

Remote Working and Work-Life Balance Among Young Professionals in Indonesia: A Qualitative Exploratory Study

Rico Happy Pratama

Master of Management, Universitas Surabaya

*Corresponding author. Email: Ricohappypratama99@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Remote working has become a dominant work arrangement among young professionals in Indonesia, accelerated by the post-pandemic digital transformation. However, the relationship between remote working characteristics and work life balance (WLB) among this demographic remains underexplored in the Indonesian context. This study investigates how flexibility, workload, lack of social interaction, and work-family conflict influence work-life balance, and subsequently affect life satisfaction and productivity among young remote workers (aged 23–35). Employing a qualitative exploratory approach, data were collected from 18 respondents comprising freelancers and full time remote employees through open ended survey instruments. Thematic analysis revealed that flexibility positively supports WLB (H1 supported), while excessive workload (H2), lack of social interaction (H3), and work-family conflict (H4) negatively impact WLB. Furthermore, improved WLB was found to enhance both life satisfaction (H6) and productivity (H5). These findings extend the work of Taşdelen-Karçkay and Bakalım (2017) into the Indonesian remote work context and contribute practical implications for organizations and policymakers in designing sustainable remote work systems for the younger generation.

Keywords: remote working, work life balance, young professionals, life satisfaction, productivity, Indonesia

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally reshaped the global work landscape, accelerating the adoption of remote working across industries. In Indonesia, this shift has been particularly pronounced among the younger generation comprising millennials and Gen Z who have embraced remote working not merely as a temporary arrangement, but as a preferred and sustainable mode of employment (Charalampous et al., 2023). As of 2024, a significant proportion of young Indonesian professionals particularly in creative, technology, and consulting sectors continue to work remotely either as full-time employees or freelancers.

Work-life balance (WLB) has emerged as one of the most critical dimensions of remote work experience. The ability to flexibly manage time and location offers immense benefits; however, the blurring of professional and personal boundaries poses challenges that can diminish life satisfaction and productivity (Taşdelen-Karçkay & Bakalım, 2017). While existing literature has examined WLB in conventional work settings, there remains a gap in understanding how the unique dynamics of remote working specifically flexibility, workload intensity, lack of social interaction, and work-family conflict shape WLB outcomes in the Indonesian context.

This study draws on an extended framework originally proposed by Taşdelen-Karçkay and Bakalım (2017), which demonstrated that work family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC) negatively mediate WLB, ultimately affecting life satisfaction. The present study adapts and extends this model by incorporating flexibility and lack of social interaction as additional predictors, while also examining productivity as an additional outcome variable. This extension responds to calls by Charalampous et al. (2023) for broader investigations of e-working dimensions beyond conflict-centric models.

The research questions guiding this study are: (1) How do flexibility, workload, lack of social interaction, and work-family conflict influence work-life balance among young remote workers in Indonesia? (2) How does work-life balance subsequently affect life satisfaction and productivity? By addressing these questions, this study contributes to the

emerging body of knowledge on remote working in Southeast Asia and offers practical implications for organizations navigating the post-pandemic work environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Remote Working and Work-Life Balance

Remote working, or e-working, is defined as a work arrangement in which employees perform their duties outside the conventional office setting, facilitated by digital communication technologies (Charalampous et al., 2023). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides a theoretical lens for understanding its dual effects: remote working simultaneously presents resources (e.g., autonomy, flexibility) and demands (e.g., workload, always-on pressure) that can either enhance or deplete an employee's capacity to maintain balance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, as cited in Charalampous et al., 2023).

Work life balance is broadly defined as the extent to which an individual's work and non-work roles are compatible, mutually supportive, and do not significantly conflict with each other (Taşdelen-Karçkay & Bakalım, 2017). For young professionals, WLB is increasingly non-negotiable; it is treated as a prerequisite for long term career sustainability and personal wellbeing rather than a mere perk.

2.2. Flexibility and Work-Life Balance

Flexibility in remote working refers to the freedom to determine when and where work is performed. Charalampous et al. (2023) identified flexibility as a key dimension of e-working that positively contributes to employee wellbeing by enabling workers to align their professional tasks with personal rhythms and life responsibilities. When individuals can schedule work around personal obligations, their perceived control over life increases, reducing spillover into personal time.

H1: Flexibility positively influences Work Life Balance among young remote workers.

2.3. Workload and Work-Life Balance

Excessive workload is a prominent demand in remote work arrangements. The absence of physical separation between work and living spaces often leads to work intensification, where individuals struggle to disengage from professional responsibilities (Charalampous et al., 2023). High workload diminishes time and energy available for personal and family activities, thereby undermining WLB.

H2: Workload negatively influences Work Life Balance among young remote workers.

2.4. Lack of Social Interaction and Work-Life Balance

One of the most cited drawbacks of remote working is the diminished opportunity for face to face social interaction. Beauregard et al. (as cited in Charalampous et al., 2023) found that social isolation among remote workers contributes to feelings of loneliness and detachment, which can spill into personal life and impair WLB. For young workers who place high value on social connection, this absence can be particularly disruptive.

H3: Lack of social interaction negatively influences Work-Life Balance among young remote workers.

2.5. Work-Family Conflict and Work-Life Balance

Work-family conflict (WFC) arises when demands from work and family roles are mutually incompatible (Carlson et al., 2000, as cited in Taşdelen-Karçkay & Bakalım, 2017). In remote work settings, WFC is amplified because both domains share the same physical space. Taşdelen-Karçkay and Bakalım (2017) empirically demonstrated that WFC significantly and negatively predicts WLB ($\beta = -.24, p < .005$), confirming that boundary violations between domains erode balance.

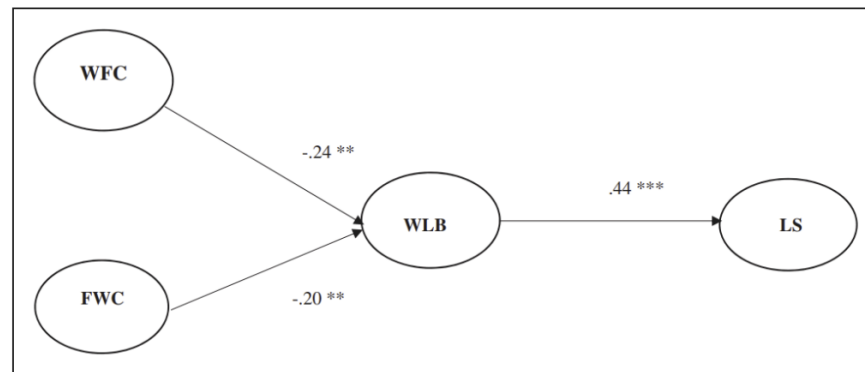


Figure 1. The full mediation model. Note. WFC: work–family conflict; FWC: family–work conflict; WLB: work–life balance; LS: life satisfaction. ** $p < .005$, *** $p < .001$.

H4: Work-family conflict negatively influences Work-Life Balance among young remote workers.

2.6. Work-Life Balance, Life Satisfaction, and Productivity

The outcome dimensions of WLB examined in this study are life satisfaction and productivity. Taşdelen-Karçkay and Bakalım (2017) established that WLB is a strong positive predictor of life satisfaction ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$), positioning it as a full mediator between conflict and life fulfillment. Additionally, Charalampous et al. (2023) highlighted that remote workers who achieve adequate WLB report higher task performance and subjective productivity, given the elimination of commuting fatigue and greater autonomy over work conditions.

H5: Work-Life Balance positively influences Productivity among young remote workers.

H6: Work-Life Balance positively influences Life Satisfaction among young remote workers.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative exploratory design to examine the subjective experiences of young remote workers in Indonesia. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate given the need to capture rich, contextual narratives about daily remote work practices and their perceived impact on work-life balance dimensions that are difficult to fully operationalize through structured Likert-scale instruments alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected through an open-ended online survey distributed to remote workers in Indonesia aged 23–35 years, representing the millennial and Gen Z cohorts. Respondents were recruited through purposive sampling via professional and social networks. The instrument consisted of five thematic open-ended questions, each designed to elicit narratives corresponding to the study's variables: (1) flexibility and daily life impact (FEX1), (2) work family boundary management and conflict (WFC), (3) productivity and environmental determinants (PRO1), (4) life satisfaction versus always-on fatigue (LSA1), and (5) the non-negotiability of WLB and WFO trade-offs (WLB1/POS1).

A total of 18 valid responses were collected. Respondents ranged in age from 23 to 35 years ($M \approx 27$), with approximately half classified as freelancers and the remainder as full-time remote employees. The majority (67%) had been working remotely for 2–4 years, with the remainder having 5–7 years or more than 7 years of experience. Responses were subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, in which recurring patterns were identified, coded, and synthesized into themes aligned with each hypothesized construct.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Flexibility and Work-Life Balance (H1 Supported)

Thematic analysis of responses to the flexibility dimension (FEX1) revealed overwhelming support for H1. Virtually all 18 respondents described flexibility as a meaningful enabler of daily life quality. Respondents articulated that the ability to self-schedule work around personal rhythms ranging from family caregiving obligations to fitness routines enhanced their sense of life control. One respondent noted being able to accompany a critically ill parent to the hospital

while simultaneously meeting work deadlines, a scenario made possible only through remote flexibility. Another respondent explicitly linked flexible scheduling to reduced burnout, having previously experienced extreme fatigue under a conventional office regimen.

These narratives align with Charalampous et al.'s (2023) conceptualization of flexibility as a core resource in the JD-R framework. The findings suggest that for young Indonesian workers, flexibility is not merely a preference but a structural enabler of work-life integration. H1 is therefore supported: flexibility positively and substantially contributes to work-life balance among this cohort.

4.2. Workload and Work-Life Balance (H2 Supported)

The workload dimension emerged as a significant source of WLB disruption, particularly among freelancers. Several respondents described working 16–20 hours per day during peak demand periods, with one noting chronic deadline pressure as a driver of emotional instability and burnout. Full-time remote employees reported that the absence of a clear office closing time created an implicit expectation of perpetual availability, eroding their ability to psychologically detach from work.

These findings support H2 and are consistent with the JD-R model's proposition that excessive job demands when unmitigated by resources deplete workers' energy and undermine balance (Charalampous et al., 2023). Workload intensity was identified as the primary mechanism through which remote work's positive potential is offset, confirming that flexibility alone cannot sustain WLB under conditions of excessive demand.

4.3. Lack of Social Interaction and Work-Life Balance (H3 Supported)

Social isolation emerged as a recurring yet often understated theme. Several respondents reported feelings of monotony and restlessness from being confined to the home environment daily, with some explicitly mentioning the need to work from cafes or co-working spaces to counteract the psychological effects of isolation. One respondent expressed a preference for WFO precisely because it enabled more meaningful engagement with the external social world.

The data support H3. Lack of social interaction impairs WLB by diminishing the psychological contrast between work and leisure, reducing sources of informal emotional support, and generating a sense of stagnation. This is consistent with findings from Beauregard et al. (as cited in Charalampous et al., 2023), who linked remote work isolation to diminished employee wellbeing.

4.4. Work-Family Conflict and Work-Life Balance (H4 Supported)

Work-family conflict manifested in multiple forms across the dataset. Respondents described interruptions from family members who did not recognize the legitimacy of work-from-home time, the difficulty of maintaining professional focus during domestic emergencies, and the psychological burden of clients or supervisors reaching out beyond agreed working hours. For respondents with young children or caregiving responsibilities, the co-location of work and family demands created particularly acute role conflicts.

H4 is supported. These qualitative patterns mirror the quantitative findings of Taşdelen-Karçkay and Bakalım (2017), who reported a significant negative coefficient ($\beta = -.24, p < .005$) between WFC and WLB. The Indonesian context adds nuance: cultural norms around collective family responsibility amplify the permeability of work-home boundaries, making WFC a particularly salient challenge for young remote workers in this setting.

4.5. Work-Life Balance, Productivity, and Life Satisfaction (H5 & H6 Supported)

The outcome variables productivity and life satisfaction were both strongly linked to WLB in the respondents' narratives. Respondents who described achieving adequate WLB consistently reported higher self-assessed productivity, attributing this to the elimination of commuting fatigue, the ability to customize their physical work environment (dedicated workspace, stable internet, quiet surroundings), and the capacity to schedule work during peak cognitive hours. Conversely, those experiencing WLB deficits reported diminished focus, task delays, and difficulty building professional credibility.

Life satisfaction followed a similar pattern. Respondents with higher perceived WLB expressed greater overall life fulfillment, drawing explicitly on comparisons with previous WFO experiences characterized by toxic office environments, long commutes, and chronic stress. This finding strongly corroborates Taşdelen-Karçkay and Bakalım's

(2017) empirical demonstration that WLB is a positive and significant predictor of life satisfaction ($\beta = .44, p < .001$). Both H5 and H6 are therefore supported by the qualitative evidence.

It is noteworthy that perceived organizational support (POS) emerged as a contextual moderating factor. Respondents whose employers explicitly respected work-hour boundaries and provided understanding for personal emergencies reported substantially better WLB outcomes, suggesting that organizational culture plays an important enabling role even in remote settings.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of remote working dimensions flexibility, workload, lack of social interaction, and work-family conflict on work life balance, and the subsequent effects of WLB on life satisfaction and productivity among young Indonesian professionals. Through qualitative thematic analysis of 18 respondents, all six hypotheses were supported. Flexibility emerged as the primary positive driver of WLB, while workload intensity, social isolation, and work-family conflict were identified as its key detractors. Improved WLB, in turn, enhanced both subjective productivity and life satisfaction, reinforcing the mediating role established by Taşdelen-Karçkay and Bakalım (2017) in a new national and occupational context.

These findings carry several practical implications. For organizations, the results underscore the necessity of establishing clear digital work-hour boundaries and cultivating a culture of perceived organizational support to protect employees' WLB. For young remote workers, proactive strategies such as dedicated workspaces, consistent scheduling, and intentional social engagement are critical to sustaining balance. For policymakers, the findings suggest a need for formal remote work regulations that protect workers from the always-on culture that currently threatens the wellbeing of Indonesia's young professional workforce.

This study has limitations inherent to its exploratory and qualitative design. The sample of 18 respondents, while sufficient for thematic saturation, may not be statistically representative of the broader population. Future research should employ mixed-methods or quantitative designs with larger, stratified samples to test the hypothesized relationships with structural equation modeling, and should further examine the moderating role of perceived organizational support across different industry sectors.

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