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Employee's Workload Stress, Work-Family Conflict and Displace Aggression before, during and after Quarantine COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly transformed remote work from a distant dream to the reality of most workers. This was a change that brought with it the introduction of games in which there were new challenges, most prominently increased workload and stress because part time working also causes to work more overtime as well; family-work conflict emerged and displaced aggression.

This study aimed to investigate the associations between work overload related stress, WFC and displaced aggression of employees who worked from home during COVID-19 quarantine time as well as prior and following the quarantines.

A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was used. Participants comprised 111 males, 60 females comprising a total of one hundred and seventy-one employees who were working remotely due to the pandemic. Workload stress and work-family conflict were assessed with standardized measures as per the surveys to which participants responded. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation and one-way ANOVA were employed for different kinds of analyses.

The results showed that there were significant differences between quarantine phases in trait anger, workload stress, work-family conflict and displaced aggression. Workload stress was at its highest level pre-quarantine, with some reduction during and post-quarantine. Displaced aggression was highest prior to and then significantly decreased following the quarantine, while work-family conflict registered its peak during quarantine. The study showed how psychological stressors varied in different pandemic stages of COVID-19, that need to be targeted by specially designed interventions for crisis management and employee support during and post a significant healthcare or similar other crises.

Keywords: Employee workload Stress. Work-Family Conflict. Displace Aggression. Before Quarantine COVID-19. During Quarantine COVID-19. After Quarantine COVID-19.

Introduction

COVID-19 is a global calamity that has produced a novel disruption, which has changed several aspects of life, primarily in the working environment (Barriga Medina et al., 2021). Mass telework as a new model of remote work that combined work with home environments imposed new risks for employees (Li et al., 2022; Lamiyan et al., 2023). Among these, workload stress became



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significant because employees were forced to manage more work within a new environment at work (de Guzman et al., 2022; Calpona, 2023). This change often entailed raising their working hours, confusion between work and personal life and inadequate provisions, leading to heightened stress (Tayal & Mehta, 2023). Such intricacies of work and family were even more complicated during the quarantine period. Due to closure of schools and child care centers, employees had to balance their working committed along with their family responsibilities which added up to work-family conflict (Giusti et al., 2023). This conflict was expressed in terms of a worsening of strife within households, as well as in terms of issues related to time organization, and general feelings of overload (Giusti et al., 2023). Such social demands that include having to work while dealing with family issues worked hand in hand to blown up stress levels among the employees (Lin et al., 2021).

Concerning workload stress and work-family conflict, their consequences manifest, more often than not, in a capacity where they cross over to other areas, thereby resulting in displaced aggression (Barua & Sarkar, 2023). Due to the limitations of the work from home environments or out of fear of offending their superiors or higher-ups, employees could not release their stress at the workplace (Kushalappa, 2023). Thus, occasionally these negative feelings were shifted to family members or, alternatively, were internalized thus affecting not only relationships with the family members but also one's mental well-being (Kerns, 2023). This discharging of aggression only served to exacerbate existing stress levels and foster conflict that only added to the experience of stress thus making it almost impossible to reduce (Falconier, 2022).

During the period following the quarantine, but when some workers have returned to offices, while others have continued to work from home, the nature of stress, conflict, and aggression shifted again (Barua & Sarkar, 2023). Those going back to work added different issues: such as having to rebuild their normalcy back in the workplace, worries of getting infected with the virus, having to cover for other people's productivity, and added workload that companies were trying to make up for the time they had lost (Waters et al., 2022). On the other hand, employees who continued to stay in remote work environment continued to experience the challenges of work-life interface which wasn't completely complicated by the nature of work from home environment but the level of intensity was perhaps more or less according to the situation of the employee (Spencer, 2024).

Other social or organizational implications for employees and their interpersonal interactions that are still unexplored or are yet to fully manifest themselves are the lasting effects of the quarantine period on the mental health of the employees (Huai et al., 2023). Nevertheless, what can be said is that the pandemic has left an imprint on how work and family are viewed and organized. All these experiences of the past years establish the concern for the organizations to acknowledge and respond to the multi-faceted correlation between workload stress, work family conflict, and displaced aggression (Chung et al., 2022). Thus, failure to maintain positive dynamics can lead to constant low satisfaction among the employees, decrease in productivity and worsened mental health, affecting employee and employer on large scale (Lanier, 2023).

While studying these phenomena it is necessary to reflect the issue of



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organizational support and the presence of available resources focused on the help of employees in managing stress and conflict situations (Hill-Murray, 2022). In the course of past years, especially during the pandemic, numerous organizations have found themselves unready for a shift to remote work and the difficulties linked to it, which contributed to the fact that most of the time, organizations have been a reaction rather than an action when it comes to the wellbeing of their employees (Su, 2022). Future implications for these findings are that organizations need to ensure that they incorporate broad strategic concepts that deal with the reaction to stress as well as actual conflict (Heath et al., 2020; Kossek et al., 2023).

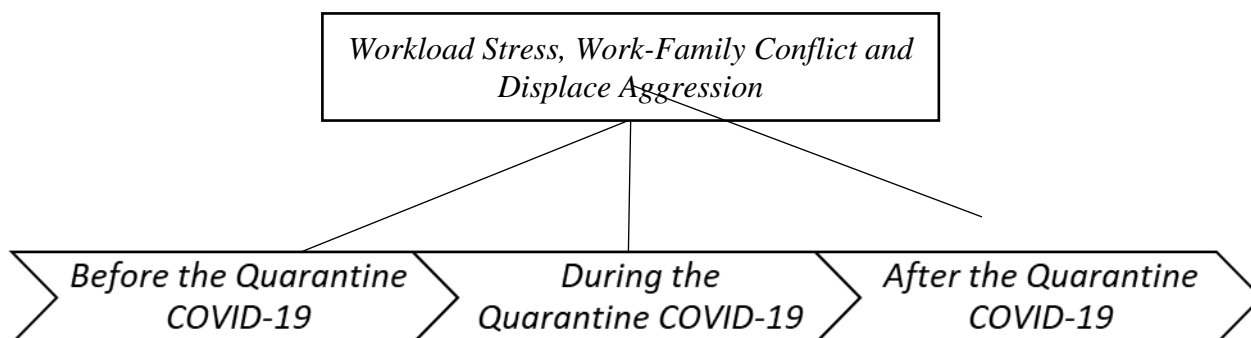
COVID-19 presents a set of lessons that organizations can use going forward as they navigate the nature of work in the future (Yamout et al., 2024). This is another nice perspective as organizations and employees manage a new terrain where it is possible to rethink work-life balance, options for flexible work, and possibilities of care (Joseph & Doon, 2023). With attention to the problems of workload stress, work-family conflict, and displaced aggression, it will be possible to build a competent, more efficient, and enduring workforce capable of withstanding future shocks and addressing the unpredictable dynamics of today's work environment.

Aim of the Study

The purpose of the study was to test the effects of COVID-19 quarantine on workload stress, work-family conflict (WFC), and displaced aggression before (pre-quarantine), during employment from home or furloughed for nonessential workers, and post / after working conditions returned closer to normal than at high peaks due to avoid [remotely] potential contamination.

Significance of the Study

Conclusion: This research underscores the varying degree of stress, conflict and aggression amongst staff during Covid-19 isolation and provides valuable insights into the psychological as well as behavioral changes that were fostered by such novel challenges in pandemic.



Method

In this study, a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design was used to establish the correlation between employee workload stress, work family-conflict and displaced aggression in the COVID- 19 quarantine period up to the



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time of writing this paper. Such design was chosen because allows data to be collected at a certain point, enabling comparisons to be made between the variables in a given context. The study sample comprised of people who had to shift to remote work because of the pandemic, and who were not remote workers before the occurrence of the pandemic. The participants consisted of 171 individuals, 111 of them being males and 60 females, who were chosen by purposive and non-probability sampling techniques: they must be over the age of 25 and work from home solely because of COVID-19.

To capture data, work was performed on quantitative online surveys, which also corresponds to the situation of working remotely, during and after the quarantine. Participants were approached via Google Forms and email, and the study utilized three standardized questionnaires: These are the Workplace Stress Scale, Work and Family Conflict Scale and the Displaced Aggression Scale. The Workplace Stress Scale has 8 items and uses The Marlin Company and the American Institute of Stress norms; it features a 5-point Likert scale and has the reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .84$. The Work and Family Conflict Scale was designed by Haslam et al. (2015) and consists of 10 items with an answer format on a 7-point Likert scale, and internal consistency of $\alpha = .70$. Denson and Miller (2006) developed Displaced Aggression Scale of 24 items on 7-point Likert scale having reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .91$. Also, a demographic sheet was designed to include the participants' age, gender, family system, education level, marital status, income level, number of children and years of service.

The questionnaires were administered after a pilot test was conducted, after which the responses were keyed into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Categorical variables were used in describing the demographic profiles of the sample, to give an overall description of the participants. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to determine the nature and the extent of the associations between workload stress, work-family conflict and displaced aggression before and after the quarantine periods. This test was selected for analysis purpose since it provides a suitable test for the analysis of raw data that testing for the presence of linear relationships between two continuous variables. The results were discussed seeking to provide a literature-based understanding of the effects of the pandemic including the alteration of work stress levels and family involvements predicting behavioral changes at work for organizational practice and study.

Results

Table 1: Demographical Information of the study participants (N=171)

<i>Variable Categories</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Female	60	35.0
Male	111	65
Age		
25 – 35	53	31
36 – 45	51	30
46 – 55	64	37
51 +	3	2
Marital Status		



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Single	20	11.7
Married	75	43.3
Divorced	35	21
Widowed/ Widower	41	24
Educational Level		
Diploma	29	17
Bachelors	38	22
Master	104	61
Year of Experience		
Less than 10 years	87	51
10 to 20 years	40	23
More than 20 years	36	21

Note: *f* = frequency, % = personage

Table 1 indicates the participants involved in the study were 171, 65% of the participants were male while 35% were female. Most of them were within the 46-55 years' age group (37%); were married (43.3%); and had a master's degree (61%). Distribution by experience: 51% of the participants had a work experience of less than 10 years, 23% – work experience between 10 and 20 years, and 21% – work experience of over 20 years.

Table 2: Inter-correlation workload Stress, Work-Family Conflict and Displace Aggression before, during and after the Quarantine COVID-19 (N = 171).

	WLS	WFC	DA
<i>Before the Quarantine COVID-19</i>			
WLS	-	.87**	.79**
WFC	-	-	.88**
DA	-	-	-
<i>During the Quarantine COVID-19</i>			
WLS	-	.26**	.21**
WFC	-	-	.42**
DA	-	-	-
<i>After the Quarantine COVID-19</i>			
WLS	-	.86**	.81**
WFC	-	-	.85**
DA	-	-	-

Table 2 Pearson correlation of WLS, WFC, and DA was conducted with 171 participants before and after the COVID-19 quarantine, showing significant inter- correlations. More exactly, WLS was significantly positively related with WFC before the quarantine, $r = .87$, $p < .01$, as well as with DA, $r = .79$, $p < .01$; after the quarantine, WLS was positively related with WFC, $r = .86$, $p < .01$, and DA, $r = .81$, $p < .01$. There were also significantly lower correlations between WLS and WFC during the quarantine, both of them being significantly different



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from the ones observed before the quarantine, $r = .26$, $p < .01$, and between WLS and DA, $r = .21$, $p < .01$.

Table 3: Gender comparison on workload Stress, Work-Family Conflict and Displace Aggression before, during and after the Quarantine COVID-19 (N = 171).

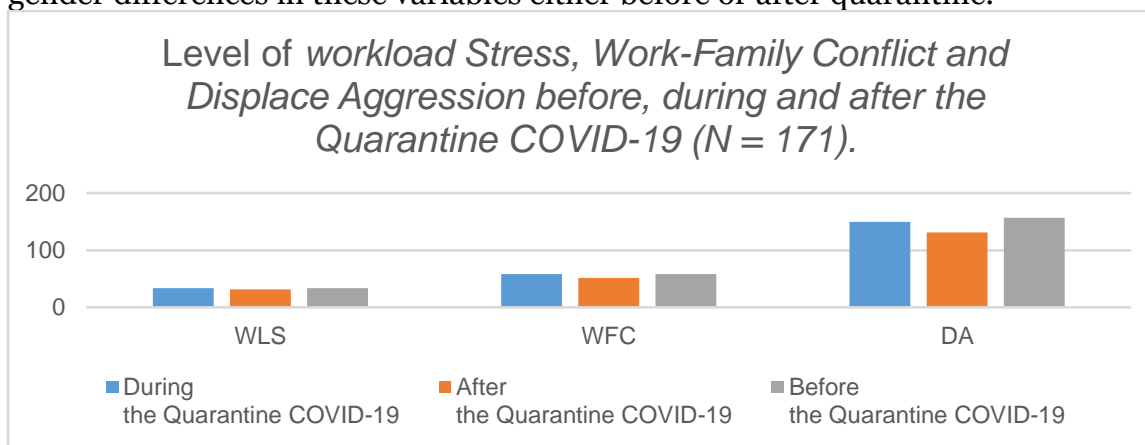
Variable	Male (111)		Female (60)		t(3.257)	p	Cohan's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
<i>Before the Quarantine COVID-19</i>							
WLS	33.69	4.97	33.01	4.51	.47	.34	3.35
WFC	55.10	11.2	57.12	10.81	.21	.31	2.98
DA	140.85	12.4	148.25	11.54	.31	.42	3.25
<i>.During the Quarantine COVID-19</i>							
WLS	31.21	3.15	34.11	4.55	.31	.01	1.05
WFC	59.41	4.51	60.14	2.94	.18	.00	1.01
DA	151.42	3.15	162.91	2.15	.27	.00	1.11
<i>After the Quarantine COVID-19</i>							
WLS	33.69	4.97	33.01	4.51	.47	.34	3.35
WFC	58.10	11.2	57.12	10.81	.21	.31	2.98
DA	141.85	12.4	151.25	11.54	.31	.42	3.25

p = significant

** = highly significant at .01

* = Significant at .05

Table 3 workload Stress Gender Differences in Workload stress (WLS), work-family conflict WFC and displaced aggression DA were compared based on the gender of 171 participants from The COVID-19 quarantine period. Female participants reported slightly larger WLS (M = 34.11, SD = 4.55) and DA scores (M = 162.91, SD 2.15), compared to males indicating significance at a 01 level ($p < .01$) and large effect sizes (Cohen's d 1.05–1.11). By contrast, there were no gender differences in these variables either before or after quarantine.



Graph 1 data shows mean level and (standard deviation) of workload stress, work-family conflict, displaced aggression across three phases in COVID-19 quarantine. Workload stress [M = 33.69, SD = 4.97], work-family conflict[M =58.10,SD=11..2] and displaced aggression [M149.85,12..4]) were shown more in mean before the quarantine as compared to during /After where scores



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reduced generally across all of them Participants reported a significant lower level of displaced aggression after quarantine period (M = 131.42, SD = 7.15), this finding indicated better psychological well-being as result from post-quarantine all and so on.

Table 4: Mean Standard Derivation and One-Way Analysis of Variance workload Stress, Work-Family Conflict and Displace Aggression before, during and after the Quarantine COVID-19 (N = 171).

Variable	During <i>the Quarantine COVID-19</i>		After <i>the Quarantine COVID-19</i>		Before <i>the Quarantine COVID-19</i>		F (2, 175)	η	Post- Hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
	WLS	33.69	4.97	31.21	3.15	33.69			
WFC	58.10	11.2	51.41	9.51	58.10	11.2	54.41	.00	8.74
DA	149.85	12.4	131.42	7.15	156.85	12.4	154.12	.01	11.51

η = significant

** = highly significant at .01

* = Significant at .05

Table 4 indicated that some of the dimensions sustain difference in relation to COVID-19 quarantine times (one-way analysis ANOVA: WLS, DA and WFC scores significantly changed across different periods). The difference in WLS between groups is explained by a large effect with. 00). Significant WFC differences were also found with higher scores during quarantine (M = 58.1, SD = 11.2) compared to post-quarantine (M=51.41, SD=9.51), and prior-to-quarantine timespan (M=54.6, SD = 11.27). Although the size of this effect was large for DA showing significantly higher scores before (M = 156.85, SD = 12.4) than during isolation (M=149.8, SD: 12..6) and after it ended (131...42 M; DS:7),η²=. 01).

Discussion

The current research sought to investigate the influence of COVID-19 quarantine on employee workload stress, work-family conflict, and displaced aggression across three key phases: pre-quarantine (Phase 1), during which more stringent social distancing leads to lockdowns; post-lockdown lifting period but same level recommendations for remote working with modifications/new approach in place as new normal) coronavirus pandemic emergency. The study uncovered substantial variances in these psychological and behavioral dimensions, underscoring the depth of impact from quarantine on employee mental health and social interactions. The results are consistent with prior study that highlights the potential for increased stress and conflict among workers in times of disruption such as a pandemic (Restauri & Sheridan, 2020; Kuntz, 2021; Woods et al., 2023). This study, anchored in the pre-, during- and post-quarantine periods offers a multifaceted perspective of what working from home looked like for employees at different points in time providing important managerial strategies and mental health assistance to workers.

One of the most important results was that WLS significantly changed over the course of quarantine across its 3 phases. There was twice as much stress from



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workload before the quarantine, but still less during it and zero after. This trend might be due to the abrupt transition from face-to-face work, which could evoke uncertainty and pressure because working remotely is new for many people (Tang et al., 2020; Ghali-Zinoubi et al., 2021; Soraya et al., 2023), making it difficult to separate their job and home (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020; Tayal & Mehta, 2023). On the other side of this, we saw that as employees got used to working at home during lockdown their levels of stress reduced a type of acclimatization and coping mechanism over time. After restrictions eased, shortening of stress levels could represent how employees become accustomed to a hybrid state where aspects returned to normal but remnants from the pandemic day remain.

In addition, Work-family conflict (WFC) was another important variable studied in this study. Results: WFC was significantly greater during the quarantine than outside of it, before and after. This increase in WFC during the pandemic could be attributed to boundaries between work and family roles being blurred, often working from home as both a professional role (employee) but also parent/spouse caretaker concurrently coaching their child(ren) through distance learning as part of their personal role responsibilities (Vitoria et al., 2022; Yngvesson et al., 2023). Workers not only had to deal with work-related matters but also household chores and the management of child care, often escalating into an increased struggle regarding conflicts between work assignments as it related to responsibilities within their families. The subsequent decline in WFC post quarantine is likely due to the return of stronger work/non-work boundaries with people moving back to their offices, or committing more deeply into remote working.

DA also significantly differed across the 4 phases of quarantine that followed similar trends as AS, with higher levels pre-quarantine (pre-lockdown), a drop during lockdown and lowest post- quarantine. This sequence implies that the increased onset of aggression in reaction to stress and uncertainty bred from the pandemic may have come about as employees struggled to manage drastic changes at work, greatly differing their lifestyle (Jain & Aggarwal, 2021; Göktaş & Varlı, 2023; Latif et al., 2023). The decrease in DA observed during the quarantine might be linked to social isolation and decreased environmental challenges for aggression. Greater decline in usage is indicated by the next fall of Qo from seven days into quarantine to 14 days after it, suggesting a transition and adaptation phase when workers were returning to their schedule while at home.

The results of the study are in line with a larger body of research on how pandemics and other large-scale crises negatively influences the psychological well-being of employees. Events like this can trigger significant stress, conflict, and aggression as demonstrated by earlier research where they cause uncertainty and disruption (Celik et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2022; Han et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the current investigation contributes to this body of literature by examining in detail how such effects change from one phase of quarantine to another; such temporal analysis is important for understanding the immediate effects of quarantine as well as its impact over time in terms of employee wellbeing.

In defense of the study aim, it is significant to note that knowledge about the



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patterns in workload stress, work-family conflict and displaced aggression develop on during different phases of COVID-19 quarantine can facilitate improving interventions. Based on these insights, organizations can design tailored strategies that address employee needs at different points during and after disruptive events. For example, during times of higher stress and conflict (e.g., at the very beginning of a lockdown), organizations could introduce flexible working hours, offer mental health facilities or support staff to talk openly in order for employees to cope with their stresses which can cause less conflicts between one another while they are apart as well.

This study is limited by the use of self-reported data, which could result in response bias and impact on validity. Additionally, since it is a cross-sectional design, this will not allow us to establish casual relationships among workload stress; work-family conflict and displaced aggression at the various phases of COVID-19 quarantine.

More significantly, this study has important implications for future research on employee well-being in crises. Future studies could be developed to investigate potential moderators that might affect the impact of workforce stress (e.g. personality traits, coping strategies or social support) on work-family conflict and displaced aggression in addition to replicating this study with other sample populations. Finally, longitudinal research would help take the investigation of these variables to another level by allowing for joint examinations across specific time frames and interactions between work-home segmentation strategies with other employee well-being indicators (e.g., job satisfaction, performance levels, general psychological distress).

Conclusion

This study provides a complete understanding of the quarantine COVID-19 and how it can lead to employee workload stress, work-family conflict, as well as displaced aggression. This work gives a rich understanding of how employee well-being may change as quarantine progresses through different stages, and is an important tool to help us understand the dynamic nature of something like global crisis on our workforce. The results highlight the critical nature of timely and context-relevant interventions in helping employees through imminent events, while also reinforcing the need for future research and organizational efforts aimed at work-related mental health.

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