

THE MODERATING EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND HOTEL EMPLOYEES' FEARS

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Original scientific paper

Received 31 October 2021

Revised 13 March 2022

13 April 2022

Accepted 22 April 2022

<https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.28.1.8>

Abstract

Purpose - The hotel environment has changed dramatically during the COVID-19 and has brought many negative social consequences for employees. Among them are employee fears of COVID -19. One of the coping strategies for the consequences of COVID -19 is the Work-Life Balance (WLB). This research mainly examined the influence of WLB on employees' fears of the threat of COVID-19. The objectives were: (1) Evaluating to what extent the hotel managers practice WLB amid COVID-19; (2) Describing the relationship between WLB and hotel employees' fears; (3) Identifying the moderating effect of COVID-19 in the relationship between WLB and hotel employees' fears.

Design/methodology - A multiple hotel case study with an online questionnaire (n=370) complemented with seven semi-structured interviews was applied with hotel managers in Egypt.

Findings - The results showed that WLB reduced hotel employees' fear of COVID -19. COVID -19 positively moderated the relationship between WLB and employee fears.

Originality - The value of this research expands our knowledge regarding the social outcomes of COVID-19 among hotel staff by offering empirical evidence of the WLB mechanism in reducing fears of COVID-19 depending on social support theory and theory of risk. Critical implications for the hotel managers are highlighted to understand the inevitability of WLB initiatives to overcome staff perceived fears.

Keywords COVID-19, Work-Life Balance, Fears, Social Support Theory, Theory of Risk

1. INTRODUCTION

Hotels are now experiencing one of the first global collective shocks that the world has not seen before. It has been the first of its kind for ages and maybe hotels have not experienced such a severe event before (Sharma et al. 2021). The media says it is the Coronavirus pandemic or the COVID-19 threat. The number of deaths due to the Coronavirus has exceeded two million cases and tens of thousands of deaths are still recorded daily (World Health Organization 2021). Perhaps, when thinking about the Covid-19 threat, the state of the psychological aspect of employees, not to mention the combined threat, does not come to mind because the focus is on the pandemic's economic consequences in terms of business loss and performance ratios deficiencies. Even when discussing the implications of this corruption, the spotlight was on digital

technology and its challenges (Buhalis and Moldavska 2021), while social initiatives related to human resources occupied only a tiny fraction of the academic debates (He et al. 2021). Several negative feelings were witnessed during Covid-19 in hotels (Naeem 2021): of them employee perceived fears (Degerman, Flinders and Johnson 2020; Doshi et al. 2020), anxiety and phobia (Kaya and Karatepe 2020; Taylor et al. 2020; Agarwal 2021). Employee fears of Covid-19 are considered negative psychological emotions that come out of control (Xu et al. 2020). Millions of hotel staff have faced this threat in different ways (e.g., job security, health problems, death cases and the danger of loss) (Mertens et al. 2020; He et al. 2021). There are many ramifications related to employee fears of COVID-19 (Karatepe, Saydam and Okumus 2021). It could decrease staff innovation, performance and wellbeing (Sharma et al. 2021). Therefore, urgent business recovery in the hotel industry is essential (Jones and Comfort 2020; Denizci Guillet and Chu 2021; Yacoub and ElHajjar 2021).

The balance between personal and work life is one of those initiatives that this study mainly focuses on as a mechanism that could help alleviate the fear feelings among hotel employees from the Coronavirus outcomes. The Work-Life Balance (WLB) concept usually refers to corporation initiatives of caring for employees to better integrate their job responsibilities with their life and family duties (Kaya and Karatepe 2020). Therefore, WLB was scrutinized empirically in this study to reduce employee fears of Covid-19, following the calls of previous research (Schieman et al. 2021). It was evidenced that WLB is increasingly prevalent in contemporary HR research (Zheng et al. 2015; Thakur and Bhatnagar 2017) than in the hotel context until the last decade (Deery and Jago 2015). It might be because there is no single agreed definition of what constitutes the WLB concept and its related practices (Zheng et al. 2015; Kumari 2021). Therefore, this article aimed to study the influence of WLB on employees' fears of the threat of COVID-19 using a mixed-methods approach with two different data collection methods to delineate this link in the Egyptian hotel context.

Regarding the research contributions, this study is among the first studies of the hotel sector based in one of the developing countries: Egypt, providing empirical evidence of the moderation effect of COVID-19 on the relationship between WLB and employee fears of COVID-19. Theoretically, this study combined the theory of risk (TR) (Pollatsek and Tversky, 1970) and social support theory (SST) (Hobfoll et al. 1990) to predict and interpret employee perceived fears of COVID-19. Few studies have used these theories to forecast adverse consequences; thus, limited explanations involving HR and the attitudinal perspective significantly elucidate these emotions, especially during the COVID-19. This study also offered a methodology to test and confirm the nexus between WLB and hotel staff fears of COVID-19 through the COVID-19's moderator using the developed hypothesized model. The model is then validated through interviews with hotel key managers. Lastly, the study findings offer hotel managers insights into practising WLB precisely during/after COVID-19 waves.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theory background and the development of hypotheses

The current study combined both the theory of risk (TOR) (Pollatsek and Tversky, 1970) and social support theory (SST) (Hobfoll et al. 1990) as a base for developing the conceptual framework (Figure1). Regarding TOR, risk hypothesis events clarify employees' different choices when confronted with vulnerability about what has to come. Ordinarily, a circumstance where threat assumption might be applied includes various potential conditions of the world, various potential choices, and a result for every mix of state and choice. The TOR theory predicts a choice as per the dispersion of outcomes it will deliver. It is significant for individuals who settle on choices whose achievement relies on the transfer of vulnerabilities over the globe subsequently (Pollatsek and Tversky, 1970).

The initial phase in applying TOR to an event determines the risk that affects individual choices. The second phase considers what the results following the risk are. The third phase is related to risk dispersion (Pollatsek and Tversky, 1970). Bearing in mind the basic assumptions of TOR, one could argue that when hotel employees are worried about their career future during COVID-19, the outcome may be an event/risk perception followed by a sense of emotional fear. Moreover, when hotel staff is forced to stay at their homes due to COVID-19 precautions, it could boost negative psychological fears of COVID-19. Ultimately, it could reflect depression and self-isolation (Nisar et al. 2021). Notably, the SST is a centre-reach theory that centres on connections and the communications inside those connections. The significance of social links in adding to wellbeing, health, and prosperity has been the focal point of examination by researchers and experts across many social science disciplines. The SST is frequently utilised broadly, typically indicating any interaction through which social connections promote wellbeing and prosperity (Hobfoll et al. 1990). According to SST, HR initiatives in hotels (e.g., WLB) are a vital source influencing staff and organisational assets that may transfer into HR through staff perceptions. He et al. (2021) confirmed the relationship between employees' perceptions of trust as a mediator factor of the impact of sustainable HR in helping employees defeat their negative emotions of COVID-19. Accordingly, this research argued that WLB practices could stimulate interpersonal justice and trust among hotel staff by providing considerable support and care, protecting individual resources, and decreasing negative fear feelings. Staff fears of external threats are psychological emotions of uncertainty and vulnerability due to undesirable occasions (Lebel 2017).

2.2. The imperative to practice WLB in hotels

WLB is used in literature to list a set of practices that contribute to achieving greater harmony between daily responsibilities and the tasks of the functional aspects (Zheng et al. 2015; Johari et al. 2018; Talukder et al. 2018), and the personal or family responsibilities (Talukder et al. 2018). One of the most pressing problems resulting from losing this balance is the conflict between work and family responsibilities. This conflict

is a clash of roles. The duties of work and family roles are mutually incompatible, and as a result, participation in one area becomes more complex than the other (Xu et al. 2020). The literature indicates WLB pacts with themes (e.g., social and personal requirements, family time, group efficiency, role clarity, job description or job design, and time controlling) (Bhumika 2020). Therefore, the WLB is a concern for employees and hoteliers who have to curb its negative consequences: low morale, low productivity, and performance (Meira and Hancer 2021). Consequently, it results in high industry turnover and many staff psychological impacts. However, hotel employees live with the COVID-19, threatening them continuously, and many fears are still witnessed worldwide (Yacoub and ElHajjar 2021).

The hotel environment has distinctive characteristics that operate throughout the year without interruption. It is characterised by intense operation and staff occupancy, physically different shifts, emotionally stressful work, erratic work schedules, unpaid vacations, and replacing high-paid employees for low wages (Wong and Ko 2009; Zaki et al. 2013). Paid employees are one of Egypt's significant hotel crisis management consequences, posing a more substantial threat to the employees' WLB. It is assumed that WLB varies according to the job standard required to deal directly or indirectly with the hotel customers. The greater the customer-employee interaction, the more significant WLB practices are (Luu 2021). Consequently, there is a vital requisite to stimulate WLB to coincide with the unique nature of hotels.

2.3. Employee fears

When an external threat occurs (e.g., COVID-19), negative emotions of fear are associated. Employee fears of risk or threats mean one of the negative emotional moods. It has not come suddenly. Organizations need to deal with this stress predictor before being maladaptive (Lebel 2016). The hostel industry has a unique environment, so that many fears could occur, especially in crisis times. Chen, Zou and Chen (2022) differentiated between two types of employee fears in the US hospitality institutions: the fear of losing jobs and the fear of approaching the COVID-19. In other words, the first type of fear is considered an economic stressor resulting from job insecurity (Kloutsiniotis et al. 2022), while the second is an occupational (Mertens et al. 2020). Recently, He et al. (2021) recommended the application of sustainable HRM to reduce the fear of COVID-19 in the Chinese hospitality context. While Kloutsiniotis et al. (2022) further advocated for an urgent transformational leadership style to cope with the adverse outcomes of COVID-19 and overcome anxiety and personal stressors in the Greek hotels.

2.4. The relationship between WLB and employee fears from COVID-19

Individuals are exhausted by the late Industrial Revolution by working many hours daily. WLB first showed up in the United Kingdom in the 80s as a board in the Women's Liberation Movement (Agarwal and Lenka 2015). The development pushed for flexible timetables and maternity leave for women. Yet, while men were socially unhampered to seek their professional objectives without stressing over housekeeping and family

matters, working women were relied upon to work and keep up obligations regarding housekeeping and family matters (Bhumika 2020). During the 80s, a regular refrain brought up this conspicuous work-life awkwardness asking could women in the work environment genuinely have everything. Despite voicing these requirements, women experienced little help or development toward WLB (Ma et al. 2021).

Today, WLB has consolidated both the issues and methodologies focused on employee successful time usage. It has likewise extended to incorporate burnout counteraction and controlling stress and anxiety. Workers today need better time the executive's abilities to invest energy with their families. Nowadays, there is an expanding accentuation in making WLB more sexually unbiased (Kaya and Karatepe 2020). Given that the hotel business shall work daily without stopping and is of high dependence on social interaction intensity for guest service provision, there is a greater need for WLB (Deery and Jago 2015). The current literature on WLB shows that work, family, and personal issues, increasingly predominant in contemporary organisational research, have received little concern in tourism research until 2010. While there is no single agreed meaning of what constitutes a WLB practice for hotels, the term usually refers to many HR initiatives (Adame, Caplliure and Miquel 2016; Panda and Sahoo 2017).

The practical usage of WLB indicators has been gradually perceived as a critical prerequisite to service organisations to assure commitment and trust (Meira and Hancer 2021). Likewise, it is settled around the world that by offering WLB benefits, organisations can attract well-free disordered staff and decrease work-life fighting between employees (Agarwal 2021). Employee involvement has been considered a vital outcome of WLB in the hotel industry. Staff involvement can be accomplished through focused WLB practices (Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer 2017). Therefore, WLB reduces staff expectations to leave jobs, prevents the fears of job insecurity, and drives firm performance. The more associated an employee is with their work, colleagues, and community, they will likely remain and stay in the job. Furthermore, these practices upgrade work-life quality, job design, and employee abilities, enabling satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, decreasing any negative emotions such as fears of threats (Baptiste et al. 2017; Melo et al. 2018).

Egypt now witnessed the fourth level of COVID-19, accompanied by a high level of acute fear among the Egyptian employees. Employee fears of threats denote one of the negative emotional feelings. It has not come suddenly. Usually, it reaches beyond the organisation's control (Lebel 2016, 2017). As with the COVID-19 case, performance and profitability descents were observed (Nisar et al. 2021). Employee fears are associated with the notion that many hotels do not cope with this vital risk and are obliged to close and retire their staff due to social distance precautions and government lockdowns. Many hotel chains are forced to close due to COVID-19 (Karatepe, Saydam and Okumus 2021). It becomes imperative to overcome such negative feelings among hotel employees. Thus, this research is settled to argue for the first hypothesis as follows:

H1. WLB is negatively related to hotel staff fears of COVID-19.

2.5. The moderation effect of COVID-19's strength

According to Hobfoll et al. (1990), the external environment causes social support changes to transform into private sources. Social support and the surrounding community have interactive effects on people. Many scholars recommended studying the moderation effects between traditional or green HR practices and their impact on employees to fulfil the potential gaps between work and academia (He et al. 2021; Carlisle et al. 2021).

Following the developed measure of the COVID-19 strength in the Egyptian hotel context (Zaki.2022), COVID-19 strength is a popular measure of the direct effects of the COVID-19 by integrating the disruption criticality and novelty level of this crisis (Bundy et al. 2017). The more strength of COVID-19' risk in hotels, the more damaging it impacts their employees' thoughts, feelings, and fears (He et al. 2021).

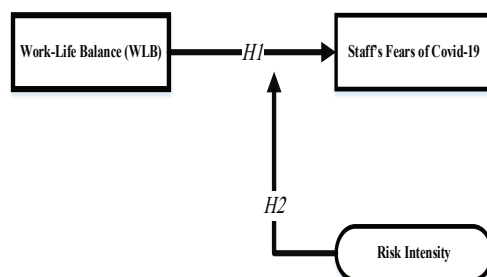
As far as the COVID-19 pandemic is concerned in Egypt, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Board's consultations regarding Egypt's current situation for 2021 showed that COVID-19 has inflicted significant damage on the Egyptian economy and led to an unprecedented economic downturn. Statistics indicate a contraction of GDP by 8.4% by the end of 2020, the most significant economic downturn in Egypt since the famous 19th January revolution (World Bank 2020). The country's fiscal deficit and public debt level increased sharply in 2020, with estimates of the central public debt rising to nearly 77% of GDP, while unemployment rates jumped to 15.1%. The IMF has predicted that Egypt's GDP growth will recover to 4.8% in 2021 due to COVID-19 impacts on the economy beginning to recede (Mostafa, Gamal and Wafiq 2021).

It is witnessed that many hotel companies in Egypt during the disruption peak of COVID-19 were forced to either close or lay off many employees. Many guest bookings, conferences, and daily events were cancelled due to lockdown decisions (Salem et al. 2021). Therefore, this poses a serious threat to employees. They were afraid of this critical risk and requested recovery if infected. In this regard, dealing with COVID-19 has become one of the most significant problems for all hospitality institutions (Baum et al. 2020; Choe, Kim and Hwang 2021). Thus, this research is settled to argue for the second hypothesis as follows:

H2. The COVID-19's strength moderates the relationship between WLB and staff fears of COVID-19.

Figure 1 shows the proposed model constructs and the related hypotheses. Given the aim of this article, WLB is sought to reduce the hotel staff perceived fears through the moderation role of the COVID-19's strength.

Figure 1: The proposed moderated framework



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and population

Chain hotels based in Cairo, Egypt, are selected as the sampling frame for this study. Cairo has 34 deluxe American and French international chains (EHA 2020). Twenty hotels were purposively selected from the hotel population. The multiple case study strategy uses mixed methods research to gather perceptions from different perspectives (Crotty 2003). The target study subject is the hotel staff working in a customer-contact department or back of the house since they fear the high-expected turnover level due to COVID-19 (Knight et al. 2020; Yacoub and ElHajjar 2021). An online questionnaire in the first phase was used from March 2020 until May 2020 to achieve the first objective. A personal connection approach with hotel managers facilitated the data collection. Hotel managers were provided with the questionnaire link for research and then were asked to approach their staff to share and distribute the questionnaire due to COVID-19 restrictions. Written and verbal consent forms were collected from respondents. Three hundred seventy valid questionnaires were received by the cut-off date and considered suitable for further analysis following the rule of 10 observations needed for each survey indicator (Kline 2005). As the questionnaire contained 23 observed indicators, the 370 sample size is valid for SEM analysis (Hair et al. 2016).

3.2. Research instruments

As with the first instrument's case, the questionnaire comprises 27 questions on three main factors (Appendix). It takes approximately 35 minutes to be completed. It has granted participants the right to be fully informed about the research rights and privacy. Confirmed voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from participation have been highlighted. Most of the questionnaire questions (Arabic and English versions) used close-ended and open-ended questions. Follow-up emails and telephone calls were used to trigger participation. Piloting was performed on a sample of academics to test the questionnaire instrument. Pilot test outcomes guaranteed a complete understanding of all agreed respondents to the research variables.

The questionnaire involved four sections. The first section encloses a cover letter to clarify the purpose of the survey, essential contact information, and general directions, followed by five questions about the demographic data (age, gender, address, qualifications, and department). The second section was designed to get the respondent's perceptions of WLB (12 items). It was developed based on reliable and valid scales of previous literature with some wording amendments to match the research goals (Wong and Ko 2009; Zheng et al. 2015; Karkoulian, Srour and Sinan 2016; Zaki 2017; Cain, Busser and Kang 2018; Talukder et al. 2018; Kaya and Karatepe 2020; Xu et al. 2020; Hjalmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir 2021). The third section was designed to get the respondent's perceptions of staff's fears of COVID-19. Staff's fears measures (5 variables) were adapted (Lebel 2016, 2017; Naeem 2021; Sharma et al. 2021). Respondents were asked how frequently they felt fear during COVID-19. The fourth section contained six variables of risk strength (Zhou, Zhang and Yu Xuan 2020; Zaki 2022). All research constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale: 1= (strongly disagree) and 5= (strongly agree).

In the second phase, seven semi-structured interviews with hotel managers and HR managers based on the snowballing technique (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2012) were mediated using *GoogleMeet* to validate and confirm the research model's relationships and achieve the second, third research objectives. It was assured anonymity during these interviews.

3.3. Data analysis

Questionnaire analysis was performed by building and testing the measurement and structural models (Hair et al. 2016). The PLS-SEM was used to test dimensions and investigate the relationship between model variables. During the second phase of this research, the semi-structured interviews were coded and then transcribed using the NVIVO tool. Three themes were then developed.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Survey findings

It was decided to use PLS-SEM to test our data. PLS-SEM is an advanced analysis technique used to predict the research dimensions. It is a flexible approach to building and testing the research model since there are fewer requirements than other methods regarding the sample size and normal distribution (Hair et al. 2016). Therefore, the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping techniques were implemented to check factor loadings, path coefficients, and significance levels. The normality of the data was judged with histograms, kurtosis, and skewness, as recommended by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012). The measurement model was considered, followed by the assessment of the structural model.

4.1.1. Sample demographics

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	100	27
	Male	270	73
Age	18-25	60	16
	26-45	280	76
	45	30	8
Qualification	Intermediate	90	24
	University	233	63
	Higher education	47	13
Department	Front of the house	290	78
	Back of the house	80	22
Total		370	100

Table 1 showed that out of 370 participants, 73% were male, and 27% were female. Results show that most respondents were 26–45 years old, 76%. While 16% were younger (18-25 years old), 8% were more than 45. Regarding staff qualifications, 63% of employees had university degrees, 24% fell in intermediate education, and 13% with higher education degrees. Regarding the working sector, 78% of respondents were employed in the front of the house sections. At the same time, the remaining 22% came from the back of the house.

4.1.2. Measurement model assessment

The descriptive statistics and correlations between the model variables were first performed as presented in Table 2. The correlation matrix showed a negative and significant relationship between WLB and employees' fears ($r = -0.250$, $\beta < 0.05$).

Table 2: Correlation matrix

Factors correlation	Mean	WLB	Staff's Fears	Covid-19's strength
WLB	3.735	1.00		
Staff's Fears	3.215	-0.250**	1.00	
Covid-19's strength	3.51	0.451**	0.611**	1.00

Note: $p^{**} < 0.05$.

The measurement model was judged, and convergent validity was guaranteed using factor loadings, Average Variance Extraction (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR).

Table 3 showed factor loadings exceeded the cut-off value of 50%, and items with the lowest factor loadings were excluded. Similarly, all CR values exceeded 0.7, which is suitable. All AVE values exceeded the recommended value of 0.5. Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) were also assured that no ‘*common method bias*’ exists as their values were less than 3 (Kock 2015).

Table 3: **Convergent validity**

Construct	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	VIF	AVE
WLB	W1	0.80	0.82	0.90	2.7	0.70
	W2	0.82				
	W3	0.71				
	W4	0.96				
	W5	0.89				
	W6	0.75				
	W7	0.68				
	W8	0.90				
	W9	0.72				
	W10	0.81				
	W11	0.93				
	W12	0.61				
Fears	F1	0.71	0.90	0.78	2.9	0.58
	F 2	0.62				
	F 3	0.98				
	F 4	0.76				
	F 5	0.68				
Covid-19's strength	I1	0.72	0.83	0.89	2.7	0.75
	I2	0.79				
	I3	0.89				
	I4	0.84				
	I5	0.69				
	I6	0.65				

Regarding the discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker formula and the HTMT ratio (Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt 2015) were used to calculate it (Hair et al. 2016). Table 4 displayed discriminant validity was also achieved.

Table 4: **Discriminant validity**

Fornell-Larcker Measures			
	WLB	Staff Fears	Covid-19's strength
WLB	0.73		
Staff Fears	0.29	0.70	
Covid-19's strength	0.26	0.19	0.72
HTMT Measures			
	WLB	Staff Fears	Covid-19's strength
WLB			
Staff Fears	0.44		
Covid-19's strength	0.38	0.19	

4.1.3. Structural model assessment and hypothesis testing

The structural model was tested after the assessment of the measurement model. Path coefficients, *t*-values, and standard errors showed the model's significance. The first hypothesis was tested for main effects using the bootstrapping technique in Smart PLS. The direct hypotheses were then empirically tested (Table 5) using a critical ratio ($t > 1.64$; $P < 0.05$). H1 proposed that WLB decreases staff's fears of COVID-19. Table 4 supported H1 since $\beta = -0.272$, $\beta < 0.01$.

The moderating effect of COVID-19 risk intensity was tested using an Excel tool (Figure 2) based on the bootstrapping technique. Results highlighted WLB was negatively related to staff's fears of COVID-19 and significant ($\beta = -0.272$, $\beta < 0.01$), while the strength level of COVID-19 positively affected staff's fears of COVID-19 ($\beta = 0.308$, $\beta < 0.01$). Table 4 also presented the interaction effect (WLB × Covid-19's strength) negatively impacted staff's fears of COVID-19 ($\beta = -0.214$, $\beta < 0.01$), which means that COVID-19's strength had a negative moderation role on staff's fears of COVID-19.

COVID-19 risk intensity played a significant moderating role (Figure 2) between WLB and staff's fears of COVID-19. The stronger the COVID-19 risk intensity, the more influential the negative impact of WLB on staff fears. Therefore, COVID-19 risk intensity strengthens the negative relationship between WLB and staff fears. As a result, H2 was strongly supported.

Figure 2: The moderation effect of COVID-19 intensity

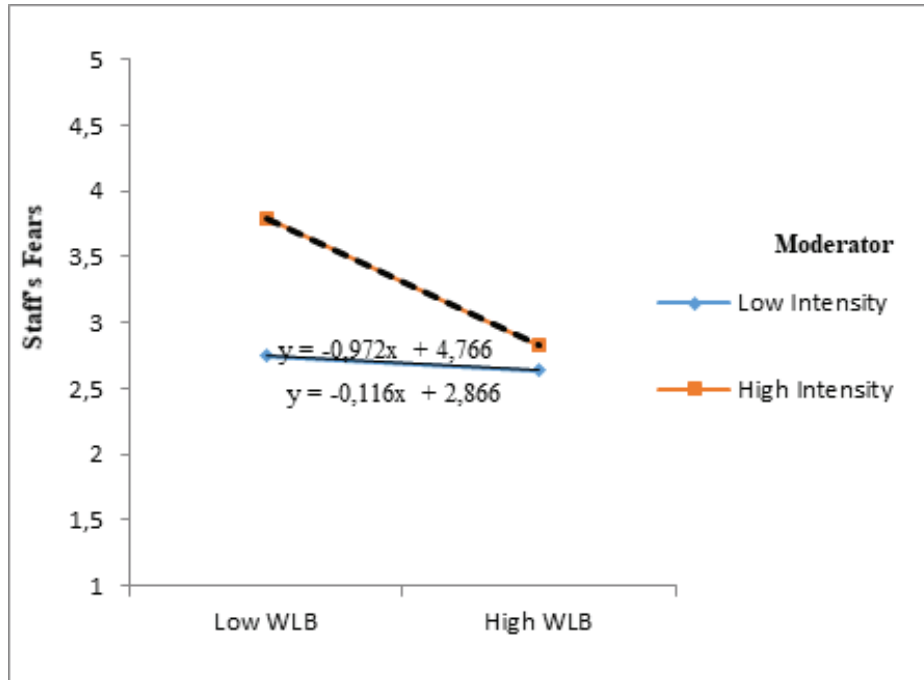


Table 5: Path analysis

H	Relationships	Beta	t-value	Lower level	Upper level	Decision
H.1	WLB→ Fears	-0.272**	4.16	-0.17	-0.34	Supported
	Moderator	0.308 **	4.08	0.22	0.41	
H.2	WLB→- Covid-19' strength	-0.214**	4.11	-0.11	-0.19	Supported

4.2. Interviews findings

This research's second phase is qualitative, based on interviews to validate the survey results. A total of seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with hotel managers (H1, H2, H3) and HR managers (H4-H7) in Cairo. Interviews were carried out in Arabic and then translated into English. Interviews were coded as follows (H1:H7), and their names were kept anonymous to ensure confidentiality. Overall, three main themes emerged. These themes offered additional confirmation and understanding of the relationships between the model's dimensions.

4.2.1. Theme one: WLB in Egyptian hotels during COVID-19

WLB is still a novel issue under research in the hotel context. There are many initiatives under the WLB umbrella. Some of them are related to modern HR practices on one side. On the other side, many scholars merged between WLB and HR sustainability. The level of WLB's training in hotels has a remarkable dual impact on the employee work environment and daily life routine (Cain, Busser and Kang 2018; Kaya and Karatepe 2020). During crises, the hotel industry struggled to maintain a low level of staff turnover. Due to lockdown decisions and the COVID-19 outbreak, many hotels are forced to close and expulsion their employees (Yacoub and ElHajjar 2021).

The following interviewees' statements supplemented the previous literature as follows:

As a big chain company worldwide, some drawbacks hindered our progress due to the global pandemic of Coronavirus in this hotel. Many bookings were cancelled, and most indoor and outdoor festivals were stoped (H6).

Like many other industries, the work-life balance can be a crucial complication for staff. Our corporate values guide us in building a skilled and more experienced team equipped with the emotional and intellectual skills to realm their work-life balance and stay healthy, fulfilling their occupation. Our commitment to staff growth through vocational training means that when you become one of our team, you do so with the confidence to embrace our hotel's strengths and overcome its future drawbacks (H2).

Our hotel strengthens the relationship between our staff. Although most of us stayed home due to COVID-19, I could not cut any staff wages. As you know, hotel staff is our niche. We searched for many work alternatives to compensate for our loss. I was lucky to present our corporate initiatives related to staff wellbeing and WLB practices to many experts in the Middle East. We do not choose to have our staff safe or decrease their duties to the minimum (H3).

What concerns me is the continuity of preserving our employment, especially the first and supervisory line, and the stability of the production wheel at work in the various hotel departments. It can be achieved by implementing innovative ideas in the community and transforming the equation from a harmful problem or crisis to positive energy. These actions have been considered inside this hotel. We still deliver staff training programs to support them and stay safe (H1).

4.2.2. Theme two: Staff's fears from COVID-19 in hotels

It is well documented that WLB helped overcome any fears about potential risks. WLB strengthens staff beliefs about their organisational capabilities and wellbeing (He et al. 2021). Balancing between life duties and responsibilities and the paid work generates safe feelings and confidence (Cain, Busser and Kang 2018). The following statements confirmed this feedback as follows:

Most of the staff are still unvaccinated. We always adopt the precautions measures of the ministry of health, like wearing masks and being on social distancing. However, fears of being infected are always a matter of doubt. As the HR manager, I was forced to hear any regulations from the top management. Many salaries were minimised, and casual workers were forbidden (H7).

Being a staff member of a susceptible industry with high turnover percentages, external threats like COVID-19 pose many dangers. I am too afraid that this virus to catch me or that this company will fire me out (H6).

Two key factors affecting the balance between our staff's work and health in hotels. The first is the basic idea of work-based shifts. For the most part, Restaurants work well external the standard all day. Accordingly, they need staff to be accessible for shifts that may begin later. Shifts' work is a two-sided deal. You can frequently take as much work as you need to set aside cash and stay occupied. On the flipside, irregular working hours require a degree of adaptability in your own life to guarantee social responsibilities. Secondly, serving liquor, as alcohol is promptly accessible at whatever point, pressure should strike (H5).

4.2.3. Theme three: The relationship between WLB and COVID-19's intensity

COVID-19's intensity increased the negative impacts of WLB on employees' fear. It has been reported that the surrounding environment influences employees (Karatepe, Saydam and Okumus 2021). COVID-19 intensity strengthened the negative relationship between WLB and staff fear of COVID-19 (Choe, Kim and Hwang 2021). As an extreme intense risk occurs, employees become more eager for care and support from their institutions (He et al. 2021). The greatest disruptive and critical was the COVID-19 pandemic; the most significant negative were the effects of WLB on doubts of the external risks (Baum et al. 2020). The following statements confirmed this feedback as follows:

Like any hotel manager, I advised staying aware of my work-life balance. If our staff become too embroiled in the hotel work, it could negatively affect their relationships, family responsibilities, and pleasure. Employee burnout is not the case in this hotel. We encourage many decent work transformation strategies as some jobs have been scheduled remotely due to COVID-19. We see a significant loss in our profit, although we are still regularly paying our payrolls (H2).

Due to corporate social responsibility, we are forced to invest more in staff capabilities. We contributed voluntarily to the community to keep staff healthy. We strongly advise them to wear masks and stay socially distanced (H4).

We practice WLB initiatives during COVID-19. WLB stops burnout, reduces stress and anxiety, and helps refocus on job duties. You can ask them about the hotel activities that make them happy and satisfied. We are confident about this hotel since we are one family fighting COVID-19. This hotel's core standard is away from stress and anxiety as we support and provide well care to staff (H5).

5. DISCUSSIONS and CONCLUSIONS

The survey findings showed that all hypothesised relationships are supported. PLS-SEM output revealed that the relationship between WLB and the negative impacts of COVID-19 is more significant since $\beta = -0.272$, $\beta < 0.01$. This result is agreed with (He et al. 2021). Moreover, COVID-19's strength showed a significant moderated effect between WLB and staff's fears of COVID-19. The stronger the COVID-19, the more influential the negative impact of WLB on staff fears ($\beta = 0.308$, $\beta < 0.01$). Accordingly, the moderation effect was significant. Moreover, the findings of the interviews confirmed a significant relationship between WLB and staff fears of COVID-19. Therefore, this result is agreed with (Sharma et al. 2021).

This research explored the moderation effect of the COVID-19's strength in the hotel industry on the relationship between WLB and employee fears of COVID-19. Consistent with the literature, WLB influenced hotel employees' psychological and social aspects (Luu 2021). The research gap is a plethora of research on the outcomes of staff fear in their career following COVID-19 (Naeem 2021). However, practices that could decrease or overcome this fear have been ignored. Previous research investigated the relationship between HR initiatives and employees' attitudes/behaviours during normal working conditions (Chiang, Birtch and Kwan 2010; Wong and Chan 2020; Ma et al. 2021), but rarely any research could suggest a mechanism to deter staff fears during COVID-19 (He et al. 2021). Therefore, this study answered how to overcome staff fear of COVID-19 through practising the WLB in hotels.

6. IMPLICATIONS

COVID-19's research gets more interest globally as it is considered a universal event / risk. However, the hotel sector still lagged in healing solutions to COVID-19 related social outcomes. This study explored how WLB affected hotel staff fears of COVID-19 in Egypt. It is concluded that hotels could manage their employees' fears by practising WLB during crises such as COVID-19. When COVID-19 becomes stronger, hotel staff fears increase. Hence, this research confirmed that practising and activating the initiatives of WLB reduced the negative impacts of COVID-19 on employees.

6.1. Theoretical implications

The proposed framework was highlighted to explore the moderation effect of WLB in times of crisis (e.g., COVID-19) with the hotel employees' fears of COVID-19. Therefore, this study contributes to the contemporary HR literature and COVID-19 research. Secondly, this research's contribution implies expanding our knowledge regarding the SST and TR theories by providing empirical evidence of the moderation effect of COVID-19's intensity on the relationship between WLB and staff fears amid COVID-19. Accordingly, this study predicts and interprets employees' fears of COVID-19 threats. Few studies have used these theories to forecast adverse consequences. Thus few explanations

involving HR and the attitudinal perspective considerably elucidate these emotions, especially during COVID-19.

This study found that hotel staff fears during COVID-19 risk could be controlled in case of better WLB practising. According to SST, hotels could offer a sense of attachment to their staff (Hobfoll et al. 2018). Accordingly, the external risks could be an issue of control. WLB sends an encouraging message to hotel employees, supporting them in overcoming risks such as negative COVID-19 impacts. Notably, this study coincided with the basic assumptions of TOR. Since hotel employees are worried about their job future during COVID-19, the result may be an event/risk perception followed by fears. As a result, this study explained the effect of WLB on overcoming employees' fears regarding COVID-19. This point of view fills the gap in the current hospitality literature.

6.2. Practical implications

Hotel managers should help their employees beat fears of outside risks during crises and pandemics. The hotel business's success relies upon populace versatility and ongoing service quality; thus, the lockdown and social separating arrangements during COVID-19 had an immediate and negative effect. The emergency projects of government were not accessible, dependable, or successful in every case. Furthermore, individual assets and resources were lacking and too powerless to consider dealing with the COVID-19's social outcomes (Bhumika 2020). Consequently, hotel managers should encourage their staff to practice WLB to overcome fears during and in the repercussions of any potential risk.

6.3. Research limitations and future directions

The study is focused only on hotel staff as the primary respondent. Future research should include other tourism staff as well. Second, exploring the respondents' age or gender impact on the WLB notion would be worthwhile. Gender variation could be a matter when practising WLB in hotels. Future research should compare sector-type results to explore other relationships with WLB. Furthermore, the generalizability of these data will be restricted because this study context is only based on an accessible sample from the hotel population in Cairo, albeit it could be a merit if it were replicated in another region.

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APPENDIX

Measures	Mean	SD	Kurto- sis	Skew- ness
WLB practices				
W1: I have to change my life plans because of hotel work stress	4.03	1.119	2.11	-1.89
W2: I could not get entertained with my family during my offs times due to my work in this hotel	3.66	.875	1.59	-1.02
W3: My ability of family responsibilities gradually decreases due to my work here in this hotel	3.85	.912	1.23	-1.09
W4: I often work late or at weekends to deal with paperwork without interruptions	3.69	.866	1.29	-0.99
W5: My family are missing out on my input, either because I don't see enough of them/am too tired from my job	3.84	1.093	1.62	-1.09
W6: My relationship with my wife/ family is suffering because of work stress or long hours of my hotel work	3.82	.911	1.10	-1.23
W7: Relaxing and forgetting about work issues is hard to do	3.60	.894	2.01	-1.08
W8: I have adequate time away from my job at the workplace to maintain adequate work and personal/family life balance	3.76	.979	1.95	-1.77
W9:I currently have a good balance between the time I spend at work and the time I have available for non-work matters	3.71	1.004	2.00	-1.87

W10:I feel that the balance between my work demands and non-work activities is currently on the correct route	3.58	1.015	0.98	-2.00
W11:I can negotiate and accomplish what is expected of me at work and from my family	3.68	1.028	1.11	-1.09
W12:I can accomplish the expectations that my hotel managers and my family have for me	3.61	1.009	1.20	-1.09
Staff's Fears				
F1: The economic downturn will negatively impact this hotel	3.65	1.201	2.00	-0.99
F2:This hotel will lose sales or revenue	4.00	.655	1.08	-1.85
F3:There will be layoffs at this hotel chain	2.97	.953	1.43	-1.67
F4:Our chain will lose business to competitors	2.92	.911	1.80	-1.83
F5:An industry downturn will negatively impact this chain	2.88	1.00	1.90	-1.00
COVID-19's Intensity				
I1: COVID-19 is critical for the hotel's success in the long run	3.66	1.110	1.89	-1.83
I2: COVID-19 is a priority to our corporate	3.89	1.053	1.09	-1.84
I3: This is an important risk for our hotel	3.49	.658	1.37	-1.00
I4: COVID-19 disrupts our hotel's ability to get its work done	3.14	.952	1.86	-1.02
I5: COVID-19 causes our hotel to stop and think about how to respond	3.76	.658	1.05	-1.86
I6: COVID-19 required our hotel to change the way we work in front of guest	3.49	.634	1.27	-1.99

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Please cite this article as:

Zaki, K., (2022), The Moderating Effect of Covid-19 on the Relationship Between Work-Life Balance and Hotel Employees' Fears. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 145-166, <https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.28.1.8>



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