

Family Support and Job Satisfaction among the Government Servants during the Pandemic Period

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Abstract

Purpose: Job satisfaction is a source of employee motivation as it increases work productivity, stimulate loyalty, and improve organisational performance. Although studies on this context are extensive, it remains significant and still an exciting field. This field has experienced cultural changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The change in the working environment underlines the essentiality for a more comprehensive understanding of job satisfaction. This study intends to examine the impact of family support on job satisfaction during the pandemic. Previously, family support was identified as a factor that facilitates employees concentration at the workplace. However, the burden of workload often dampens job satisfaction. Thus, this study examined workload as a moderator by examining how it will influence the relationship between family support and job satisfaction.

Design/methodology/approach: A descriptive design was employed. This study used questionnaires to examine the relationship between the constructs. Government servants were selected as the respondents. PLS-SEM that allows for reflective and formative constructs was utilised for data analysis.

Research limitations/implications: The result of the study suggested that a higher workload would result in a weaker relationship between the family and job satisfaction. The result indirectly indicated that a higher workload would stretch the family ties and lead to job dissatisfaction.

Practical implications: This study proposes to examine the quality of work rather than quantity. Although many employers do not favour WFH because of productivity issues, the current situation has forced WFH to be implemented. Despite that, organisations should be responsible for fostering good quality and be creative in creating a new work culture to boost the spirit of togetherness.

Originality/value: Workload was tested as a moderator and is expected to weaken the relationship between family support and job satisfaction during the pandemic. This contributes to a new model which is a novelty.

Paper type: Research paper

Keywords: Job satisfaction, Human management, Family support, Pandemic, Malaysia

Introduction

Job satisfaction is among the main factors determining an organisation's success (Shmailan, 2016). It would improve employee retention (Mathieu et al., 2015; Terera & Ngirande, 2014), increase work productivity (Platis et al., 2015; Shmailan, 2016), stimulate loyalty (Sarwar &

Abugre, 2013), reduce employment costs, and improve organisational performance (Bayarçelik & Findikli, 2016). The relationship between employees and jobs has always attracted researchers. The attention is attributed to the fact that a significant portion of the life of a man is spent at work. The job does not only offer individual status as it also connects him to society. An employee who is pleased with his work will do his job well and devote himself to his career and finally to the organisation's success (Shmailan, 2016).

Job satisfaction is considered a multifaceted construct consisting of the employees' present feelings about both the extrinsic and intrinsic elements related to the job (Octaviannand et al., 2017). It is of most extreme importance for the management to recognise components that can affect employees' degree of job satisfaction (Shmailan, 2016). Job satisfaction will reflect employees in the general joy of the work environment and keeping them with the organisation longer and be exceedingly fruitful (Bayarçelik & Findikli, 2016). There are thousands of research in examining job satisfaction (Jalagat, 2016) and in various dimensions such as work performance, life satisfaction, organisational commitment and communication (Özpehlivan & Acar, 2015). Despite many studies, this topic is exciting and always relevant, especially when the global working community gradually embraces the new norm of working environment.

Although studies related to job satisfaction is substantial, a universal definition of job satisfaction has not been developed (Aziri, 2011). It is subjective and unique according to the employees level (Bayarçelik & Findikli, 2016). Employee attitude is shaped by various internal and external factors which will influence their work (Aziri, 2011). In early 2020, the number of Covid-19 cases in Malaysia increased and worsened due to several clusters. Thus, the Malaysian government announced the Movement Control Order (MCO) to curb the spread of Covid-19. MCO refers to the restriction on the movement of the whole country. The MCO has resulted in the temporary closure of businesses, educational institutions, and the government sector, except for the essential products and services.

MCO has resulted in an abrupt change in the working environment. Employees were forced to work-from-home (WFH) between March and June 2020. A new era of work from home is the option to be taken as a regular schedule in employment (SMH Kabir, Ahasanul Haque & Rahman, 2020)). The sudden change might affect employees' work self-efficacy due to restrictions limiting the normal work routine (Prihadi et al., 2021). As educational institutions were also closed, many employees were simultaneously burdened with childcare and assistance of children's schoolwork during workdays (Delaney et al., 2021). Employees have to divide their focus between work and family responsibility during the pandemic.

The pandemic has inevitably made employees face many changes in the family's life (Ahmed et al., 2020). The changes need to be carefully tackled to avoid conflicts, instability, and even family breakdown due to the sudden devastating pressures from the restriction movement. However, some families exploited the situation and established stronger ties (Ahmed et al., 2020). Instead of more attention needed for family, WFH also meant having more time with family, reduced traveling time, and flexible working hours. The employees can maximise this opportunity to be more motivated and enjoy employment flexibility during the pandemic.

This study intends to examine the impact of family support on job satisfaction during the pandemic. Family support was identified as a factor that facilitates employees' concentration on work by knowing the sacrifice needed to be made (Baral & Bhargava, 2011). However, the burden of workload often diminishes job satisfaction. This study aims to test workload as a moderator by examining how it will weaken the relationship between family support and job satisfaction. Government servants who work at Putrajaya were chosen as the respondents in this study. During the pandemic, government servants hold the most securable job. In the public's eyes, a government job is stable, full of benefits and perks, and provides flexibility within its environment.

Literature Review

Job satisfaction is a very subjective research field. Although there are thousands of studies on job satisfaction, it remains significant and still an exciting area (Jalagat, 2016). As previously mentioned, there is no general definition that received unanimous agreement on the definition of job satisfaction (Aziri, 2011). In early research by Hoppock in 1935 on job satisfaction, job satisfaction is described as a combination of psychological, physiological, and environmental circumstances that make the employee experience truthful satisfaction with their job (Aziri, 2011; Munir & Rahman, 2016). Most researchers relate it with the positive employee emotional towards the job itself (Munir & Rahman, 2016; Özpehlivan & Acar, 2015; Spector, 1985). There is an interaction of certain aspects in the position that leads to satisfaction in doing it.

Job satisfaction is an essential source of motivation and may incur a positive effect on the organisation (Munir & Rahman, 2016). Providing satisfaction to employees will contribute to higher job performance (Platis et al., 2015) and eventually contribute to organisational commitment (Ahmad et al., 2010). As organisational success is the ultimate goal for every organisation, studies on job satisfaction that will increase organisational performance always attract researchers. Any changes in the work environment will add a new layer of knowledge to the field.

Previous studies have listed many factors that influence job satisfaction such as job security (Aletraris, 2010; Linz & Semykina, 2012), workplace and social support (Sell & Cleal, 2011), promotion opportunity (Linz & Semykina, 2012; Taylor & Westover, 2011), co-workers relationship and management recognition (Linz & Semykina, 2012), training opportunities (Latif et al., 2013; Schmidt, 2007), workplace socialisation (Bokemeier & Lacy, 1987; Taylor & Westover, 2011), job attributes (Bokemeier & Lacy, 1987) and many more. As a general survey found that reward is important (Jobstreets, 2017), researchers found a mixed result on its relationship with job satisfaction. Some found that reward is not significant (Terera & Ngirande, 2014), while others found it significant (Bokemeier & Lacy, 1987; Linz & Semykina, 2012; Sarwar & Abugre, 2013). The result is always exciting and varies as it depends largely on individual profile and working conditions.

This study intends to contribute to this field by examining job satisfaction during the pandemic. In Malaysia, there was a sudden announcement on movement restriction by the government on 18 March 2020 due to the pandemic. The pandemic had significantly affected all aspects of life (Fraenkel & Cho, 2020). This has caused personal life and the roles within families to overlap and change (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). All the educational institutions and child care centers were ordered to closed, forcing the children to stay at home. All the businesses not classified as necessities were also ordered to close. Many businesses could not be sustained and employees were laid off, leaving thousands to be unemployed. Only one person was allowed to leave home to buy the necessary goods, but it must be within 10 kilometres. Travelling across the state or district was not allowed. These restrictions have contributed to very minimal social interaction.

The restriction had left people with no choice except to stay at home with their family. As everyone is at home, the family interaction and work environment have become one. Thus, this has initiated many to be aware that work tasks and family needs must be appropriately arranged. Since the new environment had caused a physiological change, many were reported to struggle in coping with emerging depression, anxiety, and trauma (Fraenkel & Cho, 2020). However, others have embraced these changes positively by using the opportunity to establish stronger ties with family (Ahmed et al., 2020). Many view work flexibility as an effective solution for better work-life balance (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021).

Despite the new environment, government servants need to accomplish their tasks as usual as they are the backbone of the government. They need to balance their time between handling the family and fulfilling their job responsibilities. As many businesses started to retrench or deduct their employees' salaries, government servants are deemed lucky to have not experienced any salary deduction or retrenchment. This study will adopt Aziri's view of job satisfaction, which sees government servants have good feelings from their job that enables them to meet material and psychological needs during the hard times.

Family support is another factor investigated in job satisfaction that has received growing scholarly interest. In this study, family support is referred to as support given by the family to the employee. During the pandemic, government servants are entrusted to work at home. The autonomy is given to them to complete their work tasks while managing their family issue which will increase job satisfaction (Behson, 2005). Furthermore, the media coverage about the businesses that faced difficulties with sustaining, which lead to a reduction or cutting off salary, will make the family member appreciate the employee's job. Thus, it is expected that during the pandemic period, the support given to the employee by the family will influence job satisfaction. Based on this notion, the first hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H1: There is a significant relationship between family support and job satisfaction among government servants during the pandemic.

In 2013, The Malaysian Insider reported that 60% of Malaysian employees are burdened with a high workload which prohibits them from spending time with their family (Bani Hasan & Teng, 2017). During the pandemic, they have the opportunity to work from home. However, there are new challenges, especially with technology. The advancements in communication and information technologies have enabled employees to be connected to work regardless of their physical locations (Park & Jex, 2011). Ideally, the WFH should connect people electronically and utilise the situation to enable office work at home (Bawono & Setyadi, 2021)21). However, it is still uncommon in Malaysia, especially among government servants. Therefore, it will require more time for employee to explore the new work culture and familiarise themselves.

A survey by HRinAsia in 2017 highlighted that 67 percent of Malaysian employees are satisfied with their employment (HRinAsia, 2017). Similarly, a survey by Jobstreets reveals that the government servants appeared to be the happiest in Malaysia (Jobstreets, 2017). The government servants strongly hold the conventional approach to work. They are used to social interaction in work. It is among the essential factors of job satisfaction, as being stated by various researchers that investigated social interaction such as relationship with managers and co-workers (Taylor & Westover, 2011), co-workers respect (Linz & Semykina, 2012), and communication with other superiors (Platis et al., 2015). However, during the pandemic, this element was forced to be eliminated.

It is expected that technology unfamiliarity and lack of social interaction will contribute to difficulties among government servants in performing their tasks. It will become a new burden in the new work culture. They will feel like more workload needs to be carried out, even though the task might be the same as before. The lost control over the duration of work will lead to dissatisfaction on the job (Aletraris, 2010). A previous study showed that a high level of employee dissatisfaction was due to the amount of work given (Sarwar & Abugre, 2013). More work will reduce the time spent with family, even in the WFH environment. Based on the literature, a significant relationship between workload and job satisfaction is identified, and the impact of workload will weaken the relationship between family support and job satisfaction. Thus, this study hypothesises that:

H2: There is a significant relationship between workload and job satisfaction among public government servants during the pandemic.

H3 The significant relationship between family support and job satisfaction will be weakened due to the workload.

The relationships among the independent variable and dependent variable, and the moderator impact that is expected to weaken the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable are drawn as in Figure 1 below:

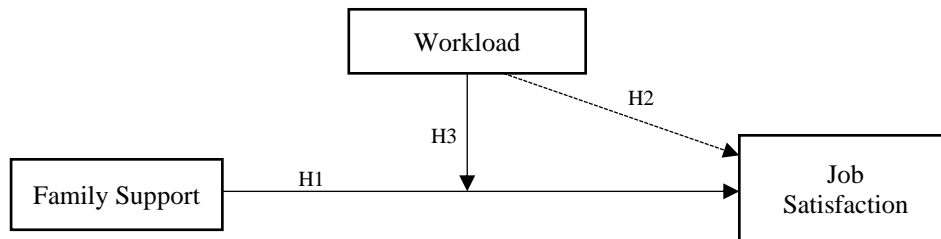


Figure 2.1: Research Framework

Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design that establishes causal relationships between variables, where it emphasises studying a problem to explain the relationships among the variables (Saunders, 2011). This study aimed to examine the relationship of family support on job satisfaction during the pandemic period. It also evaluated the moderating effect of workload on the relationship between family support and job satisfaction. This study is explanatory as it used primary data collected through a questionnaire.

Government servants were chosen as the respondents for this study due to their stable working conditions to assess how their job satisfaction was affected during the pandemic. The population for this research consisted of all government servants at Putrajaya. Stratified random sampling was employed where the population was categorised according to various departments. The respondents were subsequently grouped by a random selection of each department. The data were collected between September and October 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was no direct contact for the questionnaire survey was done. Google Forms was utilised for data collection and social media platforms including WhatsApp were used to disseminate the questionnaire link.

The questionnaire asked respondents about their experience on WFH during the pandemic and was divided into two sections. The demographic profile of the respondents was asked in Section A and encompassed questions on gender, age, marital status, level of education, employment status, and work experience. Section B was designed based on the constructs, which were family support, job satisfaction, and workload. Family support focused on how the family supports the respondents in terms of performing the task, career prospect, relationship, inspiring and fulfilling responsibility. Job satisfaction focused on the respondents positive feelings, task satisfaction, direction, and work pleasure towards his job. Lastly, workload focused on working hours, work distribution, work pressure, work-life balance, and health consideration.

All the questions were taken from previous studies and adapted based on the literature. An interval scale was used for the questionnaire which consists of "Strongly Agree" stands for "1," "Agree" stands for "2," "Neutral" stands for "3," "Disagree" stands for "4," and "Strongly Disagree" stands for "5. It is estimated that an average of 10 minutes was needed to complete the questionnaire.

Descriptive and inferential analyses were used for data analysis. Accordingly, descriptive statistics were used to summarise and describe the quantitative data, whereas inferential statistics were used for hypothesis testing. Data collected were analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for descriptive statistics and Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) for the interaction. PLS-SEM was selected as it allows for reflective and formative constructs analysis and simultaneous measurement testing (Chin, 2010; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014).

Results of Study

More than a hundred invitations were sent to respondents. However, only 54 respondents completed the questionnaires and returned them. Accordingly, based on the 10-rule method (Hair et al., 2011) and the minimum R-square method (Hair et al., 2014), the minimum sample size of this study was met. The details of the respondent profiles are tabulated in Table 4.1.

Respondents Demographic Background

Table 4.1 depicts the 54 respondents profile of the study.

Table 4.1: Respondents' Demographic Background

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Gender			Education Level		
Male	25	46.3	Master/PhD	22	40.7
Female	29	53.7	Dip/Deg	25	46.3
Age			Secondary	6	11.1
Less than 30	1	1.9	Primary	1	1.9
31 - 40	30	55.6	Job Status		
41 - 50	17	31.5	Permanent	52	96.3
More than 50	6	11.1	Piecemeal	2	3.7
Race			Current Grade		
Malay	14	25.9	54 above	7	13.0
Indian	38	70.4	48 - 52	13	24.1
Others	2	3.7	41 - 44	19	35.2
Education Level			Below 41	15	27.8
Master/PhD	22	40.7	Year of Experience		
Dip/Deg	25	46.3	Less than 5	5	9.3
Secondary	6	11.1	6 - 10	11	20.4
Primary	1	1.9	11 - 15	18	33.3
			16 - 20	13	24.1
			More than 21	7	13.0

Assessment of Measurement Model

This study assessed indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity before testing the proposed hypotheses derived from the model (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler et al., 2015). The individual item reliability was examined according to the outer loadings of each measure which was set up to be higher than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler et al., 2009). However, items with factor loading greater than 0.50 should be accepted if the composite reliability exceeds 0.70 and the average variance extracted (AVE) is more than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). The measurement model that demonstrates the PLS-Algorithm result with outer loadings is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

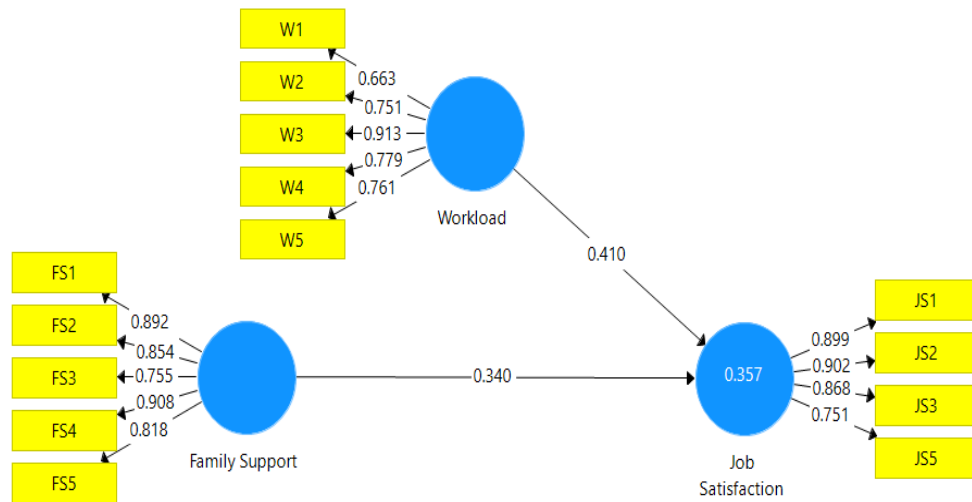


Figure 4.1: Measurement Model PLS-Algorithm result with outer loadings

Items for each construct and their respective Cronbach's alpha value, composite reliability and average variance extracted are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Items construct, and value for Cronbach's alpha, CR and AVE

Construct	Item	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Family Support	Performing task	0.892	0.901	0.927	0.718
	Career prospect	0.854			
	Good relationship	0.755			
	Inspiring	0.908			
	Fulfill responsibility	0.818			
Job Satisfaction	Positive in working	0.899	0.877	0.917	0.735
	Satisfy with task	0.902			
	Work with same goals	0.868			
	Please pleasure in work	0.751			
Workload	Fixed working hours	0.663	0.834	0.883	0.605
	Fair distribution of work	0.751			
	Free for work pressure	0.913			
	Work life balance	0.779			
	Health consideration	0.761			

Discriminant validity was used to measure the degree to which indicators are differentiated among constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The validity was obtained by examining the relationships among the latent variables, component scores, and other indicators (Chin, 1998). The result shows that the constructs discriminated well since the square root of the AVE of each reflective construct was larger than the correlations with the remaining constructs as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Discriminant Validity

	Family support	Job satisfaction	Workload
Family support	0.847		
Job satisfaction	0.449	0.857	
Workload	0.226	0.500	0.778

Assessment of Structural Model

Assessment of collinearity was established using variance inflation factors (VIF). Hair et.al. (2014) set that the threshold of a high level of collinearity VIF values needs to be maintained below 5. Table 4 displays that the VIF data were less than 5. Thus, no serious collinearity exist among the independent variables.

Table 4.4: VIF Result

	Job Satisfaction
Family Support	1.076
Workload	1.076

The coefficient of determination (R^2) represents the amount of variance in the dependent variable, job satisfaction, as explained by the model. Accordingly, the values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for dependent constructs were considered substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively. As shown in Figure 4.1, the value for job satisfaction was 0.357 which can be considered weak. This indicated that 35.7% of the variance in job satisfaction during the pandemic was explained by family support and workload. Thus, the R^2 change is important in moderation analysis (Ramayah et. al., 2018). Figure 4.2 shows that by adding the moderator, the interaction effect increased to 0.440. The R^2 has changed from 0.357 to 0.440 (changes of 0.083) due to the addition of the interaction (family support*workload).

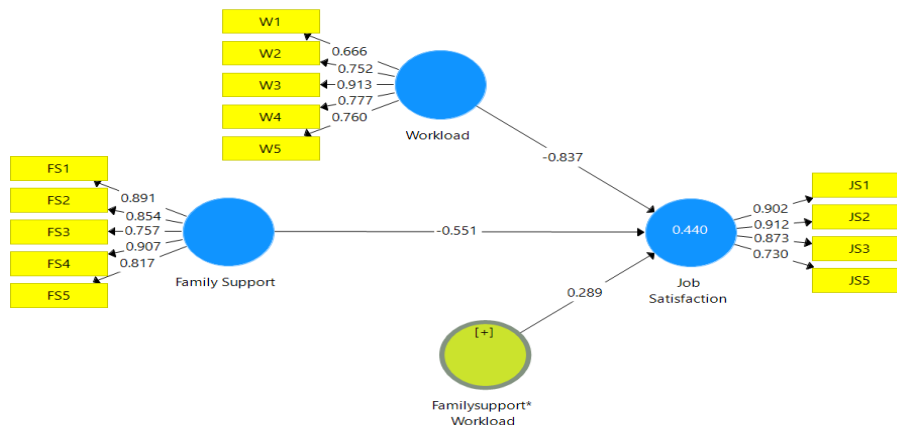


Figure 4.2: Measurement Model PLS-Algorithm with Moderator and R^2 Change

The impact of effect size on a specific predictor construct on an independent variable was measured using (f^2) (Newsome, Day & Catano, 2000). The cutting-off criteria for f^2 were outlined as 0.02 (small), 0.15 (medium), and 0.35 (large) (Cohen, 1988). Based on the criteria, family support had a medium effect on job satisfaction as shown in Table 4.5. Thus, family support was strong in explaining job satisfaction during the pandemic.

Table 4.5. Significance of f^2 Result

Independent variable	Dependent variable	R ² Included	R ² Excluded	Effect size (f ²)	Interpretation
Family Support	Job satisfaction	0.357	0.440	0.154	Medium

The significance of the paths in the PLS model was computed by running the bootstrapping procedure in PLS (Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin, & Lauro, 2005) to yield the t-values in a model. A t-value of 1.64 or higher is significant at 10% level of significance ($t > 1.64$; $p < 0.1$). Table 4.6 reports that the path coefficient from family support and job satisfaction were statistically significant as the t-value of both constructs were above the suggested level, which were 3.022 and 3.540, respectively.

Table 4.6: Result of Bootstrapping (Direct Effect)

	Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T-Value	P Value	Decision
H1	Family Support - > Job Satisfaction	0.340	0.112	3.022**	0.003	Significant
H2	Workload - > Job Satisfaction	0.410	0.116	3.540**	0.000	Significant

Note: t-value more than 1.645 at * $p < 0.05$, t-value more than 2.33 at ** $p < 0.01$

The moderating effect was tested by analysing the direct relations of family support and workload as well as the interaction term with job satisfaction. Bootstrapping is a procedure to assess the strength of the identified moderating effect (Henseler et al., 2009). Hypothesis 3 was formulated to ascertain if workload was a moderator between family support and job satisfaction. The results in Figure 4.3 confirmed that workload moderated the relationship between family support and job satisfaction ($B = .289$, $t = 2.617$, $p < .009$).

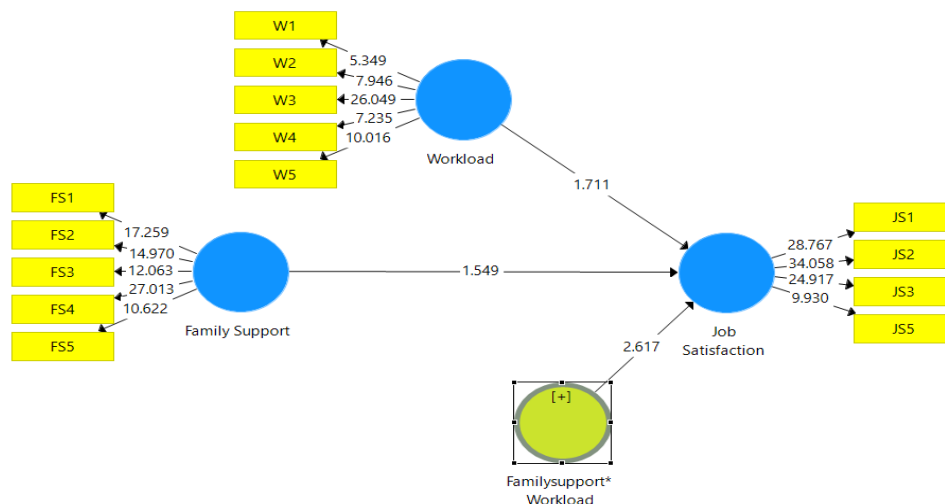


Figure 4.3: Bootstrap Result with Interaction Term

However, the results revealed that at higher workload, the family support failed to affect job satisfaction. The results in Figure 4.4 disclosed that family support was found to have a stronger impact on job satisfaction at a lower workload.

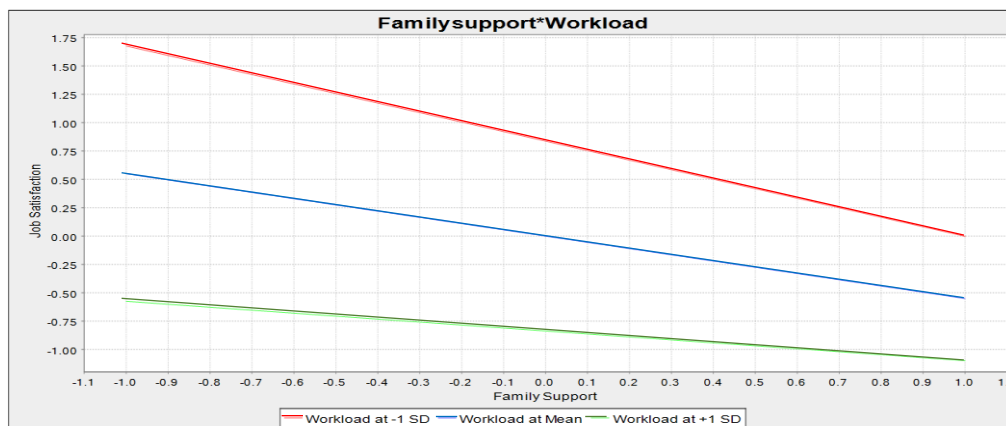


Figure 4.4: Simple Slope Analysis for the Interaction Effect

Discussion and Conclusion

This study presented the result of job satisfaction during the pandemic period, using family support as an independent variable and workload as a moderator that is expected to weaken the relationship between family support and job satisfaction. Two crucial outcomes are highlighted from the findings. First, family support has a significant relationship with job performance during the pandemic. Families that understand and appreciate the work of the employee will support the employee. During these difficult times, this support enhanced job satisfaction. Second, workload weakens the relationship between family support and job satisfaction. During the pandemic, the fixed working hours and unfair work distribution pressured the employees. The employees perceived that these had affected their work-life balance and health conditions. On top of that, a higher workload means a weaker relationship between the family and job satisfaction. Indirectly, the result suggests that a higher workload would stretch the family ties and lead to job dissatisfaction.

Theoretical, Practical and Social Implications

This study would like to propose to examine the quality of work rather than the quantity. Although many employers are not in favour of WFH due to productivity issues, it needs to be compromised during the enforcement of WFH. The high workload will not only bring to job dissatisfaction but also affect the family relationship. The implication of this would be bigger as it will involve organisations, society and even, the nation. The pandemic also does not mean less work as everyone needs to be smart enough to benefit from the situation. As the employees are forced to WFH, organisations should also be responsible for fostering good quality practices (Sarwar & Abugre, 2013). Organisations need to be creative to create a new culture that will tie everyone close to each other to boost the spirit of togetherness and achieve organisational objectives.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study, however, does not look into gender issues. It was described that the female employee as a mother would face greater mental work as they have to keep the family calm and safe during the pandemic (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). Thus, this study recommends that future studies collect more samples and use the demographic profile to determine the difference in job satisfaction when a new environment occurs. This will provide a more detailed understanding of how to react and use resources effectively in the new environment.

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