

# THE EFFECT OF EMPLOYEES' MARITAL SATISFACTION ON JOB PERFORMANCE : BASED ON THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONSERVATION OF RESOURCE THEORY

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## ABSTRACT

*The study linking the marriage with work explores the mechanism of action of employees' marital satisfaction and job performance through establishing a moderated mediating effect model. The results of the correlation and regression analyses conducted by collecting questionnaires from 290 employees indicated that: (1) Emotional exhaustion and work engagement play a chain mediating role in the positive relationship between marital satisfaction and job performance. (2) Work meaningfulness and work engagement play a chain mediating role in the positive relationship between marital satisfaction and job performance. (3) The need to support a family moderates the relationship between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness, as well as the mediating effect of work meaningfulness and work engagement on the relationship between marital satisfaction and job performance. (4) The need to support a family moderates the relationship between marital satisfaction and emotional exhaustion, as well as the mediating effect between emotional exhaustion and work engagement on marital satisfaction and job performance. (5) Self-efficacy moderates the relationship between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness, as well as the mediating effect between work meaningfulness and work engagement on marital satisfaction and job performance. This study provides a new perspective of family as resources for improving employees' job performance in management.*

## KEYWORDS

*Marital satisfaction, job performance, emotional exhaustion, work engagement, work meaningfulness.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, family and work are undoubtedly the two most indispensable parts of every employee's life, hence the issue how to balance the relationship between the two has raised increasingly attention. The marital status of an employee is the core of family relationship, while marital satisfaction is the subjective or objective measure of an individual's overall marital status which affects not only individual and family well-being but also the performance in other areas such as work in the enterprise [1]. Most previous studies focus on two issues of work-family conflict due to role conflict [2] and work-family enrichment due to the contribution of one role to another [3]. In terms of the work-family enrichment, the close family relationship could contribute to the work

because it not only brings positive emotions and reduce stress and anxiety, but also may serve as a kind of psychological resource that enables employees to maintain a good state of mind and positive self-evaluation and stimulates employees' desire for self-growth and self-development, thus enhancing the job performance in the enterprise [4]. Within the framework of work-family enrichment, the study investigates the process mechanism and boundary conditions of the impact of marital satisfaction as a psychological resource on job performance from the perspective of conservation of resource theory.

## 2. QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

According to the conservation of resource theory, an individual has the tendency to acquire, preserve and maintain resources [5]. A perfect family as a resource triggers positive emotions and cognition when sufficient, which would carry over to work and thus positively influence the psychological states and behaviors in the work [6]. In contrast, employees with low marital satisfaction are less resourceful and would experience negative emotions and cognition, which in turn affect their motivation to immerse in work (i.e., work engagement) and job performance [7]. It is inferred that employees' marital satisfaction may influence the work engagement and ultimate job performance through both emotional and cognitive paths.

The related studies on conservation of resource theory also show that emotions caused by resource sufficiency or scarcity mainly feature the emotional exhaustion [6], while the cognition includes evaluation of self and the outside world [8]. In terms of emotions, considering that marital satisfaction is a psychological resource, the satisfied marriage could bring positive emotional experiences and a steady flow of energy to employees [9] which can effectively reduce the emotional exhaustion at work. Employees can therefore put more energy and positive emotions into their working roles and contribute more effort and time to their work tasks, while employees with high work engagement are also more enthusiastic and committed to their work so as to improve the job performance [10]. On the contrary, an unhappy marriage leads to negative emotions for employees day after day [11] and individuals will bring these negative emotions from their family life to work so as to cause the further loss of individual resources, thus resulting in the emotional exhaustion [12]. In other words, a disharmonious marriage can not alleviate the emotional exhaustion at work but exacerbate it, which will result in employees not having enough resources to cope with their work tasks and affect their work engagement so as to cause the decline in the job performance [13]. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H1** Marital satisfaction affects employees' job performance through the chain mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and work engagement.

In terms of cognition, an individual satisfied with the marriage is more likely to have the positive self-evaluation, whereas one with low marital satisfaction tends to have the negative self-evaluation [14] and even doubts and denial of self [11]. Employees with high marital satisfaction may have positive evaluation of both self and work so that they can recognize themselves, develop a sense of purpose, or believe that they can create greater value at work through their own efforts, and then experience a higher work meaningfulness [15]. The work meaningfulness is an individual's personal subjective experience of the meaning and purpose of the work performed [16]. Even when the work is challenging, the positive beliefs generated by a high-quality marriage could promote hardworking engagement and perseverance of employees [17]. Fairlie (2011) surveyed 574 employees in North America and found that the work meaningfulness still explains 16% of the variation in work engagement after controlling other job characteristic variables, indicating that work meaningfulness is a strong predictor of work engagement [18]. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that employees' work behaviors and attitudes are influenced by their cognition of work meaningfulness, and that the work

meaningfulness positively predicts employees' passion and engagement [19], which in turn has a significant positive effect on job performance. The results of Schaufeli et al. pointed out the positive effect of work engagement on job performance in different contexts [20]. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H2** Marital satisfaction affects employees' job performance through the chain mediating effect of work meaningfulness and job engagement.

In summary, on the basis of the conservation of resource theory, employees' marital satisfaction may influence their work engagement and ultimate job performance through two paths of emotional exhaustion (emotions) and work meaningfulness (cognition). Moreover, it is necessary to consider the individual internal characteristics and external pressure which are important for psychological resources for their moderating role in the influencing process.

The self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's subjective assessment of his or her likelihood of performing and completing an activity and completing [22], is one of the individual characteristic variables that has received the most attention in studies related to conservation of resource theory [21]. Employees with low self-efficacy have fewer psychological resources and lower self-evaluation which leads to a lower work meaningfulness regardless of the marital satisfaction [23], which in turn negatively affects their job motivation and performance. It is therefore hypothesized as follows:

**H3** Self-efficacy moderates the relationship between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness. The higher self-efficacy contributes to strengthen this positive relationship while the lower self-efficacy to weaken this positive relationship.

**H4** Self-efficacy moderates the effect of marital satisfaction on job performance through the chain mediating roles of work meaningfulness and work engagement. Specifically, the lower self-efficacy leads to the weaker indirect relationship.

The stress is an interactive process between an individual and the environment, as well as an individual's response to various stimuli in life after the subjective assessment. Considering that an individual needs to consume resources so as to cope with stress, the individual is more likely to experience anxiety and anger and needs to devote more emotions, time, energy, cognition and other resources for emotion management once the resource consumption occurs. The resources will be further consumed if the stress is not improved, leading to the loss spiral of resources [24]. Therefore, stress is undoubtedly one of the most indispensable external factors in conservation of resource theory. From the realistic and economic perspectives, with the need to support a family as a pressure, employees have to work hard to improve their ability to support the families when the need is high. Even if their marital satisfaction is not high, employees need to work to support the families with work regarded by them as a financial source to support their families, thus giving a stable sense of meaning to the work [25]. From the emotional perspective, furthermore, employees with high need to support the families consume a great deal of psychological resources even if the marital satisfaction is high, and the excessive consumption of employees' psychological and emotional resources leads to the emotional exhaustion, which in turn reduces work engagement and performance [26]. From the cognitive perspective, employees with high need to support the families would transform their work into a way to achieve their personal values for the need even though their marital satisfaction is low, and the energy gained is put into their work so as to improve their job performance [27]. It is therefore hypothesized as follows:

**H5** The need to support a family moderates the relationship between marital satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. The higher need to support a family leads to the weaker negative

relationship while the lower need to support a family to the stronger negative relationship.

**H6** The need to support a family moderates the relationship between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness. The higher need to support a family leads to the weaker positive relationship while the lower need to support a family to the stronger positive relationship.

**H7** The need to support a family moderates the effect of marital satisfaction on job performance through the chain mediating roles of emotional exhaustion and work engagement. Specifically, the higher need to support a family leads to weaken this indirect relationship.

**H8** The need to support a family moderates the effect of marital satisfaction on job performance through the chain mediating roles of the work meaningfulness and work engagement. Specifically, the higher need to support a family leads to weaken this indirect relationship.

In summary, the study proposes the following moderated mediation model (e.g., Figure 1) from the perspective of conservation of resource theory to investigate the influencing mechanism and boundary conditions of marital satisfaction for job performance.

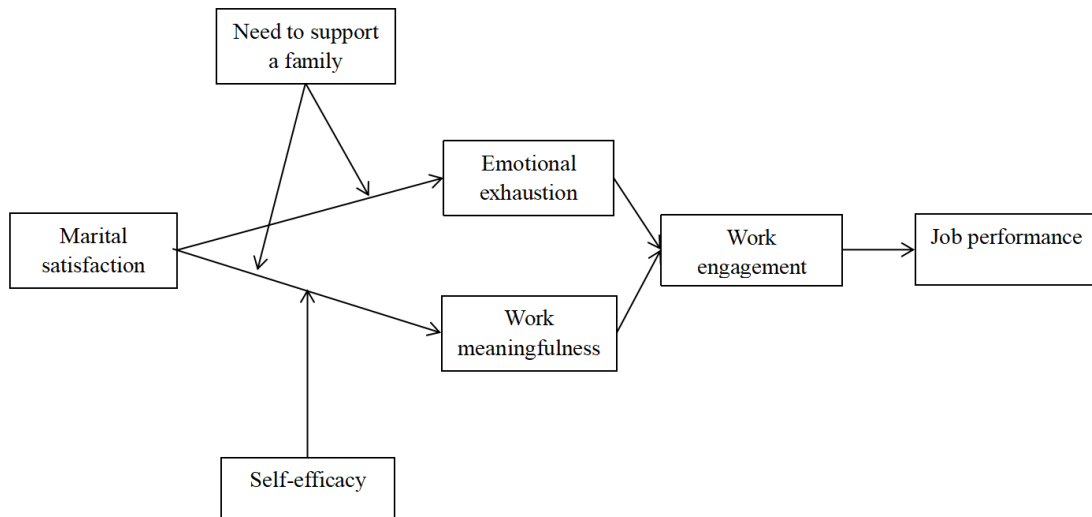


Figure 1

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1. Sample and Procedures

In the study, a total of 300 questionnaires were distributed online to collect data, with 290 valid questionnaires collected excluding 10 questionnaires that were not completed carefully. The average age of the 290 valid participants is 33 years old, among which 40% are male and 67% have a bachelor's degree. 33% of participants have worked in their current companies for 1 to 5 years, 48% for 5 to 10 years and 19% for more than 10 years. Their average income is 156,378 yuan per year. 32% of participants are ordinary employees, 37% front-line managers, 24% middle managers, and the rest senior managers. The average number of children owned is 1.14.

### 3.2. Variables Measurement

All variables in the study were measured through the Likert scale, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 5 strong agreement. The specific question items are as follows:

**Marital satisfaction:** The marital satisfaction scale based on the measurements from Fowers and Olson (1993) [28] was used with a total of 12 questions. The typical question item is as follows: “I do not like my spouse’s personality and personal habits”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient in the study was 0.662.

**Emotional exhaustion:** The emotional exhaustion was measured through the emotional exhaustion subscale of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) classic scales by Maslach [29] et al. with 5 questions. The typical question item is as follows: “Work makes me feel fairly exhausted both physically and mentally”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient in the study was 0.846.

**Work meaningfulness:** The work meaningfulness was measured through three question items [30] from Workplace Spirituality scale developed by Ashmos and Duchon in 2000 and one question item from the scale developed by Bunderson & Thompson (2009) [31]. The typical question item is as follows: “My work is meaningful to me”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient in the study was 0.694.

**Work engagement:** The study resorted to a short version of nine questions from the Utrecht work engagement scale developed by Schaufeli’s team [32]. The typical question item is as follows: “When I am working, I am enthusiastic.” The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient in the study was 0.839.

**Job performance:** The measurement of job performance in this study with 12 questions referred to Xiaotong Shen’s master thesis [33], Juan Lu’s master thesis [34] and the job performance questionnaire developed by Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1996) [35]. The typical question item is as follows: “I always complete the work tasks assigned to me on time”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient in the study was 0.812.

**Need to support a family:** The study adopted a scale with 3 question items from Grant’s scale by Menges et al. [36]. The typical question item is as follows: “I have to work for money to make the family living expenses”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient in the study was 0.892.

**Self-efficacy:** The study referred to Schwarzer’s general self-efficacy scale [37] and selected seven question items from it. The typical question item is as follows: “I still have the means to get what I want even if others oppose me”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient in the study was 0.782.

**Control variables:** According to previous studies, an employee’s gender, years, position, children quantity, age, education background, salary income and work stress would affect his or her job performance [38], hence these variables were treated as control variables in the study.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

The study resorted to SPSS 26, SPSS macro program PROCESS (3.5) line for data analysis. When the model provided by PROCESS could not meet the structural equation model of the study, the user-defined model was used for analysis.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Results of Descriptive and Correlation Analyses of Variables

The correlation analysis results between variables through SPSS are shown in Table 1. Marital satisfaction is significantly positively correlated with job performance ( $r=0.441, p<0.01$ ), i.e., the more satisfied the employees are with their marriages, the higher their job performance. Marital satisfaction is significantly negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion ( $r=-0.386, p<0.01$ ), i.e. the more satisfied the employees are with their marriages, the lower the probability of emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is significantly negatively correlated with work engagement ( $r=-0.657, p<0.01$ ), i.e., the more serious the emotional exhaustion, the more difficult it is for employees to devote themselves to their work. Marital satisfaction is significantly and positively correlated with work meaningfulness ( $r=0.235, p<0.01$ ), i.e. the more satisfied the employees are with their marriages, the more meaningful they feel their work is. Work meaningfulness is significantly and positively correlated with work engagement ( $r=0.706, p<0.01$ ), i.e. the more meaningful employees think their work is, the more willing they are to devote their time and energy to it. Work engagement is significantly and positively correlated with job performance ( $r=0.723, p<0.01$ ), i.e. the more employees are engaged in their work, the better their job performance will be. The above simple correlation results are basically consistent with the relationship between variables hypothesized in the study. According to the correlation results, the variables of an employee's gender, years, children quantity, age are not correlated with job performance, which are not consider in the regression analysis. the variables of an employee's position, education background, salary income and work stress are significantly correlated with job performance, which are controlled in the regression analysis.

Table 1. Average Values and Standard Deviations of Main study Variables

	Average Values	Standard Deviations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Gender	-	-	1														
2. Years	-	-	-.190**	1													
3. Pst	-	-	-.176**	.206**	1												
4. Qtt	1.14	0.489	-0.103	0.071	.151**	1											
5. Salary	156378	207991	-.172**	0.105	.459**	0.089	1										
6. Age	33.01	5.761	-.131*	.662**	0.087	.172**	0.015	1									
7. Edu	-	-	-0.037	-0.021	.284**	0.021	.341**	-0.112	1								
8. WS	2.9414	0.88432	-.118*	-0.025	0.021	-0.102	-0.088	-0.037	-0.006	1							
9. MS	3.5578	0.53505	-.124*	0.104	0.085	-0.04	.174**	0.013	0.09	-.118*	1						
10. NSF	3.6678	1.00345	-.367**	0.091	0.013	0.095	0.093	0.02	0.044	.172**	.149*	1					
11. WM	4.1897	0.52471	-0.06	.148*	.248**	0.11	.253**	0.053	0.1	-.228**	.235**	.227**	1				
12. WE	4.1391	0.4656	-0.061	0.104	.192**	.156**	.235**	0.048	.186**	-.362**	.362**	.157**	.706**	1			
13. SE	3.9833	0.49928	-0.015	0.092	.176**	0.09	.324**	-0.053	.117*	-.405**	.309**	0.046	.519**	.621**	1		
14. EE	1.9766	0.68195	0.034	-0.112	-.143*	-0.059	-.260**	-0.042	-.134*	.520**	-.386**	0.008	-.516**	-.657**	-.526**	1	
15. JP	4.2782	0.36548	-0.011	0.075	.176**	0.108	.252**	-0.01	.165**	-.224**	.411**	.163**	.586**	.723**	.655**	-.527**	1

Note: \*  $p<0.05$  (two-tailed), \*\*  $p<0.01$  (two-tailed), \*\*\*  $p<0.001$  (two-tailed)

Pst Position, Qtt Quantity, Edu Education, WS Work Stress, MS Marital Satisfaction, NSF Need to Support a Family, WM Work meaningfulness, WE work engagement, SE Self-efficacy, EE Emotional Exhaustion, JP Job Performance

## 4.2. Hypothesis Test

### 4.2.1. Mediating Effect

Based on the user-defined model of SPSS macro program PROCESS, the study tested both the chain mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and work engagement on marital satisfaction and job performance, and that of work meaningfulness and work engagement on marital satisfaction and job performance.

The analysis results of the chain mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and work engagement showed the significant sequential mediating effect between emotional exhaustion and work engagement on marital satisfaction and job performance ( $ab=0.0590$ ,  $BootSE=0.0135$ ) with 95% confidence interval of  $[0.0353, 0.0876]$ . Hypothesis 1 was supported.

The analysis results of the chain mediating effect of work meaningfulness and work engagement showed the significant sequential mediating effect between work meaningfulness and work engagement on marital satisfaction and job performance ( $ab=0.0581$ ,  $BootSE=0.0217$ ) with 95% confidence interval of  $[0.0216, 0.1058]$ . Hypothesis 2 was supported too.

### 4.2.2. Moderating Effect

The custom program analysis of SPSS macro program PROCESS showed that marital satisfaction and self-efficacy were significantly positively correlated with work meaningfulness ( $\gamma=0.4461$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with 95% confidence interval of  $[0.3301, 0.5621]$  not including 0. It indicated that self-efficacy played a moderating role between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness (as shown in Figure 2). The positive effect of marital satisfaction on work meaningfulness was stronger when self-efficacy of employees was high and would be weaker when self-efficacy was low. Therefore, the Hypothesis 3 was supported. The interaction between marital satisfaction and need to support a family on emotional exhaustion was not significant ( $\gamma=0.0445$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), indicating that there was no moderating effect of need to support a family on marital satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. Thus, the Hypothesis 5 was not supported. Marital satisfaction and need to support a family were significantly negatively correlated with work meaningfulness ( $\gamma= -0.1015$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) with 95% confidence interval of  $[-0.1977, -0.0053]$  also not including 0, which indicated that need to support a family played a moderating role between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness (as shown in Figure 3). The positive effect of marital satisfaction on work meaningfulness was weaker when employees' need to support families was high, and would be stronger when the need was low. The Hypothesis 6 was supported.

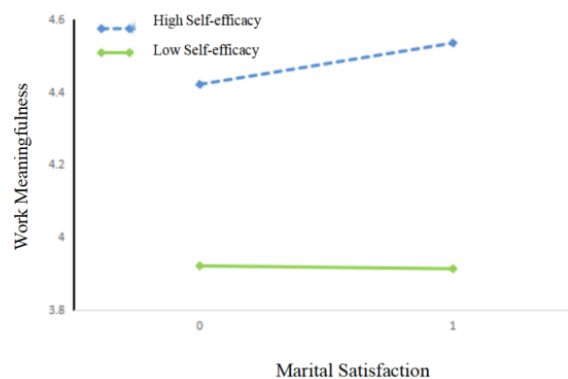


Figure 2

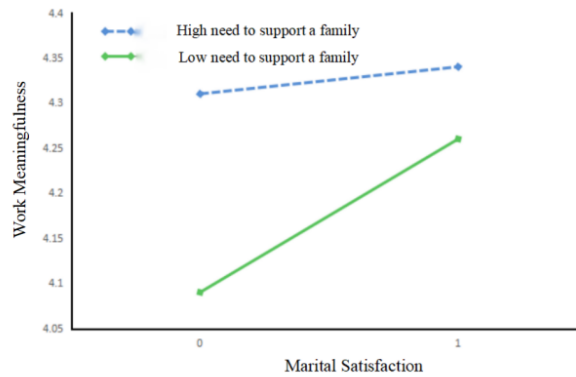


Figure 3

#### 4.2.3. Moderated Mediating Effect

Considering the aforementioned analysis showed that the moderating effect of need to support a family on marital satisfaction and emotional exhaustion was not significant, the moderating role of need to support a family in the chain mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and work engagement also did not exist. The Hypothesis 7 was not supported. According to the sequential test of moderated mediating effect [39], the effect of marital satisfaction on work meaningfulness was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), the effect of the interaction term of marital satisfaction and need to support a family on work meaningfulness was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), the effect of the interaction term of marital satisfaction and self-efficacy on work meaningfulness was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), the effect of work meaningfulness on work engagement was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the effect of work engagement on job performance was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The results of the sequential test indicated that self-efficacy and need to support a family significantly moderated the chain mediating effect of work meaningfulness and work engagement respectively. The mediating effect values and 95% confidence intervals with the moderating variables at different levels were obtained through the analysis of SPSS macro program PROCESS (as shown in Table 2). When the need to support a family was low, the confidence interval did not include 0 and the mediating effect was significant with the mediating effect value of 0.0850. When the need to support a family was middle, the confidence interval did not include 0 and the mediating effect was significant with the mediating effect value of 0.0484. However, when the need to support a family was high, the confidence interval included 0 and the mediating effect was not significant. Thus, it was obvious that the higher the need to support a family was, the less significant was the chain mediating effect of work meaningfulness and work engagement on the relationship between marital satisfaction and job performance. The Hypothesis 8 was supported. Contrarily, when self-efficacy was low, the confidence interval included 0 and the mediating effect was not significant. When self-efficacy was middle, the confidence interval also included 0 and the mediating effect was not significant either. But when self-efficacy was high, the confidence interval did not include 0 and the mediating effect was significant with the mediating effect value of 0.0694. Therefore, it was obvious that the higher the self-efficacy was, the more significant the chain mediating effect of work meaningfulness and work engagement on the relationship between marital satisfaction and job performance. The Hypothesis 4 was supported.



Table 2. Analysis of Moderated Mediating Effect

Adjustment Variables	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Marital Satisfaction → Work meaningfulness → Work engagement → Job Performance				
Low need to support a family	0.0850	0.0369	0.0222	0.1648
Moderate need to support a family	0.0484	0.0271	0.0034	0.1072
High need to support a family	0.0117	0.0334	-0.0447	0.086
Self-efficacy				
Low self-efficacy	-0.0023	0.0342	-0.0673	0.0748
Moderate self-efficacy	0.0335	0.0228	-0.0102	0.0826
High self-efficacy	0.0694	0.0262	0.0176	0.1212

## 5. DISCUSSION

It has been demonstrated that close family relationships can provide employees with resources such as time, emotions and experience to support their tasks and performance in the work domain [40]. Conducted within the framework of conservation of resource theory, the study combined family with work and regarded marital satisfaction in the family as a resource to reveal its influence on job performance through the chain mediating effect of emotional exhaustion (emotional pathway) and work meaningfulness (cognitive pathway) to work engagement, and examined the moderating effect of self-efficacy and need to support a family on this model. It is found that marital satisfaction indirectly influenced employees' job performance through the chain mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and work engagement. The hypothesis that the need to support a family played a moderating role in this mediating process was not supported by the data. Moreover, marital satisfaction indirectly influenced employees' performance through the chain mediating effect of work meaningfulness and work engagement, while self-efficacy and need to support a family moderated respectively the mediation process of marital satisfaction - work meaningfulness - work engagement - job performance, because the relationship between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness was moderated by self-efficacy and the need to support a family. The higher self-efficacy of employees led to the greater effect of marital satisfaction on job performance, while the increase in the need to support a family weakened the effect of marital satisfaction on job performance.

### 5.1. Theoretical and Practical Significance

Theoretically, previous studies mainly explained the relationship between family and work based on the perspective of work-family enrichment and work-family conflict. The study extended the perspective of work-family relationship and examined the influencing mechanism of family factors on job performance based on conservation of resource theory, by including variables of emotional exhaustion and work meaningfulness related to psychological resources as mediating variables with self-efficacy and need to support a family as moderating variables.

From the realistic perspective, conclusions from this study could enable enterprises to understand the influencing mechanism of employees' marital status on their job performance. In the management, enterprises can carry out trainings related to family relationship management, support employees to participate in family life to improve their marital satisfaction, and encourage employees to reduce unnecessary work stress and enhance their work meaningfulness through improving the work efficiency. All these can lead employees to access to more psychological resources so as to achieve the purpose of improving employees' work engagement and job performance.

## 5.2. Shortcomings and Future Directions

This study also has the following shortcomings: First and foremost, all the measurements in the study were based on the subjective reporting method and susceptible to social desirability. The following studies can resort to various forms of measurement such as evaluations by significant others and objective data to validate the moderated mediation model of marital satisfaction influencing job performance. Secondly, considering that the study was a cross-sectional study, the future study can adopt longitudinal study or even diary method to examine the effect of marital satisfaction on job performance and the time effect of its mediating mechanism, so as to further reveal the cross-lagged effects or causal relationships among variables. Thirdly, the future study may also hypothesize and verify more complex relationships among variables, such as the relationship between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness which was found to be positively correlated in the present study. However, it is possible that the very relationship is true for participants with higher marital satisfaction, while the lower marital satisfaction may lead to the higher work meaningfulness for those with very low marital satisfaction since the marriage may break up at any time. It means that the relationship between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness may be non-linear and can be explored in the future study.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrated that marital satisfaction had a significant positive effect on job performance, and that emotional exhaustion and work engagement as well as work meaningfulness and work engagement functioned as the chain mediators in the process as dual paths respectively. On the mediation path of marital satisfaction - work meaningfulness - work engagement, self-efficacy and the need to support a family moderated the positive relationship between marital satisfaction and work meaningfulness.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank reviewers and editors!

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