

# Work-life balance satisfaction in crisis times: from luxury to necessity – The role of organization's responses during COVID-19 lockdown

Work-life  
balance  
satisfaction  
during crisis

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study examines how satisfaction with work-life balance (WLB) in combination with satisfaction with organization's COVID-19 responses (SOCV19R) helps to enhance subjective well-being and performance during the lockdown due to COVID-19.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The data of this time-lagged study were gathered through an online survey with three-waves between March and May 2020 in Spain ( $N = 167$ ). Hierarchical multiple regression and PROCESS were used to test the hypotheses.

**Findings** – Direct relationships between SOCV19R and subjective well-being and performance were not significant. Instead, SOCV19R increased employees' well-being and performance through a higher satisfaction with WLB (full mediation).

**Originality/value** – The novelty of this study is the evaluation of SOCV19R as a form of organizational support in times of crisis. This study suggests that a good organizational reaction to face a crisis such as the pandemic, encourages employees' WLB and helps them to boost their well-being and performance. It may be concluded that work-life balance (WLB) in Spain was seen as a luxury in good times and turned out to be a necessity in bad times. The present study recommends practical implications and provides lessons for human resource management for future crises or similar work conditions.

**Keywords** Satisfaction with organization's COVID-19 responses, Work-life balance, Subjective well-being, Performance

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB) has been a relevant and salient topic for companies and employees during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bhumika, 2020; Möhring *et al.*, 2021; Putra *et al.*, 2020). Employees experienced important changes in their family and work roles due to the measures taken to reduce the spread of the virus (lockdowns, closing schools, public administrations and workplaces; Vaziri *et al.*, 2020). Many organizations implemented epidemic-induced telework (Carillo *et al.*, 2021) that forced employees to make an abrupt shift to working from home (Kramer and Kramer, 2020). At the same time, they had to maintain their performance and respond to their family demands while the boundaries between work and family were blurring (Shockley *et al.*, 2021). Since some jobs are not suitable for telework, many other employees had to go to the workplace – with day-cares/schools closed – which entailed a reorganization of their lives and the compliance of strict safety guidelines to prevent the virus contagion (i.e. wearing masks, keeping social distance etc.). They also worried about their health and that of their families (Prime *et al.*, 2020). Certainly, WLB has been a challenge during COVID-19 lockdown, but there is still limited understanding of how employees experienced and evaluated WLB and the role of the organization's response in this context. The main WLB research stream has largely ignored the effects that crisis events may have



had for people and the role of employers in times of crisis (Eby *et al.*, 2016). Thus, more research is needed on satisfaction with WLB (SWLB) in times of crisis.

Previous research on SWLB has shown that organizational support facilitates employees' achievement of life and work demands, enhancing SWLB in non-crisis times (Abendroth and den Dulk, 2011; Butts *et al.*, 2013; Fan *et al.*, 2021; McNamara *et al.*, 2011). The lockdown situation was a period of social isolation and economic, health and job uncertainty that increased the anxiety and stress among employees (Smith *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, organization's support might have played a key role for employee's outcomes especially in this context. Since the beginning of the pandemic, organizations and HR professionals had to respond to this exceptional situation. They were providing support and adopting measures to help employees to continue working, which might have protected employees from the harmful consequences of this unfavourable situation (Eby *et al.*, 2016). Actually, satisfaction with the organization's COVID-19 responses (SOCV19R) has been associated to positive outcomes such as psychological capital (Mao *et al.*, 2020) and performance (Vo-Thanh *et al.*, 2020).

In line with these findings and based on resource theories (e.g. organizational support theory and personal resources allocation (PRA) framework), the goal of the current study is to examine how SOCV19R, coupled with SWLB, helps to enhance subjective well-being and performance. This paper explores the relationships among the study variables in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown in Spain. It must be noted that lockdown measures in Spain were among the strictest in Europe. Adults only could leave home to go to the supermarket and to work if they were classified as essential workers. No other type of activities such as leisure walks were permitted. Furthermore, children were not allowed to leave home for any reason between March 13 and April 26 (when they first were permitted to go out for a walk with their parents during a restricted time frame). Certainly, this particular situation threatened the well-being and the performance of Spaniards.

This study aims to shed light on how the lockdown situation impacted workers' struggle to maintain their well-being and performance. Employees alone could not cope with all the challenges brought by the recent pandemic crisis. HR practitioners, supervisors and organizations were in unique positions to encourage the juggling act of dividing time resources between work and non-work activities (Parry and Battista, 2019). We contend that WLB is a dual responsibility, shared by both the organization and the employee (Barber *et al.*, 2019; Fan *et al.*, 2021; Fan and Potočník, 2021; Grzywacz and Butler, 2008; Kossek *et al.*, 2014). The results will provide significant practical implications for organizations and the role of human resource management (HRM) for future crisis management.

## 2. Literature review and hypotheses

### 2.1 Satisfaction with work-life balance (SWLB)

Different concepts have been used to study the challenge to struggle between work and non-work activities and responsibilities: work-family conflict, enrichment, facilitation balance. A central theme of several definitions in this research area is time allocation, which implies devoting equal time across multiple roles as a critical element in our attempts to achieve WLB (e.g. Greenhaus *et al.*, 2003). Following this perspective, balance is defined as the unlikely event that people attempt and succeed to divide their time equally between life domains. This suggests that balance implies an appropriate distribution of hours and that WLB is an objective goal to achieve (Thompson and Bunderson, 2001).

Recent research criticizes this objective WLB conceptualization and focuses on how individuals perceive the balance between their life roles. This perspective considers the term "balance" as a positive evaluation of how individuals manage their work and personal spheres (Valcour, 2007). In this vein, SWLB is defined as "an overall level of contentment

resulting from an assessment of one's degree of success at meeting work and family role demands" (Valcour, 2007, p. 1512). Adopting Valcour's (2007) concept, this work considers SWLB as an individuals' satisfaction with the allocation of time in work, family and personal life rather than the achievement of an objective goal. SWLB depends on an individual's desires or values and is different for each person (Kossek et al., 2011). An individual who gives substantially more precedence to one role than the other can be seen as relatively imbalanced, even if the distribution of commitment to family/personal life and work is highly consistent with what the individual wants or values. That means that an individual could be satisfied with the time he/she has for work and for him/herself even if the person invests much more time in work than in personal life activities (Haar et al., 2014).

The study of SWLB is gaining popularity in Europe (Beham et al., 2019; Walga, 2018) because SWLB considers aspects which are not accounted for by other work-life constructs (Cahill et al., 2015). For instance, SWLB refers to a general perception of how one is allocating resources among domains rather than if facilitation, enrichment or conflict between the domains takes place (Grawitch et al., 2013). Moreover, SWLB includes not only family as an opposite domain to work, as is typically considered among studies in this area, but also personal life, taking into consideration all kinds of personal activities that the individual desires to pursue (e.g. hobbies or time with friends) (Haar, 2013). For these reasons, SWLB has unique theoretical and practical advantages over related approaches, and more studies are needed to determine more accurately its antecedents and outcomes (Fan and Potočník, 2021).

## 2.2 Satisfaction with organization's COVID-19 responses (SOCV19R) and SWLB

During the first COVID-19 lockdown, many organizations have reacted quickly by adopting several measures to ensure their continuity and competitiveness. This required the development of creative solutions and agile HRM practices to help employees to continue working while dealing with an exceptional work and personal situation. In the literature, a new term has been coined to describe the employees' evaluation of this organizational reaction: SOCV19R (Mao et al., 2020; Vo-Thanh et al., 2020).

Vo-Thanh et al. (2020) defined SOCV19R as "the perception that the organization has acted appropriately and effectively in assisting employees during COVID-19" (p. 2). Mao et al. (2020) referred to satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses as the "employee overall perceptions of the support and help provided by their employers in dealing with the pandemic" (p. 3). Both definitions are based on the research by Watkins et al. (2015), who studied the employees' satisfaction with the organization's response in a crisis context for the first time in the literature. These authors emphasize the importance of analyzing how employees perceive the company's reaction or measures, rather than the company's actual actions.

The aforementioned studies showed the consequences of the employees' satisfaction with the corporate responses during and after two important emergency situations: the natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina (Watkins et al., 2015) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Mao et al., 2020; Vo-Thanh et al., 2020). They found that employees who were satisfied with the organization's responses showed lower levels of psychological strain (Watkins et al., 2015) and higher psychological capital (Mao et al., 2020). Additionally, SOCV19R enhanced job performance and buffered the negative effects of perceived job insecurity on job performance (Vo-Thanh et al., 2020).

Building on organizational support theory, this paper argues that SOCV19R may be beneficial also in improving employees' SWLB. Organizational support theory proposes that "employees develop beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 1990, p. 51). Perceived organizational support is a central construct in organizational support theory, which assumes that employees tend to attribute human characteristics to the company. They form a

global attitude towards the company's willingness to recognize labour input and satisfy socio-economic needs. Previous research in the field of WLB has shown that the individuals' perception of the organization's willingness to and interest in supporting their needs in different life areas counts more than the measures offered in terms of decreasing work-life conflict and increasing job satisfaction (Allen, 2001; Blahopoulou, 2012). Actually, Fan *et al.* (2021) coined the term "work-life balance support" to describe how social environments promote the individual's effective allocation of personal resources (e.g. time) to accomplish work and life demands.

In this vein, the present study examines how employees judge organizational measures to respond to COVID-19 challenges rather than the objective measures that companies applied. High SOCV19R means that employees are satisfied with organization's responses to COVID-19. According to organizational support theory, this study suggests that the employees' perception that their organization cares about them and is willing to help them to address their needs, may positively affect their SWLB. This is in line with previous research about the organizational antecedents of SWLB. Job characteristics (e.g. job control and job complexity), the perception and utilization of support mechanisms (e.g. part-time and home-based working arrangements) and social support at work are positively related to SWLB (Abendroth and den Dulk, 2011; Fan *et al.*, 2021; Fan and Potočnik, 2021; Valcour, 2007), whereas working hours, commuting time, job insecurity and workplace telepressure have been negatively related to SWLB (Beham *et al.*, 2019; Valcour, 2007).

In sum, based on previous studies and the arguments provided by organizational support theory, this study proposes that high levels of SOCV19R will lead to higher SWLB during COVID-19 lockdown. Thus, the present study hypothesizes:

*H1. SOCV19R (T1) will positively predict SWLB (T2).*

### *2.3 SWLB, subjective well-being and performance*

There is general consensus among scholars that WLB has important implications on people's well-being and work productivity all over the world (Fan *et al.*, 2021; Lyness and Judiesch, 2014). On the one hand, extant research shows that the people who perceive balance between their work and life roles experience better mental health (Badri, 2019; Lunau *et al.*, 2014), higher job and life satisfaction and lower anxiety and depression across different cultures (Haar *et al.*, 2014). On the other hand, some studies confirm that WLB has positive effects such as higher motivation which, in turn, increases performance and productivity (e.g. Kelly *et al.*, 2008; Vaziri *et al.*, 2020; Whiston and Cinamon, 2015). Early studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic support the strong relationship between WLB and well-being. For example, Bhumika (2020) shows that work-family conflict is positively associated with emotional exhaustion, and Ruzojcic *et al.* (2020) show that WLB, especially time structure, positively predicted well-being and job performance for teleworkers. Although several studies explored the consequences of WLB during the pandemic (e.g. Bhumika, 2020; Gigaui, 2020; Putra *et al.*, 2020; Ruzojcic *et al.*, 2020), there is lack of studies that address the consequences of SWLB.

Based on the personal resources allocation (PRA) framework, SWLB contributes to people's well-being and performance (Grawitch *et al.*, 2010). The PRA framework is a holistic approach that integrates multiple self-regulatory theories (i.e. control theory, self-determination theory and conservation of resources theory). This framework explains that people need to choose where to allocate their resources to respond to their daily demands. In the work context, employees who (1) are satisfied with the (access to) resources (e.g. time) across life domains, (2) perceive control about resource allocation and (3) are satisfied with how they manage their resources will obtain positive outcomes such as higher well-being and performance (Grawitch *et al.*, 2010; Porath and Bateman, 2006).

According to PRA framework, employees with high levels of SWLB might perceive they have enough time available to fulfill their role-related demands. In this vein, they have a sense of control over work and non-work activities, which promotes psychological well-being (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2012). Besides, individuals who experience SWLB may feel better (active, cheerful and calm) “because they are participating in role activities that are salient to them” (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2003, p. 515) and because they are investing the adequate time for what is important to them (Haar *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, employees with high levels of SWLB might feel able to prioritize and reorganize their demands and perform better (Grawitch *et al.*, 2010).

In sum, based on previous research about WLB and PRA framework, this study hypothesizes that SWLB during lockdown will increase employees’ levels of subjective well-being and performance:

H2. SWLB (T2) will predict subjective well-being (T3).

H3. SWLB (T2) will predict performance (T3).

#### 2.4 SOCV19R, subjective well-being and task performance: the mediating role of SWLB

The study of how organizational factors influence employees’ well-being and performance is of particular interest to researchers (Lee *et al.*, 2021; e.g. Sasaki *et al.*, 2020). However, we could only identify two studies that explore the role of SOCV19R on these employees’ outcomes. Vo-Thanh *et al.* (2020) reported that employees who were satisfied with organization’s COVID-19 responses showed higher levels of job performance because they trusted their organization, enjoyed job security and were motivated to work. Mao *et al.* (2020) showed that SOCV19R was positively related to psychological capital (employee self-efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism).

Based on the arguments provided by organizational support theory and previous empirical findings, we suggest a direct effect of SOCV19R on subjective well-being and job performance; thus the present study hypothesizes:

H4a. SOCV19R (T1) will predict subjective well-being (T3).

H4b. SOCV19R (T1) will predict performance (T3).

The present study goes a step further and contributes to the existing literature by proposing that the influence of SOCV19R on job performance and subjective well-being will be direct but also through SWLB. Drawing on organizational support theory, we expect that SOCV19R is interpreted by individuals as a gesture of support from the organization and supervisors. We posit that employees who are satisfied with their organization’s reaction and measures during COVID-19 feel supported while trying to balance their work and personal life, which is needed to improve their subjective well-being and to maintain performance (Bagger and Li, 2014).

Given the previous arguments suggesting that SOCV19R directly affects employees’ task performance, only partial mediation is expected.

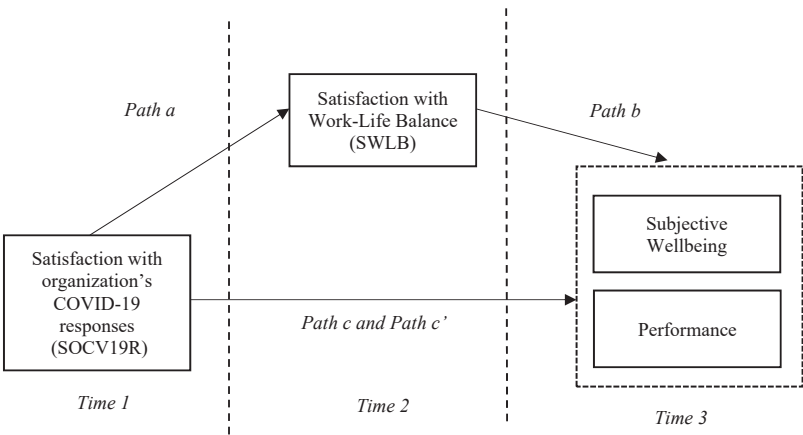
Thus, this study hypothesizes:

H5a. SWLB (T2) will partially mediate the relationship between SOCV19R (T1) and subjective well-being (T3).

H5b. SWLB (T2) will partially mediate the relationship between SOCV19R (T1) and performance (T3).

As shown in Figure 1, this research contends that SOCV19R is associated with increased SWLB (Hypothesis 1), subjective well-being and performance (Hypothesis 4). Further, increased SWLB is expected to enhance subjective well-being (Hypothesis 2) and performance (Hypothesis 3). In addition, it is hypothesized that SWLB partially mediates

**Figure 1.** Conceptual model and hypothesized relationships



the relationship between SOCV19R and subjective well-being and performance (Hypothesis 5).

3. Method

3.1 Study context

The data were gathered during the weeks when Spain was under Europe’s strictest lockdown measures due to very high infection rates (e.g. only essential workers could leave their homes; children were under strict lockdown for 6 weeks). At the time of the survey, people had to maintain their performance and respond to their family demands while blurring the boundaries between work and family (Shockley *et al.*, 2021). Adapting to an uncertain situation and keeping up performance in a stressful pandemic situation while confined with the family at home posed an important challenge for WLB.

3.2 Sample and procedure

A time-lagged design was chosen to allow for a richer picture on SOCV19R and SWLB. Data were collected in three waves. Time 1 survey was administered on March 24, 2020. This was one week after the Spanish government declared the state of alert and a 14 days’ nationwide lockdown. Time 2 was collected on April 1, 2020, and Time 3 on May 1, 2020. We chose a short time frame between the surveys to mitigate memory bias and drop rate (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, the time lag was short because the lockdown was initially planned for two weeks only, although it finally lasted three months. At the end of the T1 online survey (*N* = 456), respondents were asked to leave their e-mail address and voluntarily agree to participate in the T2 and T3 surveys. The final sample consisted of 167 participants who completed all three surveys. Following ethical guidelines, all participants received a short video with descriptive results and a thank you message after finishing the data collection period.

The average age of respondents was *M* = 41.65 years (*SD* = 8.36) and the majority were women (77%). Most employees had a university degree (72%), and the organizational tenure was up to five years for 67.7% of the participants. At the time of the survey, 70.9% of the sample were teleworking. Many sectors were represented: education (18.8%), health (15.8%), administration (10.9%), tourism and hospitality (4.8%), among others. Regarding family status, 64.8% had children under 18 years old and 80.6% were dual-earner couples (66% with both members having a full-time job).



We created a questionnaire using the free online platform Google forms to explore the early experiences with balancing work and life during COVID-19. This study used a non-probabilistic snowball sampling method to recruit participants across different occupations and locations in Spain, similar to many other studies during COVID-19 lockdown (e.g. [Chong et al., 2020](#); [Lin et al., 2021](#)). This research used a snowball sampling approach to contact as many respondents as possible in a short time period, being aware of the risk of bias in the data. Researchers shared the link through social media networks (e.g. LinkedIn), published it on the website of the researchers' university and asked to distribute it further through personal and professional contacts.

### 3.3 Measures

The four constructs in the research model ([Figure 1](#)) were measured by items used by previous studies and adapted on compliance with the context of COVID-19 (see [Appendix](#)).

*Satisfaction with organization's COVID-19 responses* (SOCV19R) was measured following [Watkins et al.'s \(2015\)](#) recommendations like other authors in their COVID-19 publications did (i.e. [Mao et al., 2020](#); [Vo-Thanh et al., 2020](#)). The scale created for the current study includes three items that refer to the employees' perception about the measures that the organization took to respond to the pandemic and perceived supervisor support. The response options were a six-point scale ranging from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied). Cronbach's alpha was 0.91.

*Satisfaction with work-life balance* was assessed using a three items scale adapted from [Valcour \(2007\)](#). The questions were whether the employee was satisfied with the time that he/she had to work, time for his/her couple and family and time for him/herself. Following [White \(1999\)](#) and ([Saltzstein et al., 2001](#)), we added a "whole over item" to know whether the employee was satisfied with the balance between work and life. In sum, this study used a holistic measure composed of four items, of employees' contentment with the allocation of time between personal, work and family life. The response options were a six-point scale ranging from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied). Cronbach's alpha was 0.85.

*Subjective well-being*. The degree of subjective well-being (affective well-being) was measured through the WHO-5 (World Health Organization – Five Well-being Index) in its Spanish version ([Topp et al., 2015](#)). This Index is a short and generic global self-report measure of current mental well-being. It consists of 5 items; a sample item is "Over the past 2 weeks . . . I have felt cheerful and in good spirits". The response options were a six-point scale ranging from 1 (at no time) to 6 (all of the time). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.84.

*Task performance*. Participants rated their task performance in the past two weeks. The scale consisted of three items to rate the quantity of work, the quality of work and the achievement of work goals based on [González-Romá and Gamero \(2012\)](#) and [Koopmans et al., \(2012\)](#). A sample item was "How do you rate the quality of your own work in the past two weeks?". The response options were a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good). Cronbach's alpha was 0.86.

### 3.4 Control variables

*Gender*. Previous research has argued that females tend to have more work-family conflicts ([Karanikas and Cauchi, 2020](#)). Accordingly, working women might experience more difficulties during lockdown because family and work were equally demanding.

*Age* is considered a central variable by researchers in WLB ([Richert-Kaźmierska and Stankiewicz, 2016](#)) because the importance of different life domains may change across the life span ([Super, 1980](#)).

*Children.* Participants reported if they had children under 18 years old, , children were at home because of lockdown, increasing the demands for parents.

*Telework.* One of the main advantages of teleworking during the lockdown due to COVID-19 was the perception of WLB (Ipsen *et al.*, 2021). Since the study sample includes teleworkers and non-teleworkers, we decided to control for this variable.

*Fear of COVID-19.* The present study collected the data during the first weeks of the pandemic in which the infection rate was very high. Some studies show how fear of COVID-19 was negatively related to well-being (e.g. Ahorsu *et al.*, 2020).

3.5 Measurement scale validation

To assess the discriminant validity of the measures, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by using structural equation modelling (SEM) was conducted through AMOS 18. The results of CFA suggested a good fit of the proposed initial measurement model to the data, based on the following fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 179,765$ ,  $df = 84$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.05$ ,  $CFI = 0.96$ ,  $TLI = 0.95$ . Cronbach's coefficient alpha indicated good reliability for the main constructs in this study, with all values above the 0.70 threshold (see Table 1). Composite reliability of the measured constructs ranges from 0.85 to 0.91, exceeding the conventional cut-off values 0.70, and thus showing internal consistency. The average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.60 to 0.77, which exceeds the 0.50 benchmark, suggesting a good convergent validity (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994; see Table 2). Finally, discriminant validity of the construct measures was assessed by comparing intercorrelations among the factors with the square root of the AVE. Given that the correlation values for all constructs are smaller than the square root of AVE, discriminant validity is supported (see Table 3).

3.6 Data analyses

Data analyses was performed with SPSS 24.0 and the hypotheses were tested via PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). Descriptive statistics were calculated for the study variables and bivariate correlations were used to analyze the relationship among SOCV19R, SWLB, subjective well-being and task performance. Next, two mediation models were tested (Hayes, 2013) to assess the relationship between (1) SOCV19R and subjective well-being through SWLB and (2) SOCV19R and task performance through SWLB. We followed Hayes's (2013) recommendations and tested *path a*, the link between SOCV19R (independent variable) and

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. SOCV19R	4.55	1.49	(0.91)							
2. SWLB	4.00	1.17	0.25**	(0.85)						
3. Subjective well-being	3.63	0.90	0.10	0.30**	(0.84)					
4. Performance	3.76	0.83	0.07	0.24**	0.18*	(0.86)				
5. Gender	1.77	0.42	-0.02	-0.09	-0.13	0.04	-			
6. Age	41.65	8.36	-0.03	0.14	0.19*	0.09	-0.04	-		
7. Fear of COVID-19	3.15	1.31	-0.15*	0.05	-0.09	-0.13	0.15*	-0.15*	-	
8. Children	0.64	0.47	-0.08	-0.32**	0.06	0.01	-0.07	-0.07	-0.00	-
9. Telework	2.07	1.34	-0.39**	-0.09	-0.09	-0.07	-0.05	-0.15	0.10	0.01

**Table 1.**  
Means, standard  
deviations and  
correlations

**Note(s):** *N* = 165. Coefficient alpha is in parentheses on the diagonal. SOCV19R = satisfaction with organization covid-19 response; SWLB = satisfaction with work life balance; gender (1 = men; 2 = women), telework (1 = yes, 2 = no), children (1 = children < 18 years old; 0 = children >18 years old or no children)  
\**p* < 0.05; \*\**p* > 0.01



SWLB; *path b*, the impact of SWLB (mediator) on subjective well-being; *path c*, total effect of SOCV19R on subjective well-being (outcome variable); *path c'*, the direct effect of SOCV19R on subjective well-being controlling SWLB and the indirect effect of SOCV19R on subjective well-being through SWLB. The same mediation analysis was used to examine whether SWLB mediated the relationship between SOCV19R and task performance. Therefore, two regression analyses with lagged effects using PROCESS (model 4) were run. This method is suitable for time-lagged and longitudinal data (Richey *et al.*, 2016) and tests the indirect effects using the bootstrapping procedure which preserves the functionality at low sample sizes (Rigdon *et al.*, 2017). To facilitate the interpretation of effect sizes, all predictors were standardized (z-scored) prior to analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations and correlations are shown in Table 1. As expected, SOCV19R was significantly and positively related to SWLB ( $r = 0.25$ ;  $p > 0.01$ ). Intercorrelations showed a significant and positive relationship between SWLB and subjective well-being ( $r = 0.30$ ;  $p > 0.01$ ), and between SWLB and performance ( $r = 0.24$ ;  $p > 0.01$ ).

4.2 Hypotheses testing

The results of the regression analysis presented in Table 4 show that SOCV19R positively predicts SWLB ( $b = 0.25$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting H1. Further, SWLB positively predicts subjective well-being ( $b = 0.32$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and performance ( $b = 0.29$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), thus supporting H2 and H3, respectively. However, the relationships between SOCV19R and subjective well-being ( $b = 0.02$ , n.s.) and performance ( $b = -0.03$ , n.s.) were non-significant, hence the results failed to support Hypothesis 4.

Finally, the results demonstrated that SWLB acts as a mediator variable in the proposed regression model (H5). Specifically, the indirect effect of SOCV19R on subjective well-being via SWLB was significant ( $b = 0.08$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This result was supported by bootstrapping analyses (95% CI [0.02, 0.15]). Similarly, the indirect effect of SOCV19R on performance via SWLB was also significant ( $b = 0.07$   $p < 0.05$ ). This result was also supported by

Constructs	AVE	CR
1. SOCV19R	0.77	0.91
2. SWLB	0.60	0.85
3. Subjective well-being	0.60	0.88
4. Performance	0.73	0.89

**Note(s):** AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability

**Table 2.**  
Convergent validity

	1	2	3	4
1. SOCV19R	<i>0.88</i>			
2. SWLB	0.15	<i>0.77</i>		
3. Subjective well-being	0.18	0.16	<i>0.77</i>	
4. Performance	0.12	0.03	0.24	<i>0.85</i>

**Note(s):** Values of square root of AVE are italicized in diagonal

**Table 3.**  
Discriminant validity

	SWLB		Subjective well-being				Performance			
	<i>b</i>	s.e	<i>b</i>	s.e	LLCI	ULCI	<i>b</i>	s.e	LLCI	ULCI
<i>Direct effects</i>										
SOCV19R	0.25**	0.07	0.02	0.07			−0.03	0.07		
SWLB			0.32**	0.07			0.29**	0.07		
<i>Indirect effects</i>										
SOCV19R → SWLB			0.08*	0.03	0.02	0.15				
→ well-being										
SOCV19R → SWLB							0.07*	0.03	0.02	0.14
→ performance										
<i>Covariates (control variables)</i>										
Gender	−0.09	0.17	−0.06	0.15			0.08	0.15		
Age	0.14*	0.00	0.15*	0.00			0.03	0.00		
Fear of COVID-19	0.13	0.05	−0.07	0.05			−0.16*	0.05		
Children	−0.28**	0.14	0.18**	0.14			0.10	0.14		
Telework	0.02	0.17	−0.06	0.15			−0.05	0.15		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.19		0.15				0.10			
<i>F</i>	6.52**		4.16**				2.64*			

**Table 4.** Regression analyses

**Note(s):** *b* = standardized coefficient; s.e. = standard error; LLCI = lower level bootstrap confidence interval; ULCI = upper level bootstrap confidence interval. \* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01

bootstrapping analyses (95 % CI [0.02, 0.16]). Since the confidence interval did not contain zero, both indirect effects are statistically significant, providing additional evidence to support H5a and H5b. Furthermore, the results support a full mediation effect because the direct relationships between SOCV19R and subjective well-being and performance were not significant (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

The proposed control variables (covariates) showed some significant effects. For example, age was positively related to SWLB (*b* = 0.14, *p* < 0.05) and subjective well-being (*b* = 0.15, *p* < 0.05). Having children under 18 years old was negatively related to SWLB (*b* = −0.28, *p* < 0.01) but positively related to subjective well-being (*b* = 0.18, *p* < 0.01). Finally, fear of COVID-19 was negatively related to performance (*b* = −0.16, *p* < 0.05).

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand the effects of a SOCV19R on employees’ SWLB and, subsequently, on employees’ well-being and performance during the lockdown due to COVID-19.

First, the results showed that employees satisfied with the organization’s responses to COVID-19 presented higher levels of SWLB over time (H1 supported). These findings are consistent with previous research, which emphasize the importance of organizational support to reduce work-family conflict (French *et al.*, 2018; Haar *et al.*, 2014) and to increase WLB satisfaction (Fan and Potočnik, 2021). Since national relief may not always be accessible or trustworthy in a crisis situation (Watkins *et al.*, 2015), organizational support (e.g. offering help and care) can contribute to meet goals in the work and personal life spheres, thus enhancing SWLB. Second, the results support the positive effects of SWLB on subjective well-being (H2 supported) and performance (H3 supported) over time. These findings are congruent with the PRA framework (Grawitch *et al.*, 2010), which emphasizes that satisfaction with balancing time and energy in the different life spheres enhances well-being and performance (e.g. Grawitch *et al.*, 2010; Porath and Bateman, 2006). Similar to previous studies of SLWB (e.g. Eby *et al.*, 2016), SLWB benefits individuals adjustment to

crisis situations. Third, contrary to the predictions of this study, SOCV19R was neither related to well-being nor to performance over time ([Hypothesis 4](#) not supported). However, recent studies have identified benefits associated with SOCV19R. For example, [Vo-Thanh et al. \(2020\)](#) demonstrated that SOCV19R was positively related to performance. [Mao et al. \(2020\)](#) found that employees with high satisfaction with organization's COVID-19 responses had greater psychological capital. Both aforementioned studies were cross-sectional, which prevents from adequately testing causal relationships. This could be a possible explanation for the incongruence with the findings. Fourth, the results show that SOCV19R had a positive impact on well-being and performance through SWLB ([Hypothesis 5](#) supported). The results of the present study empirically support that SWLB is an enabling mechanism that allows SOCV19R to enhance well-being and performance. Indeed, this study demonstrated that the relationship between SOCV19R and well-being ([H5a](#)) and between SOCV19R and performance ([H5b](#)) was mediated by SWLB. Although partial mediation was hypothesized, results supported full mediation. This study suggests that a good organization's response to face a crisis such as the pandemic is insufficient to guarantee well-being and performance unless the individual is able to satisfactorily deal with work and life demands. In other words, organization's responses to crises should support SWLB as a key mechanism that helps employees to better respond to work demands and feel better in a crisis context.

The current study provides four main contributions by addressing the literature gaps. First, this study adds to the research area by exploring antecedents and outcomes of SWLB. SWLB is a relatively young, understudied concept (compared to other forms of WLB) that recognizes that it is the subjective perception of "balance" that determines SWLB, and not the equal distribution of time or other resources between life spheres. In fact, the study of this global and positive evaluation of WLB is becoming increasingly popular (e.g. [Fan and Potočník, 2021](#)). Second, this study found evidence for the protective role of SWLB in a crisis context by confirming the benefits for subjective well-being and performance, two key outcomes of organizational effectiveness. Third, this study evaluated satisfaction with organizational support, using a specific set of items that assessed the employees' satisfaction in times of crisis, specifically with the organization's COVID-19 responses. Fourth, the present three-wave time-lagged study permits causal interpretations and offers a valid base for the elaboration of practical implications. Fifth, the results show the importance of the organizational reaction to crisis and offer practical lessons for other waves due to new variants of the virus (e.g. [World Health Organization, 2020](#)) or new pandemics that are expected to occur in the future ([World Economic Forum, 2019](#)). Specifically, this study proposes implications that are actionable for small organizations without broadly based HR departments and also big companies that protect employees' mental well-being and empower them to keep achieving their work-related goals in times of crisis.

### 5.1 Practical implications

This study suggests some important managerial and policy implications. The results show that SOCV19R increased employees' SWLB, which, in turn, increased positive employees' outcomes during the lockdown. Given these results, the present study suggests that organizations have to elaborate guidelines and strategies about how to react to a crisis. Most organizations reacted in an unplanned way to COVID-19, but they should design a plan to respond to crisis situations that includes human resources practices which promote SWLB. For example, we propose offering trainings to improve personal competences (e.g. effective time management). These trainings would help employees mitigate conflicts of resource allocation, which is likely to increase their overall performance and a more balanced response to life demands ([Grawitch et al., 2010](#); [Obrenovic et al., 2020](#)). We also recommend

organizations to show a supportive reaction to their employees and offer adequate work resources when a crisis occurs (Fiksenbaum, 2014; Wahab and Tatoglu, 2020). Specifically, supervisor support plays a significant role in helping employees achieve improved WLB (Blahopoulou, 2015). Further, the perception of a family-friendly work environment and a WLB supportive culture will help employees to cope with WLB challenges and to increase the organizational results (Allen, 2001; Cegarra-Leiva *et al.*, 2012). We also contend that managers should lead through goal setting instead of work-time controlling and let employees participate in the process of adaptation and prioritization of work goals. Finally, organizations together with employees' participation should elaborate a recovery plan (Vo-Thanh *et al.*, 2020), including the evaluation of the satisfaction with the measures of WLB (considering individual differences and preferences) and their effectiveness. This would help managers decide which are the most effective measures and maintain them after the crisis (Sirgy and Lee, 2018). The aforementioned practical implications need the experienced hand of human resources professionals. Unfortunately, in times of crisis, organizations try to reduce their costs, often cutting investments in HRM. However, we encourage organizations not to underestimate the benefits of human resource practices because they promote and ensure employees' well-being and performance, which are especially important for organizational crisis recovery (Hunsaker, 2020).

There are a number of policy implications stemming from the results of this study. Governments should regulate the WLB practices through legislation, because leaving the responsibility of WLB initiatives in the hands of (private) organizations might not be enough. For example, many parents of children who have been tested positive or are in quarantine are trying to juggle their work with their children at home. We believe that the legislation should contain mechanisms for those working parents (e.g. teleworking, adapting hours, reducing the work day or sick leave). These measures and other policies need to be developed to increase SWLB. We support the contention of Fan *et al.* (2021) who suggested that WLB should be a policy priority, and policymakers, together with employers, should design and implement WLB policies that respond to the interests of three parties: society, organizations and individuals and families. Lastly, policymakers should measure and control the degree of SWLB (Sirgy and Lee, 2018).

### 5.2 Limitations and future research

As with any study, the present investigation contains some limitations. First, the generalization of the results is limited, because data were collected through snowball sampling and the sample was low (Muthén and Muthén, 2002) and highly feminized (70%). Second, data rely on self-report scales which may introduce biases and measurement errors. However, the study variables (except performance) are usually answered through self-reports. Regarding performance, ratings by other people can also be problematic (e.g. observers lack adequate knowledge or judge performance according to the general impression of the person) (Warr and Nielsen, 2018). Although HR scholars encourage to utilize a range of both subjective and objective measures, in this case it was very difficult. We could only gather self-ratings due to collection difficulties because of lockdown measures. Third, it should also be noted that the quality of studies based on this type of questionnaire depends on the adjustment and validity of the instrument, which, in turn, limits the interpretation of the results. In this case, the impact of specific elements of work-life satisfaction (beyond time allocation), such as energy, and behaviour warrants more investigation. Fourth, the study data were gathered during lockdown and allowed studying short-term effects of satisfaction with WLB. Thus, we recommend that future studies should be more gender balanced, use different instruments beyond questionnaires to gather information (e.g. interviews, focus groups) and collect longitudinal data to track the impact of

SLWB that take longer to engender benefits. We also encourage researchers to explore whether investments in SWLB are worthwhile beyond performance and well-being. Further, future research should aim to compare the relevance of SWLB among different age groups or generations, since individuals have different priorities and needs at different stages of their life and career (Fan *et al.*, 2021). This could be especially relevant in times of pandemic because recent research has found perceptions of COVID-19 and its effects on organizational citizenship behaviours and customer orientation differ among X, Y and Z generations (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2020, 2021). In this vein, future research could examine whether the benefits of SOCV19R and SWLB vary according to people's perception of COVID-19. Mahmoud *et al.* (2021) showed that people who perceive COVID-19 in a negative way (feeling worried about the consequences of becoming infected, feeling discomfort and focusing on the negative effects of COVID-19 has had on people) show higher levels of job insecurity and lower levels of job satisfaction, customer orientation and organizational citizenship behaviour. Last but not least, this paper encourages other researchers to investigate the implementation and effectiveness of WLB policies in different countries because the availability of WLB measures and its effects might be influenced by the country's culture and social, economic and political context (Fan *et al.*, 2021).

## 6. Conclusions

WLB was already a pressing, if largely unacknowledged, workplace issue before the crisis. The pandemic has obliged companies to include WLB as a core theme of HRM. While before COVID-19, WLB measures in companies have often been seen as a luxury or "nice to have", the study findings underline their importance during crises and especially during lockdown. The current study shows that satisfaction with companies' reaction to COVID-19 increased employees' satisfaction with WLB, which, in turn, enhanced well-being and performance of employees. Companies' recovery strongly depends on the performance of employees, and to that end, that satisfaction with WLB was a luxury in good times, but turns out to be a necessity in bad times. So, the question should no longer be if the investment in WLB is worthwhile, but if the companies can afford to put at risk well-being and performance of their employees only because they cannot assist their employees to achieve a balance between working life and private life.

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**Further reading**

Huffman, A.H., Casper, W.J. and Payne, S.C. (2013), "How does spouse career support relate to employee turnover? Work interfering with family and job satisfaction as mediators", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 194-212.

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**Appendix**  
**Scale items***Satisfaction with organization's COVID-19 responses (SOCV19R)*

I am satisfied with the measures my organization/employer took to continue my work

I am satisfied with the support my supervisor gives me to continue my work

In general, I am satisfied with my organizations' reaction to the COVID-19

*Satisfaction with work-life balance*

I am satisfied with the amount of time I have for work

I am satisfied with the amount of time I have for my family/partner

I am satisfied with the amount of time I have for myself

I am satisfied with my work-life balance

*Subjective well-being*

Over the past two weeks ...

... I have felt cheerful and in good spirits

... I have felt calm and relaxed

... I have felt active and vigorous

... my daily life has been filled with things that interest me

*Task performance*

How do you rate the quality of your own work in the past two weeks?

How do you rate the quantity of your own work in the past two weeks?

How do you rate the achievement of your goals in the past two weeks?

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