

Managing Emotions while Working from Home During COVID-19 Pandemic: Working Mothers with Young Children Perspective

Tengku Elena Tengku Mahamad^{1*}, Wan Soraya Wan Abdul Ghani², Daina Bellido De Luna³ and Lucia Rivadeneira⁴

¹Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

²Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

³Vicerrectoría de Investigación y Doctorados, Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Chile

⁴Universidad Técnica de Manabí, Ecuador

*corresponding author: tengku.elena@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

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The struggle to balance work and family can be a major stressor for women with young children as it can negatively influence their emotional well-being. Studies have found that employed women experience greater difficulty than men in balancing between work and family as they have greater demands. Besides that, women tend to experience low psychological detachment from work while at home, and the emotions they experience at home have negative implications for their work engagement. This study aimed to investigate how working mothers with young children between 0 to 5 years old regulate their work-generated emotions while working from home during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The pandemic forced workers to work from home to curb transmission of the virus. By utilizing the qualitative research method, this study gathered the perspectives of 20 Malaysian working mothers from various public and private organizations who were required to work from home due to the pandemic. They were chosen by using the purposive sampling method, and all transcribed interviews were coded thematically. Qualitative analyses revealed that working mothers often find it difficult to manage their emotions while attempting to balance childcare and work. Some discussed the possible problematic outcomes caused by working from homes, such as stress, anxiety, and social isolation. We conclude that working mothers struggle emotionally when working from home and the impact can vary depending on the age of their children and, their marital status. The study provides some initial evidence that the impact of work from home with young children on emotions is worthy of further investigation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Working from home is not a new phenomenon. Many studies in the early 2000s have attempted to understand the experiences and ways on how workers work from home as compared to working physically from the office (Anderson et al., 2015; Tietze, 2002; Tietze & Musson, 2010). However, the term “*work from home*” has become increasingly popular in various organizations across the world, especially in the recent years of the coronavirus pandemic. This pandemic forced many businesses to run remotely and transition their activities from home (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). The shift in the environment disrupted the global workforce at an unprecedented scale and speed. Hundreds and thousands of workers were laid off or put on unpaid forced to leave, while others were ordered to work from home to slow down the spread of the coronavirus (Arntz et al., 2020). The school closures forced many parents to work from home and, at the same time, care for their children (Bouziri et al., 2020).

Some studies revealed that employed women experience greater difficulty than men when it comes to working from home (Gálvez et al., 2018; Kinman, 2016). For instance, in a study conducted by Newcomb (2021), she found that female academics who also plays the role of parent experience tension due to the requirement of meeting the physical, temporal, and emotional needs of both students, colleagues, and their own children. This is because fathers often rely on their partners to be responsible for childcare tasks (Derndorfer et al., 2021). Many of these studies have been conducted in Western countries such as Australia (Newcomb, 2021; Powell & Craig, 2015) and United Kingdom (Van Der Lippe & Lippényi, 2018), whereas research on the patterns of women working from home in Asian regions remains scarce. Studies have suggested that Eastern culture imposes many family responsibilities on women (e.g., Khokhar, Nas & Zia-ur-Rehman, 2020). Furthermore, past studies on working from home in Asia have predominantly looked at the perceptions of men and women (e.g., Suarlan, 2017), yet women with young children's experiences and perceptions in the Asian context yet to receive much attention. Literature has consistently neglected the important aspect of work from home, which is the pressure of a woman who works remotely while trying to balance work and everyday life (Gálvez et al., 2018).

This study is set to find out how work-generated emotions are regulated while working from home during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It draws upon findings of exploratory research with mothers of young children (0 to 5 years old) working in various organizations in the state of Selangor in Malaysia. The purpose of the present study was twofold: 1) To understand why working mothers with young children face difficulties managing their emotions, and 2) To discover how working mothers with young children manage their emotions when working from home.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Working from Home*

Working from home or teleworking can be considered a double-edged sword (Farrell, 2017). There are many definitions of working from home, but studies broadly defined it as “*any paid work that is carried out primarily from home (at least 20 hours per week)*” (Crosbie & Moore, 2004, p. 224). It is argued that working from home enables workers to achieve work-life balance by making it easier for them to juggle work and home demands as there is no need to commute to work (Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Gálvez et al., 2018; Kossek & Thompson, 2016; Powell & Craig, 2015). Working from home may also increase work productivity (Bloom et al., 2015)

and enable workers to manage their spouse, children, older people, or disabled relatives (Crosbie & Moore, 2004).

In a study conducted by Anderson and Kaplan (2015), they found that working remotely can also reduce negative emotions such as stress and anxiety and increase positive emotions such as joy and happiness. One of the reasons for this is that workers could set up their own workspace at home in their own creative ways (Anderson & Kaplan, 2015). Moreover, working from home allows workers to reduce spending (Barrero, Bloom & Davis, 2020). Other than that, working from home is linked with high levels of autonomy and the reduction of work-family conflicts (Madsen, 2003).

2.2 Negative Impact of Working from Home

While many studies have pointed out the positive effects of working from home, other studies have also found that this is not always the case, as working from home can also have negative implications (e.g., Arntz et al., 2020). Transitioning from work to home is not straightforward as, at times, achieving a good work-life balance is not easy (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Tietze & Musson, 2010). According to Clark (2000), organizations often expect workers to achieve a good work-life balance, and he defined this balance as “*satisfaction and good functioning of work and home, with a minimum of role conflict*” (p. 751). The lack of balance and stability between work and family can lead to stress (Dolcos & Daley, 2009). One of the major reasons some workers struggle to achieve this balance is because workers would often need to play multiple roles in their daily lives as an employee, spouse, and parent (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2018; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Workers need to 'learn' how to cope by being at “*home and at work*” (Tietze & Musson, 2010, p. 149). Working from home may interfere them from performing any of these responsibilities, which also may lead to work-family conflicts (Kossek & Thompson, 2016; Van Der Lippe & Lippényi, 2018; Voorpostel, 2014).

Other than that, studies found that many workers experience low psychological detachment from work while at home (Sonnetag et al., 2008; Voorpostel, 2014). This is also the case when it comes to detaching emotions that come from home while at work. According to Edwards and Rothbard (2000) and Greenhaus and Powell (2006), emotions experienced at home can have a negative impact on a person's work engagement. Often those working from home can experience social isolation, which leads them experiencing stress (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). In a study conducted by Song and Gao (2019), they found that working from home may generate new sources of conflict and stress at home. Furthermore, various studies showed that workers find it difficult to set boundaries between work and family, thus leading to stress and tensions (Kossek & Thompson, 2016; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Van Der Lippe & Lippényi, 2018).

2.3 Employed Women and Working from Home

The inability to balance work and family life is one of the major factors that cause a negative impact on women's emotional well-being (Shepherd-Banigan, et al., 2016). This may be because household and work-related tasks are never-ending (Gurstein, 1991), and women spend more time dealing with chores than men (Manzo & Minello, 2020). According to Mann and Holdsworth (2003), women are often expected to combine other works when they work from home, such as daily domestic chores, compared to men. In a study conducted by Kinman (2016), she found that female academics have issues with achieving a good work-life balance. Female academics often find managing and completing the demands of work and home chores are challenging (Kinman, 2016). Besides that, a recent research conducted by Nash and

Churchill (2020) found that female academics faced the most challenges in terms of having to balance between academia and caring responsibilities during the coronavirus pandemic.

Many studies have pointed out that childcare responsibilities are not distributed equally between men and women despite both men and women being wage earners (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2012; Chesley & Flood, 2017). Working mothers are 28% more likely to experience burnout than fathers due to unequal demands at home (Leonhardt, 2020). According to a research conducted by Crosbie and Moore (2004), they found that women tend to get disturbed by their children while working from home. The disruption between work and family demands can lead to an increase in work-family conflicts (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). Furthermore, work-family conflicts are a source of stress and are closely linked to negative experiences of emotional and physical ill-health (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). These literatures suggest that women's role is more demanding than men and that women are pressured to conform to their gender roles.

In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents faced hardship due to the closure of schools and childcare centres (Arntz et al., 2020). They are required to do work and care for their children and focus on their homeschooling (Arntz et al., 2020; Derndorfer et al., 2021). In a recent study conducted by Derndorfer et al. (2021), it was found that the involvement of fathers in childcare during the pandemic increased only when their female partner was not able to work from home. A United-States Pew Research Centre survey conducted in October 2020 also found that working mothers struggled more than fathers when getting work done without interruptions (Igielnik, 2021; Murad, 2021). This is especially hard for mothers with children under 18 at home (Igielnik, 2021; Murad, 2021).

2.4 Challenges of Malaysian Working Mothers during the pandemic

In Malaysia, many published newspaper articles have highlighted the challenges of working mothers' experience during the pandemic, especially during the first phase of the Movement Control Order (MCO) announced by the Malaysian government (e.g., Mohd Said, 2020; Murad, 2021; Poo, 2021; Tang, 2020). The first MCO was in effect from 18 - 31 March 2020, and it had restricted citizens' movements and required more workers to work from home (Yusof, 2021). Furthermore, nurseries, government and private schools, public and private higher educations were also prohibited from opening (Restriction of Movement Order, 2020). A recent article published by The Malaysian Reserve indicated that mothers in Malaysia had expressed their "*grievances*" on social media due to the challenges working from home (Mohd Said, 2020).

Working from home can be physically and mentally taxing when women cannot manage their stress, which can lead to conflict with their husbands (Mohd Said, 2020). The article also indicated that failure to cope with responsibilities could cause stress which is unhealthy and harmful for their well-being (Mohd Said, 2020). According to the LinkedIn Opportunity Index 2021 survey, they found that 32% of working mothers in Malaysia expect organizations to provide flexibility in terms of work-from-home arrangements (32%) and offer the option for reduced schedules (30%) and part-time schedules (27%) so that they can balance their work and personal life (Ram, 2021).

Many studies have contributed to identifying the imbalance of work-life and the gender differences in childcare provision. This study anticipates finding evidence on how mothers with young children balance work and family during the pandemic. The use of open-ended responses and qualitative analysis, however, enabled us to explore further how they manage their emotions while balancing their lives. The research questions focused on the ways working

mothers with young children manage their emotions while working from home and how they balance work-life in general.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research was conducted in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. This research employed a qualitative approach and was conducted from December 2020 to early February 2021. Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face online interviews with 20 working mothers who were forced to work from home by their employer at the time of the interview. The size selected was based on Creswell (2013), who indicated that the ideal sample size should be between 5 to 25. This qualitative technique was preferred as it provides an opportunity to attain a greater level of depth and detail to reveal the participants' full range of perceptions and feelings regarding the subject matter (Cresswell, 2013). Participants were chosen by using the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling enables an appropriate group, which is essential for the study, to be selected using a specific criterion (Tongco, 2007). To be eligible, participants were required to fulfil the following criteria: 1) female, 2) full-time paid employment, 3) a mother with young children, 4) working from home, and 5) working in public or private organizations in Selangor. All the interviews were conducted online using Google Meet, and the duration was between 45 and 90 minutes. University ethics approvals and informed consent from the participants were obtained prior to their participation in this study.

3.2 Interviews and Procedure

At the start of each interview, relevant information about the study, the procedure and the data usage were given to the participants who agreed to be interviewed and recorded. Data collection was made voluntary and via video call (i.e., Google Meet). Face-to-face interviews were not conducted due to the Malaysian government's social distancing measures to prevent coronavirus transmission at the time. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their experiences and managing their emotions with their small or young children while working from home.

The interview protocol started with a general question in order to get to know the participant. For instance, the interviewer asked questions such as "*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?*", "*What do you do for living?*" and "*How many children do you have?*" Questions were then funnelled towards asking more specific questions about the topic, such as "*What do you do to keep yourself feeling positive while working from home with small or young children?*" "*How do you manage your emotions?*" Probes were used to elicit further elaboration on the strategies that they have used to manage their emotions. The participants were also encouraged to provide examples and elaborate on the issues when the interview deviated from the original protocol. A pilot study to check the suitability of the questions was conducted with two female workers working in a private organization, and few changes were made to the questions. The interviews were conducted in English.

It was made clear to the participants that they had the right to withdraw from the study. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were utilized throughout this article (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2). The collected data were transcribed, and each participant was asked to review the content of their transcript for accuracy via email. This was followed by specific interview questions, and answers were matched and annotated to answer the research questions produced. The responses were analysed mostly based on each working mother's experience in dealing with their emotions when working from home with small or young

children and does not seek to compare the difference of response in terms of gender, age, and culture.

3.3 Data Analysis

Upon the completion of the data collection, the researchers analysed the transcripts thematically. The researchers first used an open coding process that focused on building larger themes and description emerged from the raw data. The stage of open coding was carried out using NVivo version 12 and through creating codes representing the participants' statements. The second stage involved axial coding, and the codes were linked to conceptual bins. This was followed by selective coding. The researchers integrated and refined the data in this stage. During data analysis, the transcripts were read and re-read for the researchers to familiarise themselves with the data set before they were divided into themes. Any overlapping and redundant codes were reduced. Data were then organized into three thematic blocks, which are *"working from home with small children"*, *"parenting process"*, and *"managing felt emotions at home"*. To reduce the risk of biased results and enhance the validity of the qualitative study, participants were asked to review meaningful quotes and interpretations by the researchers immediately after the sessions.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Working from Home with Small Children

Working from home is not a new phenomenon. However, it has been increasingly common since the COVID-19 pandemic that gravely wounded the world from the beginning of the year 2020. At the time of the interview, it had only been one year since the new coronavirus emerged. Those who were interviewed remained working remotely from home while others were able to return to work physically. At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked several questions on their experience working from home with small young children. Findings revealed that when working from home, mothers are expected to divide their time and energy for work, childcare, and household chores. Workers are expected to work as normal despite the dramatic change in the environment. The majority of the participants indicated that they had issues in separating responsibilities when working from home. For instance, Participant 1 believes that working from home has its pros and cons. She explained:

"The pro is that it can boost my productivity, and I could see some significant changes in the quality of my work due to the flexibility in time in completing my tasks; however, the cons is that I feel that communication with my team members can be tricky and that of course, I need to manage my time well between work and family."

Participant 1 also expressed that sometimes she does feel less motivated to do work due to the absence of physical separation between work and leisure time. In her own words, *"I feel it's difficult to set my mind to work mode when at home."* Participant 3 also felt the same and indicated that *"As a working parent and the need to work from home, I do struggle to separate responsibilities."* Participant 6, on the other hand, explained in length:

"I need to cater to my children's needs, and I am also bound to commitment with house chores concurrently with work submission. Hence, I have to wake up early in the morning and settle the kids before 9 am on the working day. It can be exhausting."

Participant 6 added that working from home with small young children requires one to be *"strong and resilient."* Apart from that, Participant 7 claimed that working from home is not

easy as it requires mothers to entertain their children first before they are able to concentrate on their work without any distractions. Participant 15, on the other hand, warned that those who have never experienced working from home and are required to do so for the first time might encounter difficulties with switching roles at home. She said:

"To some working mothers who are working from home for the first time, everything might be a little hectic to really focus on work. Cause you have to play your role not only as a worker but also as parent, sibling, child, and spouse."

Like the other participants, Participant 9 also expressed her struggles of working from home with small children. She revealed:

"I live with my husband and three children. The youngest is five. I think I cannot concentrate much if I'm working from home because I need to cater to the needs of my children as well. When at the office, I could concentrate fully on my work. But when working from home, of course as a mother and wife, I also need to prepare for my children's needs."

In addition, Participant 9 finds parenting difficult since she is unable to send her children to school due to the COVID-19 active cases. One of the participants (Participant 10) who need to work while caring for her five children said that she enjoys working from home but, at the same time, admits that it can be tough. Working from home with small children requires her to balance her responsibilities and attention between work and family. She claims that small children often demand more attention than older children and that they are 'clingy'. She also said:

"Every time I open up the laptop to start my work, my kids will also start to be clingier with me, and this makes me become distracted and unable to focus on my work. I try to spend half of my day to complete my work, and the other half, I spend with my family."

When asked whether the participants had difficulties in communicating with their colleagues while at home, some of the participants admitted that they found it difficult to communicate with both of their colleagues and clients when they were not in the office, for instance, Participant 1 expressed:

"I find it quite difficult in terms of communication with my colleagues and clients. It's hard to see teammates in chat or a weekly video call. I had to cancel my meeting with potential clients. Even though we regularly contact through emails and WhatsApp, but still, I'm not really satisfied with that."

4.2 Parenting Process

Although there were no questions that directly asked about the role of their spouses when it comes to childcare during the pandemic, some participants mentioned their spouse playing a minimal role. Some were, however, fortunate enough to have a hands-on spouse. For instance, Participant 4 said:

"My husband is around as he works from home, and he does help a bit when I need to attend online meetings but other than that, I normally handle the children."

Another (Participant 8) admitted:

"My husband holds a top position at his company, and he has meetings almost every day, so sometimes I find it tough to have to focus on my job and at the same time take care of my kids. I try

to make sure my kids are OK, and at the same time, I am often busy on my phone typing away messages or sending emails, and people will think that I'm ignore my children, but in reality, I'm actually doing work. When my kids are asleep, I continue doing work".

Despite working from home has its benefits, such as being able to spend more time with family and reducing the hours spent commuting to work, the participants did feel that at times, working from home can reduce their work performance. For instance, Participant 13 explained that working from home can be fun at times as she gets to spend more time with her family, but it prevents her from performing productively. Participant 17 also mentioned the same and indicated that it was due to the lack of set-up at home. She said:

"I think most of us find it is just natural to work in the office as it is more comfortable with a proper office setup, working colleagues, proper working period. The conducive environment not only can keep me motivated but my colleagues as well compared to working from home where occasionally you'll be in a meeting, and your child will be calling out your name for help."

While most of the working mothers indicated that managing time between work and family is the key for working from home, two participants admitted that they were not able to do so. Both divorcees provided the same reason due to their status. They claimed that being a single mother requires them to take care of their children and complete their work simultaneously. One of them (Participant 12) expressed sadly:

"I have to take care of my children and, at the same time, do work stuff. I just can't do two things at the same time. It gets even tough when my boss and colleagues are not understanding. They are lucky that they have their spouse or even helper to help them around. People like me have a hard time working from home due to additional responsibilities. Having kids at home is tough as kids really need extra attention, and I just can't give that to them."

The other (Participant 14) exclaimed:

"I just can't work from home with my child around. There is no way you can divide time. Sometimes I need to attend an online meeting, but at the same time, your child is sleepy or hungry. What do you do when this happens? Trust me, there are many times that I want to quit so that I could prioritize my child. But if I quit, how do I earn money? I'm divorced, and I don't have anyone else to help take care of my child, unlike other working mothers."

4.3 Managing Felt Emotions at Home

Since the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, the dual demands of work and childcare started to take a toll on working mothers' emotional well-being. Working mothers are expected to find ways to manage their own emotions in order to keep themselves feeling positive and prevent them from feeling burnout and stress at home. The majority of the participants indicated that their daily routine also involves keeping their family's emotions positive. Participant 1, for instance, indicated that the lockdown period in Malaysia due to the coronavirus took a toll on her mental health. She had to quickly find ways to manage her emotions and ensure that she remained positive. According to Participant 1, one of the ways that helped her manage her own emotions was by staying connected with her friends and family. She advised, *"Well, too much time spent in isolation can lead to loneliness and depression, so reach out to others as often as possible."* Participant 1 also explained in length:

"I try to keep positive by playing family games and trying new recipes. My three-year-old daughter insists on helping me, but of course, she ends up making a mess. Although it can be stressful working from home, but I believe it somehow has strengthened my family bond as I could do things that I've

missed out over the years. I do feel contented as I am able to be there for my family, especially my daughter, who is growing up pretty fast."

Participant 8, who also responded similarly, indicated that she manages her emotions while working from home by chatting with her family and spending more time with them together. She added:

"I watch Netflix and play video games with my children during my free time. Working from home with children does take a lot of effort. I need to double my effort. Not only do I need to settle my work according to the 'Turn Around Time' but also sort out my family. But I think in a way, working from home does allow me to be closer to God, and it has made me become more disciplined and cautious about self-cleanliness."

Participant 5, on the other hand, believes that creating a calm and relaxing environment at home can induce positive emotions within her family members. In her own words:

"It is important to make sure that your house is peaceful, calm, and relaxing. That way, not only you, but your family will feel positive too. I'm often busy with work, and with small kids, they can be sensitive. They know when you're neglecting them, and they can act up. To avoid this from happening, I do work quickly and spend time with them through activities like cooking together with them and watching tv or reading a book."

Participant 5 added that she believes that her family will also *"be happy"* when her house is in order. According to Participant 9, one of the ways that could help her avoid negative emotions is by doing activities that can make her family feel healthier. She explained, *"We try to exercise at home whenever we can or sometimes, we teach our kids some fine or gross motor skills like playdoh, make an origami and so on."*

The findings of this study also showed that the majority of the participants who are of Islamic faith indicated that one of the ways they elicit positive emotions is by practising their faith. They believe that praying can help deal with stress and anxiety at home that are mainly the result of having to find ways in balancing work and childcare. For instance, Participant 4 said:

"As a Muslim, I pray, meditate, and recite the Qur'an as well as do light exercises at home. Those are some of the ways on how I keep my emotions positive. I'm sure you know that taking care of small and active children is never easy, so praying is one way that helps me calm my nerves and anxiety."

Participant 6 claims that one of the ways she replenishes her emotional energy is by praying. She said:

"Working at home with my children, it's not easy to create a positive environment. I have kids to nurture and work to commit, and I cannot be emotional and upset. Sometimes I do feel like lashing out on my children, but I stop myself from doing so. So, what I do is I have to keep refilling my emotional tank with prayers and reading. I must prepare and practice good mental health."

More than half of the participants highlighted that having an understanding of colleagues and superiors, as well as a good relationship with them, can help reduce the negative aspects of the participants' emotions. Participant 15 was very clear: *"Seeking support from my colleagues"*.

Participant 16 also replied:

"My colleagues and boss are very understanding, and they try to help whatever they can whenever I have to handle my kids."

For others, like Participant 18, it was their spouse support. Participant 18 explained:

"It's not easy to deal with small children at home. Sometimes your boss doesn't understand that you have needy children. I may not have any issues if they were older. But we're talking about children below five. They constantly need your attention. My husband's job requires him to be at his workplace every day. He does help me with the kids before he leaves for work in the morning. What I normally do is I get support from talking to my husband during the day. He's always giving me comforting words, so I feel less stressful. On the weekends, he takes over childcare to let me rest."

5. DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined how working mothers with small young children's respond in managing emotions while working from home during the pandemic. We aimed at providing qualitative evidence into the ways working mothers cope with working from home, and discussion about this topic is an important yet under-researched topic.

5.1 Working from Home during the COVID-19 pandemic

Our findings revealed that working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic can affect workers both positively and negatively. One of the positive aspects of working from home is that working mothers can spend more time with their families. Many had mentioned that they also play games, watch TV, and read books with their children. For instance, Participants 1 and 8 indicated that whenever they can, they will play games with their children. Similarly, Crosbie and Moore (2004) noted that working from home enables workers to achieve a work-life balance. Moreover, working from home means that they could reduce the time they commute to and from work. Findings revealed that it is due to the demands of work, lack of social interactions, and the fact that their spouses play a minimal role when it comes to helping in taking care of their children. The findings are similar to past research, which highlights the struggle of women juggling work and taking care of their children (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2012; Chesley & Flood, 2017). These research, however, were mostly conducted before the pandemic.

Although this study did not seek to compare the difference of response in terms of gender, age, and culture, findings showed that women felt that they experienced more pressure during the pandemic than men. Thus, those with young children struggled to balance work and childcare at the same time. Not all participants involved in this research are married. The findings revealed that working mothers of different marital statuses (married versus divorced) felt more pressure dealing with the emotional demands of their profession and motherhood. Several single mothers' participants expressed their struggles and felt that they could not manage their emotions well compared to those with a partner. For instance, Participants 12 and 14 felt that they could not distribute the heavy load of childcare to others, unlike those with a spouse who can delegate childcare responsibilities.

5.2 Coping with Competing Demands

This study suggests that the competing demands of work and motherhood can take a toll on the working mothers' emotional well-being and affect their work performance. Working mothers experience pressure having to juggle work and childcare while working from home. They find it hard to focus on two tasks at the same time. With small young children who often demand attention, it is rarely possible to focus on their work. This is similar to what Van der Lippe and Lippényi (2018) pointed out that one of the major reasons workers struggle to achieve good

work and life balance is the multiple roles that they need to perform, such as an employee, spouse, and parent.

As presented, working from home can induce negative emotions due to the inability of juggling between work and life demands. Therefore, working mothers manage their emotions in various ways to improve their emotions. The findings suggested that praying can be helpful to make them feel at ease. Having a good support system, whether from their spouse, family, and even colleagues, help them remain positive. A few participants also highlighted that not supportive colleagues could create a negative experience when working from home. The participants believed that with immense support, it could help them cope better, especially when working from home with young children. Other ways that helped the participants reduce social isolation and improve their emotions include cooking and interacting with friends and family. Due to the pandemic, movement was restricted, thus preventing the participants from travelling and meeting their friends and family.

6. CONCLUSION

Before we address the limitations and future directions of this research, the strengths of the present study must be presented. This research offers three main contributions to research concerning emotion management. First, this research provides insight into the differences between the management of emotions that originated from work and inside the worker's home during the pandemic. Previous research tends to focus on emotions managed in the workplace pre-pandemic (e.g., Ashkanasy et al., 2016; Morris & Feldman, 1997; Rehman et al., 2021). By exploring the emotions managed from work and home, the current research furthers the understanding of how workers, in this case, working mothers, improve their own emotions. Second, this research contributes to understanding why working from home can induce positive and negative emotions towards working mothers, especially those with young children. Finally, our research makes a third theoretical contribution by offering insights into the importance of external support such as family, friends, and colleagues while working from home.

Several limitations are evident in this research. First, as a study involving samples in a particular state and country – the findings are specific to this location. It is important to note that the findings may differ in other countries and cultures. Furthermore, the support system may also be different. Second, as with a lot of qualitative research due to the small sample size, this study cannot be generalized to a wider population. To further extend this study, the researchers hope to interview more participants from various organizations and countries in the next study. Third, the findings were derived during a time when movements were restricted due to the pandemic and schools, and childcare centres had to close. Therefore, findings may differ in other contexts and circumstances. Furthermore, more studies are also needed to explore the role of fathers in supporting their spouses while working from home.

In conclusion, the findings presented here explored how working mothers with young children manage their emotions surfaced several further questions. What are the roles of working fathers in childcare during the pandemic? How can organizations help support and reduce the pandemic impact on their employees working from home with children? These questions warrant further attention for both in terms of research and reflective practices.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. Before we begin, can you please tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. What do you do for a living?
 - a. Is there such thing as a typical day or week and what does it look like?
 - b. What do you like most about your job? And what do you least like?
3. How many children do you have?
4. How old are your children?
5. How long have you been working from home?
 - a. Was the transition from office to home easy?
6. What was your work routine like before the pandemic?
7. Do you prefer working from home or your office? Why?
8. How has it been working from home especially with young/small children?
9. Do you think working from home with young/small children difficult?
 - a. What about older children?
10. What is your schedule like when it comes to managing your work and children?
11. What is your support system like currently?

12. What do you do to keep yourself feeling positive while working from home with small or young children?
13. How do you normally manage your emotions?
 - a. How do you keep your children feeling positive?
14. Was there a time when you felt like you could not control your emotions while working from home? If yes, what was the main reason?
15. Are your colleagues understanding with your current situation?
16. Have you ever encountered any difficulties in communicating with your colleagues while working from home?
17. Before we end, have you got anything to add that we haven't discussed that you might think be relevant?

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Tengku Elena Tengku Mahamad (Ph.D., M.A.) received her Ph.D. in Business and Management from The University of Manchester, United Kingdom. She is currently the Deputy Dean of Research and Industrial Linkages and a Senior Lecturer from the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. Her main research interest is on emotion management, organisational communication, and leadership communication.

Wan Soraya Wan Abdul Ghani (M.A.) is a lecturer for the undergraduate event management degree program in Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. She received her M.A. in International Hotel and Tourism (Event Management) from The University of Queensland, Australia. Her research interest is on event management, sports event, event marketing, tourism, as well as tourism marketing.

Daina Bellido De Luna (Ph. D., M.Sc.) is an organizational psychologist and received her PhD in Business and Management from The University of Manchester, United Kingdom. She is currently the PhD Programs Director at Universidad Autónoma de Chile in Chile. Her research interest is on industrial relations, trade unions, training, and the modernisation of the state.

Lucia Rivadeneira's (Ph.D., M.Sc.) research interest is focused on how machine learning approaches can be used to anticipate social media impacts on decision making, and how this knowledge may be integrated into communication design and marketing campaigns. She received her Ph.D. in Business and Management from The University of Manchester, United Kingdom. Lucia is currently a part-time lecturer at Universidad Técnica de Manabí and was the former Head of Research and Innovation at Portoviejo Municipality in Ecuador.