



Harmonious Passion Not, But Obsessive Passion and Relationship Dissatisfaction Predicts Work Addiction: A Longitudinal Study

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Abstract

Research suggests that work addiction and obsessive work passion can harm romantic relationships, but little is known about how relationship dissatisfaction affects the later development of work addiction or the role of work passion in this process. This study aimed to address this gap, assuming that relationship dissatisfaction would be a predictor of later work addiction, considering work passion as a role player in the examined association. A total of 586 participants (51.4% women) completed an online survey at two time points (T1, T2), 4 years apart. Work addiction was assessed at both time points by the Bergen Work Addiction Scale. Obsessive and harmonious passion for work was assessed using the Passion Scale, and relationship satisfaction was measured the Relationship Satisfaction Scale, both at T1 only. Path analysis showed that T1 obsessive passion for work weakly predicted T2 work addiction, while T1 work addiction strongly predicted T2 work addiction. T1 harmonious passion had no direct effect on T2 work addiction but showed an indirect effect via T1 work addiction. Although relationship satisfaction did not predict T1 work addiction, it was a weak but significant negative predictor of T2 work addiction. T1 work addiction mediated the effects of T1 obsessive passion for work on T2 work addiction. Obsessive passion for work and relationship dissatisfaction may contribute to future work addiction.

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Current work addiction plays a key role in this progression, underscoring the importance of interventions that reduce obsessive passion and promote a healthy work-life balance.

Keywords Work addiction · Workaholism · Relationship satisfaction · Passion for work · Longitudinal · Behavioral addiction · Psychological factors

One of the key questions in work addiction research is what harmful consequences the phenomenon leads to. However, it is equally important to identify the factors that may serve as potential risk or protective factors for work addiction. Such factors cannot be reliably identified through cross-sectional studies, but longitudinal analyses can help uncover them. A number of potential factors have already been suggested, many of which relate to individual characteristics of the worker, including personality traits, attitudes, and values (Kun et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Lichtenstein et al., 2019; Spence & Robbins, 1992). In addition, the role of passion for work has been increasingly highlighted, yet its long-term effects on work addiction have not been thoroughly examined.

Work passion has a generally positive connotation and is often associated with beneficial outcomes for the individual (Vallerand et al., 2010). However, according to the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand & Houliort, 2003), work passion can be either harmonious or obsessive. While harmonious passion is considered adaptive and linked to well-being and personal growth, obsessive passion is characterized by a rigid involvement in work and may contribute to psychological difficulties (Salessi et al., 2017).

In the academic literature, a large number of studies have separately explored aspects of work passion and work addiction and their interpersonal effects, but few have examined the relationship between the two. This represents a significant knowledge gap, as it remains unclear whether passion for work acts as a protective factor or, under certain conditions, may actually increase vulnerability to work addiction. Even less is known about the temporal relationship between the two phenomena, which could bring us closer to understanding causal relationships.

Among the antecedents of work addiction, interpersonal factors may also play a role—not only in the workplace, but in private life as well. For example, difficulties or conflicts in personal relationships might drive individuals toward compulsive overworking, whereas well-functioning relationships might potentially protect against the development of work addiction. While a few studies have explored the link between relationship satisfaction and work addiction, they have primarily examined relationship satisfaction as a possible consequence or correlating factor of work addiction (Kenyhercz et al., 2024). Clarifying whether relationship satisfaction may function as an antecedent or protective factor against maladaptive work involvement can have meaningful implications for both individual well-being and organizational interventions.

The aim of the present study is therefore to examine the long-term effects of harmonious and obsessive passion, as well as relationship satisfaction, on work addiction using a longitudinal design.

Work Addiction

Within behavioral addictions, work addiction is an emerging field and is receiving increasing attention. Studies show that 8–10% of the adult working population in Western cultures (e.g., Hungary, Norway, Germany) is at risk of work addiction (Andreassen et al., 2014; Berk et al., 2022; Kun et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c), while in Eastern cultures, the figure

risers to around 40% (Kang, 2020). A recent meta-analysis found that approximately 15.2% of individuals are affected by work addiction, though only a minority of studies were nationally representative (Andersen et al., 2023).

Research on work addiction increasingly raises questions not only about its context and consequences (Clark et al., 2016) but also about its definition (Atroszko et al., 2020). Oates (1971) compared work addiction to alcoholism, describing it as a compulsion that negatively impacts physical and mental health and social relationships. Some models view this compulsion as a core personality trait, while others focus on specific behavioral patterns (Pietropinto, 1986; Scott et al., 1997). Later models incorporated a cognitive component, explaining the rigid thoughts and perfectionism of work addicts (Porter, 2004). Meta-analyses point to low self-esteem, high perfectionism, and negative affectivity as key personality traits linked to work addiction (Kun et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Besides individual factors, environmental, workplace, and family-related factors also contribute to its emergence (Griffiths & Karanika-Murray, 2012; Kenyhercz et al., 2022).

Clark et al. (2020) proposed a four-dimensional model to explain work addiction, including motivational, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. While this model emphasizes psychological processes, it does not fully capture the addictive nature of work addiction, which shares symptoms with other substance use addictions, such as mood modification, tolerance, and relapse (Griffiths & Karanika-Murray, 2012). Research suggests work addiction is a complex condition with negative consequences for individuals, affecting relationships (Bakker et al., 2009), work-life balance (Kenyhercz et al., 2024), health (Balducci et al., 2018; Kun et al., 2021), and mental well-being, including anxiety, depression, ADHD, and OCD symptoms (Andreassen et al., 2016), as well as substance use (Kun et al., 2023; Salanova et al., 2016).

For micro-level factors of work addiction, there is much more research on personality traits than on work motivation. Although research has been published in the latter area (Taris et al., 2020; Van den Broeck et al., 2011), few studies have examined the relationship between work motivations and work addiction or between passion for work and work addiction in a longitudinal design. This is why we consider it important to examine this relationship, and the research question arises: what impact does passion for work have on the later presence of work addiction?

Passion for Work

Work passion can manifest in two distinct forms: harmonious passion and obsessive passion, each with different consequences for an individual's well-being. Harmonious passion arises when work is integrated into one's identity through a self-determined process, resulting in enjoyment, fulfillment, and positive emotional experiences (Vallerand & Houlfort, 2003; Vallerand, 2015). People with harmonious passion experience work as meaningful and balanced, and it does not interfere with other aspects of their lives (Forest et al., 2012; Ho et al., 2011).

On the other hand, obsessive passion occurs when work becomes a means to gain external validation, leading to an uncontrollable urge to work that is driven by guilt and rumination (Birkeland & Buch, 2015; Ho et al., 2011). This form of passion is linked to negative outcomes, such as interpersonal conflict, burnout, and worse well-being (Vallerand, 2012; Vallerand & Houlfort, 2003).

The primary difference between these two types of passion lies not in the time spent on work, but in the emotional and psychological experience. While harmonious passion enhances well-being, engagement, and positive work relationships (Tóth-Király et al., 2021; Vallerand et al., 2010), obsessive passion tends to lead to negative consequences like

work-family conflict and health problems (Vallerand et al., 2008a, 2008b; Vallerand et al., 2008a, 2008b). Thus, harmonious passion promotes a balanced life, while obsessive passion can contribute to work addiction and other adverse effects.

Although work addiction and obsessive work passion are related, they are not to be confused. A person with obsessive passion loves their work and considers it part of their identity, while a person with work addiction is more likely to suffer from their work (Spence & Robbins, 1992). The bridging link between work addiction and obsessive passion can be provided by the theme of work motivations. Some studies primarily within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), have investigated which motives are most closely related to work addiction (Stoeber et al., 2013; Taris et al., 2020; van Beek et al., 2011, 2012). They found that intrinsic motivation, which is most strongly associated with positive emotions and enjoyment of work, is not related to work addiction at all, while extrinsic work motivation and introjected motivation are (van Beek et al., 2012). Other studies—although using different motivational measure—have found a weak positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and work addiction (Endriulaitienė & Morkevičiūtė, 2020; Morkevičiūtė & Endriulaitienė, 2023). However, these studies also highlighted the greater emphasis on extrinsic (Endriulaitienė & Morkevičiūtė, 2020) and introjected work motivations (Morkevičiūtė & Endriulaitienė, 2023). This suggests that work addicts are driven to excessive and compulsive work to obtain external reinforcement and to avoid unpleasant emotional states such as anxiety, shame, or guilt. There is also evidence that work addiction predicts subsequent lower intrinsic and higher introjected work motivation (Taris et al., 2020). These controlled regulation-related work motivations also support the association of work addiction with obsessive passion.

Certain components of work engagement, particularly absorption, play a key role in linking adaptive and maladaptive work involvement. Recent network theory models conceptualize work addiction as a dynamic constellation of symptoms (Bereznowski et al., 2023a, 2023b; Bereznowski et al., 2023a, 2023b). A Polish study found that work addiction symptoms are interconnected with engagement, burnout, and stress, with absorption acting as a transitional mechanism. While absorption can be beneficial in healthy engagement, its habitual use for mood regulation in stressed individuals may contribute to addictive work behaviors, burnout, and emotional exhaustion (Di Stefano & Gaudiino, 2019; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Bereznowski et al., 2023a, 2023b).

Some theories have suggested that obsessive work passion may lead to work addiction in the long run (Vallerand et al., 2010, 2008a, 2008b), but this has not yet been empirically investigated in a longitudinal design. A recent study has shown that prior work addiction is positively associated with subsequent obsessive work passion (Tóth-Király et al., 2021), but the reverse relationship (i.e., whether work passion predicts subsequent work addiction) has not been investigated to our knowledge. For this reason, we aim to address this research gap and answer the question of whether both obsessive and harmonious passion have an impact on the later development of work addiction.

Relationship Satisfaction and Work Addiction

The results of several cross-sectional studies analyzing the relationship between work addiction and relationship quality are contradictory. Some research has found that individuals with work addiction are characterized by alienated intimate relationships, higher levels of marital dissatisfaction, and a willingness to sacrifice social relationships for job satisfaction (Flowers et al., 2000; Porter, 2001; Robinson et al., 2001, 2006). However, some research has found no association between marital relationship quality or social support in marriage and work

addiction (Bayhan Karapinar et al., 2020; Niehuis, 2007). Given the conflicting findings in the literature, meta-analyses in the field may help us to get better clarification. One previous meta-analysis (Clark et al., 2016) found that work addiction is associated with negative relational outcomes, including poor family functioning, marital dissatisfaction, and heightened work–life conflict, largely due to the excessive time spent on work at the expense of family roles (Clark et al., 2016). A recent meta-analysis has shown a significant negative but weak relationship between relationship quality and work addiction (Kenyhercz et al., 2024). As this meta-analysis points out, the research on this topic so far is largely cross-sectional, and we do not know whether a problematic intimate relationship may be a risk factor for later onset work addiction. However, we assume that relationship quality may affect later work addiction and may contribute to its development or exacerbation. In this case, it may be a form of escapism, which is also known in other addictions (Ballabio et al., 2017; Jouhki & Oksanen, 2022). Escapism has a stress-managing or mood-regulating function, which is a common feature of addictions. One element of the component model mentioned earlier (Griffiths, 2005) is mood modification: in the case of work addiction, the person might engage in work to reduce tension and negative feelings (which may arise from interpersonal conflicts). It is conceivable that mood modification may take the form of excessive work in response to relationship difficulties, with a primarily emotion-regulating function. Thus, one of our research questions is whether dissatisfaction with romantic relationships could be a predictor of work addiction.

Relationship Satisfaction and Work Passion

Vallerand and colleagues have investigated the relationship between obsessive and harmonious passion and relationship quality in several studies (Vallerand & Houliort, 2003; Vallerand et al., 2008a, 2008b). Their results show that while harmonious passion is not positively related to the amount of interpersonal conflict, obsessive passion is (Vallerand & Houliort, 2003). This type of passion can also affect different domains, such as sporting activity: a later study showed that football fans' relationships were more conflictual when the passion for football was obsessive, but there was no association with relationship conflict when the passion was harmonious (Vallerand et al., 2008a, 2008b). This has been confirmed in the context of the athlete-coach relationship: while harmonious passion for sport was not associated with conflict, obsessive passion was positively correlated with the strength of conflict in the relationship (Jowett et al., 2012). Other research has suggested that obsessive passion is associated with higher levels of psychological strain and burnout (Vallerand et al., 2008a, 2008b), which in turn negatively impacts an individual's energy reserves. Consequently, the individual is not able to provide the same level of energy and commitment to the family, thus increasing the likelihood of work-family conflict. This conclusion is in line with findings that obsessive passion depletes the individual's resources (Houliort et al., 2014; Thorgren et al., 2013), leaving less time and energy for family relationships. However, to our knowledge, no study has yet specifically examined the relationship between passion for work and relationship satisfaction.

Aims of the Study

While previous research has shown connections between passion for work, relationship satisfaction, and work addiction, little is known about how work passion and relationship dissatisfaction *predict future work addiction*, particularly in combination over time. The aim of

our research is to gain a deeper understanding of the development of work addiction symptoms using a longitudinal design. Therefore, our research questions are (i) How does Time 1 (T1) harmonious passion predict both T1 and Time 2 (T2) work addiction? (ii) How does T1 obsessive passion predict both T1 and T2 work addiction? (iii) How does T1 satisfaction with romantic relationships predict both T1 and T2 work addiction? (iv) To what extent does T1 work addiction mediate the relationships between T1 harmonious and obsessive passion, T1 relationship satisfaction, and T2 work addiction? Based on these questions, we hypothesize that (i) time 1 (T1) harmonious passion negatively predicts both T1 and time 2 (T2) work addiction; (ii) T1 obsessive passion positively predicts both T1 and T2 work addiction; (iii) T1 satisfaction with the romantic relationship negatively predicts both T1 and T2 work addiction; (iv) T1 work addiction mediates the relationships between T1 harmonious and obsessive passion and T1 satisfaction with the romantic relationship and T2 work addiction (Fig. 1).

Methods

Participants and Procedure

A longitudinal research project was carried out through an online survey that was administered in two distinct phases. The first phase (T1) was conducted in the spring of 2018, while the second phase (T2) occurred 4 years later, in the spring of 2022. For the initial phase of data collection, the survey was disseminated via two major national news websites in Hungary. Participants had to be over 18 years old and currently employed to qualify for the study. After finishing the T1 online questionnaire, participants had the option to indicate their interest in participating in future research studies. Those who consented were asked to provide their email addresses. In the spring of 2022, during the T2 phase, the researchers reached out to the individuals who had previously submitted their email addresses. The full study, including both phases of data collection, was approved by the institutional review board (IRB) of the research team's university. Additionally, the study complied with the ethical guidelines set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki.

At T1, the study involved 4340 participants (female = 2202 [50.7%], male = 2138 [49.3%]). Of these, 1743 individuals (40.16%) provided their email addresses for potential future contact. During T2, we contacted these individuals and received responses from 33.62% of them.

Proposed Mediation Model.

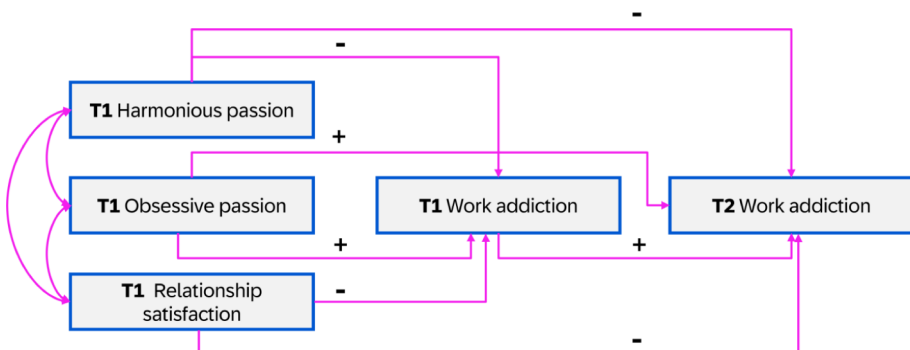


Fig. 1 Proposed mediation model

As a result, the final longitudinal sample consisted of 586 participants (female = 301 [51.4%], male = 285 [48.6%]), with ages ranging from 20 to 67 years at T1 ($M = 38.0$ years, $SD = 9.2$). Regarding educational attainment at T1, 0.3% had completed primary education, 1.7% had vocational training, 17.4% had finished secondary education, 76.1% held a bachelor's or master's degree, and 4.3% had earned a doctoral degree. In terms of marital status, 52.2% were single, 37.8% were married, 9.4% were divorced, and 0.5% were widowed.

Measures

Socio-demographic Variables

At the beginning of both the T1 and T2 online surveys, participants were presented with a series of socio-demographic questions. These initial sections sought information on their age, gender, educational background, and marital status.

Work Addiction

To assess work addiction at both T1 and T2, we utilized the Bergen Work Addiction Scale (BWAS) (Andreassen et al., 2012; Hungarian version: Orosz et al., 2016). This self-report instrument was designed based on the “components model” of addiction proposed by Griffiths (2005). The BWAS includes seven items, each addressing one of the seven fundamental aspects of work addiction: salience, tolerance, mood modification, relapse, withdrawal, conflict, and problems. Participants rated each item on a 5-point scale, from 1 (“never”) to 5 (“always”), reflecting their experiences over the past year. For instance, one of the items asks, “Worked so much that it has negatively impacted your health?” The scale exhibited good reliability within this sample (T1 $\alpha = 0.80$; T2 $\alpha = 0.81$).

Passion for Work

To assess passion for work at T1, we used two subscales of the Passion Scale (PS) (Vallerand & Houlfort, 2003; Hungarian version: Tóth-Király et al., 2021). This scale evaluates the intensity of an individual's passion for their work through two distinct dimensions: harmonious passion and obsessive passion. The harmonious passion (HP) subscale consists of six items, including statements such as: “My work is well integrated into my life,” reflecting how well the work fits with other life aspects. The Obsessive Passion (OP) subscale also includes six items, with statements like: “I have almost an obsessive feeling for this activity,” capturing the more overpowering and less manageable aspects of passion. Participants rated their agreement with each statement on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 represents “completely disagree” and 7 denotes “completely agree.” In this sample, Cronbach's alpha values were 0.81 for HP and 0.82 for OP, indicating good reliability for both dimensions.

Relationship Satisfaction

To assess relationship satisfaction at T1, the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hedrick, 1988; Hungarian version: Martos et al., 2014) was used. During the assessment, we included a filter question so that only participants who confirmed they were in an actual partner relationship completed the seven-item RAS. This scale includes two reverse-scored items (items

4 and 7) and is considered a generic measure of relationship satisfaction, applicable across different types of relationships (e.g., married couples, dating couples). The items measure specific relationship dimensions such as love, problems, and expectations. For example, one of the seven questions is: “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?”. Participants responded to each question on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (“not satisfied”) to 5 (“very satisfied”). In our sample, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.92, indicating high reliability.

Statistical Analyses

Initially, we conducted chi-square tests and independent sample t-tests to compare individuals who dropped out at T2 with those who continued in the study until T2. Following these preliminary comparisons, we proceeded with preliminary statistical analyses, which involved calculating descriptive statistics and performing bivariate correlations to examine the relationships between the study variables. We tested our study objectives depicted in Fig. 1 using a multiple mediation model. In the model, the predictor variables examined at T1 were relationship satisfaction, harmonious passion, and obsessive passion, while the outcome variable was T2 work addiction. T1 work addiction was specified as a mediator variable. Total and direct effects of the distal predictor variables on the outcome variables as well as indirect effects through the mediator variable were estimated and assessed. To estimate the parameters of the mediation model, we applied the maximum likelihood robust to non-normality (MLR) method to account for violation of the assumption of normal distribution. All variables in the mediation model were defined as observed continuous variables. Consequently, the mediation model was fully saturated (i.e., the model’s degrees of freedom was zero) and it was not possible to evaluate standard model fit (e.g., comparative fit index [CFI], Tucker-Lewis index [TLI], root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA], standardized root mean square residual [SRMR]). Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS statistics (Version 29) and Mplus 8.0 statistical software (Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

As a first step, we compared dropouts and participants at both time points based on their socio-demographic characteristics and the predictor variables in T1 (see Supplementary Table 1).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and Pearson’s correlation coefficients of the T1 and T2 variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. T1 work addiction					
2. T2 work addiction	.603***				
3. T1 obsessive passion	.549***	.419***			
4. T1 harmonious passion	-.049	-.029	.345***		
5. T1 relationship satisfaction	-.158***	-.199***	-.099**	.094**	
Range	7–35	7–35	6–42	6–42	10–35
M (SD)	21.51 (5.16)	19.55 (5.24)	16.18 (6.94)	26.85 (7.23)	28.81 (5.23)
Cronbach’s α	0.80	0.81	0.82	0.81	0.92

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

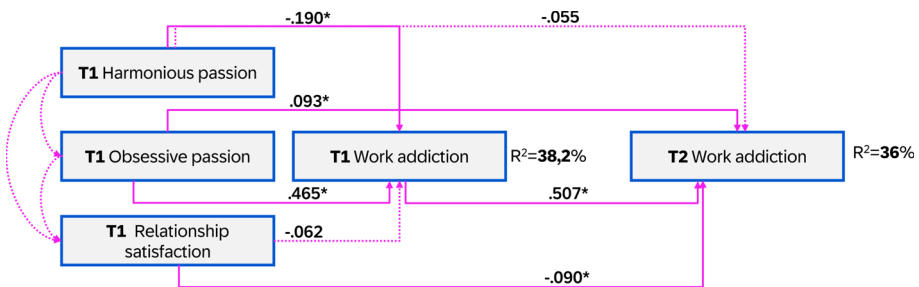
Those who participated in both waves were significantly older, had higher educational level, and exhibited lower levels of obsessive passion at T1 compared to dropouts. There were no significant differences between the two groups along the other predictor variables. Bivariate correlations between the measured variables are presented in Table 1. A significant, positive, strong correlation was observed between T1 and T2 work addiction. Moreover, higher rates of work addiction at both measurement points were significantly, moderately strongly linked to increased obsessive passion and weakly to decreased relationship satisfaction.

Results of the Mediation Analysis

The predictive direct effects between T1 and T2 variables are shown in Fig. 2. Overall, the following prediction effects were identified: T1 harmonious passion was a weak negative significant predictor of T1 work addiction, suggesting that individuals with higher harmonious passion at baseline reported slightly lower levels of work addiction concurrently. However, this effect did not persist over time, as harmonious passion did not significantly predict T2 work addiction. In contrast, T1 obsessive passion had a moderate, significant positive effect on T1 work addiction and a weak but significant positive effect on T2 work addiction, indicating that this type of passion may contribute both to immediate and longer-term increases in work addiction symptoms. T1 relationship satisfaction did not significantly predict T1 work addiction, but it had a weak, significant negative effect on T2 work addiction, implying that higher relationship satisfaction may offer some long-term protection against the development of work addiction. Lastly, the strongest predictive effect was observed for T1 work addiction, which had a strong, positive, and significant effect on T2 work addiction, underscoring the temporal stability of work addiction symptoms across the 4-year period.

As shown in Table 2, two significant indirect pathways emerged in the mediation model. Both T1 harmonious and T1 obsessive passion were significantly associated with T2 work addiction through T1 work addiction. For harmonious passion, the total effect was significant and negative, indicating that higher levels at T1 were associated with lower work addiction at T2. However, the direct effect is not significant, suggesting that harmonious

Findings of the Mediation Model



Note. Single-headed straight arrows represent regression predictive effects, and the values on these arrows are standardized regression coefficients (β). The level of significance is indicated as follows: bold arrows represent $p < .05$, while dotted arrows represent non-significant effects ($p > .05$). R^2 indicates the explained variance for the observed variables

Fig. 2 Findings of the mediation model

Table 2 Total, direct, and indirect effects of distal predictor variables

Distal predictor variables' effect	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect
T1 harmonious passion → T2 work addiction	-.21***	-.08	-.13***
T1 obsessive passion → T2 work addiction	.44***	.12*	.31***
T1 relationship satisfaction → T2 work addiction	-.13**	-.09*	-.03

The estimates in the table are standardized regression coefficients (β)

The levels of significance are indicated as follows: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

passion alone does not directly predict T2 work addiction when controlling for the mediator. The indirect effect is significant and negative, indicating that harmonious passion predicts lower T1 work addiction, which in turn predicts lower T2 work addiction. This supports a significant mediated pathway, even in the absence of a direct effect.

In the case of obsessive passion, the total effect was strongly positive and significant, confirming it as a robust predictor of higher T2 work addiction. Both the direct and indirect effects were significant, indicating that obsessive passion contributes to future work addiction both independently and via increased T1 work addiction. This reflects a partially mediated relationship, where both direct and indirect paths are at play.

Finally, no significant indirect effect was observed for relationship satisfaction through T1 work addiction. In the model, the total effect is significant and negative, suggesting that greater relationship satisfaction at T1 is associated with reduced work addiction at T2. The direct effect is significant and negative, indicating that relationship satisfaction independently predicts lower levels of future work addiction. The indirect effect, however, is not significant, suggesting that the protective effect of relationship satisfaction is not explained by T1 work addiction. In other words, there is no evidence of mediation in this case—the effect is direct.

Discussion

This study is the first to examine how passion for work, relationship satisfaction, and work addiction predict future work addiction in a longitudinal design with two data collection points over four years. Our findings offer new insights into how these factors contribute to the development of work addiction over time, particularly the effect of relationship satisfaction.

We found that obsessive work passion predicted both current and future work addiction.

Moreover, actual work addiction acted as a mediator, strengthening the positive relationship between obsessive work addiction and future work addiction. These findings support our hypothesis and align with the theoretical framework proposed by Vallerand and colleagues (Vallerand et al., 2010, 2008a, 2008b), which suggests that obsessive work passion can lead to work addiction over time. One possible explanation is that obsessive passion, driven by compulsive behavior, results in a rigid attachment to work. Individuals feel compelled to engage excessively in work activities, even at the expense of other areas of life. Over time, this compulsion can evolve into work addiction. This aligns with the notion that obsessive passion can lead to a loss of control as individuals struggle to maintain a work-life balance, ultimately fostering work addiction.

Our other significant finding was that while obsessive passion for work directly predicted future work addiction, harmonious passion did not have a direct effect but was related to it indirectly through current work addiction. This suggests that while harmonious passion does not directly protect against future work addiction, it may do so indirectly by reducing the risk of developing work addiction symptoms in the short term. The fact that harmonious passion alone does not have a direct effect on later work addiction has several important implications. First, many people believe that individuals with work addiction love their jobs and work excessively because they enjoy it and find fulfillment in their work. This reflects the misconception that work addiction is a positive addiction and that individuals affected by this phenomenon are happy people (Griffiths et al., 2018). However, our results clearly indicate that future symptoms of work addiction are not predicted by viewing work as a source of joy and engaging in it in harmony with one's well-being. Additionally, it is crucial to note that harmonious passion should not be considered as a long-term protective factor against future work addiction. This finding underscores the distinction between obsessive and harmonious work passion, as emphasized in previous models and research (Rousseau & Vallerand, 2008; Vallerand & Houliort, 2003; Vallerand et al., 2008a, 2008b). While harmonious passion allows individuals to engage in work driven by intrinsic motivations, obsessive passion—fueled by external pressures and a need to avoid guilt or anxiety—is closely linked to work addiction. As demonstrated in previous cross-sectional studies (Vallerand et al., 2010, 2008a, 2008b), our longitudinal design now confirms that obsessive passion, as a maladaptive approach to work, is a significant risk factor for developing work addiction. Based on our findings, we challenge the common perception that work addiction is simply the result of loving one's job or being highly committed. Instead, we suggest that work addiction is rooted in compulsion, not in joy or intrinsic motivation. Therefore, interventions should focus on reducing compulsive work behaviors and fostering healthier attitudes toward work rather than solely aiming to boost passion or enjoyment.

Furthermore, consistent with previous studies (Flowers et al., 2000; Kenyhercz et al., 2024; Porter, 2001), we confirmed that higher symptoms of work addiction are linked to lower relationship satisfaction over time. A novel aspect of our research was the longitudinal design, which, through path analysis, revealed that relationship dissatisfaction predicts work addiction years later. Our findings can be interpreted in several ways. One possibility is that mechanisms proposed in earlier work on addiction literature are at play. According to these theories, individuals with work addiction may engage in excessive and compulsive work because they struggle to form intimate relationships (Berglas, 2004; Robinson et al., 2006). This difficulty could be rooted in early personality development, consistent with research showing that individuals with work addiction tend to have lower levels of personality organization compared to those without work addiction (Bodó et al., 2024). As Berglas (2004) suggested, the reason for relationship difficulties among individuals with work addiction is not just their excessive work habits; rather, they may work excessively because of challenges in their personal lives. This hypothesis aligns with the component model of addiction (Griffiths, 2005), which posits that mood modification is a core component of addictions, including work addiction. Individuals may use certain activities (in this case, work) to escape difficulties or negative emotions in other areas of life (Griffiths & Karanika-Murray, 2012). Escapism is a well-established motivation in various addictions—such as substance use disorder, video game disorder, and gambling disorder—where it plays a key role in predicting problematic or addictive behaviors (Jouhki & Oksanen, 2022; Kalmár, 2020; Király et al., 2015; Neophytou et al., 2023). Although research on escapism as a motivation for work addiction is still lacking, it is plausible that this factor contributes

in this context. Individuals may turn to work as an escape from relationship difficulties, lack of intimacy, or feelings of loneliness. Future research should explore this possibility.

Another valid explanation for the longitudinal association between relationship dissatisfaction and work addiction is that satisfying relationships may serve as a protective factor against the development of work addiction. Social support is a proven effective factor in reducing work stress and preventing overwork (García-Herrero et al., 2013; Pluut et al., 2018). A fulfilling partnership could provide emotional support and satisfaction that might reduce the need to seek such fulfillment through excessive work. Our findings suggest that a high-quality romantic relationship might foster greater relationship satisfaction and protect partners from the potential harms of future work addiction. However, it is important to note that assumptions should be interpreted cautiously, as the present research did not directly test these explanations.

Finally, an important finding from our research is that while both obsessive passion for work and relationship dissatisfaction predict future work addiction, the strongest predictor remains current work addiction. Path analysis underscored that individuals with work addiction are likely to maintain their compulsive work habits, making work addiction a chronic issue. Our 4-year longitudinal data showed that work addiction is unlikely to diminish over time, with a strong positive correlation between earlier and later work addiction. This highlights that work addiction is not merely a response to external, situational factors (Griffiths et al., 2018), but is more deeply rooted in individual factors such as personality traits (Kun et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Kun et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c), internal drives and motivations (Taris et al., 2020; van Beek et al., 2011, 2012), and internalized family values (Kenyhercz et al., 2022). These findings emphasize that work addiction tends to persist over time and reinforce the need for early intervention and long-term support in addressing compulsive work behaviors.

When interpreting our results, several limitations must be considered. First, the reliance on self-report questionnaires introduces potential biases, such as participants' tendencies to present themselves in a positive light, lack of self-awareness, or memory distortions. When examining relationship satisfaction, it would have been particularly valuable to include the partner's perspective as well. Unfortunately, we were unable to do so, but future studies could benefit from a multi-rater approach where both partners provide input. This could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how relationship dynamics relate to work addiction and passion for work.

Another limitation is related to participant dropout, as a significant number of participants did not complete the second data collection. This dropout may have skewed the results, especially since those who withdrew had significantly higher scores on the obsessive passion scale. Individuals with obsessive passion may be overcommitted to work, leading to burnout and emotional exhaustion, which reduces motivation and increases stress. This makes continued participation in the study difficult, as the unsustainable drive tied to obsessive passion can cause withdrawal. The pressure to meet expectations may also contribute to dropout. These, however, are only assumptions that we cannot confirm with certainty. Moreover, while work addiction is affected by many factors, our study primarily focused on individual functioning. We could not explore workplace factors, job roles, or occupational influences, all of which may also play a role in the variation of results. In a future longitudinal study, it would be valuable to investigate the role of passion and relationship satisfaction while giving greater attention to workplace and organizational factors, including the analysis of their interactions.

Although our study employed a longitudinal design, it remains limited in establishing clear causal relationships. Many variables that could influence changes over time, such

as external stressors or life events, were not measured or controlled for. Thus, while we observed associations between variables like relationship satisfaction, work addiction, and passion for work, our finding should be interpreted with caution.

A further limitation involves the shortened online survey used during the second data collection period. To reduce participant burden, we deliberately created a condensed version of the questionnaire, meaning several measures from Time 1 could not be reassessed at Time 2, except for the work addiction scale. This limited our ability to assess broader psychological and behavioral changes over time.

Finally, for future research, we emphasize the importance of investigating escapism as work motivation in the context of work addiction, particularly in relation association to social relationships and work-life dynamics. Our findings suggest that individuals may turn to compulsive work as an escape from personal difficulties, and understanding this motivational factor could provide valuable insights into the treatment and prevention of work addiction.

Conclusions

This study highlights key factors in the development and persistence of work addiction, emphasizing the role of obsessive passion and relationship dissatisfaction as predictors. While obsessive passion significantly increases the risk of current and future work addiction, harmonious passion does not offer direct protection. Our findings also demonstrate that work addiction is a chronic condition, with individuals likely to maintain compulsive work behaviors over time if not addressed.

Importantly, these results have several practical implications. Early intervention targeting obsessive passion and compulsive work behaviors is critical to preventing long-term addiction. Programs should focus on promoting healthier work attitudes and work-life balance rather than simply encouraging passion or commitment. Additionally, relationship satisfaction plays a crucial role, suggesting that addressing personal relationship issues and enhancing social support could help mitigate the risk of work addiction. Organizations and mental health professionals should be mindful of the type of passion they foster—encouraging harmonious engagement rather than reinforcing obsessive involvement through external rewards or unrealistic expectations. Relationship counseling or psychoeducation that includes discussions about work–life boundaries and emotional connection may also serve as useful preventative tools, particularly for individuals at high risk.

Moreover, the finding that relationship dissatisfaction predicts the onset of work addiction underscores the importance of addressing personal relationship dynamics. Interventions aimed at enhancing communication, emotional connection, and mutual support in romantic relationships may help reduce the risk of compensatory overworking and work-based escape. Programs that integrate psychological support with relationship-focused components could therefore be especially effective.

Finally, the potential role of escapism in the development of work addiction—whereby individuals use excessive work to avoid personal stress or negative emotions—represents a promising direction for future research. Understanding these dynamics will aid in developing more targeted interventions for both prevention and treatment.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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