

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF WORKING FROM HOME DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND WAYS OF COPING: THE PERSPECTIVES OF MALAY EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). It has led many countries, including Malaysia, to implement Restricted Movement Order (RMO) that aimed for individuals to practice social distancing by staying at home and enforcing employees to work from home (WFH). The implementation of WFH is one of the intelligible efforts that could protect many people from the deadly virus. However, many individuals have complained about their struggles to adjust to the new working environment. Hence, a qualitative study was conducted to explore employees' experiences as they WFH during the pandemic, particularly in terms of its challenges and coping strategies. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit the participants, which consisted of five full-time employees from various sectors undergoing WFH. Semi-structured interviews were used as the technique of data collection. Based on the thematic analysis, several themes were discovered to help better understand the challenges faced by the participants and their coping strategies to overcome the difficulties. The themes of challenges discovered were household interruption, limited facilities, communication barriers, adjusting to a new norm, and mental health. At the same time, the themes for the coping strategies were acceptance, communication, social support, employee benefits, and religious beliefs. The findings manifested that the participants in the study were still struggling and probably needed more time to adapt to the new norm of working arrangement.

Keywords: challenges, coping strategies, COVID-19, Malay employees, WFH

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had infected billions of people, with 175 million confirmed cases, and 3.8 million deaths were reported across the globe (BBC News,

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2021). The deadly virus has remarkably affected human's daily activities such as education, mobility, aviation, and small and big industries worldwide. As a result, an emergency lockdown was enforced to allow individuals to practice social distancing and isolate themselves by staying at home and closing any operated businesses to prevent the disease from worsening (Sibley et al., 2020). Malaysia is one of the earliest countries in Southeast Asia that had undergone the national lockdown known as Movement Control Order (MCO) on 18th March 2020 (Khor et al., 2020).

In response to the announcement made by the Malaysian Prime Minister on the national lockdown, masses of industries in Malaysia were forced to implement the work from home (WFH) policy, which is also known as remote working, to enable the employees to work in a flexible way and time at home (Khan & Hasan, 2020). Other terms used to describe WFH are teleworking or home-based teleworking (Belzunegui-Graso & Erro-Garces, 2020). However, as many believe that WFH can be beneficial in promoting interactive settings and freedom to work flexibly, many individuals were in a dilemma in balancing their time to be productive in doing office jobs while running errands at home (Ambikapathy & Ali, 2020).

Generally, WFH, especially during the pandemic, has its pros and cons and challenges, particularly to the employees. Nevertheless, the facts had not been comprehensively understood, mainly in the Malaysian context. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the challenges of remote working and the ways of coping with the challenges among employees in Malaysia during the period of Restricted Movement Order (RMO). This study can benefit both employers and employees to understand the experiences of struggles among the employees who WFH and how the challenges could be overcome. In other words, the study aimed to answer the following questions;

1. What challenges facing the employees who work from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic and restricted movement order?
2. What are the strategies used by the employees to cope with the challenges of working from home (WFH)?

Literature Review

In most developing countries, the concept of WFH has long been introduced and embraced by the people. However, there is little research investigating the impact of working from home among employees before the pandemic. For example, research on employees in Australia indicated that even though many employees obtained a flexible time to work, employers gave high workloads, which resulted in them having difficulty balancing work and life (Dockery & Bawa, 2014). Besides, it was also found that failure to set the gap between work and family and personal life will considerably impact the work productivity for the organisation (Sakamoto & Spinks, 2008). Whereas, Crosbie and Moore (2004) stated that while individuals who worked at home spent a long time completing the given tasks, the relationship between the family members and spouses was affected as they "worked too much" while a home is a place for family.



Several strategies were recommended to overcome the difficulties of remote working, include investing in advanced technology for WFH to work smoothly and faster, communicating, explaining to family members that no interruption is appreciated while teleworking, and having an insightful discussion with superiors and team members on the progress of working (Greer & Payne, 2014). One of the major concerns pertaining to WFH was the internet connection. It was postulated that some employees might face difficulties connecting to the internet for work purposes as their premises might not have any broadband or wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) which caused remote working almost impossible (Reshma et al., 2015; Lewis, 2013). Nordin et al. (2016) opinionated that the effectiveness of WFH depended greatly on the time management skills and the self-discipline of the employees themselves. Apart from that, maintaining active communication with managers and team members is important while remote working.

Although WFH is known to be a freedom for people to work independently with flexible time, it has some impact on the psychological states of employees. Findings suggested that WFH was associated with negative affection compared to work at the workplace for both men and women regardless of whether they work during weekdays or weekends (Song & Gao, 2018). However, the same study showed that working from home was associated with positive affect for male workers and lower happiness and more stress. The higher stress level associated with telework is probably due to increased conflicting work demands versus the home.

A study supported the finding during the pandemic, which highlighted the issue that WFH led some people to struggle in juggling their work-life and family, which eventually left them stressed and depressed in balancing the non-stop supervision from superiors and stressful events their families during the pandemic. In the survey conducted on Malaysian employees, 70 per cent of 105 respondents rated themselves as feeling distressed, frustrated, and experienced sleep disturbance while they WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic (Marimuthu & Vasudevan, 2020). Nevertheless, not much is known about how they overcome the challenges. Hence, there is a need to understand the challenges more comprehensively from the perspective of the employees who WFH, particularly during the period of movement control order in Malaysia.

Theoretical Framework

Baruch and Nicholson (1997) theorised that four factors influence WFH: individual factors, organisational factors, job factors, and home or family factors. The factors are needed to be fulfilled to make WFH practical and productive. Individual factors refer to the needs for an individual or a person to fit for home working in terms of personal qualities, personality, norms, and attitudes. Organisational factors are defined as the concerns and understanding of corporate culture on the WFH system, including the potential for a workplace-based organisation to trust their employees in remote working. Job factors involve the essence of work and the

relevance or fit of technology for the specific function of work. Finally, home or family factors are referred to as the contributing factors from the standard of family relationship to the environmental setting or physical space and the availability of facilities to remote working (Baruch & Nicholson, 1997).

The study applied this model of four elements of WFH. Further, it extended the model to guide understanding the challenges of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways and strategies of coping with the difficulties to the employees in Malaysia. First, to examine the individual factors, questions addressed include the changes of the working arrangement, the preparation towards WFH, and the experiences on remote working. Second, to address the organisational factors, the participants were asked about the changes in workloads and communication with the supervisor and colleagues. Third, for the job factors, participants were interviewed about the presence of technology, whether they perceived any benefits or problems while WFH. As for the home and family factors, they were asked about interruptions during the workday while WFH. Finally, to examine the coping strategies, questions on the solutions towards the challenges they perceived during WFH were addressed to the participants. However, as the study was exploratory, it was not confined to the above theoretical framework. Thus, the researchers were opened to new ideas and findings, particularly from the study's participants' perspectives.

Method

Study design and participants

A qualitative approach was employed in the study to focus on the employees' experiences as they WFH during the MCO, particularly in terms of the challenges and coping strategies. This study was applied to the various occupation of employees in both the public and private sectors. Nevertheless, only those who were full-time employed and had been experiencing WFH during the period of MCO were selected using purposive sampling.

An advertisement was placed on social media (Facebook and Twitter) to invite willing employees to participate in the study. Out of eight individuals who responded to the advertisement, only five responded to the follow-up emails and attended the interview sessions. All five participants are full-time employees from both public and private organisations.

Participant 1 is a 27-year-old female government officer, has been serving the company for less than a year. Throughout her journey of WFH, she has been living with her housemates in Putrajaya, but there were some days she would go back to her family house nearby. Participant 2 is a 25-year-old female web designer who has worked in a creative industry for more than a year and lived with her housemates during the pandemic in Kuala Lumpur. Participant 3 is a 21-year-old salesman working in a telecommunication company for more than two years and is a single man living with his family in Kuala Lumpur during the pandemic of COVID-19. Participant 4 is a 52-year-old male assistant director who was attached to the Ministry of Education



for almost 25 years. During the pandemic, he underwent WFH and is currently living with his family in Putrajaya. Finally, Participant 5 is a 27-year-old financial consultant, a single man that lives with his housemates during the period of partial lockdown. He has worked at a private company for almost two years in Kuala Lumpur.

Research instruments

Due to the MCO and practice of social distancing, semi-structured interviews were conducted online with the participants. Interview sessions were scheduled according to the participant's availability, and the online platforms used include Google Meet, Zoom, and FaceTime. In the study, interview questions were prepared and conducted in the English language. However, participants were allowed to answer each question both in English or Malay languages, considering the participants' preference for more comfortable and accurate responses. The interviews were then transcribed word for word verbatim.

Procedures

The study was conducted upon obtaining approval from the Final Year Project Ethics Committee, Department of Psychology, IIUM. Before the interview, participants were provided with information on the interview procedures, estimated time taken for the interview, and the purpose of conducting the research paper. Only participants who provided their informed consent participated in the study.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in a friendly and less formal manner so that the participants would feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Each session took place about an hour to complete. The whole sessions were recorded through screen recording with the participants' consent and permission for transcription and data analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data collected from the interview sessions with the participants. According to Alhojailan (2012), thematic analysis was the most relevant for any study to illustrate data in detail with various themes via interpretations. The raw data collection from all interview sessions was transcribed from its video version to a written verbatim. Finally, the data were reduced in the forms of coding, category, and themes based on the study's research questions.

Findings

The following Table 1 and Table 2 present the verbatim excerpts and ten themes, answering the two research questions of the study: (1) The challenges of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (2) The coping strategies to overcome the challenges.

Finding I: Challenges of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic

Through the analysis of the interview transcriptions, five themes of challenges of WFH during the outbreak were identified. The themes include household interruption, limited facilities, communication barriers, adjusting to a new norm, and mental health. According to the participants, these challenges had a massive impact on the employees' work efficiency and well-being throughout remote working. The excerpts of verbatim which manifested the themes were presented in Table 1.

Household interruption

Most of the participants (3 out of 5) mentioned that remote working is challenging for them, especially with the constant interruption from the household members. In addition, disturbance from family members, children, and housemates negatively impact the employees' work effectiveness since their life issues invaded their career, resulting in them losing focus on work.

Limited facilities

Limited facilities are another theme discovered from the thematic analysis. Without a proper work tool or good internet connection, remote working is impossible to undergo. Three out of five participants reported that they were unhappy with their experiences on remote working during RMO because they had to deal with issues such as low internet connection, absence of work files, and unavailability of working space while at home.

Communication barriers

Communication barriers such as miscommunication and lack of understanding between colleagues, leaders, and clients occur during WFH when remote workers are entirely dependent on ICTs. The use of technology is the only option when face-to-face communications are impossible during this pandemic. Two out of five respondents stated that they struggled to communicate efficiently with the clients since the other parties hardly understood the message online.

Adjusting to a new norm

WFH means employees need to change the style and pattern of their work arrangement, from an office background to the home environment. For decades, employees in Malaysia had been comfortably working in the office setting. However, participants of the study expressed their difficulties in familiarising themselves with the new norms of working. For instance, the nature of the job requires them to meet people, but when they do WFH, they have to adjust to the new norm, i.e., meeting people virtually.

Mental health

The analysis of the interview verbatim indicated mental health as another theme of challenges faced by the participants in the study as they WFH. When a person is needed to make a sudden change in their lives, it could be mentally challenging. Two out of five participants realised that they did struggle emotionally during the pandemic, particularly with feeling lonely and distressed. In addition, the need to balance between work and life and being isolated from social interaction could affect their mental health.

Table 1: The Challenges of WFH during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Finding I	Themes	Verbatim Excerpts
The Challenges of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic	Household interruption	<p>"I find it difficult to do work because my nephews and nieces always disturb me." (P1)</p> <p>"My wife always asked me to run errands. At the same time, my children tend to ask for my help with schoolwork since they started online classes as well." (P4)</p> <p>"My housemates are too loud. It was hard for me to work peacefully." (P2)</p>
	Limited Facilities	<p>"At the office, we have our own working space. Compared to home, not many people have their own working space." (P4)</p> <p>"I always experienced bad internet connection." (P1)</p> <p>"Not many works can be done at home, most of my work tools and files are at the office." (P1)</p>
	Communication Barrier	<p>"When I send certain texts to my clients, they cannot quite understand the tone or the mood that I'm trying to portray." (P5)</p> <p>"Apart from having difficulties in having an insightful discussion with my team, communicating with my clients virtually is even harder because sometimes it's hard for them to comprehend the information that I gave." (P3)</p>
	Adjusting to a New Norm	<p>"Part of my work is to meet and interact with people. When I need to do it virtually, it does give a big impact on me. Especially when I need to interact with the boomers. As we know, they are the group that is quite unfamiliar with the greatness of technology." (P5)</p> <p>"WFH is a new norm for me. For so many years I was too comfortable with the traditional working environment." (P4)</p>
	Mental Health	<p>"Due to overwork, it challenged my mental health. I remember I broke down twice a year. I felt exhausted which made my mental drained." (P2)</p> <p>"WFH is stressing me out because almost every day I had no human interaction. No colleagues around, less communication with people. I feel lonely which make me demotivated to do work." (P1)</p>

Table 2: The Coping Strategies

Finding II	Themes	Verbatim Excerpts
The Coping strategies	Acceptance	<p>"Whether we like it or not, we have to accept the reality and do our best in creating some strategies that can be done to suit ourselves with the current situation." (P4)</p> <p>"Although the idea of WFH is quite stressing people out, I take it positively. Instead of complaining, I think WFH does helping more people to learn more skills and accept new things in life." (P5)</p>
	Communication	<p>"I told my leader to restrain from giving me any task on weekends. If he ever gives me works, he needs to pay for my extra working hours. I decided to be direct even though I have to argue to make him understand my situation." (P2)</p> <p>"When you communicate well with your colleagues, works can be done easier and efficiently." (P1)</p>
	Social Support	<p>"When the first MCO, I live alone. But I learnt my lesson. I left my old house and rent to another place which is now full of great people. It is important to take care of your mental health and know your limits." (P2)</p> <p>"Leaders need to give supports to the employees during this pandemic in terms of their emotional and mental." (P1)</p> <p>"It is important to start by choosing the right people in your life. When you are surrounded with good people, your mind will stay positive." (P5)</p>
	Employee Benefits	<p>"Company should give out extra allowance for us to purchase home Wi-Fi so that those who have trouble assessing the internet can get benefits from it." (P1)</p> <p>"Preparation such as laptop and Wi-Fi need to be prepared so that WFH can be done efficiently. Without these, nothing can be done. Hence, the company should provide all these necessities for the employees to make work more productive." (P4)</p>
	Religious Belief	<p>"I believe that improving your relationship with your Creator can be one way to help you to lessen your burden. Everyone struggles differently. So, when you feel like the world is being unfair with you, at the end of the day you will always have Him that will support and help you during your worst days." (P5)</p>



Finding II: The coping strategies

Five themes of coping strategies in managing the challenges of WFH were highlighted by the participants in the study, namely, acceptance, communication, social support, employee benefits, and religious beliefs. The participants believed that the above-mentioned coping strategies helped them overcome the challenges and difficulties throughout the remote working. The verbatim excerpts of the themes are detailed out in Table 2.

Acceptance

A participant emphasised that even though the present situation was difficult and stressful, one needed to be realistic and accept the reality. Nevertheless, on the other hand, being optimistic and adaptable to the new norms was greatly needed, especially throughout the pandemic. Apart from that, another participant suggested that people could use this opportunity to develop and learn new skills (e.g., agile, adaptability) instead of complaining.

Communication

Communication is another coping strategy stated by the participants in the study. Online or virtual communication can be challenging. However, if two parties could be open in discussing with one another and talk about all the problems or dissatisfaction, miscommunication could potentially be reduced. For example, one participant reported that after being opened and maintaining healthy communication with her superior, her struggle with heavy workloads and working overtime were no longer an issue.

Social support

WFH means less supervision and attention given to the employees since people are working remotely. As a result, some people might not work independently and feel isolated, especially during tough times. Three out of five participants believed that receiving social support from peers, colleagues, or even leaders can boost their work performances as well as can be helpful to curb loneliness.

Employee benefits

Not having access to a strong internet connection and owning laptops or tablets with a good webcam can be problematic for some people, especially when they need to prepare themselves for remote working. Therefore, two participants believed that the company should give initiatives to employees, such as giving extra allowances so that it can be beneficial for them to prepare the necessities for remote working.

Religious beliefs

One participant believed that being religious helps deal with stressful events or negative situations, especially during the pandemic. Individuals have their struggles. Therefore, by practicing a good relationship with The Creator, it could be helpful for someone to obtain their inner peace.



Discussions

The finding manifested that one of the challenges of working from home was dealing with the interference by significant others, children, family members, housemates, and even noisy neighbours. This finding is consistent with the past finding that “keeping family members away from workspace,” especially while attending online meetings with leaders and colleagues were the hardest thing to do while WFH (Moovala, 2020). In addition, women, specifically mothers, would struggle more than their counterparts. They have to manage their house chores, taking care of the family, and nourish the children’s welfare while remote working at home (Xiao et al., 2020). Past literature showed that employees were given more freedom or flexible time to finish their tasks. At the same time, WFH might reduce family conflicts and increase their job satisfaction and work productivity (Thorstensson, 2020). Nevertheless, if employees were unable to balance the work and family matters while WFH, their work productivity and job satisfaction could be impacted.

This study also discovered that lack of facilities, particularly in terms of an absence of proper physical workspace and working tools, and low data connection was another challenge facing the participants. Employees who have limited access and privilege to own a proper physical workspace at home typically tend to set up their own “office” at various places at home, for instance, the dining table, or oddly on the bed. The importance of having owned a workspace could not be overlooked. Past research has shown that remote workers who have the privilege to own a workspace at home tend to have a high level of satisfaction in indoor environmental quality (IEQ), which helped them adjust to the new working environment (Xiao et al., 2020). If one did not have access to a suitable physical workspace, failure to focus on work and body and neck pain could occur. The finding also supports the previous research finding that WFH is impractical if the internet connectivity is not cooperating while an employee is attending meetings or sending emails to the subordinates. Working people are willing to WFH if their home has a good internet connection, making it easier for them to communicate with their co-workers for work purposes (Shareena & Shahid, 2020). In addition to that, a slow internet connection also would lead WFH employees to get distracted easily (Mustajab et al., 2020).

With many businesses and companies were going remotely, employees had no choice but to utilise the technology as a medium of communication during the pandemic. However, this study showed that communicating with co-workers online has its problem, particularly in the tendency to misunderstand the message. The finding is consistent with the previous study by Wang et al. (2020). Many employees suffer from low work productivity as they experience communication barriers with their colleagues, leaders, and even clients. The current study’s finding indicated that one of the reasons for the miscommunication was the client’s lack of understanding of the language and tone of the communicator. This finding aligns with the past study, which mentioned that communication that depends on technology could lead to miscommunication due to the lack of expression, tone, and emotion an



individual wish to portray to the recipients (Brewer, 2010). Worse still, Garg and Rijst (2015) reported that in the long run, poor interpersonal communication during WFH between an employer and employee could negatively impact the workers' future career opportunities as the leader did not personally recognise the individual.

Besides, adjustment to a new environment of working could be difficult, especially for a worker who previously has been too comfortable with the traditional arrangement of working. COVID-19 pandemic has radically impacted many working people. It has caused employees to force and adjust themselves to the "new normal" of virtual work setting, even though they know that it would affect their physical and psychological wellbeing (Chinniah et al., 2020). Baby-boomers and Gen X were highlighted as the disadvantages of WFH, particularly in terms of having difficulties in self-organisation and balancing between life and work (Moovala, 2020; Raišiene et al., 2020). Although past research did not mention the Baby-boomers' struggle to use the technology, it was pointed out that the Millennials have an advantage while WFH (Raišiene et al., 2020).

While this study found that adjusting to the new working environment is a struggle for the participants, excessively high workloads during the difficult times could lead to burnout, which is also extremely physical and mental exhaustion (Novess, 2015). One participant expressed her unpleasant experience during WFH as she claimed to encounter non-stop workloads and deadlines from her team and leaders, which left her physically and mentally tired. This case supported the findings of the past study that their respondents experienced burnout because of the excessive workloads and non-stop pressure from the leader (Marimuthu & Vasudevan, 2020). Apart from experiencing a high level of stress during remote working, isolation and loneliness are also crucial issues employees face during these challenging times. Prolonged quarantines and lockdowns have led many people to feel isolated and lonely as they lacked social interaction (Caliskan, 2020). The case is similar to the remote workers. They needed to practice social distance, working away from their colleagues and workmates, which eventually led them to feel alone and isolated.

Adjusting oneself to a new environment might take quite some time. Adaptation to the arrangement of WFH varies across individuals (Baruch & Nicholson, 1997). In this present study, a participant claimed that no matter how difficult some situations might be, eventually, people need to accept and adapt to the new norm during the current pandemic. Another participant included that acceptance can be done by being optimistic, which is proved by past research that a person with an optimistic trait can adapt to difficult situations of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic (Biron et al., 2020). In research conducted by Rony (2020), most of the respondents highlighted that it is crucial to adapt oneself during the difficult times of the pandemic. Hence, it is safe to say that although it might take quite some time for an individual, specifically the employees who need WFH, to adapt to the new norm, they might eventually get through the difficult situation.



Misunderstanding and lack of open communications among workmates are some of the challenges the employees face during remote working. Hence, one of the respondents suggested that having an open discussion with the team could lessen the issue of the communication barrier. According to Rony (2020), developing an open discussion with team members and leaders would bring reassurance for employees during difficulties, as well as could be helpful for the remote workers in adjusting themselves in unresolved conditions. Furthermore, when people are open to communicating with one another, the feedback that they receive from the other party could give them a better insight into the issue they are struggling with. According to Bandura (1997), as cited in Rony (2020), an individual's confidence can be reinforced when receiving comments from their superiors. Hence, it is noted that to avoid any misunderstanding during WFH, a genuine conversation and discussion are needed from any involved party.

According to Wang et al. (2020), seeking assistance for support and getting supervised by the leaders could be a reliable mechanism to enhance an employee's work productivity and welfare. In this study, a participant suggested that getting help from people and find a companion during difficult times did help her in managing her mental health. WFH has left a considerable impact on the employees in terms of feeling lonely and isolated because they had to work far from other colleagues (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Getting supports from a group of people could help many employees who feel lonely during remote working (Wang et al., 2020). The findings also mentioned that getting less supervision from the leaders leads an individual to feel isolated from the company. Wang et al. (2020) highlighted that although job autonomy is essential, monitoring the employees can be beneficial to overcome the feelings of unwanted and reduce procrastination among the remote workers. Social support is needed to decrease the feeling of loneliness among the employees, and leaders should supervise and monitor their workers while WFH constantly.

Overcoming the difficulties of WFH is not solely depending on the employees. Baruch and Nicholson (1997) mentioned that to have effective homeworking, an element of organisational is needed to be presented, in which the concern of the companies to the employees. It was theorised that receiving allowances or getting employee benefits could lessen the hardship of remote working. Supported by Ramasamy (2018), researchers mentioned that while employees were urged to WFH, additional benefits such as allowances are needed for the workers. The additional allowances were beneficial for paying the extra bills (e.g., Wi-Fi, electricity) that cost them. At the same time, WFH can motivate them to contribute more productively to the organisation. It is a win-win situation for both employers and employees. Apart from that, benefits in terms of the provision of training to upgrade the skills specifically for the employees who have difficulty using technology are recommended (Salunke et al., 2020). When employees are given the skills from the training session, it will enhance their level of competency and self-efficacy to WFH.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted many people worldwide, especially in terms of physical health and well-being. In this study, participants



indicated that one way to overcome challenges during current difficult situations is to strengthen their religious beliefs by improving their relationship with God and practicing His teachings. Past research on sustaining physical and mental health by having a religious belief during the COVID-19 pandemic found that maintaining good spiritual health could strengthen mental and physical health and protect people from the deadly COVID-19 virus (Koenig, 2020). Protecting people from the COVID-19 means that when a person practices and maintain a good spiritual relationship with the Creator, in a way, they can pray and share the love from God to others. Similarly, Coppola et al. (2021) mentioned that spirituality and religious practices are closely connected as coping strategies for people in Italy who experienced stressful events during the first lockdown. Those who practised religiosity were found to be less emotional and more positive.

The findings of this qualitative study gave us a clearer picture of the real situations that happened to the employees in Malaysia. At the same time, they underwent remote working during the period of MCO. However, the study has some limitations. Due to the current situation, the researchers believed that the best platform for conducting the semi-structured interviews was through online meetings. Even so, throughout the interview sessions with some of the participants, the researchers experienced technical problems (e.g., poor internet connection), which caused difficulty in grasping some interviewees' viewpoints. Therefore, some critical points might be overlooked. Besides, there were only five participants in the study, and all of them were Malays. However, it is essential to note that the study findings are not generalised to the Malays or Malaysian population.

It is pertinent to explore the challenges and coping strategies of WFH during the pandemic of COVID-19 from the perspectives of employees in Malaysia. However, for future research, it is recommended to investigate the challenges of WFH and coping strategies from employers' perspectives in adapting to the pressurised situation and arranging the policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it is also suggested for future researchers to explore the challenges and coping strategies of WFH from the perspective of different professionals and levels of job positions.

Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic and enforcement of the MCO in Malaysia led organisations and companies to opt for working from home among their employees. The study looked into the challenges of working from home and coping strategies adopted by the employees. Based on the analysis of the verbatim of semi-structured interviews, themes of challenges discovered were household interruption, limited facilities, communication barriers, adjusting to a new norm, and mental health. The themes for the coping strategies were acceptance, communication, social support, employee benefits, and religious beliefs. Even though the enforcement of WFH during the period of MCO has been challenging to many, nevertheless, it is believed



as the best mechanism to keep employees and their families safe. As the WFH employees learned to adapt to the new working environment, they would learn new skills and manage the situation better. However, an individual's inner and spiritual strength and a support system and understanding from the employers are essential to enhance the employees' morale and psychological well-being, hence, their job satisfaction and productivity.

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