

Triple burden or triple strength? Exploring work-study-family balance among parents

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Abstract: This qualitative study explores how working parents pursuing higher education perceive their ability to balance work, study, and family life. Using semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, the research applied manual coding through open, axial, and selective stages to identify key themes. Time management and task delegation emerged as primary strategies for managing triple-role demands. All female participants reported experiencing burnout, whereas only half of the male participants expressed similar concerns. Each participant adopted different coping mechanisms to deal with burnout, with emotion-focused strategies appearing as the most common approach. The study shows that mothers still bear most caregiving duties and face greater social pressure than fathers when juggling work, study, and family roles. Female participants were the only ones who experienced guilt over the intricacy of several responsibilities. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of support systems—family, employers, and universities—in assisting individuals in achieving balance. It also suggests that individuals' perceptions of success in achieving work-study-family balance are not solely determined by their level of self-efficacy. No significant gender-based differences were found in the perceived attainment of balance across work, study, and family domains. Employers and universities must establish supportive policies to facilitate effective role balance among working student-parents.

Keywords: *Coping mechanism, Gender role, Parents, Support system, Work-study-family balance.*

1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced society, the question is no longer about whether we can "have it all," but how long we can keep up the effort without cracking. As professionals increasingly combine work, study, and family duties, the elusive ideal of balance has become both a personal struggle and a structural challenge in modern society. The pressure of rapid economic growth within a relatively short period, along with social changes and increasing global competition in the Asian region, has intensified work-life demands on employees [1, 2]. As a result, productivity demands have aligned with broader increases in workplace expectations. Consequently, sacrificing family time for work is often viewed as a rational decision by families seeking long-term benefits [3, 4]. Balancing work and family responsibilities poses a challenge for many contemporary workers, both employed in offices and those self-employed. When individuals assume multiple roles, role conflict may arise if those roles overlap temporally, as each role requires time, energy, and commitment [5].

As such, the overlap of roles, particularly when balancing work and academic responsibilities, is worth discussing because the phenomenon of individuals pursuing higher education while working is common in Indonesia [6] and globally [7]. Holding multiple roles can lead to conflicts when these roles intersect, demanding simultaneous attention and energy [5]. These factors impact both psychological and physical well-being. Individuals often experience chronic stress, fatigue, and diminished interpersonal relationship quality. Work-study-family role conflicts can even negatively affect academic and professional performance and parenting effectiveness [8, 9].

Work-study-life balance is an individual's effort to simultaneously manage professional responsibilities, academic demands, and personal life [10]. This concept is especially critical for working parents who are also students, as they must navigate dual, even triple, burdens in daily life [11]. In their research on work-life quality, Bhende, et al. [12] argue that work and family balance can be reflected across three dimensions: productivity, skill application, and efficiency. When working individuals feel satisfied and maintain work-family balance, this positively influences productivity, reduces turnover intentions, and enhances satisfaction with existing work schedules.

Balancing work and family responsibilities is a central issue for parents pursuing academic studies. The concept of work and non-work balance is particularly relevant for those enrolled in higher education, as they must manage professional demands alongside personal needs and recreational activities [8]. This issue is especially pronounced among mothers, who often bear the double burden of employment and domestic responsibilities. Research by Great Place to Work [13] reveals that working mothers are 28% more likely to experience burnout than working fathers. Although parental burnout is a universal concern, studies suggest that women tend to feel less control over their time outside of work compared to men [14–16]. Note that mothers' multiple roles create complexity, as they strive to balance responsibilities as parents, students, and professionals. Hjalmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir [17], who assert that managing multiple roles contributes to heightened stress and pressure for women balancing professional and familial obligations, support this.

Furthermore, Clark and Hill [18] confirm that balancing work, study, and personal life is more difficult for mothers, as women tend to bear greater familial responsibilities, even in dual-career households. As professional and personal demands increase, many parents struggle with time management between work and family, particularly amidst challenges. This imbalance causes stress and fatigue, impacting both physical and emotional well-being, and further affecting performance in both professional and academic spheres. Literature suggests that achieving a good work and non-work balance results in positive individual outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, greater organizational commitment, reduced burnout, improved mental and physical health, and enhanced performance, as well as as organizational benefits like lower absenteeism and turnover rates, and improved profitability [19].

Although an increasing number of individuals are simultaneously acting as breadwinners and students [20] and despite the documentation of positive and negative outcomes of working while pursuing academic degree, there is still limited research on how working students manage multiple life roles [8, 20]. The experiences of working students in achieving balance among work, research, and personal life warrant further exploration particularly because work-life balance among working adults remains a common concern [10]. Some studies examine working mothers pursuing education [21] and graduate students who work [22]. However, existing literature has yet to specifically examine the experiences of parents—both fathers and mothers—who concurrently navigate the triple roles of employee, graduate student, and parent. Most studies focus on one or two roles (work–family or research–work) and have yet to comprehensively explore the balance of work–research–family, especially within Indonesia or other developing countries.

This research examines how parents who work while pursuing graduate studies manage the balance of their work, academic, and family responsibilities. The geographic scope is limited to Indonesia, focusing on mothers and fathers performing the three concurrent roles of parent, worker, and student.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Work-study-family Balance for Parents*

People have increasingly felt preoccupied in recent years, and time constraints have become an intrinsic part of daily life [14, 17]. This is especially true for parents who have responsibility to balance job, childcare, and academic [17]. Parents' time pressure is influenced by when and how much work is accomplished, as well as growing parenting demands compared to earlier generations [14]. Unlike stay-

at-home parents, working parents who simultaneously pursue higher education must balance their duties and responsibilities at home, school, and work. They face several *work-study-family* challenges. According to Goewey [23] graduate students face a much larger strain in juggling work, family, and academic duties than undergraduate students. Furthermore, Ruzungunde and Mjoli [24] found that people who mix job and school usually face inter-role conflicts, which have an impact on their mental health. Nicklin, et al. [22] and Soysa and Wilcomb [25] found that formal university education is linked to higher stress levels and lower mental well-being.

Brue [26] describes work-life balance as the harmony and disruption between paid work and non-work domains, namely when individuals manage work and family roles between home and work. The concept of work-life balance (WLB) is defined as the separation of work life from personal life [27] and is considered the ability to manage both professional and family responsibilities satisfactorily [28, 29]. Studies show that WLB plays a significant role in work engagement [30, 31] and contributes to job satisfaction, lower stress levels, and improved quality of life [2].

Building upon the definitions of Work-life Balance (WLB), Work-school Balance (WSB), and School-Life Balance (SLB), as developed by O'Mahony and Jeske [11]; Ong and Ramia [32] and Voydanoff [33] defines Work-school-life Balance (WSLB) as the ability to balance three "student commitment categories": work obligations, academic demands, and personal life. WSLB reflects the experiences of students who not only pursue education while working but also strive to balance these multiple demands to fulfill social or family responsibilities [11].

2.2. *Work-study-life Balance Strategy*

According to the person-environment fit theory Edwards, et al. [34]; Edwards and Rothbard [35] and French, et al. [36] an employee's level of work-family stress is influenced by three interrelated factors: first, the extent and intensity of demands from work and family; second, the availability of resources; and third, the use of adaptive strategies [37] that is more effective than those that focus solely on addressing stress symptoms. Although much of the work-family literature rightly emphasizes the need to expand workplace policies to include lifestyle balance initiatives and employee mental health assessments, most organizational policies remain largely unchanged in implementing structural changes that can support work-family integration [38]. However, the onus is not solely on the organization. Quick, et al. [39] suggest that employees also need to take an active role in managing their own work responsibilities, family obligations, and self-expectations by understanding the sources of conflicting demands, making appropriate choices, and using strategies. Drawing on insights from boundary theory [40] and enrichment theory [41] it is believed that individuals often use a variety of work-life balance strategies to cope with the inevitable demands of work and life [42, 43]. In fact, working parents and college students have active strategies and mechanisms that allow them to reconcile the demands of the three roles, often reducing role conflict and creating mutual benefits between roles [44] for example by implementing time management [45].

2.3. *Parental Gender Role*

The phenomenon of parental burnout is a universal challenge, but research indicates that women tend to experience greater pressure than men. While some studies report a more egalitarian division of labor in heterosexual couples, research consistently shows that mothers still devote more time to household chores and caregiving responsibilities [46]. The increased workload experienced by both fathers and mothers can significantly impact family life; however, mothers who experience job-related stress report greater difficulties in managing their families, particularly those with young children, whereas fathers often feel more satisfied at work at the expense of family time [47]. Mothers' lives become more complex as they deal with their responsibilities as parents, students, and career women

[16]. According to Júlíusdóttir, et al. [48] moms dedicate more time to childcare and home tasks, regardless of their profession.

Bryson [49] discovered in his research that time is neither neutral nor fair, but rather reflects social and political disparities. Men and women have varied perceptions of their time management abilities. These findings were confirmed by recent research by Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir [17] who found that while women described how difficult it was to control their time constantly facing demands from children, partners, and work men emphasized the importance of carefully planning and strategizing around it. As a result, males in academics and other industries reported having more control over their time than women. This also suggests that men believe they have control over other people's time, which women are less likely to remark. Women tend to express that they must constantly respond to others' needs, as if their time also belongs to others. Men feel busy but not as intensely as women do because family obligations do not continuously force them to divide their focus between work and home life. Several studies by Craig and Brown [14]; Friedman [15] and Sullivan and Gershuny [50] consistently state that mothers' leisure time is more often shared with their children than fathers', and they are more likely to multitask.

2.4. Coping Mechanism

The persistent overlap of caregiving and multitasking responsibilities leaves many parents with minimal time for rest, amplifying the risk of burnout when coupled with intense work pressure. Excessive work pressure, on the other hand, can dampen passion for the job and impede personal progress. Burnout is a problem that affects not only work-life balance, but also an individual's social and professional relationships. Burnout can include a loss of interest in job, strained social connections, and even alcohol dependence. As a result, stress management measures are essential for preserving psychological well-being and life balance [51].

According to Baqutayan [52] people cannot maintain a permanent state of tension and emotional pressure, hence coping skills are crucial for stress management. Folkman and Lazarus [53] define coping mechanisms as cognitive and behavioral attempts to master, reduce, or tolerate life's challenges. In other words, how a person responds to and manages stress in their life is mainly determined by the coping mechanisms they use. In this context, Benjamin and Walz [54] conclude that stress is the result of an interaction between three major elements: the environment (organizational or social climate, interpersonal relationships, operational procedures), the nature of stressors (nagging, daily pressures, or life-threatening events), and an individual's susceptibility to stress. Therefore, effectively managing stress requires a deeper understanding of the appropriate coping strategies based on these factors.

Folkman and Lazarus [55] divide coping processes into two categories: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping refers to methods for directly changing or managing the source of stress, whereas emotion-focused coping incorporates strategies for transforming unpleasant feelings into positive ones. Understanding these two approaches allows people to choose the best coping strategies for their conditions. As times evolve, four coping mechanism styles have been identified by Folkman and Moskowitz [56]. The first is problem-focused coping, which involves directly addressing and resolving the source of stress. The second is emotion-focused coping, which aims to reframe negative emotions through more positive perspectives, such as acceptance, religious reflection, or the use of humor. The third style is meaning-focused coping, wherein individuals exposed to stress employ cognitive strategies to derive and manage meaning from the situation they are facing. Lastly, the fourth style is social-focused coping, which involves reducing stress by seeking emotional or instrumental support from their communities.

However, the efficiency of a coping method is determined by the circumstances and the person adopting it. Many coping mechanisms have been shown to be effective in specific situations, however some research suggests that not all methods have favorable consequences. Problem-focused approaches

are often considered the most beneficial, whereas certain strategies have been associated with negative outcomes, such as increased psychological distress or an inability to effectively manage stress [57].

2.5. Social Support System

The combination of parenting, workload, and academic demands creates challenges in achieving life balance. Working parents who are also pursuing higher education often have to find time in their work schedules to attend classes and complete various academic assignments. While family and work can be mutually supportive, the demands of these two roles often do not align, leading to role conflict and work-life imbalance [58].

According to ecological systems theory, establishing work-life balance necessitates the microsystems of work and non-work collaborating to produce permeable and mutually supportive work-life boundaries [45]. It is widely acknowledged that the social support people receive from their immediate surroundings has an impact on their stress levels and job satisfaction at work, where they spend a significant amount of time. According to research, social support is an important resource that reduces the negative effects of stressful life events, influences people's behavior and how they carry out their social roles [59] and protects against psychological and physical illnesses [60].

In a research by Hogan, et al. [61] social support was found to be effective in coping with stress and negative situations related to social, psychological, and general issues experienced by individuals. Social support is a crucial factor in maintaining mental health. It is also defined as readily available assistance from people connected to an individual, particularly during difficult times when support is needed [62]. Hardships in life are unavoidable, thus individuals must have appropriate social support to deal with social issues and maintain general well-being [63, 64]. Individuals who receive social support, assist others, handle circumstances with empathy, and have the requisite social relationship skills report higher levels of life satisfaction [64]. Other research on flexible work choices and career risk perceptions among mothers and caregivers suggests that having a supportive partner at home can facilitate work-life balance. Women with a partner at home reported lower stress levels and fewer negative impacts on their work compared to those without a partner [65].

Therefore, Boakye, et al. [21] concluded that relying on a supportive partner is a coping mechanism people adopt to reduce stress at home and in the workplace. These findings align with those of Murthy and Shastri [66] who also identified partner support and reliance on domestic assistants as pathways to achieving a satisfying work-life balance.

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Approach

This research employs a qualitative research approach. The objective is to explore how parents simultaneously working and pursuing graduate studies manage the responsibilities of their three roles while maintaining a sense of well-being. To understand their subjective experiences, the researcher adopts a constructivist perspective, which emphasizes the role of both social and individual constructions in shaping reality [67, 68]. The constructivist paradigm views social reality as a product of interaction between external conditions and individuals' interpretations. This framework considers social reality relative rather than absolute [69].

3.2. Data Collection Method

This research employed semi-structured interviews to explore participants' lived experiences in depth. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, using a flexible guide comprising open-ended questions. This allowed the researcher to probe unexpected responses while maintaining a natural conversational flow [70]. Interviews were selected for their effectiveness in capturing the respondents'

subjective nuances, prioritizing ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and participant comfort [71].

Data collection was supported through purposive sampling. This sampling strategy was used to recruit participants who met five core criteria: (1) married individuals with at least one child, (2) currently employed in either the public or private sector, and (3) actively pursuing a master's degree. This method was chosen to ensure the inclusion of individuals directly relevant to the research's focus [1, 72].

3.3. Interview Procedure

Interviews were conducted either online or in person, with careful preparation of safe and comfortable settings. The researcher adopted a friendly approach, engaged in active listening, and posed open-ended questions to elicit in-depth participant responses. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent to ensure data accuracy. In addition to audio recordings, supplementary notes were taken for documentation purposes. The duration of each interview varied depending on the complexity of the topics discussed and participants' availability, typically ranging from 30 to 90 minutes.

3.4. Data Ethics and Management

Before beginning the interview, the researcher needs to obtain the participant's permission via oral and written informed consent. Interviews were taped with participants' agreement and approval. This helped researchers capture every interaction during the interview process. After recording, the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

To ensure data quality and integrity, this research adheres to Lincoln and Guba [73] qualitative research reliability criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [73, 74]. Accurately reporting respondents' statements, supported by illustrative quotes, maintain credibility. Transferability is achieved by synthesizing individual descriptions into universally relevant insights [75, 76]. Dependability is ensured through meticulous documentation of all research phases [74] while confirmability is upheld by grounding interpretations in data rather than personal viewpoints.

3.5. Data Analysis Method

This research utilized phenomenological analysis as outlined by Moustakas [77] which involves identifying core phenomena, reducing data into significant statements, and clustering them into themes. Data derived from interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding techniques to identify categories, patterns, and overarching themes. The analytical process was conducted reflectively and iteratively to maintain alignment between research objectives and emerging findings.

Open coding was used to break down qualitative data into discrete concepts, followed by axial coding to relate categories and subcategories hierarchically, thereby enhancing thematic clarity [78, 79]. Selective coding was employed to integrate and refine themes into a coherent narrative or "storyline" that encapsulated the central phenomenon [80].

This iterative and reflective process, often called reflexive iteration, was essential in continuously revisiting the data and linking it with emerging insights, progressively leading to a more focused and in-depth understanding [81]. Additionally, data triangulation was employed to enhance the validity of the findings by incorporating multiple data sources for cross-verification.

3.6. Profile of Participants

Initially, the researcher planned to interview ten participants, consisting of five male and five female participants. However, there was variance in the responses from the fifth male participant, leading the researcher to decide to add one more male participant. To maintain a balance between the number of

male and female participants, the researcher also added one more female participant. Balancing the number of male and female participants is important to ensure diversity of perspectives, especially in a study on work-study-family balance, which is strongly influenced by gender roles. With this balanced composition, the researcher could more fairly compare the experiences and role dynamics between fathers and mothers managing the three simultaneous roles of worker, student, and parent. Saturation of responses was reached after interviewing the sixth male and sixth female participants. Therefore, the researcher stopped adding more participants.

The researcher conducted interviews with twelve primary participants who met the established inclusion criteria namely, parents concurrently enrolled in a master's program while employed. Six participants identified as female and six as male. Five participants were employed in the public sector, while the remaining seven worked in private enterprises. Each participant came from different research concentrations and academic semesters. All had at least one child, were actively enrolled in a master's program (minimum second semester), and were full-time employees. First-semester students and self-employed individuals were excluded to ensure the academic and organizational performance insights were drawn from participants with stable research patterns and who were subject to formal organizational policies both of which are focal areas of this research.

Table 1.
Primary Participants Profile.

No.	Initial	Gender	Age	Number of children	Study Program	Semester	Sector
1.	PT	Female	33	1	Capital Market Management	4	Private
2.	RI	Female	42	3	General Management	2	Public
3.	EY	Male	36	2	Operational Management	2	Private
4.	ME	Female	32	1	Human Resource Management	3	Public
5.	AW	Male	34	2	Actuarial Management	2	Private
6.	ZI	Male	42	1	Capital Market Management	4	Public
7.	RK	Female	40	2	General Management	4	Private
8.	TW	Male	37	1	General Management	2	Public
9.	LA	Male	30	1	Marketing Management	2	Private
10.	MD	Male	37	2	International Business Management	3	Public
11.	KE	Male	32	2	Human Resource Management	2	Private
12.	AN	Female	32	1	Human Resource Management	4	Public

Although small sample sizes are common in phenomenological studies, it is important to emphasize that researchers may need to continue adding participants until saturation is achieved to meet the research objectives [82]. According to the literature, a total of 12 participants aligns with recommendations for phenomenological research. Additionally, Creswell [83] recommends 5 to 25 participants for phenomenological studies. Guetterman [84] notes an average sample size of 15 participants in academic research, indicating that the total of 12 participants approaches this figure.

To ensure diversity of experience and enrich the analytical depth, participants were selected from various backgrounds. This diversity also facilitated data triangulation, thereby strengthening the validity and richness of qualitative insights.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the primary findings, triangulation was performed through interviews with additional participants who held relevant perspectives or had contextual proximity to the participants. These triangulation participants spouses, relatives, classmates, or supervisors—provided supplementary insights from personal and professional standpoints.

Table 2.
Triangulation Participants Profile.

No.	Initial	Gender	Age	Related Main Participant	Relationship
1.	QH	Female	41	ZI	Wife
2.	DP	Female	21	ME	Sister-in-law
3.	YR	Male	25	EY	Classmate
4.	AM	Male	30	AN	Husband
5.	LE	Female	35	Whole Speaker	Head of Academic Affairs
6.	ES	Male	48	RK	Immediate Superior

The triangulation participants came from diverse backgrounds and held various types of relational proximity to the primary participants, enabling the researcher to acquire broader and more nuanced information. This included relational roles such as spouses, siblings-in-law, and direct supervisors. One participant also represented the institutional perspective: the head of the academic division, who provided insights into institutional policies related to working students.

Furthermore, to deepen the understanding of the psychological dynamics experienced by working student-parents, the researcher conducted expert triangulation by interviewing two professional clinical psychologists. These experts were selected based on their clinical competencies and experience in addressing role-balance issues. Their input served to reinforce the validity of the research's findings and provide theoretical confirmation of participants' lived experiences.

Table 3.
Expert Participants Profile.

No.	Name	Profession
1.	Dirmantoro [6]	Clinical Family Psychologist
2.	Moustakas [77]	Clinical Child Psychologist

4. Result

4.1. Open Coding

Open coding involves labeling concepts, defining, and developing categories based on their characteristics and dimensions. This method is used to analyze qualitative data and is part of various qualitative data analysis methodologies [85]. At this stage, the researcher conducted a thematic coding process by identifying salient keywords and phrases within participants' statements that conveyed specific meanings. All interview transcripts were systematically analyzed, with segments marked based on their relevance, and subsequently categorized into thematic clusters reflecting shared meanings across data sources. A total of nineteen (19) distinct thematic categories were identified, as follows:

1. Motivational Factors for Pursuing Graduate Education While Employed
2. Challenges in Balancing Employment, Education, and Parenting Roles
3. Perceptions of Work–Study–Family Balance
4. Self-Efficacy in Role Integration
5. Strategies for Managing Multiple Roles
6. Perceived Achievement of Work–Study–Family Balance
7. Academic Performance
8. Job Performance
9. Role Prioritization
10. Role Perceived to Incur the Greatest Sacrifice
11. Social Reactions to Parents Juggling Multiple Roles
12. Parental Efforts to Maintain Child Engagement and Care
13. Parental Burnout in the Context of Multiple Role Management
14. Coping Mechanism for Role-Related Stress

15. Gendered Division of Parental Responsibilities
16. Experiences of Guilt Related to Role Demands
17. Perceived Family Support
18. Perceived Organizational Support in the Workplace
19. Perceived Institutional Support in University

4.2. Axial Coding

Strauss and Corbin [79] and Corbin and Strauss [78] introduced axial coding as the second phase of the constant comparative method used in qualitative data analysis for theory development. Axial coding provides a structured framework to synthesize and organize data into coherent, hierarchically arranged categories and subcategories. This step adds depth and nuance to emerging concepts and explores their relationships with other elements of the analytic framework. This analytic phase aims to consider and develop the interrelations between functioning categories and subcategories to capture a phenomenon's general nature and its dimensions' variation [86].

As the researcher reviewed the thematic material gathered through open coding, it was examined within the context of inductive and deductive analysis. Employing a combination of inductive and deductive approaches enhances the analytical precision and allows for accurate thematic categorization [87]. The researcher grouped related open coding categories into major thematic clusters during this axial coding phase.

Six open coding categories—Motivations for Pursuing Graduate Education While Working, Challenges in Navigating Multiple Roles, Role Perceived to Demand the Greatest Sacrifice, Most Salient Role, Parental Strategies for Ensuring Child Well-being, and Role-Balancing Approaches—were synthesized under the theme of “Motivation, Challenges, and Strategies in Managing Triple Roles”. These categories collectively reflect the dynamics and efforts involved in managing the roles of worker, student, and parent. This grouping also facilitates the identification of strategic patterns employed to achieve role balance.

Next, two open coding categories—Parental Burnout in Managing Multiple Roles and Coping Mechanism for Role-Related Stress —were integrated under the theme "Burnout and Coping Mechanism". These categories capture parents' emotional responses and stress management strategies in navigating multiple-role demands.

Then, three open coding categories—Gender Roles in Parenting, Social Reactions to Parents Juggling Three Roles, and Feelings of Guilt—were grouped under the theme "Gender and Social Expectations in Parental Role". These categories are interrelated through their connection to social constructions and gender-based expectations that influence parents' experiences of holding multiple roles. This grouping highlights how gender identity shapes societal perceptions and emotional burdens.

Following that, three open coding categories—Perceived Family Support, Perceived Organizational Support in the Workplace, and Perceived Institutional Support in Higher University—were organized into the theme "Perceived Support Systems." These categories represent external sources of support that assist participants in managing three concurrent roles. This grouping highlights the importance of external support in maintaining effective role performance.

Finally, five open coding categories—Perceptions of the Meaning of Work-study-Family Balance, Parental Self-Efficacy in Managing Three Roles, Academic Performance, Job Performance, and Perceived Attainment of Work-study-Family Balance—were grouped into the main theme “Conditions for Parental Work-study-Family Balance.” These categories reflect how parents interpret, assess, and experience the balance among work, research, and family roles. This grouping provides a comprehensive overview of the conditions and subjective perceptions of work-study-family balance.

4.3. Selective Coding Development

Selective coding is the third level of the coding process. It enables the researcher to refine and integrate the organized categories from axial coding into a cohesive and meaningful narrative. Selective coding extends axial coding to a higher level of abstraction through actions that lead to elaborating or formulating a core storyline [80]. Selective coding involves allowing a case or narrative to emerge from the coded data categories. This process enables deeper refinement, selection of key thematic categories, and systematic alignment of the central theme with other selectively coded categories. Conceptualizing the outcomes of selective coding as a “case” or “story” is essential because it provides researchers with a flexible and multi-layered framework to structure and present their findings [79].

At this stage, the researcher identified one central theme emerging from the five major themes identified during axial coding: “Work-study-family Balance Among Working Parents.” This central theme is influenced by four other major themes.

The four contributing themes were further classified into two axes: internal and external factors. “Motivation, Challenges, and Strategies in Managing Triple Roles” and “Burnout and Coping Mechanism” were categorized as internal factors, reflecting psychological responses, individual skills, and personal decisions in dealing with role-related demands. Meanwhile, the themes “Gender and Social Expectations in Parental Role” and “Perceived Support Systems” were identified as external factors, shaped by social structures, cultural norms, and institutional influences. Gender roles are affected by societal expectations around the division of labor between men and women within families. At the same time, support systems originate from external environments such as the family, workplace, and university.

4.4. Internal Factors

4.4.1. Motivation, Challenges, and Strategies in Managing Triple Roles

The simultaneous roles of parent, employee, and graduate student presents a complex challenge for many adult pursuing higher education. Participants in this research expressed that the decision to pursue a degree while working and parenting was not made lightly; rather, it stemmed from a deep motivation, particularly the desire to serve as a role model for their children. As EY (37) stated, “Basically, I want to show my child that education matters.” Similarly, AW (34) noted, “At the very least, my child will see that even though I am a father with a family, I still go to school and that is cool.” RI (42) echoed this sentiment: “I want to be a role model for my child.”

Conceptually, individuals managing three roles face overlapping pressures from three major life domains. This aligns with Van Manen [68] findings that adult students who are also parents face compounded burdens in fulfilling academic and familial responsibilities. These overlapping demands often lead to role stress Beehr and Glazer [88] and negatively affect well-being and performance across domestic and professional domains [89].

Most participants acknowledged experiencing physical and mental fatigue. The challenge of exhaustion due to time constraints was the most frequently mentioned by participants, consistent with the findings of research by Dee, et al. [90]. ME (32) commented, “The challenge is to maintain physical and mental endurance.” Others also observed this experience, such as DP, ME’s sister-in-law: “It is exhausting to be a parent, and on top of that, my sister in law is fighting for her master’s degree while working as well.” This demonstrates that the pressure of multiple roles is evident internally and to those in their social environment.

Household conflict was also a recurring issue. QH (41), the wife of one participant, shared, “We have had arguments because we are both exhausted.” Similarly, AM (30), AN’s husband, said that his wife’s ambition during her graduate school journey has impacted their relationship: “We had arguments, it was like, ‘this (mess) is all because you are too busy with school.’”

Health issues were another direct consequence. EY's classmate YR (25) reported that EY once fell ill due to "*staying up late for several nights in a row.*"

Another challenge arose from role conflict with children, who often felt neglected. As RI (42) mentioned, "*for me, it's the kids' complaints—that's the hardest part.*" Clinical child psychologist Adisa Mustikawati emphasized the importance of adaptive communication and participatory scheduling to ensure children feel secure and emotionally supported. "*Let us make a schedule together—so the child feels secure,*" she advised.

Interestingly, participants held differing views on which role was most frequently sacrificed. AW (34) reported turning down a promotion to focus on graduate studies. In contrast, KE (32) and LA (30) believed their family life suffered the most. As LA explained, "*I have been sacrificing family time for school and work.*" TW (37) added, "*The aspects most affected by the demands of juggling three roles are my time with family.*"

In the process of carrying out three roles, both female and male participants complained about time constraints challenges, which caused physical and mental fatigue. Therefore, in facing the pressure of complex roles, the informants developed strategies to manage the three roles. Most of the informants mentioned time management as the main strategy. One participant emphasized the importance of setting clear priorities and optimizing time use, stating, "To approach that, of course we use a scale of priorities in order to truly maintain everything. For example, by making the best use of our time" (AN, 32). Another participant reinforced this approach, highlighting the role of structured planning: "Prioritization and time management. It's about knowing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and how much time should be allocated to each task" (RI, 42). These findings highlight the proactive cognitive and behavioral efforts made by individuals to balance the competing demands of work, study, and family.

On the other hand, some other sources mentioned task delegation as a strategy in navigating various role demands. LA (30) stated, "At work, I've started delegating more tasks to my colleagues" Similarly, another participant, MD (37) reflected on role delegation within the family domain, noting, "The responsibility for taking care of the child has been delegated to my wife, so I can stay focused". Overall, participants used a combination of time management as well as task delegation.

Most of the participants placed family as the top priority. EY (37) affirmed, "If something urgent arises in both work and family, I will always choose family first." RK (40) likewise declared, "Family comes first." The importance of maintaining emotional connection with children through intentional communication was evident in several participants' narratives. One participant shared, "So, in the remaining time I have with my child, I make sure to engage in conversation" (TW, 37), emphasizing the value of even brief moments for sustaining parent-child interaction. Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating, "To ensure my child still receives attention, I really try—every morning when I take them to school, I always ask how things went, if there's any story to share. It's really about making an effort to build communication" (PT, 34). These strategies reflect the participants' commitment to prioritizing family as their foremost concern despite the demands of work and study.

4.4.2. Burnout and Coping Mechanism

Managing the triple roles of parent, employee, and student often leads to burnout, emotional exhaustion caused by prolonged stress (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Most participants reported experiencing burnout during their studies' initial or middle semesters. EY (37) admitted, "*Yes, I have experienced burnout—during the first semester.*" AN (32) shared, "*I am starting to feel burnout,*" while RI (42) described her situation more severely: "*Right now, I feel burned out, maybe because I am in my second semester.*" RK (40) acknowledged, "*Yes, I have been burned out. It has happened more often than I would like.*"

The primary source of pressure stemmed from the overlap between academic demands and domestic responsibilities. Burnout appeared more frequently among female participants in this research,

consistent with the findings of Robbins and Judge [91] who reported that mothers experience higher levels of parental burnout than fathers, mainly due to their greater involvement in caregiving [4]. Previous research by Kessler [92] and Russo [93] identified women reported higher degrees of stress compared to men.

To cope with this pressure, participants employed a variety of coping strategies. MD (37) adopted a problem-focused approach: *"To avoid burnout, I try to break the workload down into smaller tasks."* RI (42) employed an emotion-focused strategy, setting a time limit for expressing frustration: *"I told myself I could complain until next week—after that, no more whining."* Others adopted meaning-focused coping, such as RK (40), who said, *"I keep telling myself this storm will pass."* Some participants relied on social-focused coping mechanism. EY (37) mentioned, *"My classmates are the people I talk to daily, it's really helpful to release the stress from work and school."* YR (25), EY's classmate, confirmed, *"After class, we often talk mostly about life and venting. We basically just laugh about everything."*

One factor that positively contributes to mental health and supports recovery from stressful experiences is the ability to rebound from stress [94]. According to Frydenberg [95] coping mechanisms are key to resilience and help individuals adapt successfully to high-pressure situations. Psychologist Adisa also emphasized that although coping mechanisms vary across individuals, role awareness is essential to effective coping. This awareness allows individuals to identify and prioritize their responsibilities. She noted that burnout often results from failing to map out roles and allocate priorities.

4.5. External Factors

4.5.1. Gender and Social Expectations in Parental Role

Gender roles have a significant impact on household role allocation. Women have traditionally been connected with the home domain, whilst men are more identified with public or professional responsibilities [96, 97]. Despite the increasing involvement of women in the workforce, they still tend to bear a disproportionate share of childcare and housework [98, 99].

Female participants in this study reported that they mostly handled childcare responsibilities. RI (42) stated, *"Mostly it is me who takes care of the child, because my husband comes from a very patriarchal family."* PT (33) tells how people around her looked at her with doubt because she was a busy mother who was working and studying for her master's degree, *"the first question people always ask is 'Who's taking care of the child?' That question always comes up."* Similarly, AN (32), a working mother, recalled receiving comments like, *"Oh no, what about your kid? Poor thing—stuck in daycare all day and barely seeing their mom for even an hour."* KE (32) even recounted being encouraged to resign: *"Why don't you just quit?"* ME (32) reported receiving similar negative remarks: *"Neighbors, other parents, and coworkers have all made those kinds of comments."* These social judgments underscore the persistence of traditional gender norms, which continue to shape expectations of women's primary caregiving roles, even as they engage in professional and academic pursuits.

These negative toned comments often led to internal conflict and guilt. ME (32), even though she has been working for more than ten years, she still feels guilty for often leaving her child and still often considers resigning, *"I still feel guilty for not being able to be with my child. I've even told my husband a few times, 'Should I just quit my job?'"* RI (42) confessed, *"Of course I feel guilty... my job and my studies are driven by logic, but my child lives in my heart."* She shared that she sometimes overindulged her child to ease that guilt. PT (33) added, *"I feel like I'm not being a good mother and wife because I often leave my family (for work and for study)."* Meanwhile, AN (32) admitted to asking her husband for help to reduce her feelings of guilt towards her daughter because her busy schedule with her academic pursuit alongside her professional 9 to 5 job made it difficult for her to spend time with her daughter *"I do ask for help from my husband with parenting to ease the guilt. Of course, as a parent, you want to be there for your daughter, so she*

doesn't feel neglected." Guilt frequently arises in work–family role conflicts, particularly among women [100]. Women are under intense social pressure to maintain the ideal image of motherhood [101] even as they strive for personal achievements outside the home.

Clinical child psychologist Moustakas [77] emphasized that parenting should ideally involve complementary roles between mothers and fathers, particularly in shaping children's understanding of gender. *"Fathers can teach social and logical skills, while mothers tend to nurture emotional closeness and domestic competencies,"* she explained. However, this research indicates that mothers continue to shoulder the majority of caregiving responsibilities, even within dual-income households.

Some couples reported more equitable role-sharing. ZI (42) and his wife QH (41) are both professionals and graduate students affiliated with the same institution, where they pursue their careers and academic studies concurrently, described a flexible division of labor that adjusted dynamically in response to academic obligations, professional workloads, and childcare responsibilities: "Yeah, we're both busy... so we just figure out what works best. For instance, if the child is studying with me, I'll be the one to teach," said ZI. However, ZI still acknowledged that his wife handled more of the parenting duties.

Expectations from one's partner also significantly influence gender role construction. Family Psychologist Mira Damayanti Amir noted, *"A partner's expectations regarding their involvement in both parenting and spousal duties significantly influence the balance of roles within the household."* These expectations generally dictate each partner's level of participation in caring, which can have an impact on both their personal well-being and the everyday functioning of the family dynamic. QH (41) expressed her emotional expectations in her interview: *"Nobody's perfect, so I don't have much expectation. I need to achieve things, and my husband has supported me in that. I think that's more than enough."* Conversely, AM (30), AN's husband, reflected a more traditional view: *"I have always believed that pursuing higher education should not take away from a wife's responsibilities as a mother."* He admitted that conflicts arose with AN over the division of responsibilities during her studies.

4.5.2. Perceived Support Systems

Support systems play a crucial role in assisting working student-parents in managing the pressures associated with holding multiple roles. Support from family members, spouses, workplaces, and academic institutions constitutes the foundational pillars for maintaining role balance [44].

Several participants emphasized the importance of spousal support. PT (33) stated, *"I wouldn't be able to manage everything if it weren't for my husband's support."* Family support functions as both an emotional safety net and a practical foundation for working student-parents. Although juggling both professional and academic domain is time-consuming and demanding, emotional and empathetic support from family members can alleviate stress and sustain motivation [102]. This support is not limited to emotional aid; it also includes instrumental support. ME (32), for instance, often relied on her sister-in-law to care for her child, stating, *"My child is actually closer to her aunt (my sister in law)."* DP (21), ME's sister-in-law, confirmed that her assistance allowed ME to better focus on her other two roles: *"My sister-in-law (ME) is more focused because she has someone she trusts to care for her child."* Instrumental support includes tangible help such as childcare, household duties, and financial assistance, which ease the practical burdens of balancing work and family life [103].

In addition to family, support from a partner who is also pursuing higher education can enhance resilience. ZI and QH, a couple who studied together, agreed that shared academic experiences allowed them to "divide the task and better understand each other," which helped reduce conflict. This aligns with the findings of Craig and Brown [14] which indicate that couples who support one another are more likely to complete their graduate degree.

Workplace support also had a significant impact. Participants appreciated flexible working hours and policies such as work from home (WFH) or work from anywhere (WFA). PT (33) mentioned, *"If we request to work from home, it's allowed."* ME (32) also said similar things *"I can do WFA (Work From Anywhere), as long as the targets are met."* The flexibility of working arrangements, was particularly valued by participants. This allowed them to continue their academic commitments without compromising their job performance. While RI (42) stated that she has greatly benefited from their workplace's family-friendly policies, saying, *"so, in the 18 years I've worked, I've never been forbidden or made to feel bad about taking time off for family matters."* RK (42) emphasized the importance of having a supportive and understanding supervisor in pursuing his goal of continuing his Master's degree. On the other hands, RK's supervisor also affirmed that academic pursuits were supported as long as responsibilities and communication were well maintained: *"It's totally okay, as long as you can make sure to fulfill your duties, manage your time well, and never use your academic pursuit as an excuse,"* (ES, 48). Furthermore, ES noted that continuing master's degree is actually highly encouraged so long as work performance remained consistent.

However, institutional support from the university was perceived as limited. Many complaints were voiced, especially among new students impacted by curriculum changes. KE (32) pointed out, *"In our cohort, we had to complete 62 credits, compared to just 40 previously that's a huge increase."* EY (37) added, *"Honestly, the university hasn't done much to help. The credit load increased, and there are no online classes."* Other issues included academic scheduling and information systems. LA (30) remarked, *"Scheduling needs improvement. Ideally, class and event schedules should be shared with students at least a week in advance."* RI (42) echoed this concern: *"They should be aware that evening classes are for working students. We are not a full time students. We have other pressing responsibilities. The university should be more flexible."*

Some participants hoped for hybrid learning options during urgent circumstances. ME (32) stated, *"When someone's sick or there's an emergency, hybrid classes are essential."* RK (40) agreed, saying, *"If I have to travel for work, hybrid class would be a great solution."*

Responding to these concerns, LE (35), Head of the Academic Division, explained that curriculum changes were made to comply with new government regulations under the Ministry of Education Regulation No. 53 of 2023. *"The increase from 40 to 62 credits was mandated by the government. What we can do is propose curriculum revisions to reduce the burden."* LE (35) also acknowledged the availability of hybrid learning options, stating, *"Hybrid learning is possible under special circumstances like student illness or post-surgery recovery. We've granted such exemptions before."* Nonetheless, she admitted that bureaucratic procedures remain ongoing challenges as the request for a hybrid class must go through a specific procedure and be approved by the head of the program.

Both emotional and instrumental support have proven to be essential foundations for helping working student-parents cope with dual-role pressures and achieve work-study-family balance [58]. Collectively, these dimensions of support mitigate the negative impacts of work-family conflict and enhance overall work-life integration [104].

4.6. Work-study-family Balance Among Working Parents

Most university students report balancing personal life and work is a primary career goal; they desire a fulfilling "life" alongside their profession [91]. Imbalances in this area can lead to decreased family interaction, reduced job performance, and prolonged stress [77].

Most participants in this research defined work-study-family balance as the ability to manage all three roles without compromising health or quality of life. PT (33) stated, *"For me, balance means being able to manage work, school, and home responsibilities while still staying healthy."* However, some respondents expressed skepticism. LA (30) likened it to *"chasing three rabbits running at full speed, it would be impossible"*

to catch them all." KE (32) took a pragmatic stance: *"I don't think perfect work-study-family balance is achievable; there will always be trade-offs, and we just have to accept the consequences consciously."*

Self-efficacy emerged as a critical factor in managing multiple roles. Bhende, et al. [12] theory posits that self-efficacy influences one's resilience and adaptability under role pressure. AW (34) voiced optimism: *"You just have to be able to do it. Once you are in, you will make it."* AN (32) showed her desire to prove herself, *"that's also one of my motivations—to prove to others that it's possible to manage all three roles."* Meanwhile, RI (42) offered a realistic view: *"It is possible, but trying to give 100% to all three roles is probably not."* In contrast, LA (30) firmly stated that managing all three roles simultaneously was unfeasible: *"Trying to do all three at once left me completely drained."*

When asked, "Have you achieved work-study-family balance?" responses varied. PT (33) said, *"I think I have,"* while RK (40) noted, *"Not yet, because sometimes I feel overwhelmed."* Similarly, AN (32) stated, *"Not yet. There are times I have to sacrifice a lot."* AN's husband, AM, elaborated, *"She manages work and university life well, but when family is added to the equation, the balance slips."*

However, this study shows that individuals with high self-efficacy in achieving work-study-family balance do not necessarily perceive themselves as having achieved that balance. Psychologist Adisa Mustikawati emphasized that work-study-family balance is an idealized concept that not everyone can realistically attain. *"There will always be something that must be sacrificed—whether it's your personal life like sleep or me-time, or your social life,"* she noted, highlighting the need for clear prioritization and an awareness of personal limits regarding time and energy.

In discussions of work-study-family balance, academic and work performance can offer a more objective representation than relying solely on personal perceptions. The majority of participants reported satisfaction with their academic performance as they achieved a GPA that met or exceeded their expectations. Whereas their perceptions of work performance were more varied. Some expressed contentment, citing positive performance reviews from their employers. However, others acknowledged a decline in work performance, attributing it to the challenges of adjusting to their new role as graduate students. Academic and job performance serve as reflective indicators of work-study-family balance. When individuals demonstrate strong performance in both areas, it may suggest that balance is being maintained; on the other hand, lower performance may signal difficulties in managing the three roles effectively. However, this variable is not entirely objective, as individual perceptions of success vary based on background and expectations [90]. For example, RK's supervisor, ES (38), commented that RK managed her roles effectively: *"I appreciate how RK can divide her time between home, study, and still able to achieve the company targets."*

Participants exhibited diverse interpretations of and experiences with work-study-family balance, consistent with the broader ambiguity surrounding the parent concept of work-life balance. Due to individual variation in work and life contexts, a singular structural definition is difficult to establish [90]. Work-life balance is a theoretical construct, often implicitly experienced rather than explicitly defined by workers, and shaped by personal and organizational differences [105]. When examining the *work-study-family balance* construct, researchers vary in their definitions, measurements, and outcomes. Kalliath and Brough [106] acknowledged this dilemma, observing that while work-life balance is conceptually accepted in academia, the definition remains evolving. Some workers define balance as segmentation (clear boundaries between work and life). In contrast, others perceive it as integration, underscoring the individualized meaning in work-life balance [107].

5. Discussion

This research's findings indicate that, to cope with the complexity of managing multiple roles, participants developed strategies to balance their threefold responsibilities. The majority of participants identified time management as their primary strategy. Time management is a form of self-regulation,

whereby individuals exercise control over their time [108-110]. Suggest that time management enhances productivity and interpersonal relationships through effective prioritization and compromise. Alternatively, some participants cited the act of delegating responsibilities as a key strategy for navigating competing role demands. Research by Shockley, et al. [60] indicates that when faced with work nonwork stressors, individuals tend to employ various strategies, including seeking instrumental support, such as coordinating with colleagues or family members to share daily workloads.

The majority of participants placed family as their primary priority. According to clinical family psychologist Mira Damayanti Amir, family-related concerns are inextricably linked to professional life, as disruptions within the family sphere can substantially affect an individual's productivity. Reflecting this prioritization, participants actively sustained their parenting roles despite limited time. Many made intentional efforts to remain emotionally available to their children through simple yet meaningful interactions such as shared meals, watching movies together, or engaging in bedtime conversations. For these individuals, the perceived quality of presence held greater value than the duration of time spent. This demonstrates a persistent affective commitment to nurturing familial bonds, even while navigating the demands of other significant responsibilities.

Throughout fulfilling triple roles, individuals are highly vulnerable to burnout. Previous studies have shown that the combination of these roles often leads to significant inter-role conflicts, affecting mental well-being and reducing individuals' quality of life [5, 24]. In this research, all female participants reported having experienced, currently experiencing, or frequently experiencing burnout; in contrast, only half of the male participants reported similar complaints. Amid the rising phenomenon of parents pursuing higher education while working—particularly women—pressures emerge not only from academic and professional responsibilities but also from persistent social expectations that position women as the primary caregivers in domestic settings [50]. This burden places working mothers at a higher risk of burnout compared to fathers and carries implications for their careers, mental well-being, and involvement in child-rearing [13, 111]. Earlier studies by Kessler [92] and Russo [93] underscore important gender-related issues in counseling psychology, particularly concerning the interplay between stress, pressure, marital adjustment, and coping mechanisms. Women and men respond to stressors with differing emotional reactions and coping strategies.

Burnout can be triggered by continuous exposure to work-related and non-work-related stressors, which are defined as demands that affect both work and personal life domains—demands that inherently span both domains and are perceived as burdensome or beyond the individual's available resources [33]. Coping mechanisms are dynamic responses to these stressors within the individual's work and non-work roles. This research reveals a range of coping mechanisms among participants classified according to Folkman and Moskowitz [56] including:

1. Problem-focused coping, which involves breaking down tasks into smaller, manageable portions,
2. Emotion-focused coping, which involves taking breaks or crying to release emotional tension,
3. Meaning-focused coping, which involves reinterpreting burdens as part of a meaningful life journey, and
4. Social-focused coping which involves seeking support from a spouse, family, or friends.

Kleshinski, et al. [112] identified similar coping strategies, including seeking emotional support (e.g., confiding in someone about the distress caused by a situation), prioritizing (e.g., postponing less urgent deadlines to get through the day), and positive reframing (e.g., viewing stressful experiences as opportunities to develop time management and multitasking skills). However, individuals are not limited to a single coping mechanism, as strategies may evolve depending on changes in stressors, how those stressors are appraised, or the resources available to the individual [55].

Another compelling aspect that emerged from the findings is the influence of gender role dynamics on participants' perceptions and experiences navigating multiple roles. All participants who expressed feelings of guilt related to parenting were female. No male participants reported similar emotional

burdens. For married women with children who also work outside the home, marital relationships can become a significant source of stress [113]. Another primary stressor for married women is role overload, which is the necessity to balance responsibilities as spouses, parents, and professionals. Despite pursuing career and educational advancement, women often remain primarily responsible for domestic work and childcare [114, 115]. This indicates the persistence of traditional gender norms, particularly the societal expectation that women should remain central figures in the domestic sphere. The guilt experienced by mothers arises not only from physical absence but also from social constructs that demand their complete and consistent presence in parenting, irrespective of professional or academic demands. This highlights the disproportionate emotional burden borne by women due to societal expectations of ideal motherhood. Furthermore, family psychologist Mira Damayanti Amir stressed the significance of spouses communicating their expectations for domestic duties in the context of gender roles in parenting. A lack of such dialogue often leads to misaligned expectations, increasing the likelihood of interpersonal conflict.

Nonetheless, social support has been shown to be crucial in ensuring the continuation of participants' triple roles. According to the research by Dee, et al. [90] families and organizations play an important role in bridging several areas of work-life balance. Spouses, extended families, companies, and universities all provided tangible support to the participants, providing adapted space. Spouses who displayed empathy and shared caregiving chores helped to reduce the household burden. Extended family members, such as parents or siblings, also contributed significantly to childcare and household management. On the other hand, workplace support, such as flexible working hours, supportive of the employee academic development, and equitable job distribution, allowed participants to retain their professional competence. Meanwhile, universities that offered administrative flexibility, supportive professors, and an inclusive learning environment were critical structural supports for students' resiliency across jobs. These findings are supported by spillover theory, which suggests that social and familial support can generate positive experiences for individuals across both work and non-work domains [116].

The outcomes of this study suggest that establishing a balance between the responsibilities of parent, worker, and student is a dynamic challenging process. Participants viewed work-study-family balance as an ongoing endeavor to be present and accountable in all three domains, even if that presence is not evenly distributed. Some participants possess strong self-efficacy in their ability to balance the three roles. However, due to time and energy constraints, several participants saw perfect balance as nearly unachievable, as one aspect would inevitably be compromised. Research by Badri and Panatik [117] emphasizes self-efficacy as a powerful individual disposition that can enhance the likelihood of achieving better work-life balance. Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to experience more positive work and life outcomes, particularly in the form of greater work-family enrichment. More recent research by Fayaz and Gulzar [118] further supports the positive influence of self-efficacy as an individual attribute in improving work-life balance conditions. Nonetheless the findings of this study indicate that even individuals with high self-efficacy in managing work-study-family roles may not perceive themselves as having successfully attained balance. This viewpoint was corroborated by triangulation interviews with clinical child psychologist Adisa Mustikawati, who indicated that not everyone can manage all of their responsibilities equally. Although self-efficacy can serve as motivational support in the pursuit of balance, she emphasized that individual limitations and unpredictable circumstances necessitate the creation of personal prioritization scales. As such, trade-offs are an unavoidable part of navigating simultaneous roles. In other words, imbalance should not be viewed as failure but as part of the human adaptation process.

Consequently, work-study-family balance should not be viewed as a standardized ideal that everyone must achieve, but rather as a contextual, dynamic, and deeply personal process influenced by ongoing negotiation of one's capabilities, expectations, and available resources. These findings align

with the broader conceptual framework of work-life balance, a construct that remains challenging to define in structural terms due to the variability of individual experiences across work and life domains [90]. Within this framework, a strategic handling of the three roles—according to the proportionate demands of each role and aligned with personal capacity and priorities—along with the adoption of appropriate coping mechanisms to manage stress and the presence of a supportive social environment form the core foundations for sustaining the simultaneous enactment of multiple roles.

6. Conclusion

This exploratory research reveals the complex dynamics experienced by parents who simultaneously undertake three roles: as parents, employees, and graduate students. Based on in-depth interviews with 12 participants, along with triangulation involving related individuals and expert psychologists, it was found that each participant held highly individualized perspectives on the meaning of work-study-family balance. Consequently, participants also employed personalized indicators to assess whether they had achieved such balance. Although academic and professional performance may serve as partial benchmarks, the variation in individual backgrounds and expectations limits the reliability and comparability of work-study-family balance attainment across participants. On the other hand, self-efficacy was found to support motivation in confronting the challenges of managing three roles, but it is not a sole determinant of success. This is due to the natural human limitations in terms of time, energy, and uncontrollable circumstances that impact one's ability to equally commit to all roles. Ultimately, it is entirely reasonable for individuals to allocate their time, energy, and focus toward roles they perceive as more urgent or meaningful, rather than distributing resources equally across all responsibilities.

Participants encountered a variety of challenges in navigating multiple roles. The majority agreed that the student role was the most demanding, largely because it was the newest among the three and required substantial adjustment. Additionally, the commitment to the student role significantly reduced both the quality and quantity of their personal time. In general, the strategies employed by participants to manage their triple roles included internal strategies, such as time planning, and external support systems, such as task delegation. Moreover, most participants consistently prioritized family above all else. Amid their busy schedules, they actively sought to meet the emotional needs of their children through daily communication or by dedicating special quality time. All female participants reported burnout complaints, while only half of male participants reported similar symptoms. In dealing with both short-term and long-term stress, participants have different coping mechanism preferences. Including problem-focused, emotion-focused, meaning-focused, and social-focused approaches. However, most participants chose emotion-focused coping mechanisms.

This research demonstrates that gender roles continue to significantly influence shaping the experiences, emotional burdens, and societal expectations of working parents pursuing higher education. Although both male and female participants assumed the same three roles—parent, employee, and student female participants consistently reported a greater psychological burden, particularly in the form of guilt over limited presence in caregiving. Not a single male participant expressed comparable feelings of guilt, highlighting the persistence of social norms that continue to position women as the primary figures in the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the division of roles within the household remains unequal, with domestic and childcare responsibilities disproportionately falling on women even in dual-income families. This finding was reinforced by triangulation interviews with participants' partners and subject-matter experts.

The research further underscores that the success of working student-parents in managing their dual and triple roles meaningfully and sustainably is heavily influenced by the presence and quality of support from their immediate social environment, namely, their families, workplaces, and universities. Among the most frequently cited and impactful forms of support was spousal support, which provided

emotional and logistical foundations that enabled participants to navigate academic and professional responsibilities more calmly. Practical assistance with childcare and emotional understanding from a partner were described as especially critical.

Support from the workplace was also found to be vital, particularly in the form of flexible working hours, tolerance for workload fluctuations, and internal scholarships for employees pursuing further studies. Several participants noted that a supportive work environment helped them avoid role conflicts and maintain job performance, even amid academic and family pressures.

Meanwhile, support from the university was viewed as important, though inconsistently felt across participants. Some appreciated institutional efforts, such as access to academic journals and flexible attendance systems that accommodated professional obligations. However, participants also expressed hopes for universities to be more responsive to the needs of students who are also parents and professionals, such as through more adaptive scheduling, flexible learning systems, and adjusted academic workloads.

7. Recommendations

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for organizations and higher education institutions in supporting employees who simultaneously juggle professional, academic, and parental responsibilities. Recognizing these individuals as whole persons—beyond their role at work—is essential for fostering well-being and long-term productivity.

For practitioners—particularly human resource managers and organizational leaders—the implementation of comprehensive and inclusive policies is essential to enhancing employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention. Such policies should acknowledge the multifaceted roles of employees, especially those pursuing higher education while fulfilling parental responsibilities. Recommended strategies include: (1) the provision of flexible working hours to align with academic obligations and family needs; (2) the adoption of hybrid work arrangements to facilitate a more effective integration of professional and domestic responsibilities; (3) the establishment of administrative and academic support mechanisms, including study leave, adjusted workloads during examination periods, and access to relevant institutional resources; (4) the promotion of transformational leadership practices, wherein leaders actively demonstrate work-life balance and discourage excessive overtime; and (5) the availability of accessible psychological support services, which function as both preventive interventions and expressions of institutional care for employees managing multiple roles.

The findings emphasize the necessity for universities to establish responsive academic systems that better accommodate the varied needs of student-employees. Key recommendations include: (1) streamlining academic dispensation processes to reduce administrative obstacles; (2) increasing faculty autonomy to allow for context-sensitive and flexible decision-making; and (3) improving the clarity and dissemination of information about available support services via various communication channels and student networks. These strategies are intended to help student-employees properly manage their academic, professional, and familial duties.

8. Research Limitation

This study has a few limitations. First, the participants were recruited from a single academic program and university, which may limit the findings' applicability to students in other subjects or schools. Second, as a qualitative study with a small number of participants, the findings of this study may have limited transferability to populations with differing demographic or contextual characteristics. Third, the study's emphasis on subjective perceptions overlooked quantitative components of participants' experiences. Fourth, the researcher's and participants' different backgrounds may have altered data interpretation. Fifth, the researcher's gender, which is female, may have added bias when

evaluating the experiences of male participants. Future research should use more diversified methodology and participant samples.

A mixed methods approach may offer a more comprehensive understanding by integrating qualitative narratives with quantitative data. This design can assist in identifying critical variables impacting work-study-family balance among parents. Longitudinal studies are also recommended for examining changes in role management practices and their effects on academic achievement, family well-being, and job performance. Furthermore, research-based intervention approaches would be useful for implementing in organizational and educational contexts.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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