

# Empowering work-life balance: Exploring the nexus of flexible work arrangements, job satisfaction, and women's well-being in SMEs



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## ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study is to evaluate flexible working arrangements, work-life balance, and job satisfaction among women who work in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of flexible working arrangements, particularly for women juggling work and family responsibilities. The study evaluates the extent to which flexible working arrangements enable women to maintain a balance between work and family life in order to achieve work-related satisfaction. One hundred and thirty questionnaires were collected from the respondents for analysis. The analysis demonstrated a significant relationship between flexible working arrangements and work-life balance/job satisfaction among women working in SMEs. Importantly, work-life balance is an explicit factor that influences job satisfaction and mediates the relationship between flexible working arrangements and job satisfaction. These findings emphasize the need for organizations to seriously consider implementing flexible working arrangements and work-life balance policies in return for enhanced satisfaction of their workforce, especially women in SMEs in Malaysia. Research in this area is scarce; however, these findings offer valuable insights for SMEs in improving employee satisfaction and striving for growth and sustainability in the long run.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes by examining the underexplored impact of flexible working arrangements on work-life balance and job satisfaction among female employees in Malaysian SMEs, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era. It highlights the mediating role of work-life balance, providing valuable insights for SMEs to enhance employee satisfaction and sustainability in a rapidly changing work environment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the Covid-19 pandemic persists, developing countries such as Malaysia are increasingly adopting flexible work arrangements (Che Shaari & Amirul, 2020). To adjust to changing circumstances, many organizations and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are embracing various forms of flexible work arrangements, such as alternative work schedules, job sharing, workload flexibility, and work from home options, in response to new generations of employees, technological advancements, and current challenges (Berber, Gašić, Katić, & Borocki, 2022; Das, Murmu, & Debata, 2024). This indicates that employees nowadays are available to work anytime and anywhere, always connected to the workplace (Chung, Jaga, & Lambert, 2022). In Malaysia, the government has recognized the benefits of flexible work arrangements and implemented them to promote sustainable development

goals (SDGs), such as gender equality (Goal 5) and reduced inequality (Goal 10). Under the amendments to the Employment Act 1955, Section 60P (1), Malaysian employees can now request flexible work arrangements from their employers (Tan, 2022; The Star, 2024). Overall, flexible work arrangements can help organizations and SMEs establish a foundation for sustainable growth and innovation.

However, Azizan and Murad (2020) discovered that residents living in the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, have the longest working hours and spend more time at work than any other city dwellers worldwide. As a result, Kuala Lumpur ranks third globally for poor work-life balance. The "Best Cities for Work-Life Balance 2022" research by American security expert Kisi also support this. These statistics indicate that Malaysians are struggling to achieve work-life balance in this era of advanced technology (Zulkifli, 2022). Reports suggest that city-based female employees may struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance, potentially leading to a significant workforce loss for companies and causing economic damage to Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This is because female employees have the potential to contribute significantly to the economy, with an estimated annual GDP contribution of six million to nine million Ringgit Malaysia (Abdul Ghani, 2018).

There is evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a shift in the mindset of female employees, both during and after the pandemic (Hansen, Hansen, Hartwell, & Madsen, 2021). This situation has significantly impacted women's organizational and personal roles. They have had to face a rise in responsibilities and changes in household dynamics, which has impacted their working styles as compared to men. As a result, women have had more burdens and strains to deal with (Nayati & Puri, 2021). While some women have had to leave their jobs to care for their children at home, while others have lost their jobs due to being distracted by their children while working remotely. In some cases, women have kept their jobs but have had the added burden of being the sole breadwinner if their spouse lost their job during the pandemic (McKinsey & Company, 2020). A Monster survey in Malaysia revealed that inadequate childcare options led to 60% of women quitting their jobs. Achieving a satisfactory work-life balance has been a challenge for 55% of these mothers (Monster Malaysia, 2018). Female employees with family commitments prefer flexible work arrangements and remote work to balance their work and family life.

Maintaining a work-life balance is crucial when it comes to retaining female employees. When female employees are content with their job, they are more likely to continue collaborating with the company, which results in reduced recruitment expenses and lower turnover. Flexible work arrangements can help female employees balance their work and family obligations more efficiently. If the company policies support this flexibility, female employees are more likely to share their expertise over the long term (Teoh, Yuen, Teoh, & Thye, 2024).

There is a lack of research on examining the impact of flexible work arrangements towards work-life balance, and flexible work arrangements and work-life balance on job satisfaction among female employees in SMEs, as well as the mediating effect of work-life balance as a critical factor related to both flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to study the issues to better understand the intricate dynamics between flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, and job satisfaction, particularly within the context of SMEs. By tailoring organizational policies and practices to support the well-being and satisfaction of female employees, we can contribute to a more equitable and fulfilling work environment.

Furthermore, not all companies can implement flexible work arrangements, particularly SMEs. This is because some SMEs rely heavily on production output, and flexible work arrangements may not be suitable for all industries. Moreover, each business has its own unique structure and production processes, and some businesses are subject to different international rules and regulations. The challenges of implementing flexible work arrangements are numerous and include a lack of commitment from top management, difficulty adapting to new working models, a lack of employee engagement that can lead to lower productivity and higher attrition rates, the risk of confidential data being compromised, ensuring that remote workspaces comply with the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

Act, cultivating trust between managers and employees, and ensuring that flexible work arrangements policies are fair to all employees (The Star, 2022). This could potentially impact female employees in industries beyond IT and marketing. They may choose to leave the workforce due to family responsibilities and inadequate childcare options, and they may face lower pay and career discrimination if they opt to reduce their working hours, working days, or work remotely.

To address the research gaps above, this research is conducted with the research objective to examine flexible work arrangements, job satisfaction, and work-life balance of female employees in SMEs post- COVID-19 pandemic. The research aims to address three proposed research questions.

Research Question 1: Is there a relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance of female employees in SMEs?

Research Question 2: Is there a relationship between flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction for female employees in SMEs?

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction of female employees in SMEs?

Research Question 4: Does work-life balance mediate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction of female employees in SMEs.

This paper begins with an introduction of flexible work arrangements in SMEs post COVID-19 pandemic, followed by intensive literature reviews on flexible work arrangements, job satisfaction, and work-life balance of female employees in SMEs. This paper also discusses the research methodology carried out to collect and gather data associated with the research questions and research objective. Analysis results are discussed with practical implications for the SMEs being highlighted at the end of this paper.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements allow employees to have more control over their schedules and how they fulfill their job responsibilities (Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui, 2020). The purpose of flexible work arrangements is to let employees adjust their work schedules to their personal needs and create a positive work environment (Kim & Park, 2017). Flexible work arrangements not only help employees achieve their objectives but also assist organizations in achieving their long-term goals more efficiently. Additionally, flexible work arrangements can be especially beneficial for women who want to balance their personal and professional lives (Han et al., 2024; Rahman, 2019).

### 2.2. Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is an important organizational change that aims to reduce work-life conflict and improve employee effectiveness (Lazăr, Osoian, & Rațiu, 2010). In 1986, the US coined the term work-life balance to describe the increasing trend of individuals prioritizing work over other aspects of their lives (Smith, 2010). Work-life balance is about finding a satisfactory balance between work and personal life, which leads to a happier and more fulfilling life (Kelliher, Richardson, & Boiarintseva, 2019). In today's globalized world, work-life balance has become a basic need for every working person, as it helps to achieve life satisfaction and perform well at work (Hasan & Teng, 2017). Today, many companies are looking for ways to foster a culture that promotes work-life balance, which can lead to higher job satisfaction and productivity, and better manage changing business and employee needs (Rahman, 2019).

### 2.3. Job Satisfaction

As per Locke (1969) job satisfaction is an assessment of how people who realize or facilitate the value of their work feel emotionally. In simpler terms, job satisfaction refers to meeting or exceeding expectations and finding

fulfillment in one's job by combining one's feelings and emotions about the work and its influence on their life. Measuring employees' job satisfaction can be done by looking at their attitude, emotion, and sentiments (Sangeeta et al., 2024). Additionally, the value an employee assigns to job satisfaction is based on their expectations and the actual results (Khaira & Shariff, 2021).

#### 2.4. Flexible Working Arrangements and Work-Life Balance

An increased concern for workplace flexibility and employee-centric management practices will drive the future workplace with novel energy and vision (Subramaniam, Overton, & Maniam, 2015). The connection between work flexibility and talent in the lives of employees will be positive, as employee happiness is a byproduct of work-life balance (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). According to Kastner (2017) some countries even promote flexible working conditions for balancing work and other commitments to minimize conflict and tension between work and other domains of people's lives. Flexible work, resulting from more options, can reduce the experiences of work-life conflict.

Flexible arrangements generally include part-time work and schedules with a modicum of flexibility. Only a small percentage of the workforce exercises homework, and flexible work enhances creative effort by improving work-life balance. The realization of flexible work will ultimately benefit early-career women and men with aspirations to embark on their professions while balancing family commitments that often manifest with relocation to a new residence or city (Mazaheri, Hawk, Ledermann, Lozano, & Porter, 2023). A hypothesis is formed as follows:

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between flexible working arrangements and the work-life balance of female employees in SMEs.*

#### 2.5. Flexible Working Arrangements and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a crucial element in the realm of human resources, encompassing employees' emotions and their perceptions while at work (Spector, 1997).

It undeniably plays a pivotal role in motivating employees and enhancing their performance (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015).

Many organizations recognize the significance of implementing flexible work arrangements to promote work-life balance and employee retention, as job dissatisfaction correlates with reduced retention rates. Notably, research by Govender, Migiroy, and Kyule (2018) and Mughal and Rani (2024) indicates that organizations fostering flexibility tend to have employees with higher job satisfaction levels. Therefore, the following hypothesis ensues:

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction of female employees in SMEs.*

#### 2.6. Work-life Balance and Job Satisfaction

The nature of a job is changing, and every employee nowadays is striving for work-life balance. When the employees achieve the balance between their work and family life, they are fully satisfied with their job (Mochklas, Subagyo, Muchson, Forijati, & Rinawati, 2024; Rathi & Islam, 2024). If female employees struggle to find a work-life balance, it will decrease their morale, happiness, as well as productivity (Erwin, Rahmat, Angga, & Semerdanta, 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forth:

*H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction of female employees in SMEs.*

#### 2.7. Work-Life Balance as a Mediator between Flexible Work Arrangements and Job Satisfaction

A work-life balance may indicate how important it is to the organization and its employees, especially women.

To retain valuable employees and satisfy their wants in this intensely competitive labor market, the organization's cognizance of and actions regarding job satisfaction and work-life balance have occurred out of necessity (Yadav & Dabhade, 2014). In a study, Hafeez and Akbar (2015) noted that the probability of feelings of unhappiness among workers is increasing as a result of non-establishment of work-life balance. The study shows that addressing employees' work-life balance concerns should lead to a high percentage of job satisfaction among the labor force.

Work-life balance policies and plans are associated with flexible work arrangements and an employee's rationale for resignation or intention to resign. The employee's flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, and job satisfaction are closely related. Thus, organizations should develop their policies and plans for employees around the work-life balance. If an employee has job dissatisfaction, the system will face inefficiency (Shujat, Cheema, & Bhutto, 2011). Therefore, organizations can use different flexible work arrangements to counteract the work-life balance of employees, which would result in job satisfaction. This raises the question of how a healthy work-life balance could impact an employee's job satisfaction (Arief, Purwana, & Saptono, 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Work-life balance significantly mediates the relationship between flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction of female employees in SMEs.*

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

Female employees of SMEs participated in a quantitative questionnaire study. The questionnaire had four sections, which included eleven demographic questions. The second section concentrated on the main components of flexible work arrangements such as telecommuting, contractual working, work-shift, flexible hours, as well as work-life balance, and job satisfaction. Each questionnaire item was graded using a 5-point Likert scale instrument. The respondent answered each question using the existing scale from "1" (i.e., strongly disagree) to "5" (i.e., strongly agree).

#### 3.2. Data Collection Methods

A quantitative study was carried out among female employees in SMEs. A total of 130 female respondents were approached and a questionnaire was distributed to each of the respondents. The questionnaire had four sections, which included eleven demographic questions.

The second section concentrated on the main components of flexible work arrangements such as telecommuting, contractual working, work-shift, flexible hours, as well as work-life balance, and job satisfaction. The researchers used quantitative methods to collect data, which is suitable for a research environment and ideal for collecting large amounts of data. Previous researchers such as Rawashdeh, Almasarweh, and Jaber (2016), Aziz-Ur-Rehman and Siddiqui (2020), Singh (2013) and Jabeen, Friesen, and Ghoudi (2018) were adapted to develop the questionnaire.

Each questionnaire item was graded using a 5-point Likert scale instrument. The respondent answered each question using the existing scale from "1" (i.e., strongly disagree) to "5" (i.e., strongly agree). Descriptive analysis, Cronbach's Alpha, and regression analysis were used to test the reliability and consistency of the structure and hypothesis.

#### 3.3. Data Analysis Methods

The researchers used quantitative methods to collect data, which is suitable for a research environment and ideal for collecting and analysis large amounts of data. Descriptive analysis, Cronbach's Alpha, and regression analysis were used to evaluate the reliability and consistency of the structure and hypothesis.

Table 1. Frequency table.

Item	Label	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	Below 20	13	10.0
	21 – 25 years old	56	43.1
	26 – 30	34	26.2
	31 – 35	13	10.0
	Over 35	14	10.8
Ethnicity	Malay	95	73.1
	Chinese	28	21.5
	Indian	3	2.3
	Other	4	3.1
Marital status	Single	85	65.4
	Married	37	28.5
	Divorced	7	5.4
	Other	1	0.8
Number of dependent	None	66	50.8
	1 –2	33	25.4
	3 – 4	18	13.8
	Above 4	13	10.0
Number of dependent children	None	92	70.8
	1 –2	27	20.8
	3 – 4	7	5.4
	Above 4	4	3.1
Education level	SPM	63	48.5
	STPM	14	10.8
	Diploma	27	20.8
	Degree	20	15.4
	Other	6	4.6
Position	Junior officer	14	10.8
	Clerical level	11	8.5
	Managerial level	7	5.4
	Senior officer	3	2.3
	Executive level	10	7.7
	Other	85	65.4
What is your department?	Admin	9	6.9
	Purchasing	12	9.2
	Human resource	6	4.6
	Account	3	2.3
	Other	100	76.9
How long have you been working hours for your company per week?	40 – 44 hours	22	16.9
	45 – 49 hours	48	36.9
	More than 49 hours	60	46.2
How long have you worked for your company?	Less than 1 year	24	18.5
	1 – 5 years	86	66.2
	6 – 10 years	18	13.8
	11 – 15 years	2	1.5
What is your monthly salary range?	Below RM2000.00	74	56.9
	RM2000.00 to less than RM5000.00	52	40.0
	RM5000.00 to less than RM8000.00	3	2.3
	RM8000.00 and above	1	0.8

#### 4. RESULTS

Most of the female respondents, or 43.1%, fall into the 21–25 age range, according to Table 1's demographic data on the female respondents. The majority of respondents to the questionnaire (73.1%) are Malay, and the majority of participants in this study (65.4%) are single. Therefore, with 50.8% and 70.8%, respectively, "none" has the highest percentage of dependents and dependent children. Most female respondents in other positions (65.4%) and other departments (76.9%) chose the option of position in the questionnaire, with SPM having the highest education level of female respondents (48.5%). Most of the female respondents (46.2%) work more than 49 hours per week. Eighty-six female respondents (66.2%) who have working experience for 1 to 5 years. A significant number



of the respondents, or 40%, earn between RM2000 and less than RM5000 per month, which is the majority wage range in Malaysia. 56.9% of the female respondents to the poll earn a monthly salary of less than RM2000.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics - mean and standard deviation.

<b>Telecommuting</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
1. Working from home will help me to establish a better work-life balance.	3.18	1.110
2. I like to have remote access to my PC at work so that I can work from home.	3.35	1.179
3. I prefer telecommuting over traditional working arrangements.	3.52	0.950
4. I get the opportunity to work from out of the office with the aid of technology for a certain number of hours each week.	3.36	1.019
5. It can be much more convenient to integrate work and life due to telecommuting.	3.70	0.920
6. I do not think that telecommuting acts as a barrier to career advancement anymore in the 21st century.	3.53	0.950
Average	3.44	1.021
<b>Contractual working</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
1. A temporary contract influences the number of employees entering the organization at a given period.	3.48	0.908
2. Temporary contracts attract employees with new skills which influences the ability of employees in the organization.	3.55	0.864
3. Temporary contracts influence the number of employees moving out of the organization at a given period.	3.57	0.787
Average	3.53	0.853
<b>Work-shift</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
1. Work shift affects performance in terms of productivity.	3.64	0.932
2. The work shift helps in reducing absenteeism, the number of days an employee attends work.	3.72	0.925
3. Work shift determines the amount of effort, hours used by employees to achieve organization success.	3.77	0.894
4. Work shift determines the employee commitment in terms of time (Hours worked).	3.77	0.894
Average	3.73	0.911
<b>Flexible hours</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
1. Flexitime affects the cases reported by employees about family conflicts.	3.45	0.916
2. Flexitime gives employees more control over scheduling personal responsibility on either end of workday hence improving efficiency.	3.72	0.865
3. Flexitime determines the number of employees in the organization in each period.	3.62	0.857
4. Flexitime is one of the ways of providing professional service delivery in the organization which influences customer feedback.	3.56	0.907
Average	3.59	0.886
<b>Work-life balance</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
1. With FWAs, I feel that my company will allow me to take time for personal issues.	3.74	0.945
2. With FWAs, I feel that job sharing between two or more employees on a full-time job is important to help everyone achieve work-life balance.	3.98	0.876
3. With FWAs, I feel that I can work from home or outside of my central workplace.	3.57	0.853
4. With FWAs, I feel that my company will provide fair-treatments to all other employees using work-life balance-based policies.	3.84	0.852
Average	3.78	0.882
<b>Job satisfaction</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
1. I feel fairly satisfied with my present job.	3.80	0.830
2. Most days I am enthusiastic about my work.	3.72	0.809
3. Each day at work seems like it will never end.	3.73	0.979
4. I find real enjoyment in my work.	3.88	0.872
Average	3.78	0.873

Table 2 displays the mean and standard deviation values for the variables. The range of the variables' means, 3.18 to 3.98, shows that there is a tendency toward "neutral" to "strongly agree" responses as the dominant trend. The identical item's standard deviation ranges from 0.787 to 1.179. The mean of the items under the work-shift is typically higher than the mean value of flexible hours, contractual working, and telecommuting in the four categories considered by flexible work arrangements. The standard deviation scores of some items are high, implying a wide variation of responses. Table 3 illustrates the reliability test conducted to confirm the internal consistency of the measures applied in this study. All alpha values in this research fall between 0.818 and 0.876,

which is within the acceptable range. Hence, we can conclude that the questionnaire items used in this research are dependable.

Table 3. Reliability of scale.

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Telecommuting	6	0.858
Contractual working	3	0.874
Work shifts	4	0.876
Flexible hours	4	0.842
Work-life balance	4	0.823
Job satisfaction	4	0.818

Table 4. Regression analysis for hypothesis 1.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. error	Beta		
Four IVs (Telecommuting, contractual working, work-shift, flexible hours)	0.793	0.065	0.735	12.270	0.000

Note: Dependent variable: Work-life balance.

Table 4 has been created to demonstrate H1. The results show that there is a positive correlation between flexible work arrangements (e.g., telecommuting, contractual working, flexible hours, work-shift) and work-life balance. A p-value less than 0.05 supports this, indicating the acceptance of H1.

Table 5. Regression analysis for hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3.

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta		
	Four IVs (Telecommuting, contractual working, work-shift, flexible hours)	0.214	0.099	0.201	2.147	0.034
	Work-life balance	0.532	0.092	0.539	5.761	0.000
	R square					0.490

Note: Dependent variable: Job satisfaction.

Based on Table 5, there appears to be a positive correlation between the independent variables (IVs), and dependent variables (DV). The R-squared value is .490, indicating that these four categories of flexible work arrangements and work-life balance can account for 49% of the variation in job satisfaction. Flexible work arrangements had values of ( $\beta = .201$ ,  $p = .034$ ), and work-life balance had values of ( $\beta = .539$ ,  $p = .000$ ), which meet the acceptance criteria of  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, H2 and H3 are accepted.

Table 6. Sobel test.

Input			Statistic	Std. error	p-value
a	0.793	Sobel test:	5.225	0.081	0.000
b	0.532		5.211	0.081	0.000
.Sa	0.065	Goodman (II) test:	5.240	0.081	0.000
.Sb	0.092				

Table 6 presents the results of the Sobel test, which include the mediator test statistic, standard error, and p-value. The Sobel test was used to investigate whether work-life balance played a significant role in mediating the relationship between flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction. The findings showed that work-life balance significantly mediated the relationship between flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction ( $Z = 5.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Consequently, the fourth hypothesis (H4) is supported. This finding is a unique knowledge contribution of this



research, as recent studies (Han et al., 2024; Mochklas et al., 2024; Mughal & Rani, 2024; Rathi & Islam, 2024; Sangeeta et al., 2024; Teoh et al., 2024) did not examine the mediating effect of the work-life balance on job satisfaction and flexible work arrangements in Malaysia post-COVID-19 pandemic.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS

The research findings provide several valuable recommendations for SMEs in Malaysia that offer flexible working arrangements for female employees. SMEs in Malaysia should create organizational policies prioritizing flexible working arrangements to promote work-life balance to assist female employees in managing work pressure. SMEs should develop health and psychological support programs that consider women's flexible working arrangements practices post-COVID-19 pandemic to ensure a positive impact on job performance through happy and conducive working conditions. SMEs should encourage monetary and non-monetary rewards to compensate for the fatigue of female employees who adopt flexible working arrangements. Organizations should have a better delegation of tasks to ensure that tasks are manageable and completed remotely using innovative technology.

Female professionals who can obtain work-life balance through flexible work arrangements, are generally more motivated and remain at the same SME longer. Companies should give female employees greater autonomy and provide less interrupted work for their own preferences. Employment should be provided with encouragement for female roles in decision-making, allowing for stimulating female employee's creativity and productivity. If a Malaysian SME wishes to enact sustainable human resource management, it should focus on encouraging participation by female employees through small taskforces and flexible work arrangements. The aim to improve the job orientations of female employees by equipping them with knowledge, developing their workplace skills and capabilities, and utilizing these to enhance their work and workplace performance. SMEs should also appreciate the worker as an important organizational asset and female employees as significant agents of change and value continued employee investment in these technological tools and applications along a flexible work program to produce a win-win model for female employees (working life balance and job satisfaction) and for employers' profitability and success. In this global economy, when female professionals have thus developed more opportunity with so many works offered on the current global marketplace, SMEs in Malaysia will have to reinvent themselves and start to value offering potential female employees flexible work arrangement benefits (beyond monetary personal benefits) to retain skilled employees. Facilitating flexible work arrangement opportunities is possible, but it would be ideal if our SMEs increased their investment levels towards process automation. SMEs can consider formally evaluating female employee's adaptation phases according to job independence and evaluate graded flexibility options, according to job performance levels. It is important to consider the traditional business model for these SMEs to rethink, as they are highly dependent on people, and often depend on the dependency of a global supply chains. Reconsider how we balance dependence on technology and education. Researchers in Malaysia should conduct more research with a larger and more targeted sample size to facilitate more accurate and reliable data analysis. Additionally, there is a possibility of conducting future research to determine the differences in work-life balance between female employees with and without children. With the increasing number of females without children nowadays, it is crucial to understand the job satisfaction and well-being of female employees without children to equally access organizational work-life balance arrangements as female employees with children. Furthermore, future researchers could extend the study to other industries in Malaysia, providing a broader reference point for businesses interested in this research area.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Malaysia is currently in the critical phase of developing and improving flexible work arrangements, despite the fact that there are few existing local studies on this field (Che Shaari & Amirul, 2020). This survey utilized four categories of flexible work arrangements (telecommuting, contractual working, work shift, and flexible hours),

which have also been utilized by other researchers in the literature. All of these flexible work arrangements may have an impact on job satisfaction of female employees, but the influence varies according to the type of flexible work arrangements. Thus, organizations should increase their emphasis on the flexible work arrangements that have the most impact on female employees' job satisfaction (influence as mediated by their work-life balance). This, in turn, will lead to more job satisfaction among female employees, lower turnover, and heightened employee productivity and commitment overall, thus allowing the female employees to remain with the organization longer.

## 7. LIMITATION OF STUDY

Several limitations are noteworthy in this research study. Firstly, the study faces constraints due to a limited time, compounded by challenges related to data collection, including network issues and the inability to conduct face-to-face interactions during the pandemic. As a result, there was a delay in the data collection, which led to a hastily processed survey report.

## 8. FUTURE RESEARCH

Research instruments of this research can be replicated in future to examine the relationship between flexible working arrangements, work-life balance, and job satisfaction among female employees in other developing countries worldwide using cross-sectional quantitative research approach.

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**Transparency:** The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

**Data Availability Statement:** Upon a reasonable request, the supporting data of this study can be provided by the corresponding author.

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