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The Impact Psychological Detachment on The Association of Work-Family Demands and Emotional Exhaustion During Work-From-Home

(*Kesan Pemisahan Psikologi terhadap Hubungan antara Tuntutan Kerja-Keluarga dan Keletihan Emosi Semasa Bekerja dari Rumah*)

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of work-from-home (WFH) arrangements has significantly reshaped the environment of professional engagement, particularly in the post Covid-19 pandemic period. As employees increasingly manage the complexities of remote working, the distinctions between responsibilities in both work and family have become increasingly indefinite. This new working norm has introduced unique challenges in balancing work-family demands, leading to greater emotional exhaustion. Employing the Demand-Induces Strain Compensation-Recovery (DISC) Model, data from 335 teachers were analysed to examine how the psychological detachment impact the association of work and family demands with emotional exhaustion during WFH. Findings affirm a direct relationship with respect to emotional exhaustion and the emotional demands arising from work and family conflicts (WFC and FWC). Additionally, the findings suggest that psychological detachment alleviates the detrimental impacts of emotional demands and FWC in relation to exhaustion levels. However, a similar impact was not observed in the association linking work-to-family conflict (WFC) to emotional exhaustion. This study underscores the importance of cultivating psychological detachment as a critical organisational approach to reduce emotional exhaustion in the context of WFH, thereby enhancing employee well-being and productivity.

Keywords: Work-from-home; psychological detachment; emotional demands; work-family conflict; emotional exhaustion

ABSTRAK

Kemunculan bekerja dari rumah (BDR) secara signifikan telah mengubah landskap persekitaran profesional, terutamanya pasca pandemik COVID-19. Dengan semakin ramai pekerja menguruskan kerumitan bekerja jarak jauh, sempadan antara kedua-dua bagi kerja dan kehidupan berkeluarga semakin kabur. Amalan norma baharu ini mencetuskan cabaran unik dalam menangani tuntutan kerja-keluarga, yang seterusnya membawa kepada keletihan emosi yang lebih hebat. Berpandukan model Demand-Induced Strain Compensation-Recovery (DISC-R) sebagai konsep asas, data dikumpulkan daripada 335 orang guru dianalisis untuk meneroka bagaimana detasmen psikologi memberi kesan terhadap hubungan yang melibatkan tuntutan kerja-keluarga serta keletihan emosi semasa BDR. Hasil tinjauan mengesahkan wujudnya hubungan langsung antara keletihan emosi dan tuntutan emosi yang berpunca daripada konflik kerja dan keluarga (WFC dan FWC). Tambahan pula, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa detasmen psikologi dapat mengurangkan kesan buruk tuntutan emosi dan konflik keluarga-kerja (FWC) terhadap tahap keletihan emosi. Meskipun demikian, impak yang serupa tidak diperhatikan dalam hubungan antara WFC dan keletihan emosi. Penyelidikan ini menekankan kepentingan memupuk detasmen psikologi sebagai kaedah penting bagi organisasi dalam usaha mengurangkan keletihan emosi dalam konteks BDR, seterusnya dapat meningkatkan kesejahteraan dan produktiviti pekerja.

Kata kunci: Bekerja dari rumah; detasmen psikologi; tuntutan emosi; konflik kerja-keluarga; keletihan emosi

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 has significantly reshaped the nature of work, resulting in a substantial increase in remote working, often termed as "work-from-home" (WFH). Although this shift offers significant advantages such as increased adaptability and convenience, it has also presented pronounced issues, precisely in preserving clear boundaries linking work responsibilities and family commitments. As noted by UN Women (2020), these adjustments require

careful consideration and management to ensure a balanced approach to work and personal obligations. In Asia-Pacific countries, unpaid domestic and caregiving work increased for approximately three in ten women and two in ten men. For example, school closures required parents allocate additional time to educating and supervising their children. The switch to WFH also led to role blurring, often characterised by conflict, as individuals attempted to integrate work and home responsibilities simultaneously, resulting in multitasking across professional and family domains (Schieman & Badawy 2020).

Meanwhile, the overlap between professional and private responsibilities in remote work environments can intensify the demands of both domains, increasing the likelihood of conflict and contributing to stress and emotional exhaustion across individuals (Allen et al. 2021). In addition, prolonged exposure to such strain constitutes a central feature of burnout (Maslach & Jackson 1981). According to UN Women (2020), the escalation of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities is a significant contributor to the prevailing mental well-being, with almost two-thirds of women and half of men reporting a decline in mental and emotional health since Covid-19.

From an educational standpoint, the sudden shift to remote instruction through Home-Based Teaching and Learning (PdPR) posed substantial challenges, particularly regarding teachers' psychological strain in Malaysia. Traditionally, the structured environment of schools enables teachers to establish clearer boundaries between occupational responsibilities and private life. Nevertheless, the implementation of WFH disrupted this distinction, intensifying the challenge of managing both roles. Wijayanuddin and Zulkifly (2021) report that female teachers, in particular, experienced burnout since they were required to deliver virtual lessons, invest additional time in lesson preparation, supervise their children's online learning, and simultaneously manage household duties concurrently. Moreover, the digital divide experienced during PdPR further impeded lesson delivery, with inadequate internet connectivity and limited access to technological devices, exacerbating teachers' emotional distress and, in some cases, leading to depression among them (Ishak & Sulaiman 2023).

Psychological detachment is a crucial coping mechanism that facilitates recovery from excessive workload, restoring the energy depleted by occupational stress (Nasharudin et al. 2020; Sianoja et al. 2018). Such practice allows individuals to alleviate work-related stress by methodically distancing themselves from thinking and doing activities associated with work during non-working periods (Sonnentag et al. 2010). Effective stress recovery is vital for preserving psychological well-being and mitigating the transfer of work-related strain into the home environment. Psychological detachment served as a key mechanism in restoring essential mental energy during Covid-19 (Fauzi et al. 2020).

This study seeks to elucidate the function of psychological detachment in reducing the impact between work-family demands encompassing emotional strain, conflicts related to both family and work, and also emotional exhaustion in the remote working environment. By integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical findings, this research endeavours to contribute to the broader debate on occupational health psychology and furnish practical insights for enhancing the well-being of remote workers, thereby sustaining productivity in virtual workspaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EMOTIONAL DEMANDS AT WORK AND EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

Emotional demands at work are described as occupational responsibilities that necessitate considerable emotional investment, particularly tasks that are emotionally taxing (Van de Ven et al. 2013). Such demands are an important predictor for exhaustion (Leiter & Maslach 1988; Maslach & Schaufeli 1993). Emotional exhaustion, commonly acknowledged as a central element and precursor of burnout, represents a critical outcome in the workplace (Yang 2023; Mäkikangas et al. 2021). It is conceptualised as the profound deteriorate in emotional energy, the predominance of negative emotions, and a sense of being emotionally drained, which collectively heightened psychological strain (Maslach et al. 2001). Repeated exposure to emotionally distressing work has been linked to elevated emotional exhaustion, as employees must expend substantial emotional, cognitive, and physical resources to effectively manage demanding and stressful situations (Andel et al. 2022; Baek et al. 2023).

In wide range of occupations, including private and public sector employees (Navas-Jiménez et al. 2025), nurses (Mazzetti et al. 2020) and clinical psychologists (Geisler et al. 2025), emotional demands at work exhibit strong correlation with heightened emotional exhaustion. Among healthcare practitioners, Covid-19 crisis has further intensified these pressures, with Italian healthcare professionals reporting elevated emotional exhaustion due to escalated job demands during the crisis (Barello et al. 2021). Teachers also face frequent emotional demands, such as student misbehaviour and parental conflicts, which often necessitate the suppression of authentic emotional responses, and lead to heightened emotional exhaustion (Baeriswyl et al. 2021; Cuadrado et al. 2024). Similarly, studies conducted in Malaysia indicate that technical employees and counsellors are highly susceptible to emotional exhaustion due to the emotional demands inherent in their roles (Javaid et al. 2023; Nor & Idris 2024).

Emotional demands have been recognised as a key contributor undermining employees' emotional health (Duarte et al. 2020). Coping with such demands requires additional cognitive and emotional effort leading to psychological strain that manifests as exhaustion, anxiety and lethargy. Over time, these pressures diminish emotional health by fostering inauthenticity and depleting self-regulation resources (Azharudeen & Arulrajah 2018). In a contrasting perspective, however, Zheng et al. (2022) reported in China that emotional demands at work appeared unrelated with the emotional exhaustion experienced by the school principals. Such inconsistency, coupled with limited research on emotional demands, highlights the need for further investigation, particularly within specific work contexts, such as work-from-home arrangements, particularly within the Malaysian setting.

H_1 Individuals experiencing elevated emotional demands at work tend to exhibit a positive correlation with emotional exhaustion.

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

Work-family conflict arises when the expectations and responsibilities of professional and familial roles directly interfere with one another, leading to inter-role conflict. This construct is bidirectional, encompassing two interrelated dimensions: work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC). WFC represents the extent to occupational demands, time commitments, and strain associated with one's occupational role hinder the fulfilment of family-related commitments (Netemeyer et al. 1996). It arises as professional pressures, such as lengthy working time, tight deadlines, or job-related strain, restricts individuals' ability to engage in family routines, nurture close relationship, or provide emotional support to family members. In contrast, FWC refers to the degree to which family demands, time commitments, and strain disrupt the fulfilment of occupational obligations (Netemeyer et al. 1996). To elucidate, FWC occurs when familial obligations, such as caregiving responsibilities, domestic duties, or emotional pressures, divert attention and energy from professional roles, leading to decreased productivity, engagement, and job satisfaction.

Both WFC and FWC present significant challenges as individuals navigate conflicting expectations across professional and familial roles. This dual burden consequently results in increased stress and feelings of overload (Pikó & Mihálka 2018; Wang et al. 2019). Empirical evidence consistently indicates that both types of conflict negatively effects work and family life, leading to emotional exhaustion (Chen & Hsu 2020; Harun & Mahmood 2021; Zhao & Nuangjamnong 2023). Studies of physicians and teleworkers confirm that elevated emotional exhaustion levels are significantly correlated with elevated conflict levels arising from professional and family obligations (Medina et al. 2021; Mostafa 2021). In remote working era, employees report heightened stress from both WFC and FWC, further contributing to emotional exhaustion (Haskić-Ožegović & Hadziahmetovic 2023; Ma et al. 2025).

Study on gender differences have found that WFC, regardless of direction, exacerbates emotional exhaustion in men. Conversely, women show greater vulnerability to conflicts rooted in job demands, as they often encounter difficulties in reconciling professional and family responsibilities, thereby contributing to increased emotional exhaustion (Dukhaykh 2023; Recuero & Segovia 2021). Similarly, research conducted in Iran on 420 employed married women attributed their emotional exhaustion to WFC. In contrast, the study observed minimal impact for FWC (Bagherzadeh et al. 2016). Interestingly, research by Fasyni et al. (2020) revealed an unexpected finding: WFC was negatively associated with emotional exhaustion among nurses. Specifically, their findings indicated that nurses experiencing high WFC often reported with reduced emotional exhaustion. Conversely, other studies reported no significant association between elevated WFC and increased emotional exhaustion (Chu & Sun 2025; Richter et al. 2015). This inconsistency in the existing literature highlights a critical gap in understanding the boundary conditions under which WFC and FWC affect well-being, especially in culturally and occupationally specific contexts. This research seeks to bridge the identified gap by assessing emotional exhaustion within remote work environments, a setting that amplifies role conflict and challenges conventional assumptions.

H_2 Elevated WFC tend to be positively correlated with increased emotional exhaustion among individuals.
H_{2b} Elevated FWC is predicted to correspond with greater emotional exhaustion.

THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DETACHMENT AS A STRESS MITIGATOR

Psychological detachment entails the capacity of employees to achieve mental distance from their job when they are physically disengaged from the actual work environment. This phenomenon typically occurs during leisure periods, such as evenings or weekends, when individuals are not actively engaged in their professional responsibilities (Sonnentag & Schiffner 2019). Psychological detachment has been emphasised a vital recovery process, particularly for individuals who encounter difficulties in mentally disengaging from occupational obligations (Skurak et al. 2008). Mierswa and Kellmann (2017) argued that psychological detachment may act as a protective mechanism, buffering the adverse effects of work-related stressors on health. However, research

exploring psychological detachment as a moderating variable remains limited and has not been rigorously validated (Jafri & Batra 2014; Safstrom & Hartig 2013).

Within moderation models, psychological detachment has been recognised by numerous scholars as the major factor influencing the association between occupational demands and employee health, including depression (Nasharudin et al. 2020), work-family conflict (Molino et al. 2015), and poor health (Sonnentag & Fritz 2015). Sianoja et al. (2018) discovered that individuals facing high workloads, but low levels of detachment reported greater exhaustion compared with those who, despite similar workloads, successfully achieved psychological detachment. This indicates that effective psychological detachment from jobs during non-working period is instrumental in maintaining well-being, particularly given technological advancements that increasingly intensify job demands (Minkkinen et al. 2021). Conversely, some earlier studies have suggested that psychological detachment does not consistently buffer the association in relative to work demands with emotional exhaustion (de Jonge et al. 2012; Siltaloppi et al. 2009; Sonnentag et al. 2010).

Alongside the emotional demands placed on individuals, work can significantly disrupt their family life, adversely affecting both physical and overall well-being. These negative impacts of work-related stress can be mitigated when employees develop the capability to psychologically detach from their occupational responsibilities, thereby fostering effective recovery (Moreno-Jimenez et al. 2009). Psychological detachment is closely correlated with recovery experiences and is particularly beneficial in conserving the resources required for professional duties (Sonnentag & Fritz 2007). Jafri and Batra (2014) demonstrated that mentally stepping away from occupational duties alleviates the detrimental health consequences of WFC among lecturers. Similarly, studies in both the Netherlands and Indonesia reveal that individuals who successfully disengage mentally from work-related stress experience fewer negative emotions and reduced psychological strain (Rispens & Demerouti 2016; Sari 2020). In contrast, Murphy (2008), in a study of 295 sales professionals in Beijing, discovered that detach from work psychologically did not alleviate the association between conflicts associated with work and family (WFC & FWC), and emotional exhaustion.

From a theoretical perspective, psychological detachment is integral to the Demand-Induced Strain Compensation-Recovery (DISC-R) Model, which highlights its function in mitigating the impacts resulting from occupational obligations (de Jonge et al. 2012). Such framework indicates that job demands must be balanced with recuperation mechanisms that specifically align with the nature of those demands to preserve employee wellness and productivity (Niks 2015). More specifically, emotional exhaustion can be prevented by supplementing emotionally demanding responsibilities (e.g., managing students' behaviour or navigating parental pressures), with emotional work resources (e.g., peer support or venting in group discussions with colleagues), and psychological detachment. This approach implies distancing from the negative feelings encountered throughout the working day, a process referred to as a “matching three-way interaction” (Niks et al. 2017). Nevertheless, research on this interaction remains limited, necessitating further empirical investigation to substantiate these claims (Niks et al. 2017).

H_{3a} Detach from work psychologically mitigates the correlation between emotional demands and emotional exhaustion, such that individuals with elevated levels of psychological detachment experience lower emotional exhaustion under high emotional demands.

H_{3B} Detach from work psychologically mitigates the correlation between WFC and emotional exhaustion, such that individuals with elevated levels of psychological detachment experience lower emotional exhaustion under high WFC.

H_{3C} Detach from work psychologically mitigates the correlation between FWC and emotional exhaustion, such that individuals with elevated levels of psychological detachment experience lower emotional exhaustion under high FWC.

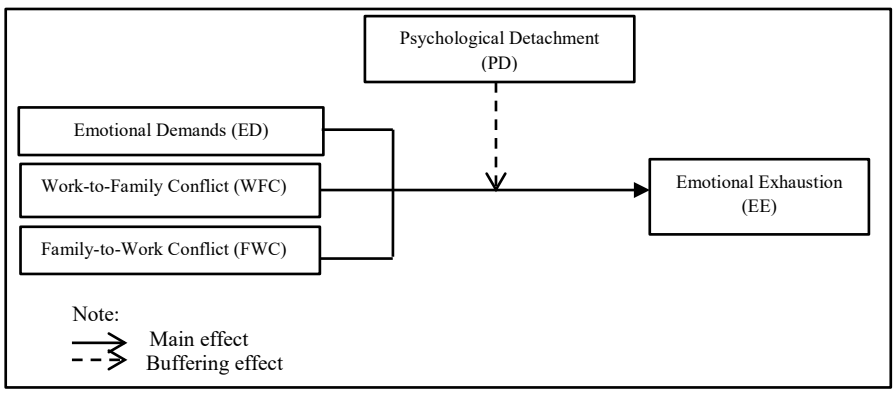

FIGURE 1. Study model

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The survey was conducted in 2021 among 335 teachers in the Kuala Terengganu district. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to participant teachers following approval from the respective school principals. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, participation was voluntary, with invitation sent via email and responses collected through Google's survey platform. This study received approval under registration number UMT/JKEPM/2020/47.

INSTRUMENTS

All instruments used were originally developed in English, but were administered in translated Malay version (Brislin 1970). The instruments used were:

1. Six items in the Demand-Induced Strain Compensation model were employed to assess emotional demands (de Jonge et al. 2009). The scale assesses the frequency of emotionally challenging interactions at work, such as dealing with anger or frustration from others. Item includes: "I have to deal with people who get easily angered towards me." Responses were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1" (strongly disagree) to "5" (strongly agree). The finding indicated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.
2. The Work-Family Conflict Scale comprising WFC and FWC was employed to assess work-family conflict (Netemeyer et al. 1996). Such capture how strain originating in one role context (occupational or familial) interferes with performance and responsibilities in the corresponding domain. The scale contains ten items from "1" (strongly disagree) to "7" (strongly agree). Among the items are: "My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfil family duties" (WFC); and "Family related strain interferes with my ability to perform job related duties" (FWC). Both WFC and FWC demonstrated excellent reliability, with Cronbach's alpha scores of 0.92 and 0.93, respectively (Ekmekci et al. 2021).
3. Emotional exhaustion was rated using nine items in the Emotional Exhaustion Scale (Maslach & Jackson 1981; Abas et al. 2016). This scale evaluates the intensity of emotional strain participants associate with their work experiences. A sample item includes: "I feel emotionally drained from my work." Participants responded on a five-point rating scale between "1" (strongly disagree) to "5" (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for this scale is typically reported at 0.91, indicating strong and consistent internal reliability (Abas et al. 2016).
4. Psychological detachment from job was analysed by employing the Demand-Induced Strain Compensation-Recovery (DISQ-R) scale developed by de Jonge et al. (2012). The instrument assesses individual's capacity to mentally disconnect from occupational responsibilities outside of working hours to promote recovery and psychological well-being. It consists of four items, including "After work, I emotionally distance myself from work." Responses were analysed using a five-point scale that ranged between "1" (never) and "5" (always). This scale has demonstrated satisfactory to excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically falling between 0.70 and 0.89 (Bova et al. 2015).

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was done by employing Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The analysis began with demographic profiling to establish a detailed profile of the teachers who participated in the study. Descriptive statistics, comprising percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations were employed to summarise the data's characteristics and distributions patterns.

To examine the relationships between various variables, inferential statistical techniques were utilised. Pearson's correlation coefficients were measured to assess the intensity and direction of linear associations among the key continuous variables, including emotional demands, WFC, FWC, emotional exhaustion, and psychological detachment. This method is appropriate for establishing whether significant bivariate associations exist between the constructs of study, which is a prerequisite for inferential modelling (Cohen et al. 2003; Field 2018).

Additionally, multiple hierarchical regression analysis was done to assess the predictive associations and to evaluate the mitigating effect related to psychological detachment on the association between work-family demands and emotional exhaustion. This approach is appropriate for assessing the incremental contribution of different blocks of variables (Cohen et al. 2003). Step 1 included control variables, including age, gender, ethnic, and marital status; Step 2 included the main predictors (emotional demands, WFC, FWC, and psychological detachment); and Step 3 incorporated the interaction terms involving psychological detachment. Hierarchical regression is particularly effective for testing moderation effects, enabling researchers to determine whether

interaction terms significantly improve the explanatory power of the model (Aiken & West 1991; Cohen et al. 2003). Accordingly, a significant focus of the analysis was on testing the mitigating impacts of psychological detachment, specifically its influence on the association relative to work-family demands and emotional exhaustion within the scope of remote working. By integrating both descriptive and inferential statistical methods, this research aimed to deliver a robust interpretation of the dynamics within remote work environments.

Harman's one-factor test was implemented to examine the potential of common method bias from self-reported measures (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Results from the exploratory factor analysis indicated that a single factor captured 49.10% of the variance, falling below the accepted threshold of 50-60%, thereby suggesting minimal concern for common method variance (Saris & Gallhofer 2014).

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHY

A total of 335 participants were analysed, comprising 57 males (17.0%) and 278 females (83.0%). The majority identified as Muslim and Malay (97.0%, N=325). The largest group consisted of participants whose ages ranged from 31 to 40 years (70.4%, N=236). Most respondents were married (87.7%, N=294), and over half reported having between three and five children (52.5%, N=176). With regard to work experience, 182 participants (54.3%) had 1 to 10 years, while 153 (45.7%) had 11-20 years (refer to Table 1).

TABLE 1. Respondents' demography

Demography	Category	No. of participants	Percentage (%)
Age	21-30 years old	12	3.6
	31-40 years old	236	70.4
	41-50 years old	87	26.0
Gender	Male	57	17.0
	Female	278	83.0
Race	Malay	325	97.0
	Chinese	9	2.7
	Indian	1	.3
Religion	Islam	325	97.0
	Buddha	9	2.7
	Hindu	1	.3
Status	Single	22	6.6
	Married	294	87.7
	Divorced	19	5.7
No. of children	None	44	13.1
	1-2	96	28.7
	3-5	176	52.5
	6 and above	19	5.7
Working experience	1 -10 years	153	45.7
	11-20 years	182	54.3

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The mean, standard deviation, correlation, and internal consistencies of components are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations between components

Components	α	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. ED	0.86	2.92	0.83	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Work-family conflict (overall)	0.97	3.51	1.41	.606**	-	-	-	-	-
3. WFC	0.95	3.56	1.47	.636**	.953**	-	-	-	-
4. FWC	0.96	3.47	1.49	.526**	.955**	.820**	-	-	-
5. EE	0.95	2.34	0.91	.585**	.706**	.712**	.635**	-	-
6. PD	0.91	2.93	1.06	.270**	.234**	.219**	.227**	.368**	-

*Note: All are significant at **p<.01*

Hypothesis 1 (H_1) predicted that emotional demands would exhibit a significantly positive correlation with emotional exhaustion. The findings supported H_1, showing that emotional demands were associated with greater emotional exhaustion ($r = .585$, $p < .01$). Similarly, Hypothesis 2a (H_{2a}) which predicted a notable correlation between WFC and emotional exhaustion, was conformed ($r = .712$, $p < .01$). The findings also supported Hypothesis 2b (H_{2b}), which was positively associated with FWC and emotional exhaustion ($r = .635$, $p < .01$). In conclusion, all variables demonstrated significant interrelationships, as illustrated in Table 2.

PREDICTORS OF JOB EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

Table 3 illustrates that psychological detachment buffered the positive connection with emotional demands and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .111$, $p = .023$), which aligns with Hypothesis 3a (H_{3a}). Conversely, Hypothesis 3b ($H3_b$), which posited that psychological detachment influences the positive association between WFC and

emotional exhaustion, failed to reach statistical significance (β = -.131, p = .070). In relation to Hypothesis 3c (H_{3c}), psychological detachment significantly diminished the interaction between FWC and emotional exhaustion (β = .162, p = .014).

TABLE 3. Hierarchical regression results predicting emotional exhaustion

	Standardised coefficient β		
	Step 1	Step 2 *Additive Model*	Step 3 *Interactive Model*
Control variables			
Age	.007	-.028	-.046
Gender	.088	-.014	-.025
Ethnic	-.104	-.045	-.044
Marital status	.167**	.142***	.137***
Predictor variables			
Emotional demands (ED)		.167***	.186***
Work-to-family conflict (WFC)		.463***	.463**
Family-to-work conflict (FWC)		.120*	.104
Psychological detachment (PD)		.182***	.171***
Two-way interaction			
ED×PD			.111*
WFC×PD			-.131
FWC×PD			.162**
R^2	.054	.602	.622
ΔR^2	.054	.547	.020
F change	4.746***	111.899***	5.721***
Df	4,330	4,326	3,323

*Note: *p <.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

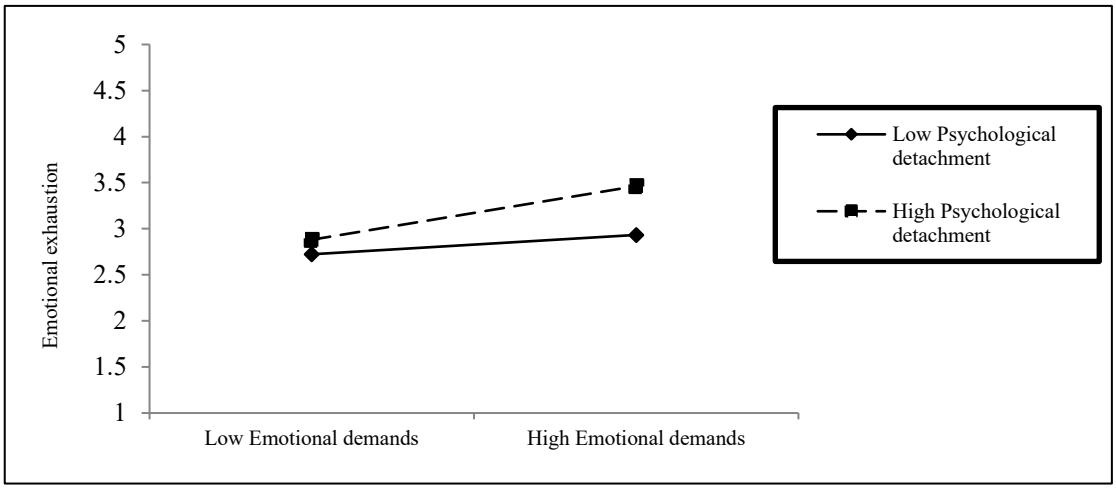

FIGURE 2. Two-way interaction of emotional demands and psychological detachment in estimating emotional exhaustion

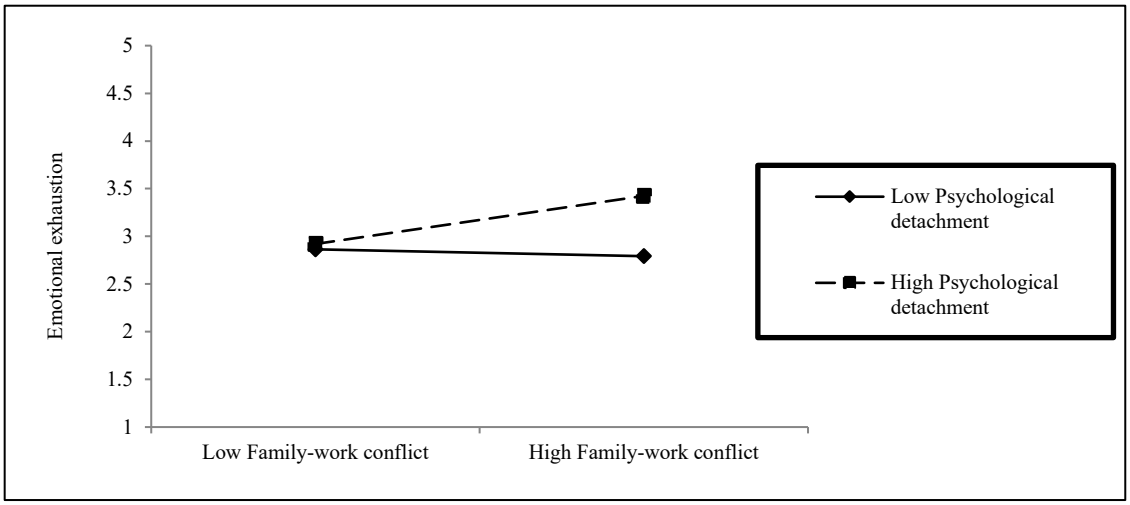

FIGURE 3. Two-way interaction of FWC and psychological detachment in estimating emotional exhaustion

DISCUSSION

Consistent with prior research and Hypothesis 1, the findings confirmed a notable positive connection involving emotional demands and emotional exhaustion (Baeriswyl et al. 2021; Cuadrado et al. 2024). During the WFH arrangements, teachers faced heightened emotional demands, such as managing student engagement remotely, adapting to new technologies, and maintaining professional composure despite personal stressors (Ishak & Sulaiman 2023; Wijayanuddin & Zulkifly 2021). These demands often required emotional labour, which can undermine emotional well-being by fostering feelings of inauthenticity and depleting self-regulatory resources (Azharudeen & Arulrajah 2018; Duarte et al. 2020).

The results also supported Hypotheses 2a and 2b, consistent with previous studies demonstrating that WFC and FWC exhibited a statistically significant positive linkage with emotional exhaustion (Harun & Mahmood 2021; Wang et al. 2019). In WFH context, teachers disclosed heightened vulnerability to emotional exhaustion when confronted with elevated levels of both WFC and FWC. The blurring of professional and family boundaries in the home environment complicates psychological detachment from work, thereby contributing to prolonged stress and heightened risk of burnout. Empirical evidence further indicates that the combined challenges of delivering effective online instruction, while simultaneously managing student needs, and addressing family responsibilities, significantly intensify emotional labour, thereby exacerbating feelings of exhaustion (Hsieh et al. 2022; Pressley 2021; Sokal et al. 2020).

Consistent with Hypothesis 3a, the result highlights the importance of psychological detachment in reducing the adverse effects of emotional demands on emotional exhaustion, particularly within WFH environments. Specifically, psychological detachment serves to mitigate the positive association connecting emotional demands with emotional exhaustion. Such finding is in line with prior empirical evidence (Minkkinen et al. 2021; Sianoja et al. 2018) and corresponds with the DISC-R Model by de Jonge et al. (2012), underscoring the importance of recovery processes in resource replenishment. In WFH settings, the erosion of boundaries between personal and professional life often intensifies emotional strain. Teachers regularly contend with high levels of emotional labour during virtual interactions, which can be mentally draining. Psychological detachment enables mental disengagement from work responsibilities, thereby fostering resilience and equipping teachers to navigate emotional demands without becoming overwhelmed. Recovery experiences, such as detachment, are instrumental in replenishing mental resources and enhancing individuals' resilience against emotional challenges, as evidenced by prior study (Sonnentag et al. 2010)

Moreover, the present study also confirmed Hypothesis 3c by showing that psychological detachment significantly influences the degree of the association connecting FWC with emotional exhaustion, particularly for teachers engaged in remote teaching. This aligns with previous studies (Sari 2020) and again supports the DISC-R Model, which asserts that psychological detachment as a recovery process alleviates the emotional distress caused by FWC. In households where family demands frequently encroach upon work hours due to shared living spaces, psychological detachment enables teachers to "mentally clock out," thereby reducing the transfer of familial stress into professional tasks and lowering overall emotional exhaustion. In other words, teachers who demonstrated stronger detachment skills experienced lower levels of emotional exhaustion even when family responsibilities significantly interfered with their job. Detachment allows employees greater control over both job and family obligations, ultimately diminishing emotional fatigue (Sonnentag & Fritz 2007).

Contrary to theoretical expectations and inconsistent with Hypothesis 3b, psychological detachment failed to significantly buffer the relationship connecting WFC with emotional exhaustion among teachers engaged in remote teaching. This outcome may have stemmed from the blurring of role boundaries in remote teaching, where the physical and temporal separation between professional and personal domains is markedly reduced, thereby hindering teachers' ability to disengage from work-related demands (Petitta & Ghezzi 2023). The inherently emotional nature of the teaching profession further exacerbates this challenge, as teachers often remain preoccupied with student needs and performance beyond standard working hours, thereby intensifying emotional labour and limiting opportunities for psychological recovery (Wu et al. 2023). Moreover, Lyndon et al. (2024) suggest that psychological detachment may not consistently serve as an effective moderating mechanism in remote work, particularly where professional isolation and high interdependence prevail, as these factors can exacerbate emotional exhaustion despite attempts to disconnect mentally. Such findings indicate that while psychological detachment remains an effective coping mechanism, its effectiveness is highly contingent upon contextual and structural factors that support boundary management and emotional regulation.

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

This research advances the conceptual advancement of occupational health psychology by deepening the understanding of psychological detachment as a fundamental mechanism for recovery in remote work contexts. It extends the existing DISC-R Model developed by de Jonge et al. (2012) by situating psychological detachment within flexible work arrangements, emphasizing its contribution in alleviating the adverse impacts of heightened

work-family demands on emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, the results highlight psychological detachment as a key strategy for sustaining work-life balance, demonstrated through its role in facilitating boundary restoration and enhancing well-being via disengagement from work-related digital interactions during off-hours. These insights enrich current theoretical frameworks by underscoring the importance of recovery processes in digital-era work arrangements, offering a basis for future investigations across diverse organizational and cultural contexts.

In addition, this research represents one of the earliest research findings regarding the predictive roles of job demands and work-family conflict (WFC and FWC) in contributing to emotional exhaustion among teachers adapting to remote work. It adds valuable insights to the limited literature on the Malaysian teaching workforce by addressing a notable gap in understanding how these dynamics unfold within this specific cultural and occupational setting. The findings offer both theoretical insights and practical guidance aimed at fostering teacher well-being in increasingly dynamic work environments.

From a managerial standpoint, this study emphasizes the need of encouraging psychological detachment to mitigate burnout among remote-working teachers. Educational institutions could implement structured work-life boundaries through formal policies, such as restricting work-related communications beyond designated working hours (e.g., email curfews) and encourage teachers to create dedicated home workspaces that reinforce the physical and psychological separation of professional and domestic roles. Beyond boundary-setting, schools could promote psychological recovery initiatives, such as virtual mindfulness training sessions, access to stress-reduction applications (e.g., Headspace, Calm), and regular micro-breaks between teaching lessons, all of which facilitate mental detachment and resource recovery (Crain et al. 2017; Slutsky et al. 2019). By integrating these strategies, educational institutions can foster an environment where teachers are better equipped to mentally disengage after work, thereby enhancing resilience and reducing emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, school leaders should acknowledge the unique challenges of remote work by offering emotional support, such as counselling services and peer-sharing sessions during virtual staff meetings, where teachers can exchange experiences and effective coping strategies. Collectively, these measures can ultimately improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and sustain high-quality teaching performance in remote-work settings.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

This research acknowledges some constraints. Firstly, it focused exclusively on one specific job demand, namely emotional demands. However, this construct encompasses three subcategories: cognitive, emotional, and physical demands (de Jonge et al. 2009). Future research should therefore build upon this research by investigating the full spectrum of occupational responsibilities across emotional, cognitive, and physical domains.

Secondly, this study was conducted exclusively within the context of WFH arrangements. While this setting provides valuable insights into remote work dynamics, the findings may not adequately capture the complexities of hybrid or fully on-site work environments. These alternative contexts may involve distinct stressors, communication patterns, and work-life boundaries that could influence both work-family dynamics and levels of emotional exhaustion in different ways. Therefore, subsequent research should broaden the coverage of analysis to include hybrid and on-site work settings to better understand how variations in workplace structures and interactions affects employee health and broader organizational performance.

Thirdly, this study's targeted emphasis on teachers restricts the applicability of its outcomes to other occupational sectors. Consequently, future research should incorporate comparisons between teachers and other professionals also engaged in remote work, thereby providing a broader understanding of work-family dynamics and emotional exhaustion across diverse occupational sectors.

Lastly, the reliance on self-reported responses may have led to bias arising from participants' tendency to provide themselves more favourably. Future studies could benefit from employing multi-method approaches that integrate quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or observational techniques (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Such triangulation of data sources would yield a more comprehensive and reliable understanding of work-family demands and emotional exhaustion, thereby reducing the limitations inherent in self-report methodologies.

CONCLUSION

Psychological detachment is essential for safeguarding employees against emotional exhaustion and supporting a balanced work-family lifestyle. It denotes the capacity to psychologically detach from occupational responsibilities and stressors, allowing employees to recharge and maintain their well-being. Its importance is particularly evident in virtual work arrangements, where boundaries between professional and private life are often compromised. Without clear mental separation between occupational and familial roles, employees may easily risk burnout due to constant connectivity and the pressures of meeting both demands simultaneously. By fostering a culture that promotes psychological detachment, organisations can help their employees establish healthy boundaries, thereby enhancing productivity, well-being, and overall life satisfaction.

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