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Working From Home – Why Aren't We Happier?

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Abstract

This study seeks to determine the impact of working from home policies due to COVID-19 restrictions towards work-life balance and job stress, and the effect of work-life balance and job stress on job satisfaction during the pandemic. It also approached the possibility of workload as a moderating variable between WFH and work-life balance, and WFH and job stress. Changes during the pandemic caused a difference in working conditions employees must adapt to. Using a regression analysis including 200 respondents of Indonesian employees, the results confirmed the relationships between WFH to work-life balance and job stress, and work-life balance and job stress towards job satisfaction. Workload did not have a moderating effect between WFH towards work-life balance or job stress.

Keywords: work from home, work-life balance, job stress, workload, job satisfaction.

Introduction

Prior to the pandemic, work from home (WFH) was a benefit for selected employees to have more allowance on personal time and space. It allows employees to have more control on their working pattern and schedules as well as a more familiar and comfortable working setup, something that is more likely to improve productivity through a more sustainable work-life balance (WLB) (Mustajab *et al.*, 2020).

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However, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the perspective of WFH. The Indonesian government forced offices to shut down and employees are forced to WFH no matter the nature of the job (Rizqo, 2021). Employees were unable to adapt to the sudden loss of separation between work and personal life, resulting in an inability to balance the two (Irawanto, Novianti & Roz, 2021). The overlap of work and life roles has pushed employees to be exposed to work overload, burnout, counterproductive work activity, and eventually job stress due to the lack of boundaries (Liu & Lo, 2017; Lourel, Ford, Gamassou, Gue'guen & Hartmann, 2009; Manalu, 2021; Palumbo, 2020). Job stress became a strong concern for Indonesian employees (Masyhuri, Pardiman & Siswanto, 2021). The sudden shift in working conditions created a lack of control for both companies and employees and made it difficult for companies to keep employees' job satisfactory levels high, and job stress levels low.

Previous studies proved the relationships of WFH affecting both job stress and WLB, and their impact on job satisfaction (Ahsan, Abdullah, Fie & Alam, 2009; Chao, Jou, Liao & Kuo, 2015; Fayyazi & Aslani, 2015; Mahardikawati & Ridha, 2019; Nurhasanah, Kalimin & Syaifuddin, 2019; Rani, Kamalanabhan & Selvarani, 2011). However, the pandemic caused WFH to no longer be a benefit but more of an obligation. It is imperative to redefine the relationships and research this subject within the context of COVID-19. Companies need to explore their options in maintaining employee satisfaction. Modifiable variables like employee-measured workload can be studied (Omar, Aluwi, Fauzi & Hairpuddin, 2020).

This study has the purpose to seek the relationships from WFH to job stress and WLB, whether workload moderates the two relationships, and to confirm the effect of job stress and WLB towards job satisfaction.

Literature review

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the extent of enjoyment seen through the positive attitude of employees towards their work (Robbins, Judge & Millett, 2015; Kristian & Ferijani, 2020). Bloom, Liang, Roberts & Ying (2015) reveals that home employees have high levels of satisfaction, and retention rates dropped by more than 50% from this. WFH was a factor that companies can consider for the better of productivity and work-life balance – a positive indicator towards job satisfaction (Irawanto et. al., 2021; Karácsony, 2021). However, high levels of job stress negatively affect job satisfaction (Hoboubi, Choobineh, Ghanavati, Keshavarzi & Hosseini, 2016; Mahardikawati & Ridha, 2019). The pandemic circumstance created role ambiguity, heavy workload, role conflicts, and additional time pressure, all of which made up job stress (Irawanto et al., 2021). The distinct environment and inability to balance work during a pandemic creates dissatisfaction from employees

when compelled to work from home (Faris, Aktaviana, Firmansyah & Apriliani, 2021; Zöllner & Sulíková, 2021).

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance (WLB) refers to the ability to manage between work and personal life with minimal role conflict (Agha, 2017; Clark, 2000; Ranjan & Khatke, 2021; Soomro, Breitnecker & Shah, 2018; Sudibjoa & Suwarli, 2020). Prior research suggests that attaining WLB improves job satisfaction (Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007; Souza-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000). Conversely, the imbalance of work-life fosters dissatisfaction among employees (Sudibjoa & Suwarli, 2020). The abrupt shift in the pandemic working conditions have impacted WLB due to the disappearance of boundaries between work and personal life.

H1: Work-Life Balance has a significant effect on Job Satisfaction.

Job Stress

Job stress occurs from working pressure that affects employees' emotions, mind, and condition (Hakim & Hidayat, 2018; Rivai & Sagala, 2011). Factors contributing to job stress include excessive workload, pressure and unfair attitude from the leader, conflicts between groups or individuals, unworthy rewards, and family issues (Hasibuan, 2014). Job stress contributes to work inefficiency, high turnover rates, a decrease in quality and quantity of operations, and poor job satisfaction and performance (Universari & Harsono, 2021). Hayes, Priestley, Iishmakhametoy & Ray (2020) mentioned that job stress levels had increased during the pandemic. A change in job stress may also affect its impact on employees' job satisfaction.

H2: Job Stress has a significant effect on Job Satisfaction.

Work From Home

The perspective of Work-From-Home (WFH) have different conclusions when related to variables that make up the productivity of a company. Studies have recommended WFH to be more accessible to employees, mentioned it as a 'win-win' solution to both employees and their employers, since it is seen as a benefit to increase job satisfaction (Bellmann & Hubler, 2020; Felstead & Henseke, 2017). However, other studies found that WFH increased job stress instead (Arwin, Ivone, Supriyanto & Sari, 2021; Irawanto *et al.*, 2021; Shepherd-Banigan, Bell, Basu, Booth-LaForce & Harris, 2016). A study mentioned the importance of planning and preparation pre-WFH period, where the COVID-19 outbreak forces companies to shift without preparations (Galanti, Guidetti, Mazzei, Zappalà & Toscano, 2021). The transition period of WFO to WFH as a benefit is necessary for it to work (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). These studies mentioned the importance of the

balance between work and home roles when switching over to WFH. However, previous studies saw a negative effect of WFH towards WLB (Elnanto & Suharti, 2021; Irawanto *et al.*, 2021; Palumbo, 2020).

H3: Work-From-Home has a significant effect on Work-Life Balance.

H4: Work-From-Home has a significant effect on Job Stress.

Workload

Workload is identified as the level of pressure and intensity of job tasks that must be completed based on the deadline (Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan & Roberts, 2007; Shah *et al.*, 2011). Idris, Dollard & Winefield (2010) stated that simultaneous work strain and deadline could lead to more stressful work, resulting in job dissatisfaction (Omar *et al.*, 2020; Ranjan & Khatke, 2021). With the blurred lines between work and home, WFH have increased perceived workload on employees. As it was studied as a significant factor of job stress (Madadzadeh, Barati & Asour, 2016), as well as a factor of WLB (Rizky & Afrianty, 2018; Syihabudhin, Nora, Juariyah, Hariri & Dhika, 2019), high workloads susceptibly caused stress, straining the WLB of employees. Additionally, workload has also been proved to be a moderating variable in several studies (Reuver, Voorde & Kilroy, 2019; Turgut, Schlachter, Michel & Sonntag, 2019).

H5: Workload moderates the effect of Work-From-Home on Job Stress.

H6: Workload moderates the effect of Work-From-Home on Work-Life Balance.

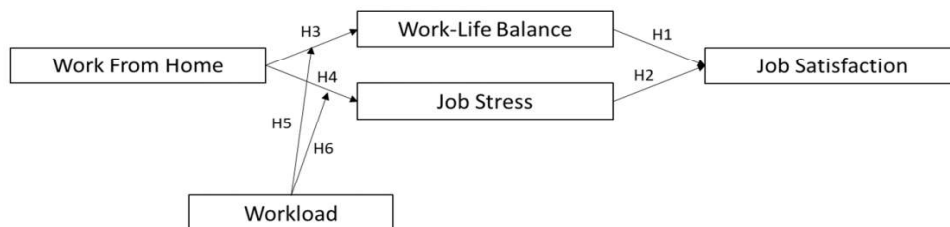


Figure 1. Research Model

Methodology

This study focuses on the variables WFH, job stress, WLB, job satisfaction and workload. WFH is measured by Neufeld & Fang's (2005) 10 items scale. Job stress is measured by a 6-item questionnaire adapted from Jamal & Baba (1992). WLB is assessed with 6 items adapted from Omar (2013), workload is determined using the adapted items from Bruin (2006), and job satisfaction is explained on a 5-item scale by Schriesheim & Tsui (1980). The data is collected through a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, taken once from active working employees in Indonesia

who have experienced WFH and office during the pandemic. A purposive sampling method is used. While this research should reach at least 190 individuals (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010), we managed to compile data of 200 respondents, processed using SEM-PLS.

Results

The questionnaire was dominated by females (55%), individuals in the 25 – 40 years old range (42.5%), singles (61.5%), employees in Jabodetabek area (75%), and employees in the banking industry (13.5%). There are 103 respondents (51.5%) who owns the position of staff, and most have worked for less than 3 years (42%). Most had incomes between IDR 5 million – 15 million (53%).

Table 1. Respondents' Characteristics

Characteristic	Items	Number	Percent
Gender	Female	110	55%
	Male	90	45%
Age	<25	66	33%
	25–40	85	42.5%
	41–55	43	21.5%
	>55	6	3%
Marital Status	Single	123	61.5%
	Married	77	38.5%
Office Location	Jabodetabek	150	75%
	Outside of Jabodetabek	50	25%
Industry	Technology	19	9.5%
	Banking	27	13.5%
	Telecommunication	13	6.5%
	Education	26	13%
	Accounting/Finance	18	9%
	E-Commerce	22	11%
	Engineering	10	5%
	Retail	15	7.5%
	Design	10	5%
	Entertainment	6	3%
	Insurance	5	2.5%
	Real Estate	4	2%

	Others	25	12.5%
Position	Staff	103	51.5%
	Supervisor	35	17.5%
	Manager	51	25.5%
	Director	9	4.5%
	C-Level	2	1%
Length of Work	<3 years	84	42%
	3–5 years	52	26%
	>5 years	64	32%
Average Income per Month	<IDR5 million	30	15%
	IDR5 million–15 million	106	53%
	IDR15 million–30 million	33	16.5%
	>IDR30 million	31	15.5%

Table 2. Mean, Convergent Validity, and Reliability

Variable	Item	Mean	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Job Satisfaction (JS)	JS1	2.71	0.804	0.599	0.880
	JS2	2.80	0.753		
	JS3	2.79	0.785		
	JS4	2.84	0.600		
	JS5	2.68	0.898		
Work From Home (WFH)	WFH1	2.79	0.717	0.527	0.908
	WFH2	2.41	0.821		
	WFH3	2.57	0.787		
	WFH4	2.46	0.691		
	WFH5	2.97	0.664		
	WFH6	2.84	0.793		
	WFH7	2.86	0.748		
	WFH9	2.78	0.585		
	WFH10	2.32	0.697		

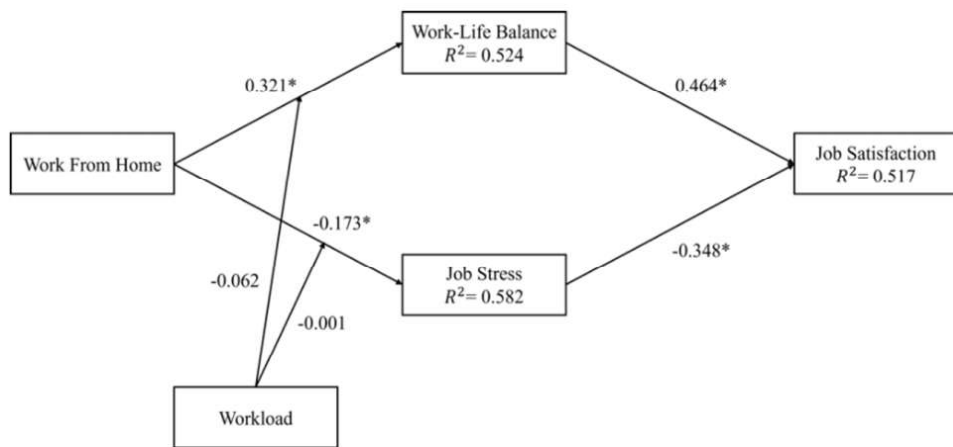
Workload (WL)	WL1	4.01	0.786	0.600	0.913
	WL2	4.10	0.697		
	WL4	3.98	0.802		
	WL5	3.95	0.659		
	WL6	4.08	0.768		
	WL7	3.94	0.834		
	WL8	3.97	0.857		
Work-Life Balance (WLB)	WLB1	2.58	0.854	0.782	0.956
	WLB2	2.41	0.862		
	WLB3	2.33	0.891		
	WLB4	2.50	0.908		
	WLB5	2.41	0.894		
	WLB6	2.64	0.896		
Job Stress (JST)	JST1	4.03	0.691	0.603	0.900
	JST2	3.76	0.775		
	JST3	3.84	0.663		
	JST4	3.59	0.823		
	JST5	3.94	0.868		
	JST6	3.92	0.819		

There are three assessments: the measurement model, the structural model, and the descriptive statistic. The factor loading values exceeded the validity parameter of 0.5, varying from 0.585 to 0.908 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The Composite Reliability (CR) values are greater than 0.6, ranging from 0.880 to 0.956, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are greater than 0.5, ranging from 0.527 to 0.782, and the values of the square root of AVE as discriminant validity are greater than the values of the correlated variables. The survey revealed low satisfaction and WFH metrics with a mean of 2.76 for JS and 2.66 for WFH. Other than that, the mean values of WLB, JST, and WL are subsequently at 2.48, 3.85, and 4.00.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

Variables	JS	JST	WFH	WLB	WL
JS	0.774				
JST	-0.607	0.777			
WFH	0.625	-0.481	0.726		
WLB	0.659	-0.558	0.565	0.884	
WL	-0.602	0.747	-0.463	-0.658	0.775

H1 and H3 are supported due to their positive path coefficients and p-values less than 0.05. H2 and H4 are also supported for their negative path coefficients and p-values less than 0.05. The structural model rejects H5 and H6. The R-squares for WLB and JST are 0.524 and 0.582, respectively, indicating that the variables WFH and WL can explain 52.4% of WLB and 58.2% of JST. The R-square of JS is 0.517, indicating that WFH, WL, WLB, and JST account for 51.7% of JS. With a value of 0.464, WLB had the largest influence on JS, followed by JST with a coefficient of -0.348. The independent variable has more effect towards WLB with a coefficient of 0.321 than towards JST with a coefficient of -0.173. It was discovered that the moderating variable, WL, did not affect WLB and JST.



* $p\text{-value} < 0.05$

Figure 2. Structural Model

Table 4. Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	T-stat	P-values
H1	WLB → JS	0.464	6.842	0.000
H2	JST → JS	-0.348	5.125	0.000
H3	WFH → WLB	0.321	5.210	0.000
H4	WFH → JST	-0.173	2.632	0.009
H5	WFH*WL → JST	-0.001	0.012	0.991
H6	WFH*WL → WLB	-0.062	1.314	0.189

The table shows the structural model designed above. The hypothesis is supported if the p-value is less than 0.05 and the T-stat value is more than 1.96, indicating that the results of H1, H2, H3, and H4 are supported. Meanwhile, H5

and H6 are not accepted because the p-values are more than 0.05, and the T-stat values are lower than 1.96.

Discussion

The findings confirmed that WLB has a significant impact on job satisfaction (Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007; Souza-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000). It is found that employees faced work-life imbalance that leads to job dissatisfaction. Most respondents are in the early stages of their careers where they had to adapt to new environments as well as the sudden pandemic shift which prolongs working hours with the lack of work boundaries (Russo & Morandin, 2019).

Job satisfaction is found significantly affected by job stress. Respondents had low satisfaction levels, a result of high job stress levels. The increasing health concerns raised to oneself during the pandemic added overall stress to the life of the employee (Pakpour, Griffiths & Lin, 2020). The sudden situational shift also disrupted the natural workflow of employees, adding abrupt changes of communication in work (DeFilippis, Impink, Singell, Polzer & Sadun, 2020). As job role ambiguity increased, work completion and job satisfaction decreased (Sypniewska, 2014), and performance pressures also added to the job stress (Wong, Kim, Kim & Han, 2021). These factors of job stress were previously proven in other studies to affect job satisfaction (Ahsan *et al.*, 2009).

WLB and job stress is affected negatively by WFH. Setting boundaries within work and personal life to achieve work-life stability is tough, especially during the pandemic's restrictions (Irawanto *et al.*, 2021). This is especially so for women with major house roles, who contributed the most to this study. Working hours are blurred and rest periods are often ignored (Oliver, Rodham, Taylor & McIver, 2021; Robinson, 2021). Poor quality of work is caused from work distractions, causing employee stress. Another study found that 42% of respondents experienced significant levels of stress during WFH (Potts, 2020).

Workload was proven to be insignificant in context to WFH. The respondents' workload did not change during the pandemic, as they had the same job descriptions pre and post-pandemic. The actual problem is the possibilities of miscommunication (Fitria & Tan, 2021; Lal, Dwivedi & Haag, 2021), which increase stress due to the additional work complexity that they must re-adapt to.

Conclusion

This study assessed the influence of WFH, WLB, and job stress on job satisfaction during COVID-19, utilizing workload as a moderating factor. In this study, employees have experienced work-life imbalance and a high job stress level,

resulting in job dissatisfaction. The unclear line between work and home roles costs employees more adjustment time and effort than necessary. This resulted in work-life imbalance and decreasing job satisfaction as work demands stayed the same, regardless of added adjustment efforts (Bhui, Dinos, Galant-Miecznikowska, Jongh & Stansfeld, 2016; Irawanto *et al.*, 2021). Job stress also affects job satisfaction because of self-isolation and lack of physical communication with co-workers (Rorong, Hanifah, Siagian & Pakolo, 2021). Workload, however, has no substantial impact on job stress because people will experience job stress and workload regardless of where they work.

Implications

The pandemic forced difficult challenges for managers in managing employees. Managers must efficiently divide office working hours and WFH hours according to necessity and coordination schedules, and slowly revert to office work. The end of the pandemic is another shift needing adaptation. Managers can modify working dynamics slowly by starting with adding offline meetings one at a time. Post-pandemic conditions can be seen as a reset – it is an opportunity to find the most fitting working dynamics. There is additional burden of worrying about the health and safety during the pandemic, affecting work and eventually creating less satisfactory results. Tolerance and mindfulness are necessary for employees to recover to their optimal working conditions. While the extremities of COVID-19 have reduced significantly, the fear has not completely dissolved. The findings are parallel to previous literatures (Galanti *et al.*, 2021; Hoboubi *et al.*, 2016; Irawanto *et al.*, 2021; Mahardikawati & Ridha, 2019), but are also contradictory to other studies due to industry specification, respondents' working positions, or the location of research (Arwin *et al.*, 2021; Sheperd-Banigan *et al.*, 2016).

Suggestions for Future Studies

This study reflects only on a small portion of Indonesian employees. Future studies should increase samples and specify intended industries, professions, and even job positions. The difference in respondents' roles can result in different conclusions. A narrower population and sampling can provide better insight for companies (Bhui *et al.*, 2016; Chung, Seo, Forbes & Birkett, 2020). Job positions like managers have additional responsibilities which can bring different outcomes as well (Kropp, Cambon & Clark, 2021; Savage, 2021). This research focused on employee satisfaction, but future research can step towards employee productivity (Gaskell, 2021; Glaeser & Cutler, 2021; Widodo *et al.*, 2020). WFO and WFH is no longer two separate working conditions and future research can focus on hybrid working dynamics.

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