

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND FAMILY-TO-WORK CONFLICT DURING WORK-FROM-HOME IN RECENT PANDEMIC: MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Dr. V. Venkateshwarlu,
Assistant Professor,
Department of MBA,
SVS Group of Institutions,
Hanamkonda, Telangana.
venkat_mba@svsit.ac.in

Abstract

In this study primary data had been collected using structured questionnaire. The association between dependent and independent variables with mediating role of emotional intelligence (EI) had been analyzed in this study. It is found that in traditional work environment emotional intelligence influence employee outcomes compared to work-from-home (new normalcy) environment. The implications for human resources managers dealing with employees in new normalcy had been discussed in this paper.

Keywords: *Work-from-home, social isolation, family-work conflict, employee performance, emotional intelligence, job burnout.*

Introduction

When everyone is thinking about advancements in technology and better life for mankind on this planet, suddenly pandemic Covid-19 had shaken the world. Employees have faced many challenges with sudden changes in work environment. Work-from-home (WFH) had become common in both public and private sector organizations. Previously WFM was common in software companies and specifically in developed nations. When organizations have implemented WFH without any strategy initially it had created confusion in all the sectors. A set up often referred as home office is required to complete the tasks. When employees need emotional support, technical support and supervisor support, it would be tough to handle in virtual environment. However, in short span of time technology had been upgraded for supporting both technical needs and emotional needs of employees. Now by the time of this research work WFH had become common scenario in global work environment. At some point of time even organizations have also got benefitted with new norms of work. But from the other side many sectors such as can services, food delivery, tourism, theme parks and multiplexes have severely with pandemic Covid-19.

Objectives

- To determine impact of work-from-home (WFH) on employee performance.
- To study the impact of social isolation and family-work conflict influence employee performance.
- To study the impact of social isolation and family-work conflict influence employee burnout.

- To give some suggestions for human resource managers in the new normalcy.

Need for the Study

When everything changed, then it is essential to rethink about traditional organizational structures and human resource policies. Employee may undergo stress with abnormal changes in work environment. Some followers can complete their job roles and responsibilities only with support of leadership or direct supervision. The emotional relationship between employees and managers at workplace cannot be found in work-from-home environment. Social support and peer relationships are more important for employees. Basically human beings like to be in social environment. Hence new norms such as work from home may isolate the employees. Teamwork also gets affected when employees because informal communication may not take place in virtual work environment.

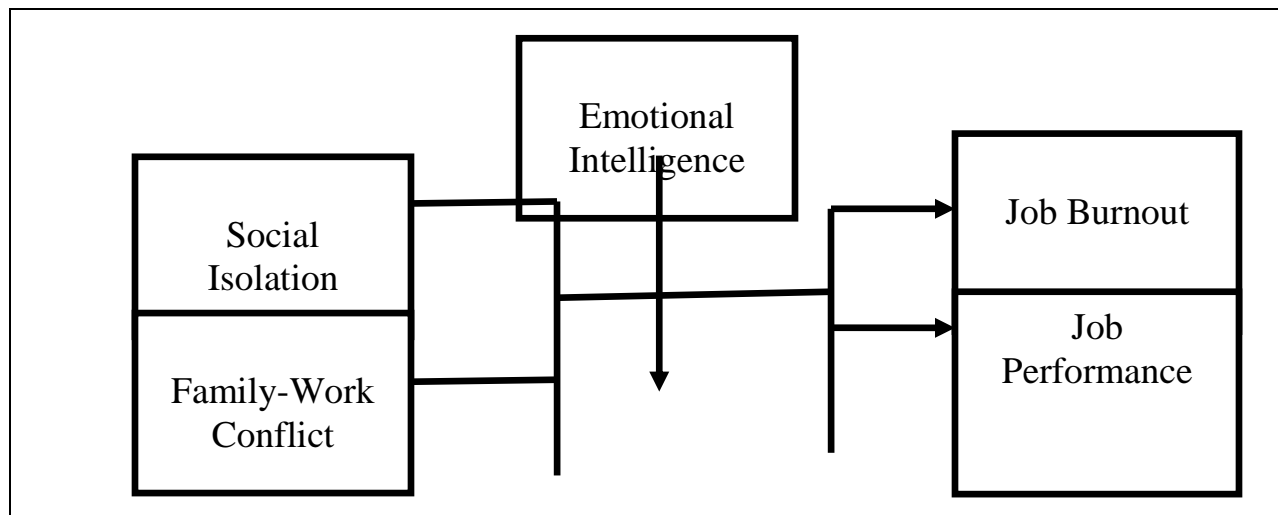
Literature Survey

Kaushik and Guleria (2020) had explained effect of Covid-19 pandemic has varies based on industry type. For example software companies could avoid fixed costs whereas manufacturing industries have been affected with disruption in supply chains. COVID-19 pandemic caused enormous disruption in businesses, which will take years to recover, if at all. The disruption is likely to lead to permanent shut down of many businesses, unable to bear the financial losses and disruptions caused by the pandemic (Kaushik and Guleria, 2020). There is need to adopt new approaches by businesses to reduce the negative impact of pandemic Covid-19. Well-being of employees working from remote locations has become important concern for business organizations in the present era. In May 2020, we surveyed more than 190 chief officers and functional leaders across industries to find out how they were thinking about spending allocation in the months ahead (Hancock & Schaninger, 2020). The old work setting and new work setting had got changed completely with the impact of lockdown and pandemic (Dian-Bahman & Abrar-Enzi, 2020). The interaction between and family had an influence on employees performance due to pandemic (Vaziri et al, 2020). According to Thomason and Williams (2020) work-life balance had taken a new position due to sudden changes in work environment. Readiness for change, job crafting, social support and organizational support has become important factors to understand work related consequences after the advent of pandemic (Prochazka et al., 2020).

Social isolation and work stress can be used as predictors to study employee producing and impact of new work environment (Toscana & Zappala, 2020). Workload had increased among healthcare employees during the pandemic which had lead to job burnout and job stress (Talaee et al., 2020). Depression and anxiety have been caused among employees with work-from-home mode. Burnout syndrome (BOS) refers to the occurrence of fatigue for extended periods of time and condensed levels of motivation and interest in the job, which lead to decreased job efficiency. In majority of the nations the job stress and job burnout had been studied with specific reference to healthcare employees (Duarte et al., 2020). The performance of employees had been severely affected with pandemic in healthcare sector. The sudden spike of cases and overtime for healthcare staff had lead to job burnout and negatively affected job

performance (Khasne et al., 2020). Caligiuri et al (2020) had explained that lot of research is needed to influence of new normal in post Covid-19 era for work environment. Li et al (2020) suggested that employees should given preference for staying healthy and well connected to organizations though technology.

Figure 1 - Conceptual diagram



(Source: Authors own creation)

Research Methodology

A web based survey had been conducted by using structured questions. Sample size (N = 100) had been selected with purposive sampling methodology. It is essential the employee must have worked continuously or in breaks for at least one year in WFH mode. Respondents have been requested to participate to survey by a telephonic request by explaining the purpose of this survey. The respondents are also encouraged to share details of eligible participants for this research study. Privacy, identity and organization name of the respondents have not been collected. Smart PLS (student version) had been used in the survey because many researchers have suggested that it can provide reliable results when sample size is small. The demographic variables (gender, family size, experience) have been used in the questionnaire. The setup about home office had been enquired. There are five constructs in the study and mostly of them have been procured from recent works related to pandemic Covid-19. Independent variables (social isolation, family-work conflict) have been used to know the variation independent variables (job burnout, employee performance) with impact of mediating variable (emotional intelligence). The items have been adopted and modified according to the need of this study. All the items have been measured using five point Likert-type scale. Figure 1 shows the conceptual diagram used for this research study.

Data Analysis

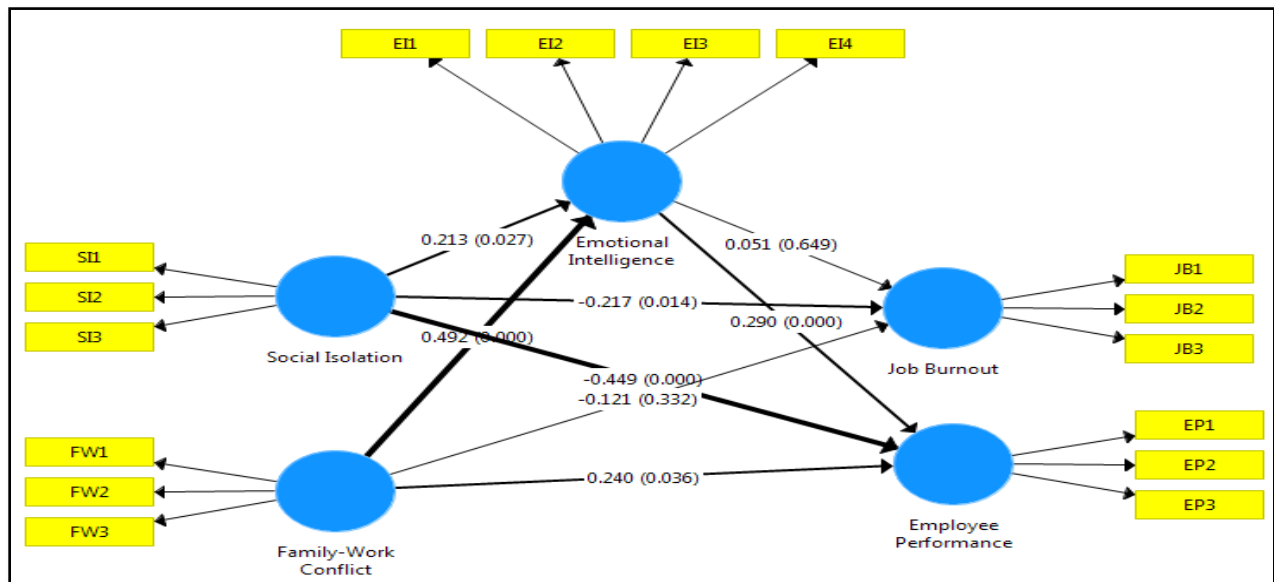
Respondents (N = 100) have participated in the survey with gender (male = 67%, female = 33%), with average family size (M = 4.85, SD = 2.114), experience (M = 11.5 years, SD = 2.324) and having home office (yes = 39, no = 61). The details related to discriminant validity (Square root of AVE > 0.70), reliability of constructs (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70), and composite reliability > 0.70 are presented in Table 1. The convergent and divergent validity of the constructs had been proved to conduct path analysis. Initially PLS algorithm had been conducted with 300 iterations with factor as selected option. In next step after checking the factor loadings bootstrapping had been made with 5000 bootstrap samples to test significant relationships between the dependent and independent variables. Figure 2 shows the path diagram with inner loadings along with p-values.

Table 1. -Correlations, reliability, discriminant validity

	EI	EP	FW	JB	SI
EI	(0.944)				
EP	0.283	(0.972)			
FW	0.528	0.317	(0.981)		
JB	-0.077	-0.053	-0.131	(0.976)	
SI	0.296	-0.323	0.169	-0.222	(0.964)
Mean	4.172	4.363	2.843	3.643	3.736
SD	0.746	0.808	0.992	1.166	0.909
Composite reliability	0.970	0.981	0.944	0.942	0.975
Cronbach's alpha	0.959	0.971	0.961	0.975	0.962
Average variance extracted	0.891	0.946	0.982	0.953	0.929

Notes: EI = Emotional Intelligence, EP = Employee Performance, SI = Social Isolation, FW = Family-Work Conflict, JB = Job Burnout. Square root of AVE is bolded and shown on diagonal.

Figure 2 - Path Diagram



(Source: Output from Smart-PLS)

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Social isolation (SI) has direct relationship with employee performance (EP) in work-from-home environment.

H2: Family-Work Conflict (FW) has direct relationship with employee performance (EP) during work-from-home environment.

H3: Social isolation (SI) has direct relationship with job burnout (JB) in work-from-home environment.

H4: Family-Work Conflict (FW) has direct relationship with job burnout (JB) during work-from-home environment.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) though partial least squares (PLS) had been used to test hypothesis in this research work. Social isolation (M = 3.736, SD = 0.909) has significant negative relationship with employee performance (M = 4.363, SD = 0.808) therefore H1 is accepted ($\beta = -0.449$, $t = 5.421$, $p = 0.000$). Family work conflict (M = 2.843, SD = 0.992) has significant positive relationship with employee performance ($\beta = 0.240$, $t = 2.143$, $p = 0.033$) therefore H2 is accepted. Social isolation has significant negative relationship with job burnout (M = 3.643, 1.166) therefore H3 is accepted ($\beta = -0.271$, $t = 2.456$, $p = 0.014$). Family-work conflict has not significant relationship with job burnout ($\beta = -0.121$, $t = 0.980$, $p = 0.327$) therefore H4 is not supported.

Table 2

Hypothesis testing

Direct effect	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Result
SI→EP	-0.449	5.421	0.000	Negative
SI→ JB	-0.271	2.456	0.014	Negative
FW→ EP	0.240	2.136	0.033	Positive
FW→ JB	-0.121	0.980	0.327	Not significant
R-square			0.307	

(Source: Compiled by author)

H5: Emotional intelligence (EI) mediates the relationship between social isolation (SI) and employee performance (EP).

H6: Emotional intelligence (EI) mediates the relationship between social isolation (SI) and job burnout (JB)

H5: Emotional intelligence (EI) mediates the relationship between family-work conflict (FW) and employee performance (EP).

H5: Emotional intelligence (EI) mediates the relationship between family-work conflict (FW) and job burnout (JB).

Table 3

Mediation analysis

Indirect effect	Coefficient	SD	t	p-value	BI[2.5%, 97.5%]	Result
FW→EI→EP	0.143	0.040	3.522	0.029	[0.078,0.232]	Partial Mediation

FW→EI→JB	0.025	0.056	0.448	0.654	[-0.088,0.131]	No mediation
SI→EI→EP	0.062	0.035	1.756	0.079	[0.003, 0.144]	Not significant
SI→EI→JB	0.011	0.027	0.398	0.691	[-0.033,0.078]	No mediation

(Source: Compiled by author)

The mediating effect of emotional intelligence ($M = 4.172$, $SD = 0.746$) had been tested on the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Emotional intelligence plays a mediating role on the relationship between family-work conflict and employee performance ($\beta = 0.143$, $t = 3.522$, $p = 0.829$, $[0.078, 0.232]$), hence H5 is accepted. Emotional intelligence does not mediate the relationship between FW and SI ($\beta = 0.025$, $t = 0.448$, $p = 0.654$, $[-0.088, 0.131]$) therefore H6 is not supported. There is no significant impact of EI as mediator between SI and EP ($\beta = 0.062$, $t = 1.756$, $p = 0.079$, $[0.003, 0.144]$) therefore H7 is not supported. Emotional intelligence does not mediate the relationship between social isolation and job burnout ($\beta = 0.011$, $t = 0.398$, $p = 0.691$, $[-0.033, 0.078]$) therefore H8 is not supported.

Discussion

Since work-from-home is new to the present generation of employees in some sectors. The role of emotional intelligence is not playing mediator role on job demands and job performances. Employees are undergoing high level of stress and anxiety about future and it is having negative impact on emotional intelligence at the individual level. Even though a lot of effort had been taken to conduct the research in more systematic way, the sample is low to generalize the results. There is need to conduct longitudinal studies to find the consistency of findings of this research work. Covid-19 had caused stress and its influence might be there on employees for at least next couple of years. Management of employees would be tough for human resource managers in virtual environment. Emotional intelligence of supervisors plays a vital role in managing employee performance and job burnouts at workplace.

Conclusion and Future Research

Emotional intelligence impact not been observed on the relationship between job demands and job performances in this study. There might be other causes like leadership style of team managers which influence job burnout and job performance. Some more latent variables need be included to increase the efficiency of the framework. Impact of demographic variables on dependent variables such as job burnout and employee performance should be evaluated by future researchers. Since the employees need infrastructure like home office, the intention of management to provide allowances for employees to created home office should be studied in future research works.

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*Notes: Items will be provided on request with author through email

Appendix

Table 4 -Exploratory Factor Analysis

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component				
	EI	FW	JB	EP	SI
SI1					.936
SI2					.944
SI3					.886
FW1		.935			
FW2		.930			
FW3		.938			

EI1	.894			
EI2	.887			
EI3	.909			
EI4	.896			
JB1			.964	
JB2			.973	
JB3			.968	
EP1				.938
EP2				.925
EP3				.934

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Table 5 - Sampling adequacy test

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.772
	Approx. Chi-Square	2544.507
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	120
	Sig.	.000

(Source: Output from SPSS)