.207 (.071)</td>
<td>.538 (.327)</td>
<td>1.000 (1.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig. (1-tailed)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWC Total</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.003 (.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.003 (.179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>000* (000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total</td>
<td>.000* (.006)</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>. (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>β</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWC Total</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>(.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSF Total</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS Total</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope Total</td>
<td>-.07 (.16)</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWC Total, LSF Total, PSS Total, Cope Total 7cope subscales</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the multiple regression indicated that the three predictors explained 12.3% of the variance ($R^2 = .12, F(4,165) = 6.95, p < .001$). Results established that perceived stress significantly predicted LWC ($β = .35, p < .001, 95% CI = .14, .49$) (see Graph 6). As did life satisfaction significantly predict LWC ($β = .27, p < .001, 95% CI = .12, .45$) (see Graph 7). However, the coping subscales; active coping, acceptance, emotional support, planning,
positive reinforcement, humour and instrumental support combined did not significantly predicted LWC ($\beta = .15, p = .39, 95\% \text{ CI} = -.15, .40$). Furthermore, nor did total coping ($\beta = -.07, p = .73, 95\% \text{ CI} = -.20, .14$). In summary, perceived stress was the only variable that significantly predicted WLB, WLC and LWC. Furthermore, life satisfaction also predicted LWC.

Figure 6. Scatter plot displaying the regression analysis between LWC and PSS.

Figure 7. Scatter plot displaying the regression analysis between WLC and LSF.
Qualitative Analysis

In addition to quantitative analysis, the researcher asked the following open ended questions to retrieve qualitative data and further feedback from participants regarding aspects of the survey. (1) Are you aware of the concept 'work-life balance' (WLB)? (2) Do you participate in any other non-work roles? and (3) In your opinion what helps you cope with stressors in life? 166 participants reported to being aware of the concept of WLB, while only 4 were not. When asked about participation in non-work roles, 88 participants responded yes to this question, their answers, including studying, voluntary work, caring for elderly, helping family with children, involvement in sports or clubs and being a parent. 82 participants reported not having a role outside work. Furthermore, when asked about coping with stressors in life, participants responses included; exercise, talking to others/family/friends, prayer, humour, therapy, playing with their children, organisation, understanding thoughts/cooling down before reacting, thinking rationally, trying to forgive oneself, stop being hard on oneself, reading, watching TV, spending time with partner/spouse, holidays, holidays/break away, nice weather, listening to/playing music, positive mental attitude, meditation, yoga, time to oneself, sleep, spending time with family, evaluating what is important in life, social network sites (facebook), time management, (not) drinking, eating, going out and facing stressors, to come up with a solution to address them.
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the psychological variables coping, perceived stress and life satisfaction affected work-life balance in a sample of participants from the Irish workplace. First the researcher proposed there will be a significant difference between males and females in relation to coping and perceived stress. Although previous research posits gender differences exist with regard coping mechanisms, this study contradicts this, as no significant difference was produced from the research findings. However, the data illustrates female scores were slightly higher. Taylor (2003) proposed that “tend-and-befriend”, is a typically female characteristic of coping with stressors, which provides a reason why ‘emotional support’ was one common coping style in this study. However, the lack of research on gender differences in relation to coping styles in the workplace make it difficult to draw conclusions on the outcome of this study.

Interestingly, there was a significant difference in relation to perceived stress between genders. This supports the findings of Matud (2004) who maintains women score higher in chronic and daily stressors than men. Bellman, Forster, Still and Cooper (2003, as cited by Watson, Goh & Sawang, 2011) posit that differences may exist in their perceptions of stress sources and outcomes. Furthermore, Eaton and Bradley (2008, as cited by Watson, Goh & Sawang, 2011) purports that females tend to appraise stressors as being more distressing than males, which offers an explanation to why gender difference exits in this study’s sample. Conversely, the results of this study highlighted that stress is a problem experienced by individuals in the workplace, although the levels of stress varied between individuals and gender. Both female and male employees’ scores were on average 20 out of a possible 40, with most participants scoring at or above this level. According to (Stafyla, Spyridis & Kaltsidou, 2013) gender has an important role in how an individual expresses the stress and the source of this stress may differ depending on his or her role and duties.
Second, it was hypothesised that coping would have a positive effect on levels of stress experienced by individuals. This study supported the hypothesis as a strong positive correlation was evident between perceived stress and coping \((rs (170)= .30, p < .001)\). Previous research posits that approach coping is more beneficial than avoidance in relation to stress (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). In order to explore these findings in greater detail, coping was divided into seven subscales based on the most prevalent answered subscales of active coping, acceptance, emotional support, planning, positive reinforcement, humour and instrumental support. Unlike avoidant emotion focused coping mentioned at the beginning of this study, participants seemed to utilise more active emotion focused and approach coping mechanisms, such as planning, acceptance and positive reframing as opposed to avoidant approaches.

One possible explanation for this is that the majority of individuals in this sample are in employment for many years and may use these coping mechanisms in the workplace on a daily basis. Perhaps their age and role in the work-place has enabled them to adapt to more favourable coping mechanisms, such as acceptance, planning and positive reinforcement. These mechanisms would be employed to help tackle daily tasks, face demanding clients and cope with deadlines. For example, if a problem arises in work individuals must face the problem and fix it instead of running away from it or avoiding it (Ogden, 2004). Perhaps they are utilising eustress or “good stress” which according to Yerkes-Dodson Law, increasing stress is beneficial to performance until an optimum level is reached (Le Fivre, Matheny & Kolt, 2003).

The findings of this hypothesis contradict previous research which proposes that women are more likely to employ avoidant and emotional coping, rather than problem solving or approach coping. According to Loo-See, B., and Leap-Han, L. (2012) individuals adopt more than one coping mechanism to combat stress based on scenarios and situations. In
addition, Dewe and Guest (1990 as cited in Yavas & Babakus, 2011) propose that employees rely on various coping mechanisms to deal with burnout and faced with adverse stressors. Furthermore, studies indicate that approach coping method has a more beneficial outcome than the avoidance method, which is associated with poor psychological and health outcomes (Taylor & Stanton, 2007).

The third hypothesis proposed that there would be a negative relationship between stress and life satisfaction experienced by individuals. The correlation showed significant findings between the variables perceived stress and life satisfaction, which suggest the higher the individual’s perceived stress scores the more likely it will impinge on their life satisfaction (\(rs (170) = -.39, p < .001\)). According to Suldo and Huebner (2004) as previously mentioned in this study, positive life satisfaction can improve individual resilience and protect against adverse life experiences (as cited in Darling et al., 2012), such as those produced by life stressors. Thus, supporting the hypothesis and verifying the significance of the correlation. In addition, coping acts as a mediator between stress and life satisfaction and well-being, consecutively having a significant impact on individuals’ life satisfaction/well-being (Lewin & Sager, 2007 as cited in McMillan, 2011). Supporting this point is Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional model of stress which explains how coping can alleviate the negative effect of stressors, such as work-life conflict (WLC) or life-work conflict (LWC) on life satisfaction.

The fourth hypothesis proposed the psychological variables; life satisfaction, coping and perceived stress would act as predictors of WLB. This hypothesis was broken down further to analyse two subscales that make up the WLB score; work-life conflict (WLC) and life-work conflict (LWC). The regression analysis results revealed that perceived stress was a significant predictor of these criterion variables; WLB; (\(\beta = .39, p < .000, 95\% \text{ CI} = .33, .92\)), WLC; (\(\beta = .27, p = .006, 95\% \text{ CI} = .09, .52\)) and LWC; (\(\beta = .35, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = .14,\))
A puzzling finding from the research relates to the life satisfaction scores correlation with WLC, which were not significant ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .742$, 95% CI = -.24, .17). Conversely regression analysis found a significant result between life satisfaction and LWC; ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = .14, .49). This finding indicates that life satisfaction significantly predicts the conflict individuals experience between the non-work domain and the work life domain from this sample. Theorists have suggested that WLB and imbalance are neither depicted as beneficial or unfavourable for psychological well-being or quality of life. For example, Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) earlier questioned whether an equal balance of time, involvement and satisfaction is better for an individual instead of an imbalance towards work or non-work life. Their study revealed that those with the highest quality of life invested more in the non-work or family role, while those who invested more time in work had lower quality of life and life satisfaction. This supports the findings of this current study’s hypothesis, as the results of the regression analysis between life satisfaction and WLC were not significant, while the results of regression analysis between life satisfaction and LWC was significant.

Furthermore, perhaps work-life creates life satisfaction for some individuals, while other individuals are happier with non-work life. Others may believe they have a ‘balanced life’, but may experience a high WLC score in comparison to a LWC score. According to a study conducted by Perrewé, Hochwarter and Kiewitz (1999) work-life conflict reduces life satisfaction. Bonebright, Clay and Ankenmann (2000) support this idea, as they posit individuals who have high WLC, have significantly less life satisfaction. However, as Grzywacz and Carlson (2007, as cited in Rantanen et al., 2011) maintains that the ‘overall appraisal’ approach refers to an individual’s assessment concerning his or her life situation, individual differences in perception of WLB concept will exist. Thus, indicating the concept of WLB is not a simple goal to achieve. The research above highlights the extent of how
important it is to address the factors related to WLB such as coping with stress and life satisfaction.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Although the current study contributes to the literature, there are several limitations and directions for future research that merit further discussion. First, non-probability sampling was employed to extract participants from a convenient population. The current study was conducted mainly with employees from a single organisation, peers, friends and family of the researcher. In this sample there was an overrepresentation of females and participants aged 31-35. A number of participants were also final year psychology students, who may have understood the implications of the questions or may have been familiar with the psychological concepts included in the survey. The diversity of the sample (e.g., age, job type, parents/non-parents and marital status) and the ability to replicate previous findings lends some credence to the notion that these findings would likely occur across organisations and industries. Therefore, future research should examine the relationship among these variables in other contexts and with an even split of male and female participants to establish the generalisability of our results.

Second, this study relied on responses from friends and acquaintances of the researcher, perhaps participants felt they were expected to answer questions in a certain way to please the researcher. Alternatively, they may have felt embarrassed to admit they are not coping or satisfied with life, indicating social desirability bias may have influenced answers. As a result, it is not known whether these findings are reflective of the population of the Irish workplace.

Third, perhaps the timing of distribution of the survey affected participants’ responses. The surveys were completed in January after the Christmas holidays, indicating
participants may have experienced more positive or negative feelings when completing the survey, depending on different personality types. It would be interesting to see if differences in scores existed if the survey was distributed in June. Furthermore, as self-reported data was collected it is important to note that the researcher is relying on data that can rarely be independently verified. Thus the answers provided have to be taken at face value, even though they may be affected by self report bias. A lie scale could be included in the research to allow the researcher to identify how the questions are being answered, with the purpose of controlling self report bias in future research.

A final limitation discovered having completed the research is that alternative measures of psychological variables may have been more suitable in the analysis. For example, the lack of previous research on life satisfaction in relation to the WLB made it difficult to draw conclusions of this outcome of this study. Job satisfaction could be an appropriate alternative variable to examine. Rama Devi & Nagini (2013) posit that job satisfaction is positively related to WLB and negatively to burnout. This may alert employers to the benefits of helping employees maintain a balance between work and non-work life. Furthermore, the researcher utilised WLC and LWC as a measure of WLB, but future research could implement different measures such as Frone’s (2003) conflict and facilitation concept, where balance is defined as “low levels of inter-role conflict and high levels of inter-role facilitation” (p. 145).

The author had intended to explore the differences between various groups such as; managers and non-managers, parents and non-parents, single and married participants and different age groups to further analyse the variables and encapsulate their effects and correlations on each other. However, due to the time and size limit of the thesis, there was no scope to analyse these possible groups.
Despite the limitations, there are many implications for the findings of this study and strengths which should be noted. Utilising questionnaires as a method of data collection is the first strength of this study, as they hold advantages over other research methods, as they are less time consuming, they offer anonymity and there is less opportunity for bias caused by the presence of an interviewer or experimenter (Berry, 2004). Second, while previous research focuses mainly on the effect WLB has on an organisation this study focuses on the individual, which is important as WLB is a two pronged approach. The researcher had a specific interest in this study at this current time in Ireland to see how attitudes and behaviours are in post-recession times. It is now even more important than ever for policy-makers, employers and employees to address the problems faced by individuals inside and outside the workplace, to ensure individuals are equipped with the correct tools and knowledge to help cope with life’s stressor, to create a work-life balance and feel satisfied with life. Therefore, this study can only add to previous findings and improve knowledge.

Conclusion

Individuals may play many roles in life: employee, boss, student, spouse, partner, parent, child, sibling and friend. Each of these roles imposes demands on individuals, which require time, energy and commitment to fulfill. Oftentimes it is difficult to juggle all these tasks at once. An imbalance or work-family/work-life conflict occurs when the cumulative demands of these many work and non-work life roles are incompatible in some respect, so that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other role. According to Morgenstern (2008 as cited in Singh 2010) WLB is not about the amount of time spent in and outside work, but about how this time is spent, as what a person does in one, fuels energy for the other. Furthermore, Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) suggest achieving WLB working
adults build networks of support at home, at work and in the community, which is important as WLC and LWC affects quality of home and work life.

As previously mentioned, stress can have many implications on individuals’ health and well-being as well as their functioning in work and non-work roles. By making individuals and organisations aware of the importance of coping strategies they too can contribute to reducing stress, increasing satisfaction with life and optimising a WLB and in turn increasing attendance in work, improving their performance, interpersonal relations and non-work life. Overall, this study provides a synopsis of the perceived stress, life satisfaction, coping mechanisms and WLB experienced by a sample of individuals in the Irish workplace. It is important to understand what factors contribute to stress and coping mechanisms that help individuals deal with stressors to help them feel satisfied with their lives and to ensure a balance can be implemented in their work and non-work life.

A key finding of the current study is that the sample population seem to implement positive coping mechanisms such as; seeking support from others whether by attending counselling sessions, talking to family, friends or partners. They also seem to recognise the benefits of exercise and time out, as opposed to resolving the problems through detrimental outlets such as substance abuse or complete avoidance of the problem. While the positive effect of coping on stress is apparent, the positive relationship between increased physical activity, emotional health and well-being has also been well documented. Studies indicate significant improvements in life satisfaction after non-work hobbies such as exercise programmes, which illustrate the positive effects of physical activity as a coping mechanism (Elavsky & McAuley, 2007 as cited in Darling et al., 2012). Perhaps incorporating exercise or other activities outside work roles may help alleviate stress, improve coping mechanisms, promote work-life balance and increase satisfaction in life.
The present study found a significant difference between males and females in relation to perceived stress, while no significant difference is evident in coping styles. It is hoped that the results of this study will help establish factors that influence WLB, while reducing the conflict that exists between roles.
References


Appendix 1 – Coversheet for Anonymous Survey

Work-life balance: exploring the link between coping, perceived stress and life satisfaction.

My name is Amanda Reilly and I am conducting research in the Department of Psychology that explores the variables influencing Work-life balance. This research is being conducted as part of my final year studies and will be submitted for examination.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves completing and returning the attached anonymous survey. While the survey asks some questions that might cause minor negative feelings, it has been used widely in research. If any of the questions do raise difficult feelings for you, contact information for support services are included on the final page.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part.

Participation is anonymous and confidential. Thus responses can not be attributed to any one participant. For this reason, it will not be possible to withdraw from participation after the questionnaire has been collected.

The questionnaire will be securely stored and data from the questionnaires will be transferred from the paper/online record to electronic format and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the questionnaire that you are consenting to participate in the study.
Should you require any further information about the research please contact Amanda Reilly, My supervisor Dr Keith Schofield can be contacted at

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

If any of the questions in this survey raise difficult feelings for you, the following support services are available to you:

Samaritans (http://www.samaritans.org.uk/talk/branches/ireland.shtm)

AWARE (http://www.aware.ie/helpline.htm)

Appendix 2 – Company Permission letter
Appendix 3 – Questionnaire
Work-life life-work conflict scale (Netemeyer, Boles, McMurrian 1996)

PLEASE CIRCLE THE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH QUESTION THAT COMES CLOSEST TO REFLECTING YOUR OPINION ABOUT IT.

1= Strongly disagree
2= Moderately disagree
3= Slightly disagree
4= Undecided
5= Slightly agree
6= Moderately agree
7= Strongly agree

Strongly disagree ←_____→Strongly agree

1 The demands of my work interfere with my life away from work   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
2 The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil other interests   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
3 Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands of my job   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
4 My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfil other responsibilities and duties   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
5 Due to work, I have to make changes to my plans for activities away from work   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
6 The demands of my personal life interfere with work related duties   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
7 I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time outside work   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
8 Things I want to do at work don’t get done because of the demands of my interests outside work   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
9 My Home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work, accomplishing daily tasks and working over time.   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
10 Family related strain interferes with my ability to perform work-related duties   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

Scoring
The Work-life life-work conflict scale is a seven point likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. You add the five scores together for the items with each WLC LWC. Higher scores on the WLC indicate a greater degree of work conflicting with family/non-work life, while a higher LWC score indicates family/non-work life conflicting with work.
**Brief COPE scale (Carver, 1997)**

These items deal with ways you've been coping with the stress in your life. There are many ways to try to deal with problems. These items ask what you've been doing in general to cope with stressful events. Obviously, different people deal with things in different ways, but think about what you usually do when you are under a lot of stress. Each item says something about a particular way of coping. I want to know to what extent you've been doing what the item says. How much or how frequently. Don't answer on the basis of whether it seems to be working or not—just whether or not you're doing it. Use these response choices. Try to rate each item separately in your mind from the others. Make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can.

1 = I haven't been doing this at all  
2 = I've been doing this a little bit  
3 = I've been doing this a medium amount  
4 = I've been doing this a lot  

1. I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things. ___  
2. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in. ___  
3. I've been saying to myself "this isn't real.". ___  
4. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better. ___  
5. I've been getting emotional support from others. ___  
6. I've been giving up trying to deal with it. ___  
7. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better. ___  
8. I've been refusing to believe that it has happened. ___  
9. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape. ___  
10. I've been getting help and advice from other people. ___  
11. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it. ___  
12. I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive. ___  
13. I've been criticizing myself. ___  
14. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do. ___  
15. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone. ___  
16. I've been giving up the attempt to cope. ___  
17. I've been looking for something good in what is happening. ___
18. I've been making jokes about it.

19. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.

20. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.

21. I've been expressing my negative feelings.

22. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.

23. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.

24. I've been learning to live with it.

25. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.

26. I've been blaming myself for things that happened.

27. I've been praying or meditating.

28. I've been making fun of the situation.

Scoring
The Brief COPE scale yields a number of subscale scores covering how much the person uses various coping methods. To calculate the total for each subscale add together the scores from the items listed below for the appropriate subscale. The higher the total the greater the use of that coping method. (note that the scale does not yield an overall total but instead rates how much the person uses the different coping strategies).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-distraction</td>
<td>1 + 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active coping</td>
<td>2 + 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>3 + 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td>4 + 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of emotional support</td>
<td>5 + 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of instrumental support</td>
<td>10 + 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural disengagement</td>
<td>6 + 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venting</td>
<td>9 + 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive reframing</td>
<td>12 + 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>14 + 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>18 + 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>20 + 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>22 + 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>13 + 26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983)
**Instructions**
The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. For each question circle one of the following options:

0 = never  1 = almost never  2 = sometimes  3 = fairly often  4 = very often

**Scoring.**
Reverse the scores for the positively worded items (4, 5, 7 & 8) eg 0=4, 1=3, 2=2,3=1,4=0.

Add the reversed scores together with the original scores for the remaining items (1, 2, 3, 6, 9 & 10).

The higher the overall total score the greater the amount of perceived stress the person is experiencing.

Satisfaction with life Scale (SWLS), (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin 1985)
Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

___ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

___ The conditions of my life are excellent.

___ I am satisfied with my life.

___ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

___ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

**Scoring**

Add the scores together from the 5 items for an overall total. Higher scores indicate greater degree of satisfaction with life. The authors have used the following cutoffs to rank the categories of satisfaction with life -

- 31 - 35 Extremely satisfied
- 26 - 30 Satisfied
- 21 - 25 Slightly satisfied
- 20 Neutral
- 15 - 19 Slightly dissatisfied
- 10 - 14 Dissatisfied
- 5 - 9 Extremely dissatisfied

Understanding SWLS scores:

http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/Documents/Understanding%20SWLS%20Scores.pdf

**Further reading** [http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/SWLS.html](http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/SWLS.html)

**Demographic and researchers own questions:**
Please select the appropriate answer under each heading.

Age:
- 18-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46+

Gender:
- Male
- Female

Marital Status:
- Single
- Married

Number of Children:
- 0
- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5+

Employment type:
- Full-time
- Part-time

Role in current position:
- Management
- Non-management

Number of years in employment:
- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21+

Are you aware of the concept ‘work-life balance’?
- Yes
- No

Do you take part in other non-work life roles?

You can complete this by typing 'Yes' or 'No', followed by a brief description of your answer is 'Yes'. For example; study, voluntary work, carer of family member/friend or other commitments.

In your opinion what helps you cope with stressors in life?

Answer by typing a brief description in the box below.