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Work-life Balance: Telepressure and Marital Status Interaction

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ABSTRACT

Telepressure in the workplace, represented as an employee's concern and urge to reply fast to work-related communications through the use of information and communication technologies, which may be concerned about poorer employee work-life balance and the employee's inferior well-being. This study aims to identify the relationship between telepressure and work-life balance. This study further tested the moderating role of marital status between telepressure and work-life balance. Data for the present study was collected from 558 volunteers from Malaysia by getting responses through online surveys. The employing simple technique was convenience. Data was analysed through PROCESS macro using SPSS. Results showed the significant influence of telepressure on work-life balance. Results further confirmed that employees' marital status moderates this relationship of telepressure on work-life balance. Results also found that the telepressure is seen high among married people but low among single people. Present study's model is supported by the Role Conflict Theory. Which covers the conflicts arises between work and personal life of employees as a result of extra demand of work. This is a unique combination that is important in the post-COVID context, and it was less explored previously. While no study has been found covering "telepressure->marital status->work-life balance" in context of Malaysia previously.

Keywords: Conflict Role Theory, Malaysia, Marital Status, Telepressure, Work-life Balance

1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of communication technology in the workplace has drastically transformed the nature of interpersonal communications at work in modern times. It enables employees to connect with coworkers or clients, regardless of location or time, through mobile phones, voice mail, email, personal data assistants (PDAs), and pagers. Modern technologies have made communication convenient and reliable and enabled workers to remain connected remotely (Kurfess et al., 2020). According to Martin (2020) this communication technology facilitates telecommuting, which helps workers to perform their work effectively even when they are away from their traditional offices. This also relieves the stress of working hours by making it possible to communicate at any time during nonwork hours. An employee, for instance, may check or answer messages in the evenings or on weekends. In short, people may remain linked to work even while they are not technically on the job (Aman-Ullah et al., 2020b). The most significant advantage is that employees can work at their convenience anytime. However, this adaptability has consequences as well. Organisations begin to believe that since employees are reachable, they must remain ready to respond anytime (Alvi, 2018; Aman-Ullah et al., 2022a). In ICT-based work communications, messages are designed to be responded to at the receiver's convenience. Nonetheless, some individuals see these communications as requiring instant answers (Lee et al., 2019; Maryuningsih et al., 2020).

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This obsession with and need to react to ICT-based work communications is seen as a fundamental ICT-related work demand known as telepressure (Barber et al., 2019). Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) further added that following the job demands-resources (JD-R) paradigm, work demands need persistent effort and attention. Workers who do not take breaks from these pressures may suffer from job exhaustion or other poor health and wellbeing related issues (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015).

Workplace telepressure is a worker's psychological reaction to perceived job pressures, that is, the need to reply immediately to work-related ICT communications. Although workers are not always doing labour-intensive activities while monitoring and responding to ICT demands, workplace telepressure has been shown to increase job burnout and lead to poor quality sleep (Hu et al., 2019). Workplace telepressure also contributes to worker burnout, impedes recuperation, and decreases work engagement (Kao et al., 2020; Van Laethem et al., 2018). Kotera et al. (2021) further added that telepressure has a detrimental impact on workers' work-life balance since the over usage of communication technology has blurred the boundaries between home and work.

In view of Denson and Szelényi (2020) the effect of poor work-life balance is seen more among married people since they remain involved in their jobs for longer hours in the day, which makes it difficult for them to spare time for their families. In the COVID-19 era, a massive shift from the conventional work system to the online system has been observed worldwide (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022; Mehmood et al., 2022). This system helped organisations maintain their work remotely by offering online work using technology. Like many other countries, Malaysia has also adopted this system successfully. Besides getting benefits from going online, several problems are also observed.

According to Muthuswamy (2021) adopting technology in the COVID-19 era has caused more pressure and stress among married individuals, especially women. Several employees reported that mass-scale technology adoption created telepressure as it increased their workload (Heng & Sol, 2021). Employees claim that previously they had specific working hours, but due to online working, there is no specific work time. Telepressure is seen higher among married employees, especially among women, since they take care of home chores like looking after their kids and many other things (Amin et al., 2022; Kumaresan et al., 2022; Soubelet-Fagoaga et al., 2021).

Furthermore, 50% of women worldwide started facing work-life balance problems after their work went online. According to a survey by malaysiakini.com, 63% of Malaysian employees face work-life balance problems, which is 13% more than the global average. The work-life balance problem is seen more among working women in Malaysia since women's participation in the Malaysian economy is over 55% (Aufa, 2022). This raises a need to study telepressure's impact on the work-life balance among working employees in Malaysia, and marital status is treated as a moderating factor in the present study to determine its impact on the relationship. To the researcher's knowledge, there is a dearth study of this inter-relationship, thus contributing to expanding the literature on work-family study.

Present study is unique in a way that this the first study exploring the relationship of telepressure with work-life balance in Malaysian context. work-life balance’ relationship in the Malaysian context, creating a gap for future studies. Literature also revealed that telepressure shows more effect among married employees. Therefore, marital status is added as a moderator in the present study to determine its impact on the relationship. The moderating effect of marital status with telepressure and work-life balance is also missing in the existing literature, representing another novelty of this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Role Conflict Theory

The present study is supported by Greenhaus and Beutell's Role Conflict Theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The concept argues that contentment and accomplishment in one sphere of human life need sacrifice in the next. This concept is based on two components 'life and work'. Both carry different expectations and standards. The role theory started from the 'scarcity concept', which indicates that people should utilise their limited resources (time and energy) to fulfil their assigned responsibilities. However, role conflicts can halt the operation smoothly. For instance, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) say that while applying Role Conflict Theory, three types of conflicts arise: 1) time-based conflict that occurs due to difficulty of task completion due to time shortage. They added that the possible reasons for time-based conflicts are inflexible work hours, irregular shift work, and long working hours. 2) Behaviour-based conflict is the second type of conflict that arises when individuals encounter unfavourable behaviours in the workplace. Lastly, 3) stress-based conflict arises due to excessive job demands, interaction tiredness, and irregular shift work. Previous researchers like Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) revealed that when a conflict arises between work and life, it creates difficulty for individuals to play a role effectively. Hence, the virtue of participation in each role dies. Several researchers found that telepressure can make a further push in role conflict among individuals (Kao et al., 2020; Page et al., 2021). For instance, workers who feel telepressure are an obsession and need to reply to work-related communication affect their health and wellbeing (Pfaffinger et al., 2022). This continual demand to reply to work emails and text messaging has also been connected to how individuals view their work-life balance (Dunn & McMinn, 2021). Therefore, it is argued that in the presence of telepressure, an individual's work-life balance will be affected negatively.

2.2 Telepressure

Previous literature shows the increasing trend of information and communication technologies (ICT) related demands that harm employees' wellbeing by increasing their stress levels (Santuzzi & Barber, 2018). Some prominent examples are 'technology difficulties (computer freezes and failures), expectations to be accessible or contacted outside of work hours (on-call duties), information overload, and employee monitoring (recording keystrokes and performance monitoring) (Day et al., 2010). Pressure to provide immediate response for electronic communications, either by phone calls, instant messages or emails, is seen as another crucial ICT-related job requirement, which is of particular significance to this research. According to Day et al. (2010) technology-based information and communication demand have increased the stress among employees and their wellbeing. Day et al. (2012) further added that the perceptions of high response expectations related to ICT-based messages are strongly associated with increasing burnout and high level of stress. This is not explicitly related to the pressure built by the compliance of external demands. However, it is also related to the psychological condition that keeps employees engaged in work-related technologies. For such stress and pressure Barber and Santuzzi (2015) used a specific word called 'workplace telepressure'. They defined it as 'an obsession and need to reply to the information and communications technology-based (ICT-based) messages'.

Telepressure in the workplace refers to the integration of response norm expectations. Such expectations are more likely associated with higher worker stress and poor wellbeing. According to Barber and Santuzzi (2015) several other job-related constructs add information and communications technology pressures, that include 'frequency of ICT usage at work and home, ICT demands, creation of ICT barriers at home, workload, and workaholism'. Also, individuals' personality attributes like 'conscientiousness, extraversion, and public self-consciousness' add up the pressures (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). In view of Grawitch et al. (2018) telepressure creates a contrasting effect since it arises from perceived norms and response expectations. These norms

are also get influenced by individual interpretations. Several researchers have observed that telepressure strongly correlates with emotional exhaustion, workaholism, work overload, and work-life conflicts (Franzen, 2020; Kantidou, 2021; Kunz, 2021).

Telepressure not only comes from inside organisations but also from outside associations, such as the pressure caused by social media involvement, FOMO and self-control (Barber & Santuzzi, 2017). These pressures are in addition to the usual pressures faced by employees. After a thorough literature review, it is believed that some aspects of workplace telepressure still need to be explored. Though the literature on telepressure about job demands is widely explored and understood, the amount of time, changes, and the circumstances that cause telepressure are yet to be explored. Expectation-based telepressure fluctuates monthly, and the area is yet to be explored. These stressors are similar to the findings of past investigations about job stressors and employee strain experiences (Kao et al., 2020). Previous researchers working on general telepressure (work and nonwork) revealed that differences in telepressure occur at least twice a month (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). Further, interference with job recovery processes was considered a possible reason behind telepressure's harmful effects on employees' wellbeing, which is also aligned with past literature (Derks et al., 2014). However, this explanation still needs to be fully verified and evaluated.

2.3 Telepressure and Work–life Balance

In view of Aman-Ullah et al. (2022) resources always remain scarce; therefore, employees always have to be very careful while utilising their limited resources such as 'energy, time, and attention to fulfil their work and nonwork demands. High levels of engagement with job demands require resources that might be diverted from engagement in the home domain and vice versa (Mohd Zin et al., 2022). As a result, individuals are often required to make critical choices about managing these resources between work and home domains. Furthermore, regarding the personal resource allocation paradigm, Grawitch et al. (2018) argue that these choices might lead to differing personal perceptions of 'balance', particularly depending on individual inclinations to participate in certain activities. One method for conceptualising work-life balance is from a global measuring standpoint, focusing on individuals' overall perceptions of managing work and home responsibilities (Aman-Ullah et al., 2020a; Barber et al., 2019). According to studies, lengthy work hours imply a worse effect on employee satisfaction with work-life balance, which is consistent with the resource drain viewpoint (Holden & Sunindijo, 2018). However, following the personal allocation framework, the motivating content of continuous engagement with work is equally important (Grawitch et al., 2010).

Thus, feeling pressured to reply to work communications is non-autonomous and may play an important role in these balancing assessments. There is an increasing concern that technology usage beyond conventional work hours has serious negative consequences for work-life balance (Hsu et al. 2019; Kelliher & de Menezes, 2019). In particular when workers do not feel in control over their technology usage (Marques & Berry, 2021; Ohly & Latour, 2014). From this viewpoint, individuals who feel compelled to reply rapidly to work-related ICT communications, such as 'the people who experience high levels of workplace telepressures', are driven to redirect resources to work responsibilities (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). This may detract time and focus from home responsibilities, given that this urge to react is a compulsion - i.e. a response that is a 'have to' rather than a 'want to' demand. It is further anticipated that these sentiments would affect wellbeing outcomes and work–life balance ratings (Bauwens et al., 2020; Grawitch et al., 2010). This is because concentrating on reacting to work ICT communications such as 'work demands' may result in the neglect of critical nonwork duties and obligations. Thus, we anticipate that workplace telepressure may be associated with low work–life balance assessments. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H_1. Telepressure has significantly negative influence on work–life balance.

2.4 Marital Status as Moderator

Changing status from single to married brings many attached responsibilities in everyone's life. It is an important and a must fact of our lives which cannot be ignored. Besides exploring the relationship between 'workplace telepressure on work-life balance,' this study also aims to explore the moderating effect of marital status. Telepressure is a reaction to internalised communication requests that repeat reminders of what must be done at work (Santuzzi & Barber, 2018). According to the effort-recovery theory Meijman and Mulder (2013) this extended reaction to job pressures may interfere with crucial recovery processes such as psychological detachment from family (not thinking about family and related aspects). Resultantly, it will affect the family life of the individuals. According to Mittal and Bhakar (2018) family requirements and stress differ between married and single people. Past literature revealed that married people are found to be more affected by workplace telepressure, since their family obligations are also very high, which creates stress among them (Grawitch et al., 2018; Kao et al., 2020). Therefore, marital status is added as a moderator in the present study. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H_2: Marital status moderates the relationship between telepressure and work-life balance.

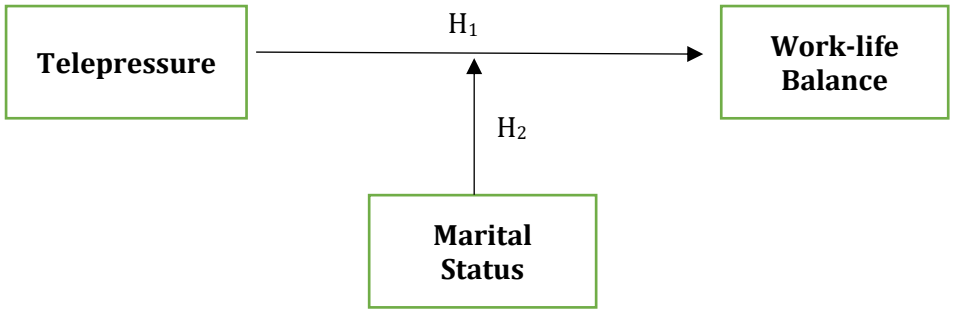


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

3. METHODOLOGY

Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique on employed people in Malaysia who participated voluntarily. Because data was collected during MCO COVID-19 restrictions, and it was difficult to target a specific population group. Therefore, convenience sampling method was used, and the data was collected through emails and WhatsApp messages from all those working employees (either working in banks, schools, hospitals public and private firms) who are residents of Peninsular Malaysia. For this purpose, more than 800 people were contacted through emails and WhatsApp. While 560 responses were received, out of which 2 questionnaires with incomplete information were discarded and 558 responses were actually utilised for data analysis.

Furthermore, pre-tested questionnaires were adapted in the present study such as: for telepressure was assessed using six items Barber and Santuzzi (2015) while confirming the reliability at $\alpha = .87$. Example items read, "I feel a strong need to respond to others immediately". The work-life balance was assessed with five items Valcour (2007) with the reliability of $\alpha = .81$. Example items read, "How well your work life and your personal or family life fit together." To rate the questionnaire, respondents were asked to follow seven-point Likert scale following (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022; Aman-Ullah et al., 2021; Aman-Ullah et al., 2022b) where 1 indicates strongly disagree to 7 strongly agreed.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Respondents' Profiles

The demographic profile includes age, gender, marital status, level of education, and employment sector Table 1. The majority of 49.6% of participants belonged to the age group of 25 - 45 years, followed by 34.1% of those in the group below 25, and respondents above 45 composed 16.3% of the total. These results indicate the participation of all age groups in this study. In terms of gender, 43.5% were male, and 56.5% of participants were females, indicating the very close presence of both genders. Regarding marital status, 54.7% were married, while 45.3% were unmarried, indicating an equal proportion between the two groups. On the education level, there is not much difference between the degree holder and non-degree holder groups, which are composed of 52.5 and 47.5%, respectively- indicating that respondents had mixed education backgrounds. Lastly, responding to the employment sector, 53.6% of respondents replied that they are serving in the public sector, while 46.4% were in the private sector.

Table 1 Respondent's Profile

Description	Range	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 25	190	34.1%
	25 to 45	276	49.6%
	Above 45	92	16.3%
Gender	Male	243	43.5%
	Female	315	56.5%
Marital status	Unmarried	253	45.3%
	Married	305	54.7%
Education level	Non-degree holders	264	47.5%
	Degree holders	292	52.5%
Employment sector	Public	298	53.6%
	Private	258	46.4%

4.2 Correlational Analysis

Table 2 of the present study represents the descriptive statistics through 'mean and standard deviation' and the correlation relationships among constructs. Results indicate that on a 5-point Likert scale, mean values for telepressure and work-life balance are 3.03 and 4.41 respectively. Also, the correlation between these two constructs is .054, indicating that the model is free from correlation issues.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistic and Correlations Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Telepressure	Work-life Balance
Telepressure	3.03	0.94	1.00	
Work-life Balance	4.41	0.99	-0.47**	1.00

Note: p<.05*, p<.01**.

4.3 Regression Analysis

The present study tested hypotheses using PROCESS macro version 4.1 of regression analysis. Table 3 shows the results of the overall fitness of the model, the direct relationship between telepressure and work-life balance, along with moderating effect of marital status on the relationship between telepressure and work-life balance. Results indicate that the study model is significant (R2 = 0.404, MSE = 0.9653, F = 3.8529, p = .0009). This indicates that the study model can proceed at p<.001***.

Results further indicate that telepressure forms a significant relationship with work-life balance at (β = .2416, t = 3.4656, p = .0006). However, in contrast to previous studies telepressure formed a positive relationship with work-life balance. For instance, Barber et al. (2019) conducted a study in the USA to test the impact of workplace telepressure on employees' work-life balance. They found in their study that workplace telepressure has a strong association with employees' wellbeing and makes it difficult for the employees to create a balance between their work and personal life. Similarly, the present study results show that work-life balance has a significantly positive relationship with marital status at (β = 1.1034, t = 3.7873, p = .0002). These findings align with the previous findings of Kelliher and de Menezes (2019) as they found that many married people took help from their spouses and other family members to seek help in solving their problems which eased their life.

The present study also tested the moderating role of marital status in the relationship between telepressure and work-life balance. Results also show that marital status moderates the relationship between telepressure and work-life balance at (β = -0.2807, t = -3.0946, p = .0021). These results align with the findings of Vaziri et al. (2020) as they found that a COVID-19 sudden work shift and change in the work interface increased work-family conflicts. Figure 2 of the present study further explains that single people have less telepressure than married people. According to Turel et al. (2011) excessive use of technology disturbs the life of married people. However, it shows no effect on the work-life balance of single people works life balance. Its possible explanation is the difference in the life goals or work-life centrality between married and single people.

Table 3 Hypotheses Testing through Hierarchical Regression

Model summary						
R	**R^2**	**MSE**	**F**	**df1**	**df2**	**p**
0.201	0.404	0.9653	3.8529	6	549	0.0009
Model						
	Coeff (β)	**SE**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**LL_CI**	**UL_CI**
Constant	3.3482	0.2662	12.578	0.0000	2.8253	3.8711
Tale-pressure	0.2416	0.0697	3.4656	0.0006	0.1047	0.3785
Marital status	1.1034	0.2913	3.7873	0.0002	0.5311	1.6757
Tale-pressure x Marital status	-0.2807	0.0907	-3.0946	0.0021	-0.4589	-0.1025
R-square increase due to interaction (s).						
	R^2-change		**F**	**df1**	**Df2**	**p**
Tale-pressure x Marital status	0.0167		9.5768	1	549	0.0021

Note: p<.05*, p<.01**, p<.001***.

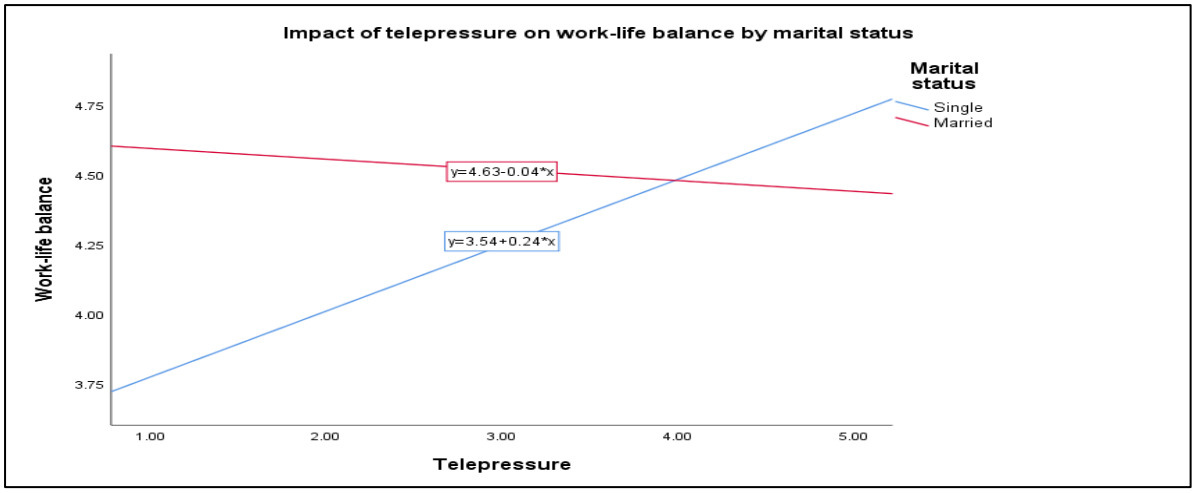


Figure 2. Moderation Effect of Marital Status

5. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Present study carries some practical implications for employee's and their organisations. It provides guidelines on how to counter the effects of telepressure on employee's work life balance issue. Findings indicate that telepressure in the workplace was related with poorer recuperation, which in turn leads to worse assessments of work–life balance. To improve the work–life balance assessment of workers and to reduce work–life conflict, businesses might consider using informal practices designed to reduce workplace telepressure. For instance, training of supervisors on work friendly policies aid in employee recuperation during nonwork time and provide opportunity on task-based norms (Aman-Ullah et al., 2020a; Kossek & Thompson, 2016). These interventions improve supervisor-employee interaction, allowing workers to feel more capable of managing household responsibilities without being continually connected to the office through technology.

6. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Besides its usefulness, this study also has a few limitations which need to be addressed in upcoming studies. First of all, the population of the present study was any working person who was voluntarily willing to participate; therefore, its industrial impact is unknown. Future studies should be conducted by targeting specific industries for better applicability. Secondly, marital status is not the only intervening factor; other factors such as organisational environment, organisational support, and coworker's role can be tested as moderating variables. This study used SPSS for data analysis, but more rigorous methods such as PLS and AMOS may be used in future studies to test the relationships. The most important limitation is its contrasting results with existing literature. This is among the early study showing that telepressure does not disturb the work-life balance of single people. Therefore, it is required to conduct further studies to find out the reasons behind these findings. Some vital circumstances might motivate the respondents to answer this way.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusions, workplace telepressure is significantly associated with work-life balance. More specially, this study concluded that excessive use of information and communication technology (ICT) strongly influences work-life balance. Results also revealed that the effect of telepressure on work-life balance is seen as detrimental among married people, as married people require

more time to manage their family issues. However, high pressure to answer calls or messages makes it difficult to spare time for the family. In addition, future studies might utilise these findings to guide their selection of measures to investigate further the nature of the association between workplace telepressure, marital status, and work-life balancing experiences.

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