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## **WORK-LIFE BALANCE THROUGH RELIGIOSITY AMONG ENTREPRENEURS IN MALAYSIA**

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### **Abstract:**

Work-life balance (WLB) seeks to balance professional and personal domains to sustain overall well-being, yet the issue remains unresolved despite decades of attention. Most studies have emphasized organizational flexibility, psychological approaches, and technical solutions, reflecting perspectives rooted in Western contexts. Despite growing interest in WLB research in Asia, the role of religiosity in shaping WLB remains insufficiently examined. In Malaysia, entrepreneurship is central to economic development, yet limited research explores how entrepreneurs draw upon religious values to manage work-life conflict. The objective of this study is to investigate how the spiritual coping framework in religiosity to influences entrepreneurs' strategies for achieving WLB in Malaysia. A qualitative case study design is adopted. Semi-structured interviews with 10–20 entrepreneurs from diverse religious backgrounds—including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism—will be conducted. Data will be analysed using thematic coding to identify patterns and mechanisms through which religiosity supports WLB. Key expected findings include evidence that religiosity provides moral guidance, emotional resilience, and social support networks that help entrepreneurs navigate stress, ethical dilemmas, and to achieve WLB. This study contributes at three levels: for theoretical to explore new insight and model integrating religiosity into WLB, as for organizational is to explore new mechanism showing how religious values strengthen entrepreneurial practice, and for national, to explore policy implications for fostering ethical entrepreneurship and sustainable work-life integration in Malaysia.

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**Keyword:**

Entrepreneurs, Religiosity, Work-life Balance



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## Introduction

### *Background of the study*

Entrepreneurship in Malaysia is growing fast. In 2022, Malaysia Small Medium Enterprise accounted for 96.9% of overall establishments in Malaysia in 2023. Its' GDP recorded a growth of 5.0% in 2023, contributing 39.1% to Malaysia's GDP. (*Ministry of Economy Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2025*).

Entrepreneurs enjoy flexibility in how they structure their work. They can design their work through autonomy in scheduling, control over priorities, using rote and digital option. In general, entrepreneurs wish to achieve Work-Life Balance (WLB) through flexibility (Shoukat & Tunio, 2025). However, they still face challenges in achieving WLB. The imbalance has threatened productivity and overall, wellbeing of entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs experiences work family conflict in spite of all the effort put to have good family life (Nasurdin et al., 2013);(Shelton, 2006); (Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008), 2008); (Rehman & Roomi, 2012). It is noted that most entrepreneurs spend less time enjoying life but more time into business (McGinn, 2005). However, there is no clear delineation between work and non-work (Jamal, 2009). They do not enjoy full weekend (Jamal & Badawi, 1995). Besides, entrepreneurs will face challenges on social support (Hazlina et al., 2012); (Lee & Ling, 2001); (Thoits, 1986); health problem (Volery & Pullich, 2010); (Loscocco & Leicht, 1993) , financial issues (Prottas & Thompson, 2006); (Parslow et al., 2004) and ethical issues (Senadheera, 2018); (Kutcher et al., 2010); (Rehman & Roomi, 2012); (Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008); (Siqueira & Honig, 2019); (Savur et al., 2018).

Globally, issues on the perspective of WLB with entrepreneurs are widely discussed in business, management and accounting, economics and finance, engineering, decision sciences and social science globally since 2000. Most studies are being conducted based on Western perspective. i.e. Hong Kong (Sun & Xu, 2019), United kingdom (Sani & Adisa, 2024); (Chamakiotis et al., 2014); (Forson, 2013), India (Verma et al., 2019); (Kotteswaran & Kala, 2018); (Shastri et al., 2019); (Bala Subramanian & Kumar, 2016); (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015); (Mathew & Panchanatham, 2011), Pakistan (Rehman & Roomi, 2012), Germany (Zerwas, 2019), Indonesia (Oktaviana Sasmita & Mardhatillah, 2019), Canada (Ezzedeen & Zikic, 2017), United states (Bennett et al., 2017), Spain (Camino Ramón-Llorens et al., 2016), Mexican (Liu & Artinez, 2024) and Italy (Gherardi, 2015).

### ***Problem Statement***

Work-life balance (WLB) has been extensively studied in Western contexts, where the focus has largely been on organizational flexibility, psychological approaches, and technical solutions. While these perspectives have advanced theoretical understanding, they often overlook cultural and religious dimensions that are highly relevant in non-Western societies.

In Malaysia, entrepreneurship plays a critical role in economic growth. Current studies in Malaysia are narrow in scope, predominantly quantitative, and largely restricted to Muslim respondents, leaving other religious traditions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism underrepresented. This lack of diversity and methodological depth highlights a significant gap in the literature.

Despite entrepreneurs' substantial contribution to Malaysia's GDP, their strategies for achieving WLB through religiosity remain insufficiently examined. Addressing this gap requires qualitative, context-specific research that explores how religiosity can serve as a meaningful resource for entrepreneurs in balancing professional and personal demands.

### ***Significance Of Study***

Hence, the primary purpose of this study is to examine on WLB through religiosity for entrepreneurs in Malaysia. It is important to examine the relationship between WLB and religiosity amongst entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Using religiosity as an approach will help facilitate the entrepreneurs to achieve WLB. This approach will be able to demonstrate that Malaysian entrepreneurs comply their activities with factors such as morality, making money ethically, and help to benefit everyone (Sloane, 1999). Furthermore, in Malaysia, research conducted mainly on Muslim and not for other religion such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity

### ***Purpose Of the Paper***

This article is aimed examining on study non how WLB through religiosity for entrepreneurs in Malaysia by adopting at qualitative case study-based research. It aims to provide insights that can explore academic research and practical strategies to promote ethic entrepreneurs.

### ***Objectives***

#### **There are Three (3) Research Objectives**

1. To explore the perspective of entrepreneurs on the concept of WLB.
2. To explain the importance of WLB for entrepreneurs in Malaysia.
3. To analyse on the different strategies on resolving work-life conflict through religiosity among entrepreneurs in Malaysia

### ***Contributions***

At the theoretical level, it provides new insight by situating religiosity as a central variable in the Malaysian entrepreneurial context. By incorporating diverse religious traditions—Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism—this study expands human resource management

theory and proposes a new model of WLB that integrates religiosity into entrepreneurial practice.

At the organizational level, the study identifies a new mechanism through which religiosity operates. Religious values and practices that will foster ethical decision-making, accountability, and resilience, while religious provide emotional support and social networks. This mechanism demonstrates how religiosity can strengthen organizational culture and help entrepreneurs manage stress, ethical dilemmas, when there is role conflicts.

Therefore, at the national level, the implementation of religiosity policies can help the government address various social issues. By promoting ethical values through these policies, entrepreneurs can adopt responsible business practices. This can foster a more balanced approach to work and life, reducing stress and conflict in society. As entrepreneurs embrace religiosity in their WLB, it can contribute to a more ethical and harmonious business environment. Ultimately, such policies can enhance social stability and promote national well-being.

## **Literature Review**

There are three points that will be discussed in literature review. The definition of WLB, variables of WLB, religiosity and entrepreneurs.

### ***Definition of WLB***

The definition of WLB is not consistent (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). It is the measurement on how work and life worker together. According to (Blunsdon & McNeil, 2006),the Western world regards WLB as family and personal life friendly workplace as workplace and should align to family friendly. (Voydanoff, 2004) stated that work and life is not in separate domain as it will affect each other. The imbalance of these will cause stress (Frone, 2003). The term “work-life-balance’ include employees who are not parents but need balance for non-work actives.

The issue of WLB is increasingly becoming important as more women with children are joining the workforce, becoming increasingly nuclear and dual earner. As an outcome, working professionals feel the need to balance their work and their personal life. WLB grabbed management’s attention in the 1980s, largely as a result of the growing number of women with dependent children entering the workforce (Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022).

Changes in work nature and demographic during the past few decades has cause more concern on the understanding of boundaries between work and non-work-life between employee work and non-work lives (Christina, 2000). Many families have dual career workforce (Komarraju, 2006). Job nature that involves telecommuting, work from home has blurred the boundaries between work and non-work (Hancock & Page, 2013).

## ***Variables of WLB***

### ***Flexible Time***

Flexible hours are used as method to enhance WLB. Employee can have better control on personal and work responsibilities. Flexitime, compressed workweeks and staggered hour minimise role conflict and improve job satisfaction (Ridzuwan et al., 2025). Flexible hours are used commonly by entrepreneurs to achieve WLB and competitiveness. (Spurk & Straub, 2020)

For employee at private higher education, Flexi time is the more preferred work arrangement to achieve WLB compared to part time and job sharing. Job sharing have positive relationship with WLB (Rahim et al., 2015).

Qualitative case study in 3 public sector organisations in Sabah, Flexi time is beneficial for worker with young children. It is found out the needs of single workers with parental/siblings' commitment where familial and communal support are expected (Ibrahim, 2016). For instance, a survey for 175 respondents in klang Valley with two business owner found out that there is a policy and practical has a gap. Even though, there are many work places in Malaysia which have implemented various family friendly policies but there still exists a gap between employee's practical needs and the availability of family friendly policies (Subramaniam, 2010).

### ***Social Support***

WLB is will be sustainable when anchored with good social support (van Engen & Gartzia, 2024). Family, friends, colleagues and community provide emotional support to juggle between work and life (Mishra & Bharti, 2024); (Inggamara et al., 2022). Social support will help individual to overcome challenges and maintain stable between work and life (Boakye et al., 2021).

Research with in depth interview with 13 Academics from kota Kinabalu has found out that institutional and social support factors is vital in order to have harmonious to optimised work and life output (Ibrahim, 2016).

### ***Technology Transformation***

Technology is another factor to facilitate WLB on digital communication (Trapsila et al., 2025). Technological transformation is needed to practice effective WLB to prove self-efficacy and job motivation (Wilson et al., 2025); (Shikusinde & Shimaneni, 2025). It should make it more technically acceptable to society specially the younger generation (Gao et al., 2013); (Trifan & Pantea, 2023). Most importantly, government should improve policy so that technology will no negative work home interface (Ahmad et al., 2016).

### ***Organizational Culture***

Organizational culture plays a important role in shaping employees' WLB (Gomes et al., 2024). A supportive culture will instil flexibility to align with working demands. However, a rigid culture will cause bad impact to personal well-being (Musadieq, 2023); (Tambosi et al., 2021).

### ***Family Friendly Policy***

Family friendly policy are practices designed to facilitate employees to balance work responsibilities and personal life (Ko, 2024); (Mordi et al., 2025). Examples of the policies are paid parental leave, flexible working hour, childcare support, wellness benefits and others.

Survey was done on cross-sectional study was conducted among 567 Malaysian women who are working in the public services from Selangor and kuala lumpur. The results of our study show that organizations need to develop and adapt family friendly policies to mitigate level of employees' work-family conflict (Aazami et al., 2015).

### ***Religiosity***

According to (*Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, 2020), It is the state of being religious or too religious. It is also being defined as state of being religious; religious feeling or devotion (*Merriam-Webster*, 2020). Nevertheless, different scholar has different interpretation (Holdcroft & Barbara, 2006). It can be defined as experiential (Kutcher et al., 2010), ritualistic (Agarwala et al., 2019) , ideological (Ammons & Edgell, 2007) , consequential (Wilt et al., 2018), communal (Rizzo et al., 2020), doctrinal, moral (Elçi et al., 2011), cultural (Gebauer & Sedikides, 2021) and psychological (Clobert, 2021).

It refers to the level of an individual's religious commitment, encompassing their beliefs, practices, and spiritual involvement. It is a multifaceted concept that includes cognitive aspects (knowledge and belief systems), behavioral elements (participation in religious rituals and traditions), and emotional components (personal devotion and spiritual experiences) (Hill, P. C., & Hood, 1999). Researchers differentiate between intrinsic religiosity, where faith is deeply internalized and central to a person's identity, and extrinsic religiosity, where religion serves as a tool for social or personal gain (Allport, G. W., & Ross, 1967).

The role of religiosity extends beyond personal faith, influencing psychological well-being, ethical decision-making, and social interactions. Studies have found that religious commitment can provide individuals with a sense of purpose, comfort, and resilience, particularly during difficult times (Koenig, H. G., McCullough, M. E., & Larson, 2001), (Koenig, H. G., McCullough, M. E., & Larson, 2001). However, the way religiosity is expressed varies across different cultures and societies, making it a dynamic and evolving phenomenon.

There are several studies being carried to use religiosity as a variable to facilitate WLB. 5 in-depth interview with Muslim female academicians age 43-45 with dependent children (1-5 years old), The current study highlights the importance of religious coping strategies in reducing conflict between work demand and family responsibilities, and in obtaining Muslim working women's well-being (Achour, 2014).

They survey in Kuching, Sarawak, 296 staff in private organisation responded. The study underscores the roles religion, which have been neglected in Western studies, as important parts in shaping the work-family interface in Malaysia. Therefore, organizations should include religious activities to encourage WLB among employees (Hazlina et al., 2012).

Survey on 166 Muslim employees (Generation Y), aged 24 to 39 years old was carried out. It is found that both of WLB and Islamic work ethic have moderate correlation with

organizational commitment. However Islamic work ethic has no moderating effect to the relationship between WLB and organizational commitment.(Nurendra et al., 2020)

### ***Spiritual Coping Framework and Religiosity***

The Spiritual Coping Framework, developed by Pargament (1997), extends general coping theory by situating religiosity as a structured resource for managing stress. It highlights how spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation function as coping strategies that enable individuals to achieve resilience. The framework is its distinction between positive religious coping seeking divine support and negative religious coping, which involves feelings of punishment or spiritual conflict (Pargament et al., 2000; Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005).

For entrepreneurs, the Spiritual Coping Framework provides a valuable perspective on how religiosity supports work-life balance. In Malaysia's pluralistic context, the framework allows for comparative analysis across Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism, revealing how diverse traditions contribute to entrepreneurial resilience and ethical practice. Thus, the Spiritual Coping Framework not only enriches theoretical understanding of religiosity but also offers practical insights into how entrepreneurs employ spiritual practices to resolve WLB. Through this framework, religiosity is understood not merely as belief but as applied coping behaviour that fosters moral clarity in decision-making.

### ***Entrepreneurs***

The entrepreneurs are the one who run the business. They are leaders who are willing to take initiative, advantage to look for advantage. The number of entrepreneurs is growing (Robinson, 2000). Entrepreneurs are looking at opportunities to make profit by planning, organization the correct resources (Deakins & Freel, 2009). According to (Yetisen et al., 2015), entrepreneurship is a process that includes designing and running a business in small and medium business. They use strategies to suit any circumstance in order to be competitive (Katila et al., 2012).

The contribution of MSME (Micro, small & medium enterprises) declined to 37.4% in 2021 with a value of RM518.1 billion as compared to 38.1% value to RM512.9 billion in previous year. The percentage of individuals who are in the process of starting or are already running new businesses in Malaysia (TEA) was at 2.9% in 2015, as compared to 6.6% in 2013 and 5.9% in 2014 ("Entrepreneurship Development," 2016). Looking at opportunities to make profit by planning, organization the correct resources (Deakins & Freel, 2009). Entrepreneurs is important in Malaysia. 97.5% establishment of business is SME. Contribution of SME in GDP and export for 2021 have increased 6.12% to 521.7 billion and 3.43% to 171.9 billion respectively. The contribution for SME employment increases every year with average of 0.73% increment per year due to the increased in number of SMEs in Malaysia. They are many technical trainings landscape provided by government. (*Key Statistics of Labour Force Malaysia, July 2020, 2020*).

In 2025, entrepreneurs in Malaysia remains key driver for economy, with Small Medium Enterprise (SME) make up of 97% of business establishments with 38% to GDP. They employ more than 7 million people. Entrepreneurship is expanding into digitalisation, sustainability, and halal economy to become the backbone of Malaysia's growth. (*Ministry of Economy Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2025*)

## ***Challenges Of Entrepreneurs***

### ***Social Support***

Entrepreneur is living a stressful life and they need social support to reduce stress (Thoits, 1986);(van Engen & Gartzia, 2024). However, study showed that there is lack of social support among Malaysia entrepreneur (Hazlina et al., 2012) . it becomes more evident on women entrepreneur that lack of social support received from family members in Singapore (Lee & Ling, 2001); (Md Isa et al., 2020)

### ***Health***

Health is important for entrepreneur for sustainable development of business. However, they rarely view health as a major resource for good business performance. They have limited awareness and understanding about health for themselves. Many of entrepreneur are facing health problem in New Zealand (Volery & Pullich, 2010). Furthermore, health aspect are always being neglected (Hagqvist et al., 2020). Moreover, stress and health is becoming more evident in India (Verma et al., 2019), hence it becomes Imbalance between work and health (Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008). Hectic working schedule has sacrificed the psychological health among entrepreneurs.

### ***Ethical Issues***

In Sri Lanka, value and trading ethics are the main issues being discussed (Senadheera, 2018). In genuine and self-imposed ethical constraint, to solve complex problem (Siqueira & Honig, 2019). Research in SME Australia found that ethical decision making is essential (Savur et al., 2018). With this effort, it will help to build organizational citizenship behavior (Kutcher et al., 2010); (Hota et al., 2023).

### ***Role Conflict***

Role conflict is a challenge among entrepreneurs. These conflicts are parent conflict, job homemaker conflict and job spouse conflict (Lee & Ling, 2001). It becomes significant specially for married women entrepreneur on work-family conflict. In view of this, support of spouse is important to reduce job spouse conflict (Marcinjus et al., 2007); (De Clercq et al., 2022)

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Methodology***

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine how religiosity influences entrepreneurs' strategies for achieving work-life balance in Malaysia. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because it enables the exploration of lived experiences, personal narratives, and contextual factors that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative surveys (Ezzedeen & Zikic, 2017). By focusing on individual accounts, the research seeks to uncover how religious beliefs and practices are integrated into entrepreneurial life and how they shape coping mechanisms for work-life conflict.

### ***Sampling Strategy***

The study will involve between 10 and 20 entrepreneurs, a sample size sufficient to achieve thematic saturation while remaining manageable for detailed qualitative analysis (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Purposive sampling will be employed to identify participants who meet specific criteria: they must be actively engaged in entrepreneurial activities and demonstrate consistent religious involvement (Omid Tajik & Golzar, 2024). To reflect Malaysia's pluralistic society, participants will be drawn from diverse religious traditions, including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Recruitment will be conducted through religious communities, places of worship, business associations, and personal referrals, ensuring that participants provide rich perspectives on the intersection of faith and entrepreneurship.

### ***Data Collection***

Interviews will serve as the primary method of data collection. This format allows flexibility to probe deeper into participants' experiences while maintaining focus on key themes (Achour, 2014). It will be conducted in participants' preferred language to ensure comfort and authenticity, where questions designed to relate on how about how religious values influence business practices, ethical decision-making, and personal well-being.

### ***Data Analysis***

Interview transcripts will be analysed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns, contrasts, and unique insights. This approach will highlight how religiosity functions as a resource for managing work-life conflict. Cultural sensitivity and confidentiality will be prioritized throughout, with ethical clearance obtained from the university's ethics committee.

### ***Ethical Consideration***

Volunteered participants will be briefed on the purpose, confidentiality. Religious practices will be respected. Questions asked will be non-intrusive. An approval on clearance will be taken from university ethics committee.

### ***Expected Findings***

Religiosity is expected to enhance WLB for Malaysian entrepreneurs a positive correlation. The practices will serve as effective method for trials and challenges. Its value will provide moral and ethical guidance in daily business decision making. Religiosity will foster a sense of purpose and internal peace, assisting entrepreneurs to navigate entrepreneurial life. Besides, the religious communities to act as supporting network, for emotional resource to achieve WLB.

### ***Implication***

The implications of this study will highlight religiosity as resource for Malaysia entrepreneurs to achieve WLB through religiosity. Human resource management will be aware on how religiosity can be integrated into human resource practices to support entrepreneurs to achieve WLB. For policy maker, these strategies can be considered into entrepreneurs' development

programs. In view of this, society will understand the importance of religiosity to promote better lifestyle and to become ethical entrepreneurs.

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**Ethics Statement:** This study has not yet commenced data collection. Prior to conducting interviews, ethical approval will be obtained from the University of Wollongong Malaysia, Research Ethics Committee. All participants will be provided with an information sheet and consent form detailing the purpose of the study, their rights, and the voluntary nature of participation

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