

The Relationship between Autonomy and Workplace Facilities and Quality of Life in Remote Work Context

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Abstract

Although Quality of Life (QoL) has been investigated, not many have included religion as part of it. As Malaysia prioritizes "Beliefs in God" as the first pillar of the country, this study examines the relationship between autonomy and workplace facilities in remote work context and employees' quality of life (QoL), with a specific focus on religiosity, as well as mental and physical wellbeing, underpin by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach was used, with data obtained from 77 remote-working employees at an educational institution in Malaysia. Spearman's rho correlation study found a positive relationship between workplace facilities and job autonomy across all three QoL categories. Job autonomy exhibited the largest relationships, notably with religiosity and mental well-being, indicating the importance of flexibility and control in remote work settings. Thus, organizations can improve remote working employees' well-being by recognizing spiritual well-being as a relevant component of QoL and emphasizing the relevance of inclusive, ergonomic, and autonomy-supportive remote work environments.

Keywords: Remote Work, Job Autonomy, Workplace Facilities, Quality of Life, Religiosity, Mental Well-Being, Physical Well-Being, JD-R theory

Introduction

Remote work, also known as telecommuting, has become increasingly common due to advancements in technology, globalization, and shifting work preferences. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of flexible work arrangements worldwide, forcing organizations to adapt and maintain productivity while safeguarding employee health (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). While remote work offers benefits such as reduced commuting time, increased flexibility, and potential cost savings, it also raises concerns about work-life boundaries, isolation, and its impact on employee well-being (Ogbu et. al., 2024).

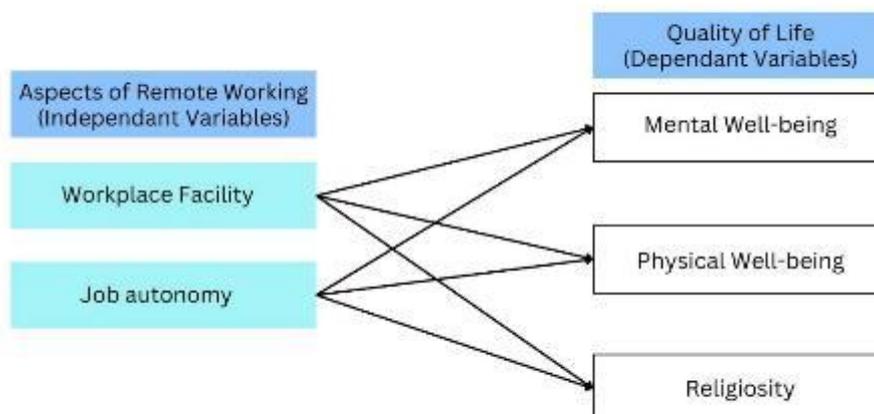
Quality of life is a multifaceted concept encompassing physical health, mental well-being, social relationships, and personal fulfillment (Aqtam et. al., 2023). In the context of employment, it reflects the degree to which work arrangements support or hinder overall life satisfaction. The relationship between remote working and quality of life has drawn significant academic interest, yet findings remain mixed. Some studies highlight improvements in work–life balance and autonomy, while others emphasize challenges such as burnout, reduced physical activity, and diminished workplace cohesion (Franco & D'Abundo, 2023).

This study focuses on employees in an educational institution in Kuching, Sarawak, who are currently practicing remote working. It examines how workplace facilities and job autonomy—two dimensions of remote work—affect employees' religiosity, mental well-being and physical well-being. This study will directly inform the current Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) initiative launched by the Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources (KESUMA), launched in December 2024. In line with the enforcement of the Malaysia's Employment Act 1955 [Amendment] 2022 under sections 60P and 60Q, which grants employees the right to request FWA to meet current needs and adapt to technology (Malaysia TalentCorp, 2024). Indirectly, the study will enlighten the outcomes of FWA from non-Western culture, which considered “new” in FWA compared to Western developed countries.

As organizations continue to embrace remote working models, understanding the relationship between remote work and employees' quality of life has become critical. Existing research has widely examined outcomes such as productivity, job satisfaction, and work–life balance, with particular focus on mental and physical well-being (Beckel & Fisher, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). However, there is limited exploration of other important dimensions of quality of life, such as religiosity, despite its significance in many cultural contexts. This is especially relevant in Kuching, Sarawak, where most employees are Malay and Muslim, and daily religious practices are an integral part of their lives. The absence of studies connecting remote work conditions to religiosity creates a gap in understanding how remote work environments can either support or hinder employees' ability to engage in spiritual practices. Addressing this gap is important not only for theoretical development but also for informing more inclusive workplace policies in the education sector, where remote work has become increasingly common.

This study proposes the following conceptual framework based on the findings of previous research:

Significance of the Study



The findings will be particularly valuable for organizational leaders and human resource practitioners in Malaysia, especially in Sarawak, where geographic, cultural, and infrastructural conditions may influence remote work experiences differently compared to more urbanized regions. Understanding which factor—facilities or autonomy—has a stronger influence enables decision-makers to prioritize investments effectively, whether by upgrading remote work infrastructure or granting employees greater flexibility.

The study also contributes to academic literature by integrating physical, psychological, and religiosity dimensions of quality of life, which is often underexplored in remote work research. This broader approach offers a more holistic understanding of employee well-being.

Finally, the results may inform policy development at both organizational and governmental levels, providing evidence-based recommendations for designing remote work guidelines, training programs, and employee support initiatives. In doing so, this research not only adds to theoretical knowledge but also offers practical implications for enhancing sustainable and human-centered work practices in the digital age.

Concept of Remote Work

Remote work, also known as teleworking or telecommuting, has become a major work arrangement enabled by digital technologies, and its use expanded sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic (Beckel & Fisher, 2022; De Vincenzi et al., 2022). Empirical studies show both benefits, which are flexibility, reduced commuting stress, potential increases in job satisfaction and drawbacks such as social isolation, blurred work–life boundaries, and inequities in access to necessary resources (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Waizenegger et al., 2020; Allen et al., 2023). Research highlights that organisations must attend to management practices, digital tools, and inclusive access if remote work is to sustain performance and wellbeing (Wang et al., 2020; Haque, 2018).

Concept of Quality of Life

Quality of Life (QoL) in this study is conceptualised as multi-dimensional, encompassing mental well-being, physical well-being, and religiosity (Yamaguchi, 2015; Upton & Upton, 2015). QoL measures capture subjective life satisfaction, emotional resilience, and physical functioning—all of which can be affected positively or negatively by remote work arrangements, depending on available supports and individual circumstances (Skevington & Böhnke, 2018; Bloom et al., 2015). Factors such as job satisfaction, financial stability, and health resources mediate the remote work and QoL relationship (Allen et al., 2023).

Concept of Workplace Facility

Workplace facilities refer to the physical and technical resources that support work in a remote setting (Surma et al., 2021). In a home-office context, this includes desks, chairs, reliable internet, hardware/software, and appropriate lighting and space. Studies cited in your paper indicate that ergonomic and well-equipped setups reduce physical discomfort and cognitive strain, improving productivity and reducing stress (Hedge, 2016; Drewniak et al., 2023; Ugemuge et al., 2022). Organizations that provide stipends, ergonomic guidance, or technical support report better worker outcomes and fewer health complaints (Heidarimoghadam et al., 2022; Allen et al., 2023).

Concept of Job Autonomy

Job autonomy is defined in your manuscript as employees' discretion over planning, organising, and executing work tasks (Johari et al., 2018; Theurer et al., 2018). Evidence in the literature shows that autonomy can increase intrinsic motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Zhang et al., 2017). However, autonomy's benefits depend on supports and role clarity: when autonomy is combined with good communication and managerial support, it tends to improve well-being, but unstructured autonomy may raise role ambiguity or isolation (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Wang et al., 2021).

Concept of Mental Well-being

Mental well-being covers emotional health, stress, resilience, and life satisfaction. Remote work's net effect on mental well-being is mixed in the literature: reduced commute and greater schedule control may improve well-being for some, while social isolation and constant connectivity can harm others (Beckel & Fisher, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Coping resources such as social support, spiritual practices, and organisational interventions (manager check-ins, counselling) are frequently cited as moderators that buffer negative effects (Abu-Raiya et al., 2016; Agarwal, 2024).

Concept of Physical Well-being

Physical well-being for remote workers relates to ergonomics, physical activity and general health. Sedentary behaviour associated with home working can increase musculoskeletal complaints and other health risks (Wang, 2024). Proper workplace facilities (ergonomic furniture, lighting) and organisational support for activity (virtual fitness, breaks) mitigate these risks (Hedge, 2016; Heidarimoghadam et al., 2022; Drewniak et al., 2023).

Concept of Religiosity

Religiosity in your study is treated as a dimension of QoL reflecting religious belief, practice, and spiritual coping (Akhter, 2019; Fitriyani, 2018). Literature included in your paper

suggests that flexible schedules and autonomy can enable religious observance (prayer, services, reflection), which in turn supports emotional resilience and life satisfaction (EM & Rajamannar, 2024). The manuscript also cites research linking religiosity to improved coping and reduced stress in work settings (Zimmer et al., 2016; Balboni et al., 2022).

Job Demands-Resources Theory (JD-R)

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory, developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), explains how job characteristics influence employee well-being and performance. The model classifies job characteristics into job demands—aspects of work that require sustained effort and may lead to strain (e.g., workload, time pressure)—and job resources—aspects that help achieve work goals, reduce demands, or stimulate personal growth and development.

In the context of remote working, workplace facilities and job autonomy function as key job resources. Adequate facilities, such as ergonomic furniture, reliable internet, and appropriate equipment, reduce physical strain and technical difficulties, enabling employees to work efficiently from home. Similarly, job autonomy allows employees to control their schedules and work methods, increasing motivation and work–life balance.

According to the JD–R model, when job resources are available and aligned with employees’ needs, they enhance motivation, buffer the negative effects of job demands, and contribute to improved mental well-being, physical well-being, and religiosity. Conversely, the absence of these resources can exacerbate stress, reduce satisfaction, and negatively impact overall quality of life.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between remote working factors and quality of life among employees in an educational institution in Kuching, Sarawak. The design was chosen to allow statistical measurement of the associations between the independent variables—workplace facility and job autonomy—and the dependent variables—mental well-being, physical well-being, and religiosity.

Population

The population of this study consisted of employees from an educational institution in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, who are currently engaged in remote working arrangements. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator, with a 5% margin of error, a 90% confidence level, and a 50% response distribution. Based on these parameters, the recommended sample size was approximately 72. A convenience sampling technique was used to select participants who met the criteria of working remotely at least part of the time.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire divided into 5 sections:

Table 1

Structure of Questionnaire

Sections	Variables	No. of Items	Citations
Section A	Demographic Information	6 items	-
Section B	Remote Work	12 items	Robelski et al., 2019; Xiao et al., 2021; Saragih, 2011
Section C	QoL: Mental well-being	5 items	Pradhan & Hati, 2022
Section D	QoL: Physical well-being	5 items	Devlin & Brooks, 2017; Waisiko, 2024; Juchnowicz, 2021
Section E	QoL: Religiosity	6 items	Slowinski, 2023; Apergis et al., 2024

The questionnaire consisted of five sections. Section A gathered demographic details, which provided background context about the participants. Section B assessed workplace facilities and job autonomy using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items in this section measured the adequacy of the remote work environment and the extent of independence employees had over their tasks. For example, respondents were asked whether *"I have a good workstation set-up for remote working," "The workplace while remote working is more ergonomic,"* and *"I have control over the scheduling of my work."* These items highlighted both physical aspects of the home office, such as furniture and ergonomics, and psychological resources, such as freedom in task management.

Section C measured mental well-being through a seven-point Likert scale, focusing on positive emotions and self-perception. Respondents rated statements such as *"I mostly feel happy," "I am an optimistic person,"* and *"I believe that I have a purpose and direction in life."* These questions provided insight into the emotional stability, positivity, and sense of meaning among employees in remote work settings.

Section D examined physical well-being, also using a seven-point Likert scale. Items in this section explored how remote working arrangements influenced participants' physical health and stamina. For example, employees responded to statements such as *"I have no pain and discomfort on my physical body," "I am physically more active,"* and *"My health and physical condition are suitable for the work I do."* These measures captured the impact of workplace design and lifestyle changes on employees' physical conditions.

Finally, **Section E** focused on religiosity, acknowledging its role as a dimension of quality of life. Using a seven-point Likert scale, respondents reflected on spiritual engagement and practices. Example items included *"I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith," "I often spend periods of time in private, thinking about religious thoughts and reflecting upon them,"* and *"I often attend online and in-person religious services or meetings while remote working."* This section was intended to capture the extent to which remote work environments supported or influenced employees' religious practices and spiritual well-being.

Data Collection Procedure

All items in the questionnaire, except for demographic information, were measured using a Likert scale format, with participants rating their level of agreement or frequency of behaviors on either a five-point or seven-point scale. This design helped to minimize common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003) while capturing nuanced responses across multiple dimensions of quality of life. To ensure clarity, accuracy, and reliability, the instrument underwent content validation by academic experts and was pilot-tested with a small group of employees. The results confirmed that all scales demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.7, indicating good internal consistency. For data collection, the finalized questionnaire was distributed electronically through Google Forms, reaching eligible respondents via email and messaging platforms. Prior to participation, individuals were informed about the study's purpose, assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and reminded that their involvement was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained electronically, and the data collection process spanned approximately four to five weeks, allowing adequate time for responses to be gathered.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequencies, and percentages) were used to summarize demographic data. Spearman's correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between workplace facility, job autonomy, and quality of life dimensions. .

Research Findings

Descriptive Statistics

The survey involved 77 respondents from an educational institution in Kuching, Sarawak, with a slightly higher proportion of females (40; 51.9%) than males (37; 48.1%). Age distribution was skewed toward mid-career employees: the largest group was 35–44 years (26; 33.8%), followed by 25–34 years (19; 24.7%), below 25 years (15; 19.5%), 45–54 years (11; 14.3%), and 55 and above (7; 9.1%). Regarding work experience and household status, 19.5% of respondents had been working remotely for less than 1 year (15), 53.2% for 1–2 years (41), and 27.3% for more than 2 years (21). In terms of marital status, 37.7% were single (29), while married and divorced/widowed respondents each comprised 31.2% (24 each). In summary, the sample was predominantly female, skewed to the 35–44 age group, with most respondents having 1–2 years' remote work experience and a mix of marital statuses.

Correlation Analysis

Spearman's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between workplace facility, job autonomy, and the Quality-of-Life dimensions: mental well-being, physical well-being, and religiosity.

Table 2

Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Workplace Facility	-	.578**	.536**	.419**	.330**
2. Job Autonomy			.656**	.498**	.487**
3. Mental Well-being			-	.496**	.356**
4. Physical Well-being				-	.506**
5. Religiosity					-

** . Correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study found that workplace facilities were significantly related to both mental and physical well-being, as well as religiosity. A strong positive correlation existed between workplace facilities and mental well-being ($r = .536$, $p < .001$), indicating that employees with adequate and well-equipped home workstations reported better mental health. This aligns with Beckel and Fisher (2022) and Wang et al. (2021), who highlight that ergonomic setups, reliable internet, and minimal distractions reduce stress and burnout.

Similarly, workplace facilities were significantly associated with physical well-being ($r = .419$, $p < .001$), echoing findings from Johari et al. (2018) and Surma et al. (2021) that ergonomic furniture, proper lighting, and supportive environments reduce strain and improve comfort during extended work hours.

Workplace facilities also showed a moderate positive correlation with religiosity ($r = .330$, $p = .003$), suggesting that well-structured remote environments can facilitate religious practice. Prior research by Apergis et al. (2024) and Akhter (2019) suggests that quiet, private, and flexible work settings facilitate employees' ability to maintain spiritual routines. This may be because a comfortable, distraction-free space allows for privacy and time to engage in religious activities, which is especially important in remote work contexts where personal and professional boundaries often overlap.

Job autonomy demonstrated a strong positive relationship with mental well-being ($r = .656$, $p < .001$). As De Vincenzi et al. (2022) and Gagné and Deci (2005) observed, autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation and emotional stability by giving employees control over their schedules and task execution. When workers can align tasks with personal strengths and manage their time, they experience less psychological strain and greater emotional balance—an effect particularly relevant in remote settings.

The results also showed a significant correlation between job autonomy and physical well-being ($r = .498$, $p < .001$). Allen et al. (2015) and Surma et al. (2021) note that flexible arrangements enable employees to integrate health-promoting habits, adjust workspaces, and take breaks as needed. Such flexibility reduces sedentary behaviour, improves posture, and encourages active self-care, ultimately enhancing physical resilience and comfort.

Lastly, job autonomy was significantly related to religiosity ($r = .487, p < .001$). Research by Apergis et al. (2024) and De Vincenzi et al. (2022) suggests that when employees are not bound by rigid schedules, they are better able to observe religious commitments without compromising work performance. Autonomy fosters work–life integration, enabling individuals to manage job responsibilities alongside personal and spiritual needs, thereby contributing to overall quality of life.

Discussion

This study examined the relationships between workplace facilities, job autonomy, and three dimensions of quality of life—mental well-being, physical well-being, and religiosity—among remote employees in an educational institution in Kuching, Sarawak. The sample largely consisted of staff in the 25–44 age range, most of whom were married and working in administrative or support roles. For these employees, remote working became an important arrangement during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when technology-mediated teaching and support functions became a norm in Sarawak’s education sector. The findings showed that both workplace facilities and job autonomy were significantly and positively correlated with all three dimensions of quality of life. Specifically, job autonomy emerged as the strongest predictor of mental well-being and religiosity, while workplace facilities were more strongly associated with physical well-being.

From the perspective of Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), workplace facilities and job autonomy function as crucial job resources that help employees manage demands such as long online teaching hours, administrative tasks, and student support services. For educational staff in Kuching, adequate home-office setups (e.g., reliable internet, ergonomic furniture, and quiet spaces) were particularly important in reducing fatigue from prolonged screen time. At the same time, autonomy allowed staff to balance teaching, marking, or administrative duties with personal commitments, which is especially relevant for the majority of married respondents who often juggle professional responsibilities with family roles.

The strong relationship between workplace facilities and mental well-being supports observations by Beckel and Fisher (2022) and Wang et al. (2021) that well-equipped environments lower stress. For educators in Sarawak, poor connectivity or a lack of proper equipment not only disrupts productivity but also causes frustration when dealing with students online. Likewise, the link between workplace facilities and physical well-being reflects findings by Surma et al. (2021) and Johari et al. (2018), as many respondents reported that ergonomic arrangements reduced posture-related strain during long hours of lesson preparation or online meetings. Interestingly, the association with religiosity resonates with the cultural context of Kuching, where most respondents were Malay and Muslim. Having private and flexible spaces at home made it easier to observe daily prayers and other religious practices without interference, which aligns with Apergis et al. (2024) and Akhter (2019).

The results also reinforce the well-established role of autonomy in supporting employee well-being. For educational staff, job autonomy meant the ability to manage lecture preparation, grading schedules, or administrative reporting at their own pace, which supported mental well-being in line with Gagné and Deci (2005) and De Vincenzi et al. (2022). Its link to physical well-being may be due to the flexibility respondents had in taking breaks between online

sessions or incorporating rest and exercise, echoing Allen et al. (2015). The association between autonomy and religiosity was particularly notable in the Sarawakian context, where flexibility allowed respondents to integrate religious practices such as prayer into their day without disrupting work performance, supporting findings by Apergis et al. (2024).

Overall, the findings highlight that for educational institutions in Kuching, supporting remote staff requires both investment in workplace resources and granting flexibility in work arrangements. By providing staff with ergonomic equipment, reliable digital tools, and greater discretion in managing their duties, institutions can foster a higher QoL. This not only aligns with the JD–R framework but also addresses the unique cultural and professional needs of educational employees in Sarawak, who balance demanding academic responsibilities with family roles and religious commitments.

Implications & Recommendations

The findings of this study offer important implications for both organisational practice and policymaking in the context of remote work. First, the significant positive relationships between workplace facilities and quality of life dimensions, particularly physical well-being, highlight the need for organisations to invest in ergonomic home-office setups. Providing employees with stipends or equipment such as adjustable chairs, desks, and reliable internet connections can directly reduce physical strain, minimise distractions, and promote better health outcomes.

Second, the results show that job autonomy is a strong predictor of mental well-being and religiosity. This suggests that allowing employees greater control over how and when they work can have wide-ranging benefits, including improved emotional stability, better work–life integration, and the ability to engage in personal or spiritual practices without compromising productivity. Organisations should therefore consider flexible scheduling policies, outcome-based performance evaluations, and trust-based management approaches to support autonomy.

From a policy perspective, these results support the development of remote work guidelines that integrate physical resource provision with flexibility in work arrangements. Public and private sector employers could collaborate to create standardised frameworks that encourage inclusive, healthy, and adaptable remote working environments. Such frameworks could also include specific provisions to accommodate diverse cultural and religious needs, ensuring that all employees can work in a supportive environment.

For human resource practitioners, the findings highlight the importance of recognising religiosity as a meaningful dimension of employee well-being, particularly in the context of educational institutions in Kuching, Sarawak, where the majority of employees are Malay and Muslim. Remote working arrangements that provide flexibility and private spaces allow employees to integrate spiritual practices such as prayer, reflection, and religious study into their daily routines without compromising work performance. By acknowledging and supporting these needs, HR practitioners can design remote work policies that respect cultural and religious values, thereby fostering inclusivity, improving work–life balance, and enhancing employees' overall quality of life.

In conclusion, the study recommends that organisations adopt a balanced approach that combines physical support (through workplace facilities) and psychological empowerment (through job autonomy). This integrated strategy is likely to yield the most significant improvements in employees' mental well-being, physical health, and religiosity, ultimately contributing to a more engaged, resilient, and satisfied remote workforce.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between workplace facilities, job autonomy, and quality of life in a remote work setting, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focused on employees from a single educational institution in Kuching, Sarawak. While this allowed for a controlled context, it may limit the generalisability of the findings to other institutions, industries, or regions with different organisational cultures, technological infrastructures, or workforce demographics.

Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which captures relationships at a single point in time. This limits the ability to establish causality between the independent and dependent variables. Future research could employ a longitudinal design to better assess how changes in workplace facilities and job autonomy over time influence quality of life outcomes.

Future research could also expand the scope of the study to include additional variables within the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) framework, such as social support, workload, or organisational culture, to examine their combined effects on quality of life. Furthermore, comparative studies between employees in urban and rural educational settings or across different cultural contexts could provide deeper insights into how environmental, cultural, and infrastructural factors shape remote work experiences.

Finally, given the inclusion of religiosity as a dimension of quality of life in this study, future research could explore the role of spiritual well-being in workplace outcomes more deeply, particularly in multicultural and multi-faith work environments. Such studies could inform the design of inclusive and supportive remote work policies that recognise diverse personal and cultural needs.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between workplace facilities, job autonomy, and three dimensions of quality of life—religiosity, mental well-being and physical well-being among employees in an educational institution in Kuching, Sarawak, who are engaged in remote work. The results revealed that both workplace facilities and job autonomy were significantly and positively associated with all three qualities of life dimensions. Job autonomy emerged as the strongest predictor of religiosity and mental well-being, while workplace facilities were more strongly linked to physical well-being.

These findings support the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory, which posits that the presence of adequate job resources can buffer the impact of job demands and enhance employee well-being. By providing appropriate physical resources and granting flexibility in work arrangements, organisations can create supportive environments that promote both professional productivity and personal fulfilment.

The study contributes to the literature by incorporating religiosity as a QoL dimension, offering a more holistic perspective on employee well-being in remote work settings. It also provides practical guidance for educational institutions and other organisations in designing remote work policies that emphasize the relevance of physical settings, i.e. ergonomic and autonomy-supportive remote work environments.

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