

Demystifying work-related outcomes and life satisfaction of Bangladeshi working women during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose: The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on working women's personal and professional lives is overwhelming. This paper aims to demystify the intervening role of work-life balance in the association of life satisfaction with work-from-home and workplace flexibility during a covid emergency.

Research methodology: To follow this aim, 196 working women coming from different occupations enjoying work-from-home arrangements during COVID-19 have been selected based on convenience as respondents. After confirming the reliability-validity and fitness of the proposed model, the responses have been further examined for testing the hypotheses.

Results: The findings demystify strong associations of independent variables (work from home and workplace flexibility) with the dependent variable (life satisfaction) as well as with the mediator (work-life balance). The mediating role of work-life balance between the independent and dependent variables has also proved significant.

Limitations: This study has limitations, such as mainly focusing on Chattagram, Bangladesh, selecting respondents based on convenience, and needing more research to analyse the effects of variables on male workers.

Contribution: Regulatory authorities, corporate bodies and HR practitioners will get strong insights while formulating strategic HR guidelines in regular situations as well as in emergencies in this study.

Novelty: In a patriarchal country like Bangladesh, where women's contributions to the economy are increasing day by day, the government and other regulatory authorities should consider working women's work-life equilibrium and well-being when drafting legislation regarding HR practices.

Keywords: Working Women in Bangladesh during COVID-19, Work-Life Balance, Work from Home, Workplace Flexibility, Life Satisfaction

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1. Introduction

In December 2019, COVID-19, a potentially fatal virus, began to spread in Wuhan, China (Nanthini & Nair, 2020; Saifuzzaman, Rahman, Shetu, & Moon, 2021). Community transmission of COVID-19 began on March 8, 2020 (Saifuzzaman et al., 2021; Shammi, Bodrud-Doza, Islam, & Rahman, 2021) in Bangladesh, a nation without a significant healthcare policy or regulatory framework to address a catastrophe such as COVID-19 (Shammi et al., 2021). However, the government imposed a nationwide state lockdown beginning on March 23, 2020, for different lengths of time, to lower the

transmission rate in Bangladesh (Saifuzzaman et al., 2021). This emergency isolation system and social seclusion approach have failed in a nation with a population of more than 165 million people (Shammi et al., 2021). Apart from the serious health consequences, the outbreak has wreaked havoc on countries' economies, causing significant joblessness and the shutdown of businesses, schools, and day care centres (Collins, Landivar, Ruppanner, & Scarborough, 2021). The disease has not only infected and killed millions of people globally but has also profoundly disrupted family and work systems (Yavorsky, Qian, & Sargent, 2021). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, classroom and childcare shutdowns have increased the burden of care for working parents. Hence, many individuals have adapted their work arrangements to meet this growing strain (Collins et al., 2021).

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly influenced everyone's professional and private lives (Collins et al., 2021; Tomohiro, 2021). As a consequence of this (COVID-19), individuals and businesses are exploring new employment arrangements (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). COVID-19 prompted a significant adjustment in work arrangements since this outbreak provides a unique environment for reexamining and considering work-life balance in such an emergency (Carinal-Go, Teng-Calleja, Bertulfo, & Manaois, 2022). The current pandemic requires employees to perform additional duties, and sometimes need to work after their regular work schedule, to complete the task at hand (Irawanto, Novianti, & Roz, 2021). As different govt. all around the world declared lockdown during the global pandemic, and a large segment of working people was restricted to commute to their regular work to slow the virus's spread, which resulted in most if not all, employees working from home (Fahmi, Saluy, Safitri, Rivaldo, & Endri, 2022; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021); often with little warning and little time to prepare (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Many workers have been adaptable and have adapted well to the unusual circumstances of the last few months, but others may be pleased to return home to a private area for at least part of the week, rather than a workplace or place of study (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020).

Moreover, the adverse effects of COVID-19 differ among people, depending on their sex, abilities, ethnicity, demographics, religion, and age. Women are negatively affected by the pandemic in terms of differential effects (Nanthini & Nair, 2020). Women are among the worst COVID-19 patients, both psychologically and physiologically, because of the devastating epidemic (Intesar, 2021). With the school being closed, the presence of the complete family, and extra family care duties, these circumstances have doubled women's workloads when working from home (Ahmed & Islam, 2022; Nanthini & Nair, 2020). Working women in patriarchal countries such as Bangladesh, as in different contexts, have faced the aforementioned challenges, making coordinating their paid and family obligations more challenging since they need to adhere to their increased family roles (Uddin, 2021). In addition, a lack of domestic helpers during COVID-19 resulted in earning women having to put in additional time and effort to fulfil the same duties at home as they do at work (Ahmed & Islam, 2022). Furthermore, women are especially vulnerable to pandemic-related job losses, and when the economy gradually reopens, women lag behind males in employment recovery. During COVID-19 research, it was revealed and substantiated by numerous pieces of data that the consequences of the epidemic had an adverse effect on women's economic and work lives (Ahmed & Islam, 2022). Women's work-life balance is largely dependent on workplace stress, job satisfaction, flexibility, and work support during the breakdown (Basak, 2021). According to Uddin (2021), "Flexibility and work from home" are recognized as critical components in strengthening Bangladeshi women's work-family experiences.

Because of COVID-19, several firms have offered their employees to perform their duties from home during the lockdown period (Sutarto, Wijayanto, & Afiah, 2021), and Bangladeshi enterprises do not differ (Ahmed & Islam, 2022). Work-from-home and remote working were identified as significant actors of WLB under the "new normal" condition and were also recognized as important for women's work-life balance (Uddin, 2021). Ensuring a good synergy between work and non-work duties is significant, as it results in life satisfaction among employees (Žnidaršič & Marič, 2021). According to Ahmed and Islam (2022), it is evident that the availability of a home office contributes greatly to female workers' job satisfaction. Moreover, working from home during the lockdown provided employees with increased freedom and flexibility as well as enabling them to work away from the workplace (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Tomohiro (2021) argued for the potential negative

consequence of overworking due to working from home. In addition, several employers have adopted pandemic-enforced flexible working arrangements to address this challenging epidemic. In a study conducted by Hayman (2009), flexible work schedules were found to generate greater work-life balance among employees. As flexibility enables employees to choose the time, place, and tenure of their work, it undoubtedly helps maintain the equilibrium between professional and personal obligations. Thus, employees may effortlessly fulfil both their working and non-working duties (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). Allowing for flexible work hours in a challenging period such as COVID-19, it is necessary to be respectful of workers' personal lives and circumstances to keep them engaged (Ravi & Anulakshmi, 2021). In addition, the concept of work-life balance (WLB) is not an extraneous issue in Bangladesh due to internationalization and greater women's involvement in paid labor (Uddin, 2021). However, limited research has been conducted during the pandemic, especially in a developing nation where the new working realities of COVID-19 have been reluctantly implemented (Sutarto et al., 2021). Thereafter, obstacles confronted by working women to settle between their work and family life during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh were investigated (Basak, 2021; Intesar, 2021). In addition, the Implications of COVID-19 on female employees in the Bangladeshi readymade garments sector were explored (Islam, Abbott, Haque, Gooch, & Akhter, 2022), and the work-life balance of female university teachers was also measured (Basak & Akter, 2022; Happy, 2021). However, the precursors of the work-life balance of Bangladeshi working women of different professions have yet to be investigated (Uddin, Ali, & Khan, 2020). Although many researchers have tried to discover the impact of a mandatory home office setting on job satisfaction and work-life balance in Bangladeshi working women during the lockdown (Ahmed & Islam, 2022; Happy, 2021), the matter of life satisfaction is still ignored. More studies are required to explore the relationship between WLB and flexible work settings (Björntoft, Hallman, Mathiassen, Larsson, & Jahncke, 2020), which is a commonly used alternative work setting during a pandemic (Attieh, 2022). In addition, to widen the understanding and expertise and study some of the concerns that may have been somewhat prominent during the breakdown of work-and family related outcomes, more research is necessary to comprehend these new situations as a consequence of mandatory alternative work settings.

This study will help mitigate the abovementioned literature gaps in several ways. First, this study contributes to the existing literature by examining the life satisfaction levels of employed women in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is noteworthy that this research is among the initial investigations conducted on this topic. Further, it will focus on the interplay between all the studied variables: work from home, workplace flexibility, work-life balance, and life satisfaction. Thus, the mediation effect of work-life balance between work-from-home and life satisfaction, and between workplace flexibility and life satisfaction will also be measured. Another justification of this study is that it also focuses on the overall impact of COVID-19 on Bangladeshi working women's families and work-related domains and provides transparent directions for future research to create common knowledge and understanding of the work-family experiences of Bangladeshi employed women, which has been an issue of ignorance for a long time in this country.

2. Literature review

2.1. Work from Home

Work from home is no longer a modern concept as it has been brought to the cognizance of multiple disciplines for decades (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). But most of this research treated work from home as a measure of ensuring work-life balance (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020; Irawanto et al., 2021) or a term used by freelancers (Pasla, Asepta, Widyaningrum, Pramesti, & Wicaksono, 2021). Work from home is defined by Bellmann and Hübler (2021) as remote working, teleworking, homework, home office work, mobile work, mobile work, and flexible work settings in which workers do not need to go to the workplace to perform their duties. Work From Home, also termed teleworking (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020; Anomsari, Handaru, & Ahmad, 2021), is a mode of different work settings for performing paid work, usually from home, using technology (Mukherjee & Narang, 2022; Sutarto et al., 2021). WFH is now recognized as an option to de-escalate the peril of COVID-19 (Palumbo, 2020; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021).

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a dramatic rise in the proportion of people working remotely, especially when the first state of emergency or lockdown was announced (Tomohiro, 2021). It has been proven as a dual-edged sword for both employee and employer as it has both negative consequences (Ekasari, Harsasi, Priyati, & Qomariah, 2022; Putri et al., 2021). Working from home may save time, permit the interleaving of work and nonwork activities, decrease stress, and offer a more conducive atmosphere for work (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). It offers workers a greater degree of liberty to deal with family domains, since they may work whenever and whenever, thereby improving the family environment and helping them to harmonize their personal and professional responsibilities (Irawanto et al., 2021). In addition, the widespread deployment of home-work technologies during the outbreak permanently boosted the efficiency of working from home compared to office employment (Davis, Ghent, & Gregory, 2021). However, the interference between work and life caused by working from home has mischievous consequences for remote employees' capacity to effectively harmonize work-life contacts (Palumbo, 2020).

2.2. Workplace Flexibility

Despite being widely used in both academic and applied literary works, the idea of workplace flexibility is largely unexplored and has unclear definitions (Jeffrey Hill et al., 2008). Workplace flexibility refers to employees' capacity to decide how, when, and where to perform duties relevant to their jobs (Jeffrey Hill et al., 2008). It is a job-scheduling technique that gives workers more freedom to decide on the place, time, and amount of work they need to perform (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). According to Smith, Gilmer, and Stockdale (2019), firms offer flexibility to attract, retain, and appease their employees, whereas employees utilize workplace flexibility to balance their jobs and personal obligations, lessen strain, and resolve disputes (Smith et al., 2019). It involves a vast array of innovative working styles that extend beyond the standard definition of "flexitime." The beneficial impact is stronger for men than for women in terms of the flexibility of life satisfaction concerning work-life balance. This indicates that males demand increased leisure and personal care time more than women do (Noda, 2020). Flexible working includes any deviation from full-time, Monday through Friday, "9 to 5," a set location, or permanent employment (Direction, 2008).

The COVID-19 epidemic triggered an unprecedented usage of flexible working, which became a permanent and required issue in today's world of work (Attieh, 2022). Companies utilize flexibility to recruit, develop, and fulfil workforce management and development, while employees apply it to perform duties and nonwork obligations with strains and contradictions (Smith et al., 2019). Well-planned flexible working offers countless advantages to the organization, including enhanced quality in the delivery of services and client satisfaction, cost reduction in talent management, and boosted morale, productivity, and loyalty among workers (Direction, 2008).

2.3. Life Satisfaction

Employee life satisfaction has featured prominently as an idea and has become strategically significant for enterprises worldwide in recent years (Kashyap, Joseph, & Deshmukh, 2016). Life satisfaction is a conceptual process of evaluating one's life. In which the evaluation of satisfaction depends on one's consideration of what is considered to be a suitable standard (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Life satisfaction refers to contentment with or recognition of one's life or the accomplishment of one's wishes and wants for life in general (Sousa & Lyubomirsky, 2001). According to Veenhoven (1996), the extent to which an individual favorably views the well-being of his or her life is referred to as life satisfaction. In other words, the extent to which a person rejoices on his or her life is called life satisfaction. Specifically, life satisfaction represents the range of negative to good feelings and attitudes regarding one's life at a given moment (Kashyap et al., 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals suffer elevated levels of anxiety and stress, which have a severe impact on their life satisfaction (Dymecka, Gerymski, & Machnik-Czerwik, 2021).

2.4. Work-Life Balance

Recent attention has been drawn to the notion of work-life balance owing to its relevance and value to all workers, regardless of their marital status, family size, or number of children (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). Work-life balance has been defined by several authors over time. In other words,

it is a person's ability to achieve a compromise between his or her job and non-work endeavors, especially social and familial duties (Best & Chinta, 2021). Pasla et al. (2021) define, Work-Life balance as a state in which someone successfully juggles career, personal and family obligations. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is a collective endeavor, including companies, families, and other participants (Basak & Akter, 2022).

Many studies have investigated the influences of WLB among employees (Caringal-Go et al., 2022; Noda, 2020), but the factorization of the work-life balance construct has not yet been determined (Taşdelen-Karçkay & Bakalim, 2017). It is crucial for both workers and employers, as a healthy balance promotes employee performance, whereas an imbalance promotes discontent and stress (Basak, 2021). Management assistance to boost employees' work-life balance can develop a positive connection between employees and management, which improves effective communication within the firm (Basak, 2021). Furthermore, work-life balance is encouraged because of the significant benefits it delivers to the firm, such as increased productivity, dedication, satisfaction, morale, attitude, and behavior of workers. However, work-life balance also benefits workers by increasing their flexibility, family and leisure time, access to childcare, minimizing burnout, and improving their emotional, physical, and mental health (Saxena, 2018). Thus, a very good work-life balance policy may help workers achieve a better balance between their work and personal lives. They have the capacity to be more efficient and productive (Basak & Akter, 2022). Considerably, a greater work-life balance was seen among workers using flextime work schedules compared to those using standard fixed-hour schedules (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014).

2.5. Work from Home and Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is indirectly influenced by the home office. Working from home lowers stress and absenteeism, which increases dedication to the company, employee loyalty, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and overall life satisfaction (Irawanto et al., 2021). However, working mothers' life satisfaction due to home office arrangements is sometimes proven to be negative, as they have to devote more time and concentration to care work (Driscoll, 2019). Clair, Gordon, Kroon, and Reilly (2021) discovered that another major reason for lower life satisfaction during the home office is social isolation. The dramatic change in work arrangements in COVID-19 results in a large number of employees working from home which leads to decreased job performance, increased stress and lower life satisfaction (Kumar, Kumar, Aggarwal, & Yeap, 2021). Moreover, Demirbağ and Demirbağ (2022) indicate an indirect effect of home office arrangements on life satisfaction. Thus, the relationship between work-from-home and life satisfaction was not generalized in the above studies. Therefore, their interactions should be further examined.

H1 Work from home has a positive relationship with life satisfaction.

2.6. Workplace Flexibility and Life Satisfaction

Because of changes in socioeconomic, demographic, and gender roles, the introduction of flexible employment programs is an increasingly widespread corporate practice worldwide (Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui, 2019). As a family friendly strategy, flexible work arrangements have recently garnered considerable attention from groups and academics (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). Workers are eager to work for companies that offer flexible work schedules and arrangements (Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui, 2019). Flexibility and workplace support create life satisfaction by ensuring job content. while work hours are directly and negatively associated (Kim, Chai, Kim, Kim, & Song, 2022).

H2 Workplace flexibility has a positive relationship with Life Satisfaction.

2.7. Work from Home and Work-Life Balance

As the shutdown began, all people who could be expected to work from home were obliged to do so, and offices and other workplaces were forced to close (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Working hours at home are associated with job and family satisfaction, but adversely affect stress and burnout. The greater flexibility provided by working from home makes it easier to prevent family duties from clashing with business (Uddin, 2021). Employers use working from home, along with other flexible work arrangements, to encourage work-life balance in their workplace (Caringal-Go et al., 2022).

According to Putri and Amran (2021), working from home has a favorable and substantial influence on work-life balance.

Working from home may influence each employee's work-life balance, either positively or negatively (Putri & Amran, 2021; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). Putri and Amran (2021) also opined that work from home may have a detrimental influence on an employee's work-life balance if not maintained appropriately. Although working from home helps lower the frequency of COVID-19 outbreaks, some women find it difficult to adjust to working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmed & Islam, 2022). The results of the study conducted by Basak and Akter (2022) also show that Bangladeshi female university teachers face difficulties in balancing their work-life boundaries while working from home. A negative effect of working from home on work-life balance was found by Vyas and Butakhieo (2021) because workers cannot split their time across work and their personal lives because they are still used to having defined working hours. In addition, the percentage of those who said their household burden had grown since the pandemic was greater among those who worked from home than among those who did not (Tomohiro, 2021). Conversely, Staying at home allows working mothers to better manage their careers, meetings, family, and other duties as well as their children are able to attend online classes and complete their everyday schoolwork during COVID-19 more effectively. Actually, this is how they can balance their career and life with the help of working from home (Uddin, 2021). As female workers could work from home, they had more time for their families and could dedicate more time to their hobbies and other interests. Furthermore, as a result of working from home, they experienced less sadness and were more satisfied with their jobs (Ahmed & Islam, 2022). Therefore, HR officials must also take note of and develop explicit rules for working from home (WFH) to ensure that employees are not overburdened (Rahman & Arif, 2021). Therefore, the interplay between work from home and work-life balance can be further examined.

H3 Work from home has a positive relationship with work-life balance.

2.8. Workplace Flexibility and Work-Life Balance

Flexible work hours provide greater productivity and increased profitability as well as reduced stress, improved employee wellness, and a sound work-life balance (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). According to Saxena (2018), flex-time, flex-place(work-from-home), shift work, and part-time employment are crucial for illustrating how work-life balance is attainable with flexible work arrangements. This also suggests that, compared to part-time workers, both men and women chose flextime and working from home as their preferred flexible work schedules. This flexibility may provide both obstacles and possibilities for the organization and work-life balance of employees (Björntoft et al., 2020). With flextime, employees can simply manage their personal and professional lives, which reduces work-life conflicts and allows them to pursue their passions while performing better at work (Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui, 2019). Conversely, no significant differences were found between flexible work schedules and fixed-hour work schedules in terms of work-life balance (Hayman, 2009).

Work-family interactions tend to be driven by flexibility and work from home, family and marital support, and organizational support among working women (Uddin, 2021). A study on Bangladeshi working women depicts, flexibility in selecting their own working hours and working days, workplace assistance and shortened work hours help them to confront this “new normal” during covid days and these are also claimed as the stimulants of their work-life balance (Uddin, 2021). Subramaniam et al. Subramaniam, Overton, and Maniam (2015) argued that women with higher levels of education and income prefer flexible work arrangements because they boost the likelihood of achieving a healthy work-life balance. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4 Workplace flexibility has a positive relationship with work-life balance.

2.9. Work-Life Balance as a Mediator

The ability of a corporation to attract, develop, and control workers is determined by the firm's endeavor in the area of employee life satisfaction (Kashyap et al., 2016). Work domain satisfaction is an antecedent of life satisfaction (Kim et al., 2022). Those employees enjoy a higher level of life satisfaction and have the capacity to maintain a well-established boundary between work and family

domains (Yasir, Majid, Yasir, & Khan, 2019). According to our study, higher levels of work-life balance had a beneficial influence on job satisfaction and life satisfaction among university teachers (Žnidaršič & Marič, 2021). Workplace stressors may harm life satisfaction among employees (Lee & Tsai, 2022). Firms may ensure a greater number of satisfied workers by offering a greater work-life balance (Kashyap et al., 2016). It is possible that the link between job quality and life happiness is also impacted by the extent to which individuals are able to balance work with other key life domains, such as social life and family life (Saraceno, Olaghero, & Torrioni, 2005).

H5 Work-Life Balance has a positive relationship with Life Satisfaction.

Employees are considered valuable assets within an organization. Organizations that prioritize facilitating a better work-life balance for their employees tend to have a higher level of employee satisfaction (Kashyap et al., 2016). They also opined that, in contemporary times, there has been a shift in emphasis towards adopting a comprehensive perspective on an employee's life to improve both the effectiveness of organizations and the retention of employees. Organizations are implementing work-life balance practices, focusing on the customization of employment conditions. These include flexible work arrangements, part-time employment, flexible working hours, and telecommuting, aimed at helping employees achieve a harmonious balance between personal and professional spheres (Kashyap et al., 2016). However, the interplay between these employment conditions remains unclear.

H6 Work-Life Balance mediates the relationship between Work from Home and Life Satisfaction.

H7 Work-life Balance mediates the relationship between Workplace Flexibility and Life Satisfaction.

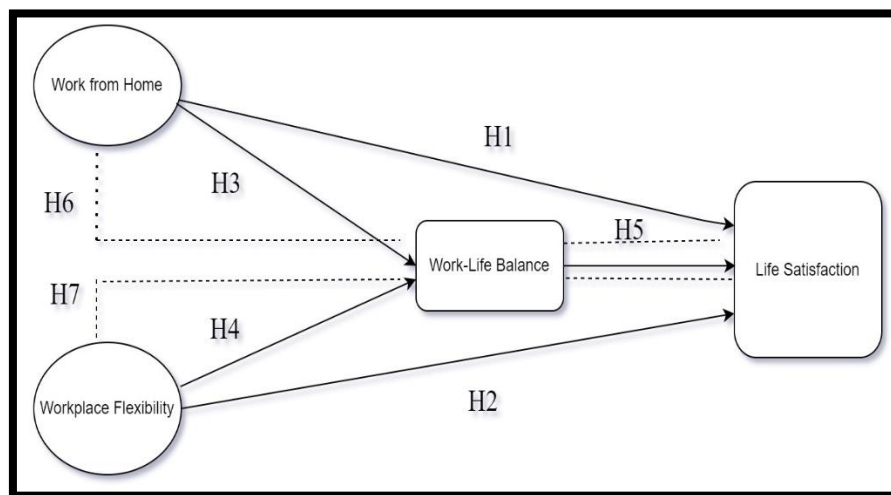


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Source: Developed by the author using draw.io

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of this study. This study investigates how flexible working arrangements, such as work-from-home and workplace flexibility, increase the work-life balance and life satisfaction of working mothers in Bangladesh. This research also examined the mediating effect of work-life balance on the relationship between work-from-home and life satisfaction, as well as the relationship between workplace flexibility and life satisfaction.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and data

To select the sample for this study, working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic was used as the mandatory criterion. A screening question (Did your employer allow you to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic?) was used to recruit the respondents. A total of 196 Bangladeshi female employees were selected as respondents of this study. Due to the mandatory enforced lockdown in this country, it was difficult to collect responses from participants physically. Thus, nonprobability sampling, as well as convenience sampling, was adopted as the sampling method in

this study. As a type of non-probability sampling approach, convenience sampling, sometimes referred to as availability sampling, collects data from readily accessible and qualified participants (Rahman & Arif, 2021). Surveying through this sampling technique may help limit bias (Su et al., 2021).

A questionnaire was distributed to 300 working women, mainly based on the Chattagram Division of Bangladesh. The 300 women were selected based on the researcher's convenience. All 300 women were communicated by the author personally (or with the help of data collectors). Among them, 224 responded to the questionnaire. After screening these 224 responses only 196 (n=196) responses were found to be complete and ready for this study purpose. This questionnaire consisted of six different sections, including the mandatory screening question section at the beginning, the demographic profile of the respondents (age of the respondents, marital status, education, occupation, number of dependents at home, and types of employment of the respondents), and the remaining four sections were used to collect data to measure the research variables.

3.2. Measurements Scales

A five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree) was used to assess the responses regarding the constructs of the research variables. In this study, several measurement scales were used to collect responses. The first is a 9-item work-from-home scale adapted from Neufeld and Fang (2005) to measure the work-from-home productivity of the respondents. A 4-item instrument was then adapted from (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001) was used to measure workplace flexibility. The Work-life Balance scale was adopted from the study of Taşdelen-Karçkay and Bakalim (2017), which is an 8-item construct. Finally, the Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener et al., 1985) was used to measure respondents' level of life satisfaction. This 4-item scale is used by thousands of studies since its inception (Deutrom, Katos, & Ali, 2022; Fisher, Sung, Kammes, Okyere, & Park, 2022; Sousa & Lyubomirsky, 2001; Trzebiński, Cabański, & Czarnecka, 2020).

3.3. Data Analysis

After data collection, the researcher checked and analyzed the data manually before conducting statistical analysis to ensure high reliability. All questionnaires were accurately completed and devoid of any outliers, rendering them suitable for subsequent data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographics of the respondents. Reliability and validity were tested to examine the data quality. Therefore, the fitness of the research model is determined. Smart PLS version 4.0.8.9 software was used to conduct further statistical analyses of the study variables and test the hypotheses.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the socioeconomic background of the participants. According to the data, the majority of respondents were married (75 %), whereas only 25% were single. Accordingly, most of the respondents (41.84%) were in the 31–40 years age group, 38.27% were less than or equal to 30 years, 15.31% were between 41 and 50 years, and the rest were more than 50 years. The majority of respondents had a master's degree or above (48.98%), followed by 31.12% have a bachelor, 16.33% up to higher secondary, and lastly, 3.57% said that they are holding higher education levels. According to the participants' answers, the results mentioned in Table 1 indicate that the majority (50.51%) had one or two dependents at home. A total of 37.76% had no dependents, 10.20% had three to four dependents and only 1.53% had either five or more dependents at home. Regarding their occupations, a large portion of the respondents 42.86% were teachers. Among the remaining, 31.12% held a private job and 9.69% were govt. service holders and 16.33% were self-employed. Finally, 79.59% of the respondents were employed full-time, where 9.69 were in part-time contracts, and the remaining 10.71% were not specified.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Item	Categories	Frequency (N-196)	Percentage
Age	>= 30 yrs	75	38.27
	31- 40 yrs	82	41.84
	41-50 yrs	30	15.31
	<= 51yrs	9	4.59
Education	Up to Higher	32	16.33
	Secondary		
	Bachelor	61	31.12
	Masters and above	96	48.98
Marital Status	Others	7	3.57
	Married	147	75.00
	Single	49	25.00
Number of children and other dependents	None	74	37.76
	1-2	99	50.51
	3-4	20	10.20
	5 and above	3	1.53
Occupation	Teaching	84	42.86
	Govt. Service	19	9.69
	Private Service	61	31.12
	Self-employed	32	16.33

Source: Authors' own survey

4.2. Reliability and Validity

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) is a well-known approach to calculating complicated path models with latent constructs and their interactions (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Researchers must differentiate between conceptions that are stated reflectively and those that are specified formatively while assessing measurement items (Ringle, Sarstedt, Mitchell, & Gudergan, 2020). Reviewing indicator loadings is the first phase in evaluating a reflective measurement model. Loadings greater than 0.708 are advised, since they suggest that the concept explains more than fifty per cent of the indicator's variation, hence providing sufficient item reliability (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). However, the Indicator reliability for exploratory research should be at least 0.60 acceptable (Hair et al., 2019). Wong (2013) further argued that the acceptable limit is 0.4 to the preferred limit is 0.7. Hence, this study shows that the outer loading of all scales of the latent variables falls within the acceptable to preferred limit. Furthermore, most of these are either close to or greater than the prescribed preferred criteria of 0.7. This indicates strong indicator reliability for the inner model.

Subsequently, the internal consistency reliability needs to be measured. In the field of social science, "Cronbach's alpha" is commonly used to quantify internal consistency reliability, although it tends to produce a conservative result in PLS-SEM (Wong, 2013). Here, the Cronbach's alpha of the four constructs of this study is more than 0.7, which is supported by the thresholds suggested by Hair et al. (2019). Another important tool for calculating consistency reliability is composite reliability, which is also a more liberal option for PLS-SEM (Ringle et al., 2020). In experimental studies, composite reliability levels between 0.60 and 0.70 are regarded as "acceptable," whereas values between 0.70 and 0.90 are "satisfying to good" (Hair et al., 2019). According to this criterion, the constructs used in this study indicate an almost good range of composite reliability, as all of them are near 0.9.

Table 2. Indicator Reliability, Cornbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and AVE

Latent Variabls	Indicators	Loadings	Cornbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	VIF
WORK	WFH1	0.818	0.901	0.919	0.532	2.959

FROM HOME	WFH2	0.807				3.194
	WFH3	0.731				2.395
	WFH4	0.790				2.832
	WFH5	0.665				1.899
	WFH6	0.713				1.891
	WFH7	0.790				2.264
	WFH8	0.653				1.735
	WFH9	0.684				1.825
	WFH10	0.612				1.520
WORK PLACE FLEXIBILITY	WF1	0.739	0.804	0.871	0.629	1.401
	WF2	0.841				2.764
	WF3	0.817				2.611
	WF4	0.771				1.386
WORK-LIFE BALANCE	WLB1	0.713	0.873	0.901	0.533	2.059
	WLB2	0.812				2.528
	WLB3	0.733				1.773
	WLB4	0.673				1.580
	WLB5	0.769				2.388
	WLB6	0.760				2.143
	WLB7	0.599				1.454
	WLB8	0.764				1.935
LIFE SATISFACTION	LS1	0.729	0.827	0.880	0.597	1.599
	LS2	0.832				2.284
	LS3	0.850				2.393
	LS4	0.813				1.951
	LS5	0.616				1.303

Source: Data processed by SMART-PLS (4)

The next phase in evaluating reflective measurement models is to focus on convergent validity, which is the amount to which a construct converges in its indicators by describing the variation in the items (Ravand & Baghaei, 2016). The average variance extracted (AVE) is an appropriate criterion for this function (Ringle et al., 2020). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) can be calculated using the square of the loading of each indicator of a construct and then computing the mean value. A valid AVE of at least 0.50, suggests that the concept explains at least half of the variation in its elements (Hair et al., 2019). Table 2 shows that the AVE calculated for the constructs of this model was less than 0.5, which satisfied the convergent validity of this conceptual model.

After establishing the reliability and convergent validity of the reflectively assessed constructs, the penultimate step was to evaluate their discriminant validity (Ravand & Baghaei, 2016). Hair et al. (2019) opined that discriminant validity is the level at which a construct differs from other constructs of the model. Although the most dominant criterion for calculating discriminant validity is “The Fornell- Larcker criterion, the results of these metrics and the examination of cross-loadings do not reliably detect discriminant validity in common research situations (Henseler et al., 2015). As a probable solution to this problem, they also proposed the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) as a new approach to assess discriminant validity in variance-based SEM where the threshold value is lower than 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT values extracted in this study meet the threshold criteria. Thus, all the tests examined to ensure the reliability and validity of this study were supported by their expected limits.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT ratio)

	LS	WF	WFH	WLB
LS				
WF	0.691			

WFH	0.699	0.605	
WLB	0.757	0.713	0.629

Source: Data processed by SMART-PLS (4)

4.3. Model Fitness

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, it is necessary to assess the structural model's fitness (Hair et al., 2019). The assessment of the structural model is an effort to identify proof to support the conceptual model, that is, the connections across exogenous and endogenous variables (Avkiran & Ringle, 2018). Generating a sequence of regression equations yields structural model coefficients for constructing relationships. When evaluating this structural correlation, collinearity must be analyzed to ensure that the regression equation is not mismatched (Hair et al., 2019). To ensure collinearity, the inflation factor VIF must be calculated (Avkiran & Ringle, 2018).

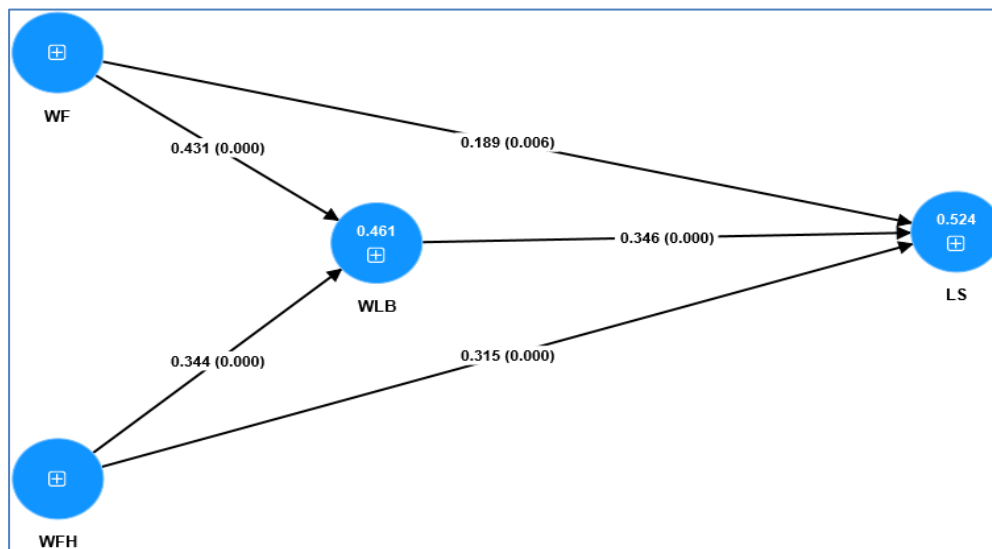
Table 4. Collinearity VIF (inner model)

	LS	WF	WFH	WLB
LS				
WF	1.732			1.388
WFH	1.608			1.388
WLB	1.855			

Source: Data processed by SMART-PLS (4)

Since all the VIF values calculated for the outer and inner models are close to or less than 3, as prescribed by Hair et al. (2019), collinearity is not an issue.

The next important step was to analyze the path coefficients. To assess the explanatory power of the model, researchers should examine the R^2 value (Hair et al., 2019; Ringle et al., 2020), which also represents the degree to which exogenous variables explain endogenous variables (Avkiran & Ringle, 2018). Table 5 denotes moderate explanatory power as the values of R^2 range around 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019). Ravand and Baghaei (2016) suggested calculating another important metric, F^2 to assess the variation in R^2 when a particular predictor is excluded from the model. This can be used to determine whether the excluded construct has a significant influence on endogenous constructs. where the standard threshold of F^2 is at least 0.02, which indicates a small effect, 0.15 means moderate effects and 0.35 directs substantial effects (Avkiran & Ringle, 2018). In this study, the F^2 values revealed that workplace flexibility and working from home have a significant effect on work-life balance, whereas the predictors of life satisfaction have a moderate effect, with the exception of workplace flexibility. The predictive power of the structural model was evaluated by calculating the Q^2 value. This number is derived using the blindfolding technique, which eliminates a portion of the dataset, guesses the model parameters, and forecasts the excluded portion based on the already calculated estimations (Ringle et al., 2020). Table 5 indicates the high predictive accuracy of the proposed model, as the calculated value of Q^2 is more than 0.35 (Ravand & Baghaei, 2016). After confirming the explanatory and predictive power of the proposed model, the next step was to evaluate the statistical significance and test the hypotheses (Hair et al., 2019).



If Q² is greater than zero, it indicates the predictive usefulness of the route model in the context of the endogenous concept and the associated reflective indicators.

Table 5. Exploratory and Predictive Power

Path	R ²	F ²	Q ²
WF-WLB	0.461	0.248	0.433
WFH-WLB		0.159	
WF-LS	0.524	0.043	0.436
WFH-LS		0.130	
WLB-LS		0.136	

Source: Data processed by SMART-PLS (4)

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

It can be noted from the results shown in figure... that WFH had a significant influence on LS [H1: $\beta=0.315$, $t=3.785$, $p=0.000$] and WLB [H3: $\beta=0.344$, $t=4.271$, $p=0.000$]; WF was found to be significantly related to LS [H2: $\beta=0.189$, $t=2.754$, $p=0.006$] and WLB [H4: $\beta=0.431$, $t=6.414$, $p=0.000$]. WLB also significantly predicted LS [H5: $\hat{f}^2=0.346$, $t=4.322$, $p=0.006$]. This indicates that H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 were all supported by this study.

Table 6. Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient	t-statistics	P value	Result
H1	WFH-LS	$\beta=0.315$	3.785	0.000	Supported
H2	WF-LS	$\beta=0.189$	2.754	0.006	Supported
H3	WFH-WLB	$\beta=0.344$	4.271	0.000	Supported
H4	WF-WLB	$\beta=0.431$	6.414	0.000	Supported
H5	WLB-LS	$\beta=0.346$	4.322	0.000	Supported
H6	WFH-WLB-LS	$\beta=0.119$	2.674	0.008	Supported
H7	WF-WLB-LS	$\beta=0.149$	3.716	0.000	Supported

Source: Data processed by SMART-PLS (4)

4.5. Mediation Analysis

A mediation analysis was performed to assess the mediating role of WLB in the relationship between WFH and LS and between WF and LS. The results (see Table 6) revealed a significant indirect effect of WFH and LS [H6: $\beta=0.119$, $t=2.674$, $p=0.008$], and WF and LS [H7: $\beta=0.149$, $t=3.716$, $p=0.000$].

The total effect of WFH on LS was significant [$\beta = 0.435$, $t = 6.242$, $p = 0.000$], as was the total effect of WF on LS [$\beta = 0.338$, $t = 4.998$, $p = 0.000$]. The direct effects were also significant between WFH and LS [H1: $\beta = 0.315$, $t = 3.785$, $p = 0.000$] and between WF and LS [H2: $\beta = 0.189$, $t = 2.754$, $p = 0.006$]. Table 6 depicts the partial mediating role of WLB between the variables (WFH and LS, WF, and LS) justified. Hence, H6 and H7 are also supported.

Table 7. Hypotheses Testing

Effects	Path	Path coefficient	t-statistics	P value
Direct effect	WFH-LS	$\beta = 0.315$	3.785	0.000
	WF-LS	$\beta = 0.189$	2.754	0.006
Indirect effect	WFH-WLB-LS	$\beta = 0.119$	2.674	0.008
	WF-WLB-LS	$\beta = 0.149$	3.716	0.000
Total effect	WFH-WLB-LS	$\beta = 0.435$	6.242	0.000
	WF-WLB-LS	$\beta = 0.338$	4.998	0.000

Source: Data processed by SMART-PLS (4)

4.6. Discussion

This study intends to investigate the mediating effect of work-life balance on the relationships between flexible work arrangements (work from home and workplace flexibility) and the life satisfaction of Bangladeshi working women. This study also proposed a conceptual model to explore the interplay between the study variables.

The results of this study reveal a positive association between work from home (WFH) and life satisfaction (LS) in Bangladeshi working women. Bangladeshi females who were employed responded that they enjoyed a higher level of life satisfaction due to the work-from-home facilities, while the catastrophic epidemic was in action. This result supplements those of similar studies (Ahmed & Islam, 2022). The opposite result was found in a study by Clair et al. (2021). They argued that work from home generates social isolation, which may lead to decreased life satisfaction.

Furthermore, the current study proves that workplace flexibility (WF) is significantly related to life satisfaction (LS). Thus, the more an employee enjoyed workplace flexibility, the more satisfied they were with their life. However, this association between flexibility and life satisfaction was absent in a study conducted by Driscoll (2019).

During COVID-19, work-from-home (WFH) facilities were found to have a positive influence on the work-life balance (WLB) of Bangladeshi working women. Similar results have been reported in several studies (Ahmed & Islam, 2022; Sutarto et al., 2021). The study conducted by Stankevičiūtė and Kunska (2022) depicts workers facing different challenges in balancing their work life while working remotely. Both the positive and negative consequences of working from home on work-life balance have been found in the study (Srimulyani & Hermanto, 2022).

A similar result was found in the interplay between another independent variable, workplace flexibility (WF), and work-life balance (WLB). Thus, workplace flexibility has had a substantial effect on working women's work-life balance in Bangladesh during the pandemic. A positive association between these two constructs was also found by Andrade et al. (Andrade, Westover, & Kupka, 2019). Karsili, Yesiltas, and Berberoglu (2021) opined that flexibility decreases work and family-related stress which is a major antecedent of sound work-life balance. Flexibility is also treated as an important tool for managing and developing employees, as it helps them manage their work and non-work-related outcomes (Smith et al., 2019).

Moreover, this study found a strong link between work-life balance (WLB) and life satisfaction (LS). During the worldwide breakdown of COVID-19, Bangladeshi women, particularly those who are employed, have found that their work and family related outcomes are associated with their life satisfaction. Thus, a well-balanced work and family life may lead to a satisfactory life among working

women. A number of studies found similar results (Haar, Russo, Suñe, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014; Kashyap et al., 2016; Taşdelen-Karçkay & Bakalım, 2017).

In addition, this study also suggests that the mediator variable work-life balance (WLB) could be a prerequisite to establish the relationship between work from home (WFH) and life satisfaction (LS), as well as workplace flexibility (WF) and life satisfaction (LS). The p-values of the indirect effect of work-life balance (WLB) between the constructs matched the significance criteria. The mediation role of work-life balance (WLB) between the relationship of the study variables is proven to be significant, and the hypothesis is supported.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

This study contributes to the existing literature in numerous ways. First, it will help explore the work-life-related outcomes of Bangladeshi working women during the epidemic. The emergency period of COVID-19 drastically shifts the world of work and family life around the globe (Taşdelen-Karçkay & Bakalım, 2017). The situation in this country is not different from that in the rest of the world. Thus, this study will help determine the level of life satisfaction enjoyed by employed women in this country in such an emergency. This study also contributes to the literature on the work and nonwork domains of working women in Bangladesh. As COVID-19 is a catalyst for women's work-life balance and life satisfaction, this study will help extend the study of work-life domains during emergencies. It also supplements previous research in this field of study by exploring the effect of work-related outcomes on life satisfaction, which is not judged by a substantial number of studies. Finally, it explored both the direct and indirect effects of work-life balance on the relationship between work-from-home and life satisfaction, as well as on the interplay of workplace flexibility and life satisfaction. This will help organizations realize the importance of work-life balance arrangements to increase the well-being and productivity of employees. HR practitioners and regulatory authorities of respective countries will collect the insights of this study to formulate the strategic HR guidelines on a regular situations as well as in emergencies.

5.2. Limitations and future research direction

Although this study contributes in a number of ways, it has a number of limitations. First, the respondents of this research were mainly from Chattagram, Bangladesh. The results can be generalized, and more research could operate in different parts of the country. Second, the emergency situation forces the researcher to select respondents based on their own convenience. Future studies could utilize a probability sampling method to increase the acceptability of research outcomes. Third, more research is needed to analyze the effects of the study variables on male workers. Finally, further studies should include different work-related issues in this conceptual framework.

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Annexure:

Work-from Home Scale	WFH 1	I am very productive while working from home.
	WFH 2	I feel that the quality of the work I do during working from home is better.
	WFH 3	Working from home is personally beneficial for me at work.
	WFH 4	Working from home motivates me to work better
	WFH 5	I have sufficient technical knowledge in completing work during working from home.
	WFH 6	I have sufficient authority in carrying out work during working from home.
	WFH 7	I have clear work targets when working from home.
	WFH 8	My boss is concerned about my well-being during working from home.
	WFH 9	I receive technical assistance from my workplace in completing work during working from home.
	WFH 10	I can concentrate on getting work done even when there are distractions from family members during working from home.
Workplace Flexibility Scale	WF 1	I have total flexibility in selecting the location of my work.
	WF 2	I have total flexibility in deciding on my work schedule.
	WF 3	I have total flexibility in deciding and scheduling my work preferences.
	WF 4	I have sufficient flexibility in my job to maintain adequate work and personal and family life balance
Work-Life Balance Scale	WLB 1	I can satisfy my own needs and the needs of the important people in my life.
	WLB 2	I can manage my roles related to family and professional life in a balanced manner.
	WLB 3	I can make enough time for myself by preserving the balance between my professional life and family life.
	WLB 4	I feel loyalty to my roles both in my professional life and my family.
	WLB 5	I manage my professional and family life in a controlled manner.
	WLB 6	I am successful at creating a balance between my multiple life roles

		(employee/spouse/mother, father, etc.).
	WLB 7	I can deal with the situations that occur due to the conflict between my roles that are specific to my professional and family life.
	WLB 8	I am equally content with my roles in my family and professional life.
Life Satisfaction Scale	LS 1	In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
	LS 2	The conditions of my life are excellent.
	LS 3	I am satisfied with my life.
	LS 4	So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.
	LS 5	If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing