



Research article

Psychological distress and workload as predictors of satisfaction with life in Peruvian female university professors with a family burden

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine whether psychological distress and workload predict satisfaction with life in Peruvian female university professors caring for dependent relatives. A total of 157 Peruvian female university professors aged 26–58 years who were caring for dependent relatives ($M = 40.50$; $SD = 7.72$) participated in the study. Of the female university professors participating in the study, 87.3% worked in a private university. The Psychological Distress Scale (K6), the Workload Scale (ECT) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were applied to them. Through a multiple regression analysis, it was found that psychological distress ($\beta = .559$, $p < .01$) and workload ($\beta = .173$, $p < .01$) are variables that significantly predict satisfaction with life in university professors who are also housewives (adjusted $R^2 = .43$), being psychological distress the variable with the highest predictive power. These findings provide evidence for the usefulness of considering both psychological distress and workload as predictors of satisfaction with life in female Peruvian university professors.

1. Introduction

The sudden changes due to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic have generated repercussions on global public health and key aspects such as research and higher education (The Lancet, 2020). In this sense, universities in the world have had to adapt to new conditions and teach virtual classes in order not to stop with the teaching and learning process (Mishra et al., 2020) (see Figures 1,2 and 3).

In this scenario, the university professors stand out as key figures expected to be prepared to teach virtually and provide education during the pandemic as a need for a reorientation of the teachers' presence and learning activity was evidenced during the health crisis (Rapanta et al., 2020). However, within this group, female teachers are the ones who deserve special consideration as they have had to face the impact of the new coronavirus at the economic, financial, family, and social levels (Chang, 2020).

With regard to the aforementioned information, and although the analysis of the impact of COVID-19 in terms of sex shows the same number of infections in both men and women, there are differences in mortality and vulnerability (Wenham et al., 2020). These differences

place men in a less favorable position; however, concerning women worldwide, the coronavirus has affected their physical health and their family, work, and daily lives (Chang, 2020). This fact is backed by some studies that found that men were more likely to die due to COVID-19; whereas women disproportionately assumed the psychological and emotional impact of the pandemic (Chang, 2020).

At this point, it is worth mentioning that during the health emergency, female university professors had to face the need to adapt to on-line classes by turning their homes into offices, classrooms, and virtual learning centers (König et al., 2020). Therefore, it was difficult for them to focus exclusively on their job as they still had to take care of housework, childcare, and even the elderly. This has clearly increased their emotional burden, negatively impacted their mental health, and majorly affected their degree of satisfaction with life (Malisch et al., 2020).

Regarding satisfaction with life, the literature shows that this construct can be defined as the optimistic assessment that a person makes about his life in particular aspects such as family, studies, work, health, friends and free time (Merino-Soto and Ruiz-del Castillo, 2018). In this regard, some studies found that satisfaction with life in university professors was associated with higher levels of prosocial behavior rated by

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	Ninguna de las veces	Pocas veces	Algunas veces	La mayor parte del tiempo	Todo el tiempo
1. Nervioso	1	2	3	4	5
2. Sin esperanza	1	2	3	4	5
3. Inquieto(a) o intranquilo(a)	1	2	3	4	5
4. Tan deprimido(a) que nada puede animarte	1	2	3	4	5
5. Cualquier cosa que hagas representa un esfuerzo	1	2	3	4	5
6. Inútil	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 1. Psychological distress scale.

students (Braun et al., 2020). On the other hand, another group of researchers sought to explain the professors' satisfaction with life-based on sociodemographic variables (Türkoğlu et al., 2014), social support (Yuh and Choi, 2017), labor conditions (Sahito and Vaisanen, 2020) and work satisfaction (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020). Regarding the population of university professors, some studies reveal that this group experiences professional burnout insofar as they have responsibilities both at home and at work (Gaxiola-Villa, 2014). This is consistent with recent findings that being a teacher is one of the most challenging and stress-prone jobs (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020).

In the Peruvian context, the reality and scientific literature show some factors that may be conditioning the positive assessment of female university professors in times of online education. First, one of the factors studied is work overload. In this regard, studies conducted in Peruvian non-university teachers showed that this variable was present as a variable explaining stress and burnout (Tacca and Tacca, 2019), even being considered as a psychosocial factor (Alvites-Huamaní, 2019). Second, psychological distress should be understood as the perceived level of stress, demoralization, discomfort, and restlessness. This concept allows obtaining information on the self-perception of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that could configure a mental health problem (Sanchez et al., 2013), Peruvian teachers have become a very visible manifestation (Alvites-Huamaní, 2019; Cruz and Bernui, 2019; Vértiz-Osores et al., 2019).

With regard to the relationship between these variables, there are reports in literature evidencing the association between psychological distress and satisfaction with life. A study revealed that emotional pain was associated with stressful factors, which prevented an adequate degree of satisfaction with life (Arvidsdotter et al., 2016). Another research evidenced that fear and depression were inversely associated with optimism in female teachers (Stachteas and Stachteas, 2020); this situation was recurrent due to the restrictions caused by social isolation, which

ended up affecting their psychological well-being (Gao and Sai, 2020). These findings are consistent with the findings of previous studies indicating that a worker's feelings have a direct impact on his/her degree of satisfaction with life (Moreta et al., 2018). Work overload is known to negatively affect the degree of satisfaction with life (De Simone et al., 2014; Erdogan et al., 2012; Nastasa et al., 2020). Recent research evidenced that work overload accounts for the second-highest risk among university professors (Pace et al., 2021). Lastly, and focusing on a gender-based analysis, some authors state that women constitute a vulnerable group when it comes to workload, which acts as a factor that decreases their degree of satisfaction with life (Kuhn et al., 2021). In addition, although some studies reveal that it is men who show a greater level of dissatisfaction with their lives (Dutot, 2020), in agreement with Clark et al. (2021), working mothers are the ones who have been more negatively affected by COVID-19 than men, experiencing different issues in terms of their well-being.

In contrast, after analyzing specialized literature, it has not been possible to find a comprehensive theoretical model that allows for the creation of a predictive model between the three study variables, although some theoretical approaches support the formulation of hypothesis stating that psychological distress and work overload are variables that exert a direct impact on satisfaction with life. In the case of psychological distress, and from the point of view of the theoretical conception of positive psychology, specifically from Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-being (Ryff and Keyes, 1995), the analysis of mental health requires a review of aspects associated with people's well-being (Moreta-Herrera et al., 2018). Therefore, mental health problems, such as psychological distress, represent a relevant type of potential predictors of satisfaction with life (Ferguson et al., 2015).

The direct relationship of workload with the degree of satisfaction with life can be explained through the theoretical approach of Psychosocial Risk (Erwandi et al., 2021). In this approach, Warr's vitamin model

0	1	2	3	4	
Nunca	Raramente: algunas veces al año	A veces: algunas veces al mes	Frecuentemente: algunas veces por semana	Muy frecuentemente: todos los días	
1) Cuando está trabajando, ¿se encuentra con situaciones especialmente duras?	0	1	2	3	4
2) ¿Ha tenido que hacer más de una cosa a la vez?	0	1	2	3	4
3) ¿Ha tenido problemas con su trabajo debido a que se ha ido complicando progresivamente?	0	1	2	3	4
4) ¿Debe trabajar con un ritmo demasiado rápido?	0	1	2	3	4
5) ¿Le ocurre que no tiene tiempo suficiente para completar su trabajo?	0	1	2	3	4
6) ¿Piensa que tiene que hacer un trabajo demasiado difícil para usted?	0	1	2	3	4

Figure 2. Workload scale.

Nº	Ítems	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1	En la mayoría de los aspectos, mi vida se acerca a mi ideal.					
2	Las condiciones de mi vida son excelentes.					
3	Estoy completamente satisfecho/a con mi vida.					
4	Hasta ahora, he logrado las cosas importantes que quería en mi vida.					
5	Si pudiera vivir mi vida otra vez, no cambiaría nada.					

Figure 3. Life satisfaction scale.

(1987) is particularly useful for explaining the impact of the characteristics of the type of job on workers' health and well-being. This model uses the example of vitamins and their impact on physical health; some of the characteristics of a certain job behave as vitamins, which, when emphasized, exert positive effects that can be observed in terms of the satisfaction experienced at work, and thus, in terms of the satisfaction with life. However, other conditions, such as an overwhelming work overload, have a negative effect, not only on physical health but also on the individual's perception of well-being and satisfaction (Warr, 1987).

In conclusion, based on the findings in literature, it can be assumed that workload and psychological distress act as independent predictors of the degree of satisfaction with life in female university professors. However, there are still few studies that analyze this predictive capacity based on sex as very few investigations focus on female university professors caring for dependent relatives; thus, there is an urgent need for establishing a predictive model that includes the three study variables. Hence, to address the gap in the literature, the present study aimed to determine whether psychological distress and work overload predicts satisfaction with life in female university professors caring for dependent relatives.

2. Methods

According to the taxonomy of study designs proposed by Alto, López & Benavente (2013), this is a cross-sectional predictive study of associative strategy. The study aimed to explore the relationship between variables on the basis of the prognosis of a dependent or criterion variable (satisfaction with life) based on two predictive or independent variables (psychological distress and work overload).

2.1. Participants

The sampling was non-probabilistic, and 157 Peruvian female university professors participated, ages 26–58 years ($M = 40.50$; $SD = 7.72$). Of the total number of professors, 87.3% worked in a private university. On average, the participants had 10.12 ($SD = 7.99$) hours of dictation per week, without considering the hours of class preparation, professional updating and administrative work. Furthermore, 42% were in charge of two or three dependent relatives, whereas 58% were in charge of three to six relatives, consisting mainly of little kids and elderly parents. The term “housewife” refers to people who carry out household activities related to caring for their husbands, children, or parents.

2.2. Instruments

Psychological stress scale (K6; Kessler et al., 2003). This scale is composed of 6 items that assess psychological distress based on anxiety and depression through the frequency of nonspecific symptoms during the last 30 days. The items are based on the diagnostic criteria for major

depression and generalized anxiety disorder of the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV; APA, 2004). The items are scaled in Likert-type format with five response options, whose values range from 0 (at no time) to 4 (all the time). In the present study, the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient to estimate reliability was good ($\alpha = .82$ [95% CI: .77 - .85]).

Workload scale (ECT; Calderó n et al., 2018). It examines the self-efficacy beliefs of workers, assessing their ability to cope with difficulties in their work. It is made up of six items on a Likert-type scale with seven response options, where 0 is “never” and six is “always”. The reliability of the ECT in the present study was $\alpha = .96$ (95% CI: .95 - .96).

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) was adapted to the Peruvian context by Caycho-Rodríguez et al. (2018). It is a brief measure made up of five items that evaluate the degree of satisfaction that the person has with his life. The item format is Likert type with five response options where 1 is totally disagrees and 5 is totally agree. The reliability of the SWLS in the present study was $\alpha = .76$ (CI95%: .72 - .78).

2.3. Procedure

This study was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, between the months of September 2020 and March 2021. Given the social isolation measures for preventing COVID-19 infection, the study participants answered a questionnaire through the Google Forms platform. Its link was sent via email and social media (WhatsApp and Facebook). In the same way, the study participants received information about the study objective, the use of data and the confidentiality agreement. In all cases, participation was voluntary, and only those who gave their informed consent were included. This procedure followed the ethical and methodological recommendations for research via the Internet (Das et al., 2018), such as including an informed consent form by which the participants in the study received information on the purpose of this research, data use and confidentiality agreement. Besides, no personal identification was requested. In all cases, participation was on a voluntary basis, and only those people who filled in the informed consent were accepted in the study. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample (N = 157).

Variable	Category	n (%)
Sex	Female	157 (100)
Age	26–40	78 (49.7)
	41–58	79 (50.3)
University where they work	Private	137 (87.3)
	Public	20 (12.7)
Number of dependent relatives	1–2	42 (66)
	3–6	58 (91)

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of satisfaction with studies, adaptability to university life and use of virtual media.

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Satisfaction with life	18.49	3.630	-.842	1.494
Psychological distress	11.39	3.784	.505	-.414
Workload	18.91	4.328	-.192	-.438

of the Graduate School from the Universidad Peruana Unión (Ref: 2021-CE-EPG-000028).

2.4. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis) of the study variables were calculated. The correlation analysis between the variables was performed using Pearson's correlation coefficient, considering that the values of $r \geq .20$, $r \geq .50$ and $r \geq .80$ are interpreted as a minimum, moderate and robust effect size, respectively (Ferguson, 2009).

Finally, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine how much variability of the Satisfaction with Life scores is explained by the variations in psychological distress and workload, considering a significance level of .05. Prior to the conduction of the regression analysis, compliance with the statistical assumptions was verified by analyzing the linearity, independence, homoscedasticity, normality, and non-collinearity of the variables. The interpretation was made through the determination coefficient (R^2) under an effect magnitude approach. A $R^2 \geq .02$, expresses a small effect size; $R^2 \geq .13$ expresses a medium effect size y $R^2 \geq .26$ a big effect (Ellis, 2010). Statistical analyzes were performed with SPSS version 25.0.

3. Results

Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristics of a group of female university professors.

3.1. Descriptive analysis

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the study variables. Regarding the coefficients of skewness and kurtosis of satisfaction with studies and adaptability to university life, both are below 1.5, which is an adequate range (Pérez and Medrano, 2010).

3.2. Correlational analysis

Table 3 shows the correlations between the study variables. A strong significant inverse correlation was found between psychological distress and satisfaction with life. Meanwhile, the magnitude of the correlation between workload and satisfaction with life was moderate.

3.3. Regression analysis

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine which variables best predict satisfaction with life (Table 4). The linearity, independence, homoscedasticity, normality, and non-collinearity of the

Table 3. Correlation between satisfaction with life, psychological distress and workload.

	Satisfaction with life	Psychological distress	Workload
Satisfaction with life	1		
Psychological distress	-.645**	1	
Workload	-.452**	.504**	1

** Significance level at 0.01 (bilateral).

Table 4. Predictors of satisfaction with life among university professors.

Predictors	B	EE	β	t	p
(Constant)	27,299	1,005		27,176	.000
Psychological distress	-.536	.067	.559	-7,981	.000
Workload	-.143	.059	.173	-2,438	.016

Note: Dependent variable = Satisfaction with life (F Test = 59,813, $p < .001$; adjusted $R^2 = .430$), B = non-standardized coefficient, EE = Standard error, β = Standardized regression coefficient.

variables was previously verified. The results of the analysis evidenced an adequate fit of the model (F test = 59,813 $p < .001$). Psychological distress ($\beta = .559$, $p < .01$) and workload ($\beta = .173$, $p < .01$) were variables that significantly predicted satisfaction with life in university professors caring for dependent relatives (adjusted $R^2 = .43$). The value of R^2 indicates that the regression model has a large effect size. Likewise, the t-values of the beta regression coefficients of the predictor variables are significant. ($p < 0.01$).

4. Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the reality of millions of people. In the educational sphere, specifically, in the role of the university professor, despite the fact that there is a considerable increase in scientific publications (Brunotto, 2020), the negative impact of the pandemic is evidenced in the increase in anxiety levels in university professors (Veis et al., 2021), professional maladjustment (Denisova et al., 2020), the reduction of the perception of well-being in relation to their profession and concerns about their professional future (Alves et al., 2020). Additionally, the deleterious effects of the pandemic exacerbate social inequality and the gender gap (Clark et al., 2021), especially in vulnerable communities and working women (Portillo et al., 2020). In Peru, many working women are single mothers and their income supports the family economy (Silva, 2021). Regarding the scientific production of women scientists, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative effect, as many women have had to move to care for their parents or children under the age of twelve (Guatimosim, 2020). With this outlook, in which women must face the demands of work and care of the home, the objective of this study was to determine if psychological distress and workload predict satisfaction with life in female university professors caring for dependent relatives.

The analysis results of a sample of 157 female university professors caring for dependent relatives is by no means a negligible number if we consider the difficulties inherent to access this kind of population, show a very strong inverse association between psychological distress and satisfaction with life, which means that people with high rates of psychological distress manifest a state of emotional distress associated with stressors that exhausts them mentally and impedes them to reach an adequate level of satisfaction with life (Arvidsdotter et al., 2016). These results are consistent with recent research in which the overall prevalence of anxiety was higher in women than in men (Li et al., 2020) and an inverse relationship between feelings of fear and depression with the optimism of women professors (Stachteas and Stachteas, 2020). In the case of education, considering the adaptation and motivation of the new online teaching, female university professors reported differences in favor compared to males (Scherer et al., 2021), although not in all countries (Portillo et al., 2020).

In the UK, the effects on women were related to isolation, affecting their psychological well-being (Gao and Sai, 2020). Other studies showed that the emotions felt by the workers affected their life satisfaction (Merino-Soto and Ruiz-del Castillo, 2018) and university professors reported higher levels of stress and mental health problems (Rodríguez et al., 2018; Stapleton et al., 2020). Moreover, previous studies revealed that university professors felt discontented at the end of the working day (Peñ aherrera-Larenas et al., 2015) with some difficulties in the use of

technologies during the teaching processes (Padilla-Beltrán et al., 2014). This was aggravated due to the extraordinary digital leap, where a traditional school went to a remote digitized one without the respective preparation (Iivari et al., 2020).

Likewise, the results found in this research showed a moderate inverse relationship between workload and satisfaction with life. This means that teachers who had high levels of workload show lower levels of satisfaction with life. The results align with previous research that emphasized that work overload negatively influences life satisfaction (De Simone et al., 2014; Erdogan et al., 2012; Nastasa et al., 2020). Previous studies show that workload, directly and indirectly related to the family, affects life satisfaction (Lee and Shin, 2017). In addition, recent research showed that work overload is may be the second-highest risk for non-university teachers (Prado-Gascó et al., 2020) and university professors (Pace et al., 2021), and workload has increased between 9 to 15 h per week, thereby reducing the time for the family and other activities (Penna Tosso, Sánchez Sáinz & Mateos Casado, 2020). These data are in agreement with the literature about the gender gap. Several employers present stereotypes about women productivity and consider that women are less committed to work (Cobos-Sanchiz, Del-Pino-espejo, Sánchez-Tovar and Matud, 2020). In the case of women, they were considered a vulnerable group about the workload; they also reported a decrease in life satisfaction (Kuhn et al., 2021).

The predictive model shows that psychological distress and workload predict satisfaction with life in female university professors caring for dependent relatives. These findings are consistent with those reported in previous studies, which found that university professors who had a more significant workload manifested symptoms of depression and that women showed a higher level of physical and emotional exhaustion compared to men (Gomes and Quintão, 2012). Although some studies show that men are more dissatisfied with their lives (Dutot, 2020), according to Clark et al. (2021), working mothers were the most negatively impacted by the pandemic, experiencing several problems related to their wellness. Satisfaction with life is an essential factor, especially for women, who have to balance work and family life demands, in a scenario where work roles often go beyond the family limits (Rawal, 2021).

These results force us to consider the role of psychological distress and workload as contributors to life satisfaction, as it was highlighted by some authors in studies on life satisfaction and psychological distress (Bustamante et al., 2016; Cobos-Sanchiz et al., 2020). Consequently, work factors (Erdogan et al., 2012) and high work pressure are antecedents that predict life satisfaction (Bhatia and Mohsin, 2020).

The results of this study must be interpreted considering its limitations. One of the study limitations was the sample size; the small number of participants could have affected data extrapolation. In addition, biases were likely to occur in sample selection because the sampling procedure was non-probabilistic, and biases might have occurred during data entry of the survey answers as data collection was carried out through virtual platforms. Another limitation may be the lack of sampling segmentation regarding relevant variables for the study, such as age, working hours per week, caring tasks, and number of dependent family members. Likewise, since it is a cross-sectional study, only the association between the variables is analyzed at a given moment; therefore, longitudinal studies are recommended.

In conclusion, given the limitations reported, the replication of this study with a bigger sample considering cultural and institutional contexts is recommended to increase the generalizability of the results and the understanding of the study variables. Moreover, future studies can supplement the findings of this study by considering variables like age, working hours, and number of dependent family members in the study.

Despite these limitations, we consider that this research has broadened the understanding of these variables and shows the predictive capacity of psychological distress and workload toward satisfaction with life in female university professors caring for dependent relatives.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Renzo Felipe Carranza Esteban, Oscar Mamani-Benito, Josué Edison Turpo Chaparro: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Susana K. Lingán-Huamán, Ana Elguera Pajares: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

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Data availability statement

The data that has been used is confidential.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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