

DETERMINANTS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE FOR WORKING MOTHERS

Wan Nur Nalisa Burdhan¹
Hatinah Abu Bakar²
Zalinawati Abdullah³

¹Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Malaysia,
(E-mail: nalisaburdhan@uitm.edu.my)

²Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Malaysia,
(E-mail: hatin463@uitm.edu.my)

³Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Malaysia,
(E-mail: zalin5026@uitm.edu.my)

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Abstract: *In recent years, work-life balance issues especially for working mothers have become a prominent concern in the society and emphasis on work-life balance policies has emerged due to change in demographic composition of workforce. The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between family responsibility and childcare arrangement on the work-life balance. A purposive non-probability sampling technique method was used to select the respondents. Based on the G Power calculation, this study requires a minimum sample size of 96 working mothers in Malaysia. The findings revealed that the family responsibility has a significant impact meanwhile childcare arrangement had no significant impact on the work-life balance. In addition, this study provides discussion and recommendations for the future reference that has been applied based on developed countries that could help working mothers in Malaysia to achieve the real work-life balance in harmonious way.*

Keywords: *Working mother, work-life balance, family responsibility, childcare arrangement*

Introduction

According to Dhingra and Dhingra (2021), the work-life balance (WLB) of an individual is said to be stable when he or she can accomplish the many duties allocated to him or her at work and home. However, becoming a mother is a prime stage in every woman's life cycle and the conflict of having to take care of children and to fulfil job requirements usually leads to most working mothers opting to withdraw from employment (Weis, 2016). Malaysia aims to become a high-income country by increasing work opportunities for men and women alike. Promoting women in the labour market is crucial in Malaysia, as the country has a lower percentage of working women compared to other Asian countries, while having a larger percentage of female graduates each year (Hassan, 2020). Malaysia's female labour force participation percentage has increased dramatically in recent years, from 50.7% in 2015 to 52% in 2019. However, because to the Covid-19 pandemic, it falls to 51.7% in 2020 and drops to 51.5% in 2023, remaining low in comparison to other nations in the area (Department of Statistic, 2020). This falls well short of the 12th Malaysia Plan's goal of achieving at least 59% female labor-force participation by 2025.

Finding a work-life balance, on the other hand, is a difficult undertaking for women, particularly a working mother. According to a study conducted by the Malaysian Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme in 2014, approximately 67 percent of married women professionals who took part in the survey chose to quit their jobs to oversee their children or to obey their husband's request to leave the workforce. Islahi (2017) revealed that the work itself did not significantly impact working mothers. Instead, the dual responsibilities at home and work intensify their stress. A lack of personal time and social interactions further exacerbates this stress. The study showed that full-time working mothers exhibited a 40% increase in chronic stress symptoms linked to hormones and blood pressure. Even with reduced hours or job flexibility, their stress level remained high at 37%, as noted by Chandola in 2019.

Literature Review

Work-Life Balance

According to Omar et al. (2022), almost all working mothers strive for and seek to attain work-life balance. Work-life balance refers to a person's degree of satisfaction in several positions, as well as his capacity to maintain a feeling of equilibrium and harmony in his life. The term "work-life balance" denotes to a person's capacity to manage work-related time, emotions, and attitudes while still fulfilling family commitments (Irawanto et al., 2021). Work-life balance is the allocation of time and energy between work and personal life to decrease stress and increase quality of life (Putri et al., 2024). Jabeen and Jabeen (2024) mentioned that it is critical for sustaining mental and physical health, improving job satisfaction, and lowering burnout. The study was done by choosing 100 working mothers from Malaysia's National Sports Council. The findings revealed that working mothers struggle to balance workplace responsibilities with family commitments. Stress management, workplace culture, and the employer's role are all important factors in assisting working mothers to achieve work-life balance.

Family Responsibility and Work-Life Balance

Family responsibility refers to women's obligations and duties to their families, which may include caring, household management, and other familial activities. This idea is especially important in the setting of female leadership aspirations since it can considerably affect a woman's capacity to seek leadership posts (Tjahjana et al., 2024). Meanwhile, family

responsibility and work-life balance are a state that employees experience in the form of connection to the workforce and family, so that they feel pleased with their duties at home and roles at work (Vernia & Senen, 2022). Family responsibility also refers to an individual's duties to their family members, which may include caring for children, ageing parents, or other relatives who require assistance. This notion is critical to understanding the rights and safeguards for employees who have such obligations in the workplace (Polozhshnyk, 2022).

A study was conducted, and the findings indicate that family responsibility has a detrimental influence on work-life balance. Working mothers who are unsatisfied will experience an imbalance, which is both an issue and a big danger to their welfare and performance. According to Mowpia (2023), women in particular industries, such as banking and education, experience more significant challenges in balancing their duties, which frequently results in extended working hours and restricted personal time. Moreover, seven family-related variables, including marital status, spouse work status, children's status, number of children, family strength, family structure, and employee status has been looked in a study and found that care responsibility is the only factor that significantly influences working mothers' work-life balance levels, indicating that the obligations working mothers face in managing family responsibility differ (Luppi & Arpino, 2020).

H1: Family responsibility is positively related to work-life balance

Childcare Arrangement and Work-Life Balance

The term "childcare arrangement" refers to formal early childhood education services given by childcare centers. In Malaysia, these centers are intended to care for and educate young children, playing an important part in their early development. The Malaysian government aggressively encourages early childhood education, recognizing its relevance for children's development and learning (Yaty et al., 2015). Childcare arrangements influence family dynamics and children's general well-being. Families that struggle to get appropriate childcare may face greater stress, limiting their capacity to integrate into the society and create a stable environment for their children (Tapuwa et al., 2024). In addition, childcare arrangements are critical to helping working mothers achieve a better work-life balance. The daycare services allow them to focus on their professions without worrying about childcare. This assistance allows working mothers to devote time and attention to their professional obligations, resulting in better work performance and happiness (Matei et al., 2024).

A study is done to investigate the effects of childcare arrangement on working mothers' satisfaction with work-family balance. The study looked at the effects of paid and unpaid childcare arrangement on working mothers' happiness with work-life balance and the obstacles they confront. The study revealed that working mothers who utilize both paid and unpaid childcare are the most satisfied with work-family balance, and those who encounter difficulties in finding inexpensive and flexible paid nursery have a lower level of satisfaction with work-family balance.

H2: Childcare arrangement is positively related to work-life balance

Methodology

This study was a descriptive study that focuses on working mothers in Malaysia. The data were collected using google form starting from 1st of March 2022 until 30th of May 2022. A purposive non-probability sampling technique was used with the general criteria which is, the

respondent must a be working woman with children. Based on the G Power calculation, the minimum sample size for this study is 96 of working mothers in Malaysia. However, this study has exceeded to 110 number of respondents. 110 responses were returned and useable for the final analysis using the structural equation model partial least square (SEM-PLS 4.0). The questionnaire was adopted and adapted from a few selected established questionnaires and measured with 5-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Work-life balance is measured from Fisher et al. (2009) and the family responsibility question was adapted from Herlin (2010) respectively.

Result and Discussion

Validity and Reliability Analyses

Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011) highlight the importance of assessing the quality of the measurement model is through convergent validity, which considers factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). In our study, all indicator loadings exceeded the threshold of 0.5 (see Table 1), indicating that each item reliably measures its intended construct. Additionally, AVE values ranged from 0.661 to 0.730, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.5, suggesting that the constructs capture more variance than measurement error. Furthermore, CR values ranged from 0.915 to 0.923, surpassing the threshold of 0.7, indicating high internal consistency. These results collectively demonstrate strong convergent validity, indicating that our measurement model effectively measures the intended constructs.

Table 1: Validity Test Result

| Construct | Items | Loading | CA | CR | AVE |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| Work-Life Balance (WLB) | WLB1 | 0.872 | 0.915 | 0.923 | 0.705 |
| | WLB2 | 0.896 | | | |
| | WLB3 | 0.888 | | | |
| | WLB4 | 0.829 | | | |
| | WLB6 | 0.859 | | | |
| | WLB7 | 0.675 | | | |
| Family Responsibility (FR) | FR1 | 0.865 | 0.907 | 0.909 | 0.730 |
| | FR2 | 0.888 | | | |
| | FR3 | 0.865 | | | |
| | FR4 | 0.850 | | | |
| | FR5 | 0.803 | | | |
| Childcare Arrangement (CCA) | CCA1 | 0.858 | 0.872 | 0.915 | 0.661 |
| | CCA2 | 0.776 | | | |
| | CCA3 | 0.879 | | | |
| | CCA4 | 0.837 | | | |
| | CCA5 | 0.702 | | | |

*AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CA: Cronbach Alpha; CR: Composite Reliability

According to Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015), the measurement model's discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. This method compares the correlations between different constructs (heterotrait) to the correlations within the same construct (monotrait). A threshold value of less than 0.85 has been suggested in the literature (Clark and Watson, 1995; Kline, 2011) to determine discriminant validity. Additionally, Voorhees, Brady, Calantone, and Ramirez (2016) proposed a more stringent

threshold of less than 0.90. In our study, the HTMT ratios presented in Table 2 are all below the recommended thresholds, indicating strong discriminant validity. This shows that our measurement model's components are diverse and measure various fundamental ideas.

Table 2: Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

| | WLB | FR | CCA |
|-----|-------|-------|-----|
| WLB | | | |
| FR | 0.885 | | |
| CCA | 0.430 | 0.523 | |

Structural Model

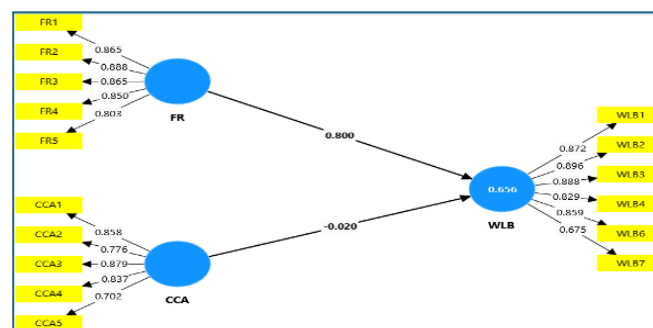


Figure 1: Structural Model

Predictive CVPAT should be used to evaluate PLS-SEM findings (Hair et al., 2022). The metric Q^2_{predict} measures a model's predictive power and is commonly used in regression and Partial Least Squares (PLS) research. Values greater than 0.5 suggest that the model has good predictive performance, but values closer to zero imply poor prediction. In our study, the number 0.656 (see Figure 1) represents the model's capacity to forecast new data, implying that the model has moderate-to-good predictive power. The high Q^2 Predict indicates that the model accurately predicts work-life balance.

Hypotheses Testing and Discussion

According to Hair et al. (2011), path analysis was used to evaluate the basic model, with R^2 values and the importance of path coefficients acting as major assessment criteria. Moreover, a good model should have an R^2 value of over 0.26 for endogenous latent variables (Cohen, 1988). In this study, the R^2 value was found to be 0.656 (see Figure 1), indicating that family responsibility and childcare arrangement can explain 65.6% of the variance in work-life balance among working mothers in Malaysia.

Table 3: Result of Direct Effect

| Direct Relationship | Hypothesis | Beta | Standard Deviation | T statistics | P Values | Result Hypothesis |
|---------------------|------------|--------|--------------------|--------------|----------|-------------------|
| FR -> WLB | H1 | 0.800 | 0.048 | 16.688 | 0.000 | Supported |
| CCA -> WLB | H2 | -0.020 | 0.076 | 0.263 | 0.793 | Not supported |

Next, the significance of hypotheses was assessed using path coefficients and the bootstrapping technique. The results revealed that the relationship between family responsibility and work-life balance was significant ($\beta=0.800$, $t=16.688$, $p<0.00$), while the relationship between childcare arrangement and work-life balance was not significant ($\beta=-0.020$, $t=0.263$, $p>0.00$). Therefore, H1 was supported, and H2 was not supported. In line with past researchers, Baker (2020) mentioned that working mothers were almost three times more likely than working men to be out of the labor force, with family responsibilities listed as the primary reason and childcare arrangement do not determine a person's work-life balance (Padma & Reddy, 2013). Family responsibilities encompass various aspects, such as caring for children, managing household chores, and attending to the needs of other family members.

Conclusion, Contribution, Limitation and Future Research Agenda

There are many factors that contribute to work-life balance. However, the determination of this study was to identify the factors influencing work-life balance among working mothers in Malaysia which includes family responsibility and childcare arrangement. Future research should divert the focus on other factors that may contribute to work-life balance such as economic aspects and nature of the work. Working mothers often bear a significant portion of these responsibilities, which can affect their ability to balance between work and personal life. Therefore, it is mandatory for the Human Resource Management for each of the organization to enhance the work-life balance policies. For example, providing a flexible working arrangement, such as part-time work, flextime, and telecommuting options allow working mothers to adapt their work schedules to better meet their family's needs, including childcare responsibilities. These initiatives could help Malaysia's governments to achieve the work-life balance as mentioned in the National Transformation 2050 (TN50) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, which aspires to guarantee healthy lifestyles and promote well-being for people of all ages.

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