

THE DYNAMICS OF HEALTH-RELATED QUALITY OF LIFE (HRQoL) IN WORKING GRADUATE STUDENTS OF PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQoL) of working psychology graduate students. It aims to delve deeper into their experiences in managing HRQoL and the strategies they use to maintain a healthy quality of life. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, the study explores the subjective experiences of two students who are pursuing graduate studies while working. The findings indicate that the combination of academic and work responsibilities impacts the physical and mental well-being of the students. Both participants employed time management strategies and adapted to different environments to maintain their HRQoL, despite ongoing pressures. In conclusion, working graduate students face significant challenges in maintaining their HRQoL, but with the right strategies, they can manage these pressures effectively.

Keywords: Health-Related Quality of Life, Graduate Students, Psychology, Work

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Working students are individuals who balance their academic activities while working in a business institution, either part-time or full-time (Mardelina & Muhson, 2017). Working students often face pressure to meet academic demands while coping with professional responsibilities (Akbar & Hayati, 2023). Students must take on more responsibilities, manage their time effectively, have the ability to distribute their energy and adapt to different environments (Ferdiawan et al., 2020). Graduate students who work face unique challenges as they must divide their focus between studies and work, two roles that require significant time and energy commitments (Hidayati et al., 2016). The psychological health of students who study while working needs to be given special attention, particularly their quality of life. The quality of life for students depends on how they view their academic life and can become an issue if they have a negative outlook on their academic life (Dewi & Saputra, 2023).

Quality of life-related to health is referred to as health-related quality of life (HRQoL). HRQoL is a multidimensional concept that measures an individual's well-being in terms of physical, mental, and social aspects, influenced by health conditions (Dewi & Saputra, 2023; Yin et al., 2016). It not only relates to the absence of disease but also to various factors such as perceptions, role functions, social health, and general well-being (Dewi & Saputra, 2023). Health students may experience mental issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression, which are speculated to interfere with the quality of life of students, both academically and professionally (Paro et al., 2010). HRQoL in students can be influenced by socioeconomic,

demographic, and behavioral factors. Implementing health promotion strategies that consider social and economic support can improve students' HRQoL (Nur et al., 2017).

This study aims to delve deeper into the experiences of graduate students in managing their HRQoL and the strategies they use to maintain a healthy quality of life. By exploring the strategies used to maintain their well-being and reviewing how HRQoL is affected by the dual workload and the social support they receive, this research adds insight into the unique challenges faced by working graduate students and offers practical solutions to address these challenges.

2.0 METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological paradigm. The phenomenological paradigm focuses on subjective experience and seeks to understand the events experienced by individuals (Nuryana et al., 2019). Two participants were selected through purposive sampling, with the following criteria: (1) active graduate students in the field of psychology, (2) students who are currently working, and (3) willing to be interviewed in-depth. Data were collected through unstructured in-depth interviews, allowing participants to freely share their experiences. The interviews focused on how participants manage their time, handle stress, and maintain their well-being amidst academic and work demands. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis, where key themes were identified and analyzed to understand patterns emerging from the participants' experiences.

3.0 RESULTS

The findings of this study show that both participants face significant challenges in maintaining their HRQoL. Participant I is a 25-year-old woman pursuing a Master's degree in Psychological Science at a university in Surabaya. In addition to her studies, she also works as a Facilitator Acquisition Specialist, commonly known as a Recruiter, at an IT course provider. Her job responsibilities include managing the end-to-end recruitment process for teaching staff. Participant II is a 33-year-old woman also pursuing a Master's degree in Psychological Science at a university in Surabaya. Alongside her studies, she works as a Retail Funding Officer at a bank in Surabaya. Participant II acknowledges that her primary focus is currently on her job, which often involves meeting high targets, particularly in managing funds in the East Java region.

Participant I, who works online, stated that one of the biggest challenges faced is the divided time demands. This time demand eventually made Participant I feel exhausted because they had to divide their time between work and studies, which sometimes overlapped. Participant I also mentioned that the flexibility of online work often blurs the line between work and personal time, leading to fatigue. Participant I admitted to sleeping less due to a busy schedule and also feeling more tired because they had to sit a lot while working from home and often stare at a laptop screen.

“I think the hardest part is dividing time. Because ideally, if it's time to work, then work, don't deal with studies, and if it's time to study, then study. Don't work, but what happens is that everything gets mixed up. Sometimes when I'm working, I'm also doing school assignments, and when I'm in class, I'm also working.”

In addition to struggling with time management, Participant I also faces demands in her job, where she is required to meet targets within specified deadlines. However, she often helps her colleagues with their tasks, which can interfere with her primary responsibilities. Moreover, her colleagues are often unaware of the deadlines, causing Participant I to work under pressure.

“As I mentioned earlier, my work involves a lot of targets, and sometimes, given the current state of my product, it's not performing as well here at Binar. There isn't much going on with my product, but I also end up helping my colleagues in other divisions. Sometimes, though, they don't consider the situation. They might suddenly hand over a task to me with just two days left until the deadline while they hold on to the tasks with longer deadlines. That's not ideal.”

Participant II, who works offline, faces greater physical challenges, such as physical fatigue from commuting and work pressure that demands energy. Participant II had difficulty dividing time between work, studies, and other activities. Participant II acknowledged that due to work demands, studies often had to be neglected. The work demands were due to the need to work accurately and quickly. Additionally, many targets also became a demand for Participant II. Participant II stated that the negative emotions felt had a significant impact, even considering quitting studies or resigning from the job due to the heavy burden.

“Studying and working drain energy, I mean, emotionally overwhelmed where at work, our tasks seem never-ending. You rest if you have time, so it's like running at work while at campus there are a lot of assignments that become a burden.”

Participant II feels extremely exhausted both physically and emotionally due to the combination of studying and working. She notes that her sleep quality has worsened, as she now goes to bed later than usual due to work and study commitments. As a result, Participant II frequently experiences negative emotions stemming from the stress of her tasks and workload, leading to mental and physical fatigue.

“...It's more about feeling physically and mentally drained because we're constantly thinking while working. Even when we're studying or doing assignments, our minds are always engaged, which can be exhausting. Sometimes, I'm so mentally tired that when I try to read a journal, I feel sleepy after just five minutes. That's when the exhaustion hits.”

In maintaining their HRQoL, both participants employ strict time and emotion management strategies and incorporate healthy behaviors to balance their studies and work commitments. Participant I used priority-setting techniques and time allocation to ensure that academic tasks and work were completed well. Participant I also acknowledged that they could accept emotions that significantly impacted them. By managing these emotions and understanding their impact well, they could avoid being overwhelmed by them.

“Sometimes emotions can make us lazy to do something, emotions can make us face others with emotion too ...”

Participant I engages in physical activity, specifically going to the gym, to maintain her health amidst the demands of work and study. In addition to regular exercise, she is mindful of her

diet, recognizing the importance of healthy eating to support both her work and academic pursuits. When she has no scheduled tasks, Participant I also ensures she gets adequate rest to preserve her overall well-being.

“Exercise is one thing, and then, like, I avoid sugary drinks, I don’t eat too much rice, and I also don’t eat too much protein. Just enough, really...”

Participant II admitted that the strategy used when feeling tired and burnt out from work was to take short breaks during free time. Participant II emphasized the importance of social support from family and colleagues in maintaining mental well-being. Additionally, Participant II also applied relaxation strategies, such as meditation and exercise, to reduce stress and maintain physical well-being.

“Motivation in healthy living is usually family, I mean, like if we are healthy, there are many things we can do for the family or maybe our contribution to the surroundings.”

Participant II, on the other hand, opts for walking around the mall as her physical activity to relieve stress. Although she used to go to the gym, time constraints have led her to aim for a daily step count of 4,000-5,000 steps to stay healthy. In addition, Participant II has reduced her intake of sugary drinks and increased her water consumption. She recognizes the importance of maintaining a balanced diet, regular exercise, and good sleep habits for long-term well-being.

“If we’re healthy, we can work well, right? At the very least, staying healthy means getting up early, drinking water, or going for a walk—like aiming for at least 4,000 steps. I often track that with my watch. That’s probably the easiest form of exercise to maintain health.”

Social support and communication also play a significant role in the HRQoL of working graduate psychology students. The social support and communication they receive significantly impact their ability to balance studies and work. Participant I has strong support from her family, supervisor, and partner, which she finds very helpful in managing the dual demands of work and school. She also adapts her communication style to match the person she’s speaking to, whether at work or in her academic life. Even though she often finds it difficult to say “no” and feels pressured when she has to give an opinion without preparation, Participant I strives to respond effectively.

“My family knows that I’m doing my master’s and working, so they understand if I come home late or can’t join them for dinner, for example. So, yeah, my family understands.”

Participant II also receives support from friends and family, whether through motivational words or social activities. When she feels overwhelmed, her friends offer advice and encouragement, which she finds helpful. Additionally, Participant II considers the ability to meet, joke, and communicate with those around her as a form of support. In her academic environment, she feels supported by close friends, especially when she feels overwhelmed. At work, she acknowledges that she maintains good relationships with her colleagues, whether in the office or through informal gatherings outside of work. Participant II also notes that her

communication style is more relaxed and adapted to her audience, whether they are colleagues, superiors, or clients.

“Social support comes from the people around you, like how they joke around. I mean, being able to talk and joke around with them.”

Both participants faced great challenges in maintaining their HRQoL. Participants I and II experienced difficulties in dividing time between work and studies. The demands and challenges of working with targets that must be achieved made both participants feel exhausted, both physically and emotionally. To face these challenges, both participants have developed their strategies, and social support and communication play crucial roles in maintaining their HRQoL.

4.0 DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study show that the HRQoL of working graduate students is influenced by various factors, including the nature of work (online vs. offline), social support, and stress management abilities. These findings align with previous research showing that dual workloads can negatively impact physical and mental well-being if not managed properly (Siregar et al., 2019). The differences in the experiences of Participants I and II indicate that the nature of work (online vs. offline) affects how students manage their HRQoL. Online work tends to burden the mental aspect more due to constant involvement, while offline work emphasizes physical challenges. However, both types of work require effective time management strategies to ensure a balance between studies and work. This research resulted in two major themes, including:

1. The Experience of Health-Related Quality of Life in Working Graduate Psychology Students

The research theme on the experiences of HRQoL among working psychology graduate students focuses on the demands and challenges faced by the participants. Participant I encounters difficulties in managing time between work and studies while also meeting strict work deadlines. She acknowledges that the flexibility of online work, which should be an advantage, often blurs the boundaries between work and personal time. When work and study schedules overlap, she feels exhausted from having to constantly be on alert and ready to handle both responsibilities. Effective time management might lead to better work-life balance, allowing individuals to distribute their time more effectively between work and personal life. A high level of work-life balance is a key factor in determining an individual's ability to sustain this lifestyle in the long term (Isni et al., 2022).

Similarly, Participant II also struggles with balancing time between work and studies, dealing with a relentless workload and heavy academic assignments. She faces greater physical challenges due to commuting to work and the demanding nature of her job. This physical fatigue is further exacerbated by academic demands, which are often neglected due to the priority given to her job. She has even considered quitting either her studies or her job because of the overwhelming burden. This situation has led both Participant I and Participant II to experience physical and emotional exhaustion. These findings align with Paro et al., (2010), who reported that health students often face mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and

depression, which negatively impact both their academic and professional performance. These issues are believed to interfere with the quality of life of students in both their academic and work spheres.

The impact of the demands and challenges faced by the participants extends beyond their time management and productivity; it also affects their overall health-related quality of life. Disrupted sleep quality, as experienced by both participants, is a clear example of how excessive workloads affect their physical well-being. Both Participants I and II complained about decreased sleep quality, which in turn affects their ability to focus and maintain energy throughout long days. This occurs due to excessive anxiety, causing them to overthink, making it difficult for them to control their emotions, leading to increased tension and difficulty in falling asleep. This sleep disturbance further impairs their ability to achieve the desired sleep quality (Wicaksono et al., 2013).

2. Strategies of Working Graduate Psychology Students in Improving Health-Related Quality of Life

The research theme on the strategies employed by working psychology graduate students to enhance HRQoL focuses on how these students utilize various strategies to manage their time and emotions. Both participants demonstrate that time management and emotional regulation are crucial in improving HRQoL. Participant I revealed that taking breaks can help improve focus. She understands that proper prioritization is essential in completing both academic and work tasks. By setting priorities, Participant I ensures that both responsibilities are well managed without sacrificing one for the other. She carefully divides her time between work and study, avoiding significant overlaps that could lead to stress. Participant I also recognizes that negative emotions can impact productivity and interactions with others, so she strives to accept and manage her emotions effectively (Fauzi et al., 2024).

Participant II also frequently takes short breaks and employs emotional management strategies by engaging in relaxation activities such as meditation and exercise. When pressure builds, Participant II uses physical activities like walking or light exercise to calm herself and relieve stress. This not only aids in emotional management but also contributes to better physical well-being. Participant II manages her emotions by reflecting on the initial goals of working and studying. These findings align with Siregar et al., (2019), who found that emotional regulation plays a role in the quality of life for women with dual roles. However, this role becomes more significant when women with dual roles possess good work-life balance skills. The emotional regulation exhibited by these women suggests that they tend to cognitively control their emotions by changing their thought processes regarding difficult situations or situations that could potentially trigger emotions, resulting in more positive emotions.

In addition to time and emotion management strategies, the importance of social support from family and coworkers identified in this study emphasizes that working graduate students cannot solely rely on themselves to cope with the pressures they face (Susanti & Maryam, 2022). Participant I receives significant support from her family, supervisor, and partner, who understand when she has to work late or cannot participate in family activities. This support gives her the strength to manage the demands of both work and study simultaneously and helps reduce the stress she experiences. Similarly, Participant II heavily relies on social support from friends and family. At work, Participant II feels supported by her coworkers, with whom she

frequently holds informal meetings outside the office to strengthen social bonds and alleviate stress. Maria et al., (2020) stated that family support is associated with psychological health-related quality of life, while friend support is linked to physical health-related quality of life. Emotional and practical support from those around them plays a crucial role in maintaining their well-being.

Health behaviors and health knowledge are also considered important in maintaining health-related quality of life by engaging in physical activity, paying attention to diet, and ensuring adequate rest. This is consistent with the findings of Anokye et al., (2012) who reported that higher levels of physical activity are associated with better health-related quality of life, such as through regular exercise. For example, Participant I routinely goes to the gym to exercise, which is one way she maintains her physical health amidst the busyness of work and study. Additionally, Participant I is mindful of her diet, reducing sugar and rice consumption and maintaining a balanced intake of food. She realizes that a healthy diet and regular exercise are key to keeping her energy levels stable and supporting her productivity. On the other hand, Participant II prefers simple yet effective physical activities, such as walking daily. Although she no longer participates in gym activities, Participant II strives to achieve 4,000-5,000 steps per day as a way to stay active and maintain her health. Furthermore, Participant II reduces her intake of sugary drinks and drinks more water as part of her efforts to maintain healthy eating habits.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that HRQoL in working graduate students is a dynamic and multifaceted concept influenced by the interaction of work, studies, social support, and personal strategies. The findings of this research emphasize the importance of time management, emotional regulation, and social support in maintaining HRQoL in working graduate students. This research provides an overview of the HRQoL dynamics of working graduate psychology students. The challenges they face, such as time management, physical and mental exhaustion, and social support, are significant factors that influence their HRQoL. Both participants employed time management strategies and adapted to different environments to maintain their HRQoL, despite ongoing pressures. The experiences and strategies described in this study can be useful for educators, employers, and students in developing policies and interventions that support graduate students in maintaining a healthy balance between their studies and work.

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