




Psychosocial factors of work-life balance and resilience among Malaysian working women: A qualitative approach



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ABSTRACT

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Regardless of cultural or geographical contexts, women worldwide often bear the primary responsibility for childcare and household management. For women pursuing careers, these responsibilities are amplified, creating a challenging dynamic as they strive to balance professional duties with domestic obligations. The onset of COVID-19 profoundly disrupted lives, with working women being particularly impacted. The pandemic necessitated a rapid transition to a "new normal," where remote work became the standard. This shift required women to juggle childcare, household chores, and professional tasks within the confines of the same physical space. Work-life balance refers to the equilibrium between personal, family, and professional responsibilities, while resilience is defined as an individual's capacity to cope with and recover from adversity. This paper examines the psychosocial factors contributing to work-life balance and resilience, which are vital for achieving a balanced and fulfilling life among working women in Malaysia. Data was collected through a qualitative approach using focus group discussions with eleven working women from diverse professional backgrounds, and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the psychosocial factors affecting work-life balance and resilience are deeply interconnected. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: social support, individual factors, and spirituality. These factors enable working women to adapt, persevere, and thrive despite challenges, especially with the support of their families, including spouses and parents. This study underscores the critical role of psychosocial factors in enhancing work-life balance and resilience among working women, highlighting their importance in navigating the complexities of modern life.

Contribution/ Originality: This study offers original insights by exploring the under-researched area of work-life balance and resilience among working women in Malaysia, focusing on the psychosocial factors that contribute to coping strategies. Its use of qualitative methods and emphasis on spirituality provide new perspectives that have been previously overlooked in the literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges and, paradoxically, presented unique opportunities across various aspects of life. Among these challenges are the sudden shift to remote work, the necessity of home-schooling, the intensification of caregiving responsibilities, and the increased dependency on technology for both work and social interactions. These rapidly changing circumstances have sparked a significant wave of research aimed at unraveling the complex relationship between psychosocial factors, work-life balance, and

resilience. The focus has been particularly on how these factors have affected working women, who have had to navigate physical, emotional, and societal pressures during this transformative period.

For working women, especially those with families, the pandemic has amplified the set of predefined expectations traditionally associated with the roles of mother and wife. These expectations, deeply ingrained in societal norms, position caregiving and domestic responsibilities as natural extensions of a woman's role (Adisa, Aiyenitaju, & Adekoya, 2021; Barnett & Gareis, 2006). While COVID-19 necessitated a swift adaptation to these evolving roles, not all women were able to effectively adjust to the new demands. The rapid transition to managing work, family, and home life simultaneously within the confines of their homes brought about significant stress and strain.

Research by Sriharan et al. (2020) highlights that during the pandemic, women were at a higher risk of experiencing burnout and depression. This heightened risk was attributed to several factors, including insufficient social support, family dynamics, organizational challenges, and broader systemic issues. The lack of adequate support systems, coupled with the increased burden of managing multiple roles, exacerbated the mental and emotional toll on women, leading to adverse outcomes such as burnout and depression.

Given these challenges, it becomes crucial to explore the role of positive attributes, such as resilience, and the psychosocial factors that contribute to work-life balance. Resilience, defined as the ability to recover from setbacks and adapt to change, is a critical factor that can help women navigate the complexities of balancing work and family responsibilities during such turbulent times. Psychosocial factors, including social support, individual traits, and organizational policies, play a pivotal role in fostering resilience and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Understanding these factors is particularly important in the context of Malaysia, where cultural expectations and societal norms may further influence the experiences of working women. Identifying and promoting psychosocial factors that support work-life balance and resilience can help women lead more balanced and fulfilling lives, even amid ongoing challenges. This understanding is essential not only for individual well-being but also for society as a whole, as it emphasizes the need for supportive environments that allow women to thrive both personally and professionally.

Ultimately, the insights gained from this qualitative study can inform policies and practices that promote gender equity, mental health, and overall well-being among working women in Malaysia and beyond, ensuring that they are better equipped to handle future crises and maintain a prosperous life.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Balancing work and personal life is more important than ever, as both significantly influence job satisfaction and overall quality of life. Those who effectively manage these areas often show greater motivation, passion, and enthusiasm. (Selim & Kee, 2022). Stankevičiūtė and Kunska (2022) define work-life balance as an individual's ability to meet the demands of work while simultaneously addressing personal and family needs. Achieving work-life balance is considered successful when individuals are satisfied with their roles in both their professional and private lives. Agrawal and Amin (2022) further emphasize that work-life balance involves the conscious efforts of individuals to allocate their time and energy between work and other essential aspects of their lives.

Numerous studies have examined the psychosocial factors influencing work-life balance. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a growing interest in how these factors have impacted individuals' ability to maintain balance in the new normal. Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) identified three key components critical to work-life balance:

- i. Time Balance: This involves allocating time evenly between work and family roles. Effective time management ensures that neither domain is neglected.
- ii. Involvement Balance: This refers to equal psychological engagement in both work and family roles,

stressing the importance of being fully present in each without allowing one to dominate the other.

iii. Satisfaction Balance: Satisfaction balance refers to achieving equal levels of satisfaction in both work and family roles. It highlights the importance of deriving fulfillment from both aspects of life, which contributes to overall well-being.

By considering these components, researchers and practitioners can better understand and address the complexities of work-life balance, particularly in the context of the evolving demands brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alafir and Gaffor (2022) categorized the factors influencing work-life balance into four key elements: i) evolving social trends, ii) work-related factors (such as occupational changes and workloads), iii) non-work factors (including childcare and health conditions), and iv) environmental factors (such as culture and policies). The onset of COVID-19 in December 2019 drastically altered these environmental factors, leading to significant impacts on the global socio-economy (Hu & Kee, 2022). Sectors like airlines, tourism, and various organizations have faced severe challenges, with some even ceasing operations due to the pandemic's pressures.

Government-imposed preventive measures, such as school closures, the shutdown of higher education institutions, organizational closures, border restrictions, and social distancing regulations, have profoundly affected individuals' quality of social life. These changes have not only disrupted daily routines but also heightened the stress associated with balancing work and personal life. Moreover, research by Köse, Baykal, and Bayat (2021) highlights that social support plays a crucial role in influencing individuals' resilience levels, which can mediate the impact of work-life balance. In other words, the presence of a strong support network can enhance resilience, enabling individuals to better cope with the demands of work and personal life, particularly in challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic. This underscores the importance of social support as a vital psychosocial factor that contributes to maintaining a healthy work-life balance amidst changing environmental and social conditions. Resilience can be best defined as resistance to risk and the ability to 'bounce back' and deal with various challenges throughout life (Windle, 2011). It is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficulties or life experiences, particularly through emotional, mental, and behavioural adjustments (American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology, 2023). Challenges or obstacles make life more colourful, teaching people to develop their hidden qualities and become stronger each day. For working women, job demands sometimes collide with family roles, leading to stress, exhaustion, and, in the worst cases, consideration of resignation. It is reported that key reasons for turnover among working women include marriage and childbirth, as they find it difficult to balance work and life roles simultaneously (Kim & Windsor, 2015). Iacoviello and Charney (2014) suggested six psychological factors that promote resilience in individuals: i) optimism, ii) cognitive flexibility, iii) active versus passive coping skills, iv) physical health, v) social support networks, and vi) a personal moral compass.

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a "new normal," where people had to adapt to working or studying from home for the first time, often without prior knowledge or training (Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Mostafa, 2021). In this unprecedented context, resilience and adaptability became essential for achieving an effective work-life balance (WLB). Recognizing the psychosocial factors that influence work-life balance and resilience is crucial for promoting quality of life (Greenhaus et al., 2003). These factors encompass various aspects, including job commitment and satisfaction (Agrawal & Amin, 2022; Alafir & Gaffor, 2022) psychological well-being (Chen, Chen, Lo, Chan, & Ip, 2022; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Kim & Windsor, 2015) and social life.

Given the significant impact of these factors, this study was conducted to investigate the psychosocial elements and resilience of Malaysian working women that empower them to navigate and thrive during these challenging times. By exploring these factors, the study aims to shed light on the motivations and coping strategies that enable working women to maintain balance and well-being in the face of adversity.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative approach through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), an effective method for gathering individuals with shared backgrounds and experiences to discuss a specific topic under the guidance of a moderator.

The moderator introduces the topic and encourages active participation in a dynamic, natural setting. FGDs are especially valuable for exploring outcomes that cannot be captured statistically, as they involve open-ended, broad responses that provide depth and variety.

Furthermore, group interactions and nonverbal communication offer additional insights into participants' genuine thoughts and feelings. FGDs are an efficient way to collect in-depth information on a community's perspectives in a relatively short time.

In this study, ten working women from diverse backgrounds, in terms of work scope and marital status (single or married), were selected as subject matter experts (SMEs) for the focus group discussion. Before the FGD, the researcher provides a semi-structure interview question as shown in [Table 1](#).

The discussion was audio-recorded with the consent of all participants. Each participant took turns introducing themselves and sharing their opinions on the topic as prompted by the moderator. During each FGD, a note-taker documented participants' opinions in their own words. Both written notes and voice recordings of the FGD were used in this study.

The data were analyzed by two individuals not involved in the FGD to ensure authenticity and credibility. A thematic analysis, a flexible qualitative method for identifying and analyzing narrative patterns or themes, was conducted. The interpretations and observations were combined to form conclusions. Both thematic analysis and constant comparison techniques were used to analyze the data.

Table 1. FGD Questions.

Session of discussion	Main question	Probing question
1	1) What is your definition of work-life balance? 2) Is there any difference in your work-life balance before, during & post covid-19 pandemic? 3) What are the impacts/Consequences of the pandemic on your work-life balance? 4) What are the factors of work-life balance from the individual & environmental aspect? 5) What are the factors of resilience in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is being able to balance work-life indicates your quality of life? ● How satisfied are you with your life & job before, during & post pandemic? ● Are you physically or mentally affected by the pandemic? ● How do you perceive your relationship quality with family members, friends or colleagues? ● Does your personality affect your work-life balance? ● Does family, supervisor or organisational support affect your work-life balance the most? ● Does your organisational policy (working hours, leave, childcare/Family dependent care etc.) enhance/Deplete your work-life balance? ● Does your cognitive & action

Session of discussion	Main question	Probing question
	enhancing your work-life balance from the aspect of individual and environmental?	<p>affect your work-life balance? What kind of thinking or action?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Does your personality affect your resilience to achieve work-life? ● Is the organisational policy (work flexibility, working hours, leave, childcare/Family dependent care etc.) affect your resilience towards work-life balance? ● Do physical activities (eg. exercise) help boost your resilience? ● How does your personal moral help strengthen your resilience? ● Is there any factor(s) that deplete your resilience towards work-life balance? How so?
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How do you perceive your resilience while facing conflict/Difficulty in balancing work-life responsibility? 2) From your own experience, how does your way of thinking affect your resilience while facing difficulty in balancing your life & work? 3) In such a difficult situation, for example a very high commitment of work and family demand, do you seek help from others? Whom would you seek help from? Family, friend or who? 4) What kind of support do you need the most? Is it in instrumental or emotional support? 5) How does the organisational and peer/Colleagues support affect your work-life balance & resilience? 6) Do you do some physical activities & how does it impact in lessen your stress? 7) Do you perform religious/Spirituality activities and how do they affect to your stress, work-life balance and resilience? 8) Any suggestions to enhance work-life balance especially for working women? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do you manage to adapt well with the different working situations/Procedures? ● Are you able to adapt or manage the latest technology (Gadgets/Apps/AI etc.) well? ● Are you an optimist or otherwise? ● How do you motivate yourself to be able to adapt/Manage the difficulty you are facing? ● Who is your source of strength? Who do you rely on the most? ● What kind of religious/Spiritual activity do you perform the most?

4. FINDINGS OF STUDY

4.1. Background of Participant

Table 2 presents the background of the participants in this study. This table illustrates a diverse group of working women with varying responsibilities, careers, and personal challenges. The participants range from professionals with significant work experience to business owners and academics. The challenges faced by some participants, such as caring for ill family members, dealing with the impact of bullying, or managing a large family without domestic help, highlight the potential stressors in their lives. This data could be useful for analyzing work-life balance, psychological well-being, and the impact of personal circumstances on professional life.

Table 2. Background of the participants.

Code of Participants	Background
SNM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate professor at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia • Married with 8 children • Been working as lecturer for almost 18 years • Had no maid
CM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher in secondary school • Married with 6 children • Been working as teacher for almost 15 years • Has a maid to help managing housework
SH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married with a child (2 month olds) • Work as an executive in a company • Husband work at Singapore (Travel back and forth between Johore and Singapore) • Had no maid and has to take care of mother with kidney failure disease
NAi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married with no child • Was working as lecturer of a private college before resigned and further study as PhD candidate • Part time tuition teacher • Had no maid and has to take care of father with kidney failure disease (Father passes away because of COVID)
NAt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married with no child • Working as Information Technology programmer • Been working for almost 7 years
HTJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married with two children • Working as sales executive for a bank • Been working for almost 16 years
NAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married with three children • Has own accounting firms • Kidney failure patient • Master degree candidate
AMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married with four children • Has own physiotherapy firm and childcare centre
N'A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single • Working as promoter for an online shopping company • Been working for almost her entire life
SNH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single • Has own social work firm • A victim of bully during school times

4.2. Psychosocial Factors of Work-Life Balance and Resilience

Table 3 shows the findings from the FGD analysis regarding the psychosocial factors of work-life balance and resilience among working women. From the thematic analysis of the FGD, there are three major themes for the psychosocial factor of work-life balance and resilience among the participants.

Table 3. Psychosocial factors of work-life balance and resilience.

Major theme	Sub-theme
1. Social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotional support: Family members, especially spouses, parents, and children, provide essential emotional support. This support can come in the form of encouragement, understanding, and love, which helps in maintaining emotional stability during stressful times. - Practical assistance: Assistance with household chores and childcare from family members reduces the burden on working women, allowing them to focus on both professional and personal responsibilities. • Colleague and supervisor support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive colleagues and supervisors create a positive work environment. Understanding supervisors who offer flexibility and empathetic colleagues who provide moral support can significantly enhance resilience. • Organizational policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies that promote work-life balance, such as flexible working hours, remote work options, and parental leave, are crucial. Organizations that prioritize employee well-being can reduce stress and improve resilience.
2. Individual trait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive outlook: Optimism involves maintaining a positive outlook on life and expecting good outcomes. Optimistic individuals are more likely to perceive challenges as temporary and manageable, which fosters resilience. - Future orientation: Optimistic individuals tend to focus on future possibilities rather than past setbacks. This forward-looking perspective helps in overcoming difficulties and planning for better outcomes. • Cognitive flexibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adaptability: Cognitive flexibility is the ability to adapt one's thinking and behavior in response to changing circumstances. Women who can adjust their strategies and perspectives are better equipped to handle diverse challenges. - Problem-solving skills: Effective problem-solving skills are a component of cognitive flexibility. Being able to find solutions and navigate obstacles enhances resilience.
3. Faith and spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faith and spirituality can provide a sense of purpose and meaning in life, which can be a powerful source of strength during difficult times. • Community support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious and spiritual communities often provide a support network that offers emotional, moral, and sometimes practical assistance.

The table is structured around three major themes, each with its associated sub-themes:

4.2.1. Social Support

4.2.1.1. Family Support

Emotional Support: Family members, particularly spouses, parents, and children, offer essential emotional backing. This can include encouragement, understanding, and love, which are crucial in maintaining emotional stability during stressful periods.

Practical Assistance: Family members also assist with household chores and childcare, reducing the overall

burden on working women. This practical help allows them to manage both professional and personal responsibilities effectively.

The respondents unanimously agreed that their families (parents, children, spouses, and other family members) are their greatest support system. They rely on this support, which has deterred them from leaving their jobs to become full-time housewives.

“Tired... yes I am tired. Working and taking care of the family, do all house chores – such no ends. I’ve once considered to resign but my husband always supports me with helping me doing the house chores, taking care of the kids and he even gives me motivation words so that I feel energised. That’s how my intention to quit the job suppressed until now.” – SNM.

“My husband never failed to fulfil his role as father. He takes care of the children when I am busy with my work and he also helps me doing house chores.” – CM.

“I always turn to my mom whenever I feel sad or bad. She knows how to make me feel better even if she doing nothing or not even a single word. Just she being with me, I feel better. She’s my strength.” – NA.

4.2.1.2. Colleague and Supervisor Support

A supportive work environment created by colleagues and supervisors plays a significant role. Supervisors who offer flexibility and colleagues who provide moral support can greatly enhance resilience, making the workplace more conducive to balancing work and life.

Additionally, the respondents mentioned that their circle of friends (including colleagues, supervisors, and employees) serves as their psychological support system. These friends understand their hardships and offer assistance, whether material or emotional.

“If I have a problem such as my kids not feeling well and I have to take care of them, I tell my boss directly, asking for a break. But once my kids recover, I’ll back to work and work harder as to show my gratitude to my boss because of his understanding of my situation.” – HTJ.

“I was once feel so down because of the pandemic and my illness, but thinking of my employees, I feel the responsible to not let them down. The bad feeling is inside me; why should I condemn the others by bringing them down with me? That’s very irresponsible of me as an employer.” – NAR.

“I feel tired with my job because it needs physical strength but to see my friends contacting me through chats or texts, I feel there is someone still take care of me. If I don’t have time or forgot to reply their messages, they keep asking how do I do. Great to know my friend always care for me.” – NA.

4.2.1.3. Organizational Policies

Policies that support work-life balance, such as flexible working hours, remote work options, and parental leave, are essential. When organizations prioritize employee well-being through such policies, stress levels decrease, and resilience improves.

From this perspective, we can assume that the participants have strong social support as a key psychosocial factor in balancing their work and life responsibilities. Alafir and Gaffor (2022) noted that having a good social circle or support system contributes to both job and life satisfaction. Individuals who are satisfied with their job and personal life typically indicate that they have successfully balanced the demands of work and family (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

4.2.2. Individual Traits

4.2.2.1. Optimism

Positive Outlook: Maintaining a positive outlook on life and expecting favorable outcomes helps individuals perceive challenges as temporary and manageable, thereby fostering resilience.

Future Orientation: Optimistic individuals are more likely to focus on future possibilities rather than dwelling on past setbacks, which aids in overcoming difficulties and planning for better outcomes.

4.2.2.2. Cognitive Flexibility

Adaptability: The ability to adapt one's thinking and behavior in response to changing circumstances is crucial. Women who are adaptable can better handle diverse challenges.

Problem-Solving Skills: Effective problem-solving is a key component of cognitive flexibility. The ability to find solutions and navigate obstacles further enhances resilience.

Moreover, participants mentioned that their awareness and knowledge help them manage their time to meet both job and family needs. Individual awareness and mindset are crucial for one's motivation, attitude, morale, behaviour, and emotions (Kassin, Fein, & Marcus, 2021). Although it can be challenging, the ability to view and approach situations positively is achievable. Therefore, self-awareness and self-recognition are essential. This study found that this ability is not only a psychosocial factor in balancing work and family responsibilities but also a key element of resilience from the SMEs' perspectives.

"I was once a bully victim, during my school times. I have been bullied because I am a fat girl. I was bullied physically and verbally. I was traumatised... until now but I think I got better. I lost count on how many times my attempt of suicide. I failed each time. Then I realised that God still want me to live then why should I die? I also realised that death is not the best solution or resort. Perhaps God wants to give me something better in the future and now I am very proud of myself. I have my own life, my own money, my own career, my own firms and I am so proud of myself." – SNH

"I was so down once I was diagnosed with kidney failure and have to undergone haemodialysis. The doctor said that I might die if I'm not undergone haemodialysis. I was terrified. So many times that I thought just die then I won't suffer the illness and I will not become a burden to my family. Yet my husband and family never stop giving me supporting words – yes until now. That's how slowly I'm back to my sense and realised that they still need me. Death is not the answer for hardship. I should be mature and cope with my illness and be strong for my family especially for my kids. And I am seeking forgiveness from Allah because of these evil thought and my weak self." – NAR

"I have to take care of my mother who are a kidney failure patient. It is hard for me at first but slowly I am become immune to it. It becomes my routine and I no longer fell hard to take of my mother. She also being better after receiving the treatment. We still trying to adjust with this new life experience but so far we are doing great. At least I know this is my chance to do good to my mother before I lost her. We give support to each other because I don't know the hardship she being through with the treatment but I can see she enduring the pain so well, try not to show it to me and that give me strength to move on. She is my source of strength and that's enough to make me realised that my hardship is noting. Just be patience, endure it and keep on moving. Everything will be fine." - SH

These statements indicate that in the face of life events such as being bullied or diagnosed with a terminal illness, it is one's mindset that motivates them to bounce back—coping, managing, adjusting, and moving forward through hardship.

4.2.3. Faith and Spirituality

4.2.3.1. Sense of Purpose

Faith and spirituality often provide a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in life, which can be a powerful source of strength during tough times.

4.2.3.2. Community Support

Religious and spiritual communities frequently offer a network of support, providing emotional, moral, and sometimes practical assistance, which can be invaluable during challenging periods.

While the challenges remain, individuals transform these negative experiences into positive ones, seeing the brighter side and growing stronger as a result. From the responses, we discovered that faith in God is a vital element of resilience. The SMEs, either directly or indirectly, acknowledged that whatever happens in their lives is part of God's plan, and they believe they will be rewarded in the future for their patience, perseverance, and endurance through hardships. They also expressed gratitude, recognising that God has given them many opportunities to become better people through these challenges. Moreover, they realised that others face even greater hardships and still manage to move on and cope well.

Lastly, the FGD revealed that a key psychosocial factor for work-life balance and resilience among working women in Malaysia is contentment—going with the flow and being happy with their circumstances as long as they and their families are satisfied and happy with their lives. This aligns with [Selim and Kee \(2022\)](#) who noted that individuals are more motivated in their jobs when they lead a happy life.

“I just follow the flow. If the company doesn't allow me to take break as I need to fulfil my religion requirement, then I believe that I belong to somewhere else. If they don't appreciate my work, why should I stay? There a lot of place out there will appreciate my talent and skill.” – NAT

“Sometimes people said that I my house is a mess and my kids not being taken care well because I am busy with my work. I never care because what I know, we are happy. My kids know their role and they know how to discipline themselves – they know to clean the mess after they done with their activity. And I know how to pay back for the time I lost for my family because of my work schedule. As long as I am happy and so do my family, I don't need to pay attention to whatever people say about my family and I.” – AMS.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the psychosocial factors influencing work-life balance and resilience among working women in Malaysia. We employed role theory, considering how the COVID-19 outbreak has altered living and working styles, especially for working women with families. As the pandemic continues to shape the dynamics of work and family life, the psychosocial factors of work-life balance and resilience were measured and assessed due to their critical role in contributing to work-life balance (WLB).

The findings underscore the importance of psychosocial factors such as social interactions, psychological well-being, and environmental conditions in achieving work-life balance and building resilience. Understanding these factors is crucial for identifying strategies to improve WLB and the overall quality of life for working women. The study revealed that working women faced significant challenges, including adapting to new role norms and balancing work and family responsibilities equally. According to [Savage \(2020\)](#) the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified domestic duties for women, with their structural roles as mothers and wives ([Barnett & Gareis, 2006](#)) increasing dramatically during the lockdown. Despite the mounting pressure and responsibilities, the SMEs involved in this study are able to cope and meet their identity-related expectations, largely due to the social support provided by their families, colleagues, and organisational policies. Support from family members, particularly spouses and parents, played a crucial role, offering emotional support through understanding, love, and empathy during stressful periods. Additionally, tangible assistance, such as help with household chores, a flexible working environment, and empathetic colleagues who provided moral support, contributed to resilience development. Finally, organisational policies that prioritise employee well-being also contributed to a higher quality work-life balance and the development of resilience. The increased engagement and support provided to working women align with the notion that they experience greater satisfaction in both work and family life, along with reduced pessimism and conflict ([Khan, 2016](#)).

This study has also highlighted the proliferation role of individual trait as a determinant for resilience and psychosocial factors of work-life balance. The gradual changes in role and the need to adapt and meet up to the

expectation given by the colleagues and family are the stressors for role conflict. According to Greenglass (2005) increase in familial expectation and duties can likely lead to conflict. In this study, respondent shown optimistic traits including having positive outlook on life and reflecting past lives as a positive challenge that help them build their character and identity today. Furthermore, past setbacks that they faced in their life serve as reference that life have both difficult and easy times and both periods are only temporary. Individuals learn how to be resilience from setbacks (Siebert, 2005). One of the SMEs mentioned about being bullied in her past life due to her physical outlook and by learning to accept her past she is able to navigate herself presently and achieve her desire career. Beyond that, respondent also acknowledge that external motivation coming from spouse or family members influence how they think and approach a conflict. One SMEs suffered from kidney failure once believe that the setback is too big for her to handle yet with the support from her husband, she was able to gain courage and able to reflect and adapt with the changing circumstances. In addition, understanding the impact of oneself had in influencing other people lives also played a vital role in developing resilience mindset. Furthermore, the integration of optimism and cognitive flexibility affected the individual representation thereof, most of the respondent found out that they need courage and resilient to carry out their responsibilities within their distinct roles. It is thus, to build resilience and promote a quality work-life balance, working women need to view challenges from the positive outlook and be cognitively flexible.

Lastly, this study findings also provide evidence on the role of faith and spirituality. The understanding of what one's value upmost is important to help one's decided what is best for him or her leading to the improve of work-life balance. For instance, when conflicting issue occurs one was able to decide what is best based on one's uphold value. In this study context, one SMEs in the discussion believe that uphold the value of spirituality and religiosity as the most important value for her, where she would be ready to resign if the employer restricted her from performing her religious belief. For these women, the increase in faith and the clarity of the value uphold was deemed important in flourishing a quality work-life balance that fulfil their psychosocial needs.

While our study advances the understanding of the determinants of resilience and psychosocial development among working women during the covid-19 lockdown, it also has some limitations that could guide future research. Firstly, the focus group discussion in this study was limited to 11 working women with families; therefore, we cannot generalise these results to other contexts, such as working women in Africa, Europe, or the Middle East. Nevertheless, according to Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) on information power and saturation, the more relevant information a sample holds in relation to the study objectives, the better if the sample size is smaller. Thus, we believe that the number of participants in this study is sufficient. Furthermore, the use of probes in this study had limitations—responses from some participants may have influenced others' answers. While probes were used to ensure the discussion remained focused on resilience and psychosocial development, they could also introduce positive biases among participants. However, the probing method is essential for maintaining the direction of the discussion to ensure that the study's objectives are met (Van Eeuwijk & Angehrn, 2017). We affirm that these limitations could provide a stimulus for future research. For instance, future studies could focus on the quality of life among housewives, who may no longer have the privacy they once enjoyed, or explore the specific life qualities of women without families.

In conclusion, it can be stated that social support and individual awareness are key factors that significantly influence work-life balance and resilience among Malaysian women. These elements are closely intertwined, as social support and individual awareness both contribute to an increase in resilience, which in turn positively affects work-life balance. The stronger the social support, the more resilient individuals become, enabling them to meet the demands of both work and family with greater satisfaction and well-being. Individuals with robust social support systems tend to exhibit higher resilience, which aids them in coping with challenges, including illness. Similarly,

those with strong social support are more effective in managing and balancing the demands of their professional and personal lives.

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