



INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF EMPLOYEES IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION - A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Pedro Couto Pereira¹, Filipa Mourão², Pedro Miguel Carvalho³

¹*Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, Portugal*

²*Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo, Laboratório de Transformação Digital Aplicada, Portugal*

³*Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo, Centro de Investigação, Desenvolvimento e Inovação em Turismo, Portugal*

Abstract

According to Muchinsky (2000), the activity in which humans are most involved in their lives is work. Thus, there is an increasing trend towards the humanization of work. Consequently, it is imperative to study the best ways to manage human resources in 21st-century organizations. The main objective of this study is to understand the influence that psychosocial risks in the workplace may have on the personal lives of employees in a Higher Education Institution (HEI), through the application of the Portuguese version of COPSOQ II. Both exploratory and confirmatory statistical analyses were conducted on the results to determine if factors related to work could influence aspects of personal life. It was concluded that great importance is given to employment and that factors related to the professional realm can indeed influence dimensions of these employees' personal lives. Among other things, it was observed that, in the case of the analyzed HEI, cognitive demands directly impact job satisfaction, quantitative demands have direct effects on work-family conflict, and job satisfaction directly influences somatic and cognitive stress. On the other hand, it was found that work-family conflict is primarily influenced by quantitative demands, highlighting the importance of a well-balanced distribution of workload among employees and the definition of concrete objectives.

Keywords

Conciliation, COPSOQ, Quality Of Life, Psychosocial Risks

1. Introduction

The organizational management paradigm has undergone several changes over the years, with a growing emphasis on the humanization of work. Consequently, it is essential to conduct studies aimed at discovering improved methods for managing 21st-century institutions.

To begin, it's interesting to note that, as per Azevedo (2017), Human Resources Management can be divided into four stages:

1. **Industrial Revolution:** During this period, Human Resources Management was virtually nonexistent. The labor market was characterized by child labor, forced labor, and low wages.
2. **Welfare Worker:** In this stage, initial steps were taken towards social responsibility, and some concern was shown for working conditions.
3. **Specialist:** Aligned with Taylor's model, there was a focus on ensuring that each task was suitable for employees' capabilities.
4. **Industrial Relations:** Associated with the era of labor unions, there was an increased ability to negotiate between employees and employers.

Given that work remains the primary activity throughout a person's life (Muchinsky, 2000), it is of utmost importance for organizations to recognize the significance of Human Resources Management. As pointed out by Klein et al. (2019), Haslinda (2009), and Richman (2015), employees are the cornerstone of institutions, and their technical skills and knowledge are crucial for achieving organizational goals.

According to Sampaio (2012), there isn't a single, universally accepted definition of Quality of Working Life (QWL), as it varies depending on the perspective of each author. Erdem (2014) also points out that achieving a unanimous definition of the QWL concept is virtually impossible. Sampaio (2012) suggests that what truly exists is a theoretical framework related to organizational and mental health factors.

In today's context, QWL emerges as a crucial factor for organizational success. While there may not be a consensus in the scientific community regarding its definition, most authors tend to agree that it is a tool aimed at enhancing the humanization of work (Sant'Anna et al., 2011, as cited in Sampaio, 2012).

The labor market is becoming increasingly complex, necessitating ongoing evolution in Human Resources Management (HRM). As highlighted by Sirgy et al. (2001), HRM can promote the quality of life for workers without negatively impacting company results. In fact, happy employees tend to be more productive, as suggested by Sirgy et al. (2001). Cordeiro (2012) emphasizes that organizational commitment (OC) is a critical aspect of a company's operations, defining the relationship between the worker and the institution. Therefore, promoting mutual trust through HRM policies based on social-emotional terms can enhance OC (Marescaux et al., 2013), benefiting both, employees, and the company.

In this context, the use of scientifically validated questionnaires, such as the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ), becomes a valuable tool for measuring and evaluating psychosocial risks within companies. The data obtained through such questionnaires can assist organizational managers in implementing measures and policies to prevent these risks.

Frequently, work is portrayed as an activity that helps individuals achieve social inclusion and reduces the likelihood of health issues. However, certain aspects of the workplace environment can lead to physical and psychological ailments (Lopes-Borges et al., 2018; Kilimnik et al., 2015). According to Lopes-Borges et al. (2018) and Silva et al. (2011), "psychosocial factors" are defined as the set of characteristics related to working conditions that affect individuals' health through psychological and physiological processes. Silva et al. (2011) further notes that measuring psychosocial factors is a complex task due to a lack of sustained theoretical support and the existence of various methods for assessing psychosocial risks.

Soeiro's (2020) perspective is that psychosocial risks are directly linked to the conditions to which workers are exposed in their workplace. Factors such as task organization, job type, the organizational environment, and opportunities for career advancement are associated with "psychosocial risks." In this regard, psychosocial factors can have both positive and negative impacts on employees' quality of life, health, and workplace productivity (Soeiro, 2020).

Furthermore, as highlighted by Delgado (2019), as Human Capital continues to gain importance in the world of business management, numerous studies have aimed to understand the relationship between Human Resources Management and business outcomes. However, the objective of the present study is not to explore these relationships but rather to assess whether psychosocial risks may impact the personal lives of employees at the Polytechnic University of Viana do Castelo. To achieve this objective, the COPSPQ II (Portuguese Version) was administered to the institution's employees, and the responses obtained were subjected to statistical analysis.

It becomes apparent that psychosocial risks play a highly significant role in the realm of organizations. Thus, the purpose of this research is to evaluate how work impacts the Quality of Life of IPVC employees, by resorting to the results derived from the application of the COPSOQ II (Portuguese version). In summary, the main objective of this study is to understand the influence that psychosocial risks in the workplace may have on the personal lives of employees in a Higher Education Institution (HEI), through the application of the Portuguese version of COPSOQ II.

2. Quality of Life (QoL)

Considering the present study aim, its essential explore the quality-of-life concept. According to Liu (1975), QoL refers to the well-being of each individual and the environment in which they live. For this author, QoL is reflected in the needs and desires of everyone, so whenever these are met, there will be an increase in satisfaction on their part. According to Amorim (2017), defining quality of life is not easy because it depends on various factors, including the temporal period and the social context in which everyone is placed. Some authors suggest that factors such as age, geographical area of residence, socio-economic status, profession, and family relationships can influence the perception of health status and quality of life (Ferreira & Santana, 2003). Therefore, the accepted standards of quality of life today may not necessarily be the same in ten years; it all depends on individuals' needs. Thus, the World Health Organization (WHO) (1997) defines quality of life as the perception that everyone has regarding their standard of living, considering the context in which they live and comparing it with their goals, expectations, and concerns.

From Phillips' (2011) point of view, there are two types of Quality of Life: (1) Individual Quality of Life (IQL) and (2) Collective Quality of Life (CQL). IQL depends not only on the satisfaction of basic human needs but also on factors such as autonomy to make choices, the existence of opportunities to improve well-being, and the possibility of personal growth. On the other hand, CQL refers to the quality of life of a society. Therefore, it is

evident that it is essential to ensure a healthy and sustainable social environment from a psychological and social perspective.

As previously mentioned, QoL is necessarily linked to the needs of everyone. In this sense, Maslow (1943) organized human needs in the form of a pyramid, dividing them into five categories: Physiological, Safety, Love/Relationship, Esteem, and Self-actualization. It can then be considered that individuals who have more needs met have a better quality of life.

It is important to note that humans rarely achieve complete satisfaction. That is, whenever a need is met or a goal is achieved, others arise to take its place (Liu 1975). Thus, throughout this research, it is considered that General Quality of Life is directly related to the needs of each individual and the environment in which they are placed.

3. Quality of Working Life (QWL)

Once the main objective of this study is to understand the influence that psychosocial risks may have on the personal lives of employees, it becomes clear that is important to understand the concept of quality of working-life. Although there isn't a universally agreed-upon definition of QWL, exploring classic models can provide valuable insights. Therefore, three such models were examined: Walton's model (1973), Hackman and Oldham's model (1975), and Westley's Model (1979).

These models offer varying approaches to QWL. For instance, while Walton's model considers eight criteria influencing QWL, it omits biological and physiological needs (Pedroso & Pilatti, 2010). On the other hand, Hackman and Oldham's model introduces the "Job Diagnostic Survey," a quantitative tool for measuring QWL. This model focuses on motivation stemming from the work environment (Pedroso & Pilatti, 2010). In contrast, Westley's model categorizes problems into four types: Political, Economic, Psychological, and Sociological, associating each problem with a specific situation (e.g., Political – Insecurity; Economic – Injustice; Psychological – Anarchy; Sociological – Alienation).

Despite the different socioeconomic contexts in which these models were developed, they offer valuable perspectives that can assist contemporary company management.

After examining classic models, it's important to consider recent studies aimed at understanding QWL. However, there is a notable scarcity of studies focused on reviewing scientific literature, particularly on management models aimed at promoting QWL (Medeiros & Ferreira, 2011). According to DGS (2021), achieving high levels of health and well-being requires the prevention of psychosocial risks. This entails ensuring a work-life balance, promotion of emotional equilibrium and quality of work life (QWL).

In both classic models and recent studies, it's evident that the worker is at the core of the organization. Consequently, aligning Human Resources Management with QWL, as advocated by some authors, can increase the likelihood of organizations achieving their objectives. Prioritizing employee well-being can also reduce the risk of psychosocial issues in the workplace. According to Farias et al. (2023), it is apparent that scientific studies typically incorporate the concept of psychosocial risks linked to several aspects of the work environment. Castelôa et al. (2019), cited by Farias et al. (2023), identified workload, schedules, organizational culture, work-life balance, and other elements as potential factors that could impact workers' health. Furthermore, Untarini et al. (2020) emphasize that work-related stress negatively impacts job satisfaction, health, and the intention to quit.

Therefore, as Cotrim et al. (2017) emphasize, psychosocial risk has gained significant importance in the business world. Consequently, it has become increasingly imperative for organizations to assess and analyze these risks.

4. Methodology

After the introduction and analysis of scientific literature, carried out in the previous sections, it appears that psychosocial risks are an increasingly relevant factor in the world of organizations. The Polytechnic University of Viana do Castelo (IPVC) developed the "IPVConclia" (POCI-05-5762-fse-000328) project with the primary objective of analyzing and promoting the work-life balance among the employees of this Higher Education Institution.

Throughout this project the Portuguese Versions of Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire was applied to IPVC employees. Once this questionnaire has been applied in several companies and countries, over the years, it is presented by the scientific community as an important tool to evaluate the psychosocial risks at the organizations. Resorting to the results obtained by the application of COPSOQ at IPVC in the present study a statistical analysis was conducted, leading to the development of both a structural model and a measurement model. These models allow us to understand if there is a relationship between the several dimensions of COPSOQ.

5. Sample characterization

From all IPVC employees (Teachers, non-teachers, service providers) 163 valid responses were obtained. These responses are distributed according to the role that the employee performs at IPVC and the majority of employee's concern career teachers and non-teaching staff (Table 1).

Role	Number
Teaching Career (indefinite period)	60
Teachers hired on a fixed-term basis (full-time/exclusivity)	15
Teachers hired on a fixed-term basis (part-time)	19
Another situation	1
Non-Teaching Staff	66
Service providers	2
Total	163

Table 1-Function performed at IPVC

Regarding age groups, most participants are between 46 and 55 years old. It is also interesting to note that the majority of employees, due to their age, are in the middle of their career. Among employees aged between 46 and 55 years, the roles performed are essentially career teachers and non-teaching staff and these two categories include mid-career employees.

In a previous work presented at the XIII Meeting of Quality Researchers, the authors, among other results, showed that career teachers consider that their workload accumulates because it is poorly distributed, when compared to the functions performed by other employees. This category also considers that, in relation to other employees, they often do not have time to complete all the tasks of their work and when asked "Do you need to work overtime?", career teachers and teachers on fixed-term contracts (full-time/exclusivity), are the most penalized when compared to non-teaching staff and teachers hired on a fixed-term basis (part-time). Thus, in the quantitative requirements dimension, teachers are the most penalized in their workplace. Regarding the cognitive demands dimension, the work of career teachers, compared to that of non-teaching staff, reflects a greater demand in proposing new ideas. Regarding the dimension of influence at work, they concluded too that non-teaching staff participate less often in choosing the people with whom they work. Based on the conclusions obtained in the previously work, the authors, in order to respond to the objective of the current investigation, analyzed the relationship between the various dimensions of the questionnaire: quantitative demands, cognitive demands, somatic stress, cognitive stress, job satisfaction and Work-family conflict.

6. Multivariate analysis

Structural equation modeling, or SEM, is a technique for general multivariate statistical modeling, which is widely used in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The interest of many researchers and other professionals in SEM often derives from the theoretical constructions that can be developed from latent constructs. The relationships between theoretical constructs are represented by regression coefficients or path coefficients between observed and/or latent variables. The structural equation model implies a structure for the covariances between the observed variables. Structural equation models are, most of the time, visualized by a trajectory diagram. This was the analysis used to verify the relationships between the various dimensions of COPSOQ questionnaire and which are presented below.

Measurement model

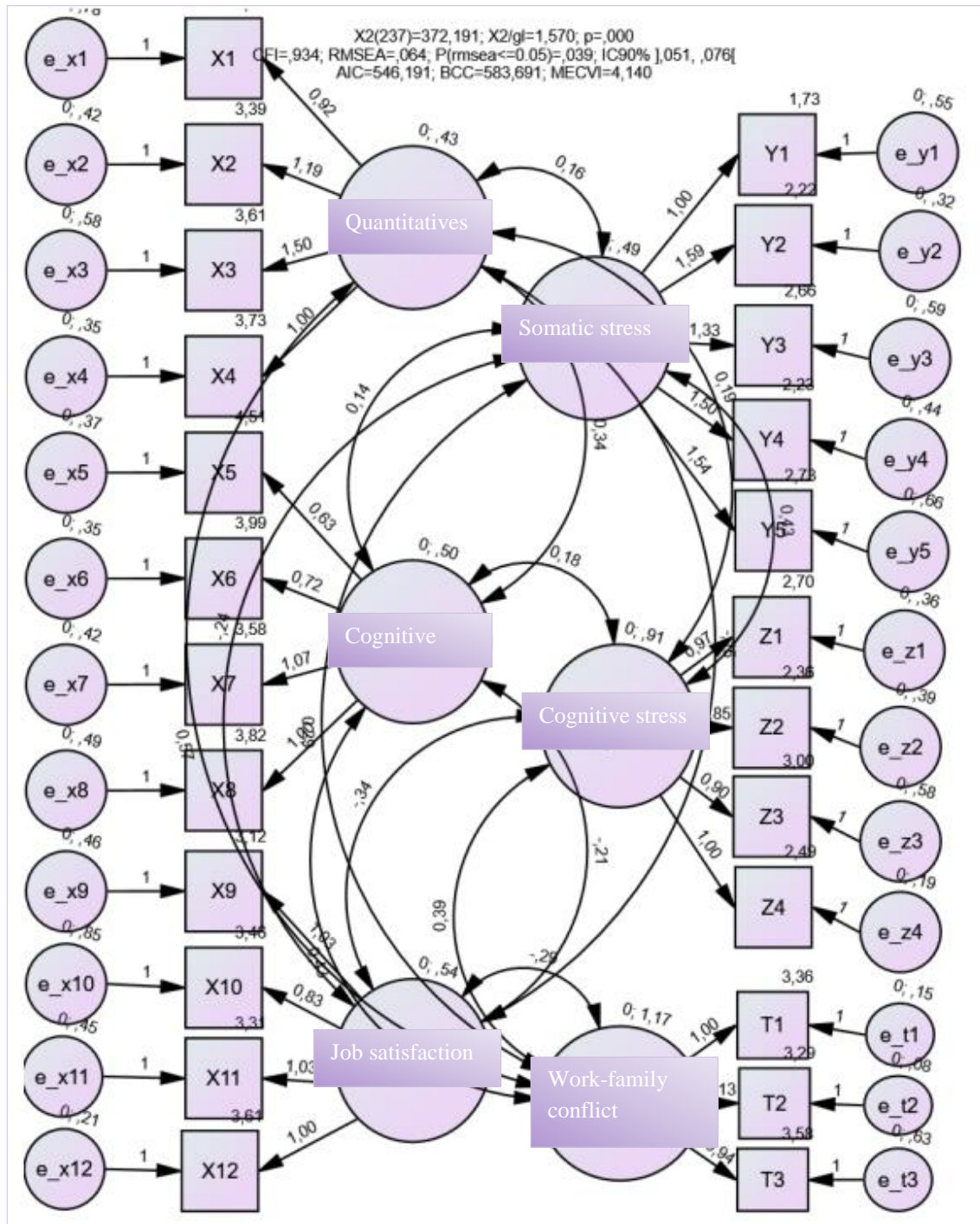


Figure 1 - Measurement model

The analysis of parameter estimates (Figure 1) revealed positive relationships between the factors: Quantitative Demands and Cognitive Demands ($r = .724, p < .001$), Cognitive Stress and Somatic Stress ($r = .649, p < .001$), Quantitative Demands and Somatic Stress ($r = .342, p < .01$), Cognitive Stress and Quantitative Demands ($r = .298, p < .01$), Cognitive Demands and Somatic Stress ($r = .279, p < .01$), Cognitive Stress and Cognitive Demands ($r = .262, p < .05$), Work-Family Conflict and Cognitive Stress ($r = .381, p < .001$), Work-Family Conflict and Cognitive Demands ($r = .553, p < .001$), Work-Family Conflict and Somatic Stress ($r = .379, p < .001$), and Work-Family Conflict and Quantitative Demands ($r = .796, p < .001$). On the other hand, it revealed negative correlations between the factors: Quantitative Demands and Job Satisfaction ($r = -.305, p < .01$), Cognitive Demands and Job Satisfaction ($r = -.402, p < .001$), Cognitive Stress and Job Satisfaction ($r = -.487, p < .001$), Somatic Stress and Job Satisfaction ($r = -.446, p < .001$), and Work-Family Conflict and Job Satisfaction ($r = -.367, p < .001$). Furthermore, all indices saturated in the factors: Quantitative Demands, Cognitive Demands, Job Satisfaction, Somatic Stress,

Cognitive Stress, and Work-Family Conflict, with factorial weights ranging from .57 to .79, .59 to .76, .55 to .85, .68 to .85, .84 to .91, and .79 to .97 (all ps < .001), respectively.

Structural model

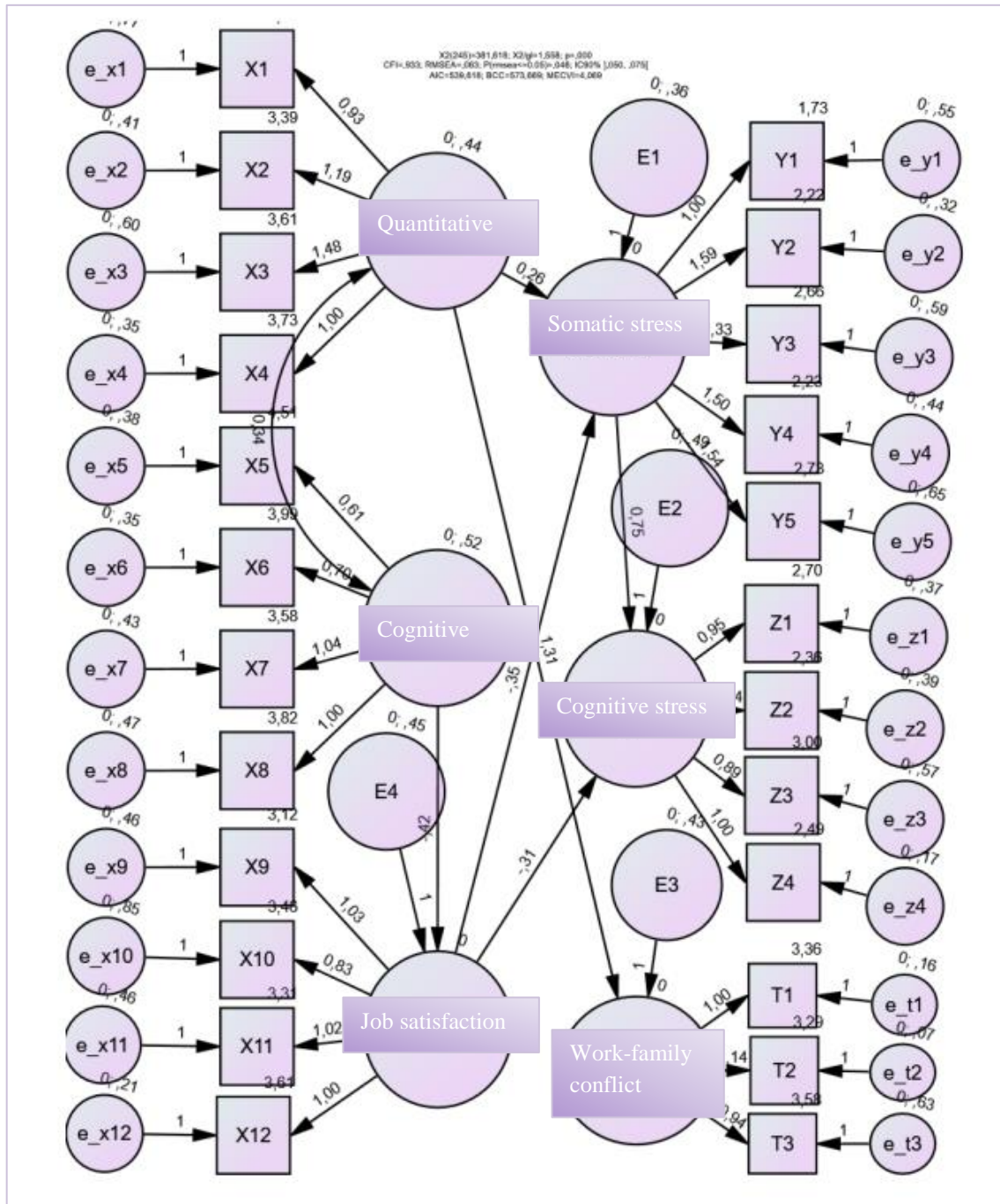


Figure 2 - Structural model

Subsequently, partial and total mediation models were tested. The results showed an acceptable fit for the partial mediation model, χ^2 (238, N = 142) = 372.216, $p < .001$, CFI = .934, RMSEA = .063, 90% CI [.051, .075] $P(\text{rmseaa} \leq .05) = .052$, as well as an acceptable fit for the total mediation model, χ^2 (246, N = 142) = 470.557, $p < .001$, CFI = .089, RMSEA = .08, 90% CI [.069, .091] $P(\text{rmseaa} \leq .05) = .000$.

The models were compared using the χ^2 test and significant differences were found between the two models, χ^2 (8) = 98.341, $p < .001$. Therefore, because the partial mediation model had the lowest χ^2 value, the partial mediation model was chosen. However, since seven non-significant paths were identified, namely from Cognitive Demands to Cognitive Stress ($b = -.025$, $p = .859$), Quantitative Demands to Job Satisfaction ($b = -.031$, $p = .854$), Quantitative Demands to Cognitive Stress ($b = .063$, $p = .639$), and Cognitive Demands to Somatic Stress ($b = -.096$, $p = .55$), Cognitive Stress to Work-Family Conflict ($b = .063$, $p = .639$), Job Satisfaction to Work-

Family Conflict ($b = -.106$, $p = .213$), and Cognitive Demands to Work-Family Conflict ($b = -.103$, $p = .422$), these paths were eliminated in order to simplify the model. The fit of the final simplified model is acceptable, $\chi^2 (245, N = 142) = 381.618$, $p < .001$, CFI = .933, RMSEA = .063, 90% CI [.050, .075] $P(\text{rmsea} \leq .05) = .046$.

Based on the final model, the results showed that Quantitative Demands are correlated with Cognitive Demands ($r = .723$, $p < .001$). Regarding the direct effects between the factors, it is noteworthy that Cognitive Demands negatively contribute to Job Satisfaction ($B = -.425$, $b = -.417$, $p < .001$), as well as Quantitative Demands positively contribute to Somatic Stress ($B = .263$, $b = .249$, $p < .05$). It was also found that Job Satisfaction negatively contributes to Somatic Stress ($B = -.355$, $b = -.375$, $p < .001$) and Cognitive Stress ($B = -.307$, $b = -.236$, $p < .01$). In turn, it was observed that Somatic Stress has a positive direct effect on Cognitive Stress ($B = .745$, $b = .542$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, Quantitative Demands were found to positively influence Work-Family Conflict ($B = .745$, $b = .797$, $p < .001$) (Figure 25).

7. Results analysis, discussion, and conclusions

With this investigation it becomes even more noticeable that there are many factors that influence Quality of Life at Work and Quality of Life in General, and more than that, that factors related to professional life influence health and personal life of employees. The statistical analysis carried out in the previous sections allows us to verify a series of statements made by many authors, such as Sirgy et al. (2001) and Walton (1973), where it is observed that there are several factors that influence the quality of work life, with work-family balance taking center stage in this research. It is observable from the analyzed data that somatic stress is directly influenced by quantitative demands and job satisfaction and is also indirectly influenced by cognitive demands. On the other hand, cognitive stress is directly influenced by job satisfaction and somatic stress. Indirectly, cognitive stress is influenced by cognitive and quantitative demands. Thus, it is evident that both the quantity of work (Quantitative Demands) and job satisfaction can influence employee health (Stress). This situation should be considered by the managers of IPVC, since, as mentioned throughout the research, according to Dias and Ferreira (2017), the health status of workers can negatively influence organizational performance. It can be noted that somatic and cognitive stress are particularly influenced by job satisfaction, and the higher the satisfaction, the lower the stress. Job satisfaction should be considered as an indicator, since in more severe cases of employee dissatisfaction; physical and emotional problems may arise, such as Anxiety and Depression (Dias & Ferreira, 2017). It is worth noting that in this study conducted at IPVC, there is observed an influence of quantitative demands on work-family conflict, which means that the higher the quantitative demands, the greater the work-family conflict.

As observed, the quantitative demands of work have an influence on the stress and work-family conflict of employees, which leads us to consider that, as mentioned in Walton (1973), it will be important to try to ensure a balance between work and personal life. It is known that excessive work can lead to family and health problems, which can change the productivity of employees and thus negatively influence organizational results. From this perspective, it will be advantageous for IPVC to ensure that the schedules and objectives of each worker are always well defined, avoiding the deterioration of leisure moments and family relationships.

Analyzing the structural model presented in Figure 2, it was found that, through the job satisfaction factor, cognitive demands have a significant indirect effect on somatic stress and cognitive stress. Thus, it is worth noting that job satisfaction exerts a total mediating effect between cognitive demands and somatic stress, as well as between cognitive demands and cognitive stress. On the other hand, it is observed that somatic stress exerts a total mediating effect between quantitative demands and cognitive stress, as well as a partial mediating effect between job satisfaction and cognitive stress.

The analyzes carried out suggest that HEI managers must pay attention to their employees, since, as already mentioned throughout the investigation, according to Dias & Ferreira (2017), the health status of workers can negatively influence performance of the organization. Job satisfaction should be an indicator to take into account, since, in more serious cases of employee dissatisfaction, physical-emotional problems may arise, such as Anxiety and Depression (Dias & Ferreira, 2017).

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