

# The Impact of Marital Status on Work-Life Balance Considering Covid-19 Pandemic at Midlands State University

تأثير الحالة الزوجية على التوازن بين العمل والحياة بالنظر إلى جائحة كوفيد-19 في جامعة وسط  
البلاد

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## The Impact of Marital Status on Work-Life Balance Considering Covid-19 Pandemic at Midlands State University

تأثير الحالة الزوجية على التوازن بين العمل والحياة بالنظر إلى جائحة كوفيد-19 في جامعة وسط البلاد

### Abstract:

**Objectives:** Researchers sought to investigate how spousal relationships of employees affect the management of employment commitments and social life responsibilities during the coronavirus pandemic within a state university. Specifically, researchers desired to explore how employees struggled with work-life balance during covid-19 pandemic, ascertain any work-life balance benefits brought about by the covid-19 pandemic among host organisation employees and measure differences between marital status and level of work-life balance of employees.

**Methods:** The study was anchored on multi-methodology research conceptualization, embedded research design, and critical realism paradigm. A sample size of 40 research subjects selected through a controlled quota sampling method was used for the study.

Correspondingly, primary data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide and structured questionnaire. The main data analytical tools used were inferential statistics and thematic headings.

**Results:** Available evidence from the study indicates that participants struggled to balance employment commitments and social life responsibilities during the coronavirus pandemic. Telecommuting resources were scarce and stumbling blocks in professional development efforts were faced. The study also revealed that the pandemic helped research subjects to improve their digital skills in the workplace.

**Conclusions:** Given the above observational evidence, the management of the host organization might need to offer sufficient telecommuting resources and a policy framework that guides such flexible work arrangements. A holistic picture of the subject matter can also be understood through a longitudinal study design with a bigger sample size.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Embedded Research Design; Marital status; Work-life balance.

### الملخص:

**الأهداف:** سعى الباحثون إلى التحقيق في كيفية تأثير العلاقات الزوجية لموظفين على إدارة التزامات العمل ومسؤوليات الحياة الاجتماعية خلال جائحة كوفيد-19 داخل جامعة حكومية. على وجه التحديد، كانت رغبة الباحثين في استكشاف كيفية تكافح الموظفين في التوازن بين العمل والحياة أثناء جائحة كوفيد-19، والتحقق من أي فوائد في هذا التوازن ناتجة عن جائحة كوفيد-19 بين موظفي المنظمة الأم، وقياس الفروق بين الحالة الزوجية ومستوى التوازن بين العمل والحياة للموظفين.

**المنهجية:** استندت الدراسة إلى تصور البحث المتعدد الأساليب، وتصميم البحث المضمن، ونموذج الواقعية الحرجة. تم استخدام عينة مكونة من 40 مشاركاً في البحث تم اختيارها باستخدام طريقة عينة متحكم بها بالحصص على نحو مقابل، تم جمع البيانات الأولية باستخدام دليل المقابلات شبه المنظمة والاستبيان المنظم. وكانت الأدوات التحليلية الرئيسية المستخدمة هي الإحصاءات الاستنتاجية والعناوين الموضوعية.

**النتائج:** تشير الأدلة المتاحة من الدراسة إلى أن المشاركين كافحوا في تحقيق التوازن بين التزامات العمل ومسؤوليات الحياة الاجتماعية خلال جائحة كوفيد-19. كانت موارد العمل عن بعد نادرة وكانت عقبات في جهود التطوير المهني. كما كشفت الدراسة أيضاً أن الجائحة ساعدت مشاركي البحث على تحسين مهاراتهم الرقمية في مكان العمل.

**الخلاصة:** نظراً للأدلة المرئية السابقة، قد تحتاج إدارة المنظمة المضيفة إلى توفير موارد العمل عن بُعد الكافية وإطار سياسي يوجه مثل هذه الترتيبات المرنة للعمل. يمكن أيضاً فهم صورة شاملة لموضوع الموضوع من خلال تصميم دراسة طويلة المدى بحجم عينة أكبر.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تصميم البحث المضمن؛ الحالة الزوجية؛ التوازن بين العمل والحياة؛ COVID-19.

## Introduction:

Work-life balance is a strategy that assists employees of corporate organizations to balance their personal and professional lives (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Essentially, the concept enables employees to apportion their time according to work schedule demands and time with family, seeking medical services, meeting career progression demands, and business travel. Thus, it is an important concept that provides a unique bond between employing organizations and employees through motivation and increased loyalty. An employee who works for long hours during midweek and possibly during weekends may end up neglecting his or her family (Khateeb, 2021). In certain circumstances, such stressful jobs would cause the incumbent's health to crumble (Noon *et al.*, 2013). Remarkably, this is the stage where work-life balance as a business strategy deserves proper application. When the work-life balance concept allows employees to maintain an essentially good balance between time devoted to work and personal life, increased productivity in the workplace is recognizable (Gagnano *et al.*, 2020).

This is because workers would execute duties in a relaxed manner without their brains being in a web of tension about personal commitments and immediate work instructions. From the foregoing statements, it is apparent that the work-life balance concept affects different classes of employees regardless of marital status. Married employees have children who can fall sick and needs parental superintendence and care, equally, single/unmarried employees can have study programs to pursue and balance with work exigencies (Gálvez *et al.*, 2020). Hence, some national governments and business organizations crafted favorable laws which govern the work-life balance phenomenon (Khateeb, 2021). Some of the obtaining laws include recognition of work-from-home and paternity leave for men (*ibid*). Also called teleworking, this phenomenon was voluntary and different from the compulsory work-from-home scenario necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic outbreak in late 2019 (Del Boca *et al.*, 2020).

The organization under study is a public university in Zimbabwe located in Gweru, Midlands Province. This institution adopted blended learning and compulsory work from home to contain the spread of the deadly virus, as also directed by the state. Staff working from home bemoaned lack of requisite work tools. Hence, the purpose of this article was to investigate how workers of different marital statuses within the host organization balanced work and life tasks during the time of covid-19 pandemic. Eventually, this paper sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore how employees struggled with work-life balance during covid-19 pandemic.
- To ascertain any work-life balance benefits brought about by the covid-19 pandemic among MSU employees.
- To measure differences between marital status and level of work-life balance of MSU employees.

This treatise would provide insight for university policymakers as they seek to improve the working environment of employees from different backgrounds. This is particularly significant as policies and procedures in institutions of higher learning are changing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, the paper advances existing knowledge on teleworking in the global space. Furthermore, the treatise contributes to future research approach in the social sciences field.

## Literature Review:

The study was anchored on two work-life balance theories namely, spillover and compensation theory.

### Spill-Over Theory:

Spill-over theory by Guest (2002) contends that working-class people have dynamically two spheres of home and work which in most circumstances affect each other. The relationship between these domains can be positive or negative. This theory asserts that the skills, behavior, and attitude of an individual at home can flow into the working environment constructively or destructively. Serious familial conflicts resulting from lack of financial support can flow into one's workplace through a wife wreaking havoc at the husband's workplace. Typically, such conflicts can attract the attention of other employees through uncontrollable crying or shouting (Khateeb, 2021). It might be through intervention of the employer that this problem can be solved, either by counseling or a garnishee order. Such incidents humiliate the employee to such a dangerous extent that morale and work commitment would be affected. Certainly, this phenomenon resembles the negative spillover aspect of this theory. On the flip side, positive aspects of the workplace like being awarded bonuses, worker of the month awards, free medical aid, and company accommodation have the potential to enrich employees' life at home. For

industrial harmony and social life to prevail, an equilibrium position should be maintained between these home and work domains.

### **The Compensation Theory:**

Proponents of this theory argue that there is an opposite relationship between work and social life (Staines, 1980). A typical example would be workers who have physically demanding jobs like gold panners, haulage truck drivers, and rock drill machine operators. This category of employees and others tend to indulge in leisure activities so that they recuperate better. Taken to the limit, this theory would imply that employees who earn little from their employers can compensate for what they lack by stealing from the company. Therefore, a balance should be maintained by organizational leaders by shunning discriminatory tendencies against employees. In the same vein of argument, employees themselves should be contented with the status quo.

The theories discussed above assist in shaping the understanding of Work-life balance (WLB) in the corporate business world. Obtaining economic twists and downturns are necessitating work demands to encroach family and social life at a faster pace. Although work-life balance issues differ across genders, lessons drawn from the above theories are that organizational leaders need to understand the social aspects of their employees to be able to manage them successfully. Work-life balance helps maintain the mental health of employees and this reduces stress and chances of burnout.

### **Empirical Literature Review:**

Digital News Asia (2013) as reported by Norzita *et al.* (2020) carried out a survey on 954 Malaysian employees across various industries and revealed that more than sixty percent of workers do not spend enough time with their families due to long working hours. Another study by Prithivi and Thilagaraj (2020) identified that work-life responsibilities hurt the personal life of employees. Notable benefits of working from home are sufficient time with family and having time to do other home chores. Nevertheless, conflicting issues remain in the form of failure to separate work and family life (Del Boca *et al.*, 2020; Gálvez *et al.*, 2020). Covid-19 induced work from home phenomenon was problematic due to travel restrictions imposed to control the pandemic. From a regional perspective, Nguru and Gichuhi's (2018) study in Kenya discovered that there is a strong affirmative link between work-life balance and employee dedication to work.

Muzaeni *et al.* (2020) study in the Zimbabwean banking industry established that various work-life balance programs offered by employers greatly improve the work performance of workers. From another angle, Maviza and Thebe's (2023) research study acknowledges that the covid-19 pandemic gave rise to new work methods in the corporate world. Nevertheless, working women faced double challenges of balancing between reproductive and productive roles.

In a nutshell, there is no nay-saying to the fact that work-life balance is peculiarly problematic due to the unusual conditions of the covid-19 pandemic. The outcome of most past research identified above revealed a general picture that it was comparatively difficult for employees to harmonize work and family life. Nevertheless, a positive work-life balance was reported to have a positive relationship with employees' well-being.

### **Methods:**

Mixed methods are the research approach used by the researchers (Dawadi *et al.*, 2021). Researchers were interested in finding out more about the behavioral aspects exhibited by employees in spousal relationships and work-life harmony during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. One research approach alone (qualitative or quantitative strategy) would not sufficiently give possible solutions to the observed workplace challenges. As determined by the qualitative nature of the crafted objectives for this study, the traditional approach was the qualitative method and the quantitative method played a secondary supportive role (Timans *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, possible conclusions could be drawn from the study by riding on the benefits proffered by the two combined research approaches.

### **Research Design:**

Given the unbalanced order of the study's research objectives, researchers saw it prudent to utilize the embedded research design (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). The action verbs used to construct research objectives 1 and 2 demand mainly a qualitative approach and the third objective sought to quantify the phenomenon understudy. Hence, it was prudent that the third objective was to be inserted into the mainly

qualitative research strand and the suitable design under the mixed method approach was the embedded research design. Consequently, the chosen design enables cross validation of results and eventually proffer richer insights into the phenomenon under study (Yu and Khazanchi, 2017).

### Research Paradigm:

This paper was guided by critical realism paradigm. It is a school of thought which posit that the world is constructed from inhabitants' experiences and views (Brant & Panjwani, 2015). Advocates of this perspective remark that the universe can be understood through understanding unrecognizable structures which cause observable events to unfold (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In essence, the paradigm teaches facts about life to say what is "real" cannot be observed and exists independently from human perceptions. Accordingly, the use of this paradigm in this study provides a less dogmatic conceptualization that permits both hypothetical and observational evidence that satisfies the research aim.

### Sample Frame and Size:

From the target population of 1700 employees, important subgroups which are mutually exclusive were identified as directed by the research topic.

As determined by the research goal, four subgroups of married employees, single, spouses not geographically present, and widowed were chosen by the researchers. The next step taken by the researchers involved estimating the proportions of each stratum based on personal judgment. Consequently, ten units for each stratum were chosen to acquire valid results for the study (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the procedure assisted to reach the desired sample size of forty (40) research subjects. The utilized sample size has empirical support of past published research (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2015) which postulate that where nested research design is used, three or more participants per subgroup would suffice. In this study, four subgroups made up of ten participants per each group were chosen. Thus, creating a case of congruence between past and present study endeavor. In the same vein, Casteel and Bridier (2021) revealed that a sample size of between 12-15 participants is sufficient to provide multiple perspectives about the subject matter under study when a qualitative study is undertaken. Although the current study took a mixed methods approach, the major strand was a qualitative method. Therefore, the sampling method and sample size followed the major strand (qualitative) from the two research strands (qualitative and quantitative) used concurrently. Moreso, researchers chose a sample of forty research subjects because they had no access to the entire university population and wanted to monitor the number of participants who would complete the survey dependent on their marital status. Hence, the use of controlled quota sampling method.

### Data Collection Methods:

Two primary data collection tools used by the researchers were closed-ended questionnaires and moderately structured interviews. An extensive literature review of similar context past studies as determined by the research purpose yielded the final data collection tools used in this study (Hayman, 2005; Naithani & Jha, 2009; Norzita *et al.*, 2020; Lonska *et al.*, 2021; Schieman *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, both instruments had five structured questions which asked about the demographic characteristics of the research subjects. Separately, the structured questionnaire had thirteen other five-point Likert scale questions concerning work-life balance and spousal relationships. Ten other interview questions regarding marital status and work-life harmony were used to elicit data about participants' feelings, opinions, and suggestions regarding the study subject matter.

### Data Collection Procedure

Researchers sought and obtained written approval from the host organization's senior management. Self-administration method was used to administer the structured questionnaire and respondents were given two working days to respond and then researchers collected the completed questionnaires. Only thirty-six respondents managed to answer all the survey research questions. The quota sampling method was used to assemble participants for the interview sessions in the free office space provided by the organization. Eventually, interview sessions of between 30-40 minutes long were conducted over two weeks, observing the covid-19 regulations with all forty participants. The data collection process was done outside the employer's production time frames.

## • A Pilot Study

In this research, focus group interviews were conducted before the main data collection. The focus group comprised five people who are staff members of the university. The five members were selected based on their accessibility, willingness to cooperate, and physical proximity (Becker, 2008; Schindler, 2023). The focus group discussion mainly centered on material support and communication challenges during the corona virus pandemic. Demographic question which asked about the length of service of research subjects was deemed not necessary in the pilot test instrument. The reasoning behind the comment was that the research topic itself was concerned about marital status and work-life balance during covid-19 pandemic. Some of the questions were found to be ambiguous and double barreled. Researchers then used the results of the focus group to improve research protocol and the interview guide. Lastly, the final instrument had short and precise research questions which permitted reasonable time management during the actual data collection process.

## Data Analysis:

Primary data were analyzed through thematic assessment and statistical methods. To obtain research subjects' appreciation of the key issues understudy, researchers used a deductive thematic analysis approach (Nigatu, 2009). A deductive coding following a top-down approach and verbatim transcription was used (Hyde, 2000; Saldana, 2009; Medelyan, 2023). Thus, research objectives were used to group the primary data to look for sameness and variation. The statistical technique was used to maximize the understanding of what numbers tell and determine whether there was enough evidence to test the research hypothesis derived from the third objective of this paper.

## Trustworthiness Issues:

Transferability was ensured through a thick description of the participants, methods, and procedures used to collect primary data (Anney, 2014). Researchers opined that this would help future researchers to evaluate the application of present results to other scenarios. Referential adequacy of data collection tools and all key information in this paper was ensured to achieve credibility of the qualitative research findings. Furthermore, researchers engaged in iterative questioning of research subjects during the interview process, and at the end of the data collection process, participants were given the results to validate their contribution. Methodological (mixed methods) and data triangulation (qualitative and quantitative) techniques were used to achieve congruence of research findings with reality (Maher *et al.*, 2018). Dependability was ensured by precisely describing how data was collected and the duration of the data collection process.

## Ethical Issues:

This research considered ethical factors in several ways. Written consent was obtained from the research subjects. Subjects were given pseudo-names to conceal their job titles or actual names in the final report (Bryman & Bell, 2015). No deceit techniques were employed by the researchers. Data collection was done with the approval of the host organization. Equally, researchers-maintained objectivity, presented true research findings, and used the research results for academic purposes only.

## Results:

### Response Rate:

A total of 40 research volunteers were considered for study participation. A systematic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide were used to collect data. Two surveys were left blank, and two respondents did not respond out of the 40 research subjects. This resulted in an overall response rate of 90%, or 36 viable responses divided by 40 administered questionnaires multiplied by hundred  $36/40 \times 100 = 90\%$ . Scholars (Baruch, 1999; Wu *et al.*, 2022) remark that response rates of at least 50%, 60%, and 75% are sufficient, satisfactory, and excellent, respectively. Thus, 90 % was an excellent response rate. Based on this notion, it indicates that the findings were better placed to provide authentic results on the impact of marital status on work-life balance considering covid-19 pandemic with specific reference to Midlands State University.

## Demographic Information:

Demographic information gives data on research participants and is required to determine whether the individuals in a particular study are a representative sample of the target population for generalization



purposes (Hammer, 2011). The following information provides background information about the thirty-six (36) employees who participated in the survey. The demographic data includes age, gender profiles, education level, and marital status.

#### **Age Range:**

Primary data reveals that 28% (5 females and 5 males) of the participants were in the age range 20-30 years, age range 31-41 years was 33% of the sample size (comprising 7 females and 5 males). The bigger percentage representation was 39 % of the sample size which was 42-52 years age range (made up of 4 males and 10 females). Primary data findings reveal that the study sample was made up of the young generation (20-30 years) middle-aged employees (31-41 years) and mature employees (42-52 years). All working age groups from the sample were covered and these would give a balanced view of the impact of marital status on work-life balance considering covid-19 pandemic at MSU.

#### **Gender:**

Results reveal that fourteen (39%) of the participants were male employees and twenty-two (61%) were female employees. There were more female employees from the selected sample than male employees. Ideas proffered were from a matriarchal perspective. Primary data findings concord with Mahonde's (2022) population census report which revealed that there are more females (51.94%) than males (48.06%) in Zimbabwe.

#### **Educational Qualification:**

Primary data reveals that 28% (5 females and 5 males) of the participants had Ordinary level as their highest level of education. Thirty-three percent (33%) of the sample size (comprising 7 females and 5 males) had a bachelor's degree as the highest level of education. Also, thirty-nine percent (39%) of the sample (made up of 4 males and 10 females) had a master's degree as the highest level of education. From the education perspective, all the respondents had a sufficient level of education to be able to give information regarding the impact of marital status on work-life balance considering covid-19 pandemic.

#### **Marital Status:**

The results indicate that ten (27.7 %) of the research subjects were married, 6 (16.6%) of the research subjects were single, 10 (27.7%) were widowers, and 10 (27.7%) had spouses not geographically present. Thus, most of the participants were married and could therefore easily relate the quality-of-life factors with the burdens of family responsibilities, especially regarding work-life balance.

#### **Interview Findings:**

##### **Theme 1: employee struggles with work-life balance during covid-19 pandemic**

Employee struggles with work-life balance during covid-19 pandemic were analyzed. Both groups of different marital status participants revealed different challenges which include a lack of data for internet connectivity and working online, working odd hours, family disturbance, boredom, and failure to supervise subordinates properly. Professional growth and failure to adapt to the new normal challenges were also noted.

##### **Married employees group averred that:**

*"Taking care of the family, faced interruptions constantly especially when attending online meetings. As the mother of young children who were in grade zero and grade three, I automatically became the teacher by assisting children who were doing online lessons. I could help children log on to the internet and platforms like Teams as they had challenges in using such learning platforms and downloading their notes. As a working mother, I had a torrid time completing my work targets. Under lock our gardeners and maids were failing to report for work constantly, then we had to do all their duties and got no help from spouses." (2 Excerpts)*

*Having a huge team to supervise as a head of the department, it was just difficult to meet some targets as I was also supervising people who were working from home. The other challenge was that the employer could not respect working time, you could receive online meeting invites during odd hours. The dynamics could not allow us to do our duties properly during odd hours. Time to buy food could be missed due to limited business trading hours. (3 Excerpts)*

*As academics, we did not have sufficient data to continue working online, one could continue working only when one goes to work during your rotation schedule turn. Got delayed in completing study programs like PhD as time to move around collecting data was restricted due to the national lockdown to control the pandemic and data for online interaction was scarce.*  
(3 Excerpts)

*Giving instructions to subordinates online was a challenge since some of them did not have even airtime to call and get clarity. Spending the whole day with family ended up in severe quarrels. Some machines needed really someone to be physically present at the workplace unlike working online. I can say productivity decreased because of this covid-19 pandemic.*  
(2 Excerpts)

#### **Spouses not geographically present group agreed that:**

*As distance couples, we had much time together which led to noticing each other's weaknesses and resulted in marriage conflicts. My husband was an entrepreneur in another town who was doing well before the imposed lockdown, so due to the lockdown there was not enough income to sustain the family, and this caused big problems. Some of my kids ended up taking drugs because of more time spent at home without going to school and their father whom they respect, and fear was away at work. His movement was restricted by the national lockdown.* (10 Excerpts)

#### **Unmarried Group (Single):**

*Boredom as it was staying at home for too long just watching movies. Ended up forgetting some of the things you are supposed to be knowing daily. We faced the challenge of balancing work, education, and social life because we were coming to work since May 2020. No one could take care of my child as the maid was away due to travel restrictions.*  
*Financial challenges: traveling costs became high due to limited public transport availability. Some commodity prices became highly exorbitant.* (6 Excerpts)

#### **Widowed Group:**

*We were torn apart between taking care of sick relatives who tested covid-19 positive at home and work demands. There was a shortage of transport to move between key points and ended up buying expensive goods since the town was not accessible. It was hectic as we had to adapt to the new normal.* (10 Excerpts)

#### **Theme 2: work-life balance benefits during covid-19 pandemic**

Various work-life balance benefits during covid-19 pandemic were given by the participants. It was revealed that the pandemic helped research subjects to know that work can be done from anywhere and one does not have to be physically present at the workplace. Participants were asked to explain the benefits and reflected as follows:

#### **Married Group:**

*Ability to exercise since driving time was less as I was steeled at home. Could attend prayer meetings with different church members and helped in spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment. Improved digital skills to attend meetings through google teams and Meet links, ability to sign documents digitally, and still can apply these skills these days. Could balance house chores and the children's welfare since at times we were at home as we rotated going to work. We enjoyed employing part-time maids as the great bulk of our time we were at home.* (10 Excerpts)

#### **Widowed Group:**

*Having time with your family was a flexible working scenario ushered by this pandemic. We discovered that it was possible to work from home and have meetings online unlike before it was deemed an impossibility. We earned foreign currency in the form of the covid-19 allowance that was introduced.* (10 Excerpts)

#### **Unmarried Group:**

*Time to rest. No stress about how the work is going on. Having time with family members while working.* (6 Excerpts)

#### **Spouse not geographically present agreed that:**

*We had enough time to be together with the family and that formed a good social bond with children.* (10 Excerpts)



## Findings from Quantitative Data:

The level of work-life balance was assessed using the Romanian version of Hayman's (2005) Work-Life Balance Scale. To suit this investigation, the scale consisted of 13 Hayman-adopted components. A five-point time-related scale was used to assess the responses. Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to examine the internal reliability of the structured questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha values obtained for the thirteen questionnaire factors are shown in Table (1) below.

<i>Table (1): Reliability Statistics</i>		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.784	.727	13

The scale had thirteen items that passed the reliability test with an alpha value of .784 which is an acceptable value of Cronbach's alpha (Kline, 2015; Field, 2018).

## Hypothesis Testing:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Employees' level of work-life balance does not vary depending on their marital status.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Employees' level of work-life balance varies depending on their marital status.

## Kruskal-Wallis Test:

The Kruskal-Wallis H test is a non-parametric rank-based test that can be used to evaluate whether there are statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable on a continuous or ordinal dependent variable (Field, 2018). It is a non-parametric alternative to one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and an extension of the Mann-Whitney U test that allows for the comparison of more than two independent groups. The dependent variable (work-life balance) was measured on a 5-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," and the independent variable was marital status, with four independent groups: married, single, widow, and spouse not geographically present.

Table (2): Ranks			
	Marital Status	N	Mean Rank
level of work-life balance	married	10	17.29
	single	6	13.50
	spouse not geographically present	10	17.29
	Widowed	10	17.29
	Total	36	
Test Statistics <sup>b</sup>			
	level of work-life balance		
Kruskal-Wallis H			3.571
df			2
Asymp. Sig.			.168
a. Kruskal Wallis Test			
b. Grouping Variable: marital status			

As shown in Table (2) above, the Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the level of work-life balance and employee marital status,  $\chi^2(2) = 3.571$ ,  $p = .168$ . Data indicates an invalidation of the research hypothesis ( $p > 0.05$ ). It appears that the four categories of employees included in the study (married, single, widow, spouse not geographically present) do not have a significantly different level of work-life balance.

## Discussions:

### Theme 1:

Primary data findings revealed the fact that work-life balance is a phenomenon that transcend business and personal life of the working class. Participants had never telecommuted before and found themselves in a new environment where their work-life collided with home life. Employees worked for long hours than they did previously during office hours due to home distractions and lack of requisite resources. Nevertheless, some of the employees thrived in the newfound freedom of working from home during the corona virus pandemic

period. Equally, the organisation understudy was caught flat footed on aspects to do with policy guidelines and resource provision during the study period in question. All in all, boundaries between work and home life became blurred for the generality of employees within the host organisation. Another key point from the results is that the pandemic intensified challenges of balancing work demand and looking after children that working women face in the corporate business world.

From the literature review, primary data findings on employee struggles with work-life balance during covid-19 pandemic have been buttressed by Maviza and Thebe's (2023) research study which acknowledges that working women faced double challenges of balancing between reproductive and productive roles. Similarly, ILO (2020) also observed that one of the most significant problems faced by employees working remotely during the pandemic is the conflict between work and private life, as they experience a blurred line between work and private life. The findings were also in tandem with Lonska *et al.* (2021) study results which revealed that more than sixty percent of Malaysian employees across various industries do not spend enough time with their families due to long working hours. In sum, the findings support the spillover theory in the sense that work aspects can get into the social aspects of human beings and affect them negatively.

## Theme 2:

As indicated by research findings, the organisation understudy was forced to allow its employees to work from home through flexible working hours in response to the government's call to control the Covid-19 pandemic. Eventually, participants enjoyed balancing house chores with children's welfare, enough time to rest and being together with the family. It is a great lesson that the organisation can take advantage of by resetting workplace norms around flexible working hours. Resetting workplace norms might not be an overnight exercise but an aspect that requires strategic planning and fortified leaders. Primary data findings about work-life balance benefits during covid-19 pandemic concur with Maviza and Thebe's (2023) research study which acknowledges that the covid-19 pandemic gave rise to new work methods in the corporate world. Similarly, Muzaeni *et al.* (2020) study corroborated the findings with their study which established that a good working environment improves workers' commitment to work. In agreement, Sanfilippo (2020) discovered that a positive work-life balance improves the mental health and well-being of employees and is beneficial to organizational productivity.

## Quantitative Data Analysis Results:

Based on the results, the study accepts the null hypothesis. In practice, all categories of the studied employees face equally the same work-life balance burdens according to this compressed picture of the phenomenon understudy. This is a point of divergence from the qualitative research findings.

Qualitative research results indeed indicate that there are differences in work-life balance challenges per category of the marital status of employees. Married employees prove to be the most tormented group by the negative side of the phenomenon understudy than other categories. These study results depict the picture that quantitative research has its shortcoming in terms of interpreting human feelings, opinions, suggestions, and values. The results of this study are consistent with previous research findings. Prithivi and Thilagaraj's (2020) study in India identified that work-life responsibilities have an impact on the personal life of employees. In a nutshell, the quantitative findings noted above feed into the first theme of the qualitative results which revealed work-life struggles to all categories of employees during the covid-19 pandemic.

## Conclusion:

As work-life harmony becomes more vital to the working class, it is critical to understand how various individuals manage employment commitments and social life responsibilities during pandemics. This study established that participants struggle with work-life balance during the pandemic. Transport challenges, stumbling blocks in professional development, and failure to balance work demands due to the need to take care of online learning children at home and other house chores were noted. Equally, organizational productivity was severely affected. Some participants suffered strained family relations due to loss of income and children got into the use of dangerous drugs. Thus, the results respond to the first objective of this study. As directed by the second objective of the survey, it was discovered that the pandemic helped research subjects to improve their digital skills. Moreover, participants enjoyed a long time with family and flexible work schedules. In response to the last objective of the treatise, the study disclosed no fundamental variation in the level of work-life balance and employee marital status among the studied groups. Given the above observational

evidence, the management of the host organizations might need to consider training members of staff on the use of modern-day work-related technologies. More so, sufficient telecommuting resources and a policy framework that guides such flexible work arrangements would be needed. Moreover, marriage counselors to resolve work-family-related challenges would be employed and awareness campaigns about work and family-related challenges can be increased.

In terms of management, communication protocols should be observed and improved, as some participants bemoaned receiving work-related instructions and messages during odd hours.

### Recommendations:

Since it was found that employees struggle with work-life balance during the pandemic, the study recommends that the organization should invest heavily in staff training and telecommuting resources which can be utilized by workers. Leadership behavior that gives employees a sense of stability, empowerment, and inclusion despite the prevalence of the pandemic is paramount. Remote working and blended learning and teaching can always be the new normal and this can always be buttressed by the provision of workplace rules and regulations. Strong surveillance and monitoring mechanisms for remote working should therefore be a necessity. It is recommended that the organization can do continuous surveys to find out more about work-life balance issues among employees to understand matters that can affect employee morale and productivity. A holistic picture of the subject matter can also be understood through a longitudinal study design with a bigger sample size by future researchers.

### Author Contributions:

KM did the following sections of the article: title, abstract, introduction, methodology, results, and discussion.

PN contributed to the introduction and the recommendations section.

VC contributed to the discussion and recommendations.

NS contributed to the theoretical framework and key words.

ID contributed to the theoretical framework and references.

CK contributed to the results and discussion sections.

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