

Work-life Balance and Perceived Stress in a Telecommunication Infrastructure Company Amidst COVID-19

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented impact on work and life to almost everyone. This paper aims to investigate the work-life balance and perceived stress amidst COVID-19 in a telecommunication infrastructure firm in Malaysia. Quantitative data was collected from 139 respondents using simple random sampling method. The findings showed that in general, slightly less respondents (48.2%) suffered from high level of stress compare to 51.8% who suffered low level of stress since COVID-19 pandemic started. For respondents between 26 to 40 year old, or the Gen Y, 60% of them perceived high level of stress. Findings also showed that every nine of ten respondents were worried about their finances, fear of being infected by COVID-19 and losing their job. As for work-life balance, respondents generally indicated low level of work interfering with personal life, and a low level of personal life interfering with work. However, the number of days working from home was a significant determinant of work interfering with personal life. For those who work four days and more per week from home showed that work indeed interfere with their personal life. It was also found that both work interfering with personal life, and personal life interfering with work are significant contributing factor to respondents' stress during COVID-19. It is essential for employers to create more impactful initiatives to ensure their overall well-being is taken care of. This study has shed more light on employees' stress and work-life balance amidst COVID-19 pandemic and it contributes to the managing of human resource in a an organisation by recommending some practical initiatives.

Keywords: COVID-19, Work-Life Balance, Perceived Stress, Interference of Work, Interference of Personal Life.

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented changes at a global scale to everyone, from how we work, how we learn to how we live (Chung, Subramaniam and Dass, 2020). COVID-19 has acted like a time machine by bringing 2030 to 2020 (Ip, 2020), business changes that might have taken years to occur unfolded within months. Many companies were forced to modernize or face the risk of becoming irrelevant. With such dark cloud looming over the society and economy all over the world, work and workplace practices have also been transformed almost overnight to ensure business continuity.

Sacofa Sendirian Berhad (SSB) is the leading telecommunication infrastructure company in Sarawak, Malaysia. A total of 192 staff are employed at SSB with offices located in Kuching, Sibu, Bintulu, Miri and Mersing. It provides services such as setting up, maintaining and consulting data and voice communications technology. Like many companies in Malaysia, SSB has implemented the new work arrangement (NWA) during the Movement Control Order (MCO) since March 2020. The NWA would minimize the number of staff required to be in the office at any one time to avoid potential COVID-19 exposure. Whilst SSB cannot compare their efforts, risks and sacrifices to those in the medical field, SSB too has its own version of front liners, predominantly their technical team to ensure that business runs smoothly and in a timely manner. These groups must commute and remain in the office during the MCO period while other staff were either work from home (WFH) or work in split teamwork (STW). During this pandemic with WFH practices implemented almost overnight, employees who work remotely grapple with distractions, facing the blurred line between work- life balance and they also have trouble maintaining a routine (Grant, Wallace, Spurgeon, Tramontano & Charalampous, 2019). They were more likely to work nights and weekends when working from home and found it hard to keep boundaries between work and home life, while at the same time maintaining their motivation to work despite the risk of infection. Although the new work arrangement has been effective in ensuring SSB's business continuity while reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19, there have also been many challenges in adapting to their new routines for both work and personal commitments, leading to higher stress levels. This paper aims to investigate the work-life balance and perceived job stress amidst COVID-19 in Sacofa Sendirian Berhad. Therefore, in order to understand this phenomenon, some of the pertinent questions to be asked in this study include: 1) To what extend are the employees stressed ever since COVID-19 started? 2) What type of work-life balance do employees have during this pandemic? 3) What is the effect of work-life balance and stress during COVID-19 among the employees?

Literature Review

COVID-19 Outbreak in Malaysia

On the 25th January 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Malaysia and traced back to 3 Chinese nationals who previously had close contact with an infected person in Singapore (Borneo Post. 2020 January 25). At the time of writing, the total confirmed cases stands at 2,156,678 while death due to COVID-19 complications is at 24,681(MySejahtera, 2021). With vaccination being ramped up at a massive scale, the R^1 value has been reduced to 0.9. Like

^{1 1} The R value is a way of rating coronavirus or any disease's ability to spread. R is the number of people that one infected person will pass on a virus to, on average. Measles has an R number of 15 in populations without immunity. That means, on average, one person will spread measles to 15 others.

most countries, COVID-19 has forced Malaysians to exchange the physical for the digital world. Movement Control Order (MCO) was implemented and enforced to flatten the infection curve since March 2020. Since then, Work from home (WFH) has become a norm and this norm is likely to stay for the foreseeable future. Among companies still operating, 67% required their staff to work from home. While WFH helped minimized long commutes and facilitated a better work-life balance, it also presented challenges in engaging with family members with restricted access to working resources and blurred lines between work and family. In a survey conducted by Ipsos Sivanandam (2021), it was revealed that 65% of Malaysian claimed to be working from home, compared with 52% of the global average. The survey also revealed that Malaysians experienced the highest level of anxiety among the 28 countries polled. The stress was mainly due to a change in routine, family pressure and other concerns. In a study conducted by JobStreet's Malaysia (2021), it shows that 48 per cent of employers in the survey lamented that the new norm had resulted in decreased productivity as the WFH arrangement had taken a toll on their physical and mental health (Krishnan, 2021).

Escalating Perceived Job Stress Amidst COVID-19

Perceived stress is the degree of stressfulness of a certain incident, with the influence of an individual's surroundings, personality traits, and ability to cope with stressors (Cohen et al., 1983). Perceived stress at workplace and other mental health issues during COVID-19 pandemic has reached a whole new level unseen before. Up until May 2021, there has been 468 cases of suicide in Malaysia. This was a stark increase compare to 631cases in 2020 and 609 cases in 2019. Despair and hopelessness besides the feeling of loneliness during this pandemic were cited as the most common root cause of these suicides. Economic uncertainty, loneliness, fear of visiting health facilities due to the risk of infection, and the loss of one's usual coping mechanisms such as socialising, group sports and travelling also contribute to mental health problems (CodeBlue, 2021). Some individuals are at a higher risk of developing mental health problems like depression, especially when they are under a lot of stress or isolated from their friends and family (Chung et al., 2019). In addition to that, economic downturns such as firms shutting down and individuals being laid off also directly contributed to stress and affected mental health (Salari et al., 2020). Many studies (see eg. Brooks et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2011) that have examined the psychological disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic have reported that the affected individuals show several symptoms of mental trauma, such as emotional distress, depression, stress, mood swings, irritability, insomnia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, post-traumatic stress, and anger. The COVID-19 pandemic has had sweeping effects on the economy worldwide. Malaysia is no exception, suffering huge losses many businesses eventually had to reduce their workforce, leaving thousands unemployed. showed that out of five people working pre-COVID 19, one was permanently removed, and about 13% remain employed but are not working. For those actively working during the COVID-19 outbreak, nine out of ten were in some way impacted by the pandemic. This situation has surely contributed to employees' stress and other ailments associated with stress such as a wide range of mental-health and physical health issues.

Work-life Balance

The ability to successfully combine work, personal life and family responsibilities is crucial for both employees, their family members and their employers. Work-life balance does not only mean an even distribution of time between work and personal life, it also mean flexibility in being able to work in the professional field, while maintaining time and energy to spend on personal life. COVID-19 pandemic has thrown all balance out of the window. During the initial weeks of MCO, many employees grappled with the effort put in to move all work activities online while many others took this as respite to slow down and take stock of the rat race in the corporate world. What exactly is work-life balance? There is an array of definitions of work-life balance available in the literature dating back to decades ago. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) advocate that work-life balance is bidirectional and it carries over from one domain to the other: home-to-work and work-to-home. Positive as well as negative carry over is now accepted, with research identifying the bidirectional constructs of work–family facilitation and enhancement, as well as conflict. Work-life balance aims at creating happiness and success in the workplace and family domain by preventing a conflict of roles (Clark, 2000). It focuses on individual satisfaction within the description of ‘work/family border theory’ and defined work–life balance as: ‘satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict’ (p. 751). Previously, work-life balance was designed to the extent that an individual is putting in equal amount of time in his role as a worker and his family's role. Greenhaus et al (2003) define work-life balance as ‘the extent to which an individual is engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role. Apart from that, work-life balance is defined as a person's subjective assessment of the agreement between their non-work and work activities and life (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). Ever since WFH has become the new norm, the boundaries between work and life has blurred and many employees worked more than the usual 9 to 5 work hours. Many employees face the challenge of finding the right work-life balance. Employees who think they have little time to live in a personal atmosphere feel tired and disturbed during their jobs. Furthermore, the negative side of working long hours could result in job fatigue, interferes with family and friends, loss of fun and increased stress that affect their personal life. Employees may have struggled to establish and maintain social, physical and psychological boundaries as they worked from home, which resulted in having trouble sustaining work-life balance (Bhumika, 2020). It cannot be denied during the MCO, the WFH approach interferes with family life or family life interferes in work. In this study, work-life balance takes on the definition advocated by Greenhaus et al (2003) and is measured using two scales: work interfering with personal life and personal life interfering with work life operationalised by (Hayman, 2005).

Methods**Instrument**

The survey instrument used in this study was a combination of two established measurements. Perceived stress was measured using 10 items adopted from (Cohen et al., 1983). These items were adapted to suit the current study by incorporating the phrase “Ever since COVID-19 started” at the beginning of all the ten items. The response scales for these items range from “0” never to “4” always. Higher total scores indicate higher stress. There was an open-ended question that sought respondents’ feedback on what other events currently create stress for them. Next, work-life balance was measured by adopting and adapting the 11 items by (Hayman, 2005). These items were used to gauge work interfering with personal life (WIPL, seven items) and personal life interfering with work life (PLIW, four

items). Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they have felt in a particular way since COVID-19 started. The response scale ranged from “0” never to “5” always, with higher total scores indicating higher interference of one domain into the other.

Context and Participants

The study employed a non-experimental quantitative research design. A set of questionnaire in Google Form was sent out to the 192 employees via instant messenger at Sacofa Sendirian Berhad. A total of 139 responded and their responses were collected, cleaned and transferred to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analyses. As depicted in Table 1, the 132 respondents are made up of 70 (50.4%) male and 69 (49.6%) female. They range from 23 to 58 years old, with the average age of 37.3. A total of 45 (32.4%) are married, close to three quarter of them are in executive positions. Due to the core business of the organisation, close to half of the respondents (67) were from the Engineering and network department, followed by 30 (21.5%) from Human Resource and Compliance department. The remaining 23 (16.5%) were from Sales and Customer Relations and 19 (13.7%) were from Financial Services. Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic started, slightly more than half of the respondents (77) spent between 1 to 3 days working from home, slightly more than a quarter (38 respondents) spent 4 to 5 days doing that. Five of them worked six to seven days from home. The remaining 19 of them worked at site or in office throughout. Crosstabulation revealed most of them were from the Engineering & Network Department, who are also the front liners in Sacofa Sendirian Berhad. When asked on how many hours they worked from home, out of the 120, about 61% of them (74 respondents) worked up to 8 hours per day, while 28.3% (46) of them worked between 9 to 13 hours per day. A quick crosstabulation showed that the latter group are mostly those who are between 26 to 40 years old, from Sales & Customer Relations and Financial Services.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Profile	n	%
Gender		
Male	70	50.4
Female	69	49.6
Age		
23-25 (Generation Z)	17	12.2
26-40 (Generation Y)	71	51.1
41-58 (Generation X)	51	36.7
Marital Status		
Single	45	32.4
Married	94	67.6
Job level		
Non-Executive	35	25.2
Executive	104	74.8
Department		
Financial Services	19	13.7
Sales & Customer Relations	23	16.5
Engineering & Network	67	48.2
Compliance & Human Resource	30	21.5
Days a week WFH during COVID-19		
0 days	19	13.7
1 to 3 days	77	55.4
4 to 5 days	38	27.3
6 to 7 days	5	3.6
Hours of work per day while WFH during COVID-19		
1 to 8 hours	74	61.7
9 to 13 hours	46	28.3

Reliability

Although the instrument used in this survey are validated in various contexts in other studies, it is essential to test its reliability in the context of the current study. The internal consistency for these measures were determined first before the subsequent analyses. According to Nunnally (1978), an internal consistency of 0.7 and above is acceptable as a value for a reliable construct, while 0.9 and above is considered as very good. Perceived stress, which was measured using ten items had an internal consistency of 0.85; work interfering with personal life (WIPL) with seven items had internal consistency of 0.82 while personal Life interfering with work, four items, 0.84. All three dimensions had a strong correlations ranging from 0.644 to 0.82 with each other, all correlations were also significant at 99% confidence interval.

Perceived Stress

Perceived stress among respondents were measured by calculating the frequency of respondents experienced stress since the COVID-19 pandemic started. The ten items were adopted and adapted from (Cohen et al., 1983). Table 2 shows the findings. Between 30% to 40% of the respondents indicated that they sometimes felt stress on all the 10 items presented in the questionnaire. Between 8% to 11% of them never felt stressed, between

15% to 26% almost never felt stressed, between 17 to 28% fairly often felt stressed and between 7% to 13% were often stressed. When the total scores for all 10 items were calculated and divided into two groups, the level of stress among respondents were derived. The highest possible total scores for the 10 items were 40. Scores between 1 and 20 represent low level of stress while scores between 21 to 40 represent high stress. Analysis shows that 51.8% of the respondents has low level of stress while the remaining 48.2% shows high level of stress. A further Chi square analysis revealed that age group had a significant effect on perceived stress, with p value < 0.05 , as in Table 3. When compared within the same group of Gen Y, 62% of respondents, that is those between 26 to 40 years old perceived high level of stress. When compared across the three different age groups, up to 65.7% of Gen Y still reported to have high level of stress compare to the other two age groups. This finding is also supported by Chung et al (2018) where many people of different age groups, the challenge lies in how they navigate all the stress brought about by conflicting job and life demands. One plausible explanation is that more than half of the total respondents are in the Executive positions which requires numerous planning and decision making with regards to the day to day operations (Chung et al., 2018). Another explanation could be that many of the Gen Y have children below 12 years old and working from home during the pandemic has increase the stress to a whole new high level. This finding is also supported by Salari et al (2020) where the levels of anxiety, depression and stress are significantly higher in the age group of 21–40 years.

The open ended questions were analysed using a simple thematic approach through identification of keywords. The findings yielded four main themes: fear of losing job, worry about finances, fear of being infected for self and family members. Some 136 (98%) of them were worried that they might get infected by COVID-19 from work or from other non-work day-to-day activities such while buying essential items. Some 124 (89.2%) of them were worried that their family member might get infected. Apart from that, 125 (90%) were worried about their finances while 127 (91.4%) were worried about losing their job at SSB. This is despite data from Human Resource Department of SSB that none of the staff were put on unpaid leaves nor having their pay reduced. This could stem from their insecurity that downsizing might happen to SSB.) showed that out of five people working pre-COVID-19, one was permanently removed, and about 13% remain employed but are not working. For those actively working during the COVID-19 outbreak, nine out of ten were in some way impacted by the pandemic.

Table 2

Frequency of perceived stress among respondents

	Item	Never		Almost never		Some-times		Fairly often		Always	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	...how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	18	12.9	27	19.4	56	40.3	28	20	10	7.2
2	...how often have you felt nervous and stressed?	14	10.1	23	16.5	49	35.3	39	28	14	10.1
3	...how often have you felt that you were NOT effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?	15	10.8	30	21.6	48	34.5	32	23	14	10.1
4	...how often have you felt NOT confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	15	10.8	36	25.9	43	30.9	35	25	10	7.2
5	...how often have you felt that things were NOT going your way?	16	11.5	20	14.4	56	40.3	31	22	16	11.5
6	...how often have you found that you could NOT cope with all the things that you had to do?	13	9.4	35	25.2	44	31.7	29	21	18	12.9
7	...how often have you NOT been able to control irritations in your life?	14	10.1	30	21.6	55	39.6	23	17	17	12.2
8	...how often have you felt that you were NOT on top of things?	15	10.8	30	21.6	42	30.2	37	27	15	10.8
9	...how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	14	10.1	31	22.3	44	31.7	33	24	17	12.2
10	...how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	11	7.9	37	26.6	41	29.5	31	22	19	13.7

Table 3

Age group of respondents and perceived stress level

Item	Never		Rarely		Some-times		Fairly Often		Often		Always	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Work interfere with personal life												
Since COVID-19 pandemic started,	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 ...my personal life suffers because of work.	26	18.7	26	18.7	32	23	26	18.7	20	14.4	9	6.5
2 ...my job makes personal life difficult.	25	18	30	21.6	30	21.6	28	20.1	21	15.1	5	3.6
3 ...I neglect personal needs because of work.	27	19.4	43	30.9	27	19.4	19	13.7	15	10.8	8	5.8
4 ...I put personal life on hold for work.	26	18.7	33	23.7	35	25.2	28	20.1	12	8.6	5	3.6
5 ...I miss personal activities because of work.	19	13.7	26	18.7	37	26.6	26	18.7	18	12.9	13	9.4
6 ...I struggle to juggle work and non-work.	21	15.1	26	18.7	26	18.7	21	15.1	24	17.3	14	10.1
7 ...I am unhappy with the amount of time for non-work activities.	26	18.7	25	18	26	18.7	26	18.7	24	17.3	12	8.6
Personal life interfere with work												
8 ...my personal life drains me of energy for work.	24	17.3	30	21.6	30	21.6	28	20.1	17	12.2	10	7.2
9 ...I am too tired to be effective at work	26	18.7	29	20.9	37	26.6	22	15.8	8	5.8	17	12.2
10 ...my work suffers because of my personal life.	28	20.1	35	25.2	34	24.5	24	17.3	9	6.5	9	6.5
11 ...it is hard to work because of personal matters.	28	20.1	33	23.7	38	27.3	14	10.1	11	7.9	15	10.8

** significant at 0.05 level

Work-life Balance

The second research question was “What type of work-life balance do employees have during this pandemic?” Work-life balance among respondents were measured in two different domains: work life interfering with personal life and personal life interfering with work. Table 4 shows the frequency of the two domains. Between 13.7% to 20% of the respondents indicated that their work never affected their personal life and vice versa since COVID-19 pandemic started. A small number of participants, that is between 3.6% to 12.2% said work always interfered with their personal life and vice versa. One in every three respondents said their job rarely made personal life difficult while the one in every five said sometimes it did. The rest of the statements had quite an equal distributions of frequency. As for the level of interference, analysis shows that 87.1% of the respondents had a low level of work interfering with personal life and 87.8% had a low interference of personal life into their work. This is quite an unusual and unexpected finding to discover that only less than 13% of respondents had high level of interference of one domain into the other. Further Chi square analysis indicated that that working from home more than 3 days a week had a significant effect on work interfering with personal life, with p value $< .05$, as seen in Table 5. This is supported by Liu and Lo (2018) that work from home often makes workers have no clear boundaries between work and personal life that it impacts work-life balance, which increases stress and anxiety. This finding is also supported by studies that described work from home had negative effects on the domain of life. For example, Grant et al (2019) uncovered that workers find it difficult to manage boundaries between working and non-working time resulting in a tendency to overwork. Other studies described work from home can support work-life balance positively (eg: Ellis and Webster, 1998; Fedáková and Ištoňová, 2017) and negatively

(Wessels et al., 2019; Novianti and Roz, 2020). Work from home also frequently results in a higher level of stress (Gálvez et al., 2020; Gajendran and Harrison, 2007).

Table 4

Frequency of work interfering with personal life and personal life interfering with work among respondents

Item	Never		Rarely		Some-times		Fairly Often		Often		Always	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Work interfere with personal life												
1	Since COVID-19 pandemic started, ...my personal life suffers because of work.											
2	...my job makes personal life difficult.											
3	...I neglect personal needs because of work.											
4	...I put personal life on hold for work.											
5	...I miss personal activities because of work.											
6	...I struggle to juggle work and non-work.											
7	...I am unhappy with the amount of time for non-work activities.											
Personal life interfere with work												
8	...my personal life drains me of energy for work.											
9	...I am too tired to be effective at work											
10	...my work suffers because of my personal life.											
11	...it is hard to work because of personal matters.											

Table 5

Level of work interfering with personal life and number of days working from home

Number of days working from home (WFH)	Work interfering with personal life (WIPL)				Total (within stress level)		p value
	Low		High		n	%	
	n	%	n	%			
0 to 3 days (within level of WIPL)		71.9		50		100	1.23
0 to 3 days (within number of days WFH)	87	90.6	9	9.4	96		
4 to 7 days (within level of WIPL)		21.8		50		100	**.035
4 to 7 days (within number of days WFH)	34	79.1	9	20.9	43		

** significant at 0.05 level

Effects of Work-life Balance on Perceived Stress

The third question in this study was to investigate the effects of work interfering with personal life (WIPL) and personal life interfering with work (PLIW) on perceived stress. A multiple regression analysis was conducted. The finding is depicted in Table 6. Overall, the regression was significant, $F(2, 136) = 56.89, p < .05, R^2 = .455$. This indicates that the predictors (work interfering with personal life and personal life interfering with work) account for 45.5% of the

variance in perceived stress amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the predictors investigated, both work interference in personal life ($\beta = .330$, $t(136) = 2.897$, $p < .05$) and personal life interfering with work ($\beta = .376$, $t(136) = 3.301$, $p < .05$) were significant. The beta value of .330 for work interfering with personal life, and .376 for personal life interfering with work show a positive relationship with perceived stress. This indicates that the higher the interference of one domain into the other, the higher is the perceived stress felt by the respondents. The finding is supported by Brough et al(2014) and Ross & Vasantha (2014).

Table 6

Model Summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Std error of estimate
1	.675 ^a	.455	.477	7.62442

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1	Regression	6613.037	2	3306.518	56.880	.000 ^b
	Residual	7905.913	136	58.132		
	Total	14518.950	138			

a. dependent variable: Perceived stress

b. predictors: (Constant), work interfering with personal life, personal life interfering with work

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. error				
1 (Constant)	9.290	1.228		7.567	.000	
	WIPL	.368	.127	.330	2.897	.004
	PLIW	.695	.211	.376	3.301	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Perceived stress

Conclusions

As a conclusion, is work-life balance and stress among just a COVID-19 hype during this pandemic? In normal times, the interference of work in personal life and vice versa represent normal tension many people encounter. But since COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, nothing has been normal. Many people suffered tremendous stress brought about by lockdown, economic and societal uncertainties. Many others who started working from home also had irregular working hours and working even on the weekends. The work-life balance, or the lack of it has also resulted in higher stress in many people. Based on the findings presented, it was found that the total respondents who suffered from high level of stress since COVID-19 started is slightly less than those who suffer from low stress. A handful of them were never stressed while some were always stressed. A closer analysis showed that six in every ten between 26 to 40 year old, or the Gen Y, perceived high level of stress. The main reason for this seems to be that this age group are concerned over the future consequences and economic challenges caused by the pandemic, as they are key active working forces in a society and are most affected by lay-offs and business closures. Findings also showed that

every nine out of ten of the total respondents were worried about their finances, fear of being infected by COVID-19, not just for themselves, but for their family as well. They were also fearful of losing their job. As for work-life balance, respondents generally indicated low level of work interference with personal life, and a low level of personal life interfering with work. However, the number of days working from home was a significant determinant of work interfering with personal life. For those who work four days and more per week from home showed that work indeed interfere with their personal life. It can also be concluded that both work interfering with personal life, and personal life interfering with work are significant contributing factor to respondents' stress during COVID-19. When either one of this work-life balance domain increases, it creates stress to the respondents. As to manage the higher stress level among the Gen Y, it is recommended that the Management look into creating wellness program for all employees. It is a very vulnerable time for many people, especially those who have history of mental health issue. Counselling services should be made available either in-house or engaging external consultants. In order to manage work-life balance and stress at SSB, based on this study, it is recommended that the number of days employee WFH should be reduced to three days or less. Although COVID-19 cases is still on the rise, with the nation getting into vigorous vaccination program, it is expected that the economy will slowly open up and employees can expect to return to work as normal, with strict standard operating procedure in every workplace. Leaders could also look into creating hybrid workplace strategy that combines the best of the digital workplace and the physical workplace. This includes empowering people with the flexibility and autonomy of remote work and enabling the crucial human connection with colleagues and customers in person. The implementation of a successful hybrid work culture requires organisations to experiment and refine over a long-term period. Employee wellbeing should be at the forefront of this strategy and it requires a rethinking of long-held assumptions by organisations, bearing in mind the impact it will have on the growth, as well as its ability to foster collaboration and innovation.

This study has shed more light on the effects of work-life balance on stress among employees in a telecommunication infrastructure. It has contributed to the existing knowledge on one of the most-researched topic of the decade, that is COVID-19. This study is not without limitations. The findings of this study cannot be generalised to other sectors of different geographical context as the data for this study was collected from a specific industry. For future studies, it is proposed that testing the variables to a larger sample as well as adding other variables such as motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, impact of social isolation and productivity as a result of working from home. In addition, this study could be expanded to include other sectors in different geographical context to investigate if there is any difference among the different sectors and various geographical locations. A follow up study could also be conducted to investigate if employees have finally embraced the changes brought about by the pandemic. As economies all around the world are slowly opening up, investigation into if employees prefer to continue to work from home would make an interesting study as well.

Statements and Declarations

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article and the authors did not receive support from any organization for the submitted work. Informed consent was obtained from the Management of Sacofa Sendirian Berhad and all individual participants included in the study.

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