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Work, family, work-family spillover and mental health among working adults - A comparison of data from national surveys in Korea and the U.S. -

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Guided by bioecological systems theory, this study aimed to examine the associations between work microsystem characteristics (working hours, decision latitude, work pressure), family microsystem characteristics (marital status, parental status), work-family mesosystem factors (positive and negative work-family spillover) and mental health (depressive symptoms, positive affect, psychological well-being) among working women and men. The moderating effects of cultural context (Korea vs. U.S.) were also evaluated. OLS regression models were estimated using data from 1,260 working women (Korea: 463, U.S.: 797) and 1,659 working men (Korea: 795, U.S.: 864) aged 30-59 who participated in nationally representative survey studies of middle aged adults in Korea (MIDKO) and the U.S. (MIDUS).

Results indicated that: (1) The associations between work microsystem factors and the mental health of working adults are somewhat different across countries. More working hours was associated with better mental health of women and men regardless of the country context. More work pressure was associated with women's poorer mental health, particularly among U.S. women. More decision latitude was associated with better mental health, particularly among Korean men. (2) There were significant differences between countries in the associations between family microsystem factors and mental health. Being married was associated with better mental health among Korean women and men compared to U.S. women and men. Having children was associated with poorer mental health among Korean women and men compared to U.S. women and men. (3) There were also significant differences across cultural context in the strength of associations between work-family spillover and mental health for some mental health dimensions. Positive work to family spillover was associated with better mental health among working adults, except for Korean women who experienced more depressive symptoms with the presence of more positive work to family spillover. Negative work to family spillover was linked to poorer mental health of working adults, particularly among U.S. women and men compared to their Korean counterparts. Positive family to work spillover was associated with better mental health of women and men, particularly among U.S. women and men compared to their Korean peers. Negative family to work spillover was associated with poorer mental health of working women, particularly among U.S. women compared to Korean women. Negative family to work spillover was also associated with poorer mental health of working men, and this association was stronger among Korean men in contrast to U.S. men. Overall, findings suggest work, family, and work-family spillover are significantly associated with various dimensions of mental health of working adults, sometimes contingent on the cultural context, supporting the assumptions of bioecological systems theory.

Keywords: work characteristics, family characteristics, work-family spillover, cultural context, mental health, depressive symptoms, positive affect, psychological well-being,

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