

## Work-Life Balance Among Elderly Caregivers in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Work-life balance is an important aspect of an employee's life. It is the ability to balance two important aspects of an individual's life; pursuing a successful career and prioritizing personal or family matters. Many children neglect their parents due to working commitment and pressure to cope with the financial burden. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between job, family, individual, and career growth on the work-life balance of the caregiver. This article presented the stages of analysis taken to achieve these aims. Questionnaires were distributed online to the elderly caregiver and purposive sampling was adopted as the sampling procedure. The questionnaire was designed in two sections, one consisting of demographic information and the second relating to the determinants of the work-life balance. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 was used for data analysis. The output from the descriptive statistics has provided a summary of the samples and the measures done on a particular study. It is used to describe the characteristics of a sample or data set. Next, the directions for this paper are to run for a reliability analysis followed by multiple regression analysis. This study advances current knowledge by shedding light on some important factors relating to work-life balance as eldercare issues need an eye-opener to the public.

**Keywords:** Work-Life Balance, Elderly, Caregiver, Malaysia

### **Introduction**

Work-life balance is an important aspect of an employee's life. It is the ability in balancing two important aspects; pursuing a successful career and prioritizing personal or family matters (Khairunneezam, 2011). Broers (2005) believed that balancing a successful career with a personal or family life can be challenging, and shall impact a person's satisfaction in their work and personal life roles. Meanwhile, Dundas (2008) argues that work-life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and all other important activities such as family, community activities, voluntary work, personal development, leisure and recreation. In Malaysia, more than half of the nation's population are actively working, managing and balancing work commitments along with family and personal life commitments (Haslinda & Ying, 2018). However, research done by Rozanti and Salmiah (2014) shows that one in five Malaysians are stressed and face work-life conflict as they have difficulties in managing work and family at the same time. The situation worsens when the employee turnover rate increases. In addition, Gautun and Bratt (2016) evidenced that the need to provide care for the elderly can strain their working adult children, which potentially interferes with their work performance and attendance. This may possibly affect the caregiver's overall productivity and the caregiver's promotion and salary (Bolin et al., 2008; Phillips et al., 2002).

With the COVID19 pandemic affecting the globe since December 2019, employees were made compulsory to work remotely from home. Hence, having to work from home blurred the line between professional and personal life and made it even harder for many employees to maintain a work-life balance. Meanwhile, Chugh (2021) has briefly explained The Great Resignation phenomenon, where there shall be recorded high numbers of people leaving their jobs after the pandemic ends and upon returning to the new norms, as predicted by Professor Anthony Klotz of Texas A&M University. Hence, employers now need to navigate the ripple effects of the pandemic and re-evaluate new strategies to retain employees. Heger and Korfhage (2020) explained that working adult often faces the hard decision between assisting their parents and staying in the industry. Caregiving strengthens family bonds yet it requires emotional and physical presence. Hence, serving as an informal caregiver often competes with workforce involvement. If one fails to balance work-life, it may affect their productivity, promotions or even cost their employment. However, Rozanti and Salmiah (2014) explained that about two-thirds of the respondents placed their family first, before work, while the others were trying hard to balance work and family life.

Therefore, in line with the country's aspirations of moving towards an ageing nation status by 2030, the Government should have championed and promoted the act of caregiving and its services, whilst offering incentives to employers by acknowledging the caregivers' responsibilities. In the long run, this would also serve as a strategy to retain the employees. According to Jones and Taylor (2017), the work-life balance structure can be categorized into (i) personal life (family, friends and self); and (ii) professional life (job and career). Jeyaseelan and Premkumar (2018) have identified factors affecting work-life balance which include the work environment, family environment, family and community groups, physical well-being, mental well-being, personality, and financial stability. Meanwhile, Nizam and Kam (2018) identified factors of working hours, workload, work arrangements and reward schemes giving significant impacts on work-life balance.

Concisely, this study intends to investigate the perceptions of caregivers based on the determining factors, towards achieving work-life balance according to (i) personal life (family and self); and (ii) professional life (job and career). The chosen factors are expected to provide guidelines in formulating retention employment strategies by the employers. In addition, the findings of this study will provide beneficial inputs for further research in this area. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews existing literature to provide a basis for the development of the hypotheses. The following section presents the methodology that is employed to test the hypothesis. The results of this study are reported and discussed in the fourth section. The final section concludes and discusses the implications of this study.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### ***Work-Life Balance***

There is an endless debate on work-life balance focusing on the number of questionable assumptions and perceptions. Eikhof (2007) has identified assumptions as of the following where (a) 'work' could be experienced as negative, with long working hours; (b) 'life' can be equated with caring responsibilities, most particularly childcare; (c) work and life can be separated; or (d) work and life is in need of being separated. Meanwhile, Dhas (2015) quoted that work-life balance is about creating and maintaining supportive and healthy work environments, enabling employees to balance work and personal responsibilities while strengthening employees' loyalty and productivity. It basically means a balanced allocation of time and psychological resources in work and nonwork life while obtaining a high level of satisfaction from both (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Therefore, upon achieving a positive work-life balance at the workplace, both employees (who are caregivers), and organizations benefit from having low employee turnover, work engagement, organizational citizenship behaviour, in-role performance, increased firm productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitments (Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Denson et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, according to Khairunneezam (2011), even though the work-life balance has direct consequences on the employees' life and the organization; not everybody feels that work-life balance is an important aspect of life. Many studies have shown that work-life conflict leads to work, personal, family or health effects. Rozanti and Salmiah, (2014) shared that based on a survey done in Selangor of 120 married female secretaries face work-family conflict, resulting in lower work satisfaction and family dissatisfaction. This study is supported by the findings of earlier research where work-family conflicts are strongly associated with stress and psychological pressure (Siti Aisyah et al., 2012). Undeniably, the work-life conflict appears to be relatively common in most societies, particularly among working women. This is because, in the vast majority of countries around the world, women have traditionally assumed the majority of household responsibilities and are primarily responsible for their children and elderly care (Alqahtani, 2020). In addition, Kim and Windsor (2015) have also mentioned that work-life balance can affect employees' turnover intention. Furthermore, Jaharuddin and Zainol's (2019) study findings clearly show the importance of work-life balance in job engagement and employee retention. Many working adults face challenges in balancing between work-family and this could lead to inter-role conflict as the role demands on one sphere (work or family) are incompatible with the role demands of another sphere (work or family) (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Kelloway et al., 1999).

Mita and Ravneeta (2014) observed that there is a direct relationship between an employee's decision to stay in an organization and work-life balance. In addition, Bhende et

al. (2020)'s research has established that by enhancing the quality of work-life, it is possible to enhance productivity and skill deployment by employees. Therefore, in ensuring that employees stay productive while achieving work-life balance, organizations may face the most challenging task not only of how to handle employees but also how to retain them on the job for as long as possible (Kossivi et al., 2016). Kossivi et.al. (2016) identified the common factors related to employee retention are development opportunities and quality supervision, job stress and colleague stress, compensation and appreciation of work done, provision of challenging work, promotion and development chances, the attractive atmosphere within the organization, relationship with colleagues, work-life balance, communication, and supervision.

However, employees who think that they are not in the right place in an organization will tend to leave for other companies who much appreciate them; implying that employees tend to leave the organization when they are dissatisfied with their job or the organization. Therefore, organizations prioritizing and understanding the influential factors of their employee turnover observe gains including increased employee morale, decreasing the selection and training costs, providing customer satisfaction and at the same time can enhance the organization's productivity (Kerdpitak & Jermstittiparsert, 2020).

Unfortunately, not all organizations' strategies in promoting the well-being of their employees are achieved through work-life balance policies, as compared to attaining profitable growth for the organisations. Realizing the importance of work-life balance, employees not only want better promotion and career growth; they deserve the satisfaction in their personal life too and this has significantly influenced the employees' decision to stay in an organization (Kossivi et. al., 2016).

Therefore, this study focuses on the determining factors affecting caregivers' towards achieving work-life balance according to the identified elements which are (i) family; (ii) individual; (iii) job; and (iv) career growth.

### **Family**

A family can be described as two or more persons, one of whom is the householder; related to one another by birth, marriage, or adoption who live in the same housing unit. It is a common perception that family can provide good support in an individual's career, despite facing challenges in balancing both work and family. A study by Stone et al (1987) showed that 8.9% of caregivers quit their job due to the effect of long-term care; 21% of caregivers worked for reduced hours; 29.4% of caregivers changed their schedules, and 18.6% of caregivers took unpaid leave. Meanwhile, Merz et al (2009) has mentioned that family relationships play a significant role in defining an individual's well-being across the life course. With sometimes complex marriage histories, diverse relationships with children, competing time pressures, and commitments for care, family relationships often become more complex as people age (Thomas et al., 2017). As individuals age, these family relationships become even more crucial to well-being as the need for family caregiving increases making the workplace becoming less of a priority in their lives (Milkie, Bierman, & Schieman, 2008). Moreover, those receiving support from their family members may feel a greater sense of self-worth, and this enhanced self-esteem may be a psychological resource, encouraging optimism, positive affect, and better mental health (Symister & Friend, 2003). Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between family and the work-life balance of the caregiver.*

**Individual**

Every individual is unique and thus work-life balance for every employee may be different. Certain employees may find working for long hours as a source of value creation while some feel it is a burden or taxing of the job responsibilities. It is very important that each employee is able to establish his or her own work-life balance in the organization. The efforts have to be put in by both parties to have remarkable effects on work-life balance policies laid down by the organization (Arora and Wagh, 2017). In addition, an individual's personality also affects how one views the aspect of work-life balance. According to Noraini (2003), an individual with a high tendency to overemphasize the negative sides of their experience is called neuroticism and tends to show greater stress. On the other hand, an individual with a positive attitude, who feels good about themselves and their surroundings, is known as extraversion and tends to have good mental health. This is evidenced by a study where only 39.5% of respondents stated that work (rather than family) is their major source of satisfaction in life. It shows that employee focuses more on family rather than their work. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between an individual and the work-life balance of the caregiver.*

**Job**

Since as early as the 1980s, few organizations have already taken the initiative to review and analyze challenges faced by women employees during employment. Upon materialising the concept, a few provisions have been introduced including the provision of maternity leave, Creche provision, provision for lactating mothers and working from home hence (Arora and Wagh, 2017). Nevertheless, there are situations where work may also be viewed as a means of escape and self-expression, as discovered by Cowling (2005) where women having more than two children, may unquestionably consider longer working hours as a means of escaping family stress.

Meanwhile, Isles (2004) stated that work can make a major contribution to overall life satisfaction. Employers can improve their employees' work-life balance through the introduction of strategies including flexible working hours, compressed workweeks, job-sharing, telecommuting and child-care support. These options would allow employees to have more control over their lives, enabling them to be more productive (Dhas, 2015). On the other hand, Major et al (2002) has found that longer working hours could lead to work-life imbalance, causing health issues such as depression or stress-related problems. Research done by Hsu et al (2019) revealed significant correlations between long working hours and both occupational stress and work-life balance, as well as between occupational stress and both work-life balance and job satisfaction. This finding is supported by Kinman and Jones (2003), which showed that long working hours have an effect on employees' psychological (i.e. anxiety and depression) and physical well-being (i.e. coronary heart disease), and both these factors are linked with job stress in many occupations. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

*H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between Job and the caregiver's work-life balance.*

**Career Growth**

Any employee having a good start in their career shall have different views on achieving work-life balance. Veiga (1983) has discovered that as individuals age, they shall go through different development stages and exposures that will affect their employment priorities.



Giele and Elder (1998) added that depending on an individual's age and exposure, different factors take on differing degrees of importance and that these varying factors may influence attitudes towards work and behaviours in the workplace. Meanwhile, Broers (2005) believed that balancing a successful career with a personal or family life can be perplexing and this influences an individual's fulfilment in their work and personal life roles.

Employers that provide and meet the individuals' work preferences are more likely to retain employees and gain their loyalty (Guest, 1998). This relationship between orientations to work, career and life stage is presented from a longitudinal study of graduates in large organizations conducted by Sturges et. al (2000), where respondents believed that the ability to control their working lives remains core in their capability to cope and tolerate longer working hours. This study has discovered that at the point of entry into their career, the issue of work-life balance is seen as very important. However, as their careers advance, they work longer hours and have become more dissatisfied with their work-life balance. They continue to rationalize the imbalance quoting that it is only temporary, and the 'imbalance-period' would be over once the required task is completed. In addition, Osman (2013) found that employers offering emotional support to employees through work-life balance reduces their intention to quit their job.

O'Laughlin and Bischoff (2005) found that balancing parenthood and career is very challenging for all professionals who engage in careers. Career progress determines the success in their field and it is the tool, which measures their competencies. Research has found that having to care for older parents might hinder the working adult children from participating in social arrangements or accepting extra responsibilities that would promote their careers (Gautun and Hagen, 2010; Mooney et al., 2002; Phillips, 1994). Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

*H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant relationship between career growth and the caregiver's work-life balance.*

Based on the discussion in the previous section, the following framework is developed (Figure 1).

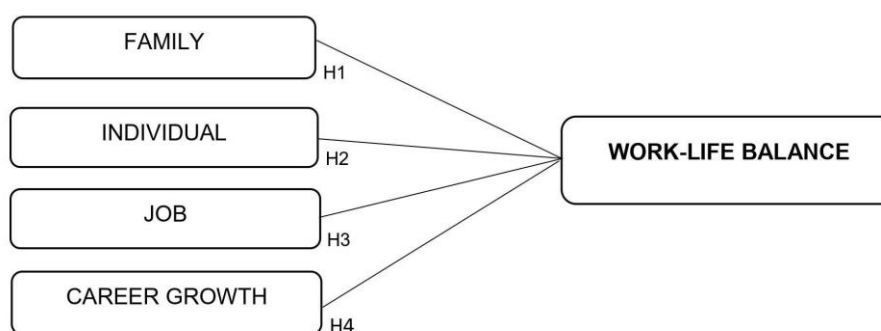


Figure 1: Research Framework

### Research Methodology

This research invited participants who are actively involved in providing care to the elderly while working, albeit half-time or full-time. This shall help investigate whether working caregivers can achieve work-life balance while taking care of their elderly families. This research adopts a cross-sectional analysis. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), data is gathered once over days, weeks, or months to answer the research questions. The sample

size needed for this research has been calculated by using the GPower application, an open-source program for power analysis and sample size calculation. It is a great teaching tool since it is simple and easy to learn and use. To use this application, the researcher needs to key in some research details, and it will automatically calculate the sample size. It encoded that the respondent required for this research is a minimum of 30 respondents. The sample size calculation is the minimum amount for the analysis. However, the greater the respondents are, the better to get a good result for the research. The total number of respondents in this study is 42 elderly caregivers.

The data for this study are generated from responses to a self-administered questionnaire completed during the actual survey. The questionnaire can be administered in person, mailed to respondents, or delivered electronically (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In general, the questionnaire is created using the adapt and adopt a procedure that the researcher for the research initially created. The questionnaire for this research consists of five (5) sections, namely, "demographic profile," "elements of the family towards work-life balance," "elements of self towards work-life balance," "elements of work towards work-life balance," and "elements of career towards work-life balance. This study followed ten steps suggested by Malhotra (2010) on the questionnaire design checklist. The items of the questions are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. To analyze the data, frequency analysis is employed to extract percentage-based data from the profiles of respondents regarding gender, ethnicity, age, marital status, and monthly income earned. Mean and standard deviations are computed for descriptive analysis. The reliability test is used to examine the internal consistency of the items in their respective factors. Multiple regression analysis is mainly used to test the hypotheses proposed earlier.

## **Results**

As presented in Table 1, 81% of the respondents are female, while only 8% of the respondents are male. 98% of the respondents are ethnic Malay, while only 2% are Indians. Out of 42 respondents, 12 respondents are aged between 30 and 39 years old, 20 respondents are aged between 40 and 49 years old, and only 8 respondents are aged 50 and above. Most of the respondents are married (80%) and the balance is singles (20%). 83% of the respondents are working full-time, while only 17% of the respondents are working part-time. Most of the respondents have monthly scale salary ranges of more than RM7,000 (43%), equal percentages for monthly scale salary ranges between less than RM2,500 and between RM2,500 and RM5,000 (21%), while the lowest numbers of respondents have monthly salaries ranges between RM5,001 and RM7,000 (14%). Out of 42 respondents, more than half have only one care recipient (57%), two care recipients (33%) and three care recipients (10%). Among the 42 respondents, 30 respondents stated caring for either parent (23.8%), mother (19%), mother-in-law (14.3%) and father (14.3%). About 68% (n=28) of the respondents provide daily caregiving, several times a week (24%) and only a small percentage of respondents provide caregiving duties once a month (7%). With regards to the duration of care provided, the highest percentage was more than 10 years followed by between 3 and 4 years at 29% and 21% respectively.

Table 1

*Respondents' Profile*

Factor	Level	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	8 (19%)
	Female	34 (81%)
Age Group	18-29 years old	2 (5%)
	30-39 years old	12 (29%)
	40-49 years old	20 (48%)
	50 years and above	8 (19%)
Employment Status	Full-time	35 (83%)
	Part-time	7 (17%)
Marital Status	Single	8 (20%)
	Married	33 (80%)
Race	Malay	41 (98%)
	Indian	1 (2%)
Monthly Gross Income	<RM 2500	9 (21%)
	RM 2500-RM 5000	9 (21%)
	RM 5001-RM 7000	6 (14%)
	>RM 7000	18 (43%)
Number of Care Recipient	1	24 (57%)
	2	14 (33%)
	3	4 (10%)
Relationship to Each Care Recipient	Children	2 (4.8%)
	Father	6 (14.3%)
	Parent	10 (23.8%)
	Children & Parent	5 (11.9%)
	Daughter	1 (2.4%)
	Mother in law	6 (14.3%)
	Mother	8 (19%)
	grand children	1 (2.4%)
	wife & children	1 (2.4%)
	Daughter in law	1 (2.4%)
Frequency of Care Provided to Care Recipient	Daily	28 (68%)
	Several times a week	10 (24%)
	Once a month	3 (7%)
Duration of Care Provided	<1 year	8 (19%)
	1-2 years	8 (19%)
	3-4 years	9 (21%)
	5-9 years	5 (12%)
	>10 years	12 (29%)

***Descriptive Statistics***

Table 2 illustrates the descriptive analysis results. Firstly, in regard to “work-life balance”, the item “It is important for me to have a positive work-life balance” obtains the highest mean of 4.33. This indicates that it has the strongest influence on the work-life balance of the



caregivers. Next, for the variable “family,” the item “My family understand the nature of my job demands” obtains the highest mean of 4.45. This indicates that it has the strongest influence on the work-life balance of the caregivers. Secondly, in relation to “Individual,” “I wish I had more time to do things for myself” obtains the highest mean of 4.21. This explains that it has the strongest influence on the work-life balance of the caregivers. Thirdly, the variable “Job” indicates that “The earnings from my work are my primary source of income” obtains the highest mean of 4.43. This explains that it has the strongest influence on the work-life balance of the caregivers. Furthermore, the variable of “career growth” shows that “I feel that it is important to be successful in my career.” has the highest mean of 4.38. Thus, the finding indicates that it has the strongest influence on the work-life balance of the caregivers.

Table 2

*Descriptive Analysis*

Item	Mean	SD
<b>Family</b>		
1. My family understand the nature of my job demands.	4.45	0.77
2. My family members help me with the household responsibilities	4.19	0.83
3. My family members help me with the caregiving duties.	4.14	1.00
4. I worry about my care recipient when I am at work.	3.81	1.17
5. I think about my family matters when I am at work.	3.76	1.10
6. My family matters come first then work.	4.12	1.06
<b>Individual</b>		
1. I am happy with my current personal achievement at work.	4.05	0.70
2. I do not have any health conditions diagnosed (by Health Practitioners) suffer due to work obligations.	3.86	0.90
3. I wish I had more time to do things for myself	4.21	1.00
4. I prefer focusing on my self-development to working long hours in the office.	3.93	1.07
5. My family understand my goals in life.	4.14	0.90
6. My employer provides room for my personal development.	4.14	0.98
<b>Job</b>		
1. The earnings from my work are my primary source of income.	4.43	0.91
2. My employer arranges social functions at times suitable for families.	3.05	1.08
3. My employer understands my responsibilities as a caregiver.	3.48	1.23
4. I have problems getting support from my supervisor when I need to take leave due to caregiving duties.	2.36	1.23
5. If required, I stay back after office hours to complete my work.	3.79	1.09
6. I have difficulty managing the demands of my work in the given time.	2.48	1.09
<b>Career Growth</b>		
1. I am happy with the current position that I am in.	4.07	1.02
2. My family understands my career goal.	4.26	0.77
3. I feel that I am rewarded accordingly by the organisation.	3.57	1.17
4. Despite my commitment as a caregiver, my employer provides room for career growth.	3.98	0.90

5. I am not actively looking for another employment.	4.02	1.18
6. I feel that it is important to be successful in my career.	4.38	0.73
<b>Work-life balance</b>		
1. The organization provides support in ensuring a positive work-life balance.	3.83	0.99
2. I have difficulty balancing the demands of my family with my work.	2.50	1.17
3. I have difficulty balancing my personal matters with my work.	2.43	1.11
4. I have difficulty balancing my work obligations with my personal matters.	2.43	1.06
5. I have difficulty pursuing my career growth due to my family matters.	2.40	1.01
6. It is important for me to have a positive work-life balance.	4.33	1.00

### Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the relationship between job, family, individual, and career growth on the work-life balance of the caregiver. This article presented the stages of analysis taken to achieve these aims. Next, the directions for this paper are to run for a reliability analysis followed by multiple regression analysis. This research is essential because eldercare issues need an eye-opener to the public. After all, many children neglect their parents due to working commitment and pressure to cope with the financial burden. This corroborated that work-life balance is crucial in building sustainable social and economic growth capacity. Employees are the most important resource in an organization. Their value for the organization is to recruit the best talent, but they also need to be retained in that organization for the long term (Bauer & Sousa-Poza, 2015). The Department of Statistics Malaysia has reported that the labour force participation rate in the country is increasing from time to time. In 2019, it was 68.6% and rose to 68.9% in January 2020, higher than the previous year. In Malaysia, more than half of the nation's population are actively working, and managing work commitments and life commitments requires an appropriate balancing on the individual's part (Haslinda & Ying, 2016). Employees should not focus only on their working commitments but need to divide their time for life commitments such as self-time (Rozanti & Salmiah, 2014). As an individual, having a work-life balance is very crucial. Research done by Rozanti and Salmiah (2014) showed that one in five Malaysians feel very stressed and face work-life conflict where they have difficulties in managing work and family at the same time. The problem became more serious when the turnover rate increased. However, many people cannot focus on several things in their life at once, and it may have adverse effects. For example, employees who work as full-timers cannot take care of their parents well, especially during the parents' older age, and need assistance in their daily life (Bauer & Sousa-Poza, 2015).

Conclusively, this study advances current knowledge by shedding light on some important factors relating to work-life balance. This study explains the effects of job, family, individual, and career growth. This study is one of the first to investigate the determinants of work-life balance among elderly caregivers. It is worth noting that this study proposes a conceptual model as a framework to understand caregivers' opinions and experiences toward work-life balance.

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