
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN AND THEIR PERCEIVED SUPPORTS TOWARDS REMOTE WORK IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore on challenges faced by working women and the perceived support during remote work. Besides, this study emphasizes the perceived support that affects working women to manage the challenges and maintain the Work-Life Balance (WLB) during remote work in Malaysia. As this is a qualitative study this study adopts basic qualitative study as a research strategy. Besides, this study utilised the inductive approach to develop a richer theoretical view than the current theory on the context of the subject matter. The study found the challenges encountered by the working women during remote work and explored the support they perceived during the remote work. Moreover, this study discovered the perceived supports that bring a positive attitude to managing the challenges and maintaining work-life balance during remote work. Besides, this research uncovered that working women perceived a lack of organizational support which had a negative impact on their physical and mental well-being. Besides, this study's results provide deep insight for society and organizations to understand the perspective and experience of working women towards remote work in terms of their challenges and the effect of their perceived support.

Keywords: *Work-Life Balance (WLB), Perceived Support, Family Support, Organisation Support, Work from Home (WFH)*

1.0 Introduction

Globally, Covid-19 brought a huge changeover to a human lifestyle where working remotely fully emphasized human activities. According to Berg et al. (2020), 260 million employees across the globe

were pushed to work from home (WFH) permanently during the Covid-19 lockdown and economists estimate around 42% of the US labour force are WFH as full time currently (Pitrelli, 2020). Moreover, Lund et al. (2020) mentioned both employers and employees encounter issues and challenges to ensure work productivity and work-life balance (WLB) respectively by remote working.

Hence, most companies globally implement WFH policies to ensure productivity and ensure WLB of their employees. As remote working is prolonged throughout the pandemic period, various companies implemented the WFH policy. Google announced until mid of the year 2021, employees do not need to return to the office and provided flexible working arrangements for their workforce (Lomas, 2020). Despite that, even employers implement WFH policies to ensure WLB of employees, from employees' perspective they still face various physical and mental challenges by working remotely, especially women.

Globally, on average women spend 4 hours 22 minutes on unpaid work whereas during the Covid-19 pandemic, it extended to 15 hours per week because women are restricted by the cultural gender gap and women are accountable for household responsibilities such as childcare, house chores (Catalyst, 2021). Therefore, married working women bear an extra burden where they need to be productive in their office work and engage in household responsibilities concurrently during remote working. According to Coury et al. (2020), the Covid-19 crisis negatively impacted women where it created "double shift work" for working women/mothers.

In Malaysia, the WFH concept became widespread after the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) that imposed by the Malaysian government. During the pandemic situation, organizations pondered on the cost structure, business strategies, and work procedures (Goh, 2020) and expected in the future, WFH would be an option that would be fully embraced by employees in Malaysia. Even though the WFH concept was fascinating and offered some advantages, the WFH concept and situation is unworkable for many employees, especially for working women as they encounter various challenges and this impacts their well-being and WLB (Bernama, 2020; Said, 2020). Besides, working women felt that supportive family members and employers would be helpful to manage the challenges else it would be a double task, particularly for those having children below the age of five (Said, 2020).

Working women, especially married women, uphold family responsibilities while concurrently seeking to sustain the work productively during WFH. Besides, by WFH, working women might not perceive support from their families or organizations to manage the challenges through remote working. Across the globe, their efforts to manage and balance between profession and life during remote work prove to be challenging for working women, including in Malaysia. According to UNDP (2020) in Malaysia, teleworkers are worried that there are no official working hours and are required to work all round the clock. Working women sustain to be productive but (40% vs 20%) reflected with the high domestic burden on women than men. However, these challenges could be tackled with organization support, family support, and other support to enhance the career development of working women during WFH ("Understanding the pandemic's impact on working women," 2020; Said, 2020; UNDP, 2020). Nevertheless, data shows women in the labour force sustained productivity while facing challenges during WFH and have different perspectives on the concept of remote working culture. UNDP (2020) illustrated that employees need more technical and material support from their employers. However, working women need more care and support in terms of physical, mental, and emotional during remote work which aids women to neglect work-life strain.

Several studies conducted on remote work indicated that women faced several challenges that show their work-life strain during remote work. According to Adisa et al. (2021), role conflicts arise during remote work and lockdown phase where British women mentioned that domestic workloads interfered

with work and had an imbalance between work and life. The significant reason behind this scenario would be women taking on multiple roles such as house chores, childcare which affect their WLB (Grünberg & Matei, 2019). Besides, mandatory full-time remote work would bring emotional stress and exhaustion when work interfered with family, workload pressure, etc.,. This revealed that women are the most affected gender because of personal life interference during remote work (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020; Bhumika, 2020). Besides, WFH during the pandemic situation creates a gender gap in work satisfaction and work productivity where women reported low productivity and job satisfaction. Additionally, the researchers acknowledge that trends towards gender equity in the workplace might be reversed due to these changes (Feng & Savani, 2020). However, several reports on organizational support, family and social support help to reduce the burden on women's responsibilities and enhance WLB (Adisa et al., 2021).

Prior studies documented challenges such as roles conflicts, emotional states, work-life strains of working women towards remote working in countries such as the US, UK, India. However, there is a lot of literature on the perceived support by working women to manage the challenges of remote work. However, past research does not concentrate on challenges encountered by working women during remote work in Malaysia. Besides, past research has not emphasized support perceived by working women and the effect of perceived support in managing the challenges and maintaining WLB during remote work in Malaysia. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study focus on challenges faced by married working women and perceived support during remote work in Malaysia. Additionally, this study concentrates on the perceived supports that affect working women to manage the work challenges as well as to maintain WLB during remote work in Malaysia. Therefore, three research questions were established to achieve the purpose of this study.

1.1 Research Questions

RQ1: What are the challenges faced by working women during remote work in Malaysia?

RQ2: What are the supports perceived by the working women during remote work in Malaysia?

RQ3: How do the perceived supports affect working women to manage the challenges and maintain work-life balance during remote work in Malaysia?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Remote Work and Working Women

As in past decades, in the industrialized world, the transformation in the pattern of work and employment with the advent of advanced technology and transmission to the virtual organization is continuously witnessed by the organizations (Webster & Randle, 2016). Currently, the novel coronavirus pushed most organizations towards remote work with the support of ICT's working culture. According to Halford (2005) states ICT utilization primarily supports employees working remotely, especially women in balancing competing work demands and family responsibilities. However, with advanced ICT utilization on remote work, it does not provide a WLB environment for working women because of the integration of family duties and work-life (Adisa et al., 2021).

Besides, the remote work concept during the Covid-19 pandemic brings the closeness of family relationships where women's caregiving role stimulates the healthy family life during the lockdown and working women appreciate this beautiful period (Crosbie and Moore, 2004; Adisa et al., 2021). Despite this, they do realize remote work pushed women to work double. Apart from house chores and

childcare, women personally end up with no rest and no personal space during WFH (Crosbie and Moore, 2004). Therefore, working women being mothers and wives, their role as caregivers prioritizes lesser regarding their health and well-being. Besides, current remote work expands long working hours (Min, 2020), where women encounter challenges to balance work and house responsibilities.

Besides, every individual employee seeks job satisfaction when they perform a job and expect to maintain productivity. Job satisfaction is a relative aspect of an individual's overall feeling about a job and where the job is performed; additionally, researchers mentioned that four factors such as physical, psychological, financial, and technological could influence job satisfaction (Ramchandran and Hemapriya, 2019; Bhattarai, 2020). In India, the current crisis increases the workload in terms of job and household duties leading to work pressure. In addition, two factors such as marital status and the dynamic nature of family impact the female employees' job satisfaction during WFH (Shaikh et al., 2021). Besides, researchers found in the US, women's work productivity and job satisfaction decrease dramatically than men during WFH (Feng & Savani, 2020). Therefore, the sustainability of job satisfaction and work productivity during remote work is based on physical and mental support that working women perceived from organizations and families would drive women to focus on their work.

2.2 Challenges Faced by Working Women Towards Remote Work

2.2.1 Increase in Role Conflicts

According to Bem (1994), Gutek et al. (1991) state that primarily women hold most of the households and childcare. This is reliable with gender role theory which speculates that society classifies the family role as primary to women. Crosbie and Moore (2004) highlight there is a lack of differentiation between paid work and house chores because of the cultural difference and ethnic groups. As evidence from empirical research in India, during the lockdown, women have double work due to gender-specific roles and they struggle to balance between their professional and personal lives (Bhumika, 2020).

Besides, another empirical research stated that British working women became "assistant teachers" for their children during the pandemic. During the lockdown, the rise in family duties and work resulted in the proliferation of role conflicts (Adisa et al., 2021). Women involved in multiple roles concurrently in the same place face depletion of their time and energy which are stressors for role conflicts. According to Del Boca et al. (2020), there has been increased participation of men in domestic chores, but there is also unbalanced distribution of work during the pandemic as the empirical research on Italian women affirms that extra work was borne by women during WFH.

As women act in different roles such as wife, mother and daughter-in-law, they feel that their roles are unacknowledged by people around them. This makes them feel undervalued and it is increasingly difficult to manage the domestic system and professional obligations at the same place and time (Venkataraman & Venkataraman, 2020). However, Adisa et al. (2021) affirm that there has been role enhancement whereby performing multitasking engendered a sense of satisfaction for the women when concerning positive relationships and closeness with family members and positive outcomes by reigniting family values. Hence, even though there has been increased role demand with expectations and the absence of good working conditions, women require positive support to enhance their WLB and to manage these challenges during remote work.

2.2.2 Working Women Towards Emotional Exhaustion

According to Bhumika (2020), during remote work especially during the pandemic, there was emotional exhaustion experienced by the working women because of juggling between family responsibilities and work obligations. One of the factors is women are portrayed as a multitasker, which proved in a survey

that most of the participants believed women are better than men at multitasking (Szameitat et al., 2015). However, Buser and Peter (2012) argued that women struggle when forced to multitask and do not prefer to do that when there has an option to perform multitask. Nevertheless, working women carry out multitasking during the pandemic or WFH to sustain their work and personal life regardless of the intensity of family and work demands (Adisa et al., 2021).

Working women apply multitasking skills which facilitate them to maintain their personal and professional life, but the interference of personal life with work is double-bind for working women during remote work, especially during this pandemic which leads to emotional exhaustion (Bhumika, 2020; Venkataraman & Venkataraman, 2020). Besides, infrequent salaries or lacking benefits during pandemic increased the financial insecurity of working women drives emotional exhaustion such as pressure, stress, etc (Venkataraman & Venkataraman, 2020; “Understanding the pandemic’s impact on working women,” 2020). Emotional exhaustion or emotional disturbance can be influenced by work-life conflicts (Liu et al., 2014) where women face such emotional challenges to sustain their work productivity and family obligations during remote work, particularly in the lockdown phase.

2.3 Required Support by Women

According to Jamal et al. (2021), exhaustion and stress are influenced by workload pressure, task interdependence, professional isolation, and family interference. The authors affirm that the presence of autonomy, flexible schedule and efficient technology enhance the employee’s WLB, job performance and job satisfaction, as well improved well-being. Besides, Deloitte company suggests employers should provide flexible work schedules, leading with empathy and trust, mentorship, rewards, and promotion to ensure work productivity and WLB to working women during remote work (“Understanding the pandemic’s impact on working women,” 2020). Besides, employers should concern with employee emotions and psychological safety which is influenced by social comparison of emotional resources. A supportive supervisor with participative leadership aids to reduce the emotional exhaustion experienced by an employee and this leadership skill can contribute to the psychological well-being of an employee during the WFH (Bhumika, 2020). Employers should treat and provide emotional support and autonomy through flexible work arrangements, appreciation, trust and empathy which drive towards high psychological safety for employees including working women.

Besides, several researchers mentioned that social support through family leads to reduce emotional stress (Gambin et al., 2021). Bhumika (2020) acknowledges that specific gender roles in specific cultures or societies drive women to wrestle between profession and life. Family members could contribute to sharing the burden of women with family related tasks and responsibilities. Such support would be greatly helpful and create a positive impact on working women in remote work. Besides, some men willingly participate in childcare, however, they are not so interested in doing house chores (Del Boca et al., 2020). Moreover, in some societies, the working women felt that their efforts and sacrifice during the pandemic in terms of carrying out family responsibilities is unappreciated by family members (Venkataraman & Venkataraman, 2020). Therefore, working women need support and appreciation from their family members to enhance their family relationships while simultaneously growing well in their careers.

2.4 Maintaining Work-Life Balance (WLB)

Essentially, the coexistence of work, family and individual needs is known as Work-Life Balance (WLB). Grady and McCarthy (2008) studied how working mothers maintain their WLB in their hectic schedules by constantly struggling with their motherhood. The researchers believe that WLB can achieve through planning and coordinating personal life along with the reliance on the support system

in the workplace. As married working women need both social (family) and organisational support to balance their work-life and family-life as when they work remotely. According to Schueller-Weidekamm and Kautzky-Willer (2012), married working women need mentoring programs, coaching and support from their partner or other well-wishers as this would help working women to improve their skills, well-being and can establish WLB. The working women need balanced support from both organizations and families to improve their career development.

Adisa et al. (2021) stated that reduction of work-family conflicts leads to better WLB. Mostly, working mothers have been trying and seeking to reduce the clash between work and family demands. However, the WFH concept leads to severe role conflicts and tension between roles for working women. To maintain individual WLB allocation, the interaction of different resources such as time, decision making, emotional resources, social resources are important for working women to maintain the WLB during remote work (Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012). Generally, availability of support, family demands, career expectation differ for every working woman (mothers) (Chalosfky, 2003). Therefore, the general identification of what satisfies working women regarding work-life and family life would lead to establishing WLB during remote working.

2.5 Underpinning Theories

2.5.1 Role Theory

Turner (2001) stated the role theory addresses the construction of social behaviours on individual and collective levels. Moreover, the role theory provides an understanding of the relationship among macro, micro and intermediate levels in a society. Role differentiation is defined as the tendency of actions and sentiments to be differentiated into roles by sorting and separating different actions and sentiments and blending them into different roles (Turner, 2001). Therefore, this theory can relate where commonly women's role is blended with doing house chores, childcare, looking up family needs whereas men need to seek money for family needs.

Both women and men perform multiple roles that bring both positive and negative outcomes, and the role theory suggests that both men and women handle both natural and unnatural roles (Barnett et al., 1992). For instance, women's natural role is being mothers, wives and the unnatural role is associated with being an employee, whereas men's natural role is being breadwinners or employees and their unnatural role is connected with the responsibilities as father and husband (Barnett et al., 1992). Moreover, inter-role conflicts raised as women are associated with paid employment and managing their natural roles which lead to work-family conflicts (Kanter, 1993). As women engage in multiple roles, they find it difficult to assign resources to each role to achieve optimal satisfaction for all involved (Thornthwaite, 2004). The issue of long working hours for women and their linkage to negative outcomes such as diminishing energy, strain, contradictory behaviours coupled with their performance in the family role is the elementary fundamental to work-family conflicts (Barnett et al., 1992).

Hence, this theory provides an understanding of women's natural role as caregivers and caretakers of the family, the multiple roles held by working women, the challenges they encounter to sustain WLB and how to reduce work-family conflicts during remote work. Therefore, this theory provides support to the statements regarding women's roles in society, along with the reflection of challenges faced by working women during remote work.

2.5.2 Organizational Support Theory

Organizational Support Theory (OST) addresses the employee's perception of their organization where employees trust that their organization values, their contributions and caring for their well-being

(Eisenberger et al., 1986). As the organization expects the commitment of the employees, the same applies to employees who expect commitment and concern towards them. Additionally, to enhance the OST, researchers improve with four theoretical themes such as concerns on employee well-being, non-traditional workers, international and cross-cultural issues, and developments tied to the use of multilevel modelling (Baran et al., 2011). The consideration of employees' well-being by the organization aids employees to escape from emotional exhaustion. Apart from formal policies, the organizational support for family appears even enhance the employee's attitudes (Demirtaş et al., 2017). Hence, this theory would help further reflect on how support from the organization, supervisor, the manager is perceived by working women during remote work and how the perceived supports affect working women to manage the challenges and achieve WLB.

3.0 Research Methodology

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the research design is outlined to collect, measure and analyse the data to answer the question raised in the research. There are two types of business research such as applied and basic research. This study adapts basic research because it supports generating and expanding knowledge and understanding regarding the researcher's interested phenomena (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This study adopts the "research onion" as a supporting methodological method for the further process, techniques and approaches. For this study, the researcher adopts the philosophy of interpretivism as a foundation of the research and an inductive approach was utilised in developing the research questions. Moreover, the nature of this research is based on an exploratory study that provides the evaluation of this qualitative study. Furthermore, for this qualitative study, the non-probability sampling method was used to collect the data from nine participants to establish the purpose of this study. This study is cross-sectional research that was conducted to collect primary data through semi-structured interviews and transcribing, coding and thematic analysis was utilised for data processing and analysis.

4.0 Research and Findings

There are a total of 9 participants that participated in this study and the participants were all married working women or working mothers who have full-time positions in private and public sectors and also currently working remotely in Klang Valley. The data collected from the participants will aid to understand the complexities and support in working women/mothers' life.

Moreover, the themes were discovered as part of the challenges faced by working women/mothers and perceived support that could help married working women to manage the challenges as well as to maintain WLB during remote work. This is what created the basis of the data analysis performed in this research. Besides, three research questions were established to gather data from the respective participants which established 14 themes in total. These 14 themes are categorized according to the research questions where 6 themes were categorized under research question 1, 4 themes emerged in research question 2 and lastly, 4 themes were demonstrated to answer research question 3.

4.1 Themes formed under Research Question 1

What are the challenges faced by working women during remote work in Malaysia?

Emotional and Physical Exhaustion

This study found that work-family interference, never-ending routines, anxious feeling about their own and family health are factors that cause emotional and physical exhaustion in working women during remote work. These findings were similar to findings by Bhumika (2020) and Venkataraman and

Venkataraman (2020) which stated that the interference of both attributes in the same place are stressors that affect emotional health. However, the literatures have yet to indicate the anxious feeling of working mothers in term of their own and family members' physical health which creates an emotional disturbance for working mother during this pandemic. Thus, this study found working mothers felt exhaustion, frustration, stress, emotionally disturbed when they carry both huge responsibilities and roles simultaneously while they WFH.

Work-life balance

Another prominent theme discussed by the participants was work-life balance. This study understands that working women's work-life balance has been impacted in terms of juggling between dual roles, multitasking, family members depending on the women. These attributes impact working women WLB during remote work. Though the participants varied by job role, sectors and demographics, the role of a wife and mother cannot be replaced by any concepts or situations which was demonstrated in the role theory. Adisa et al. (2021) clarified that working women during the lockdown phase encountered a proliferation of role conflicts due to handling both professional and personal lives together and stated that multitasking provides positive outcomes. However, the findings of this study show that, even though multitasking provides positive outcomes, the reality is the integration of work duties and domestic responsibilities handled by working mothers is a major challenge. Besides, this study found that working mothers are faced with both family and work duties during the remote work phase. This results in no personal space or personal development being achieved by them as they are unable to spend their own time, especially during the pandemic and WFH environment, which was similar to the finding of Crosbie and Moore (2004).

Isolation

Isolation is one of the themes that emerged under research question 1. Working women highlighted that lack of communication and social relation leads to isolation. Therefore, they prefer more face-to-face communication instead of virtual communication. The finding of this research established that working women perceived that social well-being was affected and the interest in sharing lived experiences with known people was lacking while WFH. Jamal et al. (2021) addressed that professional isolation causes mental stress and exhaustion, but the literature is yet to signify the working women's emotional state in terms of isolation and loneliness as a challenge that is influenced by lack of social interaction during remote work. Therefore, this study revealed that isolation due to lack of social relations is a challenge encountered by working women during remote work in Malaysia which can affect their mental health and job performance.

Distraction and Interruption During Work

This study found that working women faced challenges such as distraction and interruption during remote work, especially working mothers with small kids since the kids depend on the mother. Besides, other background noises that arise at home such as other family members' meetings, children's online classes, and even neighbourhood noise are factors that cause distraction and interruption while WFH. These kinds of factors affect working women's concentration on the job and this is a challenge. The finding of this research is fairly related to the study of Ramchandran and Hemapriya (2019); Bhattarai (2020), who highlighted that job satisfaction can be influenced by the four factors such as physical, psychological, financial, and technological factors. This research has proven that physical & psychological elements such as distractions and interruption by their children or by other social actors can affect working mothers' concentration during remote work it might affect their job performance.

Besides, this study also found that environmental factors such as noisy environment can affect employees' concentration on work including working women.

High Expectations and Workloads

This study revealed that long working hours, high expectations and workloads from both domestic and job duties create mental pressure, exhaustion, and this leads to a rise in role conflicts for working women. These findings were coherent with the study by Shaikh et al. (2021) who clarified that rise in work demands and duties leads to mental pressure that can affect the job satisfaction of an employee. In addition, Barnett et al. (1992) exhibit the issue of long working hours for women and the linkage to negative outcomes such as diminishing energy are one of the fundamental elements of work-family conflicts. This study found this kind of situation made the working women bear the challenges, even though they found it create a bad impact on their physical and mental health.

Poor Technology Facility and Knowledge

This theme focused on poor knowledge of digital transformation during remote work as a minor challenge that is faced by specific generations. Participants who belong to Generation X have difficulty handling the digital transformation during WFH. This study found that lack of facilities will cause a negative impact on work productivity. Working women mentioned that the absence of these flaws would help enhance work productivity and performance during remote work. Halford (2005) evaluated ICT utilization and the support facilities provided to working women to balance competing work demands and family responsibilities during remote work. However, the literature has yet to indicate the lack of knowledge of working women especially women under Generation X about the digital transformation. The lack of facilities may affect the work productivity and performance of the working women during remote work. Thus, this study highlights these poor technology facilities and knowledge as a challenge faced by working women during remote work.

4.2 Themes under Research Question 2

What are the supports perceived by the working women during remote work in Malaysia?

Family and Social Support

This study pulls out that working women perceived physical and emotional support from family members, especially from their spouses and mentioned that social support is equally significant to working women's life during remote work. Participants agreed that physical support such as sharing domestic responsibilities, childcare by their family members and getting emotional support from them encourages them personally during remote work. Del Boca et al. (2020) clarified that men are more interested to participate in childcare activities than house chores. Nevertheless, from this study, most of the participants agreed that the other family members including their spouses, understand the working women's situation and equally shared their burden during the remote work phase. However, the outcome of this study contradicts the study of Venkataraman and Venkataraman (2020) which stated that during the pandemic, working women's sacrifice and efforts was unappreciated by family members. Therefore, this study revealed support statements of participants who acknowledged that they perceived positive emotional support from their family members during remote work. Through this study, working women stated that social support is important as well to balance their work and life responsibilities such as nursery support to take care of their kids.

Organization Support

This study found that organisational understanding, empathy, emotional support and flexible working hours is significantly important for working women to manage their career and family life together during remote work. In addition, this research revealed some organizations encourage good teamwork and communication through virtual platforms which are required to sustain employees including working women's job performance while WFH. These findings were found consistent with Ghasemi (2021) under the WLB literature. Deloitte company advised other organizations to provide flexibility, empathy and trust, mentorship, etc components to ensure work productivity and to provide WLB for working women during remote work ("Understanding the pandemic's impact on working women," 2020). This study found that support of employees including working women's well-being by the management enhances job satisfaction and WLB during remote work.

Self-Support

One of the significant themes that emerged and were discussed by participants in this study is self-support. The independence of working women was one of the new aspects found in this study. Self-motivation, self-caring and self-management are categorized under self-support. Balancing both family and career during remote work was a great challenge, but participants illustrated that self-motivation and self-caring are important keys to handling the challenges. This study found that self-support in terms of self-motivation, self-management, self-caring are vital attributes to handling dual role responsibilities during remote work. This finding was similar to the study by Ghasemi (2021) who stated that self-relaxation is one of the strategies to achieve WLB. However, this study added further that self-motivation and self-management are also important keys to handling both responsibilities and tasks together while working remotely.

Lack of Organization Support

This study found that working women sacrifice their time and energy on untimed work because of the misconception of remote working by their organization. This study found that few participants perceived a lack of trust and flexibility in their organization. Therefore, to ensure employees satisfaction participants recommended that the organization, superiors and peers should provide trust, empathy and flexibility for employees, especially for working women because working women have multiple roles and responsibilities that need to handle simultaneously during the remote working phase. The result from this study is highly related to the study of Lee (2021) who clarified that the supervision with downward social comparison, presents emotions such as empathy and trust for the employees and the contradict comparison presents emotions such as unfairness, stress, anxiety for the employees. The upwards social comparison emotions trigger and affect the working women's psychological safety while WFH. Besides, as mentioned under the OST theory, this study revealed that working women are able to perceive whether their organization is concerned with their well-being and WLB (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Thus, this study found that few working women realize there has lacking support from their management, although some of these participants state that their organization provides webinars and motivational talks. However, basic support such as trust, empathy and flexibility are required attributes to sustain the psychological safety of working women during remote work.

4.3 Themes under Research Question 3

How do the perceived supports affect working women to manage the challenges and maintain work-life balance during remote work in Malaysia?

Time Management

This study found that three perceived supports are vastly and equally valuable because if there has one lacking at least the other two supports would be there for working women which enhances their time allocation and create a positive effect to handle both dual role responsibilities under the same roof. Self-management, family support and understanding and organisation support in terms of providing flexibility, understanding and ICT support enhance the working women's time management to handle their roles and responsibilities effectively and ability to manage their time during remote work. This study was coherent with the study of Jamal et al. (2021) who affirms that the presence of autonomy, flexible working schedule and ICT support enhance employee WLB, job satisfaction and well-being. However, the literature has yet to indicate the additional support such as family support, and self-time allocation and flexible working hours are essential components to manage work and life together. In addition, this theme establishes that with the help of the perceived support it reduces the role and work-family conflicts that could arise as a challenge among working women during remote work.

Focused on both Personal and Work Responsibilities

This study revealed family support affected the working women in a positive way which help them to concentrate on their career development and job duties during remote work. Besides, the involvement and sharing of household responsibilities by other family members reduce the burden of working women during remote work. Moreover, the organization's support enhances the working women's role to concentrate on their personal and family priorities and obligations. Thus, the study exposed that both supports are equally needed by working women to create a beneficial impact to balance work-life during remote work. These findings are consistent with the literature that establish the work-life balance. Grady and McCarthy (2008) stated that coordination and planning of personal life with the support of an organization drives to achieve a WLB. Similarly, this study demonstrates the attributes of support from the organization such as flexible working hours, supportive and understanding management are valuable and beneficial for working women to engage and concentrate on their obligation during the remote work phase. Therefore, the perceived supports are vital for working women to balance their personal and work life during remote work.

Lessen Emotional and Physical Burden

This theme discussed and focused on the participants who perceived self, family, social and organisational support. This study claimed that perceived supports from these parties create a great impact on their physical and mental health. Working women understand self-caring would enhance their physical and mental health by reducing physical and mental stress. This study found the emotional support perceived by their family and sharing their present feelings with them facilitate recovery from emotional setbacks. Also, sharing the household activities with the family members helps working women with physical burdens during remote work. These highlights that both emotional and physical support from the family enhance the working women's physical and mental health while working from home. In addition, a reduction in the level of emotional and physical strains provides confidence to working women to manage both dual role-responsibilities under the same roof. Moreover, the organisation supports in terms of providing facilities, flexibilities, well-being related programmes and other emotional support and the management's with employee well-being that creates a good impact on employee satisfaction and encourages working women to sustain good mental and physical health.

These findings are consistent with the study by Grady and McCarthy (2008) and Schueller-Weidekamm and Kautzky-Willer (2012). The researchers studied and clarified that support systems, coaching, mentoring and emotional support are required elements for working women to establish good well-

being and WLB. However, this study added that apart from emotional support, physical health is equally important to be concerned and working mothers' burden and domestic workloads need to be shared among family members. This study claimed that both physical and mental health can be enhanced with the help of self, family and organization support and with these supports and understanding can establish good well-being for working women.

Rise in Physical and Emotional Strain

This study highlights that there has risen in physical and emotional strain when working women perceived a lack of support. This theme was one of the aspects explored in this study when participants revealed that lack of support from their management causes more workloads and emotional stress while performing remote work. Participants who perceived a lack of trust, empathy and understanding from their organization recommended that working women required such support from the organization to overcome emotional exhaustion during remote work. Bhumika (2020) illustrated that to reduce the emotional exhaustion experienced by an employee with supportive management practice participative leadership. Similarly, this study found that without supportive management, the working women experienced emotional exhaustion which greatly impact the working women's psychological well-being while WFH.

Moreover, this study additionally found that working women experienced tiredness when handling their children alone while WFH. Some participants expressed that when their spouses are working, they have to handle the child alone while managing their job duties and expressed as it is a nuclear family both husband and wife need to depend on each other. Therefore, this kind of situation makes working women handle both roles which cause physical tiredness. Hence, this study found that organisational support and family support are much needed to support working women during remote work.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, organizations and other social actors must consider and hold a significant level of commitment to promote and support a comprehensive WLB for working women during remote work. Moreover, with reference to the result of this study, the government bodies and human resource departments should examine and enhance the organizational policies to ensure a WLB environment without any work-family conflicts for working women, especially during remote work. As the remote working environment is an option for the future workforce, the government should support and build effective guidelines, practices, and policies to create a beneficial WLB environment for working women. As this study was explored in a qualitative way, the results of this study presented a comprehensive flow of information and permitted the establishment of interviews with a sample size of participants. However, this research consists of several limitations that are important for the researchers to be aware of. As this study was conducted during the MCO period implemented by the Malaysian government due to the reason for the Covid-19 pandemic, the interview was conducted online. That made it relatively tough to understand the body language of the participants when compared with the physical interview. Therefore, in future studies, it is suggested to conduct a physical interview to overcome these barriers and limitations to understand more about the participants' non-verbal cues and behaviours. Besides, the thoughts and beliefs based on lived experience would be varied in terms of locations and this study was limited to participants within Klang Valley, Malaysia. Future studies could be quantitative research conducted with large sample data that involves participants in different locations, states, and industries in Malaysia. Moreover, as this study focussed on married working women with children, the challenges and the perceived support might vary from the perceptions and experiences of single mothers. Thus, future researchers can cater to single mothers from different industries, demographics, and job positions to discover their perspectives and lived experiences. This

would help produce comprehensive insight into the perception, challenges, perceived support and its impact on single mothers during remote work.

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