

Challenges for work–life balance during COVID-19 induced nationwide lockdown: exploring gender difference in emotional exhaustion in the Indian setting

Gender
difference in
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exhaustion

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to attempt to explore the nature of relationship between work–life balance and emotional exhaustion experienced by the employed individuals while working from home during the pandemic COVID-19 induced nationwide lockdown in the Indian setting.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 180 working professionals in North India who were working from home during the lockdown. PROCESS macro developed for SPSS was used to test the hypotheses.

Findings – Findings depicted that in comparison to men, women felt more emotional exhaustion due to personal life interference in work during work from home period. Surprisingly, the relationship between work interference with personal life, and emotional exhaustion did not differ by gender. It was found that the participative leadership could contribute to reduction of work interference with personal life, and through such an influence, emotional exhaustion experienced by an employee could be reduced to some extent.

Originality/value – Many previous studies have explored the nature of the relationship between work–life balance and emotional exhaustion, but rarely any study could cover any Pandemic affected working scenario. This study attempted to investigate such a relationship when employees were obligated to mandatorily work from home during the countrywide lockdown.

Keywords Gender, Emotional exhaustion, Work–life balance, Participative leadership

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The beginning of the year 2020 was marked by a major global public health crisis. The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) that supposedly originated from Wuhan in China during December 2019 made its presence felt in more than 100 countries by the first week of March 2020. On March 12, 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) characterised COVID-19 as a “controllable pandemic” (WHO, 2020, COVID-19 Situation Report-52, 12th March). In India, the first case of COVID-19 was reported on 30 January 2020, and by mid-March a total of 25 confirmed cases were reported.

Considering the fact that currently, no medicine or vaccine was available to treat this pandemic, “social distancing” was suggested as one of the possible measures to protect individuals from being infected or infecting others. On 24 March, Indian Prime Minister announced a 21 days’ nationwide lockdown till 3 April 2020, which got further extended till 3 May 2020. Following the Government’s mandate, some of the industries made their



employees “Work from Home” (WFH) during this lockdown period. WFH, also known as telecommuting or telework (Bloom *et al.*, 2015), has now become a popular practice due to the advancement in information and communication technologies (ICTs). Telecommuting enables employees to perform the tasks allocated at the workplace by being at a place away from the normal workplace (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). Some employees prefer WFH as it helps in attaining work–life balance (WLB), but managers become sceptical as it could lead to shirking from assigned responsibilities while being home (Bloom *et al.*, 2015). COVID-19-induced lockdown has forced businesses to run through WFH. After the announcement of nationwide lockdown in India to contain the spread of the infection, WFH policy was opted by the majority of organisations. During this lockdown, the scenario at home was quite different from the previous times, as all family members were lockdown together inside home. On the one hand, if this lockdown gave an opportunity for good family time, but on the other hand, it created challenges to manage family responsibilities. Restriction on out-door movements changed the lifestyle of every individual. Keeping all the family members engaged during the lockdown and facilitating their psychological well-being required a lot of effort from every member of the family. Many Indian households have a practice of hiring the services of paid domestic helpers to do the basic household chores. Due to the lockdown, the services of domestic helpers were hindered. In such a scenario, most of the working professionals got loaded with some household chores that consumed their time and energy and possibly made them feel exhausted.

Working from home during this lockdown was quite challenging for most employees. Irrespective of whether they were staying single or with family, they had to get involved in some household chores. During the lockdown, coordinating between work and family demands was a daunting task for every employed individual. Boundary theory suggests that people create and maintain physical, temporal and psychological boundaries around them to simplify their functioning in the world around them (Allen *et al.*, 2014). Formation of such boundaries enables employees to minimise the interference of work and non-work life with each other. Drawing on the boundary theory, it is posited that while working from home during the lockdown, employees could have struggled in creating and maintaining the temporal, physical and psychological boundaries due to which they might have experienced some difficulties in maintaining WLB. The chances of work–life interference with family life, or family life interference with work–life or both, during WFH in lockdown may not be denied. Due to such conflict between work and personal life during the lockdown, employees might have felt emotional exhaustion. This study attempted to explore the relationship between WLB and emotional exhaustion experienced by employees who were working from home during COVID-19-induced nationwide lockdown, and how this relationship differs between male and female employees. The possible association between perceived participative leadership and work interference with personal life was examined, and how does this association affect emotional exhaustion was also explored.

Theoretical background

Boundary theory

Work life and family life are intertwined and consistently affected by each other. Boundary theory is a popular framework facilitating the understanding of how an individual creates and manages the boundary between work–life and family life domain as an effort to simplify and classify the world around them (Allen *et al.*, 2014). It explains the dynamics of transition from one life domain (such as family) to another life domain (such as work). Throughout the day, people cross various physical, temporal and psychological boundaries during the transition from one domain to another domain (Clark, 2000). Physical boundary corresponds to the place where role-domain behaviour occurs, and temporal boundary

specifies when role-domain work occurs (Allen *et al.*, 2014). Going to office for work means employee physically enters the office premises and stays in office for the duration during which work is done. Psychological boundaries correspond to the rules developed by people regarding which thinking patterns, behaviour patterns and emotions are appropriate for a particular role-domain (Clark, 2000). So, when a person enters an organisation, he/she adheres to contextually relevant behaviours as per the requirement of work-domain-related roles.

Greer and Payne (2014) have suggested boundary theory as a supportive framework for understanding the unique challenges related to WFM. According to the authors, the traditional boundaries between work and home get changed in the case of WFH. Due to the proximity to family life, an employee could get distracted by the different demands of the family members while working on some official tasks. During WFH, individual transitions from work–life to family life and vice-versa throughout the work-day. Such frequent transition between work–life and family-life demands extra efforts to sustain and adhere to the psychological boundaries, particularly when attending work–life. Individuals need to mentally prepare themselves for every transition from one psychological role to another (Greer and Payne, 2014), and such frequent transition could make individuals feel exhausted.

Work–life balance

WLB is about experiencing satisfaction and having effective functioning both at work and family domain by avoiding role-conflict (Clark, 2000). Even distribution of time, energy and commitment across different life domains lead to an experience of satisfaction among all domains, which altogether facilitate the attainment of WLB (Kirchmeyer, 2000). In earlier days, work life balance was conceptualised as “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role” (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2003, p. 513). So, the individuals’ interpretation of WLB depends upon their perception about how well different life-roles are balanced in their lives (Russo *et al.*, 2016). But the importance of life roles varies according to the stages of work and family lives. Considering the person-centric approach to WLB, Greenhaus and Allen (2011) have argued that the interpretation of WLB will vary throughout the life of people depending upon the career and life stages as well as the variation in their values, goals and aspirations. Literature suggests that WLB is majorly conceptualised around themes like attentive engagement in multiple roles, managing time and involvement across multiple roles, attainment of satisfaction across multiple domains and balanced involvement and satisfaction across life domains (Sirgy and Lee, 2018). An individual would experience a balance when his/her role expectations and role effectiveness are consistent with the prevailing life priorities (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011).

WLB literature is dominated by work-life conflict tradition (Sirgy and Lee, 2018). Work–family balance is often understood in terms of the absence of conflict or interference between family and work (Frone, 2003). The terms like work–family conflict (WFC), family–work conflict (FWC) are frequently used to represent work/nonwork interference (Mellner *et al.*, 2014). WFC occurs when pressure and problems related to work intrude on the family life domain and negatively affect the quality of family life, whereas FWC happens when the family responsibilities related demands interfere with work-duties related demands (Liu *et al.*, 2015). Fisher (2001) have operationalised WLB in terms of three aspects: work interference with personal life (WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW) and work/personal life enhancement. However, some studies on WLB have focused on only two dimensions:

WIPL and PLIW (Karkoulian *et al.*, 2016). The absence of work-life-conflict reflects WLB (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). Work–life conflicts have dysfunctional consequences for the well-being and health of an employee (Sirgy and Lee, 2018). A decrease in WLB increases emotional exhaustion (Lee and Kim, 2013).

Balancing work life and family life while working from home during the lockdown could have been a challenge for many of the employed individuals. On one hand, official responsibilities demanded more effort, whereas, on the other hand, the personal/family responsibilities needed more time and energy. Many of the employed individuals could have experienced work-family conflict while working from home during the changed scenario at home at the time of lockdown.

Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is one of the widely discussed components of burnout. It has emerged from Maslach's (1982) model of burnout, which conceptualised burnout as a three-dimensional construct (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2003). Emotional exhaustion "represents basic individual stress dimension of burnout" (Maslach *et al.*, 2001, p. 399). Overwhelming demand of time/energy experienced by an individual (Boles *et al.*, 1997), excess of emotional and psychological demands thrust on an individual (Bacharach *et al.*, 1991) lead to emotional exhaustion. So, the feeling of being overextended and drained of inner resources causes emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben and Bowler, 2005). Research suggests that work–family conflict often leads to emotional exhaustion (Liu *et al.*, 2015).

At the time of lockdown, the employed individuals who are working from home might be experiencing difficulty in maintaining WLB. Considering the possibility of interference of work with family and vice-versa, it is hypothesised that:

- H1. A positive relationship would exist between WIPL and emotional exhaustion.
- H2. A positive relationship would exist between PLIW and emotional exhaustion.

Role of gender

Gender has been a popular variable of interest in work–life studies (Delina and Raya, 2016; Drummond *et al.*, 2017; Eby *et al.*, 2005; Shockley *et al.*, 2017) and emotional exhaustion studies (Rubino *et al.*, 2013). It is also explored as an important moderator variable in the work–family interface process (Drummond *et al.*, 2017). Gender differences and gender roles are important factors in facilitating a better understanding of the work–family interface (Eby *et al.*, 2005). Gender role theory (Pleck, 1977) posits that men and women prioritise work and family differently. According to this theory, when it comes to giving preference between work and family domains, work becomes the primary domain for men and women give preference to the family (Blanch and Aluja, 2012). Literature suggests that any change in the work–family context gives the reason to explore the gender differences both within and across the work and family life domains (Drummond *et al.*, 2017).

WFH during the nationwide lockdown created unexpected changes in work–family context. Considering such changes in the work–family context, it was decided to explore the gender differences between the relation of WIPL and PLIW with emotional exhaustion. It is hypothesised that:

- H3. Gender would moderate the relation between WIPL and emotional exhaustion.
- H4. Gender would moderate the relation between PLIW and emotional exhaustion.

Participative leadership

Participative leaders are considered to be supportive as they consult subordinates about problems and possible actions required to address those problems (Mulki *et al.*, 2006). Participative leadership plays an important role in reducing emotional exhaustion (Mulki *et al.*, 2006). Many studies have suggested social support as one of the antecedents of work–family conflict (Blanch and Aluja, 2012; Eby *et al.*, 2005). The supportive nature of a participative leader might be anticipated to play a significant role in creating less stress among employees in any demanding situation. During the work from home at the time of nationwide lockdown, the boundary between work and family life can be considered to be quite permeable between the official hours. In such a work–family context, the role of participative leadership in deciding the work-schedule and task performance level could be considered to help reduce WIPL. Considering the supportive nature of a participative leader, the rationale to explore the participative leadership as an antecedent of work-family conflict can be justified. In some of the research, the work–life conflict is found to mediate the effect of social support on burnout (Blanch and Aluja, 2012). Similarly, an attempt to investigate WIPL as a mediator between perceived participative leadership and emotional exhaustion can also be considered. It is hypothesised that:

- H5. Perceived participative leadership would negatively relate to WIPL.
- H6. Perceived participative leadership would negatively relate to emotional exhaustion.
- H7. WIPL would mediate the relationship between perceived participative leadership and emotional exhaustion.

Method

Sample and procedure

For this study, the data were collected from the employed individuals (employed on payroll) who were working from home during the COVID-19-induced countrywide lockdown. The selected participants were full time employees, and their employers expected them to be available online at least for the normal office hours during the working days. The research participants belonged to a heterogeneous sample of industries, including IT, education, finance and automobile.

The data collection was undertaken through an online survey in 10 days between 10 April 2020 to 20 April 2020. In India, Covid-19 announced at first a nationwide 21 days' lockdown from 24 March until 14 April, which further got extended until 4 May 2020. It may be noted that the lockdown further got extended until 31 May 2020, with some relaxations. Data were collected from working professionals in the north India who were working from home during the lockdown. Considering the time constraint, as data had to be collected during the lockdown period, so the questionnaire was circulated among the known professional contacts of the author. These were mostly employed in the companies located in north India only.

The questionnaire was shared with 194 prospect respondents. A total of 180 respondents provided usable data, making a response rate of 92.8%. The majority of the respondents were male (51.7%), working in a private sector (78.3%), between age of 25 and 35 years (64.4%), and had more than three family members staying with them during the lockdown (56.1%).

Measures

Items to measure the variables in the study were majorly adapted from the validated scales and few were added (Mas-Machuca *et al.*, 2016) as suggested by a group of five knowledgeable experts (having a PhD degree in behavioural sciences) in a consensual

manner. Respondents indicated their responses on a five-point scale with anchors 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Further information about the measurement of variables is given below.

Work-life balance. The scale used to measure two chosen dimensions of WLB, namely, WIPL and PLIW, was built upon the scale given by Hayman (2005). To measure WIPL, three items were adapted from the scale of Hayman (2005), and two new items were developed and included in the scale. To measure PLIW, three items were adapted from the scale of Hayman (2005) and one item was developed and included in the scale. The items for WIPL and PLIW, that are developed by the author of this study, are given in Appendix. Considering the changes in work-family context during the telework at the time of COVID-19-induced nationwide lockdown, only those items were chosen from Hayman's (2005) scale that seemed to be related to the changed scenario.

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was assessed using five items adapted from the exhaustion subscale of Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). These five items were also used by Moore (2000) to operationalise work exhaustion and reported the acceptable psychometric properties ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Participative leadership. Participative leadership was measured by using the adapted items from Harris and Ogbonna's (2001) scale. Out of the five items of the scale, only three items were selected to measure a particular leadership style and the remaining two were dropped as they did not relate well with the changed work context during the nationwide lockdown. For this variable, respondents indicated their responses by using a five-point scale with anchors 1 = not at all to 5 = to a great extent.

Results

Data analysis and strategy

The analyses were done in two steps. In the first step, the validity and reliability of the measurement scales of the variables were assessed by using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. In the second step, the hypotheses were tested. We assessed the hypothesised effects of WIPL and PLIW on emotional exhaustion. After that, we assessed the moderation effects of gender on the relation of WIPL and PLIW with emotional exhaustion. At last, we assessed the effects of perceived participative leadership on emotional exhaustion both directly, and indirectly through WIPL. We used the SPSS macro Process (Hayes, 2013) to examine the hypothesised mediation and moderation effects. Through the macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2013), unstandardised coefficient estimates and bias-corrected CIs were produced via bootstrapping (5,000 bootstraps samples). The criterion of $p < 0.05$ was followed for statistical significance.

Assessment of fit

Initially, the convergent validity of all the items of the respective scales was examined through exploratory factor analysis (Mas-Machuca *et al.*, 2016). The results of EFA corroborated that all items were correctly grouped for the construct they were referring to. The factor loading of five items to measure WIPL ranged between 0.73 and 0.81. The factor loading of four items corresponding to PLIW ranged between 0.75 and 0.86. Five items intended to measure emotional exhaustion scales had the factor loadings between 0.78 and 0.86. The factor loading for three items measuring participative leadership ranged between 0.86 and 0.88. According to Bagozzi and Yi (1988), factor loadings above 0.60 are considered to be good. All items of respective variables had their factor loading above 0.60, which gives the support for the convergent validity at EFA level.

The reliability of all the constructs was also evaluated. As shown in Table 1, the values of both the Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) stand above the threshold values of 0.6 (Mas-Machuca *et al.*, 2016). The results in Table 1 indicate that the scales for all the constructs have good internal consistency. The value of CR greater than 0.50 or above corroborates adequate convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981, p. 46).

The overall fit of the measurement model was assessed with respect to χ^2 statistics, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) and comparative fit index (CFI). For the RMSEA and SRMR, values less than 0.50 indicate good fit, values of 0.500-08 indicate moderate fit (Browne and Cudeck, 1993). For CFI, values of 0.95 or higher represent excellent fit, whereas values of 0.90 are acceptable (Hu and Bentler, 1998). The factor structure of hypothesised measurement model consisting of four factors, namely, WIPL, PLIW, emotional exhaustion and participative leadership, was examined. The results for indices (χ^2 (df) = 163.21 (110); CFI = 0.976, RMSEA = 0.052; SRMR = 0.04) indicated that hypothesised measurement model fits the data.

The convergent validity for each factor was further established by the factor loadings resulted in CFA (Iverson and Maguire, 2000). The factor loading of 0.50 or above shows the existence of convergent validity (Liang and Chia, 2014). Loadings (standardised regression weights) for the items of WIPL ranged from 0.78 to 0.88, for PLIW they ranged between 0.73 and 0.99, emotional exhaustion items had from 0.76 to 0.92 and items of participative leadership ranged from 0.76 to 0.84, suggesting a good convergent validity. Discriminant validity is established when the square root of AVE (average variance extracted) of each construct is higher than the correlation of that particular construct with any other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The values of the square root of AVE (depicted in italic in the diagonal), as shown in Table 1 establishes the discriminant validity.

Harman's single-factor test and partial correlation procedure were followed to statistically test the impact of common method variance (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). For Harman's single factor test, all variables were loaded onto a single factor, and only 38% of variance was found to be explained by a single factor. For the partial correlation procedure, factor analysis was conducted. The effects of the first unrotated factor were statistically controlled to test whether the correlations between the variables of interests were still significant. Results suggested no significant changes. Both tests indicated that common method variance would unlikely to create any serious issue in this study.

Test of hypotheses

We tested all hypotheses by using the SPSS macro PROCESS (Preacher *et al.*, 2007). Using Model 1, as hypothesised in H1, WIPL ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = 0.55 to 0.82) was found to be positively related to emotional exhaustion. In support of the H2, PLIW ($\beta = 0.81$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = 0.61 to 1.01) was found to be positively related to emotional exhaustion.

Construct	Cronbach's						
	α	CR	AVE	EE	WIPL	PLIW	PL
Emotional exhaustion (EE)	0.93	0.929	0.724	<i>(0.851)</i>			
Work interference with personal life (WIPL)	0.92	0.913	0.679	0.755	<i>(0.824)</i>		
Personal life interference with work (PLIW)	0.87	0.880	0.647	0.535	0.521	<i>(0.805)</i>	
Participative leadership (PL)	0.84	0.841	0.638	-0.152	-0.209	-0.153	<i>(0.799)</i>

Notes: $n = 200$; $r > 0.15$ are significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 1.
Properties of
measurement scales
and correlation
matrix of latent
factors

As per the results of Model 1, the *H3* could not be supported as the relationship between WIPL and emotional exhaustion was not found to be moderated by gender ($\beta = -0.03$, $p = 0.78$, 95% CI = -0.23 to 0.17). Consistent with the *H4*, gender moderated the relationship between personal life interference with work (PLIW) and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.39$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = -0.72 to -0.09), such that it was stronger for women than men. The interactive influence of personal life interference in work (PLIW) and gender on emotional exhaustion is depicted in [Figure 1](#).

Model 4 was used to test the *H5*, *H6* and *H7*. As hypothesised (*H5*) perceived participative leadership was negatively related to WIPL ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = -0.29 to -0.03). *H6* could not supported, as the direct relationship between participative leadership and emotional exhaustion was not found to be significant ($\beta = -0.01$, $p = 0.9842$, 95% CI = -0.10 to 0.10). To test *H7*, [Hayes \(2013\)](#) was followed, who stipulated that mediation is evident in the data if there exists a significant *ab* effect, irrespective of paths *a* and *b* being separately significant ([Drummond et al., 2017](#)). The results indicated that work interference in personal life (WIPL) mediated the relationship between perceived participative leadership and emotional exhaustion as the indirect effect (*ab* effect) was found to be significant ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = -0.21 to -0.01). Though the path (i.e. path *a*) between perceived participative leadership and WIPL ($\beta = 10.16$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = -0.29 to -0.0) and the path (i.e. path *b*) between WIPL and emotional exhaustion were also found to be significant ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = 0.58 to 0.80).

Discussion

Consistent with the previous research ([Liu et al., 2015](#)), both WIPL and PLIW, related positively to emotional exhaustion. The relationship between PLIW and emotional exhaustion was moderated by gender such that it was stronger for women than men. This finding was consistent with previous research about family–work conflict being a major contributor to emotional exhaustion in women ([Posig and Kickul, 2004](#)). Surprisingly, the relationship between WIPL and emotional exhaustion did not differ by gender. Perceived participative leadership was found to be negatively related to WIPL. The direct relationship between perceived participative leadership and emotional exhaustion did not emerge to be

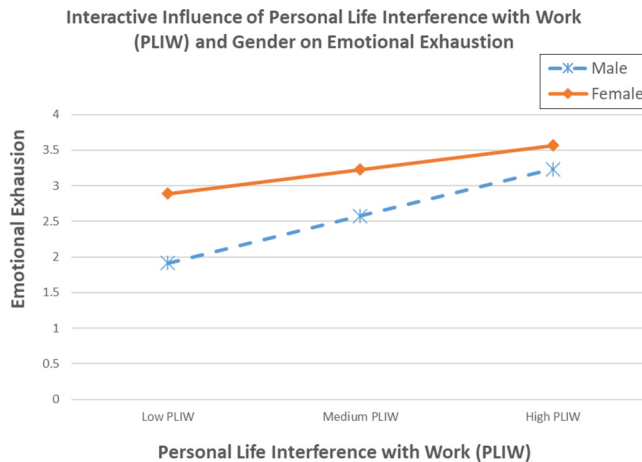


Figure 1.
Interactive influence of personal life interference with work (low, medium and high) and gender (male and female) on emotional exhaustion

significant in the changed work–family scenario. The mediation hypothesis got support as WIPL mediated the influence of participative leadership on emotional exhaustion. In the current study, the role of participative leadership in reducing emotional exhaustion (Mulki *et al.*, 2006) could only be supported through WIPL.

This research highlights the nature of WLB experienced during work from home situation at the time of COVID-19-induced nationwide lockdown, and how it differs in men and women. This study also highlights the fact that in such an unprecedented scenario how participative leadership could contribute to reducing WIPL and through such an influence, emotional exhaustion experienced by an employee could be reduced to some extent. It can be suggested that during WFH (work from home), participative leadership could relate to emotional exhaustion only when an individual perceives work as interfering with personal life.

According to gender role theory (Rajadhyaksha *et al.*, 2015), family and work are considered to be the primary domains for women, whereas work becomes the primary domain for men. Due to such prescribed gender specific roles, working women might experience a double bind when family and work are equally demanding. In the case of dual-career phenomena, couples juggle between work and family demands, and in such cases, women might feel a double bind due to the prescribed gender specific roles existing in a particular society. The working women might have to struggle to create a balance between work and family, particularly when both simultaneously demand higher attention and efforts. In such a double bind situation, support from family members would be a great help for working women. Rupert *et al.* (2012) have found that social support from family becomes more important for working women than men. The social support by family members helps to minimise work–family conflict and hence reduces the experience of psychological stain among working women (Drummond *et al.*, 2017).

During the lockdown, the scenario at home was quite different from the normal scenario. All family members were confined within the house, no outdoor movement to socialise or for entertainment, and no support was available in household chores from the hired domestic helpers. During such an unprecedented scenario, most of the employed individuals had to focus on their professional demands, together with fulfilling their personal life needs. Anticipating the possibilities of economic slowdown, the fear of impending lay-off started percolating in the minds of most of the employed individuals. Such thoughts made individuals put extra efforts to give their best toward their professional responsibilities to minimise the possibility of being laid-off. During the lockdown, WFH was the most popular mode to get into work-life to meet professional demands. It is not as though WFH does not have its own challenges, which can be understood from the boundary theory framework (Greer and Payne, 2014). As mentioned earlier, according to this theory, individuals seek to create and maintain some boundaries to simplify and order the environment around them (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000). Such psychological, temporal and/or physical boundaries (Clark, 2000) help individuals to minimise interference of work with family life and vice-versa. The changed scenario at home during the lockdown made it challenging for an employed individual to create such boundaries to minimise the conflict between work and family life. The experienced conflict between work and family while working from home during the lockdown emerged as one of the sources of emotional exhaustion among employees.

Fear of impending lay-off due to the lockdown induced economic slowdown implicitly made the work-life a priority in comparison to the non-work life. Due to such implicit influence, an individual could not perceive work–life interference with personal life, but they could perceive personal life interfering with work. Such perceived interference emerged as a source of emotional exhaustion. In India, men generally do not participate in household work (Rout *et al.*, 1999), so women have to take the responsibility of the major share of

household chores (Rout *et al.*, 1999). Though Indian working women prefer to take services of paid domestic help for household chores, but during the lockdown, such services could not be availed. Because of the sheer load of household chores, women are left with less resources to engage with professional demands (Ghosh *et al.*, 2020). Working women are in dilemma as to how to manage with perfection between work and home (Delina and Raya, 2016), and this is creating a double bind for them. During the telework at the time of lockdown, working women could feel more emotional exhaustion than men due to two reasons. First, as like men, they too faced the fear of lay-off due to the lockdown induced economic slowdown. Second, because of the demanding household responsibilities, they were struggling to give their best during work from home.

Practical implications

In general, irrespective of gender difference, work–life interference with personal life and PLIW could lead to emotional exhaustion. This study brings out the fact that even during telework at the time of nationwide lockdown, such association would hold. Previous research suggested that the participative leadership approach of a supervisor could make a difference in emotional exhaustion experienced by an employee (Mulki *et al.*, 2006). The findings of this study suggest that in case of work from home, when an employee feels emotional exhaustion due to WIPL, then participative leadership by his/her supervisor can contribute to the reduction of emotional exhaustion by lowering WIPL. So, during imposed work from home situation, if a supervisor practices the participative leadership, then he/she can, in some way, facilitate minimisation of emotional exhaustion experienced by an employee. Thus, by practicing participative leadership, a supervisor can contribute to the psychological well-being of an employee during the lockdown induced WFH. Considering the possibilities of the employees experiencing emotional exhaustion, an organisation could consider arranging for the provision of an online counselling service by a trained professional psychiatrist. Such a proactive initiative by an organisation during a stressful environmental situation could also help the employees maintain their psychological well-being.

Limitations

The study is based on a very limited number of variables. The inclusion of some more variables could have added more insight about the WLB experienced by employees during working from home at the time of lockdown. The data for this study were collected in a very short period and only through an online survey, which resulted in a small sample size. A larger sample size might have resulted in more valid and useful results. Data collection from various industries and their comparative analyses could have added more clarity about the association of WLB and emotional exhaustion experienced by the employees of different industries.

Conclusion

WFH policy is considered to support better WLB. COVID-19-induced nationwide lockdown made it mandatory for most of the employees to WFH. During such an unprecedented scenario, when the fear of lay-off was prevailing due to economic slowdown, many employees experienced PLIW during their efforts to give their best performance while working from home. The struggle to juggle between work and family responsibilities emerged as one of the sources of emotional exhaustion experienced by employees during COVID-19-induced nationwide lockdown. During the lockdown, working women are on double bind. Due to the gender-specific roles existing in a particular society, women struggle

to maintain a balance between their professional and personal lives. In such an unprecedented scenario, support from family members, particularly in the context of family related tasks and responsibilities, could be a great help for working women. During the times of COVID-19, news and social media platforms are filled with the pandemic-related precautionary measures. Any attempt on public platforms to motivate family members to help and support the women of their houses to fulfil various family related responsibilities might encourage individuals to actively participate in household responsibilities. Such small efforts initiated on public platforms might be a great help for working women as social support from family members facilitates better WLB for working women.

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Appendix

To measure WIPL, three items were adapted from the scale of [Hayman \(2005\)](#), and two new items were developed and included in the scale. The items for WIPL that are developed by the author of this study, are as follows:

- (1) At the end of telework-day during this lockdown, I am so exhausted that I easily get annoyed with the expectations of my family members.
- (2) Due to the telework during the lockdown my negligence towards family responsibilities is causing conflict in my personal life.

To measure PLIW, three items were adapted from the scale of [Hayman \(2005\)](#) and one item was developed and included in the scale. The item for PLIW, that is developed by the author of this study, is as follows:

- (1) Due to the expectations of my family members at the time of lockdown, I am unable to focus during the telework.

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