

IMPACT OF CHANGED WORK ENVIRONMENT AND FAMILY DYNAMICS ON WORK LIFE BALANCE: A STUDY ON INDIAN WORKING WOMEN DURING THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This research paper examined the impact of changed work environment, due to pandemic, on working women and how they managed to realize the work-life balance. The study wanted to find out whether there was any impact on women's workplace engagement and workplace stress. Primary data were collected from working women, employed in the education sector, who were full time employees or teachers at university, college, and school level. The study found that there was significant relationship between all the three factors, affecting WLB, from respondents' perspective. The R-square of the SEM model was found to be .78, which indicated that 78% of the variance in WLB could be attributed to work engagement, work stress and family life.

Keywords: *Pandemic, Working Women, Employee Engagement, Employee Stress, Work Life Balance, Work Environment.*

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1. Introduction

The plight of professional women, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, was that they persistently tried to balance their jobs and family lives. A balance in work-life involved engagement in work and non-work life with a minimal conflict between the two roles. A good work-life balance could lead to high organizational performance, increased job satisfaction, and stronger organizational commitment. It also plays an important role in individuals' health, family, and overall satisfaction. Working women have been subjected to tremendous changes and upheaval due to the global COVID 19 pandemic. Among other challenges, attaining satisfactory role balance was one of the key challenges working women had to face. Achieving a satisfactory role balance was challenging for women as they had to perform a disproportionate number of domestic roles. Due to sudden lockdown and work from home situation, women had become prey to "double burden syndrome". In other words, women were expected to perform dual responsibilities at the same time. Because women have fundamental role to play when it comes to fulfilling family responsibilities, it can also be challenging and stressful for women to be involved in multiple roles (Amatea et al., 1986). Hence this study to examine the impact of changed work environment due to pandemic, on working women and how they achieved work-life balance (WLB).

The studies, investigating the women striving through the problem of work life balance, identified that the increased participation of more women in professional world, has been the main reason behind their struggle with WLB (Maertz and Boyar, 2011). Earlier, women were mainly

responsible only for caring for their families and children, even if they had an extremely limited interest in working (Rafnsd et al., 2013). As compared to men, working women must execute a dual role. For example, doing household chores, taking care of children, elders in the family, planning of everyday meals etc. and the list goes unending and they struggle to achieve WLB (Grunberg and Matei, 2020). Moreover, the patriarchal standards and expectations also discourage significant participation of men in doing household chores and it has made it more difficult for working women to achieve WLB (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Evertsson, 2014). Many researchers have suggested that it is very demanding for women to "have it all" i.e., to be dedicated to their profession and families at the same time (Seierstad and Kirton 2015).

2. Review of Literature

Work-Life Balance means experiencing contentment and being able to function effectively, in both the areas i.e., job and family (Clark, 2000). In other words, in the office premises, one can adopt suitable behavior according to the job-related roles. But the work schedule changed during the COVID-19-induced lockdown, for both men and women (Rudolph et al., 2020). When you can divide your time, strength, and commitment over different aspects of your life equally, it will automatically lead to the attainment of WLB (Kirchmeyer, 2000). WLB is realised to "the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role" (Greenhaus, Collin and Shaw 2003). In other words, WLB is dependent on how efficiently he/she can balance various life roles (Russo, 2006). Greenhaus (2011)

suggested that the equilibrium, linking work and life, continues to vary over the lifespan of women in accordance with their career growth and family life. According to **Fisher (2001)**, work - life balance has three different facets i.e., Work-life interference with Family-life (WLIFL), Family-life interference with Work-life (FLIWL) and Work-Family life enhancement.

Workplace environment consists of all the experiences, positive or negative, which an employee experiences and hence no employee can be viewed separately from his/her work environment. Researchers of behavioural science have found that the workplace environment plays an important role in influencing employee engagement (**Duran, et al., 2004**). Working women, after COVID-19-induced lockdown, found it difficult to maintain work-life balance (**Hayman 2005**). Under the Government's directives, almost all the companies made this transition of work from office to work from home (WFH) (**Bloom and Ying 2015**). However, "work from home" imposed a key challenge of separating family or private life from that of the work domain (**Bernheim et al., 2020**). The teleworking had intensified the amount of time and effort women had to spend on household and care duties, exposing gender duties in the pandemic workspace (**Andrew et al., 2020**). A study, by Polish and Swedish researchers, has shown that socio cultural context posed the biggest challenge for women's desired work life balance (**Kurowska 2018**). The study also reported a high level of gender difference, as a key barrier encountered by women. Similarly, another study by **Chung (2020)**, demonstrated childcare to be a serious constraint for women. The

pandemic situation had also widened the gender gap and inequalities significantly as reported in a study by Canadian women researchers (**Qian and Fuller, 2020**). It can be inferred that women tended to experience more stress, due to work family interface (**Craig and Churchill, 2020**). This may be due to gendered roles, which imposed heavier load on women.

3. Statement of the Problem

This paper attempts to extensively study WLB, since a lot of importance has been given to employees' health and wellbeing in recent times (**Peeters & Demerouti, 2014**). The Covid-19 - induced lockdown created high level of stress for working women, since they had to manage heavy load of household responsibilities like home schooling children, taking care of elders, manage without domestic help incessantly. Hence the WLB had become an increasingly important domain for HR managers and practitioners. This called for revisiting the impact of WS, FL and WE on work life balance, in response to changed work dynamics in the Covid times. Hence, this research paper proposes to study the impact of changed work environment, caused by pandemic, on working women, striving to attain work-life balance.

4. Need of the Study

The COVID-19 epidemic had exercised gender-specific impact on women, notably their traditional role as home administrators. The goal of this study was to use role theory to look at how the COVID-19 epidemic affected women's work-family balance, during the lockdown. The pandemic - induced changes mandated a study on working women in the education sector, taking online classes, which interfered with achieving healthy work life balance for them. Hence the

study intended to probe this problem in-depth, to identify the significant factors impacting work-life balance.

5. Objectives of the Study

- a. To measure the impact of Work Engagement on WLB
- b. To measure impact of Work Stress on WLB
- c. To measure impact of Family Life on WLB

6. Hypotheses of the Study

H1: There is significant impact of Work Engagement on WLB

H2: There is significant impact of Work Stress on WLB.

H3: There is significant impact of Family Life on WLB.

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Sample Selection

Data were collected from working women, who were employed in education sector. They worked from home during the lockdown situation, taking online classes. The samples selected for data collection, consisted of full time employees or teachers at university, college, and school level. The data were collected via online questionnaires. An online questionnaire was prepared and sent to the target population via WhatsApp and Email. Because of the time constraint, data were collected through the known sample's contacts of both the authors. For sampling selection, non probability convenience sampling was preferred. Online survey was administered to 150 women, working at different positions like Professors, Associate Professors etc., out of whom 110 responded.

7.2 Sources of Data

The present study was mainly based on primary data. The required data about the Impact of Changed Work Environment and Family Dynamics on Work Life Balance, were collected from sample respondents, by using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed in the form of statements, based on a five-point Likert Scale, with options ranging from one for strongly disagree to five for strongly agree, to obtain the perception of the respondents about the topic of the study.

7.3 Period of Study

The study was done during the period, January, 2021 to March, 2021.

7.4 Tools used for the study

A structured questionnaire, with close-ended questionnaire, was devised as an instrument of data collection, administered through Google forms. Descriptive statistics, Correlation and Regression were used for analyzing the data. IBS SPSS AMOS Version 21 was used to carry out CFA and SEM modeling.

8. Data Analysis

Data analysis, for the purpose of this research paper, was done in two parts. In the first part, Cronbach alpha, for reliability and construct validity, was measured by using CFA and normality was measured through skewness and kurtosis. In the second part, hypothesis testing was done by using Structural Equation Modelling, through SPSS. The descriptive analysis results and internal consistency are shown in the **Table-1**. The skewness and kurtosis indicators are < 1 and hence the normality of the data can be inferred. CFA model, with four variables, WLB, WS, WE, FL,

is depicted in **Figure-1**. The SEM Model depicted in **Figure-2**, consists of dependent and independent variables, in which WLB was the dependent variable and Work Engagement, Work Stress and Family Life were independent variables.

All the construct loadings, as shown in **Table-2**, were greater than 0.5. The high values of standardized beta revealed that the different statements did have significant correlation with the construct. The critical ratios of all the statements, as shown in **Table-2**, were greater than 1.96, indicating their significance. Hence all the statements reported significant correlation with the construct. Therefore, convergent validity of the scale was confirmed. The results of the correlation analysis, as shown in **Table-3**, established that all the constructs were moderately correlated, indicating that they were viewed differently by the respondents. Hence we can ensure discriminant validity. The result, as shown in **Table-4**, revealed that the calculated CR values of each variable, representing the four separate variables, were more than 0.7 and AVE calculated value of each variable was more than 0.5. Hence convergent validity of the factors was confirmed. To detect the discriminant validity in the measure, the MSV estimated value was compared with the AVE estimate of different measures. The results, as shown in **Table-5**, indicated that AVE was greater than MSV, demonstrating the presence of discriminant validity among the measurement. The **Table-5** shows the evaluation of the square root of AVE and the correlations within the different measurement scales. The diagonal entries are the square root of the AVE evaluates and the off diagonals represent the correlation within the different pairs of measurement scales.

The **Table-5** shows that the square root of the AVE of each measurement scale was more than the correlation with all other measurement scales, showing the presence of discriminant validity in the measurement scale.

The result, as shown in **Table-6**, indicated the estimated results of standardized slope coefficient of the different cause and effect relationship, unstandardized regression weights, standard error, critical ratio, p-value and the R-square of the SEM model. The results revealed that the probability values of critical ratio, in the case of all the three cause and effect relationships i.e., from work engagement, work stress, and family life on the WLB, were found to be < 5 % level of significance. The p-value of work engagement was 0.04, which was less than 0.05, hence and the hypothesis **H1** was accepted. In other words, there was significant impact of Work Engagement on WLB. The p-value of work stress was 0.00, which was less than 0.05 and hence and hypothesis **H2** was accepted. This implied that there was significant impact of Work Stress on WLB. The p-value of family life was 0.04, which was less than 0.05 and hence hypothesis **H3** was accepted. In other words, there was significant impact of Family Life on WLB. Thus it has been established that there was significant relationship between all three factors, affecting WLB, from the respondents' perspective. The R-square of the SEM model was found to be 78., which indicated that 78% of the variance in WLB can be attributed to work engagement, work stress and family life, with the help of SEM model. The study also concluded that all three independent variables i.e., Work Engagement (0.130), Work Stress (0.760) and Family Life (0.172) exercised significant and positive impact

on the dependent variable. The results, as shown in **Table-7**, revealed that under the structural model, CMIN/df statistic was 2.462 (less than the required value of 5), GFI was 0.811, CFI was 0.907. TLI was 0.883 and RMSEA was 0.078. In other words, the goodness of fit indices is in the expected range and indicated that the structural model can be used further for generalization of the results.

9. Findings of the Study

- From the study, it is evident that there was significant impact of Work Engagement on WLB, Work Stress on WLB and Family Life on WLB. According to the model, the factor, Work Stress, reported the highest impact on WLB whereas work engagement exercised the least impact on WLB.
- The above-mentioned results revealed that if working women's work engagement and work stress increased, it significantly impacted the WLB of working women. The changed work environment as well as increased responsibilities at home, due to Covid-19 - induced lockdown did have a consequential effect on the working women's WLB.
- Moreover, it was found that family life also exercised significant impact on the working women's WLB because family life generated more expectations from women as wife and mothers. These defined roles are also assumed to be inherited naturally by women as compared to men.

10. Suggestions of the Study

This study found that Work Engagement, Work Stress and Family Life did have significant effect on WLB. Hence it is suggested

that HRD professionals should have clear view of this synthesized association between all three-independent variables (WE, WS, FL) and the variable dependent (WLB), in order to have best practices aligned together for a comprehensive perspective, rather than having practices which consider isolated effect of the independent variables. Thus study the demonstrated a proper relationship between WE, WS, FL and WLB. With the help of the above discussed SEM model, it will be easier for organizations to formulate such policies and practices, which will enhance workplace engagement more, so that it can further facilitate in maintaining appropriate WLB for working women. It is also suggested that efficient workload management and building better or participative supervision would lead to significant reduction in work stress of working women.

11. Conclusion

Since it was lockdown situation and all professionals were working from home, this found that family dynamics did have significant effect on WLB of working women. Though the capability of women of multitasking can also help them in rationalizing their jobs and household responsibilities, it can also increase stress levels of working women.

This study contributes to a better understanding of how organizations can support employees' WLB and work engagement. According to our research, by strategically and proactively implementing WLB-accommodating policies and systems, employees can bring not only their authentic selves to the workplace but also feel valued, thereby achieving more desirable individual and organisational outcomes

(e.g., a high level of work engagement and productivity).

12. Limitation of the study

Since this study was conducted during Covid-19 period, collection of data became a challenge. We were able to collect data from the known contacts only.

13. Scope for further research

Since this study was conducted in the education sector, the scope of the study can be extended to other sectors as well.

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Table-1: Results of Descriptive Statistics of WLB, WS, WE and FL.

S.No.	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach Alpha
1	WE1	3.8818	0.99293	-0.847	0.007	0.603
2	WE2	3.9818	0.81254	-0.803	0.574	0.603
3	WE3	3.8909	0.90204	-0.622	0.112	0.603
4	WE4	3.3455	1.15287	-0.565	-0.644	0.603
5	WS1	3.6273	1.24782	-0.613	-0.848	0.934
6	WS2	3.6182	1.15720	-0.692	-0.420	0.934
7	WS3	3.5818	1.16825	-0.781	-0.391	0.934
8	WF1	3.4273	1.17668	-0.648	-0.580	0.915
9	WF2	3.1727	1.21050	-0.529	-0.973	0.915
10	WF3	3.2818	1.17412	-0.569	-0.852	0.915
11	WF4	3.7364	1.08092	-0.875	0.187	0.915
12	FW1	3.3182	0.99477	-0.451	-0.542	0.913
13	FW2	3.2000	0.97491	-0.353	-0.992	0.913
14	FW3	3.2182	0.98969	-0.280	-0.916	0.913

Source: Primary data (2021) using SPSS AMOS (Version 21.0)

Table-2: Results of Regression Weights of WLB, WS, WE and FL.

			Construct loading	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
WE4	←	work_engagement	0.068	1.000			
WE3	←	work_engagement	0.568	6.568	10.565	0.622	***
WE2	←	work_engagement	0.659	6.864	11.022	0.623	***
WE1	←	work_engagement	0.822	8.261	13.264	0.623	***
WS3	←	work_stress	0.916	1.000			
WS2	←	work_stress	0.885	0.956	0.066	14.443	***
WS1	←	work_stress	0.926	1.080	0.066	16.246	***
WF4	←	WLIFL	0.590	1.000			
WF3	←	WLIFL	0.874	1.752	0.255	6.862	***
WF2	←	WLIFL	0.944	1.794	0.251	7.156	***
WF1	←	WLIFL	0.893	1.649	0.237	6.948	***
FW4	←	FLIWL	0.913	1.000			
FW2	←	FLIWL	0.882	0.897	0.070	12.878	***
FW1	←	FLIWL	0.797	0.785	0.073	10.812	***

Source: Primary data (2021) using SPSS AMOS (Version 21.0)

Table-3: Results of Correlations between WLB, WS, WE and FL.

			Estimate
work_engagement	↔	work_stress	0.122
work_engagement	↔	WLIFL	0.273
work_engagement	↔	FLIWL	0.338
work_stress	↔	WLIFL	0.867
work_stress	↔	FLIWL	0.675
WLIFL	↔	FLIWL	0.705

Source: Primary data (2021) using SPSS AMOS (Version 21.0)

Table-4: Results of Convergent Validity of the chosen Factors

	CR	AVE	MSV
WLIFL	0.901	0.700	0.752
Work engagement	0.636	0.59	0.114
Work stress	0.935	0.827	0.752
FLIWL	0.899	0.749	0.497

Source: Primary data (2021) using SPSS AMOS (Version 21.0)

Table-5: Results of Discriminant Validity of WLB, WS, WE and FL

	WLIFL	Work Engagement	Work Stress	FLIWL
WLIFL	0.837			
Work engagement	-0.273	0.599		
Work Stress	0.800	-0.122	0.909	
FLIWL	0.705	-0.338	0.675	0.865

Source: Primary data (2021) using Stats Wiki

Table-6: Regression weighs for SEM Model between dependent and independent variable of the study.

		Standardized beta	Estimate	SE	CR	P	R ²
Worklife balance	Work engagement	0.130	1.345	1.799	0.748	0.04	0.78
Worklife balance	Work Stress	0.760	0.729	0.091	8.033	***	
Worklife balance	Family Life	0.172	0.149	0.073	2.034	0.04	

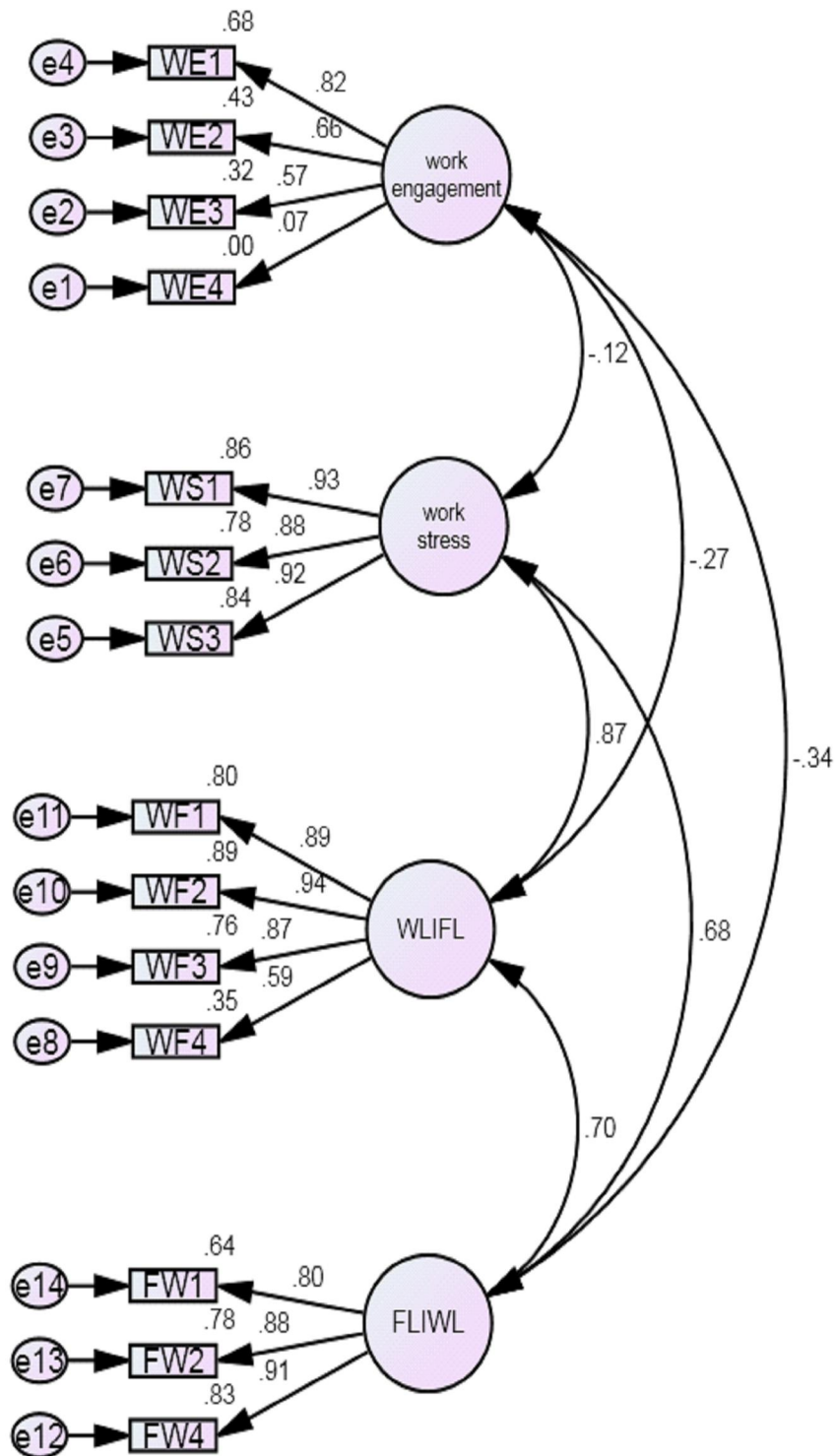
Source: Primary data (2021) using SPSS AMOS (Version 21.0)

Table -7: Model Fit Indices for studying Impact on WLB.

S.No.	Variable	Estimate
1	CMIN/df	2.462
2	GFI	0.811
3	CFI	0.907
4	TLI	0.883
5	RMSEA	0.078

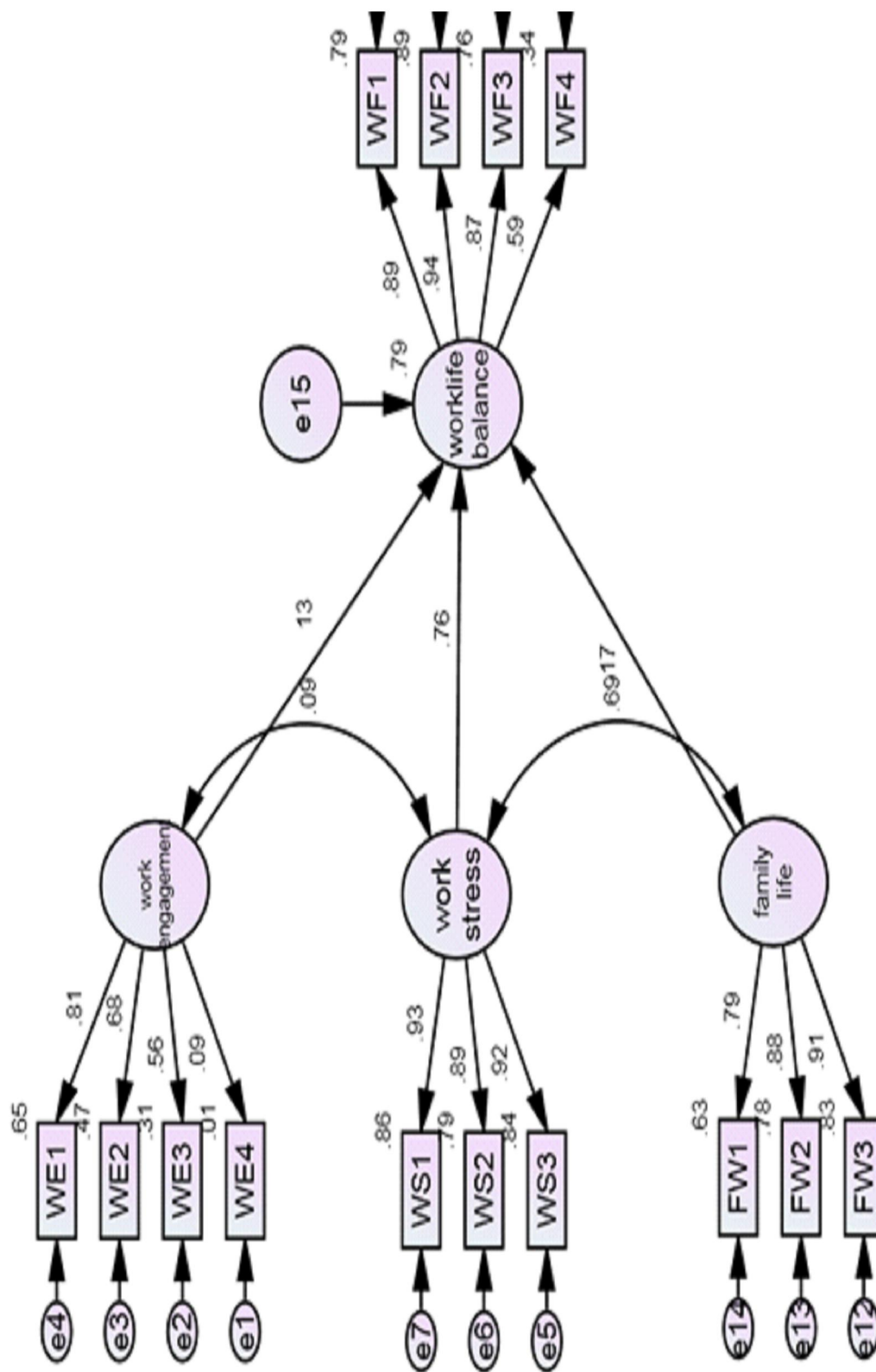
Source: Primary data (2021) using SPSS AMOS (Version 21.0)

Figure-1: CFA model with four variables WLB, WS, WE and FL



Source: Primary data (2021) using SPSS AMOS (Version 21.0)

Figure-2: Structural Equation Model depicting independent variable as WLB and Dependent variables as WE, WS and FL.



Source: Primary data (2021) using SPSSAMOS (Version 21.0)