

## Intermediated communication and Mental Stress

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### Abstract

Face-to-face communication implies a great deal of mutual exchange of valuable information. In this study, we aim to examine if the presence of children in the household associated to the daily time declared to be spent on intermediated communication has a significant effect on indicators of adaptation referring to mental stress. The sample of this study, used also in another past researches, was multicultural and conveniently composed of  $N = 261$  participants, 102 males and 149 females, 10 gender-missing, having a mean age of 51.55 years old ( $SD = 13.67$ ). The results of univariate ANOVA revealed the existence of a significant effect ( $F = 11.88, p < 0.001$ ). We discuss these findings.

**Keywords:** Face-to-face Communication; Univariate ANOVA; Back-translated Questionnaire; Mental Strain

### Introduction

In a previous review study, the authors revealed the existence of a poorer quality of the work-life balance in the households inside which more than two children were present than in other cases [1]. In another, more recent study, the findings show that more hours of exposure to communication by e-mail has a negative impact on the work-life balance of the people [2]. The maintenance of work-life balance has importance for the general health condition. The emotional load that the people may experience after work, during commuting from work, or in their homes is an indicator of a difficulty in mental detachment. In previous studies, the authors proved that the mental detachment from work-preoccupations prevents people from the experience of imbalance [3]. In taken altogether, in this study, we had the purpose to examine if the relationship between the presence of children in the household and the daily time spent on intermediated communication in rapport to the experience of mental stress.

### Method

The research-design of this study implied a sample composed of 112 people of Japanese nationality, 110 people living and working in U.S. and 30 people of Romanian background. Out of this sample, 85.1% filled in the on-line version of the back-translated questionnaire. About the same percent received remuneration for their answers. Before collection of the answers, the participants received informed consent and agreed to take part in this research. We additionally obtained an information about the mean time that this sample had in filling their answers,  $M = 13.83$  minutes ( $SD = 9.54$ ). We observed that most part of this sample preferred to fill in the questionnaire during morning (36.40 %) or during afternoon (29.90 %). Only 26% of this sample filled in the questions during late evening or night. The rest of it, up to 100%, chosen a time in-between.

To continue, we confer a detailed description of the measures for the main variables of this study. Thus, there was a single-item, for both dependent and moderator variables. We asked the participants to express in minutes the approximate time that they spent during

a day in communication other than face-to-face (i.e. Internet, phone). We also asked about the age of children present in their household. We transformed these into dummy variables.

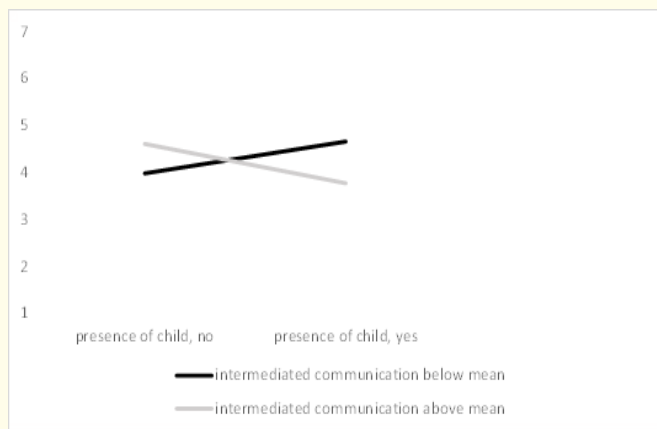
The independent variable of this study referring to mental stress was coded on a five-point Lickert type of scale, with answers ranging from 0, meaning “totally disagree”, to 3 (“partially disagree”), 4 (“neither agree, nor disagree”), up to 7, meaning “totally agree”. The content of the three items composing this variable referred to feeling of being under a high level of stress, difficulty of detachment from daily preoccupations and subjective feeling of mental pressure/strain. The value of the Cronbach alpha that we found for this measure was of 0.79.

We also mention that the percent of fit between the initial English format of the measurement instrument and that after translation was of almost 90%.

### Results

In the following, we present the descriptive statistics and Pearson’s correlation coefficients between the main variables of this study. Calculated at a level of significance of 95%, the value of the correlation coefficient between mental stress ( $M = 4.16, SD = 1.30$ ) and intermediated communication ( $M = 117.28$  minutes,  $SD = 124.48$ ) was  $r = 0.10$  ns, and that between mental stress and presence of child in the household ( $M = 0.26, SD = 0.44$ ) had a value of  $r = 0.09$ , ns. In this context, the only relationship found significant was between the moderator and the dependent variable,  $r = 0.15, p < 0.01$ .

We examined the main hypothesis of this study stating the existence of a significant effect of the interaction between the variable referring to presence of children and that referring to intermediated communication on mental stress, through univariate ANOVA. The results, presented in Figure 1, revealed it to be supported entirely the reverse of our initial expectation.



**Figure 1:** The interaction of presence of children in the household with intermediated communication has a significant effect on mental stress.

### Discussion

Although initially we believed that the excess in the time spent on the Internet may have disturbing effects, representing a risk for the anchoring in the immediate reality and of the promptitude of the responses conferred to the people in the proximity or in intimacy, the

above results revealed that if there is the case of no child inside the household, than it is recommendable to keep the time spent with daily intermediated communication below two hours. Reversely, if there is a child present in the household, the mental stress decreases in the case of more than two hours daily spent with intermediated communication.

Among the limitations of this study, we mention that referring to self-reported measures and of single-item measuring the variable referring to intermediated communication. Also, a design of this study implying the measure of the effects across a time-lag would confer more understanding about the process and of the strategies of maintaining a meaningful and a successful living.

### Conclusions

We consider that a merit of this study is the revealing of an empirical association among the type of communication, the composition of the family and the mental strain, standing beyond the cultural backgrounds.

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