

# PUBLIC SERVANTS' JOB SATISFACTION DURING THE TIME OF COVID-19 IN MALDIVES

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## ABSTRACT

A Covid-19 pandemic occurring in early 2020 has influenced organizations across the globe. Organisations are forced to do business differently such as introducing work from home policy and change business processes rapidly to ensure survival. Thus, the aim of this paper is to narrow the gaps by exploring the potential determinants of job satisfaction during the Covid-19 pandemic namely emotional intelligence, work-life balance, perceived work environment. Quantitative research was conducted on public servants in the Maldives. The questionnaire was used to measure public servants' responses on emotional intelligence, work-life balance, perceived work environment and job satisfaction. Using structural equation modelling-partial least square to analyze 208 responses, the results showed that all relationships were significantly positive except for work-life balance to job satisfaction. Government Maldives should pay attention to the emotional intelligence and perceived work environment to enhance job satisfaction of public servants during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings were also useful for Maldives policymakers on how to support job satisfaction in public servants successfully and maintain the well-engaged workforce during Covid-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence; work-life balance; perceived work environment; job satisfaction, Maldives, Covid-19 pandemic.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Public servants are a crucial asset for any country's operations because they deliver quality public service that drives the strength of the countries (Naeem, Sentosa, Nejatian & Piaralal, 2011; Subramaniam & Basheer, 2017; Rafieque, Hou, Chudhery, Gull & Ahmed, 2021; Todisco, Tomo, Canonico, Mangia, Sarnacchiaro, 2021). The effectiveness of Covid-19 pandemic prevention depends on public servant's efforts such as collecting and disseminating information, and offering disease prevention to citizens (Hartanto & Siregar, 2021; Tung & Thanh, 2020; Wu, Deng & Liu, 2021; Ye, Liu, & Zhang, 2021). Having said that, if the employees (e.g., public servants) are dissatisfied with their jobs, they may not be able to deliver excellent quality services during the Covid-19 pandemic (Jones, 2021; Ng, Hsu, Yim, Zou & Chen, 2021; Prysmakova, 2020; Stefurak, Morgan & Johnson, 2020; Tran, 2021). Thus, public servants' job satisfaction (i.e., the extent to which employees like or dislike the jobs) (Erro-Garces & Ferreira, 2019; Prysmakova, 2020) is critical to examine. It is reported that the unexpected outbreak of

the Covid-19 caused the infection cases to increase in a short period (Chanana, 2021; Inegbedion, 2021). Public servants face the combination of heavy workloads, the higher chance of infection, psychological stress, which creates a difficult working environment and impact on job satisfaction (Yu, Zhao, Li, Hu, Xu, Zhao & Huang, 2020). However, how far the Covid-19 pandemic impacts public servants' job satisfaction remains unexplored. Lacking an answer to this problem limits the understanding of government responses in crisis to maintain public servants' job satisfaction. Thus, this study fills the gap by examining the determinants that influence the job satisfaction of public servants. As such, this study helps the government improving public servants' job satisfaction levels during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Besides that, the spread of Covid-19 results in negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression, suicide) among public servants (Arslan, Yildirim, Tanhan, Bullus & Allen, 2020; Giri & Maurya, 2021; Min, Shen, Yu & Chu, 2020; Vo-Thanh, Vu, Nguyen, Van Nguyen, Zaman & Chi, 2020). Government restriction movement such as disruption of daily activities, curfew period, and the closure of recreational facilities impacts the emotions and mental well-being of public servants (Brooks, Webster, Smith, Woodland, Wessley, Greenberg & Rubin, 2020; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Chanana, 2021; Huang, Xu, Liu, 2020). For instance, public servants' fear and panic of infection can spread to others and may influence others. Public service employees' anxiety also arises following frequent media reporting of death and new Covid-19 cases (GAO. Zheng, Jia, Chen, Mao, Chen, Wang, Fu & Dai, 2020). Constant disclosure to Covid-19 cases in written, visual further increase the anxiety and fear levels (Moron & Biolik-Moron, 2021; Perez-Fuentes, Molero-Jurado, Martos-Martinez & Gazquez-Linares, 2020) of public servants. In this situation, public servants must have the emotional intelligence to face the fear, anxiety and panic generated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Baba, 2020; Dhoopar, Sihag, Kumar & Suhag, 2021). Emotional intelligence allows the management of the emotional complexity of public servants during the Covid-19 pandemic effectively (Baba, 2020). Nevertheless, there has been no assessment on how the emotional intelligence of public servants' influence job satisfaction during the Covid-19 pandemic. This reason motivates this study to determine the impact of emotional intelligence on public servants' job satisfaction.

Additionally, considering no vaccine available to cure the Covid-19, social distancing refers to the effort of minimizing physical transaction as the only method to safeguard people from being infected or infecting others (Arli, Ang & Wei, 2021; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2021; Robillard, Turner, Ames & Craig, 2021; Robinson, 2020). Social distancing can be in the form of workplace closure, compulsory self-quarantine and work from home (European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020). The government of Maldives announced 14 days' lockdown in the capital Male on April 17, 2020 (Miglani & Junayd, 2020). In following government policy, public servants work from home. Working from home during lockdown causes employees' work life to overlap family life, family life intervenes in work life or both (Bhumika, 2020; Giurge & Bohns, 2020; Ninaus, Diehl & Terlutter, 2021; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Take for example, a working mother is interrupted by her daughter while she is in a department meeting. This is challenging to maintain a work-life balance. It results in conflict and changes the job satisfaction level of public servants (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). This has

been neglected in the prior studies, especially on public organizations and the well-being of public servants during Covid-19. As a consequence of limited understanding and knowledge, the present study seeks to examine the connection between work-life balance and job satisfaction experienced by public servants that work from home in the Maldives during the Covid-19.

Moreover, the workplace is reopening and invites public servants back to the workplace during post-Covid-19 (Shaw, Main, Findley, Collie, Kristman & Gross, 2020). Despite that, when employees work together for long hours, there is a high chance for Covid-19 to spread (Chi, Vu, Vo-Thanh, Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Tuzoiv & Kabadayi, 2020). Organizations including the public service departments introduce new practices to ensure a safe working environment (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). For instance, public servants strictly follow social distancing guidelines, employees accept the sanitization protocols for work desks, office pantry and meeting rooms, employees wear face masks, gloves wash hands all the time (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Having said that, Covid-19 has changed the perceived work environment (Ancillo, Val-Nunez & Gavriila, 2020; McKinsey, 2020). These changes have created stress and anxiety for employees (Ahorsu, Lin, Imani, Saffari, Griffiths & Pakpour, 2020; Bufquin, Park, Back, De Souza Meira & Hight, 2021; Lee, 2021). Indeed, public servants are essential to continue working despite high likelihood of Covid-19 infection (Larochelle, 2020; Shaw et al., 2020). Public servants also face difficulties interacting with employees and access to new equipment and responsibilities (Larochelle, 2020; Shaw et al., 2020). This have the potential to influence public servants' job satisfaction. This is the study objective to investigate perceived work environment and job satisfaction. This study enriches the understanding of the job satisfaction of public servants by identifying the motivators. The government could use appropriate measures to remove the motivators leading to job dissatisfaction. The study finding is also useful for the policymakers on how to support public servants successfully and maintain the well-engaged workforce during Covid-19 pandemic. Following is the hypothesis and research framework development. The methodology and findings are discussed thereafter. Discussions, future research suggestions and study limitations are followed thenceforth.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Emotional intelligence and job satisfaction**

Emotional intelligence is the capability to detect others' emotional states and regulate self-emotions (Praveena, 2015; Salovey & Mayer, 1989, Goleman, 1998). Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory identifies emotional intelligence as the important predictor of job satisfaction (Rahman & Haleem, 2018; Khan, Masrek & Nadzir, 2017; Anari, 2012; Adeyemo & Ogunyemi, 2005). Referring to JD-R theory, work characteristics (i.e. job demands, job resources) are related to work outcomes (e.g. job satisfaction) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Cao & Zhang, 2021; Kaiser, Patras, Adolfsen, Richardsen & Martinussen, 2020). Emotional intelligence is an employee's personal job resource because employees with high emotional intelligence better manage their emotions (e.g., frustration, sadness) (Sembiring, Nimran, Astuti & Utami, 2020; Suleman, Syed,

Mahmood & Hussain, 2020). They thus have positive attitudes toward jobs and produce excellent performance, exhibiting job satisfaction (Pau & Sabri, 2015). Furthermore, employees with high emotions are resilient because identify the sources of work stress, create approaches to handle work stress, use emotions to generate ideas and in turn increase job satisfaction (Cekmecelioglu, Gungel, Ulutas, 2012). Contrary, employees lack of emotional intelligence lack awareness to detect emotions and have fewer capabilities to deal with emotions when in difficult situations (Cekmecelioglu et al., 2012). Their level of stress is increasing and job satisfaction is decreasing. In addition, emotional intelligence enables employees to assess their strengths and weaknesses (Wu & Griffin, 2012). It creates a professional image, develops trust and connects to employees' performance (Khan et al., 2016). Subsequently, it promotes job satisfaction (Tutuncu & Kucukusta, 2007). Thus, it is hypothesized as:

H1: Emotional intelligence positively related to job satisfaction.

## **2.2 Work-life balance and job satisfaction**

Work-life balance is the individual's perceptions of how well his or her work and the rest of their lives are balanced (Haar, Russo, Sune & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014). Work-life balance includes flexible working hours such as flexibility in scheduling the arrival and departure time, flexibility to work remotely, flexibility for overtime, financial assistance for childcare (Baral & Bhargava, 2010). Work-life balance and job satisfaction relationship appear to fit into Social Exchange Theory (SET). SET explains individual relationships are based on reciprocal and mutual benefits (Blau, 1964; Settoon, Bennett & Liden, 1996; Stevens, Moriarty, Manthorpe, Harris, Hussein & Cornes, 2019). Referring to the reciprocal essence of SET, employees' behavior depends on how the organizations treat them. When employees recognize they are being cared for via work-life friendly initiatives, employees are more likely to recognize organizations treat them better. Employees thus reciprocate by improving work productivity and job satisfaction (Haar et al., 2014; Lunau, Bambra, Eikemo, Van der Wel & Dragano, 2014). Balancing employees' work and social life helps to reduce their stress level, report higher level of physical, mental health, which focuses more on work. This allows employees obligated to return organizations favor by performing better and increasing job satisfaction. In sum, work-life balance assures the employees' organizations care about their welfare and leisure needs (Baral & Bhargava, 2010; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Thus, it is hypothesized as:

H2: Work-life balance positively related to job satisfaction.

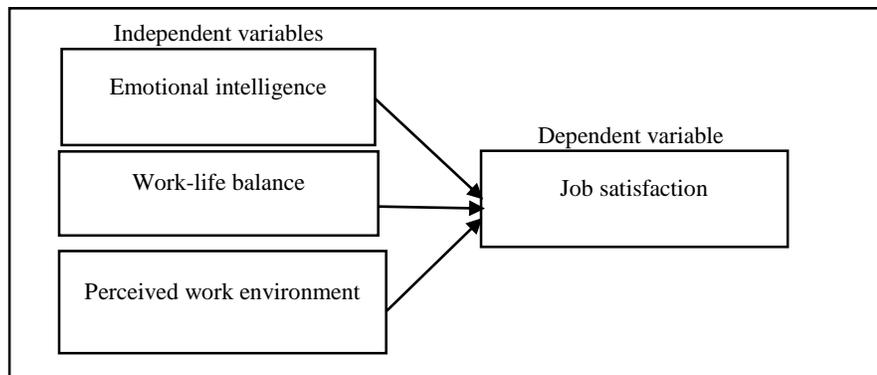
## **2.3 Perceived work environment and job satisfaction**

The perceived work environment is the workplace surroundings that affect employee performance, security and quality (Akinwale & George, 2020; Anasi, 2021; Hoendervanger, Yperen, Mobach & Albers, 2019; Mgaiwa, 2021). Grounded in SET, a caring work environment is critical to job satisfaction. SET theory suggests that while employees perceive organizations to support them in some way, employees will reciprocate with positive behaviors (Blau, 1964). In line with SET, this study shows one way that employees reciprocate with positive behavior (i.e., job satisfaction) with the belief that their organizations provide a supportive work environment. Such a work environment

enhances the physical and mental well-being of employees, thus influencing employees to perform their tasks effectively i.e., characteristics of job satisfaction (Agbozo, Owusu, Hoedoadia & Atakorah, 2017; Razeeq & Maulabakhsh, 2015; Way, Morgan, Larremore & Clauset, 2019). The working environment has two forms namely psychological working environment and social working environment (Agbozo et al., 2017). Psychological working environment refers to the characteristics (e.g., motivation, decision-making) of the work environment that contributes to overall employees' feelings. The studies of Cahill, James and Pitt-Catsouphes (2015); Hurtado, Nelson, Hashimoto and Sorensen (2015); Dunn, Wilson and Esterman (2005) found that job flexibility, work breaks improve mental, physical health employees and contribute to job satisfaction. The social work environment is the working relationship in the job setting (Agbozo et al., 2017). It includes the communication style and working relationship between employees, subordinates and superiors (Elechi, Lambert & Out, 2018; Pawirosumarto, Sarjana & Gunawan, 2017). To achieve a positive work environment, respect for each employee is vital for organizations. Respect for each employee should avoid the issues such as prejudice based on generation, gender, race and personal conflicts. As such, the abundance of respect retains the employees and boost job satisfaction.

H3: Perceived work environment positively related to job satisfaction.

**Figure 1: Research Model**



### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Sample

In this study, the total population of public servants in the Maldives from all government sectors is 25652 (Statistical Pocketbook of Maldives, 2020). Public servants were selected because of the critical roles public servants play to ensure continuity of public service throughout the severe Covid-19 crisis. This study identified the sample size based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. Referring to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the desired sample size for 25652 populations is 379. A technique of systematic sampling method was used to choose the study sample because it represents larger populations accurately. To do so, a sampling frame contains 25652 names and email addresses of the public servants in Maldives was used. Of 25652 public servants, every 68 public

servants (i.e., 25652/379) of the sampling frame were selected for the survey. In other words, public servants numbered 68, 136, 204, 272, and 340 of the sampling frame were selected until 379 were attained.

### **3.2 Data collection process**

This study is quantitative research and used an online questionnaire to gather the data. The online questionnaire was entitled to prevent Covid-19 infection for researchers and participants. The researcher made the first contact with the human resource department to ask permission before distributing the online questionnaire. They agreed to participate and online questionnaires were emailed to them. The researcher informed the participants of the online questionnaire purpose and the data confidentiality in the email. The participants were allowed one week to complete the online questionnaires. Of 379 online questionnaires emailed, 278 were returned 70 were incomplete. Only 208 completed were used for further analysis. 50.5% of respondents were female, 49.5% were male. The greatest 32.2% of the respondents derive from the age group 24-29 followed by 29.3% in the age group 30-35 respectively. 35.6% of respondents was qualified with A level certificate or a diploma. Looking at the work duration of respondents, 54.3% of respondents have been working as public servants for more than 4 years followed by 30.3% of respondents who have been working as civil service employees for less than 2 years.

### **3.3 Measures**

Job satisfaction measurement has five items adapted from Ramasodi (2010). In this study, the reliability coefficient was 0.858. Emotional intelligence was accessed based on 14 items adapted from Gignac (2010). The reliability coefficient in this study was 0.777. Work-life balance is measured using Al-Sumaiti (2010) five items. The reliability coefficient in this study was 0.904. Perceived work environment measurement has five items adapted from Agho et al. (1992). The reliability coefficient in this study was 0.808. These measurements used five points Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree as the response scale. A pretest was conducted with a total of four organizational behavior researchers to enhance the content validity of the measurements. Referring to their comments, minor amendments such as grammatical error correction, word standardization were made. After that, a pilot study was conducted to examine questionnaire instructions and item clarity. The pilot study result showed that the measurements have a high reliability value, above 0.70, fulfilling Nunally (1978) threshold value. In brief, the measurements are reliable.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1 Measurement model assessment**

Before performing measurement model assessment, raw data screening including missing values, outliers, normality and linearity have been tested via Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) 28. Fortunately, the raw data showed no missing values, outliers and met the requirement of normality and linearity. After that, SmartPLS 3.2.8 software

using Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was preferred in the present study (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2017). PLS-SEM performs adequate statistical power and provides robust results because it predicts the greatest endogenous variables via multiple regression analysis (Hair et al., 2017; Hwang, Sarstedt, Cheah & Ringle, 2020). The fundamental process of PLS-SEM was to assess the measurement model ensuring items that meet the criteria for validity and reliability (Chin, Cheah, Liu, Ting, Lim & Cham, 2020; Hair et al., 2017).

Firstly, the items' reliability was examined using loadings (Wong, 2013). Referring to Table 1, loadings are well-above the cut-off point i.e., 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017) except EI14, EI16, EI18 and EI12. These items are removed from further analysis. Referring to Mackenzie, Podakoff and Jarvis (2005), removing items does not change the content of the emotional intelligence constructs as the items are highly related. Secondly, Composite Reliability (CR) examines the item's reliability (Wong, 2013). Table 1 reveals CR values are above 0.70 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1998). After that, the item's validity is accessed by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (Wong, 2013). AVE in this study was above the threshold of 0.50 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1998). After that, Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) criterion was performed to evaluate the discriminant validity. HTMT is considered as a more powerful method to assess discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). The HTMT results are displayed in Table 2. The HTMT ratio did not exceed the minimum point of 0.90 (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Henseler et al., 2015). In short, the measurement model is at an acceptable level.

**Table 1: Items loadings, CR, AVE constructs**

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Emotional intelligence	EI1	0.765	0.826	0.635
	EI2	0.902		
	EI3	0.760		
	EI4			
	EI5	0.789		
	EI6			
	EI7	0.719		
	EI8			
	EI9	0.796		
	EI10	0.083		
	EI11	0.843		
	EI12			
	EI13	0.836		
	EI14	0.906		
Job satisfaction	JSQ1	0.765	0.900	0.644
	JSQ2	0.861		
	JSQ3	0.847		
	JSQ4	0.781		

Perceived work environment	JSQ5	0.849		
	WE1	0.750	0.866	0.657
	WE2	0.851		
	WE3	0.778		
	WE4	0.611		
	WE5	0.756		
Work-life balance	WLB1	0.776	0.927	0.719
	WLB2	0.785		
	WLB3	0.903		
	WLB4	0.865		
	WLB5	0.903		

Notes: CR=composite reliability, AVE=Average Variance Extracted, =Items dropped as the loadings below 0.4.

**Table 2: HTMT ratio**

	Emotional intelligence	Job satisfaction	Work life balance	Perceived work environment
Emotional intelligence	-			
Job satisfaction	0.323	-		
Work life balance	0.296	0.221	-	
Perceived work environment	0.339	0.467	0.435	-

Notes: HTMT  $_{0.90}$  criterion

## 4.2 Structural model assessment

Structural model was done using the significance of path coefficients, effect size,  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$  (Hair et al., 2017). The bootstrapping enables to obtain the significance of path coefficients, with 5000 runs. The results support the relationship between emotional intelligence-job satisfaction ( $b = 0.267$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), perceived work environment-job satisfaction ( $b = 0.313$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) is significant. In contrast, work-life balance- job satisfaction was found to be non-significant ( $b = 0.027$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The  $R^2$  values suggest that emotional intelligence, work-life balance and working environment explain 27.2% of job satisfaction. Whereas, Cohen's  $f^2$  effect size indicates that emotional intelligence had small effects on job satisfaction ( $f^2=0.083$ ). Meanwhile, the perceived work environment had a medium on job satisfaction ( $f^2=0.104$ ). On the other hand, work-life balance had no effect on job satisfaction ( $f^2=0.001$ ). Referring to Hair et al. (2017), an effect size less than 0.020 consider no effects. Additionally,  $Q^2$  values based on blindfolding indicate was greater than 0, meaning the structural model had sufficient predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017). Table 3 depicts the structural model results.

**Table 3: Structural model results**

	Path coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	$f^2$	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>	Decision
EI -> JS	0.267	0.295	2.836	0.083	-	-	Support
WLB -> JS	0.027	0.032	0.424	0.001	-	-	Not support
PWE -> JS	0.313	0.312	4.597	0.104	-	-	Support
JS	-	-	-	-	0.27	0.132	-

Note: JS=job satisfaction, EI=emotional intelligence, WLB=work-life balance, PWE=perceived work environment, *t* value> 1.96 (two-tailed).

## 5. DISCUSSION

First, emotional intelligence has a significant relationship with job satisfaction considers emotional intelligence is related to job satisfaction. This is consistent with results from Rahman and Haleem (2018); Khan et al., (2017). The possible reason is that public servants in the Maldives with a higher-level of emotional intelligence can manage emotions, eliminate difficulties and have positive attitudes toward their work i.e., job satisfaction characteristics during the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides, work-life balance has an insignificant association with job satisfaction. This contradicts the results of Agbozo et al., (2017); Andrade, Miller and Westover (2021). This suggests that the work-life balance of public servants in the Maldives is not related to job satisfaction. A possible explanation for the contradictory result is public servants in the Maldives do not derive job satisfaction from work-life balance. As such, it does not lead to significant improvement of job satisfaction. The significant association between perceived work environment and job satisfaction explains the public servants in the Maldives perceive the public organizations create conducive work environment results they interact with each other, enjoy themselves and more likely to work positively i.e., job satisfaction characteristics during Covid-19 pandemic. This is consistent with existing evidence Cahill et al. (2015), Hurtado et al. (2015).

### 5.1. Research implications

From theoretical implications, this paper enriches the body knowledge by exploring the role of employees' job satisfaction in a global crisis i.e, Covid-19 pandemic with emotional intelligence-job satisfaction, perceived work environment. This is a topic that has been neglected. Particularly, this paper narrows the research gap by advancing the knowledge about the impact of the global crisis on public servants whose country's operations are often dependent on public servants. Secondly, work-life balance is inapplicable to explain job satisfaction, offering additional insights to further investigate work-life balance and job satisfaction in a different context to confirm the contradiction. As such, it could enrich the discussion and offer new insights in the field of job satisfaction among public servants.

Thirdly, this study supports JD-R theory by demonstrating that emotional intelligence is one of the personal resources that is crucial to job satisfaction. Fourthly, this study supports SET when employees perceive organizations provide a supportive work environment that is crucial to their well-being, their job satisfaction can be anticipated. Fifthly, this study contradicts SET when employees perceive organizations offer work-life friendly programs, employees have no job satisfaction.

In addition, this study offers practical implications. Given the importance of emotional intelligence to reinforce job satisfaction during the Covid-19 pandemic, government Maldives is suggested to develop public servants' emotional intelligence. This includes regular training sessions to improve public servants' emotion management, gain confidence, handle work stress and in turn enhance job satisfaction during the Covid-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, in the Covid-19 situation, the government of Maldives makes sure public servants understand the significance of emotional competence programs, share adequate information about Covid-19 threats and clear procedures about the actions to take constantly. This is to ensure public servants have positive emotions and improve their emotional intelligence. Thus, public servants with higher levels of emotional intelligence respond Covid-19 pandemic less negatively. The superiors must be emotionally intelligent themselves to influence the subordinates to be emotionally intelligent. For instance, superiors should view Covid-19 pandemic problems from subordinates' angles as subordinates' act based on their knowledge and experience. Superiors practice listening and reflect subordinates' viewpoints because subordinates experience increased stress associated with heavy workload, health problems, financial strains, lack of childcare during the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, superiors that show concern for subordinates' experiences are valuable to manage subordinates' emotional intelligence.

In contrast, the non-significant role of work-life balance to enhance job satisfaction does not eliminate the significance of work-life balance to enhance job satisfaction. However, it identifies the government Maldives should not consider work-life balance as the fundamental practice to develop job satisfaction during the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides that, a significant relationship between perceived work environment and job satisfaction reminds the government of Maldives to provide a high-quality work environment as it benefits government Maldives through increased job satisfaction. Government Maldives could carry out merely necessary tasks and delay some trivial tasks during the Covid-19 outbreak. This is to make sure only public servants who are essential to carry out the tasks are in the workplace and reduce the presence of other public servants. Government Maldives could place posters that inspire public servants to stay at home while sick, cough and sneeze to avoid Covid-19 infection. Besides, the government should minimize the public servants' physical interaction with clients via online transactions, phone orders and contactless delivery. This always leads to job satisfaction of public service employees in the Maldives.

## **5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

With a cross-sectional design, the present study has no strong causal differences between emotional intelligence, work-life balance and working conditions are unclear.

Thus, it implies that future research may focus on longitudinal studies to identify the changes between these relationships over time. Besides that, this research was focused only on public servants in the Maldives. It thus may not be suitable to generalize this study to other countries. This is due to the differences in government policies, culture and operations procedures. It is suggested to replicate this study in other countries. Future studies may also extend the investigation to the private sector employees. Private sector employees often have different job satisfaction levels compared to public service employees. In addition, the use of questionnaires in this study may be prone to bias because respondents' responses were based on their opinions and perceptions. To prevent this, qualitative measures may be incorporated into future studies. This is to provide more details to the job satisfaction level of public service employees in the Maldives and improve results precision.

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