



## Article

# Job demands and work–family conflict as predictors of emotional exhaustion among women working from home in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** Working from home has brought about significant changes in workplaces. On the one hand, it has introduced greater flexibility. On the other hand, it poses a major threat to employees' well-being—particularly that of women employees—as it creates an overlap between work and family responsibilities. This study, therefore, investigates the effects of job demands and work–family conflict—specifically, work interference with family—on emotional exhaustion among women employees during work from home. Using Structural Equation Modeling, data from 157 women employees working in private and government-linked companies (GLCs) were analysed. Consistent with role theory, job demands and work interference with family were found to be positively associated with emotional exhaustion. While work-from-home arrangements have become an established mode of work in recent years, this study advances understanding of the key factors influencing the psychological well-being of women employees engaged in remote work.

**Keywords:** job demands; work-to-family conflict; emotional exhaustion; women employees

## 1. Introduction

Working from home (WFH) has reshaped workplaces globally, introducing unique challenges for employees, particularly women. Most Malaysians previously worked in the office. However, the pandemic changed lives and workplaces all over the world. Previous research indicates that high job demands and work-family conflict (WFC) are linked to mental health outcomes, yet findings remain inconsistent, particularly regarding WFH settings. Furthermore, specific challenges faced by women employees during WFH were under-researched (Oakman et al., 2020). Many working parents have had to take on the role of their children's teachers due to school closures and the transition to online learning. According to a 2021 survey, the biggest obstacle to working from home was disruption at home, followed by persistent problems with motivation, lack of specific space, fear of pay reduction, managing workload, and fear of losing one's job (National Population and Family Development Board, Malaysia, 2020). Therefore, it can be expected that balancing professional responsibilities with childcare, domestic duties, and family expectations has led to increased job demands and WFC affects health and is associated with psychological issues, such as depression and emotional weariness.

This study is grounded in Role Theory, which posits that individuals occupy multiple social roles, each associated with distinct expectations and demands. Because time, energy, and psychological resources are finite, simultaneously fulfilling multiple roles may generate role strain and inter-role conflict when competing expectations become difficult to reconcile. According to Kahn et al. (1964), role conflict arises when the demands of one role impede the effective performance of another, particularly in contexts where role boundaries are poorly defined.

For working women, role conflict is often intensified by the coexistence of professional responsibilities and family-related roles, such as those of caregiver, spouse, and household manager. In WFH settings, the physical and temporal boundaries that traditionally separate work and family domains are substantially blurred, increasing the likelihood that work and family role demands will overlap. As a result, women may experience heightened pressure to respond simultaneously to occupational tasks and family expectations, thereby exacerbating role strain.

Role Theory provides a particularly relevant framework for understanding these dynamics in remote work contexts, where women may encounter increased expectations to remain available for family-related activities while fulfilling job responsibilities within the same physical environment. When professional and family roles compete for limited resources, individuals may experience sustained psychological tension, which can manifest as work–family conflict and emotional exhaustion. Accordingly, Role Theory offers a robust conceptual foundation for examining how job demands and work–family conflict contribute to emotional exhaustion among women working from home.

According to Karasek (1979), job demands encompass psychological stressors associated with fulfilling one's workload, including stressor stemming from unforeseen tasks and those arising from interpersonal conflicts related to work. Furthermore, Wu and Chen (2020) observed that employees who consistently operate from an office or workstation experience an increased workload when working from home, as a significant portion of their tasks can be efficiently conducted in a home environment. Many studies have shown that high demands and workloads predict emotional exhaustion and higher job demands are associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Roşca et al., 2021), also when employees sacrifice their leisure time because of higher job demands, they lose valuable resources, which relates to emotional exhaustion (Minkkinen et al., 2021). Barelló et al. (2021) in their study involving healthcare workers identified that exposure to job demands resulted in feelings of emotional exhaustion.

Work family conflict represents an inter-role conflict wherein individuals struggle to equilibrium the obligations of both work and family, ultimately finding it challenging to fulfill obligations to each sphere (Kahn et al., 1964). This construct is bidirectional, encompassing both direction intervention, i.e., WFC, and family interference with work (FWC). Scholars have consistently posited that emotional exhaustion increases with an increase in WFC, and WFC predicts emotional exhaustion (Recuero & Segovia, 2021; Silva & Guarda, 2026). Burić et al. (2023) examined Croatian teachers and found that higher levels of WFC are often associated with increased emotional exhaustion. Sulistiawan et al. (2022) discovered that WFC (time and strain) and FWC (time and strain) correlate with emotional exhaustion, indicating that as firefighters encounter insufficient time and energy, thus, their emotional exhaustion increases. Fasyni et al. (2020) presented findings that diverge from the conventional understanding of the relationship between work family conflict and emotional exhaustion. Their research, conducted among nurses in Indonesia, uncovered a negative and statistically significant impact of WFC on emotional exhaustion.

Despite this evidence, three issues remain insufficiently resolved. First, prior

studies have often examined job demands or work–family conflict as separate predictors, leaving less clarity about whether each explains distinct variance in emotional exhaustion when both pressures are experienced concurrently in a WFH arrangement. Second, work–family conflict is frequently discussed as a broad or bidirectional construct, although the direction originating in work, work interference with family, is especially relevant when job demands extend into the home. Third, much remote-work evidence has emerged from Western or mixed-gender samples. Evidence from Malaysian women is therefore theoretically informative not merely as a new setting, but as a context-sensitive test of Role Theory where paid work and family roles are enacted in the same space and may be shaped by salient caregiving and family-role expectations. Because the present study does not compare countries or genders, it does not test cultural or gender differences directly; rather, it examines whether the proposed role-strain relationships are evident within this theoretically relevant and underrepresented context.

Accordingly, this study examines the simultaneous relationships of job demands and work interference with family with emotional exhaustion among women employees working from home in Malaysia. It adds to the literature in three specific ways. First, it integrates occupational demands and a direction-specific form of inter-role conflict within a single Role Theory model, thereby distinguishing the strain associated with demanding work from the additional strain created when work disrupts family life. Second, by estimating their concurrent effects through structural equation modelling, it evaluates whether the two predictors make unique contributions to emotional exhaustion rather than representing the same underlying pressure. Third, it extends the empirical scope of remote-work research to Malaysian women employees, allowing assessment of the relevance of role-based explanations in a non-Western work and family context. These contributions refine understanding of how blurred role boundaries translate job and family-role pressures into emotional exhaustion and provide a clearer basis for gender-responsive WFH practices.

Working from home requires professional and family roles to be enacted within the same physical and temporal space, which may blur role boundaries and intensify work-family conflict (Pluut & Wonders, 2020). For women in particular, the overlap of job demands and family responsibilities can reduce opportunities to establish clear role differentiation, increasing exposure to inter-role conflict. Research on remote work suggests that when competing role demands draw on the same limited resources, individuals may experience sustained role strain that undermines their ability to manage work and family responsibilities effectively. Consequently, the accumulation of unresolved work–family conflict may exacerbate emotional exhaustion among women working from home.

Based on this discussion, we developed the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Job demands are positively related to emotional exhaustion during WFH.

Hypothesis 2: WFC is positively related to emotional exhaustion during WFH.

Hypothesis 3: Job demands and WFC significantly predict emotional exhaustion during WFH.

## **2. Materials and methods**

### **2.1 Sample of the study**

After obtaining approval from the management of several private-sector organisations and government-linked companies (GLCs) in Terengganu, Malaysia, in which women employees were invited to participate in the study via

email. Participating organisations were predominantly involved in healthcare, manufacturing and administrative sectors. Participants were recruited across various occupational levels including managerial and professional as well as non-manager roles. Using purposive and convenience sampling, employees who met the inclusive criteria such as women and experience WFH were approached through Human Resources Department. Data collection was conducted using an online survey administered through Google Forms, allowing participants the flexibility to complete it at their convenience around their work schedules. A total of 289 women employees were approached, of whom 157 completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 54.33%.

## **2.2. Instruments**

Job demands were measured using the Demand-Induced Strain Compensation (DISC) Questionnaire developed by de Jonge et al. (2009). The instrument comprises 16 items assessing three dimensions of job demands: cognitive demands (five items), emotional demands (six items), and physical demands (five items). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher levels of job demands. Sample items include “I have to do a lot of emotionally demanding work” and “My job requires me to perform many physically demanding tasks.” The overall scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.916$ ), with subscale reliabilities of 0.798 for cognitive demands, 0.897 for emotional demands, and 0.859 for physical demands.

WFC was assessed utilizing the five-item scale developed by Netemeyer et al. (1996). Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Higher scores on this scale indicate greater levels of WFC. An illustrative item from the scale is, “The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life.” The reliability of this scale, as measured by Cronbach’s alpha, is 0.955.

Emotional exhaustion was measured using the Emotional Exhaustion Scale developed by Maslach et al. (1996). This scale comprises nine items, each evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Elevated scores correspond to increased levels of emotional exhaustion. An illustrative item from the scale is, “I feel emotionally drained from my work.” The internal consistency for this scale is recorded as high ( $\alpha = 0.947$ ).

## **2.3. Data analysis**

Data were first examined using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to summarise participants’ demographic characteristics and the distribution of the study variables. Pearson correlation analyses were then conducted to examine the bivariate relationships among job demands, work–family conflict, and emotional exhaustion. Subsequently, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesised model. All statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS). Since this study relied on self-reported data, Harman’s one-factor test was conducted to check for the potential issue of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The exploratory factor analysis revealed that the single factor explained 44.95% of the variance, which is below the 50% threshold, indicating no significant common method variance (Saris & Gallhofer, 2014).

## **2.4. Analytical procedure**

To examine the direct effects, we employed SEM analysis, which consists

of several systematic steps. In Step 1, we established a conceptual framework identifying job demands and WFC as independent variables, with emotional exhaustion designated as the dependent variable. Step 2 involved the application of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the measurement model, assessing how effectively the observed variables encapsulate the underlying latent constructs, namely job demands, WFC, and emotional exhaustion. The reliability of these constructs was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). Validity was determined using two assessments: convergent validity, which necessitates the calculation of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity, established when the square root of AVE for each construct surpasses its correlations with other constructs (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In Step 3, we tested the SEM model to estimate the direct effects, specifically job demands associated with emotional exhaustion and WFC also associated with emotional exhaustion. We analyzed the path coefficients (standardized regression weights) for significance, employing a p-value threshold of less than 0.05 to ascertain the strength and direction of the relationships. Furthermore, model fit indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), were utilized to confirm the adequacy of the structural model, adhering to thresholds that align with those employed in CFA (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

## 2.5. Ethical procedures

The researcher secured the necessary permissions and received ethical clearance from the UMT Research Ethics Committee. The committee has conducted a thorough review and granted approval for the research project, designated as UMT/JKEPM/2022/107.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Profile of the respondents

The respondents were 157 women employees aged between 21 and 50 and above living in Kuala Terengganu District. Most respondents were Muslim (98.1%,  $N = 154$ ), Malay (96.8%,  $N = 152$ ), and married (61.1%,  $N = 96$ ). Many respondents (41.4%,  $N = 65$ ) did not have children. Regarding education level, respondents with a bachelor's degree (47.1%,  $N = 74$ ) were the highest in number. Most respondents (71.3%,  $N = 112$ ) had worked in their current organization for 1–10 years. Many respondents (41.4%,  $N = 65$ ) had a monthly income (including basic salary and allowances) of less than MYR 2,500. Furthermore, most respondents experienced high job demands (72.6%,  $N = 114$ ) and WFC (66.2%,  $N = 104$ ). Half of the respondents (50.3%,  $N = 79$ ) experienced low emotional exhaustion, while nearly half of the respondents experienced high emotional exhaustion (49.7%,  $N = 78$ ) (see **Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Profile of respondents ( $N = 157$ )

| Demography  | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Age (years) | 21–30    | 63        | 40.1           |
|             | 31–40    | 61        | 38.9           |
|             | 41–50    | 21        | 13.4           |
|             | ≥ 51     | 12        | 7.6            |
| Religion    | Islam    | 154       | 98.1           |
|             | Buddha   | 1         | 0.6            |
|             | Hindu    | 1         | 0.6            |

Continued table:

| Demography                                | Category             | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Ethnic                                    | Christian            | 1         | 0.6            |
|                                           | Malay                | 152       | 96.8           |
|                                           | Chinese              | 1         | 0.6            |
|                                           | Indian               | 3         | 1.9            |
|                                           | Others               | 1         | 0.6            |
| Marital status                            | Married              | 52        | 33.1           |
|                                           | Single               | 96        | 61.1           |
|                                           | Divorced             | 9         | 5.7            |
| Educational level                         | SPM/STPM/Certificate | 33        | 21.0           |
|                                           | Diploma              | 34        | 21.7           |
|                                           | Bachelor's degree    | 74        | 47.1           |
|                                           | Master's degree      | 16        | 10.2           |
| Number of children                        | None                 | 65        | 41.4           |
|                                           | 1–2 children         | 46        | 29.3           |
|                                           | 3–5 children         | 46        | 29.3           |
| Length of current services (years)        | 1–10                 | 112       | 71.3           |
|                                           | 11–20                | 30        | 19.1           |
|                                           | 21–30                | 8         | 5.1            |
|                                           | ≥ 31                 | 7         | 4.5            |
| Monthly income (basic salary & allowance) | ≤ RM2,500            | 65        | 41.4           |
|                                           | RM2,500–RM3,170      | 35        | 22.3           |
|                                           | RM3,171–RM3,970      | 19        | 12.1           |
|                                           | RM3,971–RM4,850      | 13        | 8.3            |
|                                           | RM4,851–RM5,880      | 6         | 3.8            |
|                                           | RM5,881–RM7,100      | 9         | 5.7            |
|                                           | RM7,101–RM8,700      | 3         | 1.9            |
|                                           | RM8,701–RM10,970     | 2         | 1.3            |
|                                           | RM10,971–RM15,040    | 3         | 1.9            |
|                                           | ≥ RM15,041           | 2         | 1.3            |
| Level of job demands                      | Low                  | 43        | 27.4           |
|                                           | High                 | 114       | 72.6           |
| Level of WFC                              | Low                  | 53        | 33.8           |
|                                           | High                 | 104       | 66.2           |
| Level of emotional exhaustion             | Low                  | 79        | 50.3           |
|                                           | High                 | 78        | 49.7           |
| TOTAL                                     |                      | 157       | 100.0          |

### 3.2. Correlation between variables

**Table 2** presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients among the study variables. Overall job demands were significantly and positively correlated with emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.60$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that higher levels of perceived job demands were associated with greater emotional exhaustion among women working from home. Similarly, work–family conflict showed a strong positive correlation with emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that increased interference of work

demands with family life is closely linked to heightened emotional strain.

At the dimensional level, emotional demands demonstrated the strongest association with emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.59$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), followed by physical demands ( $r = 0.53$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and cognitive demands ( $r = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These findings suggest that emotionally and physically taxing aspects of work may play a particularly salient role in contributing to emotional exhaustion in work-from-home contexts. In addition, work–family conflict was moderately correlated with all dimensions of job demands, with the strongest association observed for emotional demands ( $r = 0.54$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that emotionally demanding work is more likely to spill over into the family domain.

Overall, the correlation patterns provide preliminary support for the hypothesised relationships and justify the subsequent use of structural equation modelling to examine the direct effects of job demands and work–family conflict on emotional exhaustion.

**Table 2.** Mean, standard deviation (SD) and correlation of the variables

| Variables                | Mean | SD   | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6 |
|--------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Job demands (Overall) | 3.10 | 0.75 | -     | -     | -     | -     | -     | - |
| 2. Cognitive demands     | 3.55 | 0.77 | .71** | -     | -     | -     | -     | - |
| 3. Emotional demands     | 3.00 | 0.98 | .92** | .50** | -     | -     | -     | - |
| 4. Physical demands      | 2.75 | 0.93 | .84** | .37** | .69** | -     | -     | - |
| 5. WFC                   | 3.05 | 1.10 | .57** | .33** | .54** | .50** | -     | - |
| 6. Emotional exhaustion  | 2.72 | 1.01 | .60** | .31** | .59** | .53** | .63** | - |

Note: All are significant at \*\* $p < .01$

### 3.3. Inferential statistics

In the context of reporting the outcomes of structural equation modeling, Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2013) emphasized the importance of addressing two key components: the measurement model and the structural model.

#### 3.3.1. Measurement model

Validity pertains to the soundness of a principle, inference, or calculation, as well as its likelihood of accurately correlating with real-world phenomena (Brians et al., 2010). In this study, we employed face validity to assess instrument validity. Face validity evaluates the extent to which a test measures a specific concept; however, it does not ensure that the test truly reflects the underlying phenomena within that domain. A measure may have high validity but poor face validity when it does not seem to evaluate what it is supposed to measure. Face validity is closely related to the validity of the text. In contrast, content validity assesses whether a test measures all areas of a given concept based on a formal assessment.

In this study, job demands were analysed as a second-order construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and physical demands, rather than as three separate constructs. This approach is consistent with how job demands have been conceptualised and modelled in recent studies (Abukhalifa & Kamil, 2024; Kazar & Rahmanzadeh, 2024). **Table 3** presents the outcomes of the analysis conducted to assess the discriminant and convergent validities of the measurement instrument. Discriminant validity was evaluated through the calculation of the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results indicate that discriminant validity is established, as the square root of the AVE for each latent variable exceeds the highest correlation observed with any other latent variable. Additionally, convergent validity was determined by utilizing the AVE. Based on

Hair et al. (2013) guideline, convergent validity is established if the AVE is equal to or higher than 0.50. Convergent validity was established, as all constructs had an AVE higher than 0.50. Next, we used CR to test the reliability of the measurement tool. It is calculated using the number of items and the loading factor. The constructs used in this study were reliable because the CR of all variables was greater than 0.70.

**Table 3.** Discriminant and convergence validity and reliability of the measurement scale

| Variable             | CR    | AVE   | MSV   | ASV   | WFC   | EE    | JD    |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| WFC                  | 0.953 | 0.803 | 0.428 | 0.405 | 0.896 |       |       |
| Emotional exhaustion | 0.941 | 0.641 | 0.444 | 0.436 | 0.654 | 0.801 |       |
| Job demands          | 0.897 | 0.748 | 0.444 | 0.413 | 0.619 | 0.666 | 0.865 |

**Table 4** presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the construct job demands. Items JobDem1 to JobDem16 significantly measured job demands at the 0.01 or 1% significance level. This was established because the critical value (C.R.) was more than 1.96 (t-table cut-off value).

**Table 4.** The result of CFA for the construct of job demands

|                   |     |                   | Estimate | S.E. | C.R.   | P   |
|-------------------|-----|-------------------|----------|------|--------|-----|
| COGNITIVE DEMANDS | < — | Job Demands       | .339     | .051 | 6.665  | *** |
| EMOTIONAL DEMANDS | < — | Job Demands       | .881     | .085 | 10.415 | *** |
| PHYSICAL DEMANDS  | < — | Job Demands       | .589     | .069 | 8.536  | *** |
| JobDem12          | < — | Physical Demands  | 1.090    | .106 | 10.312 | *** |
| JobDem15          | < — | Physical Demands  | 1.004    | .103 | 9.756  | *** |
| JobDem16          | < — | Physical Demands  | 1.000    |      |        |     |
| JobDem7           | < — | Emotional Demands | 1.000    |      |        |     |
| JobDem1           | < — | Cognitive Demands | .850     | .072 | 11.802 | *** |
| JobDem2           | < — | Cognitive Demands | 1.000    |      |        |     |
| JobDem3           | < — | Cognitive Demands | 1.222    | .090 | 13.554 | *** |
| JobDem5           | < — | Cognitive Demands | .971     | .090 | 10.760 | *** |
| JobDem8           | < — | Emotional Demands | 1.135    | .080 | 14.240 | *** |
| JobDem9           | < — | Emotional Demands | 1.143    | .085 | 13.497 | *** |
| JobDem10          | < — | Emotional Demands | 1.097    | .081 | 13.554 | *** |
| JobDem11          | < — | Emotional Demands | 1.081    | .085 | 12.716 | *** |
| JobDem14          | < — | Physical Demands  | 1.355    | .126 | 10.791 | *** |
| JobDem13          | < — | Physical Demands  | 1.229    | .118 | 10.407 | *** |
| JobDem4           | < — | Cognitive Demands | .951     | .082 | 11.602 | *** |
| JobDem6           | < — | Emotional Demands | .926     | .081 | 11.461 | *** |

**Table 5** presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the construct WFC. Items WFC1 to WFC5 significantly measured WFC at the 0.01 or 1% significance level. This was established because the critical value (C.R.) was more than 1.96 (t-table cut-off value).

**Table 5.** The result of CFA for the construct of WFC

|      |     |                      | Estimate | S.E. | C.R.   | P   |
|------|-----|----------------------|----------|------|--------|-----|
| WFC4 | < — | Work Family Conflict | 1.095    | .059 | 18.617 | *** |
| WFC3 | < — | Work Family Conflict | 1.150    | .059 | 19.629 | *** |
| WFC2 | < — | Work Family Conflict | 1.189    | .059 | 20.059 | *** |
| WFC1 | < — | Work Family Conflict | 1.062    | .061 | 17.392 | *** |
| WFC5 | < — | Work Family Conflict | 1.000    |      |        |     |

**Table 6** presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the construct emotional exhaustion. Items EmoExh1 to EmoExh9 significantly measured emotional exhaustion at the 0.01 or 1% significance level. This was established because the critical value (C.R.) was more than 1.96 (t-table cut-off value).

**Table 6.** The result of CFA for the construct of emotional exhaustion

|         |     |                      | Estimate | S.E. | C.R.   | P   |
|---------|-----|----------------------|----------|------|--------|-----|
| EmoExh9 | < — | Emotional Exhaustion | .762     | .061 | 12.426 | *** |
| EmoExh8 | < — | Emotional Exhaustion | .956     | .053 | 18.017 | *** |
| EmoExh7 | < — | Emotional Exhaustion | .763     | .062 | 12.323 | *** |
| EmoExh6 | < — | Emotional Exhaustion | .845     | .052 | 16.222 | *** |
| EmoExh5 | < — | Emotional Exhaustion | 1.067    | .052 | 20.465 | *** |
| EmoExh4 | < — | Emotional Exhaustion | .934     | .056 | 16.751 | *** |
| EmoExh3 | < — | Emotional Exhaustion | 1.061    | .056 | 18.860 | *** |
| EmoExh2 | < — | Emotional Exhaustion | 1.000    |      |        |     |
| EmoExh1 | < — | Emotional Exhaustion | 1.007    | .045 | 22.469 | *** |

**Table 7** presents the results of testing the model's goodness-of-fit using a three-factor structure. We used absolute, incremental, and parsimonious fit indices to ensure that the data fit the model. Only the value of goodness of fit index (GFI) did not exceed the threshold value. Even though its value did not exceed 0.90 (the threshold value) but was still acceptable if above 0.8 (Baba-Nalikant et al., 2023). **Figure 1** illustrates the results.

**Table 7.** Goodness of Fit (GoF)—three-factor structure

| Category                 | Index         | Threshold | Empirical test |
|--------------------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| Absolute Fit Indices     | Chi-Square/df | < 3.00    | 1.914          |
|                          | RMSEA         | < 0.08    | 0.056          |
|                          | GFI           | > 0.95    | 0.853          |
|                          | PCLOSE        | > 0.05    | 0.046          |
| Incremental Fit Indices  | AGFI          | > 0.80    | 0.822          |
|                          | CFI           | > 0.95    | 0.950          |
|                          | TLI           | > 0.90    | 0.944          |
|                          | NFI           | > 0.90    | 0.902          |
| Parsimonious Fit Indices | PNFI          | > 0.50    | 0.800          |
|                          | PCFI          | > 0.50    | 0.843          |

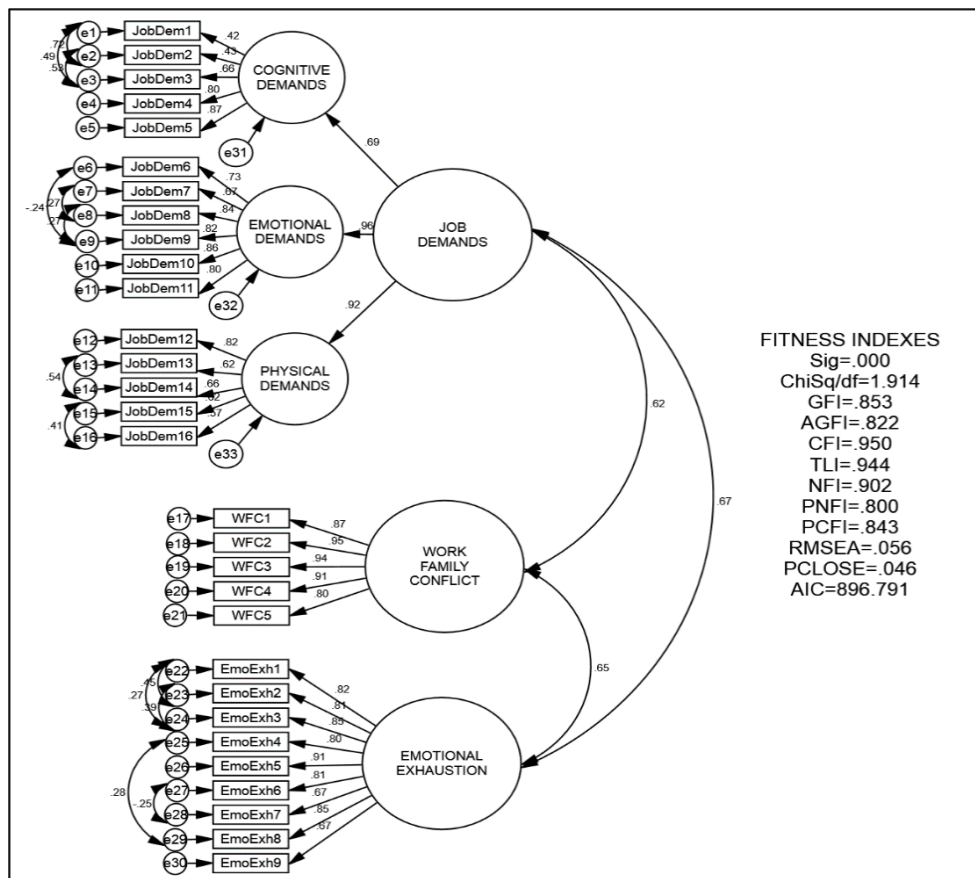


**Figure 1.** Three-factor structure model after modification indices

### 3.3.2. Structural model

The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM), and model fit was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.06), indicating a good fit. As shown in **Table 8**, the SEM results indicate significant relationships between job demands, WFC, and emotional exhaustion in the WFH context. Specifically, job demands had a significant positive effect on emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = 0.424$ ,  $CR = 6.442$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that higher workload and work pressure in WFH arrangements are associated with greater emotional exhaustion. This finding supports Hypothesis 1.

In a similar vein, WFC was positively and significantly associated with emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = 0.403$ ,  $CR = 6.136$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) supporting Hypothesis 2. This result suggests that difficulties in managing work and family roles while working from home contribute to increased emotional strain. The blurring of boundaries between work and family domains in WFH settings likely intensifies role interference, which is associated with heightened fatigue and emotional depletion.

Furthermore, the model demonstrated substantial explanatory power, with job demands and WFC jointly explaining 53.9% of the variance in emotional exhaustion ( $R^2 = 0.539$ ). These findings support Hypothesis 3, indicating that both job demands and WFC significantly predict emotional exhaustion among employees working from home.



For women employees, these pressures are often compounded by culturally embedded expectations regarding household and caregiving responsibilities. In Malaysia, traditional gender norms continue to position women as primary caregivers and household managers, even when they are engaged in full-time employment. As a result, the simultaneous management of occupational tasks and domestic responsibilities may generate sustained psychological strain. The “always-on” nature of remote work further exacerbates this strain, as employees may feel compelled to remain continuously accessible to supervisors and colleagues (Costin et al., 2023). Over time, such persistent demands can erode emotional resources and increase susceptibility to emotional exhaustion.

In line with previous studies (Burić et al., 2023; Silva & Guarda, 2026), the present findings also reveal a significant positive relationship between WFC and emotional exhaustion. This suggests that as work demands increasingly interfere with family life, women experience heightened emotional strain. Women employees may be particularly vulnerable to WFC due to the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic labour, which remains prevalent in many Malaysian households. As highlighted by Zeng et al. (2024), the pressure to multitask across professional and family roles can result in feelings of fatigue and emotional depletion. In WFH environments, the absence of physical and temporal boundaries between work and family roles may further intensify stress, as women struggle to disengage from work obligations while attending to household and caregiving duties (Rudolph et al., 2021).

Moreover, research indicates that women working from home frequently encounter interruptions from family members or household tasks, which is associated with fragmented attention and increased cognitive and emotional fatigue (Shockley et al., 2021). In the Malaysian context, where multigenerational living arrangements are relatively common, such interruptions may be particularly pronounced. The cumulative effect of these competing demands can foster a cycle of chronic stress, undermining emotional resilience and increasing the risk of emotional exhaustion.

The present study further demonstrates that job demands and work–family conflict jointly serve as significant predictors of emotional exhaustion. These findings are consistent with previous research (Minkkinen et al., 2021; Recuero & Segovia, 2021) and align closely with the propositions of Role Theory. According to Role Theory, individuals occupy multiple social roles, and conflict arises when the expectations and demands associated with these roles exceed available resources or are incompatible (Kahn et al., 1964). In WFH contexts, the collapse of spatial and temporal boundaries between work and family roles intensifies role competition, increasing the likelihood of role overload and role strain.

Within Malaysia’s socio-cultural environment, women employees may experience a pronounced “double burden” when working from home, as professional role expectations coexist with deeply rooted familial obligations (Kaur & Sharma, 2020). When women are expected to perform effectively as employees while simultaneously managing household responsibilities and caregiving roles, the accumulation of role demands may exceed their coping capacity. This sustained role strain provides a plausible psychological explanation for the observed associations between job demands, work–family conflict, and emotional exhaustion. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of addressing both organisational and socio-cultural factors when examining women’s psychological well-being in remote work arrangements.

The Malaysian context also helps specify the boundary conditions of these relationships. At the sociocultural and household levels, the effects of job demands and work interference with family are likely to be stronger where women retain primary responsibility for unpaid care and household work, family

members expect availability during working hours, and multigenerational or space-constrained households make physical separation of roles difficult. Under these conditions, a given level of job demand is more likely to cross the work–family boundary, generate interruptions, and consume the recovery time needed to prevent emotional exhaustion. The same mechanisms may therefore be relevant beyond Malaysia in societies, communities, or households characterised by similarly gendered divisions of labour, strong family-role obligations, limited access to formal care, or restricted domestic workspace. Conversely, the relationships may be weaker where domestic labour is shared more equally, dependable childcare or eldercare is available, family members respect protected work time, and employees have a private workspace. Accordingly, the findings should not be interpreted as indicating that Malaysian culture itself causes emotional exhaustion; rather, they suggest that specific arrangements of role expectations, care responsibilities, and household boundaries may alter the strength of the proposed relationships.

#### **4.1. Implications and recommendations**

##### **4.1.1. Theoretical implications**

The present study contributes to the psychological literature on remote work by extending the application of Role Theory to contemporary WFH contexts. While prior studies have primarily examined job demands and work–family conflict in traditional workplace settings, the current findings demonstrate that these mechanisms remain salient and may be intensified when professional and family roles are enacted within the same physical environment. By empirically confirming that both job demands and work–family conflict predict emotional exhaustion among women working from home, this study reinforces the relevance of role-based explanations in understanding psychological strain in flexible work arrangements.

More specifically, the findings extend and contextualise Role Theory in three ways. First, they show that role strain in WFH arrangements is not confined to conflict between roles that are performed in separate settings. When work and family roles are enacted in the same physical and temporal space, greater boundary permeability can make competing expectations simultaneous and more difficult to sequence, thereby identifying co-located role enactment as an important contextual condition of role strain. Second, the significant relationships of both job demands and work interference with family with emotional exhaustion distinguish two complementary sources of strain: demands arising within the work role and interference occurring across work and family roles. Job demands and work–family conflict are therefore not interchangeable indicators of the same pressure; rather, they represent distinct pathways through which limited time, energy, and psychological resources may be depleted. Third, the findings demonstrate the explanatory relevance of Role Theory among women employees in the Malaysian WFH context, where the management of work and family boundaries may be especially salient. This contextualisation does not establish that the relationships are stronger for women or in Malaysia, because the study did not compare genders or countries. Instead, it shows that the role-strain mechanisms predicted by Role Theory remain evident within an underrepresented non-Western setting and clarifies the contextual conditions under which those mechanisms operate.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of conceptualising job demands as multidimensional constructs encompassing cognitive, emotional, and physical components. The observed associations between these dimensions and emotional exhaustion suggest that emotionally and physically demanding aspects of work may be particularly detrimental in remote work contexts. This

underscores the need for future psychological research to move beyond global measures of job demands and to examine how specific demand profiles interact with work–family dynamics to influence well-being outcomes.

From a broader theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of work on occupational stress by situating emotional exhaustion within a socio-cultural context. The Malaysian setting illustrates how culturally embedded gender norms and family expectations may amplify role strain and resource depletion among women, suggesting that psychological models of work stress should be interpreted within their cultural and institutional environments.

#### **4.1.2. Practical and policy recommendations**

From a practical standpoint, the findings underscore the need for Human Resource Management (HRM) in related organisations particularly to proactively manage job demands in remote work arrangements. For example, HRM should establish clear expectations regarding working hours, availability, and performance standards to prevent excessive workload and continuous connectivity. Implementing policies that encourage boundary management, such as flexible scheduling, clear communication norms, and respect for non-work time may help reduce emotional exhaustion among women working from home.

In addition, HRM should consider providing targeted psychosocial support for women employees, including access to employee assistance programmes, mental health resources, and supervisor training focused on recognising signs of emotional exhaustion. The HR department plays a critical role in shaping employees' work experiences in remote settings, and supportive leadership practices may buffer the negative effects of high job demands and work–family conflict. Providing additional training to supervisors related to emotional support and empathic communication may mitigate the negative association of job demands and work family conflict on employees' wellbeing.

At the policy level, the findings suggest a need for more comprehensive guidelines on flexible work arrangements in Malaysia. While WFH has become increasingly prevalent, formal frameworks addressing workload management, work–life balance, and employee well-being remain limited. HR practitioners and policy makers may benefit from developing gender-sensitive WFH policies that acknowledge unequal caregiving responsibilities and promote equitable distribution of work and family roles.

Finally, interventions aimed at reducing work–family conflict should extend beyond individual coping strategies and address structural factors within organisations and households. By recognising the psychological costs associated with blurred work–family boundaries, translated current findings into HRM practices can implement more sustainable remote work practices that support women's mental health and long-term occupational well-being.

#### **4.2. Limitations and future research**

A few limitations have been identified in the current study. Firstly, the research concentrated exclusively on female employees, which confines the applicability of the findings. Although the study aims to understand gender-specific challenges, particularly those faced by women employees during work-from-home arrangements, the exclusion of male employees prevents a holistic understanding of how these dynamics may differ across groups. Malaysia is a collectivistic society with culturally diverse exerts different gender and role expectations in managing work and family responsibilities. Traditional expectations for caregiving and household tasks often make it harder for women especially Malay to balance their jobs and family lives. Therefore, future studies should aim to include male employees to explore whether the relationships observed in this study differ across demographic groups. Furthermore, the

applicability of findings that contribute more insight into the challenges associated with remote work can be achieved by incorporating a diverse array of respondents' profiles. Future research can expand these findings by studying employees across different regions, ethnic groups, and industries.

Second, this study examined job demands as a unified concept, even though it has three sub-constructs (i.e., cognitive, emotional, and physical demands). By examining these sub-constructs separately, future studies could provide more precise insights into how each component of job demands uniquely impacts outcomes. Furthermore, this study focused exclusively on one aspect of work family conflict, specifically the interference of work demands with family responsibilities (WFC). Although focusing on one direction, i.e., WFC, is theoretically justified as the focus of this study, it limits the understanding on how the interruption from family related matters (FWC) such as childcare responsibility and elder/parental caregiving, contributes to employees' emotional exhaustion. It is important to note that work-family conflict constitutes a bidirectional construct which encompasses both WFC and FWC. Future studies should extend this study by examining both WFC and FWC to provide a better understanding of how conflicts originating from work or family responsibilities influence individual well-being.

Third, although collecting data from a single point study was beneficial in identifying relationships among constructs, it did not facilitate causal inferences or provide insights into the temporal evolution of job demands, WFC and emotional exhaustion. Hence, researchers should consider adopting longitudinal designs to examine how job demands, WFC and emotional exhaustion evolve over time. This would allow researchers to observe how these variables evolve and interact in the long term, offering a clearer view of causal relationships and whether certain conditions increase or decrease emotional exhaustion as remote work continues. Such studies could reveal patterns or trajectories, offering richer insights for intervention strategies.

Lastly, the reliance on self-reported questionnaires in this study may introduce potential bias, as participants may not always provide accurate or truthful responses. Conducting Harman's single factor cannot conclusively eliminate CMB, thus, collecting data from supervisor/superior assessment of job demands and WFC would minimize bias. Furthermore, future research would benefit from employing a mixed-methods strategy by consolidating data from both quantitative and qualitative data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This integration of data sources would yield a more thorough and reliable understanding of job demands, WFC and emotional exhaustion, thus minimizing the biases associated with self-reporting.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that job demands and work-family conflict are key factors associated with emotional exhaustion among women working from home. Elevated job demands deplete cognitive, emotional, and physical resources, while work-family conflict compounds this strain by requiring women to manage competing professional and family roles within the same environment. The blurring of boundaries between work and non-work domains inherent in work-from-home arrangements appears to intensify role strain, making it increasingly challenging for women to sustain psychological well-being.

This study contributes to the literature by providing early empirical evidence on the psychosocial consequences of work-from-home arrangements during the emergence of a new working norm. By focusing on Malaysian women employees, the findings address a notable gap in the predominantly Western-centric literature on remote work and occupational stress. The results highlight how job

demands and work–family conflict interact within a specific socio-cultural and organisational context, offering a more nuanced understanding of emotional exhaustion in non-Western settings.

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of organisational strategies that proactively address psychosocial risks in remote work environments. Organisations may mitigate emotional exhaustion by implementing flexible work arrangements, enhancing managerial and supervisory support, and establishing clearer boundaries around working hours and availability. Developing supportive and well-structured remote work practices is essential not only for protecting employees' psychological well-being but also for ensuring the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of work-from-home arrangements.

Overall, addressing the distinctive challenges faced by women in remote work contexts is critical for promoting healthier, more inclusive, and resilient work environments in an increasingly digital and flexible world of work.

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