

RELATING REMOTE WORKING FACILITIES WITH SUSTAINABLE WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL WITH EVIDENCE FROM FEMALE-OWNED STARTUPS FROM PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This is one of the unique studies concerning the developing sides of the world. The study aims to explore the effect of remote working amid the outbreak of COVID-19 on sustainable work-life balance. Previously most of the work has been conducted concerning work-from-home facilities on employee morale and well-being etc. However, in post-COVID-19 it is imperative to understand the impact of remote working on employee well-being. Therefore, a new idea has been developed by combining indications, theoretical frameworks, and gaps from prior research work. Data for this study was collected through non-probability sampling and the sample size was 150 respondents. Analysis has been made through structural equation modeling through SMART-PLS, which reflected that remote working has a definite association with work-life balance.

Key Words: COVID-19, Female startups, Female Entrepreneurship, Developing World, Remote Working & Sustainable Work-life Balance.

INTRODUCTION BACKGROUND

The phenomenon of remote working has been under practice since 1980'S. However, the outbreak of the pandemic in 2019 resulted in a massive surge in the level of popularity of the concept. There are several synonyms for remote working e.g. teleworking, telecommuting, Working from Home & Homework etc. Remote working can be defined as any piece of organizational work that is performed outside the constraints of organizational space & time. However, with the increase in the use of technology, the phenomenon is fully capable of replacing traditional offices and workspaces. The importance of remote working can be assessed through the verdict from recruitment companies which highlighted that around 85% of job-seekers will not switch if flexible working is allowed by the employer. However, the weightage and importance of remote working are not the same in every profession as through using remote working facilities it is difficult to complete all the work and related tasks. According to the recruitment agencies, it is also possible that only a few of the

responsibilities might be conducted from remote locations as the facility of remote working is occupation-sensitive (Klopotek, 2017).

Similar has also been indicated by Memon et al (2022), that transition to remote working may vary from job to job and profession to profession. It is also completely different from the conventional way of working and also has different work protocols. Studies also mentioned that working from home continuously is not easy but the outbreak of the pandemic forces employees from every sector to adapt work protocols that are required to overcome uncertainty. On the other side home-based working also has numerous benefits like time-saving, interruption-free working, more satisfaction, availability of more time for family, reduced social contact, and also on productivity (Klopotek, 2017). Contrary to these benefits Abdullah et al., (2020) highlighted that family issues and conflicts are hindrances in remote-based working as by adapting remote working protocols employees are required to

work for extended hours and diminish the level of productivity.

INTRODUCTION

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, Felstead and Henseke (2017) indicated that changes in social norms are forcing employers to change work patterns. Hence, observing changes in the demographic factors employers may allow employees to use facility of flexible working. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 forced organizations all over the globe to incorporate remote working. Managers are also required to study and understand the pros and cons of work-from-home facilities to relate this effectively and efficiently with organizational settings (Bhatia & Mote, 2021). This postulate is valid as even before the outbreak of the pandemic work from home was quite common in developed sides of the world. Although the way of performing work from home previously was much different in comparison to the work from home amid COVID-19 (Kosteas *et al.*, 2022). Similar has been found true for the post-pandemic era where remote working is one of the key characteristics of the work. Therefore, in the long run, organizations are required to adopt hybrid working models with the combination of office and telework. However, several studies also highlighted the other way as remote working may create negative impacts on job satisfaction, well-being, and work performance (Raghavan *et al.*, 2021).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM, SIGNIFICANCE & PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The main challenge for the Post-Pandemic era is the use of learning and tools by management employees and employers to foster and manage work amid the pandemic. This adaptation process is also subjected to organizational, size, structure, values norms, etc (De Vincenzi *et al.*, 2022). However, most of the previous studies associated with remote working and its effect on employees use only job satisfaction as the outcome variable. However, the real need is to conduct quantitative studies that may specifically determine the impact of remote working on work efforts, work-life balance or well-being etc (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative to use De Vincenzi *et al.*, (2022), as the base to conduct further research that may reflect the relationship between remote working and employee well-being in the post-pandemic era. Especially research related to

employee well-being may be substantial to implement & support teleworking facilities in the long run (Raghavan *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, this study is conducted to understand the use and significance of remote working in the post-pandemic era. Similar has also been postulated by Jovanovic and Lugongic (2022) that research activities under the new normal may use primary data-collection to explore patterns of organization & employee working and adaptation.

Thus, this is one of the primary and pervasive studies that explore the indirect effect of remote working on employees on sustainable work-life balance. Hence, the findings of this study are beneficial for academicians, researchers, and scholars to conduct more studies in this vein. Other than academic purposes policymakers may also use this study to devise better policies to facilitate the workforce in the post-pandemic era. All these significances become more prevalent as this study is associated with the remote working facilities associated with the employees from female-owned startups. Hence, this study would be a cornerstone in optimizing research as well as to improve policy implications.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The basis of this theory has been underlined with the border theory explained by Clark (2000) that working becomes more complex when management narrows the gap between work & home intentionally. This will result in the evolution of organizational (micro) & meso-level challenges that are associated with the response of primary stakeholders rather than the country or society. Some of organizations and their employees become more resilient for the upcoming era through the adoption of technological processes (Raghavan *et al.*, 2021). Although adoption of technological processes during the pandemic might also be associated with the Holistic Techno-stress Model (HTM) that has been proposed by Califf *et al* (2020). However, working from home amid COVID-19 also posited several stressors for employees. Stressors produce negative & positive outcomes for employees (Memon *et al.*, 2022). Therefore in line with the need for research by De Vincenzi *et al.*, (2022) and Jovanovic and Lugongic (2022) etc., the use of HTM is effective in conducting the study in the new normal to understand the impact of remote working on the psychological wellbeing of employees. This assumption is valid as working extensively from remote locations may

increase pressure & workload that may also be reflected negatively on an employee's personal life. Similar was also indicated by Mann and Holdsworth (2003), that working from home may cause social isolation that is harmful for the psychological well-being of the employee (Parsad et al., 2020). Barber and Santuzzi (2015) also supported these postulates and indicated that working from home may also produce negative impacts on employee performance & well-being.

Therefore, on the base of these indications remote working is the only predicting variable and a decrease in employee well-being is the only outcome variable. However, this study is supplemented with parallel mediation of work overload (Pasla et al., 2021); Task Interdependence (Abdullah *et al.*, 2020 & Cheng et al., 2023); Professional Isolation (Agba et al., 2021 & D'Oliveira & Persico, 2023) and Family Interference (Abdullah *et al.*, 2020 & Allgood et al., 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies highlighted that it is quite common for employees to be involved in work-related activities even after their job timings. In recent times employees have been involved in working from their homes. This statement is also applicable to white-collar jobs. However, there is a need for efficient technological resources that may connect employees to work at any time with the optimum level of connectivity (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Therefore, the outbreak of the pandemic in 2019 also caused a significant surge in work-from-home practices. Countries like Egypt which did not prefer working from home forced to shift to work from home. The idea of working from home is based on the philosophy that there is no need to perform work from a particular place to increase employee comfort and make them more productive by creating an effective work-life balance (Mostafa, 2021).

Recently some of the studies highlighted that home-based working may have the dual effect of tasks allocated to employees. Findings highlighted that working from home will foster productivity associated with creative tasks but at the same time may also cause a decline in the productivity of dull tasks (Klopotek, 2017). Hence work from home may also be termed as a tool that has a dual impact as it may provide more flexibility, ease, and comfort to employees and may boost their morale, satisfaction, and productivity. However, the tool may not be

beneficial for all forms of work as well as employees & may hamper their satisfaction & performance (Mostafa, 2021). On the other side Organizational Theory indicates that organizational size is strongly correlated with the organizational structure complexity, higher internal division of labor & more diffuse use of formal control. Although literature indicated mixed results regarding the firm size and use of remote working as the work strategy using work from work-from-home strategy is the essence of large firms that may have better planning and resources as compared to SMEs (Donati et al., 2021). Working from home may also take employees away from management. Therefore, employees rely mostly on their performance and quality of output & working becomes much more complex due to the absence of physical observation by the supervisor. Upcoming literature will present all those important variables associated with employees' sustainable work-life balance.

Workload: Workload is a state of job demand that is often highlighted by the need to perform work in speed, with multiple tasks at a time & to respond in a quick sensation of time (Ingusci et al., 2021). Other studies mark workload as the number of activities carried out by employees in a given period. We can also define workload as the number of work-related activities that require skills, competencies, and consciousness to complete allocated tasks within the given time (Pasla et al., 2021). Previously tasks performed by employees during remote working were almost the same as the tasks employees needed to perform at the office. However, the outbreak of the pandemic in 2019 caused the addition of multiple miscellaneous tasks into work-from-home arrangements (De Vincenzi *et al.*, 2022). This might have different impacts on different types of employees as employees belonging to Generation X have a practical approach to work wishes to have a work-life balance as well as fun-related activities at the workplace. However, employees belonging to Generation Y are found to be more optimistic, higher in self-confidence, and more focused on personal achievements (Pasla et al., 2021). However, remote working mainly increases work overload through the addition of activities & the complexity of working from different and remote locations. Hence, overall produced a negative impact on the sustainability of work arrangements.

H₁A: There is a relationship between remote working and increased workload among female employees from female-owned startups

H₂A: Work Overload does mediate between remote working and sustainable work-life balance of female employees from female-owned startups in Pakistan.

Task Interdependence: Task Interdependence affects the level of personal relationships in a team and also has the tendency to modify the performance of teams (D'Oliveira & Persico, 2023).

Studies based on social interdependence theory indicated that working together enhances workplace friendship which results in improved employee well-being (Zhang et al., 2022). However, task interdependence also requires each employee to play a significant part in the job through sharing knowledge and ways to perform the work. Studies indicated that employees segregated by geographic boundaries can also play their part in work completion by leveraging their competencies and skills with technology. However, remote working facilities may produce a negative impact on employees association that ultimately causes workplace loneliness (Cheng et al., 2023). Moreover due to the absence of supervision employees have to manage all the tasks on their own and therefore may also harm employee productivity as well as performance (Abdullah et al., 2020). Hence, legitimate to declare predictions made by Cheng et al (2023) are true as the adoption of the remote working environment may cause workplace loneliness which is caused by the external environment.

H₃A: There is a relationship between remote working and increased workload among female employees from female-owned startups

H₄A: Task Interdependence does mediate between remote working and sustainable work-life balance of female employees from female-owned startups in Pakistan.

Professional Isolation: Professional Isolation or work isolation is one of the downsides of remote working as it is difficult for employees to interact with their colleagues and supervisors in their time of need. Contrary to remote working scenarios employees may have around 3 to 4 hours of discussion which may hamper work-life balance but also fulfills work-related requirements (Muralidhar et al., 2020). Social isolation not only diminishes social networking but also diminishes the noticeability of employees & sense of social status (Klopotek, 2017). However, some of the studies

highlighted that social isolation leads to more continuity in conversation between peers through secure connective and therefore enhances information exchange (Agba et al., 2021). On the other side, workplace isolation is also a predictor of poorer workplace well-being (D'Oliveira & Persico, 2023). In fact, due to isolation workers may not communicate and take help from their colleagues. Hence the family bonding between colleagues as well as between employees and employers could not be developed (Abdullah et al., 2020)

H₅A: There is a relationship between remote working and the professional isolation of female employees from female-owned startups

H₆A: Professional association does mediate between remote working and sustainable work-life balance of female employees from female-owned startups in Pakistan.

Family Interference: The construct of work-family conflicts emerged initially in 1996 and is conceptualized as the conflict between professional and family life due to the time and strain of work-related activities. These forms of conflicts and interference may result in employee burnout emotional exhaustion cynicism etc (Allgood et al., 2022). Work and Family conflicts are mainly studied by social scientists, especially in the domain of organizational health psychology (OHP) the major focus is on the relationship between work-from-home initiatives and stress on employees & their families (Geurts et al., 2003). Similar has also been indicated by Klopotek (2017) that while working from home it is much more difficult to separate professional work from personal. Families of employees may also suffer from remote working due to the blurred boundaries of professional and personal work (Abdullah et al., 2020). Hence, it is legitimate to indicate that an increase in work-family conflicts resulted in employee burnout (Allgood et al., 2022).

H₇A: There is a relationship between remote working and family interference and increased workload over female employees from female-owned startups

H₈A: Family Interference does mediate between remote working and sustainable work-life balance of female employees from female-owned startups in Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

The study by Abdullah et al (2020) was one of the quantitative studies to understand the impact of working from home amid COVID-19. However, the study is conducted to gain understanding through descriptive statistics rather than inferential analysis. On the other side outbreak of the pandemic provides that women support each other more than their counterparts. However, still there are very few female startups working all over the globe (Akhavan et al., 2022) & initial studies on the outcomes of COVID-19 highlighted that the pandemic affected female-owned businesses more drastically (Fairlie, 2020).

Similar has been found true for Pakistan where COVID-19 posed several challenges for female-owned startups in Pakistan (Abbasi et al., 2021). The government of Pakistan was also not able to render adequate support to female-owned enterprises at the wake of the pandemic (Parveen et al., 2020). Hence this study has been conducted with the reference of female-owned enterprises of Pakistan.

Sampling Design & Research Instrument

The sampling type is non-probability as used by prior studies like Memon et al (2022), etc. Although the sample method used by Memon et al (2022), was a snowball sampling as it was qualitative research. However, to fulfill the gap posited by Raghavan et al (2021) and Jovanovic and Lugongic (2022) there is a need of a quantitative study to relate remote working on employee wellbeing. Thus the sampling method for this study is non-probability sampling as used by Memon et al (2022). The population for this study includes female employees from female-owned startups from Pakistan. Therefore, this study has only based on data collected from 150 female employees working on middle and upper-level positions. Initially, 200 questionnaires were circulated but due to the research area and requirements of this study.

Hence the response rate is 75% which is based upon a closed-ended questionnaire adapted from multiple studies e.g., Abdullah et al (2020); Aropah et al (2020), etc.

Statistical Technique and Software:

Aropah et al (2020) use structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze employee performance while working from home during COVID-19. Therefore, this study also uses SMART-PLS SEM to assess the impact of remote working on female employees from female-owned startups from Pakistan.

Figure 2 indicates the reliability of the indicators used in the study. This is termed as outer loading which is almost similar to the factor loading (Afthanorhan, 2013). Sander and The (2014) indicated that the values of these indicators must be 0.70 or above to legitimize the model and to be included in the study. Therefore, considering these postulated all the indicators are valid to be included in the model as none of these are lesser than 0.70 as indicated by figure 1.

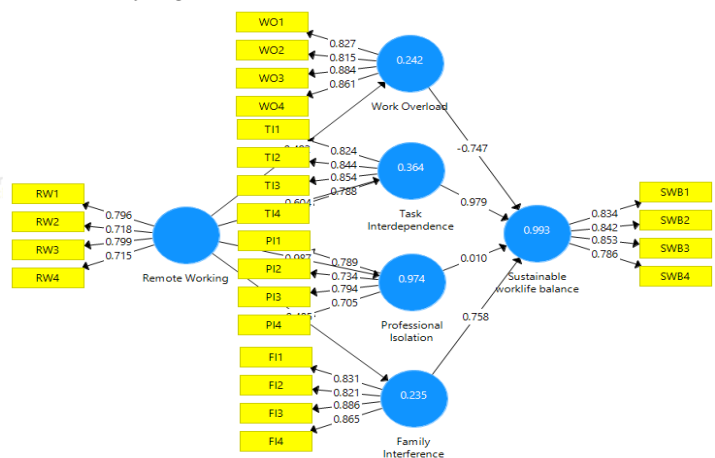


Figure 2: Outer Loading and CFA

Table 1: Construct Reliability & Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Family Interference	0.873	0.880	0.913	0.725
Professional Isolation	0.750	0.753	0.842	0.572
Remote Working	0.752	0.755	0.843	0.574
Sustainable work life balance	0.848	0.850	0.898	0.688
Task Interdependence	0.847	0.849	0.897	0.686
Work Overload	0.869	0.876	0.910	0.718

Table 1 is the reflection of construct reliability and convergent validity. It consists of three reliability indicators i.e., Cronbach’s Alpha, Goldstein rho, and composite reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability are also used to reflect convergent validity. Relating these points to prior studies we have found that AVE is the indicator that is sufficient to reflect convergent validity is the value is equal to or more than 0.50 (Yaacob *et al.*, 2021). Hence the table reflects

Convergent Validity effectively and efficiently. On the other side using the reference of to Vijayabanu and Arunkumar (2018) it is revealed that minimum required values for reliability indicators e.g., Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability are 0.40 and 0.60 respectively. Therefore, Table 2 is effective in assuring construct reliability as we ll as convergent validity as none of the layers of Cronbach’s Alpha is lesser than 0.750 and 0.572 respectively.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	Family Interference	Professional Isolation	Remote Working	Sustainable work life balance	Task Interdependence	Work Overload
Family Interference						
Professional Isolation	0.614					
Remote Working	0.589	0.794				
Sustainable work life balance	0.724	0.769	0.742			
Task Interdependence	0.702	0.744	0.752	0.847		
Work Overload	0.672	0.589	0.598	0.701	0.716	

Table 3: Predictive Accuracy (Quality Criteria)

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Family Interference	0.259	0.252
Professional Isolation	0.974	0.973
Sustainable work life balance	0.993	0.992
Task Interdependence	0.364	0.360
Work Overload	0.275	0.270

Table 2 is plotted to make readers observe discriminant validity through Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) which is the best tool to assess the discriminant validity (Iqbal *et al.*, 2021). However, there must be no value that is higher than 0.85 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Thus, in line with this point, the table sufficiently indicates discriminant validity as no value in the table is equal to or greater than 0.85.

Table 3 is deemed to highlight the effectiveness of the structural and measurement model of SMART-PLS. This is also known coefficient of determination

(Purwanto et al., 2020). According to studies the minimum value that may reflect the model fit is 0.25 and values equal to or greater than 0.75 are termed as substantial. The tool is the reflection of a 01% change in the independent over the dependent variable (Wong, 2013). Therefore, considering these points it is effective to declare that Table 3 is sufficient to indicate model fit and coefficient of determination as the values of R-Square in all the cases are higher than 0.25.

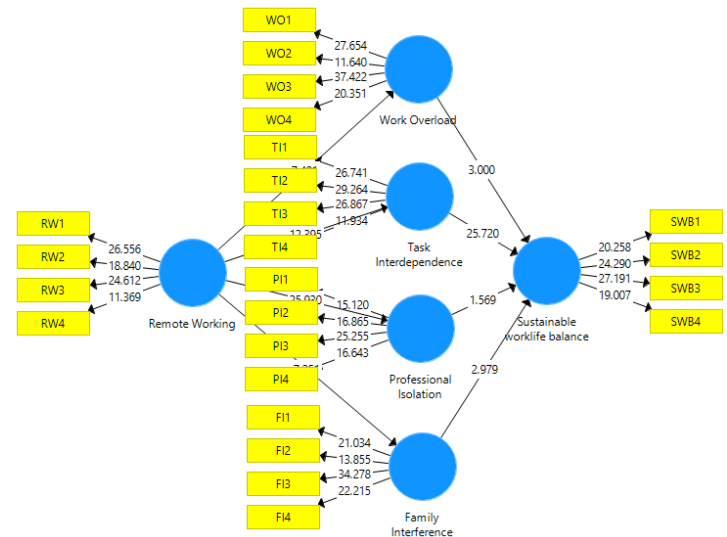


Figure 3: Path-Coefficient

Table 4: Path-Coefficient

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Family Interference -> Sustainable work life balance	-0.499	-0.492	0.168	2.979	0.003
Professional Isolation -> Sustainable work life balance	-0.053	-0.049	0.034	1.569	0.117
Remote Working -> Family Interference	0.543	0.548	0.075	7.251	0.000
Remote Working -> Professional Isolation	0.927	0.930	0.036	25.930	0.000
Remote Working -> Task Interdependence	-0.665	-0.668	0.054	12.395	0.000
Remote Working -> Work Overload	-0.543	-0.549	0.073	7.401	0.000
Task Interdependence -> Sustainable work life balance	-0.942	-0.944	0.037	25.720	0.000
Work Overload -> Sustainable work life balance	-0.489	-0.481	0.163	3.000	0.003

Table 4 along with Figure 3 indicates the impact of variables over each other. It is technically termed as Path-Coefficient and it is part of inferential analysis based on SMART-PLS (Silaparasetti, Rao & Khan, 2017). Two mainstream criteria need to be fulfilled to ensure the impact of variables over each other. The first criterion is termed as t-value and the second is the p-value which needs to be equal to or higher than

1.97 and less than or equal to 0.05 to ensure the impact and path-coefficient (Hair et al., 2017). Adding to this Hair et al (2019) indicated that both the criteria must be fulfilled in order to assume the association between the valuables. Therefore based on the impact assessed through path coefficient, it is legitimate to reject H₁O, H₃O & H₅O but failed to reject H₇O. However, there is an indirect association

between work overload, family interference, and task interdependence, and sustainable work-life balance. Table 5 is the enhancement of the path coefficient and is termed a specific indirect effect. The table is also based on the points mentioned by Hair et al (2017) and Hair et al. (2019) to assess the indirect association between the variables. Hence, legitimate to declare that professional association is not a mediator between remote working and sustainable work-life balance. Similarly, there is a

negative mediation has also been proved for the use of work overload in the relationship between remote working and sustainable work-life balance. However, all the other mediators are found to harm sustainable work-life balance. Similar to the path coefficient based on specific indirect effects researchers can reject H_2O , H_4O , and H_6O but fail to reject H_8O . Although the findings from Table 5 are similar to Table 4 which indicated a negative indirect association between all the variables of interest.

Table 5: Specific Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV)	P Values
Remote Working -> Family Interference -> Sustainable work life balance	-0.271	-0.270	0.102	2.652	0.008
Remote Working -> Professional Isolation -> Sustainable work life balance	-0.049	-0.046	0.031	1.552	0.121
Remote Working -> Task Interdependence -> Sustainable work life balance	-0.627	-0.630	0.055	11.412	0.000
Remote Working -> Work Overload -> Sustainable work life balance	-0.266	-0.265	0.100	2.667	0.008

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicated that remote working has created a significant negative impact on the sustainable work-life balance. Previous this type of research has been conducted for work-from-home facilities. However, in the post-COVID-19 era work life is associated with hybrid working, and therefore the a need to conduct a study to relate work efforts. Hence, it is imperative to use (Felstead and Henseke (2017) and De Vincenzi et al., (2022), to conduct further quantitative studies to understand the impact of remote working on employee wellbeing etc. Hence, the basis of this theory is valid which is based upon theory triangulation as the base of this study has been associated with the border theory explained by Clark (2000) and also with the Holistic Techno-stress Model (HTM) by Califf et al (2020). However, HTM is believed to be a better theory for the analysis of

hybrid and remote work activities of employees over their wellbeing (De Vincenzi et al., 2022 & Jovanovic & Lugongic, 2022).

Relating the work with inferential analysis it has been observed that work activities that are selected as the mediator between remote working and sustainable work-life balance produce a negative impact on the sustainable work-life balance. Hence the development of the model is consistent with the indications of Pasla et al., (2021); Abdullah et al., (2020); Agba et al. (2021); Allgood et al., 2022 Cheng et al., (2023) and D’Oliveira and Persico (2023), etc.

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