Measuring the Mental Wellbeing of E-Workers and Its Impact on E-Work Life Balance during COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The 2020 coronavirus outbreak has turned into a pandemic that threatens the global health, thereby promoting the concentration of studies in measuring the mental wellbeing of e-workers and its impact on e-work life balance, which has not been adequately addressed. The study examines how e-working promotes to cope up with work demands and family responsibilities. The study is conducted with 142 e-working professionals and in a different position. The impact of e-working cannot be underestimated since an employee has to maintain the family and satisfy the work boundaries have become more challenging. There is a need to balance employees' mental wellbeing, which may otherwise have negative consequences causing underperformance and increased emotional exhaustion. This study also attempts to determine the factors such as organizational support required for e-work life balance and ways to mitigate the balance and mental wellbeing in a better manner.

Keywords
Mental well-being, E-work life balance, Work life interference, Quality of life

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has completely changed the business world we once knew. Several organizations worldwide have asked their employees to work from home (Adalja, Toner & Inglesby, 2020). It is exceptionally challenging for e-workers during the pandemic to have proper work-life balance. Work from home is often perceived as a privilege that employees love. Although this statement is true in some cases, it is also a fact that long term work from home policy negatively influences every individual's mental health. Productivity varies when employees work from home and work from office because not everyone has the discipline to work in a comfortable place (Bloom, 2014). Employees must have sound mental health to deliver their work effectively. Productivity per hour needs has to be achieved while having the right amount of mental health per hour too. Since this massive shift in the system was unprecedented and unexpected, most Organizations did not have adequate time to create such comfortable working environments. Failing this would lead to underperformance in family and work demands and lead to burnouts, stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (Sonnentag, Kuttler & Fritz, 2010). It is understood that not all employees are

fit enough or disciplined to work from home effectively, concentration levels, home environments, motivation, and dedication varies for different individuals. Based on these levels, an e-worker can be physically and mentally affected. Moreover, the responsibilities of employees differ based on different work and family commitments. It suggests that gender is becoming a major factor in the WLB, and marital status also significantly affects office hours. E-working un-married men and women are more likely to work overtime (Padmasiri, 2016). In most cases, female employees might have more household responsibility than their male team members. These factors could directly result in low performance and mental stress. Balancing work and family commitments are often more complicated for women rather than men, since women have more family responsibilities (Padmasiri, 2016). The effect of additional and growing pressures on women can be long-lasting, and they continue to take up work and family responsibilities. The responsibility of women in the sense of coronavirus disease, Covid-19, is no different (McLaren, Wong, Nguyen & Mahamadachchi, 2020). The present situation has become more challenging to spare quality time to family and juggling a stressful job. Many women are engaged in managerial work in the present

scenario and want to combine their career and personal lives. In corporate working women have considerably more family obligations (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001) and also for men working from home. When the workplace joins the home, it has equal consequences for both men and women in different perspectives as the roles and responsibilities vary for the working men and women. Nevertheless, in order to be systematic in the context of developing countries such as India to include all groups of men and women, not just middle-class professionals, we need to state this topic with other dimensions of e-work life balance and the mental well-being of e-workers to expand the spectrum of 'work from home'. Though there are several empirical studies in work life balance with consideration to many other demographic factors, those study were undertaken during the normal period were only women employees will experience working from home compared to men's. Since work from home concept is evolving for all the employees during the COVID-19 lockdown, all the employees have to work from home, so to have a clear understanding of the impact of gender, marital status and other demographic factors are highlighted in this research. The research aims to find the issues faced by different types of e-workers with varying endurance levels and find the appropriate preventive measures to overcome difficulties even during a pandemic. The findings will not only benefit Organizations and their e-workers to work efficiently in an epidemic, but it will also help them adapt to a post-pandemic world.

Need for balancing e-work life balance

Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic, the general public has asked to follow social distancing as most organizations worldwide have incorporated e-working policies that require employees to work from home. The new normal of e-working is experiencing for a pretty long period. The e-workers could better balance their work and family needs when there is less gender divide, to have a proper balance. With both men and women working from home, men tend to spare extra hours in work tasks, while women takes up more domestic duties. Understandably, working from home often tempts employees to mix work and leisure. On the contrary, Grant, Wallace, Spurgeon, Tramontano & Charalampous, (2019) suggest that e-working has always been associated

with over-working due to communication overload, and reduced employee wellbeing, which could also subsequently affect an employee's performance and job effectiveness. Nevertheless, as recent studies have shown that, there can also be negative consequences when maintaining work-life balance, which suggests that remote work enables the working professionals to balance the dual role of family and work responsibilities, this has reported in spending very less time for personalized leisure activities (Grant et al., 2019). Restubog, Ocampo & Wang (2020)opined that balancing busy work schedules and family demands could lead to shoddy work and family results and lead to increased stress, burnout, and emotional fatigue. Due to increased interest, more focus is being given to understand the serious challenges and the role that workplace factors have on employee wellbeing (Agarwal & Sharma, 2011).

Need for employees mental well-being

Mental wellbeing is necessary for workers to be innovative and productive to fulfill the demands of their jobs. As the coronavirus pandemic forced working professionals worldwide to adjust to the new standard, employers should pay attention to their workforce's mental wellbeing. Employers should not be surprised that the current pandemic of COVID-19 has affected and will continue to influence employees' mental health and wellbeing. According to Bumhira, Musara & Nzonzo (2017), employee wellness is an element which is directly responsible for the degree of authenticity an employee has while connecting with his/her peers around the world, and find the purpose in their personal life and career. However, to do so, Restubog et al., (2020) suggest that individuals effectively adapt and respond to challenges in their jobs and events by improving their emotional skills and cognitive abilities. Connell (2005) evident that now there are increasing signs of stress, anxiety and social conflict based on the the alliance with the family and the labor market. In this context it cannot be concluded that there will be continuing movement towards gender equality and a better balance between work-life balance. Panisoara & Serban (2013) have found that parent workers have substantially higher tension rates between work and personal life. Married workers were found to have considerably higher proportions of conflict over non-parents between work and personal life. The adaptation of

parenthood tends can be a marked by the upraised level of stress in which there are major changes in the relationship, roles, interests of the family and gender differences in Understanding the work-life Distribution (Malik, 2015). Under the current circumstances,it is observed that mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, stress, insomnia, anger, denial, low morale, and fear are common among individuals (Torales, Higgins, Castaldelli-maia & Ventriglio, 2020). Kazmi, Hasan, Talib & Saxena (2020) opined that, due to the novel Covid-19 pandemic, e-workers professionals face extreme challenges because they are left with limited information for the underlying mental health and psychological impact that virtual working has on the general public.

Proposed Theoretical Framework

The outbreak of COVID-19 is transforming the day today life in unimaginable way and emotionally stressing. Both sections of people, including employees and employers, will play a role in safeguarding oneself and others around them by preventing the disease from spreading further (WHO). In particular, e-workers must learn skills related to increasing their ability to self-manage their jobs, set appropriate goals and expectations, and ensure that requirements are achieved. According to Grant et al., (2019), E-Well-Being is all about how e-workers try to balance their health and wellbeing positively while remote working and aware of when to "switch off" from e-work. The coronavirus outbreaks have impeded economic growth and disrupt healthy day-to-day life. These unprecedented outbreaks also elicit long-term and acute effects on an individual's wellbeing. E-working has fallibility, such as the lack of performance as a team and also the supervisory system, which is not maximal for the manager but has its shortcomings. The study is focused mainly on the pandemic situation since another study has been undertaken during the normal time. Buddhapriya (2009) comments that Work-life imbalances typically arise from a lack of adequate time and resources for the management of work obligations, as well as personal and family commitments. Employees who can effectively control their emotions will be more productive and efficient in achieving their work goals, given

the need to suddenly turn their job into a home setting with many other distractions and demands (Restubog et al., 2020).

The study of Mustajab et al., (2020) has also shown that e-working gives employees flexibility and discretion to do their jobs without supervisors or managers' direct supervision. The need to balance difficult work and family demands may not only cause individuals to underperform both in the workplace and in the family. Still, it may also lead to increased emotional exhaustion, stress and burnout (Restubog et al., 2020). Certainly, e-working is not risk-free, what often happens is the mutual distrust that arises from both the employer and the worker, because the trust factor in the WFH concept is an essential factor that all parties must agree on (Mustajab et al., 2020). Clark (2000) Wok-Family Border Theory seeks to understand how people manage and negotiate work and family worlds and boundaries between them to maintain harmony. This contrasts work and family environments with opposing cultures in various countries and defines people as border-crossers who pass between these worlds. This is a valuable theory for the conceptualization of work-life harmony.

Gender disparities occur in terms of work and family boundaries in almost every culture, resulting in gender differences in work-family interface interactions. Over time and across cultures, research continues to document the enduring differences in household work allocation within dual-career families, including among couples with 'modern' values and a dedication to gender equality at home and work(Buddhapriya, 2009). Jick & Mitz (1985) reviewed the scientific evidence of gender disparities in stress dynamics. They concluded that women tend to report higher psychological distress rates while men are more prone to serious physical illness. WLB has mainly been seen as a problem for women, particularly those working in business and have family responsibilities. Gender is an essential part of every debate on the intersection of paid employment and family life(Emslie & Hunt, 2009).

The work-life balance represents an issue of prime concern for working men too. Women managers follow a range of work-life approaches that respect the organizational norm and that value the individual and the family (Guillaume & Pochic, 2009). Simultaneous pursuit of career and family

responsibilities involves greater awareness and mutuality between the husband and the wife (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1987). Women still primarily take care of domestic tasks, regardless of their employment status. As a result, many female workers also face difficulties managing these two powers(Malik,2015). Hall & Gordon (1973)stated that domestic behaviors are of primary concern to married women, regardless of their sexual sexuality (career versus traditional roles). Individuals can also experience positive effects, such as positive spillovers, in which work or home domain elements enhance the other domain(Kim & Hollensbe, 2018). Quantitative studies have attempted to monitor this disparity by contrasting men and women working in similar occupations. The findings are mixed: some studies have shown that women experience more tension between work and home life than men (Emslie & Hunt, 2009).

While the emergence of family friendly work environment has been an important aspect to promote and engage women in workforce, both male and female e-working professionals will be benefited from such formal policies and informal changes. (Feeney & Stritch, 2019). We also, therefore, recognize that the effects of family-friendly policies and culture can vary in terms of their impact on the WLB for both men and women.

The marital status of the person is another important factor in the issue of achieving an acceptable WLB. A relaxed or unpleasant WLB may be traced back to one's marital status. The early focus of work-family / life balance research was on working mothers and dual-wage couples. Therefore, the marital status of employees with its inherent obligations coupled with workplace obligations makes the task of finding a balance between the two realms a vital activity for a married worker (Amazue & Onyishi, 2016).Thus, balancing work and life can also be critical for individuals who are not married, as well as for those who are married.

The lack of continuity between supervisory management and the implementation of flexible work systems can contribute to perceived stress when trying to balance personal and work life(Hayman & Hayman, 2009). Individual wellbeing reflects the degree to which an individual authentically experiences a relationship with others and the world and seeks meaning in

life and work(Bumhira et al., 2017). Several empiric studies have shown that work-life balance experience is positively related to employee performance and organizational success(Kim, 2014). However, the degree to which individuals carry work to home and its results depend not only on their individual characteristics but also on the size of the demands and resources they have at work and home (Kim & Hollensbe, 2018). In a recent study Amazue & Onyishi (2016), it was found that every worker needs a life outside the workplace and beyond family life. Restubog et al., (2020) has suggested in future research opportunity to study the immediate effect on this pandemic period, it is said that the importance to examine how numerous attempts to reduce the spread of the virus will potentially influence people's jobs and personal lives, giving us an in-depth and systematic view of how this pandemic affects the working lives and job decisions of individuals both in short and in the long term.

The above discussion of the study states that there is a research gap, as far as measurement of work life balance during this pandemic and the factors that affects the mental well-being based on the demographic. In this view, the following hypotheses are proposed.

1. There is a significant difference among the demographics and work life balance.
2. There is a significant difference between demographics and mental well being.

Research Methodology

Sample

A descriptive study was conducted among 142 e-working professionals of the different organization using snowball sampling techniques. Online survey links (Google form) were circulated among the e-workers with a structured questionnaire from 04 – 24 th April 2020 with a clickable link for a voluntary, anonymous online survey. The questionnaire's link was sent to the contacts via e-mails, WhatsApp, and other social media. Participants were encouraged to roll as many people as possible out for the survey. Thus, apart from the first point of contact, the link was forwarded to people, and so on. The participants were auto-directed to the study information and informed consent upon receiving and clicking the link. They have filled out the demographic details

after they agreed to take the survey. Then a series of 39 questions were presented sequentially, which were to be answered by the participants. The study focused on the e-workers who were engaged in e-working practice since the lockdown. The design chosen for the current study is recorded information about the participants without any manipulation of the study environment.

Background Information

To come up with quantitative data participants were asked open questions about their e-work life balance and mental well-being of e-working professionals. Participants were also asked to report their age, gender, marital status, position, job experience, sector to support the quantitative analysis.

Variable Information

The primary independent variable measured the impacts of e-work life balance during the COVID-19 lockdown. The independent variable e-work life had sub-variables such as Work-life interference: Mohamad, N., Ismail, A., Mohamad, N. M., Ahmad & Yahy (2016) stated in a qualitative analysis of work-family research that conflict, distress, tension at work, unpredictability in the job routine and coercive management were all linked to job and family involvement. Effectiveness and productivity: Grant et al., (2019) found that e-working is the only case were the home has lesser interruption than office. Organizations usually focus on using technology to enhance consumer experience and encourage the employees to use the latest means to enhance their efficiency. Organizational trust: trust in an organization and its members by developing an intra-organizational value chain, both horizontally and vertically, to achieve organizational objectives. Flexibility: scheduling provides the flexibility to change the days and hours at the workplace, enabling remote work for employees .

The dependent variable measured the mental well-being of e-workers who were forced to accept the new normal. The measurable items comprising the dimension mental well-being include Quality of life: The satisfaction of employees with different needs, including social needs, the need for respect, the need for skills, the need for psychological

well-being(Cheung & Tang, 2009). Depression: is a common psychiatric illness with depressed mood, lack of interest or enjoyment, decreased motivation, low self-esteem, impaired sleep or appetite, and poor concentration. Anxiety: The American Psychological Association (APA) anxiety is characterized as emotions by feelings of distress, anxious thoughts and physical changes such as elevated blood pressure.

Obsessive-compulsive: is an anxiety disorder in individuals have recurrent, Unwanted thoughts, concepts, or feelings (obsessions) that make them feel obligated to do something repeatedly. Repetitive behavior, checking things, can have significant impact on individual's social interaction and daily activities. Stress Work-related stress is the reaction that people may have when faced with work demands and strains that are inconsistent with their skills and abilities to cope. These variables were used to measure the accuracy and several dimensions to analyses the influence of e-work life balance on mental well-being of the e-workers.

Measure

All the constructs of the study was measured using five point likert agreement scale with the responses ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Independent variable such as work life interference, organizational trust ,effectiveness and productivity, and flexibility was assessed with the scale developed by Zayed, Ahmed, Niekerk, King & Ho (2018). Work-life interference was measured with three positive statements (e.g., "I am happy with my work-life balance when e-working remotely"), with the moderate Cronbach's alpha =.721 (M=3.255, SD=4.400). To measure the effectiveness and productivity scale consisting of four statements (e.g., "When e-working I can concentrate better on my work tasks"), with a moderate Cronbach's alpha =.702 (M=3.445, SD=3.43). Organizational trust was measured with four statements (e.g., "My organization provides training in e-working skills and behaviors"), with a moderate Cronbach's alpha =.712 (M=3.731, SD=3.35). Flexibility was measured with four statements (e.g., "My supervisor gives me total control over when and how I get my work completed when e working") with a moderate Cronbach's alpha =.773 (M=3.630, SD=3.54). A five point likert scale was used to measure the negative

statements(e.g., "My e-working takes up time that I would like to spend with my family/ friends or on other non-work activities") in work life interference, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) was reverse coded so that higher values on the scale indicate greater focal on right e-work life balance.

All the construct under dependent variable are measured using five point likert scale with a responses from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Dependent variable such as depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder was measured with a scale developed by Derogatis (1983). Depression was measured with a scale composing of three statements (e.g. "Feeling hopeless about the future being quarantined") with a moderate alpha =.727 (M=3.18, SD=3.186). To measure anxiety three statement was used (e.g., "Suddenly scared or nervous when my peers call") with a moderate alpha =.718 (M=3.012, SD=3.2). Obsessive compulsive disorder was assessed with four statements (e.g., " Having to check and double-check what you do") with a moderate alpha =.718 (M=3.012, SD=3.2). Quality of life was assessed using the SF – 36 V2 health survey developed by Good (2009) with an agreement scale composed of three statements (e.g., "Feel e-working has cut down on the amount of time spent on work or other activities") with a moderate alpha =.729 (M=3.092, SD=3.055). To measure stress DASS scale developed by Lovibond (1995), composing of four statements (e.g., " I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing") with a moderate alpha educational qualification, most of the respondents are postgraduates (61.3%) and undergraduates (32.4%).

Results

The study sought to understand the work-life balance and its impact on mental well-being of e-

=.710 (M=3.34, SD=3.5). The sum of all items was used as the score for data analyses.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analyses were carried out in the IBM SPSS statistics 23.0 version. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation were calculated for the various scales and subscales to achieve the study's purpose. Frequencies and percentage analysis were used to study the respondent's profile. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the factors affecting the mental well-being of e-workers. Independent sample t-test and step wise regression was used to know the predictors of mental well-being.

Respondent's Profile

The sample comprised of 142 e-workers, where the majority are male (68.3%). A majority number of respondent belongs to the age group of 20 – 25 years (55.6%). In terms of the marital status majority of the respondents were un-married (83.8%). The majority of the respondents were from IT sector (33.1%), marketing (23.9%), banking (19.7%), BPO (14.8%), content sourcing (5.6%), and pharmaceutical (2.8%). In terms of managerial hierarchy the respondents were, manager (27.5%), executive position (25.4%), developer (19.0%), trainee (15.5%) and analysts (12.7%). Majority of the respondent has (76.8%) 1 – 3 years of work experience. In terms of

workers gender and marital status, to show the comparison between of mental well-being and e-work life balance based on gender and marital status, independent sample t-test were performed for the two groups (Table 1).

T-test for Gender and Marital Status (Table 1)								
	Work Life Balance				Mental Well Being			
	OT	EP	FLX	WLI	QOL	DEP	ANX	OCD	STRS
Gender	4.059	.285	.782	.000	1.065	.106	.451	2.012	3.328
Marital Status	.828	7.136	4.333*	.060	.107	3.664	.030	.120	.003

*significant at 0.05 level

The result of Table 1 shows that there is no significant difference in work life balance and mental well-being of gender. The results indicate that marital status has a significant difference between the marital status and flexibility. However, married (M=3.931) experience higher work life balance then un-married (M=3.573).

Table 2 shows the impact of work life balance and mental well-being with other demographic factors. Analysis of variance was performed (ANOVA) with work life balance and mental well-being with other demographic factors such as sector, position, job experience and qualification.

ANOVA (Table 2)								
	Work Life Balance				Mental Well Being			
	OT	EP	FLX	WLI	QOL	DEP	ANX	OCD	STRS
Sector	3.120*	.672	2.411*	.754	.098	.238	.997	.166	.454
Position	1.296	.713	1.763	.356	.831	.715	.953	1.750	.296
Job Experience	1.116	.929	.993	.861	.868	.832	.808	1.237	1.063
Qualification	2.627	1.273	2.326	4.068*	1.069	.354	.482	1.323	.301

*significant at 0.05 level

The table 2 shows that there is a significant difference between sector and organizational trust. The banking sector has a significant difference between other sectors in terms of organizational trust (p=.011, F=3.120). In terms of sector flexibility has a significant difference, its banking sector that has a significant difference with the (p=.040, F=2.411). The table reveals that qualification has a significant difference between work life interference, the post graduates has a significant difference in terms of qualification with the p=.008, F=4.068.

To get a better understanding on the predictors of work life balance and mental well-being, step-wise regression was performed (Table 3).

Step-wise Regression for Mental well-being and work life balance (Table 3)			
	Standardized Co-efficient Beta	t	Sig
Work Life Interference	.911	19.615	.000
Organizational Trust	-.578	-12.435	.000

*significant at 0.05 level

The results of table 3 reveal that work life balance will predict mental well-being. Work life interference and organizational trust have merged as predictors of mental well-being. Work life interference is a important predictor with standardized co-efficient beta .911, followed by

organizational trust with the standardized co-efficient beta -.578. an increased organizational trust can increase the mental well-being of the employees, as such the other findings of the study depicts that higher the wok life interference lower the mental well-being.

Discussion

Though a large number of studies had been carried out by researchers in the past analyzing work-life balance considering job demands and family life, the current situation is posing a challenge for e-working professionals, demanding them to display extended commitment in terms of time and resources. During the epidemic, the redesigned jobs warranted a critical behavior wherein the employees underwent depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and stress due to lack of preparedness. This prevailing condition is likely to affect and impact the mental well-being of e-workers, warranting the current study to analyze factors that need to be considered to balance the e-work life during the time of crisis and prioritize the importance of the mental well-being of e-workers.

Various researches have demonstrated that the stress created by the dynamics of work-home interface stress varies between men and women. The finding of this particular research has shown that gender has no significant difference on the mental well-being of the e-workers. Similar results are also evidenced in the study of Sahgal (1995) that male and female groups do not differ in different stress dimensions. In the findings of this study gender has no significant difference on the work life balance of the e-workers. In contradiction to the findings the study of Malik (2015) states that gender has significant impact on the work life balance.

The study further throws evidence that flexibility influence the work life balance of the married and un-married e-workers. The married individuals are trying to strike a balance between their personal and work life, compared to the unmarried e-workers. The studies of Malik (2015) and Panisoara & Serban (2013) also falls in line with these findings of the study.

The study results reveal that organizational trust and flexibility of the banking sector employees has a significant difference between other sectors. In terms of educational qualification the post graduates have a significant difference between all qualifications in terms of work life interference.

Work-life interference has the greatest impact on the mental well-being of e-workers. The finding of this particular research has shown that the work life interference have emerged as predictors of Mental well-being of e-working professionals. The results of this study are evidenced by the findings of Kim (2014) work-to-family interference (WIF) and family-to-work interference (FIW), where the two factors are adversely linked to mental well-being. It is possible that organizational trust can allow the employees to have a balanced mental well-being. The study reveals that the organizational trust of the e-workers have emerged as a predictor of mental well-being. Grant (2019) work-life intervention, productivity and organizational trust were also associated with the workers vitality for their subjective well-being. The more e-workers feel that e-work improves their efficiency, it is carried out within a supportive and trustworthy organization, the greater their self-reported mental well-being.

Limitation and Future Scope of Study

It is important to note that the limitations of this study pertain to the restricted population studied who are technically sound professionals, with the knowledge of high end technologies used for work from home, and have access to such technical advancements. The scope of research can be extended to the work from home community falling under the un-organized sector and who have limited access to the technological advancement.

Conclusion

As a remedial measure, the e-workers can create a private space, void of distraction, equipped with access to the internet and technology. To improve the quality of work-life, it's time to plan a better work pattern inclusive of fitness routines, healthy diet schedules, and quality family time to switch between work and family routines. Though temporary, the pandemic has provided a chance

for a rapport between the efforts of the organization and the efforts of the working professionals to synchronize with each other for better productivity.

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