

# A Study on Work-Life Balance of Employees Working from Home during the Covid- 19 Lockdown Period

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## ABSTRACT

The study unfolds the impact of work from home on employees in terms employee work-life balance during the Covid-19 lockdown period in Sri Lanka.

The research approach is mixed method and data was gathered through questionnaire survey and structured telephone interviews.

The research findings indicate that the impact of work from home on work-life balance of employees differs from employee to employee. Further, the research findings unveil that there is a significant impact of work hours of an employee during work from home period on employee-work life balance.

*Keywords* — Covid-19, Work from Home, Work-Life Balance, Work Hours, Working conditions

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The first Covid-19 patient in the world was recorded in Wuhan, China on December 2019. The virus spread across the world rapidly and the virus was declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in January 2020 and as a pandemic in March 2020 by the World Health Organization (hereafter, referred to as the WHO).

The first Covid-19 case in Sri Lanka was reported on 27<sup>th</sup> January and the first Sri Lankan Covid-19 patient was discovered on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

As per Lau et al (2020), many governments across the globe-imposed lockdown state to reduce the spread of the virus. The Sri Lankan government also imposed a lockdown period nationwide in March to mitigate the spread of the virus.

With the impose of the lockdown period, most organizations across all industries in the country declared work from home status for the employees. The newly introduced work from home state was an unprecedented turmoil in the lives of the Sri Lankan employees.

As per Jaiswal & Arun (2020), due to work from home the employees experienced major changes to their job roles, conflicts with families, disturbances to the work-life balance, increase in stress levels and exhaustion during the lock down period.

Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the impact of work-life balance and employee exhaustion experienced by the Sri Lankan employees who work from home due to Covid-19. Under this broad topic the following research questions are being addressed.

1. What was the impact of work from home on employee work-life balance?
2. How did the work hours of the employees impact the work life balance of the employees?

3. How did the working conditions available at home impacted the work-life balance of employees during the lockdown period?

These questions are addressed in the Sri Lankan context to achieve the following objectives.

1. To explore the impact of work from home on employee work-life balance.
2. To explore the impact of work hours on employee work-life balance.
3. To explore the impact of working conditions on employee-work life balance.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Covid-19 Crisis**

As per the UNDP (2020), Covid-19 pandemic started off as a health crisis but twisted into the greatest global humanitarian crisis after the Second World War.

The contagious virus evolved with different variants and spread across the globe rapidly. The rate of the spread increased rapidly, and many measures taken by individuals and single entities were deemed fruitless as stated by key contributors in the area. (Jaiswal & Arun, 2020).

### **2.2. Lock Down: the response to the crisis**

As per Brooks et al (2020), governments around the globe declared lock down states with the intention of isolating the diagnosed patients and the citizens who are maintaining close relationships with the infected patients from the rest of the citizens to bring down the rate of transmission of the disease.

### **2.3. Work from Home during Lockdown Period**

Existing literature defines work from home could as an employee working for an organization performing the duties of the employee outside the physical premises of the organization and maintaining communication with the employer and the organization using telecommunication methods. (Morgan,2004, Nilles,2007 & Savić, 2020)

Crosbie & Moore (2004) suggests that the concept of work from home is not a new concept to the modern world.

However, the key contributors in the area emphasize that the concept of work from home became widespread during the year 2020 due to most organizations being forced to adapt to work from home concept as the governments urged the citizens to stay home and imposed lockdowns. (Shareena & Shahid,2020, & Jaiswal & Arun, 2020).

### **2.4. Work-Life Balance**

The existing literature defines work-life balance as the level of prioritization and the allocation of time between an individual's personal and professional life. (Felstead et al,2002, & Crosbie & Moore,2004).

### **2.5. Work from Home and Work-Life Balance**

The existing literature provides mixed thoughts about the impact of work from home on employee work-life balance.

Several researchers in the area argue that work from home allows employees to spend more time with their families, manage household chores, reduces commuting time that can be utilized for personal activities and therefore, improves the work-life balance. (Sullivan & Lewis,2001, & Savić, 2020).

On the other hand, several key researchers in the area have provided contradictory opinions and stated that work from home negatively impacts the work-life balance as employees tend to allocate the time saved by working from home rather than commuting to work on either more official work or household chores that further reduce the time allocated for their personal activities. (Hilbrecht et al.,2008).

### **2.6. Research Gap Identified**

With Covid-19 there was a paradigm shift in the work practices of the organizations and the lives of the employees where most employees were

required to work from home irrespective of their willingness or the facilities at home.

The researcher identified that its worthwhile to examine the impact of work-life balance and employee exhaustion experienced by the Sri Lankan employees who work from home due to Covid-19. Under this broad topic, the following research questions are being addressed.

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### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

#### 3.1. Research Approach

The research adopted a mixed method of questionnaire survey and structured interviews.

The researcher conducted the survey online and approached 130 respondents representing a variety of industries that worked from home during the lockdown period due to Covid-19. 111 individuals out of the invited respondents responded to the survey.

Structured telephone interviews were conducted with 15 randomly selected employees from the respondents.

The data gathered through the survey was analyzed statistically using the software SPSS to identify the impact of work from home on

employees. The statistically analyzed information was then triangulated against the information generated through the interviews.

#### 3.2. Conceptual Diagram

The conceptual diagram was developed using the Boundary Theory by Kossek et al. (2012).

The diagram elaborates how the work hours and the working conditions of an employee impact the work-life balance. The work-life balance is determined using the parameters professional deadlines, personal chores, time for relaxation and conflicts with family members due to professional commitments.

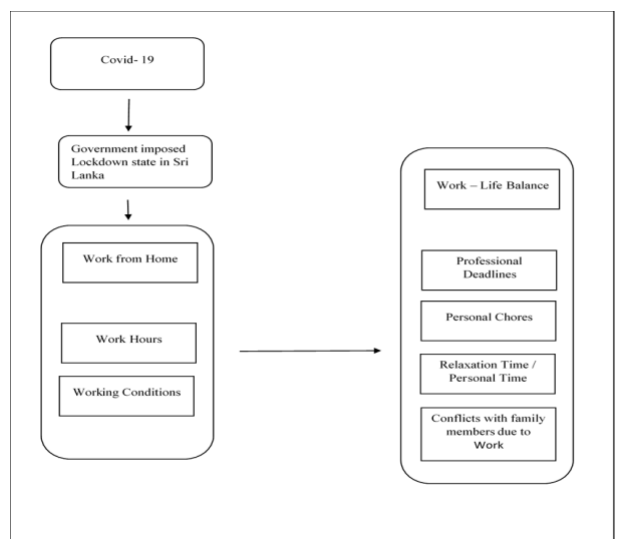


Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram

#### 3.3. Operationalization

The variables given in the conceptual diagram could be operationalized as below.

1. **Work Hours:** The number of hours that an employee worked per day during the lockdown period.
2. **Working Conditions:** The facilities that an employee had during the lockdown period to work from home including a separate workstation, access to devices and a strong internet connectivity)

3. Professional Deadlines: The official deadlines that an employee is required to meet during the work from home period. Failure to meet the deadlines indicate that the employee does not have a proper work-life balance.
4. Personal Chores: The household and other personal chores that are expected from the employee. Failure to perform these chores indicates lack of work-life balance.
5. Personal Time: The time that the employee spends on himself/herself. Lack of personal time during the work from period indicates a lack of work-life balance.
6. Conflicts with family members due to work: Having conflicts with family members to due to work related issues indicate a lack of work-life balance.

### 3.4. Sources and Collection of Data

Data was collected through two main sources.

1. Online Survey: The researcher conducted the survey online and approached 130 respondents representing a variety of industries that worked from home during the lockdown period due to Covid-19. 111 individuals out of the invited respondents responded to the survey. The survey included open ended questions as well as five-point Likert scale questions.
2. Structured telephone interviews: The researcher conducted structured telephone interviews with 15 randomly selected respondents who have filled the survey questionnaire.

The data collected through the survey was subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS statistics software.

The information obtained through the statistical analysis was then subjected to data triangulation against the information generated from the telephone surveys.

### 3.5. Test Hypothesis

In order to find the relationship between the work hours during work from home and work-life balance, and the relationship between working

conditions and the work life balance, the following two hypotheses are tested at a significant level of 95%.

#### 3.5.1. The Relationship between Work Hours and Work-life Balance.

H1: There is a significant relationship between work hours and the work-life balance.

#### 3.5.2. The Relationship between Working Conditions and Work-life Balance.

H2: There is a significant relationship between working conditions and the work-life balance.

The following Regression Model is used.

$$Y = \beta_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2$$

$\beta_0$  refers to the intercept of the regression.  $B_1$  refers to the coefficient of variable  $X_1$ .  $X_1$  refers to the variable work hours.  $B_2$  refers to the coefficient of the variable working conditions and  $X_2$  refers to the variable working conditions.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The data was collected from both male and female employees working in clerical level, executive level, management level and senior management level of all age groups that are allowed to work.

The gender and employment level composition of the respondents are given in table 1.

Table 1. Gender and Employment Level Composition

		Emp_Category				Total
		Clerical level	Executive level	Management level	Senior Management level	
Gender	Female	3	46	8	1	58
	Male	2	31	18	2	53
Total		5	77	26	3	111

The respondents represented the following industries: Apparel, Education and Consultancy, Finance, IT, Logistics, Manufacturing and Industrial, Plantation and Agriculture, and Retail and Trade and employees with various educational and professional qualification levels and work experience.

Therefore, the respondents represented a wide array of social and other levels in Sri Lanka.

## 4.2. Statistical Analysis

### 4.2.1. The Work-Life Balance

The work-Life Balance of employee was computed using the information derived from Likert scale questions targeting the four sub variables of measurement of work-life balance.

### 4.2.2 The Regression Analysis

As indicated in Figure 3, the regression analysis gives the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable as given below.

$$Y = -.965 - .247 \text{ Work Hours} -.054 \text{ Working Condition.}$$

As per the statistical results, both independent variables indicate a negative relationship with the dependent variable.

Table 2. Results of the Regression Analysis

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.965	.140		-6.916	.000
	Work_Hours	-.247	.061	-.367	-4.084	.000
	Working_Conditions	-.054	.130	-.037	-.417	.678

a. Dependent Variable: Work\_Life\_Balance

However, for the hypotheses to be either accepted or rejected, the significance tests should be conducted at the significant level of 95%.

### 4.2.3 The Significance Test

The p value of work hours is 0.000 and the p value of working conditions is 0.678. The rule for hypothesis is to accept the alternate hypothesis if the probability is less than 5% and to accept the null hypothesis if the probability is greater than 5%.

### 4.2.4 Rejection/ Acceptance of Hypotheses

As per the hypothesis acceptance/ rejection rule, the alternative hypothesis, H1: There is a significant relationship between work hours and

the work-life balance is accepted since the p value is less than 5%.

As per the hypothesis acceptance/ rejection rule, the alternative hypothesis, H1: There is a significant relationship between working conditions and the work-life balance is rejected since the p value is more than 5%.

## 4.3. Respondent Statements

Given below are a few statements extracted from the telephone interviewees.

Ms. A, a lecturer at a leading private university who delivered online lectures and worked online from home stated, “I was not prepared to conduct online lectures. I have two children at home, and they disturbed me all the time when delivering lectures. I had so many conflicts with my family. Overall, the work from home context resulted in negative impact on my work-life balance”.

Mr. B, an IT expert from a leading IT firm stated, “I used to work around 10 hours per day before Covid-19. But now with work from home I am working more than 18 hours every day. We have meetings even at 10.00 pm. I had to sacrifice many personal and family related things and I had so many fights with my wife. Work from home created an unpleasant situation for me”.

Mr. C, a logistics professional of a leading company stated, “I had no designated place to work and I enjoyed time with my family. Whenever, I was not busy with meetings, I helped my wife with household chores and played with my children. For, me work from home was good”.

Ms. D, the Finance Manager of a retail company stated, “I had a designated workplace, a laptop and an internet connection given by the company. I only worked during the office hours. I had a routine. Therefore, I experienced only minor changes in my work-life balance”.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After data triangulation the researcher identified the following.

There is a significant negative relationship between work hours and employee work-life

balance which is supported by the existing literature. (Crosbie & Moore,2004)).

The relationship between working conditions and work-life balance varies from one person to person. The researcher failed to establish an opinion since the statistical results could not be backed up in the data triangulation as several respondent indicated that there is a significant relationship between the two.

The researcher identified that the impact of work from home on the employee-work balance differs from one employee to another as several employees were benefitted from the situation whereas several employees were penalized. This is again backed by the existing literature that provides a both positive and negative school of thought about the impact of work from home on employee work-life balance. (Hilbrecht et al., 2008, Sullivan & Lewis, 2001, & Savic,2020).

The researcher found out that the majority of the employees who worked from home were mentally exhausted due to the long hours, isolation from other employees, being congested to their residences and the routine lifestyle due to work from home.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research contributed to the existing literature on the area through analyzing the work from home context in Sri Lanka and its impact on the employee work-life balance by concluding that there is a significant relationship between the work hours and the work-life balance.

The research would be helpful to the corporates and the employees to understand that even during a work from home period, there is a need for a work hour limit for a day for the employees to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

## 7. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research was conducted using a small number of Sri Lankan respondents and therefore the results may not be universally applicable.

The research did not study the differentiating factors such as the gender, age, marital status and residence that could be the reason for the

different opinions of employees about work-life balance during work from home.

Therefore, it is recommended to expand the number of respondents to gather information and to expand the number of variables to include the differing factors that result in the differences in employee perceptions regarding work from home and work-life balance.

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