

PREDICTORS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG SUPPORTING STAFF IN A MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR DEPARTMENT

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(Received 18th March 2026; revised 26th June 2026; accepted 28th July 2026)

Abstract. Work-life balance has emerged as a critical strategic priority for organizational sustainability and employee well-being, particularly within high-stakes public sector environments where evolving expectations often distort the boundaries between professional and personal life. This study aims to investigate the primary predictors of work-life balance, specifically perceived organizational support, workload, and flexible working hours; among supporting staff of a Malaysian public sector department. Employing a quantitative research design, empirical data were collected from 110 supporting staff using a structured questionnaire adapted from established instruments. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26 through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal that organizational resources play an essential role in improving employees' work-life balance. Specifically, both perceived organizational support and flexible working hours exert a significant and positive influence on work-life balance, with perceived organizational support emerging as the most dominant predictor. Interestingly, while excessive job demands are frequently cited as primary detractors of work-life balance in broader academic literature, this study found that routine workloads did not significantly disrupt the balance of the supporting staff. This suggests a highly normalized task distribution within the department, where heavier analytical burdens are effectively managed by higher-ranking officers, thereby strategically insulating supporting personnel from workload-induced stress. Consequently, the study concludes that human resource interventions in Malaysian public agencies should prioritize strengthening empathetic supervisory care and ensuring access to usable scheduling autonomy. By strengthening these specific structural resources rather than relying solely on workload reduction strategies, government organizations can effectively maintain harmony between professional demands and personal lives, driving job satisfaction, enhancing workforce productivity, and decisively promoting long-term work-life equilibrium.

Keywords: *work-life balance, organizational support, flexible working hours, public sector, human resource management*

Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB) has become one of the most important issues in organizational research due to changes in employment structures, increasing reliance on technology, and shifting workforce expectations. Modern organizations operate in highly competitive, digitally connected, and performance-driven settings that require employees to handle demanding work responsibilities alongside personal and family commitments. As a result, employees are finding it harder to maintain a balance between their work and personal lives, making WLB a key factor in employee well-being, organizational effectiveness, and sustainable workforces (Wayne et al., 2017; Allen et al., 2015). The growing focus on WLB also reflects broader concerns about employee mental health, burnout, work-related stress, and declining psychological well-being in today's workplaces. Recent research stresses that WLB is a dynamic process influenced by organizational structures, job demands, management practices, and access to supportive resources (Chauhan and Rai, 2024). The rapid shift to digital workspaces

and the increase in flexible work arrangements following the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened interest in WLB. While technology and flexible practices offer more freedom and adaptability, they have also made it harder to separate work and personal life (Kniffin et al., 2021). Employees are increasingly expected to be available outside regular working hours through emails, messaging apps, and virtual communication, which extends work demands into their personal lives. Such trends complicate employees' ability to detach from work and maintain healthy work-life boundaries (Allen et al., 2015).

In public sector institutions, the significance of WLB is especially clear due to growing administrative complexities, increased accountability, and ongoing digital transformation. Public sector employees often work in bureaucratic environments with strict processes, performance monitoring, and substantial operational duties. These demands can be especially intense in research-oriented governmental sectors, where employees must support various activities under tight schedules and expectations. Support staff in these settings is vital for organizational continuity and effectiveness, yet they often face significant pressure, role demands, and heavy workloads that impact their work-life balance. Among the organizational factors influencing WLB, perceived organizational support, workload, and flexible working hours have gained considerable attention in human resource management and organizational behavior research. Perceived organizational support reflects employees' feelings that their contributions are valued and their well-being is considered (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Supportive organizations typically offer emotional backing, managerial understanding, flexibility, and fair treatment, helping employees manage work and personal responsibilities. On the other hand, excessive workload poses a major challenge that leads to stress, fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and conflicts between work and family life (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Flexible working hours, in contrast, are seen as an important resource that enhances employee autonomy and improves coordination between professional and personal duties (Allen et al., 2015).

Although many studies have looked at WLB in private sector and general public sector contexts, there is still limited empirical evidence focusing on support staff in Malaysian public sector settings. Additionally, the Malaysian public sector has unique socio-cultural, organizational, and policy factors that may shape employees' experiences of work-life balance differently from Western contexts commonly portrayed in the literature. Thus, this study aims to explore the relationships between perceived organizational support, workload, flexible working hours, and work-life balance among support employees in a Malaysian public sector department. The research objectives are to (1) investigate the link between perceived organizational support and work-life balance, (2) examine the relationship between workload and work-life balance, (3) determine how flexible working hours relate to work-life balance, and (4) identify the most significant predictor of work-life balance among these variables. This study adds to the growing body of WLB research in several ways. First, it expands existing WLB literature into a less explored public sector environment characterized by confidentiality, accountability, and digitally mediated work. Second, the study incorporates Segmentation Theory, Spillover Theory, and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model to map out how organizational resources and job demands affect employees' WLB experiences. Finally, the findings may help policymakers and HR practitioners design supportive organizational policies and flexible work practices that improve employee well-being and effectiveness in Malaysian public sector institutions.

Literature review

Theoretical foundations: Segmentation and spillover theories

Segmentation theory suggests that employees can keep their work and non-work domains separated, allowing them to manage their roles and reduce conflicts between them. In contrast, spillover theory indicates that emotions, stress, behaviors, and resources can flow between domains, having both positive and negative effects (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). In modern digital work environments, these views are no longer exclusive. Employees may try to maintain separation through boundary management while still dealing with spillover when work demands, digital connectivity, or family responsibilities overlap (Baum and Rau, 2024). This study also connects with the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, which distinguishes between job demands that drain energy and job resources that reduce strain and help achieve goals (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). In this model, workload is seen as a demand, while organizational support and flexible work hours are viewed as resources. This framework helps explain why some work conditions increase imbalances, while others allow employees to maintain work-life balance in high-pressure environments.

Work-life balance

Work-life balance is best viewed as a changing state where employees meet expectations in both work and personal roles without feeling drained or facing significant conflict. These include satisfaction with resource use, success in meeting role expectations, and how well work and non-work roles fit together (Wayne et al., 2017; Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). Recent reviews argue that work-life balance should be considered within a wider work-life integration framework, especially in virtual and hybrid settings where role boundaries are more fluid (Chauhan and Rai, 2024). Research has shown that work-life balance is linked to higher job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, better well-being, and more sustainable performance. In contrast, imbalance relates to fatigue, less recovery, and increased emotional strain, particularly when job demands are high and organizational support is low (Allen et al., 2013). These findings support treating work-life balance as an important outcome in studies on organizational support, workload, and flexible hours.

Organizational support and work-life balance

Perceived organizational support refers to employees' beliefs that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Support is shown through understanding from supervisors, family-friendly policies, fair treatment, development opportunities, and access to flexible options. Recent evidence suggests that family-friendly policies and workplace support have small to moderate positive effects on career, job, and work-family outcomes, and that support often has a greater impact than policies alone (Blom et al., 2025). In remote work settings, perceived organizational support has been positively linked to work-life balance and resilience, highlighting its importance in digital work environments (Ferreira and Gomes, 2023). When employees feel the organization cares about their welfare, they are more likely to feel secure in managing competing demands and experience less spillover from work to personal life, as perceived support may determine how well employees

maintain work performance without sacrificing personal well-being. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a relationship between perceived organizational support and work-life balance.

Workload and work-life balance

Workload refers to the amount, pace, and intensity of work employees must complete in a given time. In the JD-R model, workload is a key job demand because it consumes time, energy, and attention and can cause strain when recovery opportunities are limited (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Recent longitudinal studies show that high ICT workload leads to increased emotional exhaustion over time, especially when employees experience extended work availability and workplace stress (Zinke et al., 2024). This is crucial because digital work environments can turn workload into a constant demand that spreads beyond specific tasks. The connection between workload and work-life balance involves both time-based and strain-based spillover. When the workload is too heavy, employees spend more time on work tasks, leaving less time for family and personal responsibilities. Recent research on workplace flexibility shows that poorly structured work can lead to longer hours and increased effort in flexible settings, which might worsen balance instead of improving it (Baum and Rau, 2024). In demanding public service roles, a high workload is likely to act as a hindrance stressor, undermining balance and recovery. The evidence supports the expectation that a greater workload will weaken work-life balance. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: There is a relationship between workload and work-life balance.

Flexible working hours and work-life balance

Flexible working hours refer to arrangements that allow employees some control over their start and end times, daily schedules, or how they allocate hours throughout the week. Research consistently shows that temporal flexibility is particularly important for work-life balance because it helps employees better coordinate their work with household and personal obligations (Baum and Rau, 2024; Allen et al., 2013). A recent mini-review found a significant positive relationship between flexible working arrangements and employee outcomes, such as work-life harmony, job satisfaction, and reduced stress. The best results come when flexibility is implemented in a structured and supportive manner (Çivilidağ and Durmaz, 2024). Recent evidence demonstrates that temporal flexibility is more important than location flexibility for employees trying to balance work and personal life. The benefits of flexibility also depend on job autonomy and the ability to manage boundaries well (Baum and Rau, 2024). This suggests that flexible working hours are most likely to improve work-life balance when combined with reasonable workload expectations and a culture that does not penalize employees for using flexibility appropriately. In this study, flexible working hours are seen as a resource that can help employees align their work schedules with personal responsibilities and reduce spillover between areas. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: There is a relationship between flexible working hours and work-life balance.

Overall, the literature indicates that work-life balance is shaped by the interaction of organizational resources and job demands. Perceived organizational support helps employees manage competing role expectations and reduces strain spillover. Workload tends to erode balance through time pressure and exhaustion, and flexible working hours improve balance when they provide genuine temporal control rather than simply shifting work into non-work time. These patterns provide a clear rationale for testing the three hypotheses in the current study context (*Figure 1*).

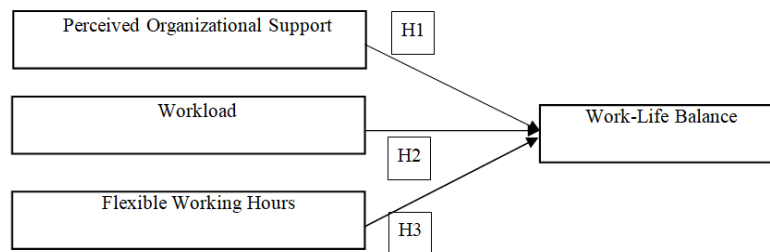


Figure 1. Research framework for predictors of work-life balance among supporting staff in a Malaysian public sector department.

Materials and Methods

This study used a quantitative, descriptive research design to examine how perceived organizational support, workload, and flexible working hours impact work-life balance among supporting staff in a Malaysian public sector department. A quantitative approach was suitable because the study aimed to systematically explore the relationships between the independent variables and work-life balance through statistical analysis (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The target population included supporting staff employed within the chosen department, with a sample of 110 respondents selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the study objectives and workplace experience. Data were collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire distributed electronically through Google Forms. The questionnaire was adapted from established tools validated in previous studies, divided into five sections covering demographic information, organizational support, workload, flexible working hours, and work-life balance. All items in the questionnaire were measured using a four-point Likert scale, where strongly disagree = 1 and strongly agree = 4. To ensure the reliability of the measurement scales, we conducted Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26. Descriptive statistics, such as percentages, frequencies, and means, described the respondents' demographic profiles and the studied variables. We conducted multiple regression analysis to find the influence of the independent variables on work-life balance and to test the proposed hypotheses. We assessed statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level (Hair et al., 2019).

Results and Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the 110 respondents were analyzed based on gender, age, marital status, occupational grade, and length of service within the department. The sample shows a mainly female workforce, making up 67.3%, while

males represent the remaining 32.7%. The age distribution reflects a mature demographic. The largest group is aged between 36 and 40 years, comprising 33 (30%) of the respondents, followed closely by those aged 40 and above at 26.4%. In contrast, younger employees aged 21 - 25 years make up the smallest group at 8.2%. A significant majority of the supporting staff are married, comprising 87 (79.1%) of the respondents, while 18.2% are single and 2.7% are divorced. The respondents mainly fall into mid-level supporting grades, with Grades 19 - 26 and Grades 29 - 40 each making up 44.5% of the sample. Experience levels are notably high, as 69.1% of the respondents have worked in the department for more than 10 years, suggesting a relatively experienced workforce. The majority of respondents are also in middle and higher employment grades. This is important because long tenure and familiarity with roles can influence how employees view demands, support, and boundary management in daily work. A reliability analysis was performed to check the internal consistency of the measurement tools used in the study (*Table 1*). The measurement scales showed strong internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values were 0.93 for organizational support, 0.87 for workload, 0.95 for flexible working hours, and 0.96 for work-life balance. These values indicate good to excellent reliability and support the use of the instruments for further analysis.

Table 1. Reliabilities (Cronbach Alpha) of the measures: (n=110).

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha
Perceived Organizational Support	5	.93
Workload	5	.87
Flexible Working Hours	5	.95
Work-Life Balance	6	.96

Descriptive statistics (*Table 2*) were generated to evaluate the central tendency and dispersion of the responses (measured on a scale of 1 to 4). The variable of workload recorded the highest mean score ($M = 2.46$), while flexible working hours recorded the lowest ($M = 1.74$). The mean for work-life balance was 2.30, and perceived organizational support scored a mean of 1.86. Based on the interpretation of mean scores for a four-point Likert scale, values between 1.00–1.99 indicate low levels, 2.00–2.99 indicate moderate levels, and 3.00–4.00 indicate high levels (Pallant, 2020). These patterns suggest that respondents generally perceived the organization as not highly supportive or highly flexible, while workload remained present but not overwhelmingly elevated. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which perceived organizational support, workload, and flexible working hours influenced work-life balance among supporting staff (*Table 3*). The regression model was statistically significant, with $R^2 = .404$ and $F = 23.954$, $p < .001$, indicating that perceived organizational support, workload, and flexible working hours jointly explained 40.4% of the variance in work-life balance. Among the predictors, perceived organizational support was the strongest unique contributor ($\beta = .379$, $p < .001$), followed by flexible working hours ($\beta = .348$, $p < .001$). Workload was not significant ($\beta = -.006$, $p = .935$). Overall, the findings indicate that work-life balance in this department is shaped more by organizational resources and flexibility than by workload alone.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (n=110).

Variables	Mean
Perceived Organizational Support	1.86
Workload	2.46

Flexible Working Hours	1.74
Work-Life Balance	2.30

Table 3. Regression analysis.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Perceived Organizational Support	0.457	0.107	0.379	4.279	0
Workload	-0.006	0.075	-0.006	-0.082	0.935
Flexible Working Hours	0.363	0.093	0.348	3.915	0
F-value			23.954		
Sig.			.000*		
Adjusted R2			0.387		
R2			0.404		

Perceived organizational support and work-life balance

The finding confirms a highly significant positive relationship between perceived organizational support and work-life balance ($\beta = .379$, $p < .001$). Thus, H1 is supported. The positive effect of perceived organizational support on work-life balance is consistent with recent evidence showing that perceived support and family-friendly organizational practices are associated with better work-family outcomes, greater well-being, and stronger employee adjustment. Recent research also indicates that support matters not only as a formal policy condition but also as a lived experience of care, access, and supervisory responsiveness, especially in boundary-permeable work environments (Blom et al., 2025; Ferreira and Gomes, 2023). The current results suggest that employees in the department may rely heavily on managerial understanding, welfare initiatives, and workplace responsiveness to maintain balance across work and non-work domains. This pattern is especially meaningful in a public sector department context where role demands are shaped by accountability and institutional pressure. The finding that perceived organizational support was the strongest predictor also aligns with the broader literature showing that support is more effective when it is experienced as tangible and accessible rather than merely symbolic. Recent meta-analytic work on family-friendly policies indicates that workplace supports are linked to career, job, and work-family outcomes, and that actual support conditions often matter more than policy statements alone (Blom et al., 2025). In this study, that interpretation is reinforced by the respondents' relatively low mean score for organizational support, suggesting that even modest improvements in support may have meaningful effects on work-life balance.

Workload and work-life balance

Workload did not show a significant relationship with work-life balance in the regression analysis, despite workload being a central job demand in theory ($\beta = -0.006$, $p = 0.935$), prompting the rejection of H2. This non-significant result suggests that workload may not have been experienced as the dominant source of imbalance for supporting staff in this department. The finding is consistent with the possibility that role experience, task clarity, and the distribution of duties across employee groups may buffer the effect of workload on WLB. In the study, the results also indicate that many workload-heavy responsibilities were concentrated more heavily among officers and supervisors, which may explain why supporting staff did not perceive workload as strongly disrupting their personal lives. Recent research supports the view that workload effects are context-sensitive rather than universally strong. High digital workload and constant connectivity are associated with exhaustion and impaired detachment,

especially when work demands extend into off-hours (Zinke et al., 2024). At the same time, the JD–R literature emphasizes that job demands do not operate in isolation; their effects depend on the availability of resources such as support, autonomy, and boundary control (Demerouti, 2025). The absence of a significant workload effect suggests that existing routines, experience, or role boundaries effectively mitigated typical workload pressure. While workload remains generally important, it was not the primary driver of WLB in this specific context.

Flexible working hours and work–life balance

Flexible working hours showed a significant positive relationship with work–life balance and emerged as the second strongest predictor after organizational support ($\beta = .348$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H3 is supported. This finding is consistent with recent reviews showing that temporal flexibility supports work-life harmony by giving employees greater control over when work is done and how it is coordinated with personal responsibilities (Baum and Rau, 2024; Çivilidağ and Durmaz, 2024). Flexible working hours are especially helpful when they enable employees to manage family responsibilities, appointments, commuting, and recovery time without reducing work performance. Recent work has found that workplace flexibility can enhance work–life outcomes, but the effect depends on whether employees can truly exercise control over their time rather than simply extending work into home life (Baum and Rau, 2024; Allen et al., 2015). In this study, respondents appear to have viewed flexible working hours as practically useful, particularly for managing family and personal commitments, which aligns with the positive beta coefficient and significant correlation obtained in the analysis. The result suggests that well-implemented flexibility can act as a meaningful organizational resource in public sector settings, even where formal work expectations remain high. Overall, the findings indicate that work–life balance in this Malaysian public sector department is shaped more strongly by organizational resources than by workload alone. Perceived organizational support was the most influential factor, while flexible working hours also played a clear positive role. The non-significant workload result suggests that workload effects may be more context-dependent than assumed and may be moderated by experience, job distribution, or organizational routines. This pattern is consistent with contemporary research showing that the work-life interface is shaped by the interaction of demands, resources, and boundary conditions rather than by any single factor in isolation (Chauhan and Rai, 2024; Allen et al., 2015).

Conclusion

While excessive job demands can generally reduce employees' ability to sustain healthy role integration, this study found that routine workloads did not significantly disrupt the equilibrium of supporting staff, indicating a highly normalized task distribution. These findings are particularly important within public-sector and research-oriented organizational environments where employees frequently encounter demanding workloads and evolving work expectations. Strengthening supervisory care and ensuring access to usable flexibility are likely to improve employee balance more effectively than focusing on workload reduction alone. These can ensure that employees maintain harmony between their professional demands and personal lives, driving job satisfaction, enhancing productivity, and decisively promoting work-life equilibrium during challenging life stages.

Acknowledgement

This research is self-funded.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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