



## **Modeling Work-Family Conflict Among Workforces Engaged in Long Distance Relationship: Moderated by Emotional Quotient**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Around the globe, evidence shows the growing number of married couples are living separately from one another. They are married to each other but stay apart for work reasons and meet at least once a week. In Malaysia, there are over 500,000 spouses who live separately due to employment demands. At present the country's evidence is staggering records of declines in marriages and rising divorce cases in 2022, triggering curiosity about whether being in a long-distance relationship leads to work-family conflict. Long-distance relationships come with their unique challenges, and loneliness is one of the triggering factors. Present theories relevant to work-family conflict are still insufficient to explain further long-distance relationships. To the fact that present studies have shown that some long-distance marriages are as not as successful as live-together marriages, a study of whether emotional quotient moderates the relationship between loneliness and work-family conflict using a quantitative approach is warranted for investigation. This research output will provide in-depth knowledge on how the ability to understand, use, and manage one's emotions will moderate the relationship between loneliness and work-family conflict. The study is aligned with Malaysia MADANI core values of 'Prosperity' and Peace in Islam that encourage dual-earner families towards tranquility and peaceful living without work-family conflict.

**Keywords:** Loneliness, Emotional Quotient, Long Distance Relationship, Work-Family-Conflict.

## INTRODUCTION

Work-family conflict (WFC) has been widely recognized as a significant challenge for employees striving to balance professional responsibilities and personal life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This conflict arises when the demands of work and family roles are incompatible, leading to stress, dissatisfaction, and decreased well-being (Allen et al., 2000). The challenge becomes even more pronounced for individuals engaged in long-distance relationships (LDRs), where physical separation from partners adds another layer of complexity to managing both work and personal commitments (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Research suggests that prolonged separation can exacerbate stress and emotional strain, potentially affecting job performance and relationship satisfaction (Stafford, 2005).

While extensive studies have examined WFC, limited attention has been given to its impact on employees in LDRs. Given the unique demands of maintaining a relationship across distances, it is essential to explore the factors influencing WFC in this context. Emotional quotient (EQ), or emotional intelligence, may play a critical role in mitigating WFC by helping individuals regulate emotions, cope with stress, and maintain relationship stability despite physical separation (Goleman, 1995). Employees with higher EQ are better equipped to manage work demands while sustaining healthy relationships, potentially reducing the negative effects of WFC (Bar-On, 2006).

This study aims to model work-family conflict among employees engaged in long-distance relationships and examine the moderating effect of emotional quotient on this relationship. By exploring these dynamics, the research provides valuable insights into how organizations can implement targeted interventions to support employees in LDRs, ultimately fostering a more balanced and productive workforce.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN, 2014), a commuter marriage is where a couple is married but stays apart for work reasons and meets at least once a week. Moreover, the Fifth Malaysian Population and Family Survey (KPKM, 2014) reported that in Malaysia over 500,000 spouses live separately due to employment demands. Therefore, the demands from work and family domains can trigger the deleterious impact of work-family conflict (Zainal et al., 2020). The statements also aligned with the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM) recorded a decline in marriage and a simultaneous increase in divorces within the country in 2022. Loneliness is a factor in triggering work-family conflict situations. From the retrieved studies, the prevalence rate of loneliness among older people in Malaysia is around 95.5% (Elias, 2018).

Based on Financial Minister II, Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani claimed at the Global Women's Trade Summit 2017 that there were more than 700,000 working women in the country as of 2017 which represents an increase of 54.3 percent compared to 46 percent in 2011. (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development Blueprint, 2015). In addition, women's participation in a variety of professions has raised the Gross Domestic Product by 0.3 percent. (GDP). The rise in numbers is mostly caused by shifting societal standards and female-specific economic considerations (Sawai, et. al., 2023). Consequently, this transformation of demographic trend affects the composition of the workforce (Zakaria & Ismail, 2017) and

increases the number of families with both husband and wife working, namely dual-earner families or dual-income families (Zaimah et al., 2013).

A survey by the Fifth Malaysian Population and Family Survey (KPKM, 2014) found that 6.9 percent of married working women live apart from their husbands and that 32.6 percent of them meet their husbands four times a month while 24.8 percent did so twice or three times a month. Also, 16.1 percent meet their husbands once a month, 13.7 percent once in a few months, and about 2.6 percent of couples only meet once a year. Thus, through this percentage, it can be concluded that with less time spent together, there is potentially greater pressure among commuting couples to maintain their relationships leading to frustration and disappointment. Therefore, the very nature of long-distance relationships is often the reason why couples find it difficult to sustain their marriages. (Sawai et al., 2023).

The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM) recorded a decline in marriages and a simultaneous increase in divorces within the country in 2022. The statement was also supported by the chief statistician, Datuk Seri Dr. Mohd Uzir Mahidin, who said the number of marriages among the country's population recorded a decrease of 0.5 percent, or 214,824 in 2022 compared to the preceding year, which was 215,973. In contrast to the trends in marriages, the report also revealed an increase in divorce rates, surging to 43.1 percent, reaching 62,890 in 2022 from 43,936 compared to the previous year (New Straits Times, 2023). This is due to the possibility that any poor tactics could create a psychological breakdown in the marriage. Such couples continue to maintain their long-distance relationship for a variety of reasons other than their job. Hence, inappropriate handling of this circumstance may result in an unwelcome divorce (Sawai et al., 2023).

Reflecting to the concept of MADANI in the holy Qur'an Malaysia Madani, a new political slogan under the new premiership, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim that comprises six core values namely Sustainability, Innovation, Respect, Trust, Prosperity, Care, and Compassion guides the new framework of governance as it ensures fair, just and compassion to all. 'Prosperity' in the religion of Islam, literally means 'Peace', thus encouraging dual-earner families towards tranquility and peaceful living without work-family conflict. The statements also aligned with (Aziz, 2023) view of prosperity as far more than wealth which it is when the citizens are entitled to live with freedom. Prosperity is reinforced by an all-encompassing society, with a strong social contract that protects the fundamental liberties and security of every citizen. Hence, Malaysian prosperity is progressive where community and individual growth and economic rise can take place concurrently without putting others' interests at stake.

The Department of Statistics Malaysia stated the increase in the number of women in the formal employment sector escalated from 44.5% in 1982 to 55.3% in 2018. There has been an increase in the number of families with both husband and wife working, namely dual-earner families or dual-income families. Malaysia nowadays has an increased number of dual-earner families from 7,421.8 people in 2010 to 8410.1 people in 2013. Moreover, public sector employees are expected to have different levels of work-family conflict experience concerning their demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, and marital status when considering the different perception of work-family conflict (Abdullah, 2018). Therefore, the research on married employees that face work-family conflicts is prominent in both the West

and Malaysia. Additionally, Zakaria and Ismail (2017) stated that about 40% to 78% of employed parents experience work-family conflict at some point in their marriage.

In fact, when couples are in a long-distance relationship, they are physically separated from their families for long periods. This affects their quality time together and could lead to psychological problems such as loneliness and depression. Consequently, this could worsen psychiatric issues if a partner has to take on additional roles in raising the children alone, while the other lives far away and feels lonely (Sawai et al., 2023). Those findings are supported by other studies (Awang, 2022) loneliness was found to be one of the symptoms of psychological disorders such as depression and loneliness and social isolation have been cited as risk factors for all-cause morbidity and mortality. Hence, moderating of emotional quotient is now deployed in this study and the gaps have yet to exist in previous studies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict (WFC) has been defined as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role constraints from work and family domains are mutually conflicting in some respects”. Therefore, this means that the level of commitment and role demands increase as people step into different phases of adulthood where there is a constant juggle between family and work. (Zakaria & Ismail, 2017). Meanwhile, there are a few factors in triggering the work-family conflict situation. The dramatic changes in the composition of families such as the rise of dual-earner, single-parent families and growth in the number of working mothers have contributed to work-family conflict. In addition, due to an increase in dual-earner households, non-traditional gender roles, and an increase in the number of hours individuals work within each household, conflict between work and family has become part of everyday life for millions of adults (Zainal et al., 2020)

Moreover, the study on work-family conflict has explored areas in various dimensions such as organization-related aspects in terms of working hours, role ambiguity and role overload along with familial aspects such as spouse support parental demand and marital satisfaction, as well as the individual aspects such as demographic characteristics such as gender, age and marital status (Abdullah, 2018). Consequently, work-family conflict hurts employees' productivity and harms job performance by decreasing the job satisfaction of employees. It also affects employee turnover, psychological distress, and life satisfaction (Obrenovic et al., 2020).

### Loneliness

Loneliness is defined as a psychological state that is seen as a feeling that differs from individual to individual, from time and circumstances of one's own life. In several studies, loneliness has appeared to be associated with poor physical and mental health and is often linked to depression, hostility, suicide, and psychosomatic diseases, among others (Goncalves & Santos, 2022). Furthermore, loneliness is a subjective and negative feeling that occurs when there is a difference between an individual's expectations and their social network each person perceives loneliness differently, it is often accompanied by symptoms such as disturbed sleep, reduced satisfaction from social networking, diminished interest in social activities, and weight gain (Elias, 2018). Consequently, loneliness at work could negatively impact an employee's mental state due to a lack of socialization and meaningful interpersonal relationships. Therefore, an employee experiencing loneliness in the workplace is isolated and has difficulty developing

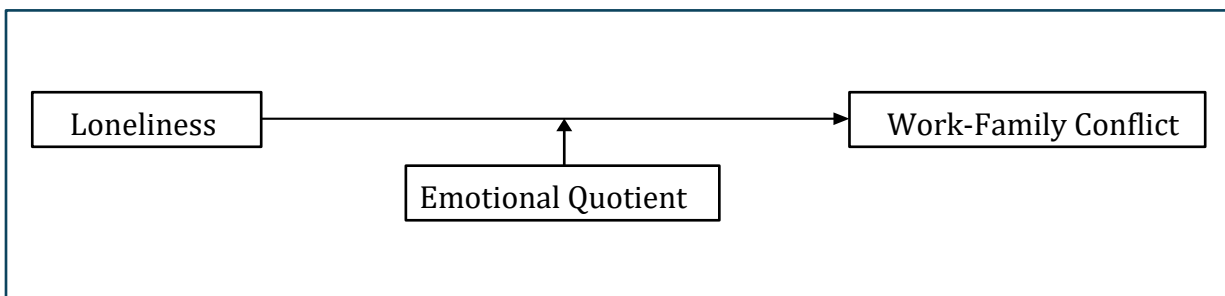
adequate relationships with themselves or other employees. This could increase stress, emotional deprivation, and reduced social interaction (Febriani et al., 2023).

### Emotional Quotient

The emotional quotient is associated with the ability to control impulses in self-control and empathy. The emotional quotient is the ability to recognize our feelings and others' feelings, to motivate ourselves and to manage our emotions well, and to manage our emotions in relationships with others (Amilin, 2017). Moreover, the emotional quotient is the ability that includes enthusiasm, and perseverance, as well as the ability to be self-motivated, and resilient in the face of failure, controlling emotions and delay satisfaction, and regulating the mental condition. Hence, with emotional intelligence, a person can place his emotions at the right level, sort out satisfaction, and regulate mood (Wiguna et al., 2020). Based on past research, it was shown that there is a relationship between loneliness and emotional quotient which is also indirectly related to work-family conflict.

### CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Accordingly, this study proposed a model with three core constructs, namely loneliness (L) as the independent variable with work-family conflict (WFC) as the dependent variable and emotional quotient (EQ) as moderating variable.



The proposed framework offers valuable contributions to both academia and practice. Theoretically, it enriches work-family conflict literature by introducing the moderating role of emotional quotient in the context of long-distance relationships. Practically, it provides insights for organizations to design interventions that support employees facing WFC, such as emotional intelligence training, flexible work arrangements, and counseling programs. Future empirical research can test the proposed relationships using quantitative methods such as surveys and experimental studies.

### CONCLUSION

As for the conclusion, this study is a crucial step toward understanding the challenges faced by long-distance couples in managing work-family conflict. By incorporating emotional intelligence as a moderating factor, the study offers a fresh perspective on how psychological resilience can buffer the negative effects of loneliness on relationships. The findings have important policy and practical implications for organizations and governmental bodies aiming to support dual-income families in Malaysia. Moreover, this study also would like to suggest that Ministries such as the Ministry of Higher Resources and the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development of Malaysia could leverage this research to create intervention programs such as training that can give awareness to the employees on how to control their

emotions in the office during working hours. For future research, an inclusion of a new variable of emotional quotient is novel which has never been tested between the loneliness and work-family conflict relationship among workforces engaged in long distance relationship. In addition, the study would recommend the theoretical framework can be expanded with new independent and moderating variables.

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