

## **Burnout among working mothers: The role of work-life balance and perceived organizational support**

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received November 25, 2021

Revised July 12, 2022

Accepted July 18, 2022

#### Keywords

burnout;  
perceived organizational support;  
work from home;  
work-life balance;  
working mother.

### ABSTRACT

The pandemic of COVID-19 has influenced business in general. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, most companies or organizations have been implementing work from home (WFH). For working mothers who have children, this WFH policy creates a more stressful situation since they simultaneously have to deal with work and family in the same place. This study investigated the role of work-life balance and perceived organizational support in the level of burnout tendency among working mothers. Two hundred thirty-seven working mothers who work from home participated in this study. Questionnaires were distributed to the working mothers to measure work-life balance, perceived organizational support, and burnout tendency. Multiple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis. The results show work-life balance and perceived organizational support simultaneously predict burnout tendency. However, perceived organization support, especially a concern for employee welfare, contributes more to reducing burnout. Therefore, human resource management may develop a policy to reduce burnout among women employees by concerning employee welfare in terms of compensation and benefit and creating a conducive working environment.

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread globally since 2020 and has changed the community's social and economic life. This condition has caused stress among workers because, despite it, every employee must struggle to remain professional in their work (McKinsey & Company, 2020). In particular, this condition has forced many companies to adopt a work from home (WFH) policy to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The WFH policy triggers a potential conflict between the work environment and family where employees must manage childcare issues and the continuity of their work professionally (Gądecki et al., 2018). The demands between the two roles are increasingly blurring work and family roles. In addition, another phenomenon caused by WFH is a conflict in the balance of family life due to a conflict of interest between the work demand and family matters (Gądecki et al., 2018).

This phenomenon cannot be separated from the dual role that employees took part in during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women who are married, have children, and work have higher role demands than married men (McConnon et al., 2022; Raymo & Ono, 2007). During WFH, women assume most of the household and childcare responsibilities though women's participation also contributes to work in the public sector (Lyonette & Crompton, 2015). Commonly, societies expect women to perform the role concerning household responsibilities. It also pressures career women to negotiate and balance commitments between housework and work in the office (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009). Thus, burnout due to

women's role pressures at work and home becomes a real problem (McKinsey & Company, 2020). For women, the house is a source of additional unpaid work (Dobbs, 2007; Wheatley, 2013). This domestic perspective parallels the work context, where many studies emphasize that women are more exposed to work-related pressures and stress than men (Doyle & Hind, 1998). Women are also experiencing a lack of promotion, organizational support (Knights & Richards, 2003), and even gender role stereotypes and discrimination in the workplace (Cooper et al., 2021). These stressors in the workplace can put tremendous stress on women and contribute to burnout (Garossa et al., 2008).

Although stress and burnout are a group of variables with almost the same discussion, they have different causes and consequences. Tanner (2011) explained that burnout is a chronic stress reaction due to pressure from work interactions with employees. Pines and Keinan (2005) explained that burnout correlates with negative symptoms, including physical, emotional, and performance symptoms at work, compared to stress. Thus, burnout is the level of reaction to stressors that have the potential for more severe problems. Therefore, this study focuses on the burnout variable.

Theoretically, burnout symptoms occur in three stages (Szigethy, 2014). In the first stage, the symptoms are mild; employees will feel mentally tired when carrying out their work, frustrated, tense, suffer from unexplained body aches or pains, feel left behind in work, and have anxiety the next day. Employees will feel insecure, apathetic, and bored in the second stage, which runs continuously. In the third stage, when burnout is not taken seriously, it will become persistent and develop into depression, insomnia, anxiety, and even medical diseases such as heart disease. Previous research has widely studied the causes of burnout (Brummelhuis et al., 2011; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Time pressure, role ambiguity, role conflict, and conflict in cooperation can cause burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

Ignoring burnout symptoms can negatively affect work roles (de Beer, Pienaar, & Rothmann, 2014). If the pressures are not handled effectively, it will cause psychological symptoms that result in loss of creative ability, lack of commitment, emotional disturbances, and emerging behaviors that can interfere with adjustment in daily life. It was further explained that due to unresolved stress or tension situations, adjustments could not be made optimally, resulting in fatigue and decreased capacity and cynicism towards work resulting in a loss of professional efficiency (Hätinen et al., 2009).

Demographic characteristics are also important in examining the factors that cause burnout, such as gender, education level, economic problems, and marital status (Güriş, Akyurt, & Astar, 2017). Women are more likely to experience burnout than men in service jobs. In addition, the level of education is also a contributing factor. Female employees with a higher education level can parse burnout symptoms more quickly than those with low levels of education. Education is realized into an essential potential that can develop better mental and emotional skills in the face of pressure. On the other hand, married employees with economic problems are also more likely to experience burnout. While age is not the principal cause of burnout, employees who work longer, at least seven years and over, have better coping skills to avoid burnout (Divinakumar et al., 2014).

It is essential to determine appropriate intervention steps to prevent burnout in organizations and individuals (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Nevertheless, individual intervention is the primary intervention that must be carried out first (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2017), based on conceptualizing cognitive-behavioral interventions to improve coping skills, social support, and relaxation (Maricutoiu & Crasovan, 2016). It was further explained that formulating interventions related to the role and support of the organization would significantly reduce burnout (Dreison et al., 2018).

Burnout cannot be reduced merely by individual interventions; it needs more extended interventions. Pijpker et al. (2020) suggest that the appropriate intervention to overcome burnout is to build self and work resources to overcome the causes of prolonged stress. At this stage, the effectiveness of reducing burnout can be confirmed through the ability of

individuals and organizations to provide resources that can reduce pressure on women at work. In line with the above explanation, [Szigethy \(2014\)](#) explains the areas of prevention strategies for burnout, consisting of two main areas. These areas are life balancing as the primary source of internal factors and perceived organizational support as an external factor from individual work. Both are assumed to be effective interventions to reduce burnout in workers.

As the primary source, work-life balance is an individual's ability to balance life roles between work and family demands ([Haar et al., 2014](#); [Özbilgin et al., 2010](#)). Work-life balance is how individuals can engage and feel satisfaction between roles in family and personal life ([Poulose & Sudarsan, 2014](#)). Employees who can balance the demands of their roles at work and home will be satisfied with their work ([Maslichah & Hidayat, 2017](#)). Burnout mediated positive work-life balance and job satisfaction ([Iswardhani et al., 2019](#)). The individual's ability to integrate work with family life can benefit employees and the organization. These benefits can protect employees' health and will increase productivity at work. Work-life balance can affect the decrease in burnout through the emergence of work motivation to work better ([Parris et al., 2008](#); [Tuğsal & Ülgen, 2017](#)).

The escalation of work demands will create an unstable situation. A working woman who is married and has children faces a dual role in her daily life with two types of work, i.e., paid and unpaid work ([Dobbs, 2007](#); [Wheatley, 2013](#)). This condition requires every woman always to balance her two roles ([Bloom, 2016](#)). The primary source to carry out work-life balance is the workers themselves. Companies cannot provide all facilities and services to build a good work environment. Each individual has to manage themselves. Hence they can adapt according to the demands of their role ([Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015](#)).

Organizational support is present as an external factor that cannot be separated from its efforts to provide a balance between the roles of female employees. Therefore, the second important factor that cannot be separated from private efforts is perceived organizational support ([Szigethy, 2014](#)). A better work-life balance is accompanied by high perceived organizational support, vice versa, and the better the individual can resolve the pressures raised by their work ([Puspitasari & Ratnaningsih, 2019](#); [Sheikh, 2022](#)).

Individual behavior depends on the work environment because individual behavior towards the work environment is an inseparable entity ([Artha & Hidayat, 2018](#)). Interactions that occur result in the development of the expected behavior. Employees who perceive the work environment positively will tend to show positive behavior. Moreover, employees who feel they fit into the organization can show low burnout.

The benefits of work-life balance in reducing burnout cannot be separated from the role of perceived organizational support ([Gayathri & Sajeethkumar, 2019](#)). Perceived organizational support is a buffer associated with burnout ([House, 1981](#); [Parasuraman et al., 1992](#)). If employees cannot deal with stress effectively, they may face failure to balance their roles and thus create a price they become threatened ([Xu & Yang, 2018](#)). Confidence in support of the organization can reduce the tendency to overestimate pressure and increase perceptions of available resources to reduce burnout.

Organizational support in the form of attention and appreciation can be an external encouragement to strengthen the self in the face of pressure from outside the individual. Perceived organizational support is essential to improving employee welfare ([Leather et al., 1998](#)). Perceived organizational support is a determinant of improving mood and satisfaction for employees to increase productivity at work ([Jain et al., 2013](#)). In other words, the higher the work-life balance and perceived organizational support, the higher the burnout. Work-life balance and perceived organizational support reflect person-environment fit in connection with the dual role of women working and organizational involvement ([Terborg, 1981](#)). The suitability of individuals with both roles in work and the family will increase the effect of the target variable, namely a decrease in burnout ([Edwards & Billsberry, 2010](#)). While in another

study, perceived organizational support negatively correlated with burnout (Zeng et al., 2020).

This research hypothesizes work-life balance and perceived organizational support contribute to burnout in working mothers. Thus, this study aimed to examine the role of work-life balance and perceived organizational support on burnout in working mothers. This study is a replicative of the previous study that aimed to strengthen the evidence of the correlation between POS, work-life balance, and burnout. However, this study is needed to understand burnout among working mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Method

This study uses a quantitative research approach by distributing questionnaires to measure three variables (work-life balance, perceived organizational support, and burnout) in the research sample. The questionnaire was distributed online to all participants who met the criteria from July 6<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Questionnaires were distributed by broadcast messages or email to several parties meeting the research criteria.

## Participants

Criteria of participants in this study were working women, had children at age 0 to 6 years, had a minimum education of diploma 3, worked for more than six months, and their organization or company implemented work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study's participants were 237 mothers who worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data that has been collected is then carried out with descriptive analysis to determine the description of the characteristics of the research participants, as shown in Table 1. Most respondents work from six months to three years, with the highest percentage being six months to one year.

Table 1  
*Demographic Data*

| Category           | Description             | N   | %           | Category                   | Description        | N   | %    |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-----|------|
| Working period     | 6 months – 1 year       | 71  | 30.0        | Field of work              | Human Resources    | 62  | 26.0 |
|                    | 1 – 2 years             | 57  | 24.0        |                            | Law                | 54  | 23.0 |
|                    | 2 – 3 years             | 62  | 26.0        |                            | Education          | 40  | 17.0 |
|                    | 3 – 4 years             | 38  | 16.0        |                            | Telecommunications | 24  | 10.0 |
|                    | More than four years    | 9   | 4.0         |                            | Government         | 19  | 8.0  |
| Types of company   | Services                | 76  | 32.0        | Banking sector             | 14                 | 6.0 |      |
|                    | Industry                | 50  | 21.0        | Mass media                 | 14                 | 6.0 |      |
|                    | Trade                   | 50  | 21.0        | Energy and mining          | 5                  | 2.0 |      |
|                    | State Owned Enterprises | 33  | 14.0        | Information and technology | 5                  | 2.0 |      |
| Age                | 21-25 years             | 73  | 30.8        | Number of children         | One                | 147 | 62.0 |
|                    | 26-30 years             | 86  | 36.3        |                            | Two                | 81  | 34.0 |
|                    | 31 – 35 years           | 65  | 27.4        |                            | Three              | 9   | 4.0  |
|                    | 36 – 40 years           | 6   | 2.5         | Age of children            | 0 – 2 years        | 178 | 75.0 |
|                    | 41 – 45 years           | 6   | 2.5         |                            | 2 – 4 years        | 47  | 20.0 |
| 45 – 50 years      | 1                       | .5  | 5 – 6 years | 12                         | 5.0                |     |      |
| Length of marriage | Less than one year      | 1   | .4          |                            |                    |     |      |
|                    | 1-2 years               | 106 | 44.7        |                            |                    |     |      |
|                    | 3-5 years               | 72  | 30.4        |                            |                    |     |      |
|                    | More than five years    | 58  | 24.5        |                            |                    |     |      |

## Instruments

Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI), developed by Maslach et al. (1996), has been adapted into the Indonesian version (Andika, 2020). This adapted version of MBI was used to measure burnout in this study. The MBI consists of three aspects, i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment with 22 items with five answer choices, 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (not appropriate), 3 (neutral), 4 (appropriate), and 5 (very appropriate). "Emotional exhaustion" is illustrated in these items: "I feel exhausted when I get home from work" and "I feel pressured while working with people all day." Item examples in the "depersonalization" aspect are "I feel like I am inside a circle that has no end" and "I feel I treat others as if they were not human." Examples of the "reduced personal accomplishment" aspect are "I have accomplished many valuable things in this work" and "I feel myself having a positive influence on the lives of others/other coworkers."

The work-life balance variable in this study is measured with an instrument by Fisher et al. (2009) with 24 items. It is composed of three aspects, including WIPL (Work Interference With Personal Life), PLIW (Personal Life Interference With Work), and WEPL (Work Enhancement Of Personal Life). Wardhani (2019) has also adapted the scale into an Indonesian version. The WLB scale has five answer choices, namely 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Often), and 5 (Always). Examples of the WIPL aspect are "My personal life drains the energy I need to work" and "My job is neglected because of everything in my personal life." For the PLIW aspect, examples are "I cannot relax at home because I am still busy with work" and "I have to postpone my interests because of work." The examples for the WEPL aspect are "I have a better mood at work because my personal life is fun" and "My personal life gives me the energy to work."

The scale to measure perceived organizational support in this study was developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). This instrument has been tested by Nugroho (2019) in the Indonesian context. The scale consists of 16 items and comprises two aspects: *attention to employee welfare* and *respect for employee contributions*. The POS scale has five answer options, namely 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (not appropriate), 3 (neutral), 4 (appropriate), and 5 (very appropriate). For the "attention to employee welfare" aspect, the examples are "The policies where I work are made by taking into account the values that are shared by employees, including me" and "I feel unnoticed by my place of work even though I have done a good job." Examples of the items of "respect for employee contributions" aspect are "The place where I work appreciates the work I get" and "The way where I work respects employee contributions is in line with what I expected."

Twenty-eight experts tested the instrument's validity by judging the items. The experts have a minimum master's degree in psychology. Aiken's of the items on the MBI scale range from .65 to .73. The validity value of POS and WLB scales ranges from .71 to .74 and .70 to .74, respectively. All the items are valid as they meet the cut-off value for the content validity using Aiken's V, which is more than or equal to .65 (Aiken, 1985).

Subsequently, the reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha found that the reliability coefficient for the MBI scale is .924, with the item-rest correlation value ranging from .332 to .853. The WLB scale has a reliability value of .945, with the item-rest correlation value ranging from .335 to .890. The POS scale has a reliability value of .931, with the item-rest correlation value ranging from .350 to .874. Thus, all instruments in this study had a good reliability value.

## Data Analysis

Multiple linear regression was applied to analyze the data analysis of this study. The results of multiple regression analysis can provide information about the contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable (Wampold & Freund, 1987).

## Results

The data can provide information about the research sample by examining the number of samples, mean, minimum score, maximum score, and standard deviation of empirical and hypothetical data. Results showed that burnout (BO), perceived organizational support (POS), and work-life balance (WLB) have a higher empirical mean than the hypothetical mean. These results show that those variables are higher than the assumed score (see Table 2).

Table 2  
*Description of Research Data*

| Variable | Hypothetical score |             |             |             |           | Empirical score |             |             |           |
|----------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
|          | <i>N</i>           | <i>Xmin</i> | <i>Xmax</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Xmin</i>     | <i>Xmax</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| BO       | 22                 | 22          | 110         | 66          | 14.67     | 69              | 107         | 88.51055    | 6.33      |
| POS      | 16                 | 16          | 80          | 48          | 10.67     | 34              | 72          | 53.20675    | 6.33      |
| WLB      | 24                 | 24          | 120         | 72          | 16        | 52              | 99          | 79.64557    | 7.83      |

Note: *Xmax* = maximum score; *Xmin* = minimum score; *Mean* = average; *SD* = standard deviation; *N* = number of item.

Hypothesis testing in this study used multiple linear regression to examine the relationship between work-life balance, perceived organizational support, and burnout, which is seen based on the predictive value between variables. The analysis results show that the  $R^2$  value between WLB and POS in predicting burnout is .072 with an  $F$  value = 9.088 ( $p < .001$ ).

Table 3 shows how WLB has no significant effect on burnout ( $\beta = .230$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and how POS predicts burnout ( $\beta = -.472$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These results showed that POS has a more substantial predictive value than work-life balance toward burnout. The higher the POS, the lower the burnout level, and vice versa.

Table 3  
*Regression Analysis*

| Predictor | <i>Beta</i> | <i>SE</i> | $\beta$ | <i>t</i> |
|-----------|-------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| WLB       | .144        | .113      | .230    | 1.271    |
| POS       | -.445*      | .170      | -.472*  | -2.609*  |

Note: \* $p < .05$

An additional analysis using multiple linear regression analysis with the stepwise method was conducted to explore each aspect of perceived organizational support in predicting burnout in working mothers. Results show that only concern for the employee welfare aspect from POS has a negative impact on burnout ( $R^2 = .078$ ;  $F = 19.773$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\beta = -.492$ ;  $p < .001$ ). On the other hand, the award for employee contributions did not predict burnout. Concern for the employee means companies have indifferent attitudes towards women's opinions and complaints. It shows an open attitude and provides opportunities for two-way communication. Thus, the higher the company's concern for employee contributions, the lower the burnout, and vice versa.

## Discussion

The current study aimed to examine the roles of work-life balance (WLB) and perceived organizational support (POS) on burnout among working women, especially those with

children. Results showed that work-life balance and perceived organizational support simultaneously help working mothers face burnout. It supports previous studies about work-life balance as an internal variable and perceived organizational support as an external variable that can reduce burnout (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Dreison et al., 2018). Unfortunately, the predictive power of work-life balance and perceived organizational support on burnout in this study showed a small percentage, i.e., 7.2%. The nature of two variables in dealing with the current COVID-19 pandemic has a crucial role in influencing its role against burnout.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, one solution that could contribute to the high work-life balance was implementing work from home (Krasulja et al., 2015). It has even become a family-friendly policy (Lockwood, 2003), such as in South Korea (Lee & Hong, 2011). On the contrary, Martin et al. (2022) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, time spent working among workers and stress increased.

Work and family are the main domains in an employee's life, especially for women who work and have children (Gayathri & Sajeethkumar, 2019). The interactions carried out cannot be separated from aspects of employees' perceptions of the system and human resource management policies in their place of work. Organizational support is present as an external factor that cannot be separated from its efforts to provide a balance between the two lives of female employees

Working women must struggle to balance work and family, especially when both simultaneously demand greater attention and effort (Rajadhyaksha et al., 2015). During the implementation of work from home, the situation at home is very different from before work from home was carried out. It was unprecedented; most working women had to focus on professional demands, and together they had to meet the needs of their personal lives. Ideally, WFH is a condition for creating a work-life balance (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Greer & Payne, 2014). Furthermore, Ashfaq et al. (2013) consider that the demands of work and family where there is a conflict between the two roles can note that the conflict between the two is multi-directional and multi-dimensional. Working women feel mentally drained by work and less able to boast that they have achieved many valuable things in their work (Oludayo et al., 2015). The level of organizational support is one of the positive efforts in helping employees coordinate their work and obligations at home to not interfere with each other (Voydanoff, 2004). Specific resources such as organizational support can reduce adverse psychological conditions, especially burnout (Kossek et al., 2011). Therefore, organizational support can significantly reduce the demands imposed by the two most dominant roles: work and family

This study result also shows POS negatively affects burnout. It relates to employee perceptions of organizational commitment regarding the extent to which organizations value contributions and care about employee welfare through the benefits of perceived organizational support in predicting burnout (Gayathri & Sajeethkumar, 2019). It refers to the social support theory proposed by House (1981). Social support is considered a "buffering" effect associated with burnout (Parasuraman et al., 1992).

Organizational support is present to help women who work to represent organizations by attributing characteristics to positive social exchanges (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Women who work believe that if the company gives respect, and cares about the welfare of its employees, then employees will provide resources to help manage requests and accepted roles.

Xu and Yang (2018) explain that if individuals cannot cope with stress effectively, they can face failure in balancing their roles so that their self-esteem is threatened. However, suppose individuals feel that they are cared for by their organization. In that case, individuals believe that the organization can provide information about the causes of stress and tell them how to deal with stress functionally. This belief in perceived organizational support can buffer

the effects of perceived burnout, reduce the tendency to overestimate stressors, and increase perceptions of available resources to reduce burnout.

The support received can be manifested as an external encouragement to strengthen self-strength in the face of pressure outside the individual. In this case, perceived organizational support is an essential determinant of improving employee welfare (Leather et al., 1998). In turn, perceived organizational support is a determinant of improving employees' mood and satisfaction, increasing affective commitment, and reducing unproductive organizational behavior (Jain et al., 2013).

This study result shows that among two aspects of POS, only concern for employee welfare contributes significantly to burnout. The more concern for employee welfare, the less burnout will be, and vice versa. It means that the company's attention to providing an attitude of disregard for women's opinions and complaints shown by an open attitude and providing opportunities for two-way communication can reduce burnout compared to giving awards for employee contributions (Kosseck et al., 2001).

This research is inseparable from the limitations. The data collected in this study used an online survey distributed and filled out online by participants from any city. In addition, the researcher does not have a description of the condition of each company which is one of the measuring objects in understanding the phenomenon of burnout in working women. Thus, this study does not explain the differences in company characteristics in their effect on burnout. The information about companies can be used as the measuring object in understanding the phenomenon of burnout in working mothers.

## Conclusion

Work-life balance and perceived positive organizational support simultaneously reduce burnout in working and married women. Therefore, reducing burnout in working women in the context of working from home can be facilitated by involving the organization in providing support and the role of these women in balancing the two roles. To minimize burnout, POS is significantly needed in an organizational setting. The practical implication of this study involves the human resource management policy concerning employee welfare in compensation and benefit and a conducive working environment.

## Acknowledgment

This article is supported by the funding (RTA) from the Faculty of Psychology Universitas Gadjah Mada.

## Declarations

**Author contribution.** BR as the corresponding author wrote the English version of the article and edited the article from the editing process until the final format. GR collected the research data and wrote the research report in Indonesian.

**Funding statement.** This article was funded by the Faculty of Psychology Universitas Gadjah Mada through the RTA program (5380/UN1/FPSi/UP4/PT.02/2021)

**Conflict of interest.** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Additional information.** No additional information is available for this article

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