

Balancing Service and Life among Disciplined Professionals: The Influence of Marital Status on Satisfaction Pathways

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between work–life balance (WLB) and job satisfaction among members of the disciplined workforce, a group often exposed to irregular schedules, high demands, and structured occupational environments. Drawing on data from 250 respondents employed in disciplined services, WLB was assessed across three dimensions – work interference with personal life (WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW), and work/personal life enhancement (WPLE), while job satisfaction was measured using intrinsic, extrinsic, and general satisfaction indices. Findings indicate that WPLE was the strongest predictor of job satisfaction across dimensions, with WIPL also contributing significantly, though to a lesser extent. Comparative analyses showed that marital status moderated these dynamics: married employees' satisfaction was shaped primarily by enrichment, while single employees' satisfaction was influenced by both enrichment and reduced interference. These results highlight the importance of organizational strategies that foster positive work–life enrichment while mitigating conflict. This study contributes to the literature by contextualizing WLB-satisfaction dynamics within disciplined professions and outlining implications for practice and policy.

Keywords: *Work–life balance, Job satisfaction, Disciplined workforce, Marital status, Hong Kong*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Disciplined workforces, including police officers, firefighters, and correctional personnel, operate within environments characterized by nonstandard schedules, unpredictable demands, and elevated responsibilities. These occupational features often constrain employees' ability to maintain work–life balance (WLB), affecting job satisfaction and well-being (Peterson et al., 2019; Roşca et al., 2021). While WLB research has expanded to encompass not only conflict but also enrichment and compatibility between roles (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Casper et al., 2018), its significance is particularly acute in disciplined professions, where high-intensity demands and limited boundary control exacerbate strains. Understanding how WLB shapes satisfaction in these contexts is essential for developing strategies that foster engagement, mitigate burnout, and sustain organizational commitment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Allen et al., 2013).

At the same time, personal and relational circumstances may condition how disciplined employees perceive and respond to WLB challenges. Marital status, in particular, has been identified as a factor influencing the salience of enrichment and conflict pathways, with family support sometimes buffering negative spillovers or amplifying positive synergies (Islam et al., 2020; Knobloch et al., 2023; Woodall et al., 2020). However, less is known about how these mechanisms operate in disciplined professions, where occupational cultures are highly structured and stressors distinctive. This study addresses this gap by examining how different dimensions of WLB influence intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction among disciplined employees and whether these relationships vary by marital status.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Work-life Balance

The study of work–life balance (WLB) has roots in the broader work–family interface literature, which initially emphasized role conflict. Early contributions, such as Kahn et al. (1964), framed role conflict as inter-role strain caused by competing demands. Building on this, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work–family conflict as occurring when role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible, a conceptualization that dominated early scholarship. During the 1990s, scholars began shifting attention toward balance as a broader construct, incorporating not only the absence of conflict but also the degree to which individuals could experience satisfaction and effectiveness across multiple roles (Frone, 2003). This marked a turning point from conflict-driven models toward more integrative understandings of the work–life interface.

By the early 2000s, WLB was increasingly seen as a multidimensional construct that captured both negative and positive interactions between work and non-work domains. Greenhaus and Powell's (2006) theory of work–family enrichment highlighted the potential for resources gained in one role (e.g., skills, positive affect, social support) to enhance experiences in another, complementing the longstanding emphasis on conflict. Around the same time, scholars proposed definitions of WLB that accounted for alignment across roles. For example, Voydanoff (2005) conceptualized WLB as a fit between work and family demands and resources, while Frone (2003) treated it as a global appraisal of how compatible work and family roles are. Kalliath and Brough (2008) offered one of the most influential definitional reviews, arguing that WLB is best understood as “the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth according to an individual's current life priorities.” Their work reinforced that balance is not simply the absence of conflict but rather the presence of harmony and alignment.

Contemporary scholarship views WLB as a dynamic, individualized, and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by evolving organizational practices and societal expectations. Kossek and Lautsch (2012) emphasized that balance must be understood through both personal boundary management styles and broader organizational contexts, including cultural norms and flexible work practices. Allen et al. (2013) further established that access to supportive practices—such as flexible scheduling and managerial support—strongly influences WLB, linking it to outcomes like engagement and reduced turnover. More recent reviews (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Casper et al., 2018) consolidate decades of research, showing how WLB scholarship has expanded from conflict-based origins to encompass enrichment, satisfaction, well-being, and subjective boundary management. Thus, the historical trajectory of WLB reflects an evolution from narrow, conflict-based definitions to broader, multidimensional and context-sensitive frameworks, better suited to the realities of contemporary work arrangements.

2.2 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has evolved from an undifferentiated attitude toward work to a multifaceted construct with clear cognitive and affective components across a century of research. Early psychometric efforts established the construct's measurability (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951) and tied satisfaction to core features of work design via the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Contemporary syntheses trace how this foundation broadened into an integrated view of job attitudes that distinguishes enduring evaluations from momentary affect at work, while acknowledging their dynamic interplay (Judge et al., 2017). More recent theory updates further position job satisfaction within resource-based models of work (e.g., the Job Demands–Resources framework), which specify how job demands and resources shape motivational states and in turn satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Together, this historical arc has moved the field from static, global indices toward process-oriented accounts that connect job design, motivation, and affective experiences to satisfaction judgments.

A key strand in this development is the differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. Classic work design theory already implied an “intrinsic” route – where skill variety, autonomy, and task significance foster meaningfulness and internal motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) – while compensation, supervision, and conditions reflect more “extrinsic” facets. Modern measurement work has clarified and validated these facets at scale, showing robust reliability of intrinsic and extrinsic subdimensions and their distinct nomological networks (Lepold et al., 2018). Meta-analytic evidence also highlights that dispositional tendencies and basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence and relatedness, differentially channel the intrinsic-extrinsic pathways to job satisfaction (Steel et al., 2019; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Complementing these structural drivers, day-level and affect-focused research shows that discrete emotions experienced at work systematically colour satisfaction judgments, cementing the field's shift toward affect-cognition integration rather than purely cognitive evaluations of job attributes (Williams et al., 2024).

Recent developments have extended these traditions into contemporary contexts and clarified boundary conditions. Resource-based perspectives specify how redesigned and crafted jobs – often in digitally mediated or flexible arrangements – enable employees to align tasks with motives, thereby bolstering intrinsic satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Rudolph et al., 2017). Age-related and career-stage contingencies qualify these effects: for instance, job autonomy's link to satisfaction strengthens with age, indicating shifting motive salience across the life span (Ng & Feldman, 2015). At the same time, macro-level dynamics that influence extrinsic features, such as job alternatives and mobility pressures, shape the satisfaction–turnover nexus with cumulative evidence elucidating when and why dissatisfaction translates into withdrawal (Rubenstein et al., 2018). Overall, the literature now situates job satisfaction as a dynamically constructed judgment emerging from the interplay of job design, intrinsic needs, affective experiences, and contextual constraints, spanning both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Judge et al., 2017; Van den Broeck et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2024).

2.3 Work-life Balance and Job Satisfaction for Disciplined Workforce

Disciplined, uniformed and emergency service workforces confront contextual demands such as shift work, irregular hours, exposure to trauma, and high responsibility that shape their work-life interface and, in turn, job attitudes. Contemporary studies applied resource-based and job-demands frameworks to explain how structural features of disciplined work such as rotating shifts, long duty periods and high task demands increase work-family conflict and reduce job satisfaction unless mitigated by job resources such as schedule control, social support and meaningful work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Allen et al., 2013; Marcos et al., 2020). Empirical investigations among police officers and firefighters showed consistent associations between shift characteristics, sleep disruption and elevated work-family conflict, with consequent effects on burnout and lower job satisfaction (Peterson et al., 2019; Roşca et al., 2021). Longitudinal evidence from a metropolitan police force further demonstrated that redesigning shift schedules to increase predictability and off-duty time improved officers' perceived work-life balance and raised job satisfaction over time (Rohwer et al., 2022). These findings indicate that for disciplined workforces the mechanics of scheduling and exposure to occupational stressors are proximal levers for WLB and satisfaction outcomes.

Research specific to disciplined occupational cultures stresses occupational specificity and coping resources as moderators of WLB-satisfaction links. Studies of police populations identified that role segmentation, threat to family role, and resilience influence whether work-family conflict translates into reduced job satisfaction (Islam et al., 2020; Griffin & Sun, 2018). Similarly, research on firefighters indicates that high job demands and occupational stressors are associated with exhaustion and burnout, while individual and organizational resources may help mitigate these effects (Roşca et al., 2021; Vinnikov et al., 2019). Meta-analytic and review work in the broader WLB literature underscored that enrichment and resource pathways in work and family dynamics can partly offset conflict pathways, but their operation is context-dependent,

especially in occupations with nonstandard, high-risk duties (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Casper et al., 2018). Taken together, the discipline-specific literature points to a model in which structural job features and occupational culture set the contours of WLB, while psychological and organizational resources determine whether these contours produce satisfaction or strain.

Marriage and family structure appear to moderate how disciplined employees perceive and respond to WLB stressors, with several recent studies documenting differential patterns by marital status and spouse circumstances. Large-scale family and military cohort research shows that military stressors such as deployments, relocations and combat exposure undermined marital quality largely through increased work-family conflict, and that dual-military status and spouse gender could further condition these effects (Woodall et al., 2020; Knobloch et al., 2023). Systematic reviews of military couples found that most empirical work showed married service members and their partners used unique maintenance strategies and faced vulnerabilities that reshaped how work demands spilled into marital life and subsequently affected well-being (Knobloch et al., 2023). In policing and firefighting populations, studies reported that officers' domestic arrangements, such as having a partner or parental status, and perceived family support altered the magnitude and direction of associations between shift work, WLB and job satisfaction. Marriage often provided social resources that buffered negative spillover, but this could also introduce additional role obligations that increased family interference with work in some contexts (Rohwer et al., 2022; Peterson et al., 2019).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The preceding literature review demonstrated that disciplined workforces, including police, firefighters, and military personnel, are uniquely affected by occupational structures that shape their work-life balance (WLB) and job satisfaction outcomes. Prior studies indicated that factors such as shift work, high occupational demands, and organizational culture strongly determine WLB, while individual and relational resources, including marital status, may moderate these effects (Griffin & Sun, 2018; Islam et al., 2020; Rohwer et al., 2022). Against this background, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between WLB and job satisfaction in a sample of disciplined employees and to explore whether employees in different marital status groups perceived WLB and job satisfaction differently. Specifically, the objectives were: (a) to assess the association between WLB and job satisfaction, (b) to determine the relative influence of WLB subdimensions on intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction, and (c) to examine whether marital status influences perceptions of WLB and job satisfaction among members of the disciplined workforce.

The study employed a purposive sampling approach. Invitations were distributed to part-time students enrolled in undergraduate programmes at a self-financing tertiary institution in Hong Kong, with eligibility restricted to those currently serving or having colleagues employed in disciplined professions, including police, fire and rescue, and correctional services. These students were encouraged to share the invitation with colleagues in the disciplined workforce, thereby broadening the sample pool while retaining its occupational specificity. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to survey commencement.

The data collection was conducted through an electronic questionnaire accessible via a QR code printed on the invitation materials. We chose this format to maximize accessibility and convenience for shift-working participants. To safeguard data quality, we employed multiple measures to deter and detect duplicate entries. The survey platform restricted single submissions per device, and time-stamp analyses identified and removed potential duplicates. Additionally, incomplete responses were excluded from the final dataset to ensure the robustness of the findings. After screening for completeness and accuracy, we included 250 valid datasets in the analysis.

Work-life balance was measured using Hayman's (2005) 15-item adapted WLB scale, which captures three distinct subdimensions: Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL), Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW), and Work/Personal Life Enhancement (WPLE). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and negatively worded items were reverse-coded so higher scores indicate better balance. In this study, the internal consistency of the WLB subscales was satisfactory to excellent: WIPL ($\alpha = .895$), PLIW ($\alpha = .867$), WPLE ($\alpha = .692$), and overall WLB ($\alpha = .787$). These values align with prior validations of the scale, which reported alpha reliabilities ranging between .70 and .89 across subdimensions (Hayman, 2005).

Job satisfaction was assessed using the 20-item short form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) (Weiss et al., 1967). The MSQ distinguishes intrinsic satisfaction (12 items) from extrinsic satisfaction (6 items), along with an overall general satisfaction index. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, consistent with established practice in organizational research (Hirschfeld, 2000). Reliability analysis demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the current study: General Job Satisfaction (GJS) ($\alpha = .934$), Intrinsic Job Satisfaction (IJS) ($\alpha = .908$), and Extrinsic Job Satisfaction (EJS) ($\alpha = .844$).

These values align with prior research, where MSQ subscales have consistently demonstrated high reliability across occupational contexts (Hirschfeld, 2000).

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 showed some variation in how respondents perceived different aspects of work-life balance. Among the three dimensions of work-life balance, PLIW had the highest mean score ($M = 3.524$), while WIPL had the lowest ($M = 2.989$). As these scales were reverse-coded, higher scores indicated less interference. Thus, the findings suggest that participants generally perceived their personal lives as less likely to hinder their work, whereas work demands were more frequently seen as intruding upon personal life. The mean WPLE score was 3.292, reflecting a moderate level of positive enrichment between work and non-work domains. The overall WLB composite had a mean of 3.213 and a relatively small standard deviation ($SD = 0.565$), indicating that participants tended to report a consistent, moderate sense of balance.

The descriptive results for job satisfaction showed that respondents reported relatively high satisfaction across dimensions, with stronger endorsement of intrinsic aspects of work than extrinsic factors. IJS had the highest mean ($M = 3.602$), followed by EJS ($M = 3.183$). GJS was also high, with a mean of 3.500. The standard deviations, which ranged from 0.685 to 0.834, indicated moderate variability in responses, reflecting some diversity of views but an overall tendency toward higher satisfaction. These findings suggest that participants derived more fulfillment from the inherent qualities of their work than from external rewards or conditions.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of work-life balance and job satisfaction scores from respondents in this study

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	Items
1	Work Interference with Personal Life	2.989	0.809	.895	7
2	Personal Life Interference with Work	3.524	0.896	.867	4
3	Work/Personal Life Enhancement	3.292	0.713	.692	4
4	Work-Life Balance	3.213	0.565	.787	15
5	Intrinsic Job Satisfaction	3.602	0.692	.908	12
6	Extrinsic Job Satisfaction	3.183	0.834	.844	6
7	General Job Satisfaction	3.500	0.685	.934	20

The correlation analysis in Table 2 examined the associations between work-life balance dimensions and the three measures of job satisfaction among all respondents of this study. The results showed significant correlations between job satisfaction and the reverse-scored interference dimensions. WIPL exhibited a significant positive correlation with all three job satisfaction measures: IJS ($r = .157, p < .05$), EJS ($r = .211, p < .01$), and GJS ($r = .186, p < .01$). This suggests that when employees perceive less interference from work into their personal lives, their reported satisfaction increases across all dimensions. In contrast, PLIW, also reverse-scored, was not significantly correlated with any job satisfaction measures, indicating that the extent to which personal demands intrude on work did not meaningfully influence satisfaction in this sample.

A notably strong and consistent set of correlations is observed between WPLE and all three job satisfaction dimensions. WPLE, which measures the positive spillover between work and personal life, demonstrated strong positive correlations with IJS ($r = .647, p < .01$), EJS ($r = .558, p < .01$), and GJS ($r = .653, p < .01$). The magnitude of these correlations, all significant at the 0.01 level, suggests that when employees' work and personal lives are mutually enriching and supportive, they are substantially more satisfied with both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of their jobs. These findings underscore that a positive, enhancing relationship between work and personal life may be a key factor in fostering job satisfaction, and it is the strongest relationship observed in the analysis. The overall work-life balance index also showed significant positive correlations with IJS ($r = .368, p < .01$), EJS ($r = .326, p < .01$), and GJS ($r = .371, p < .01$), suggesting that employees with higher perceived balance generally report higher satisfaction.

A regression analysis entered WPLE and WIPL as predictors of GJS to further assess the relative contributions of these subdimensions. The model was statistically significant, $F(2, 247) = 98.625$, $p < .0005$, explaining 44.4% of the variance in GJS. Both predictors contributed significantly, with WPLE emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .642$, $p < .000$), while WIPL showed a smaller but significant effect ($\beta = .135$, $p < .005$). PLIW was not retained as a predictor, consistent with its non-significant correlations. Together, these results confirm that job satisfaction is shaped most strongly by the degree of positive enrichment between work and personal life, supplemented by the extent to which work interference with personal life is minimized.

Table 2. Correlation analysis between work-life balance and job satisfaction

(N = 250)	WIPL	PLIW	WPLE	WLB
1 IJS	.157*	.106	.647**	.368**
2 EJS	.211**	-.007	.558**	.326**
3 GJS	.186**	.065	.653**	.371**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To further investigate whether employees' marital status affected their perceptions of work-life balance and job satisfaction, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. The results indicated no statistically significant differences between married and single participants in mean scores for IJS, EJS, GJS and WIPL. These findings suggest that marital status, in itself, did not exert a discernible effect on respondents' overall satisfaction with their work or on the extent to which work obligations disrupted their personal lives.

However, the analysis revealed statistically significant differences in two work-life balance dimensions. Married respondents reported a higher mean score for PLIW ($M = 3.792$) than their single counterparts ($M = 3.428$), a statistically significant difference ($t(248) = 2.868$, $p < .005$). Given that higher scores reflect reduced interference, this result indicates that married participants perceived their personal lives as less likely to disrupt work responsibilities. In contrast, single respondents reported a significantly higher mean WPLE ($M = 3.386$) than married respondents ($M = 3.030$), with the difference highly significant ($t(248) = -3.556$, $p < .001$). This suggests that single individuals were more likely to experience positive spillover effects between work and personal domains.

Taken together, these findings point to a differentiated pattern in how marital status shapes the experience of work-life balance. While no overall differences emerged in the aggregated measure of balance, the subdimensions reveal contrasting tendencies: married respondents reported less disruption of work by personal life, whereas single respondents perceived stronger positive enrichment across work and personal roles. These patterns suggest that marital status may moderate specific facets of the work-life interface, warranting closer examination of the underlying dynamics in subsequent analyses.

Table 3. Correlation analysis between work-life balance and job satisfaction by marital status

Married (N = 66)	WIPL	PLIW	WPLE	WLB
1 IJS	.106	.089	.726**	.379**
2 EJS	.123	.030	.641**	.336**
3 GJS	.099	.060	.735**	.365**
Single (N = 184)	WIPL	PLIW	WPLE	WLB
1 IJS	.204**	.152*	.594**	.381**
2 EJS	.273**	.009	.501**	.336**
3 GJS	.252**	.100	.599**	.392**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis by marital status in Table 3 revealed no significant relationships between job satisfaction and the interference dimensions of work-life balance for the married respondents ($N = 66$). Specifically, WIPL and PLIW showed no significant correlations with any job satisfaction measure. However, WPLE demonstrated strong positive correlations with IJS ($r = .726$, $p < .01$), EJS ($r = .641$, $p < .01$), and GJS ($r = .735$, $p < .01$). The overall WLB index also showed significant positive associations with IJS ($r = .379$, $p < .01$), EJS ($r = .336$, $p < .01$), and GJS ($r = .365$, $p < .01$). These

results suggest that, for married respondents, positive enrichment between work and personal life and the overall sense of balance were critical for job satisfaction, while interference effects carried little weight.

For the single respondents ($N = 184$), the correlation patterns are more widespread and differ from the married group. Significant correlations are observed across both positive and interference dimensions of work-life balance. WIPL was positively correlated with IJS ($r = .204, p < .01$), EJS ($r = .273, p < .01$), and GJS ($r = .252, p < .01$), indicating that reduced work intrusions into personal life were linked to higher satisfaction levels. PLIW also showed a significant, though smaller, correlation with IJS ($r = .152, p < .05$). As in the married group, WPLE was strongly correlated with all satisfaction measures: IJS ($r = .594, p < .01$), EJS ($r = .501, p < .01$), and GJS ($r = .599, p < .01$). The overall WLB index was likewise significantly related to IJS ($r = .381, p < .01$), EJS ($r = .336, p < .01$), and GJS ($r = .392, p < .01$). These results show that single respondents evaluated job satisfaction in relation not only to the positive spillover of WPLE but also to the extent of interference, making their satisfaction more broadly sensitive to multiple aspects of the work-life interface.

Subsequent regression analyses provided further insight into these differences. For married respondents, WPLE was the sole significant predictor of general job satisfaction ($\beta = .735, p < .0005$), accounting for 54.0% of the variance [$F(1,64) = 75.174, p < .0005$]. In contrast, for single respondents, both WPLE ($\beta = .575, p < .0005$) and WIPL ($\beta = .171, p < .005$) were significant predictors, together explaining 38.8% of the variance in general job satisfaction [$F(2,181) = 57.363, p < .0005$]. These findings show that while enrichment plays a central role in both groups, married individuals' satisfaction is explained almost exclusively by WPLE, whereas single individuals' satisfaction is influenced jointly by the positive enrichment of work and personal life and by the extent to which work intrudes upon personal domains.

4.2 Discussions

4.2.1 The Role Of Work–Life Balance In Shaping Job Satisfaction Among Disciplined Workers

The present findings highlight the centrality of work–life balance in shaping job satisfaction among disciplined employees, a workforce often characterized by nonstandard hours, high occupational demands, and structured hierarchical environments. Across the sample, positive enrichment between work and personal domains emerged as the most influential factor in sustaining satisfaction, confirming prior research that framed enrichment as a critical job resource (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This underscores that, despite the structural constraints of disciplined work, opportunities for individuals to perceive synergies between work and life beyond work substantially enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of satisfaction.

At the same time, the results demonstrate that minimizing work interference with personal life contributes meaningfully, though to a lesser extent, to satisfaction. This aligns with studies of police officers and firefighters showing that shift patterns, long duty periods, and work-related stressors tend to intrude upon personal lives, thereby undermining satisfaction unless appropriately mitigated (Peterson et al., 2019; Roşca et al., 2021). Current evidence indicates that, while disciplined employees may not entirely avoid such intrusions, their job satisfaction rises when work structures enable them to protect time and energy for non-work roles. This reflects the continuing importance of reducing conflict, even as enrichment plays a dominant role.

These findings also resonate with resource-based perspectives, which emphasize that supportive organizational practices, such as predictable scheduling, managerial understanding, and opportunities for recovery, buffer the negative effects of high demands (Allen et al., 2013; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). Within disciplined professions, where structural constraints are more rigid, even incremental adjustments that improve predictability or enable meaningful off-duty engagement may foster stronger perceptions of balance. When such conditions are present, employees are better able to experience work as compatible with, rather than in competition with, their personal lives, thereby promoting higher satisfaction.

Taken together, the results affirm that job satisfaction in disciplined workforces is not solely contingent on the absence of conflict but is strongly reinforced by positive cross-domain enrichment. This insight advances the literature from a conflict-focused model of work–life balance toward a more integrative framework that accounts for the dual role of conflict reduction and enrichment.

4.2.2 Work–Life Balance And Job Satisfaction Dynamics By Marital Status

While these findings provide an overview of how work–life balance contributes to job satisfaction across the disciplined workforce as a whole, they also suggest that individual circumstances may condition these relationships. In particular, marital status emerged as a meaningful factor influencing how employees evaluate both the positive and negative aspects of the work–life interface. The comparative analysis between married and single respondents shows that marital status is an important contextual factor shaping the relationship between work–life balance and job satisfaction among disciplined employees. Married respondents placed greater weight on positive enrichment between work and non-work domains, whereas single respondents evaluated satisfaction in terms of both enrichment and reduced interference. This pattern suggests that relational and domestic structures shape the salience of specific balance dimensions, echoing earlier findings that family context moderates how work demands translate into job outcomes (Knobloch et al., 2023; Woodall et al., 2020). In short, while all employees benefit from enrichment, the protective value of reducing work–life conflict appears more pronounced among single individuals.

For married respondents, the salience of enrichment over interference is consistent with studies of police and military personnel, which suggest that spousal support and shared domestic responsibilities can buffer the negative effects of role conflict (Islam et al., 2020; Griffin & Sun, 2018). Family resources may diminish the disruptive impact of interference, allowing positive spillovers to play a central role in shaping satisfaction. These results support the broader enrichment perspective that family structures can transform potential stressors into opportunities for support, thereby reinforcing satisfaction despite demanding work conditions (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

By contrast, the finding that single employees rely on both enrichment and minimizing work intrusions highlights this group's distinct vulnerabilities. Without the buffering capacity of a spouse or family structure, single employees may be more exposed to the disruptive aspects of work demands. This aligns with evidence from policing and firefighting studies, which indicate that unmarried personnel often report greater strain from irregular schedules and long shifts, in part because they manage recovery and boundary maintenance independently (Peterson et al., 2019; Rohwer et al., 2022). For these employees, ensuring that work does not excessively encroach on personal life is a prerequisite for job satisfaction.

4.2.3 Different Experiential Pathways Beneath Similar Satisfaction

Although the t-test results indicated little evidence of overall differences in job satisfaction between married and single respondents, the correlational and regression analyses highlighted clear divergences in the mechanisms linking work–life balance to satisfaction. This duality is not contradictory; it shows how different analytical lenses reveal distinct aspects of the phenomenon. Mean comparisons reflect surface-level similarities in outcomes, whereas relational analyses illuminate the deeper processes through which individuals arrive at those outcomes (Aguinis et al., 2013). As Casper et al. (2018) argued, work–life balance research requires attention to both general levels of well-being and the pathways through which employees experience and interpret balance.

The apparent convergence in average satisfaction levels across marital groups therefore conceals the different patterns of association underlying those outcomes. For married employees, job satisfaction was grounded primarily in enrichment between work and personal life, while for single employees both enrichment and the mitigation of interference mattered. These findings resonate with boundary management perspectives, which posit that personal contexts determine how employees weigh the costs and benefits of role interactions (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). Thus, what appears as statistical similarity in means is underpinned by contrasting relational dynamics that are equally important for understanding employee well-being.

Together, these results show the value of complementary analytic strategies when examining complex constructs such as work–life balance (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Reliance on mean-based comparisons alone could have suggested that marital status makes little difference, whereas relational analyses revealed that employees' lived experiences of balance are strongly conditioned by their domestic arrangements. Rather than presenting contradictions, the findings offer layered insights into how disciplined employees construct satisfaction amid demanding occupational environments. From a practical standpoint, this interpretation underscores that organizational interventions cannot be designed solely on average satisfaction scores. While overall satisfaction levels may appear stable across groups, the underlying drivers vary and demand targeted strategies. For instance, cultivating enrichment opportunities may be especially effective for those with spousal or family support, whereas minimizing interference is critical for employees who manage boundaries more independently.

4.2.4 Implications for Practice

For disciplined organizations, the findings underscore the importance of cultivating work environments that reduce work-to-life interference while fostering opportunities for positive enrichment across domains. Leaders in policing, firefighting, and related services should prioritize interventions that increase predictability and help employees protect meaningful personal time, as evidence shows that minimizing intrusive work demands contributes to higher satisfaction (Peterson et al., 2019; Roşca et al., 2021). At the same time, policies that encourage enrichment, such as promoting skill transferability, creating supportive peer networks, and framing occupational service as meaningful beyond the workplace, can significantly elevate both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of job satisfaction (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In practice, this may include structured recovery opportunities, managerial training to support boundary management, and organizational communication that highlights how personal growth and family well-being can be compatible with disciplined service. Such initiatives align with research showing that disciplined employees are most satisfied when they view their professional and personal lives not in opposition but in synergy (Allen et al., 2013; Casper et al., 2018).

Tailored strategies are also warranted to address differences between single and married employees in disciplined professions. For married personnel, satisfaction appears strongly linked to work–life enrichment, suggesting that interventions that strengthen family-inclusive practices, such as spousal engagement programmes, family-friendly scheduling, or organizational recognition of family contributions, are particularly impactful (Knobloch et al., 2023; Rohwer et al., 2022). Single employees, who derive satisfaction from both enrichment and reduced interference, may benefit more from strategies that protect personal autonomy and prevent work from encroaching excessively into personal domains (Peterson et al., 2019). Flexible shift arrangements, adequate rest between duties, and professional development opportunities beyond immediate job roles could meet these needs. These differentiated approaches recognize that while all employees benefit from positive enrichment, single employees are more sensitive to interference, whereas married employees rely heavily on enrichment and family support structures. Hence, disciplined organizations that adapt their practices to these nuanced needs can foster higher levels of sustained job satisfaction across their workforce.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that work–life balance plays a decisive role in shaping job satisfaction among members of the disciplined workforce, where occupational demands and organizational structures often intensify role conflict. Across the sample, work–personal life enrichment emerged as the strongest predictor of both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction, underscoring the value of fostering positive synergies between work and non-work domains. At the same time, minimizing work-to-life interference contributed meaningfully to overall satisfaction, particularly among single employees who lack the buffering effects of family support. Although no aggregate differences were found between single and married participants in overall job satisfaction, the distinct mechanisms linking work–life balance to satisfaction highlight the importance of tailored approaches to workforce management. Taken together, these findings reinforce the need for disciplined organizations to integrate both conflict-reducing and enrichment-promoting practices into their human resource strategies, ensuring that employees experience work and personal life as mutually supportive rather than competing domains..

Several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting the findings. First, the study relied on self-reported survey data from a purposive sample of disciplined employees, which may introduce response bias and limit the generalizability of results across broader populations and different cultural contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, preventing definitive conclusions about the directionality of relationships between work–life balance and job satisfaction. Third, while marital status was examined as a key moderator, other demographic and contextual variables such as age, career stage or parental status were not fully explored and may further shape these dynamics. Future research could build on these findings by using longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to trace how work–life balance interventions influence job satisfaction over time, and by extending inquiry to include comparative analyses across diverse cultural, organizational, and disciplinary settings. Such research would not only strengthen theoretical understanding of the work–life interface in high-demand professions but also generate actionable insights for policy and practice tailored to the unique needs of disciplined workforces.

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in the paper.

8. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Terence Kwong contributed to the conceptualization, research design, and writing of the original draft. He also developed the theoretical framework and conducted the literature review.

Tak Ming Yu was responsible for data collection, methodology design, statistical analysis using SPSS, and validation of the results. He also contributed to interpreting the findings and preparing tables and figures. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

9. ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of the West London and adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their Participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. We obtained written informed consent from all participants before data collection. The researchers strictly maintained participants' privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process, and they anonymized all collected data and used it solely for academic purposes. No personal identifying information was disclosed in any reports or publications resulting from this study.

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