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Work-life balance experiences during COVID-19 : A case of academics at a South African university

By

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DECLARATION

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Signed



Date

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of dissertation is to understand, examine and analyze the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on academics who are working remotely from home. In other words, using remote work from home as a case study, this research paper aimed to examine, analyze, and understand the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on academics' work-life balance. The study was conducted at a South African university. It draws on work design and spillover theory on remote working as a probable framework for understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of public sector employees on work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown. It is structured around three approaches that are often used by researchers to investigate the concept of work-life balance and remote working among employees. The researcher adopts an explorative qualitative research approach to critically investigate how COVID-19 affected the work-life balance of academics in South Africa while teleworking remotely from home. The research uses a purposive sampling method to recruit a total number of eleven respondents for this study. The researcher provides strong theoretical reasons for the selection criteria, which fit well with the objectives of the study. The study finds that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has been a challenging experience for many families, and strategies to prevent the crisis from affecting public health (such as working remotely from home) have had a negative impact on engagement in everyday life. The results demonstrate that the experiences of confinement and working remotely from home during the pandemic have been particularly detrimental to the trajectories of academic mothers, especially those with unconducive household situations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The coronavirus crisis has produced an earth-shattering disruption in the functioning of public sector organisations as we once know it (Schuster, Weitzman, Mikkelsen, Meyer-Sahling, Bersch, Fukuyama, Paskov, Rogger, Mistree, and Kay, 2020) . "Responding to COVID-19 through surveys of public servants." *Public Administration Review* 80, no. 5 (2020): 792-796. In other words, the chaos brought about by the coronavirus pandemic has compelled a large number of public sector employees to remotely work from home. For example, in unprecedented fashion it required academics to stop all non-essential campus-based activities to curb the rapid spread of the virus. This transition took place quickly (both locally and internationally), constraining academics to work and study from home. Consequently, there has been uncertainty about the future as we experience a confinement that is new to us (including a transition from freedom to limited agency) while regulating our social relationships, our potentially unsuitable working environments, and the increasing responsibility of our lives.

In response to the disruption of public sector operations caused by the COVID-19 crisis, telecommuting¹ from home (teleworking) has become an increasingly popular means of providing public services while adhering to the social distancing mandates prescribed by health bodies to curb the rapid spread of the virus (WHO, 2020a; Choudhury *et al.*, 2020; Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garces, 2020; Hayes, 2020). By means of home-based teleworking, the education sector in South Africa ensures the continuity of the service it offers (reducing the disruption caused by the pandemic). While this situation prevails, little is known about the effect of home-based telecommuting on academics' ability to balance work and life. Teleworking – as a means to address the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic – raises many issues which are still poorly understood by practitioners and scholars (Yang, 2020). Clearly, existing knowledge about telecommuting can be called into question during crisis circumstances like this coronavirus pandemic. Since little is known about the direct and indirect effects of remote work on the work-life balance of public servants during the pandemic, there is no way to design and implement

¹ A model of work whereby employees work in remote locations away from their central offices or production facilities - also known as teleworking, remote working, flexible work arrangements, or distributed work (Allen *et al.*, 2015). Here, employees are unable to physically interact with their colleagues or clients while working remotely, but are able to make contact using ICTs (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990).

management interventions that consider the multiple ways in which telework affects the ability of academics to remain productive.

This research intends to contribute to filling in these gaps in the scientific literature by analysing the experiences of UKZN academics who have been working remotely since the beginning of the pandemic and conducting an empirical examination of the implications of remote working on academics' work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown.

This chapter clearly outlines the background of the study, the research problem, the aim and objectives of the study, the research questions and the methodology employed in the study, and outline of the presentation of the dissertation.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, telecommuting was not a common practice (Mohalik *et al.*, 2019; Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Desilver (2020) indicates that telecommuting is most often practised by the relatively wealthy in the USA (over 75%), and over 40% of white-collar workers - such as managers, executives, or professionals - telecommute (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Based on the results of the 2017 American Community Survey, regardless of ICT development in the US, only 2.9% of US employees worked remotely in 2017 (Mazur *et al.*, 2017), a figure which represented a statistical increase of 1.8 million to 3.9 million employees between 2005 and 2017. Similarly, even in Europe only 2% of the workforce (employees rather than employers) worked remotely in 2015, regardless of the advancement of ICTs in Europe (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2017). Thus, most workers around the globe had little telecommuting experience before the pandemic struck; neither were they or their institutions prepared to support this practice. Then in 2020 millions of workers were suddenly forced to work remotely from their houses due to the unprecedented coronavirus pandemic – unwittingly creating a global telecommuting experiment (Kniffin *et al.*, 2020). Subsequently, working remotely has become the universal “new normal”. The pandemic has changed the way organisations are structured and managed in most countries (Grint, 2020). The transition to telecommuting from home has specifically affected the education sector and, as a result of this transformation, human resources management has had to equip employees with new ways of navigating these conditions.

During normal times, the distinction between work and nonwork responsibilities is a potential source of tension for many people every day (Allen & Martin, 2017; Kossek, 2016). However, 2020 has been anything but normal. As a result, as more people have started working from home,

a shift in work-nonwork boundaries has created potential shocks and role conflicts for them. With the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, many academics have had to perform their work duties at home along with their household duties. With most schools and day-care centres closed in 2020 (massively increasing the need for parental childcare) academics in South Africa have had to juggle their work and non-work boundaries. Because access to the childcare previously provided by friends and grandparents has been limited due to the lockdown protocols, many parents must now care for their children themselves. In addition, given that most women carry out disproportionately more domestic labour, childcare, and household responsibilities than most men (Bianchi *et al.*, 2012), they are at risk of being more affected by the lockdown than men. Given the unequal distribution of domestic duties, the lockdown is more likely to burden female academics with more home-related tasks, leaving them less time to dedicate to their work. Kossek and Lee (2017 p.2) therefore argue that the concept of work-life conflict or work-life balance “is an extension of work-family conflict reflecting the reality that the work role may interfere with individuals’ other personal life roles and interests.”

Regardless of the household conditions, could everyone continue to be productive during a global pandemic even if their domestic conditions were "conducive" and/or "more favourable"? It is significant to note that most academics in South Africa had had little telecommuting experience previous to 2019, nor were they or their institutions prepared for this model of working. As many studies have been conducted on remote working issues and challenges (e.g. Grant *et al.*, 2013; Konradt *et al.*, 2003; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001), one might think we have enough evidence to understand how remote workers are affected by pandemic lockdowns, but none of those studies was conducted when telecommuting was prevalent at the unprecedented magnitude precipitated by the current pandemic crisis, so the knowledge accumulated about those circumstances may be irrelevant in the current situation. At the least there is a need to study how this context has impacted on the experience of telecommuting from home amidst all the unique conditions that have come about with the pandemic.

Although some literature explores the issue of working from home and its effects on employees’ well-being and work-life balance, a lack of consistency has been noted in the relevant literature. For example, the existing knowledge concerning telecommuting is derived mostly from circumstances where only a few people practised telecommuting from home on a regular basis, rather than on all or most employees. As rightly noted by Bailey and Kurland (2002 p.396) “the occasional, infrequent manner in which telework is practised likely has rendered mute many

suspected individual-level outcomes for the bulk of the teleworking population,” suggesting that it is possible that the experience of those who telework extensively may differ significantly from that of those who do it sporadically, a fact which may affect the outcome of this model of working. Moreover, previous findings on working from home are partially biased by selection, because previous telecommuting was voluntary. The researchers analysed the experiences of individuals who chose to work remotely at their own convenience (Lapierre *et al.*, 2016). In addition, most telecommuters who work from home do not clearly distinguish between work and private time, which can have negative spillover effects in terms of conflict between work and non-work roles (Vittersø *et al.*, 2003). Consequently, the benefits previously identified as arising from telecommuting from home might apply only to those who might find the practice useful (Kaduk *et al.*, 2019). There is a need to shift the focus in research from whether or not online learning is successful to identifying how online learning can achieve its full potential in an unprecedented time where telecommuting from home is no longer optional but rather a "universal mandate" arising from the need to adhere to lockdown regulations.

The author knows that the occupational implications for South African academic employees' work-life balance of telecommuting from home before the COVID-19 pandemic were partially examined, but little research has been conducted on how the pandemic lockdown has affected the work-life balance of public sector employees in the country. A study of the impact of the COVID-19 on academics' work-life balance is therefore necessary in the light of their remote working practices.

1.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The ability to balance work and family commitments is said to contribute to work-life balance as well as job satisfaction (Sulaiman *et al.*, 2018). However, in the era of the COVID-19 Pandemic little research had been done on the work-life balance. It was therefore necessary to conduct a study of the issue of COVID-19 and work-life balance because the working conditions of academics have changed. This includes working from home in which the environment is not always in favour of the processes of work. Furthermore, working from home can lead to emotional distress and at times can hinder one's potential to be productive at the workplace. The data generated from this study will assist decision makers to understand the factors that contribute to a productive work-life balance and or an imbalance among academic staff during the pandemic. This study may provide new, recent evidence about the effects of remote working on an employee's work-life balance. Lockwood (2003) explored the challenges and solutions of work-

life balance. That study revealed that the challenges of work-life balance will likely persist in our society for some time to come (Lockwood, 2003). Thus, the findings of this study may be instrumental in enlightening stakeholders about the implications of remote working during the pandemic and how to get the most out of telecommuting from home.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 Aim of the study

This study seeks to understand how COVID-19 has affected the work-life balance of the academic staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), College of Humanities, which is situated in Glenwood and Pinetown, EThekweni.

1.4.2 Research Objectives

1. To explore the effect of COVID-19 on the work-life balance of academics at the University of KwaZulu Natal.
2. To identify the factors that contribute to the work-life balance and work-life imbalance of academics during COVID-19 at the University of KwaZulu Natal.
3. To establish the mechanisms employed by UKZN to assist academics to achieve work-life balance during COVID-19 .
4. To understand the support provided by families/spouses and friends to assist academic employees to succeed in creating a productive work-life balance.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does COVID-19 affect the work-life balance of academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
2. What factors contribute to the work-life balance or imbalance of academics during COVID-19 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
3. What mechanisms are employed by UKZN to assist academics to achieve a productive work-life balance during COVID-19 ?
4. What kind of support do academics receive from their family members during COVID-19 ?

1.6 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used in this study to evaluate how COVID-19 impacts on the work-life balance in academia. This is a case study of a South African University. Interviews were conducted remotely via the Zoom and Teams platforms due to the need to observe the COVID-19 regulations. The study adopted the purposive method of sampling. It focussed on the College of Humanities across two campuses, namely the Edgewood and Howard College campuses. The participants were academic lecturers of different ranks. Informed consent forms and the interview guide were issued to all fifteen respondents for their information and consideration. All interviews were audio-recorded for the purposes of data collection, and the researcher made notes for further clarity and other matters arising. Chapter Three of this report contains a detailed description of the methodology employed in the study.

1.7 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

- *Chapter One:* The study is introduced in this chapter by describing its background, the research problem, the research question and the research objectives.
- *Chapter Two:* This chapter contains a review of past literature and/or existing knowledge. It is positioned around telecommuting from home and the impact of such telecommuting on employees' work-life balance. The chapter further elaborates on COVID-19 and the state of disaster management in South Africa.
- *Chapter Three:* In this chapter the methods of data collection and analysis are described, as are the design of the study, the strategy of sampling, and the methods of collecting data. The chapter also outlines the ethical considerations relevant to this study.
- *Chapter Four:* This chapter analyses presents and discusses the research findings, based on the research objectives.
- *Chapter Five:* This chapter presents the study's findings in summary form, draws conclusions based on the major findings, makes recommendations, and describes the limitations of the study.

1.8 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter has presented the background to the study and introduced it in detail. The chapter has also outlined the research problem, suggested the significance of the study, and specified the research objectives and questions. The chapter ends with this summary.

CHAPTER TWO

EVALUATING WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As a form of social construct originating in industrialised Western countries, work-life balance is a relatively new (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). As such, the term is not used consistently or understood in one particular way. Over the last few years many discussions and perspectives about work-life balance have emerged in academic circles, in dynamic organisations, and across time and space (Lewis *et al.*, 2016a,b; Lewis *et al.*, 2007). Work-life balance and/or the relationship between work and life is defined by scholars in the work-family interface at an individual level (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). Many scholars refer to the "life" realm or aspect of it as being interchangeable with "family" – especially in terms of responsibilities related to the family (Lewis *et al.*, 2016a,b; Haar *et al.*, 2014; Özbilgin *et al.*, 2011). In addition to increasing workers' control over the spatio-temporal context of work, workplace flexibility and autonomy are also thought to improve employees' productivity and the quality of organisational work (Browne *et al.*, 2019; Breugh & Farabee, 2012; Baruch, 2000). Furthermore, some researchers have found that working from home appears to result in less work-life conflict since it provides autonomy and flexibility (Bloom *et al.*, 2015; Laegran, 2008; Hill *et al.*, 2003). Thus, the unprecedented Coronavirus pandemic made working from home a prevalent work arrangement for public sector workers across the globe (ILO, 2020), despite the theory that it is less common in the public sector than elsewhere (Mohalik *et al.*, 2019). The pandemic lockdown has led to a consensus that setting up a virtual workspace is a good solution to preventing the spread of the virus (Choudhury *et al.*, 2020; Hayes, 2020) as it allows employees to work safely from the "comfort zone" of their homes while adhering to the lockdown and social distancing regulations prescribed by national and international health agencies to control the pandemic (WHO, 2020).

Working from home and the work-life balance in relation to COVID-19 are discussed in this chapter, in which you will also find a discussion of the theoretical framework that supports the study. The researcher here applies the work design perspective and spillover theory to the study of the remote working practices of academic staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Both scholarly journals and the popular press have for decades been publishing research on the work-family balance. The rising interest in such a balance is a consequence of concerns that unbalanced or poor work-family relationships have the potential to result in poor health (for both individuals and families) and poor organisational productivity. Although the analysis of the work-life balance has gained a lot of popularity, a formal definition has yet to emerge. No one definition of the work-life balance or of work-life relations that is universally accepted in the literature. Thus, in this theoretical exploration of the work-life (family) balance, I have not limited myself to a single definition of it but have instead made myself open to exploring new possibilities of understanding the concept – not as a way of arriving at a yet another single way of defining the phenomenon but as a way of leaving open the latitude for more than one understanding of it. The work-life balance is conceptualised in several different ways in the literature, but its most essential elements are 1) the existence of multiple roles that the subject has to play, 2) the need for equilibrium between the multiple roles, 3) the perception of control between the multiple roles, and 4) perceived satisfaction arising from playing the multiple roles. The literature has varying degrees of success with exploring each of these ideas.

The perspective that work-life balance is impacted on by a person's multiple responsibilities is a result of the early recognition that non-work responsibilities may spill over into work responsibilities, thereby compromising workers' health and their performance at work. For example, in a classical definition, the "spillover" between the multiple responsibilities is mutually correlated. Thus, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) assume that the transfer of work-to-home and home-to-work is mutually correlated. This classical work gave rise to the spillover theory, which emphasises that individuals' experiences associated with life (family) can carry over into the work domain. As a result, Greenhaus *et al.* (2003, p511) recently defined the work-life balance broadly as a "multiple role conflict that reflects an individual's orientation across different life roles, an inter-role phenomenon." The spillover theory suggests how one's experience in the life territory can overlap into the work territory and vice-versa, and is generative of an understanding how work conflicts contribute to family conflicts. Spillover theory is one of the best theories for explaining both negative and positive spillover effects as well as how experiences are transferred from one domain to another (Sok *et al.*, 2014).

Greenhaus *et al.* (2003) examined the role of time and the related work-life balance in their study of equilibrium and/or the satisfaction gained by an individual from playing multiple balanced

roles. They describe work-family balance as “the extent to which an individual is engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role” (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2003, p513). They propose that there are three elements of work-life balance: “time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance” (p513).

Additionally, some scholars have suggested that individual satisfaction is more important than the performance of multiple roles. A work-life balance, as defined by Kirchmeyer (2000), involves achieving satisfaction in each area of life, which requires a good distribution of resources, such as time and energy, across the various areas. In other words, in Kirchmeyer's (2000) definition, work-life balance refers to reaching satisfaction in all areas of one's life by allocating ample resources across these areas. Likewise, Clark (2000, p751) also emphasises an individual's satisfaction within the boundaries of work and life by defining work-life balance as “satisfaction and well functioning at work and home with a minimum of role conflict.” In addition to this, individual satisfaction is associated with the perception that the importance (or salience) of a role varies in individuals across time and location. A major point made in support of this argument is that the salience of various roles changes over time with widespread life events such as childbirth, work promotion, the illness of parents or spouses, and so forth. As a result, some scholars have described work-life balance as the degree to which employees' “effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles is compatible with the individuals' life role priorities at a given point in time” (Greenhaus & Allen, 2006, p10). Accordingly, a meta-review study recommended that research on work-life balance should analyse how well individuals' expectations about their roles in work and family are being met (Eby *et al.*, 2005).

A work-life balance can also be described in the literature as a measure of employee freedom (or autonomy) over the demands placed on them by having to play multiple roles. For example, Fleetwood (2007, p351) defines work-life balance as “people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work”. We might also understand the work-life balance as an individual's autonomy over the role that is most important to him/her. As a result, if a parent or spouse is ill, reducing the hours spent at work in order to spend time with the spouse can also be considered effectively balancing work and family life.

Recent evidence suggests that a work-life balance refers to the distinction between the time spent working and the time spent with the family (Karkoulia *et al.*, 2016; Reddy, 2015; Wolor *et al.*, 2020). In other words, the term work-life balance refers to the balancing the time dedicated to working against personal time. Regardless of a person's gender, Hjalmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir

(2020) define work-life balance as the capacity to successfully balance work (paid work performed outside of the home) and family commitments, whereas Deshpande *et al.* (2020, p229) describe a work-life balance as “the extent to which one’s perceived allocation of physical, mental, and emotional resources between the work and non-work domains matches one’s expectations, personal and professional goals”. This indicates that different authors have different definitions of what a work-life balance is. However, all agree that achieving a work-life balance is a matter of balancing personal life and work life. It has been demonstrated from the review of the literature that the full meaning of a work-life balance cannot be captured by simply defining it or defining simple measures to achieve it, because no systematic effort has been made to develop one clear definition or measurement of a work-life balance. On the face of it, a work-life balance is defined by most scholars as a perception of a good balance between work responsibilities and non-work multiple roles.

A work-life balance should also be considered in the context of the notion that it can change with time – depending on the importance assigned to specific life events. Thus, in their quest to provide a generally acceptable definition of a work-life balance, Kalliath and Brough (2008, p326) define a work-family balance as an “individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth following an individual’s current life priorities.” Their definition highlights that balancing the demands of the workplace and life outside of it has positive results for growth and development. It proposes that the evaluation of a work-family balance should also be influenced by an individual's preferences for working from home (as opposed to working at an office).

Therefore, even though there are several definitions and/or explanations of a work-life(family) balance, with different emphases cast on it as an entity, there is consensus that it has to do with a “compatible good balance between work and non-work domains”. The beauty of life is to be seen in its variation and diversity, not in linearity. Thus, these variations and the elastic dimensions of the work-life balance or these paradoxes in explanations of the work-life balance are in themselves “contradictory” but contextually valid. It is paradoxical that these various notions of work-life balance describe the essence of what this concept really represents. Thus, a work-life balance by nature is contextual.

2.3 FACTORS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Factors associated with a work-life balance include family-related issues, technological advancement, social support, workloads, and organisational support.

2.3.1 Family-related issues

The family plays an important role in the work-life relationship phenomenon. Vyas and Shrivastava (2017) confirm that when employees receive support from their families they tend to excel in their workplaces. More so, an employee's unhappiness because of the family has been argued to negatively impact on the work domain (Vyas & Shrivastava, 2017; Fayyazi & Aslani, 2015). When family matters negatively impact on the work-life balance this affects employees' attitudes and behaviour and may give rise to emotional exhaustion, decreased commitment, and job burnout (Fayyazi & Aslani, 2015). However, according to Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2020), Manzo and Minello (2020) and Craig and Churchill (2020), the division of labour in household responsibilities is not equal in the era of COVID-19 and never was before the start of the pandemic. As a result, women are inclined to perform and dedicate more time to household chores than men, which results in an imbalance of work and non-work roles (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2020; Manzo & Minello, 2020; Craig & Churchill, 2020).

In recent studies it has been demonstrated that women struggle with work-life balance, report lower levels of job satisfaction, and have difficulty managing their teaching, research, and service responsibilities (Denson *et al.*, 2018). According to Denson *et al.* (2018), due to their domestic responsibilities females in academia have developed tensions whenever they wish to start families. This is mainly because “women's employment on marital interaction is mediated by their attitude towards work and the extent of their commitment” (Reddy, 2015; p17).

2.3.2 Technological advancement

Technological advancement has changed how organisations operate. Although it has assisted many organisations to be competent and efficient in the global market, “technology can make people willing to work in their time and can also use their work time for their personal affairs, but there are some people who want a clear separation of personal and work life and consider it detrimental so that it can cause stress both at work and in [their] personal life” (Nurisman &

Sampurna, 2019, p. 85). This spillover effect is what scholars consider as among the detrimental impacts of technological advancement on a work-life balance. Likewise, technology is useful only to the people who understand its workings, suggesting that only industrial countries with technological advancement can enjoy the dividends of technology. However, with technological advancement employees can always work around the world in the “comfort zones” of their homes today. Additionally, technological advancement allows workplace flexibility (Allen *et al.*, 2015; Aziz & Cunningham, 2008; Kinnunen *et al.*, 2004; Warr, 1994). Aziz and Cunningham (2008) agree that the advancement of technology helps to reduce working hours as it allows flexible work schedules.

Furthermore, technological advancement has assisted with communication between stakeholders and has improved customer services. Previously communication took place only via landlines. However, employees can now communicate while sitting at home using emails, Business Skype, WhatsApp and instant messaging. Then again this compels people to work even after hours, thereby taking up the time they would want to devote to their families. As a result, Jones and Taylor (2017) argue that technology has improved business in terms of productivity and communication, and the time for face-to-face meetings is coming to an end. Recent research has established that the use of technology during the pandemic has also made it possible for people to continue with their social lives during lockdown and quarantine (Riva *et al.*, 2020). This is mainly because the COVID-19 restrictions support of social distancing, and social gatherings remain prohibited during the lockdown. Kaushik and Guleria (2020) are of the view that the concept of working from home has gained popularity in the corporate world during COVID-19 as employees can perform their duties from home through virtual platforms because of technological advancement. Such platforms include Zoom and Teams, etc. Furthermore, technological tools and the social media in general have assisted individuals to stay updated and alive online (Riva *et al.*, 2020). However, Khan and Javed Hasan (2020) argue that telecommuting contributes to the feeling of being disconnected from the workplace. It is also evident, however, that individuals who are not on the internet or otherwise lack the necessary technological resources will not be so happy about telecommuting during COVID-19. Working from home is not possible for all the parties involved.

2.3.3 Social support

New perspectives on social support have emerged from recent empirical research. Drawing on research that examined the perceptions of social support and compliance during the outbreak of COVID-19 it was found that social support is associated with the presence of safe and trustworthy people who care, love, and value the individual. (Paykani *et al.*, 2020; McKinley, 2020). A similar definition is offered by Cohen and Syme (1985), who define social support as information and other benefits provided by some people for the benefit of others. Additionally, they argue that social support may be effective at one point and useless at another (Paykani *et al.*, 2020; McKinley, 2020). Thus, social support refers to the availability of interpersonal resources which provide people with the psychosocial support they need, thereby influencing, improving, and sustaining the well-being and health of employees.

2.3.4 Workload

Work overload affects the balance between work and life. Work overload can be defined as having too much to do (Mokana, 2016). If one's workload exceeds one's capacity, one will experience fatigue and exhaustion, which will adversely affect one's ability to meet other responsibilities – thereby affecting one's work-life balance. Studies have demonstrated that overworking employees is unproductive and that their work-life balance is negatively affected (Holland *et al.*, 2019; Johari *et al.*, 2018; Fan & Smith, 2017; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016; Omar *et al.*, 2015; Bubb & Earley, 2004; Glynn *et al.*, 2002). Various scholars contend, for instance, that for employees to manage their workloads, they have to put in longer hours at work, which then impacts on their work-life balance (Glynn *et al.*, 2002). The existing literature suggests that COVID-19 has also contributed to the increased workload for employees (Shoja *et al.*, 2020). As Chung *et al.* (2020) point out, increased workloads during COVID-19 have resulted in conflicts between work and family obligations. The authors suggest that increased workloads during COVID-19 are detrimental to employees' work-life balance and mental health.

2.3.5 Perceived organisational support (POS)

Aisbett and Hoyer (2014) define perceived organisational support as “the set of beliefs that individuals hold concerning how organizations value an individual's contribution to the

organization, as well as how organizations care about the well-being of an individual” (p338). A similar hypothesis in organisational support theory holds that employee attitudes are conducive to the development of POS (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 698). According to the researchers, there are three main factors that contribute to perceived organisational support, including fairness, supervisors' support, and job conditions. These factors are said to be crucial in enhancing employees' well-being and work-life balance (Aisbett & Hoye, 2014; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

2.3.5.1 Fairness

According to Aisbett and Hoye (2014) and Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), fairness refers to concerns about the justness of procedures at the workplace and how fairness is utilised in the distribution of resources among employees. Their discussion also touches on the concept of increasing employee perceptions of support from the organisation through these procedures. For this study, fairness is understood in terms of the support received by employees during COVID-19 in relation to practical resources and emotional support.

2.3.5.2 Supervisors' support

“The degree of support provided by a supervisor, in which they value an employee's well-being and contributions, is also an influential aspect in determining an employee's level of POS” (Aisbett & Hoye, 2014, p. 340). Supervisors are seen as representatives of the organisation. It is their responsibility to give directions to the employees to achieve maximum productivity and ensure good employees' work-life balance. Employees view the support of supervisors as organisational support that enables them to achieve maximum productivity and ensure a work-life balance among the employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Previous research has also established that when employees are not able to manage the balance and do not have support from the employer, they quit their jobs (Jones & Taylor, 2017). Therefore, it is an employer's responsibility to ensure that the employees are empowered. The issue of work-life balance remains essential to the organisation (Jones & Taylor, 2017), however, some organisational cultures do not fully support this initiative, and that hinders the organisation from delivering all the promised benefits (Jones & Taylor, 2017).

The literature confirms that employers' concerns about work-life balance can influence employee recruitment, job satisfaction, attitude, and retention (Kelliher *et al.*, 2019). In this light, the data suggest that it is vital for organisations to promote work-life balance policies and implement

flexible working arrangements to improve employee productivity (Jackson & Fransman, 2018; Jones & Taylor, 2017).

2.3.5.3 Rewards and job conditions

Studies of perceived organisational support (POS) highlight that human resources practices involving the recognition of employees' contributions should be positively related to POS (Aisbett & Hoyer, 2014; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). More importantly, favourable rewards and conditions of employment are also believed to play an important role in how employees feel supported by their supervisors as well as by the organisation. These researchers argue that rewards are associated with recognition, promotion, training, and job security (Aisbett & Hoyer, 2014; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

2.4 THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON REMOTE WORKING AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The importance of maintaining work-life balance is becoming more evident among academicians, health care providers, and other public sector employees over the years (Kasbuntoro *et al.*, 2020; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Agha *et al.*, 2017; Haar *et al.*, 2014; Yadav & Dabhade, 2014; Arif & Farooqi, 2014; Azeem & Akhtar, 2014; Maeran *et al.*, 2013; Kluczyk, 2013). In Sirgy and Lee (2018) argue that workers with well-balanced work-life situations report low levels of emotional exhaustion and feel satisfied at work. Low irritability, low hypertension, low depression, and low alcohol abuse were also associated with good work-life balance (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). A similar study suggests that the imbalance may lead to poor psychological and physical health, alcohol abuse, and decreased engagement in family function (Kluczyk, 2013). Thus, the balance between work and home/family life is achieved when work does not interfere with these activities (Jones & Taylor, 2017). In other words, a work-life balance refers to the ability to manage work and non-work domains together in a way that is in harmony. However, there is evidence that the COVID-19 outbreak has put a psychological strain on workers worldwide. Research conducted in China indicates that COVID-19 plays a role in mental health (Kim *et al.*, 2020). This indicates that work stress is a norm during COVID-19, where people are required to work in unfamiliar spaces.

Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2020) show that mothers experience more pressure than husbands in juggling home-schooling and child care during the lockdown and its restrictions. Millions of workers globally are being forced to work remotely from home due to the unprecedented outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, resulting in a *de facto* global experiment of telecommuting (Kniffin

et al., 2020). As a result, telecommuting from home has suddenly become the universal “new normal”. Consequently, the unforeseen impact of the pandemic reformed the way organisations are structured and managed in most countries (Grint, 2020). Teleworking from home particularly impacts on the education sector. This transformation has compelled the human resources management to renegotiate how employees work in these unprecedented conditions. For example, online learning allows lecturers, seminars, consultations, and submissions to be conducted online.

2.4.1 The impact of COVID-19 on the education sector

Although teleworking from home can be flexible and autonomous, it can also lead to a disproportionate work-life balance. A study by Vyas and Butakhieo (2020) points out that working from home has some disadvantages, such as distractions, the lack of a good working environment, and detachment. In other words, teleworking from home can make it impossible to achieve a balanced relationship between work and life for employees while attending to work-related matters, since academic employees are required to attend to family-related issues too, including taking care of children and elders, and attending to household chores (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Since teleworking from home has blurred the lines between the work and non-work roles in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, it clearly makes a work-life balance difficult to achieve.

Of course, online learning allows lecturers, seminars, consultations, and submissions to be conducted online. While these factors may be true, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in South African universities is challenging, largely due to the fact that a great deal of the set curriculum was not planned for online transmission (Motala & Menon, 2020; Hodges *et al.*, 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Adding to that, a good proportion of the lecturers are not properly equipped for the use of digital resources and/or online learning (Motala & Menon, 2020; Quezada *et al.*, 2020), while many students are lacking the resources necessary to access online learning and/or do not have suitable devices (Motala & Menon, 2020; Rahiem, 2020a,b; Assunção & Gago, 2020). Other studies suggest that some lecturers and learners are unfamiliar with the tools and resources available made to them at such short notice on digital platforms and in online tutorials (Motala & Menon, 2020; Aliyyah *et al.*, 2020; Huber & Helm, 2020). As a result, the rapid transition from campus-based activities to working and learning at home is creating many socioeconomic challenges not only for the South African education sector but also for other countries around the world (Schiff *et al.*, 2020; Huang *et al.*, 2020; Farooq *et al.*, 2020; Kapasia *et al.*, 2020; Sobaih *et al.*, 2020). A 2020 study found that many public universities in

developing countries lack the appropriate online learning management systems that encourage students and lecturers to interact (Sobaih *et al.*, 2020). All these challenges and/or barriers could therefore make adjusting to working remotely particularly demanding and challenging for academics and thereby impact on academics' work-life balance during the pandemic. Similarly, another study has demonstrated that this rapid change to online learning has exposed some major barriers in the Chinese government's policy on the COVID-19 pandemic education such as 1) there not being enough time to prepare the learning material to allow educators to adjust to online classes, and preparing the learning material takes a lot of time; 2) as a result of the mandate concerning social distancing, both educators and students have become frustrated and helpless; and 3) engaging and motivating students during a long period of distance learning is especially critical as the drop-out rates are higher than in traditional classroom environments (Huang *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, understanding these challenges and how academics navigate these challenges relative to their work-life balance would be instrumental in promoting and facilitating quality well-being and job satisfaction among academics in South Africa and other parts of the world.

2.4.2 The impact of disasters on employment (livelihood)

Natural disasters are a disruption of the world that negatively affect the economy, the environment, agriculture and our livelihoods – particularly for employees who are required to work during these critical times. Nagamine *et al.* (2016) argue that disasters have the potential to expose employees to dangerous working conditions that are inhumane and emotionally exhausting. Similarly, Logue *et al.* (1981) are of the view that great stress arising from disasters has a long-term effect on health, leading to mortality and morbidity. The most frequent disasters include earthquakes, tornados, etc. However, the world is undergoing the COVID-19 pandemic which was classified as a global catastrophe in early 2020 (WHO, 2020b).

Maintaining a sound work-life balance among their employees is significant to all organisations, since such a balance contributes to job satisfaction and productivity in both the work and the non-work domains. However, when conditions are abnormal, as with COVID -19, maintaining a sound work-life balance is impossible. The findings of a study conducted in Europe in 2020 show that most employees are happy with working from home, but some reported being unhappy. Furthermore, their study indicated that one of the advantages of working from home during lockdown is that individuals are kept safe from contracting the virus, they can take food breaks in between sessions of work, and they can work flexibly. However, the disadvantages include having

poor working conditions at home and having inadequate working materials (Ipsen *et al.*, 2021). Of course, the findings of this study are valid, but they cannot be generalised to developing countries with limited technological advancement.

2.4.3 The COVID-19 and work: COVID-19 and its impact on work

Recent evidence suggests that in the wake of the coronavirus, several businesses across the globe have been affected, which has led to drastic changes in their operations (Kniffin *et al.*, 2021). Kaushik and Guleria (2020) hold the view that working from home is inevitable because of the coronavirus restrictions such as social isolation and distancing. This means that most employment activities (in the public sector) have been shifted to virtual platforms with employees working remotely from home. Similarly, Vyas and Butakhieo (2020) state that due to the drastic changes imposed by the coronavirus businesses had no alternative other than to change to working remotely. Also, they indicate that working from home is not suitable for people who are living in small houses, as it requires a space conducive to performing the daily tasks of the workers profession. However, recent research has also established that teleworking from home requires discipline in terms of setting boundaries between work and home (Kniffin *et al.*, 2021; Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). Furthermore, several authors are of the view that post-COVID-19, organisations will be prone to shift from office-based working to full-time working from home. As a result, some scholars concur that employees with strong educational backgrounds are likely to continue working from home (Bick *et al.*, 2020; Mongey *et al.*, 2020). These results exemplify how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected employment prospects and the labour market in general.

2.4.4 The COVID-19 and its impact on family life

More recent work has highlighted that closure of schools because of COVID-19, which is regarded as disturbing by parents, and which impacts on family life (Bhamani *et al.*, 2020). Drawing from the work of Cluver *et al.* (2020), it is evident that parents are unable to work from home while taking care of children, and the situation is worse in families with low income because their homes are crowded. Similarly, Karki *et al.* (2020) are of the view that parents are affected by COVID-19 in terms of the increased responsibility of working from home and taking care of children, coupled with the fact that there is no access to psychological support services due to the COVID-19 restrictions. In their view, schools are important to children since they help them to

manage their time and to do assignments on time, which cultivates a healthy balance between the work and non-work domains. This is a clear indication that parents across the globe are experiencing the stress that is associated with managing the household during social distancing and restrictions to outdoor activities. Thus, some scholars argue that the economic crises associated with COVID-19 have led to a greater decline mental health and stress to parents, which contribute to aggression, abuse, and yelling at children (Bhamani *et al.*, 2020; Cluver *et al.*, 2020; Karki *et al.*, 2020). Lu *et al.* (2017) define the work-family conflict as an inter-role conflict that is caused by being unable to balance family responsibilities with work pressures.

Already, previous research has established that work-life conflicts occur when one is experiencing difficulties in finding a balance between work responsibilities and non-work responsibilities or roles such as leisure and family responsibilities (Ojo *et al.*, 2014). An Irish study, for example, has found that work-family conflicts occur when the work activities conflict with the family activities (Kluczyk, 2013). The opposite is the case with family-work conflicts. These may develop when family obligations interfere with work duties (Kluczyk, 2013). Additionally, Nurisman and Sampurna (2019) mention that work-family conflict can also lead to stress and depression, both of which have negative effects on mental health. These scholars also demonstrate that women (in employment, as against unemployed women) are more likely to be affected by the conflict between work and family (with more stress levels) since they are required to perform their work and their home roles simultaneously (Nurisman & Sampurna, 2019; Kluczyk, 2013). They further highlight that conflict between work and life (family) will always exist because of their interdependence. However, this can be manageable if one can allocate an equivalent amount of time to family and work engagement. There is no doubt that a work-life balance creates a positive or negative outcome, but the idea is to approach it in a way that maintains an individual's career, family, and personal needs in a harmonious way (Nurisman & Sampurna, 2019; Kluczyk, 2013). Hence, these scholars argue that work and family are important components of an individual's wellbeing (Nurisman & Sampurna, 2019; Kluczyk, 2013).

2.4.5 The Impact of COVID-19 on employees' wellbeing

A good working environment, health, financial security, and safety at the workplace are elements of employees' well-being. Thus, several scholars argue that employees' well-being is inclusive of both social well-being and physical well-being. For example, Celma *et al.* (2018) hold a view that employees' well-being combines physical health and social health. Similarly, Rath and Harter

(2010) assert that social wellbeing is defined as having strong interpersonal relationships and loving people, whereas physical wellbeing refers to good health and energy to perform all daily tasks in the workplace. Therefore, working in an unhealthy work environment can lead to poor work results and poor performance in other areas (e.g. personal life and/or family life), and can ultimately end up causing discord between one's work and one's personal life. A recent study by Karkoulian *et al.* (2016), has also established that the work-life balance has an impact on employees' well-being. Because the COVID-19 pandemic has put employees under strain and stress due to the changes made in organisational practices, including working remotely from home, this raises questions about the quality of the work-life balance at this time. Consequently, Bhumika (2020) is of the view that employees probably have difficulties in achieving a work-life balance during COVID-19, and this could lead to conflict between work and home. Thus, there is a struggle between creating and maintaining boundaries between work and home, suggesting that it is unlikely that one will be able to achieve a work-life balance under abnormal circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic – especially for those employees who are working remotely for the first time and experiencing family-related demands.

2.4.6 The impact of COVID-19 on stress related to the work-life balance

The benefit of a sound work-life balance is that it reduces stress and health issues, which in turn leads to greater job satisfaction and fewer problems - ultimately resulting in greater engagement and productivity in the organisation (Bell *et al.*, 2012). Zhang *et al.* (2012) argue that emotional stress from any domain of life can affect an individual's health and so reduce the quality of the work-life balance. In fact, they contend that if a person continuously struggles to meet the demands of a given role because another role interferes with it, he or she is likely to experience a high level of psychological distress. Of course, work has its demands, which include deadlines, and meeting all these demands requires psychological commitment (Jones & Taylor, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified recent research on the impact of job pressure on the work-life balance and productivity during the pandemic lockdown. For example, one study conducted during the pandemic has found that stress incurred by employees due to job demands can affect the work-life balance and productivity of workers (Tran *et al.*, 2020). Their findings show that stress at the workplace impairs employees' health and well-being, which affects business productivity and profit. Correspondingly, the WHO (2020b) argues that it is most likely for employees to feel under pressure during the COVID-19 period, mainly because they have never been in this situation

before. Work stress was a common condition that significantly impacted on employees' well-being even before the pandemic (Bell *et al.*, 2012), but the impact of work stress during the pandemic is quite different because of the specific circumstances. The work-life balance and work-life conflict existed before COVID-19, but COVID-19 has worsened the condition. Thus, experiencing stress at the workplace during the pandemic has put a significant strain on family relations (Tran *et al.*, 2020).

The unprecedented changes that have been brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, where employees are working remotely, which is different from being physically available at the office, have contributed to the disturbance of the work-life balance, and because the work-life balance is significant to employee's level of productivity and organisational throughput, it is also important for employers to put mechanisms in place to assist employees to achieve a sound work-life balance. For example, the WHO (2020b) has advised employers to ensure that employees are protected from chronic stress or poor mental health during the COVID-19 response. The WHO has also recommended implementing flexible schedules for employees who are directly impacted by the pandemic, or have a family member who has been infected (WHO, 2020b). According to Bhumika (2020, p. 714), "considering the potential of the employees experiencing emotional exhaustion, an organization could consider arranging for the provision of an online counselling service by a trained professional psychiatrist." This initiative could assist employees to maintain their emotional health.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

There is a rising concern about the quality of the work-life balance of public sector employees following the lockdown and social distancing mandates that has set millions of workers to working remotely in 2020 and beyond. By integrating the work design perspective and spillover theory for the study, the researcher hopes to understand the impact of virtual work (the characteristics of remote work) on individuals' experiences of remote working during the pandemic lockdown. In this section the researcher therefore reviews previous research on the work design and spillover theory to determine the need for exploratory research when assessing the quality of the work-life balance among academic staff in South Africa during the pandemic lockdown.

2.5.1 Conceptual framework: the work design and spillover theory on remote working

Among the most influential models of remote work in existing literature are the work design and spillover theory. In the following paragraphs of this section, the researcher discusses three types of work design and spillover theory which influence an employee's work-life balance. This section is based on a literature review.

According to the first approach, intensive remote working (whether mandated or not) is seen as an independent variable that influences the workforce's overall productivity and quality of work-life balance, while perceived work characteristics are seen as mediators, suggesting that intensive telecommuting from home is an independent factor that modifies other work characteristics. This approach prides itself on identifying which types of jobs are most suitable for remote working. In other words, a major aspect of this approach is identifying the jobs that are best suited to remote working. A study conducted by Golden and Gajendran (2019) shows a correlation between intensive remote work and job performance in those with low social support at work. On the other hand, the spillover theory emphasises that experiences in one realm of one's life can affect other realms (Du *et al.*, 2018; Bell *et al.*, 2012). This is important to the research project because it allows the researcher to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on the work-life balance of academic lecturers at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. One of the greatest strengths of spillover theory is that it explains both negative and positive spillover and how experiences are transferred from one domain of life to another (Sok *et al.*, 2014). As a result, Golden and Veiga (2005 p.303) argue that “whether individuals can fully benefit from telecommuting is likely to be influenced by how they must perform their work activities”, suggesting that the possibility of telecommuting exists only for certain kinds of jobs (Pinsonneault & Boisvert, 2001). This approach determined how to overcome the mixed effects of teleworking by using employees' work characteristics as criteria. The approach emphasises the need for managers to allow workers to work from home where appropriate to attain a desirable work-life balance – thereby promoting the quality of the work performance (Golden & Veiga, 2005). Several studies have been conducted over the years to support this argument (e.g. Golden & Gajendran, 2019; Perry *et al.*, 2018; Golden *et al.*, 2006; Golden & Veiga, 2005). These studies have demonstrated that the impact of teleworking remotely from home on employees' wellbeing (work-life balance) also depends on other work characteristics such as job autonomy and task interdependence. In this regard, the first approach assumes that workers' work characteristics will not be impacted on by teleworking practices.

Instead, managers can use these characteristics as constraints when determining the policy on remote working.

In the second approach, work characteristics are regarded as mediating between the independent factor of telecommuting from home and the dependent variables (employee outcomes and experiences), thus assessing how virtual work impacts on employees through shaping the way they perceive the nature of their work. For instance, one study demonstrated that an individual's degree of remote work was negatively correlated with the level of perceived social support, thereby resulting in more emotional exhaustion while working remotely (Vander Elst *et al.*, 2017). In other words, engaging in an intense remote work culture changes the autonomy and demands of work, as well as the relationship aspect of work, thereby affecting the work experience for employees. Similarly, the spillover theory argues that the behaviour, attitudes, and emotions of an individual produced from work and personal life have the potential to overflow into one another (Du *et al.*, 2018; Bell *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, both the first and second methods analyse the entire work of the employee – both aspects of remote work and non-remote work – with the independent variable reflecting the level of contribution made by each factor to the overall work.

On the other hand, the third approach focusses on just the experience of working remotely. Researchers taking this approach tend to be focussed on both the virtual and remote work characteristics that influence the work experiences of remote workers. In some cases, social support can help remote workers' ability to overcome social isolation during the time away from the office (Bentley *et al.*, 2016). Thus, it is clear that in the third approach, work design and spillover analysis have a different meaning from in the first and second approaches. This is simply because it focusses on the working conditions of the employee when at home (what does the employee's work look like when working from home). In this school of thought, telecommuting is viewed as a "context" instead of an independent variable, which is based on the socio-technical system perspective (Trist, 1981; Trist & Bamforth, 1951), suggesting that the characteristics of remote work should be incorporated into the new model of work to achieve workplace satisfaction and well-being (work-life balance) (Bélanger *et al.*, 2013). This approach further suggests that teleworking characteristics that do not adequately meet the task and individual needs may also result in unintended outcomes. A work-to-family conflict can result, for instance, if teleworkers' demands are too high and they have limited autonomy. Drawing from the study of Kinnunen *et al.* (2006, p. 149), "negative work-to-family spillover was most strongly related to low well-being at work (job exhaustion) and next strongly to low general well-being (psychological distress),

whereas the negative family-to-work spillover was associated with low well-being in the domain of family (marital dissatisfaction)". The spillover theory proves especially useful to this approach because COVID-19 and the measures taken to prevent its spread clash with the usual lives and activities of the employees – particularly work and family. Additionally, this had led to depression and loneliness, which subsequently affect the domains of both work and life. The spill-over effect is useful for this study as it aims to explore the effects of COVID-19 on the work-life balance. In any case, the lockdown alone causes severe problems for employment, production, demand, and overall performance.

2.5.2 Conceptualisation and summary in the context of the current research

Two of the approaches described above can be used to evaluate, analyse and develop telecommuting policy before the COVID-19 pandemic. An important implication of these approaches is that decision-makers should offer such policies or work models to individuals and jobs that require them. In 2020, however, telecommuting was not an option. Instead people were forced to work from home because of the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, regardless of their preferences, abilities, and work characteristics (e.g., field of work). Thus, it appears that remote working or telecommuting from home has become the "new normal" in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic – thereby rendering the third approach highly significant.

Central to the third approach is that it uses a context-based approach to analyse telecommuting (Bailey & Kurland, 2002) by focussing on the positive and negative associations between telecommuting features and working experiences. Thus, the third approach has significant practical and theoretical implications which are particularly useful for evaluating and analysing teleworking experiences in the context of Coronavirus.

From a theoretical perspective, telecommuting from home can have variable effects based on the nature of the work (Morganson *et al.*, 2010). As rightly argued by Johns (2006), context is “a shaper of meaning”. It is clear from this that some work characteristics might have developed in a unique context as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, during the 2020 pandemic lockdown and distancing scenario, connecting with colleagues, friends, and families might mean something different from social connection in the normal workplace as we once knew it. In other words, even a little social support can have a substantial positive impact on someone in a time of crisis when social resources are limited. For instance, social support is said to play a decisive role

in preventing suicide during COVID-19 lockdowns (Kawohl & Nordt, 2020). A striking aspect of the current context (the new normal) is work autonomy, in the light of the scarcity of social resources available to workers. Using Warr's (1994) vitamin model, it follows that too much of a good thing can have negative effects (or spillovers). Thus, a greater sense of autonomy may also result in workers being distracted by family obligations and therefore not being able to concentrate on their work at home, thereby reducing workplace productivity, efficiency, and impairing the work-life balance.

The first and second approaches adopted in previous studies were premised on the notion that working from home was optional and identified which types of jobs and individuals could work remotely successfully. Unfortunately, following the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, working from home is not optional, as people are forced to work from home to curb the spreading of the virus, so that some scholars believe that some jobs will likely become permanently remote due to the pandemic lockdown (Syth & Greer, 2020). Therefore, by focussing on the characteristics of teleworking and its associated outcomes, the third approach could offer valuable information to human resource managers in the quest to boost workers' job productivity, performance, and wellbeing (their work-life balance), consistent with the current context (the new normal). The researcher has therefore adopted the third approach and used qualitative methods to explore the challenges and experiences of UKZN academic staff working remotely following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

An overview of the literature relevant to this study was presented in this chapter. The chapter also pointed out some of the gaps in some of the findings in that literature. Finally, the theoretical framework that underpins this study has been presented in detail in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

While the previous chapter reviewed the literature regarding the phenomenon under study and provided the theoretical framework for it, this chapter focusses on adopting a more comprehensive approach for investigating the phenomenon. The study used a qualitative research methodology for understanding the relationships between work and non-work responsibilities among academics during the pandemic lockdown in South Africa. As such, a critical paradigm was employed by the researcher as the medium of investigation. Accordingly, this chapter outlines how this study was conducted, as well as its method and procedures. The research paradigm and design are described in this chapter. Next, the chapter describes the site of the research, the population, the sampling, the data collection procedures, the data analysis, the ethical considerations, and finally, the trustworthiness and credibility of the research.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Park *et al.* (2020,p.690), “Research paradigms guide scientific discoveries through their assumptions and principles”. This is a clear indication that understanding a research paradigm through which research is carried out is paramount for every research project. A research paradigm assists researchers to identify gaps and support findings. Thus, Guba and Lincoln (2005) describe a research paradigm as a net containing ethics axiology, epistemology, ontology and methodology, which act as beliefs that guide the implementation and facilitation of a research project. The researcher framed the study in a constructivist paradigm, which is discussed in detail below. The human way of thinking and the diversity of ways of explaining reality have led to the development of many paradigms of research. That being said, the most challenging aspect of this study was defining and committing to a single paradigm in the face of the availability of so many various paradigms. However, the constructivism paradigm is adopted as the research paradigm guiding this study. Because it possesses unique tools designed to comprehend the subjective world of human experience, constructivism, whose mother is interpretivism, was considered vital when conducting this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In addition to exploring the individual and social significance of human characters, interpretivism is an approach that examines culture and society

through participation (Chowdhury, 2014). The interpretivist paradigm and/or the constructivist paradigm attempt to gain insight into the minds of those being studied in order to uncover and interpret insight into their perspectives. Here, the researcher makes every effort to understand the experiences and/or worldviews of the participants rather than her own. In an interpretive approach, the only focus is the thoughts of the respondents, the perceptions, the experiences, and the feelings that have an impact on what is being observed and recorded by the researcher (Bunniss & Kelly, 2010). Hence, the interpretivist paradigm and the constructivist paradigm share the central principle that reality is a social construct (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In other words, it is a research method that understands people's knowledge as being socially constructed. As a result, the interpretivist and/or constructivist philosophical paradigms do not allow theory to precede research, but rather enable it to be grounded in the information gained from the research process (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Ontology is the study of reality and the human experience of society. It is a systematic view of what exists and what reality is (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Generally speaking, the interpretivist and/or constructivist view of knowledge is that it is socially constructed and that it is meant as a means to make sense of the world rather than to answer a question. It requires an understanding that reality can be interpreted through a variety of lenses and that interpretations emerge from analyses based on alternatives and non-univocal interpretations (Cordella & Shaikh, 2006). This study assumes that the reality of the work-life balance relative to working remotely from home during the pandemic is different for different people and that therefore people from different cultures and backgrounds will have different opinions. On the topic of epistemology, the interpretivist and/or constructivist paradigm is concerned with the manner in which reality is learned, experienced, and understood. To put it another way, epistemology is how we perceive the relationship between knowledge and ourselves (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

This paradigm is deemed useful for this study as it has adopted a qualitative research method to understanding the work-life balance experiences of academics during the pandemic lockdown and the consequent social requiring that academics work remotely from home. Honebein (1996) characterised constructionism as a theory that posits that people experience things and then reflect on them as they construct their understanding and knowledge of reality. This is based on the understanding that people construct or form meanings through what they experience and learn through experiences (Duckles *et al.*, 2019; Cashman *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, for constructivists meaning is constructed through experiences. Put differently, learning is the application of the acquired knowledge in real-life settings. Thus, this school of thought asserts that learning does not

just happen by lecturing or observing, but also when the learner develops knowledge through direct experience and experimentation (Adom *et al.*, 2016; Kalender, 2007). This is very important to this study because the best and only way of understanding the work-life balance experience of academics during the pandemic is to study the learned experiences and reflections of those who experience the events themselves. Interpretivist and/or constructivist theoretical paradigms function as a framework for understanding and analysing the knowledge derived from various experiences of work-life balance during the pandemic. Additionally, these theoretical frameworks enable the researcher to explore issues from the perspective of the participants. Of course, the interpretivist and/or constructivist philosophical paradigm is significant for shaping the entire research process of this study – thus, the researcher was able to gather insights from the participants about the topics relevant to the study. Interpretivism and/or constructivism place a high value on the reality of subjective lived reality, which means that existence is not something objective (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher therefore conducted semi-structured and in-depth interviews as part of a qualitative method of generating data for this study.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research methodology² is a method of collecting and analysing data in order to answer a research question systematically (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). A research design, as described by Akhtar (2016), holds all the elements in a research project together. It is an outline of what is to be done. In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2011; 2005; 1994) argue that the methodology a researcher chooses is determined by the research question and phenomena studied. The strategy or methodology employed in any given research is to be utilised as a means of answering the research question(s). This study seeks to understand how COVID-19 has affected the work-life balance of the academic staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), College of Humanities, which is situated in Glenwood and Pinetown, EThekweni. Accordingly, the following questions guided the choice of the study's research design:

1. How does COVID-19 affect the work-life balance of academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
2. What factors contribute to the work-life balance or imbalance of academics during COVID-19 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
3. What mechanisms are being employed by UKZN to assist academics to achieve work-life balance during COVID-19 ?

² A method of data collection and of the analysis of the data collected for the research (Neuman, 2014).

4. What kind of support have academics received from their family members during COVID-19 ?

It is therefore critical that the researcher employs a research methodology that is suitably for appropriately answering the above research questions. This researcher chose to adopt a qualitative approach as a methodology since the use of this research approach would generate an understanding and interpretation of meaning relative to the teleworking experiences of academics' work-life balance during the pandemic, and would generate rich, detailed data for this study. According to Bless *et al.* (1995), qualitative research provides in-depth descriptions of people's lived experiences and social contexts that contribute to or diminish their quality of life and employment. This method allows researchers to document both the verbal and written responses to a phenomenon. A qualitative study allows researchers to grasp the social and cultural experiences of participants and be enlightened by them. This includes the events of daily life, how individuals behave towards one another, and how they behave in social groups.

Various scholars define the qualitative research approach as being naturally inductive and allowing the researcher to explore the meanings attached to the phenomenon being studied (Mohajan, 2018; Levitt *et al.*, 2017; Bahari, 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Weischedel *et al.*, 2005). Bahari (2010), for example, points out that qualitative research is inductive - meaning that it is based on observing and developing a theory based on observations of empirical data. A qualitative research approach is one that collects, gathers, and analyses non-numerical data in order to evaluate and interpret social phenomena through the study of particular populations, places, or events (Punch, 2014). Following the same line of argument, McGuirk and O'Neill (2016, p248) assert that "qualitative research seeks to understand the ways people experience the same events, places, and processes differently as part of a fluid reality; a reality constructed by them through multiple interpretations and filtered through multiple frames of reference and systems of meaning-making." In qualitative research the main focus is on an individual's lived experiences, which are presented in thoughts, ideas, and perceptions (Ohman, 2005). Qualitative research permits flexibility throughout the research process. It may therefore involve using multiple methods, such as interpretive or naturalistic approaches to the phenomenon being investigated (Miller *et al.*, 2018; Gentles *et al.*, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hill *et al.*, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An investigator can thus develop a holistic grasp of a topic by taking advantage of the multifaceted nature of qualitative research. In other words, it examines or studies local knowledge about a given subject matter (phenomenon), the impact of

events and programmes, the meanings and relationships people have, as well as the social processes and contextual factors that impact on the phenomenon under study.

3.4 RESEARCH SITE

The University of KwaZulu Natal comprises five (5) campuses including the Edgewood, Howard College, Medical School, Westville, and Pietermaritzburg campuses (the latter being also known as the PMB campus), each with its distinct characteristics. With four of the campuses situated in the eThekweni municipality and one of the campuses situated in the uMgungundlovu municipality, UKZN is ranked 4th among the top universities and colleges in South Africa, according to international rankings (International Rankings, 2021). The information of this research study were collected from academics only at the College of Humanities at the Edgewood and Howard college campuses, although the UKZN College of Humanities is present on three campuses Howard College, Edgewood and PMB. Howard College campus is situated in the Glenwood area of Durban, whereas Edgewood campus is in the Pinetown area of Durban.

3.5 POPULATION, SAMPLING AND SAMPLE SIZE

3.5.1 Population and sampling strategy

A study population, according to Sekeran and Bougie (2016), consists of all the elements, individuals, or groups of people, objects, or substances that meet the study criteria and are relevant to the researcher. The total target population for this study was 369 academic staff in the College of Humanities. Academic ranks in south Africa includes lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors , and full professors, as shown in Table.3.1. The inclusion criterion was the limitation to academics staff in the College of Humanities on the Edgewood and Howard College campuses.

Probability sampling and non-probability sampling are two main types of sampling techniques. The non-probability sampling was adopted for this study because of the need to gather quality information from participants who best fitted in with the aim of the study. In comparison with other sampling methods, non-probability sampling is known to be cost-effective and faster to implement (Baker *et al.*, 2013). In using the non-probability sampling approach, the researcher could draw on past field research and observe practices (Baker *et al.*, 2013).

Therefore, a purposive sampling method (a non-probability technique) was used to recruit fifteen respondents. The researcher provided theoretical reasons for deciding on the selection criteria that

complemented the research objectives. The researcher had a specific agenda in mind (Neuman, 2011). Since the study was exploratory, the researcher could select participants based on their interests, to obtain the most useful data for this study (Edwards Jr *et al.*, 2006). Purposive sampling, then, allows the researcher to choose study participants who will complement and enhance the study by providing perspectives on their challenges and experiences.

3.5.2 Sample size

According to the UKZN College of Humanities Handbook (2020), there are 369 academic staff in the college, as shown in Table 3.1. This excludes honorary academics. Hence, the composition of the total target population is as follows: Professors (34), associate professors, (59) senior lecturers (57), and lecturers (219). The researcher estimated a sample of fifteen participants to be sufficient for the study. Therefore, only about 4.07% of the target population (academic lecturers) were recruited for this study. A qualitative study, by its very nature, emphasises quality over quantity, so a small sample was sufficient. Another reason for the limitation was to avoid “unsatisfactory saturation” (O’Reilly & Parker, 2013). The researcher therefore sent out semi-structured interview schedules to the fifteen participants via emails. However, of the fifteen participants recruited for the study, only eleven responded positively – making the study’s response rate 73.33%.

Table 3.1: Summary of the study’s sample

Schools under the College of Humanities	Professor	Associate Professor	Senior Lecturer	Lecturer	Total	Sampled
Applied Social Science	7	5	5	39	56	2
Art	6	10	5	49	70	3
Built Environment and Development Studies	1	3	10	21	35	1
Education	9	21	19	66	115	5
Social Science	9	4	18	32	63	3
Religion Philosophy and Classics	2	16	0	12	30	1

Total	34	59	57	219	369	15
Sampled	1	2	3	9	15	15

3.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The researcher collected primary data³ from the participants using both semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews. These were used since the study aimed to answer important questions regarding how the participants perceived their work-life balance during the pandemic with respect to working from home. Semi-structured interviews are described in simple terms as “conversations in which you know what you want to find out about and so have a set of questions to ask and a good idea of what topics will be covered, but the conversation is free to vary and is likely to change substantially between participants” (Fylan, 2005,p65). In a study such as the current one, where the research questions cannot be narrowly defined, semi-structured interviews or in-depth interviews are suitable (Fylan, 2005). To gain an understanding of how work-life balance affected the participants' experiences during the pandemic, a semistructured interview and in-depth interviews were deemed plausible as qualitative tools (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Rowley, 2012; Louise & While, 1994). In addition, the semi-structured interviews conducted as part of this study offered in-depth insights in regard to the work-life balance related to working from home during the pandemic lockdown. Given the use an open-ended method of data collection, the participants could share their experiences and perceptions, providing sufficient information to lead to a better understanding of the work-life balance of academics in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic.

semi-structured interviews in this study served to give respondents a measure of control over the research process during in-depth interviews, that were done telephonically or digitally. The researcher directed the participants' responses to specific areas of inquiry⁴ during the semi-structured interviews (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The investigator was thus able to employ her expertise to generate detailed information on the topic of the investigation. Lowe (2011) argues that semistructured interviews involve asking open-ended questions relating to identified themes, and interjecting probes designed to elicit more elaborate responses from the participants in the study. Because the use of interview guides is common practice in qualitative research, the

³ “A primary data is an original data which is collected by researchers for a specific research project and purpose” (Goeldner & Richie, 2007).

⁴ The participants' responses were geared toward a particular aspect of their experiences to generate in-depth information and clear descriptions of their experiences or perceptions.

researcher in this case used them to guide the discussion to the issues and topics she intended to examine during the data collection phase. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) contend that interviews permit a researcher to obtain more detailed information from a limited number of participants and are an effective method of gathering more in-depth data. This was an ideal technique to be used for this study since it allowed the primary investigator to delve more into issues that were of significant interest during the telephonic or digital in-depth interviews with the participants. As rightly argued by Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014), qualitative research aims at getting in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon being studied and does not attempt to generalise its results to a broader population.

The participants were contacted either by telephone or by digital medium for the in-depth interviews, depending on their preference. Therefore, the semi-structured interview questions and responses prepared the stage for the telephonic or digital in-depth interviews, and the entire interview was recorded. Here, the telephonic or digital in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to observe the COVID-19 regulations of social distancing. Although this method was cost-effective, the researcher was unable to observe the body language, behaviour and attitude of participants. The data were collected between January and March of 2021.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

A qualitative data analysis process is described by McMillan *et al.* (2006) as an integrated, methodical procedure of organising, categorising, identifying and interpreting data to describe research subject matter, which is integrated in all phases of qualitative research. In qualitative research analysis the subject matter is categorised into patterns, trends, themes and associations (Mouton, 2001). The data analysis attempts to develop an interpretation of the data based on relations among variables, constructs, concepts or deductions from the research that either disprove or support the assumptions that were made before conducting the research. “Analysing qualitative data involves being able to explain and interpret the data, to identify themes, patterns, and codes, to make interpretations, pose critiques and produce theories based on the data” (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, qualitative data must be analysed in such a way that the researcher adequately describes the lived experiences of the participants by assessing how they interpreted their experiences in their natural situation (Bless *et al.*, 1995). Mouton and Marais (1991) argue that phenomena must be broken down into their constituent parts to be understood.

In this study the researcher adopted a thematic analysis (TA) technique. Citing Howitt (2010), Ramaite (2013) argues that TA is a method of analysing how participants express their ideas. TA

can ensure that the data gathered in an interview, or knowledge generated during it, is correctly and precisely organised. Participants' perceptions, meanings, and experiences are characterised by meaningful themes in TA (Clark & Braun, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Taking into account the model developed by Maguire and Delahunt (2017, p354), the following stages should be taken into consideration: “familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for a theme, defining and naming themes, producing the report”. The TA in this study involved pinpointing, assessing and documenting themes or patterns in the transcribed data, which helped the researcher to defining the discourses (themes⁵) associated with a specific research question (Clark & Braun, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2006). The identification of themes is largely up to the researcher's judgment during this phase. A theme's importance depends on its relevance to the research topic and question (Clark & Braun, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2006; Rice & Ezzy, 1999). This study employed a TA technique to analyse the collected data and to understand the work-life balance of South African academics during the COVID-19 pandemic relative to working remotely from home. The study therefore identified different themes rather than providing a definitive answer to the problem. This is not an unusual research outcome in such cases. TA often “involves telling an interpretative story about the data in relation to a research question” (Clarke & Braun, 2014: 6626).

Consequently, after the data for the study had been collected using a semi-structured questionnaire (see **Appendix 1**) and audio recordings obtained during the follow-up in-depth interviews, the data were later transcribed verbatim and analysed using the TA as prescribed by Clarke and Braun, Maguire, and Delahunt, and Rice and Ezzy. The TA technique employed in this study involved a continuous process of reading the collected transcribed data many times to ensure that the concepts had been fully understood and recorded accurately by the researcher. The researcher was this able to gain a better understanding of the participants' ideas and the meanings they had constructed in relation to those ideas. The researcher identified similarities, differences, and ambiguities in the discourses to identify the common constructions and/or meanings. Thereafter, the discourses were deconstructed to extract themes based on how the participants had talked about the different themes that emerged from the dataset. Comprehensive and holistic themes were constructed based on the discourses of the respondents. The researcher also enlisted the help of a research analyst to review the analysed data and ensure that the researcher's findings were accurate. In other words,

⁵ A theme is a specific pattern of responses, meanings, or ideas in the data as they relate to the research question. (Clark & Braun, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2006).

the analysis of the data involved the participation of two people who worked with the raw data to ensure that the research findings corresponded with the participant's viewpoints.

In this study the TA occurred in five phases as follows:

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data

The researcher made herself familiar with the data gathered from the participants through this process. Familiarising herself with the data meant re-reading the transcripts, listening to the audio recordings and watching the video recordings of the interviews, and making notes of what had transpired during them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allowed the researcher to fully understand the participants' viewpoints and better analyse and document them. The zoom, and audio-recorded interviews were replayed and notes were made for further analysis.

Phase 2: Coding

To conduct a TA, verbal recorded interviews should be transcribed to note any possible patterns. This process allowed the researcher to generate or identified reoccurring themes from the dataset while keeping in mind if it relates to the research question(s). This codes were therefore outlined and sometimes highlighted on a section of paper/table. Words were added or subtracted and codes were split or combined (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Clark & Braun, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2014; 2006; Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

Phase 3: Identifying themes

In this phase the researcher analysed the data collected to identify similar topics, ideas, and meanings. A theme could be expressed in the form of a phrase or sentence in order to provide meaning for a code (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Clark & Braun, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2014; 2006; Rice & Ezzy, 1999). This phase also involved forming a thematic map of the collected data through disassembling and reassembling the connections between overlapping themes, and thus indicating the emergence of new ones (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Clark & Braun, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2014; 2006; Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

Phase 4: Defining and naming themes

During this phase the collected data were refined and every theme was further examined to identify its specific significance in the larger data set (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Clark & Braun, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2014; 2006; Rice & Ezzy, 1999). In other words, during this stage of the TA

process the researcher identified common meanings or constructions that developed from the collated data. After identifying these constructions a discourse analysis was conducted to gain an understanding of how each discourse had been portrayed or constructed by the participants. In turn, the researcher examined the text for contradictions, similarities and ambiguities presented by the respondents during the deconstruction process.

Phase 5: Producing the report

As an outcome of the TA process the researcher constructed an overall, comprehensive picture of the participants' discourses or constructions and summarised the findings in a narrative style, attempting to describe the perspectives or concepts of the participants during the pandemic and relate the descriptions to the data collected, using these stages of the TA process for the organisation and interpretation of the collected data.

The coding and analysis process for this study was done manually. While the manual process seemed tedious in some ways, the reading and rereading of the texts nonetheless proved to be efficient (Clark & Braun, 2014; Braun & Clark, 2014; Braune & Clarke, 2006).

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ethical clearance letter for the study was obtained from the UKZN ethics committee which is responsible for research in the human sciences. The UKZN office of the registrar also provided the researcher with the gatekeeper's letter, which permitted the researcher to use human subjects - academic staff in this case. A consent form was also given to the participants. The study's participants volunteered to take part, and the participants were informed of their rights. Each informed consent form was completed and submitted to the researcher for record purposes before the interviews began. The participants were made fully aware of the importance of confidentiality issues and that they could opt out of sharing their information if that was not something they were comfortable with. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities. In terms of storage, the collected data will be stored on a flash drive for reference purposes for a maximum of five years before being disposed of.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY

It is crucial in a qualitative research approach to ensure that the research and its results are of high quality. The notion of generalisability is a fluid concept in qualitative research. Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) posits that trustworthiness is a function of credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability. Quantitative researchers take pride in whether their results hold up over time (reliability) and whether they measure the outcome they were seeking (validity), but qualitative researchers dispute the idea that results are generalisable and contend that meaning is contingent, hence no two people are going to experience the same phenomenon in the same way (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Of course, in qualitative research the scrutiny of trustworthiness is crucial to ensuring reliability and validity (Golafshani, 2003). This entails that a research study must provide results that are reliable and valid. In achieving this, the results need to be checked and tested until it can be proven that they are authentic. Validity becomes very critical when a researcher is researching interactions and in-depth information in the lenses of life events and livelihood (Golafshani, 2003). As a result, data and findings from qualitative research cannot be generalised across different situations because of the multiplicity of the conditions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A researcher's ability to convey enough detail and meaning to the reader to interpret the content of his or her qualitative research is a sign of validity in qualitative research (Smythe, 2012; Mouton & Marais, 1991). Scholars contend that the amount of information provided by the researcher and the processes through which the results are met can also determine the degree of trustworthiness of a qualitative research process (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). In other words, validation needs to be transparent as to how data is collected and analysed.

Additionally, for qualitative research to be more credible, the reviewers should check the consistency of both the process and the product (Hoepfl, 1997), while Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014, p253) states that dependability is the “quality of integration that takes place between data collection method, data analysis and theory formulated”. There was consistency in the interview process during the data collection in this study from participant one to participant eleven. The same questions were asked of all of them. The findings were all based on the participants’ responses. Additionally, the researcher enlisted the help of an analyst from a research team to ensure that both the process and results of the study were consistent in line with what Hoepfl prescribes. Similarly, to ensure the quality of the research and the results, the study was supervised by a supervisor throughout.

On confirmability, Anney (2014), argues that the extent to which a researcher's findings can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers is the characteristic of confirmability. Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) asserts that confirmability refers to how the findings and interpretation of a study are supported by the data collected. In summary, the trustworthiness of qualitative research is contingent on the transparency with which the research was conducted. In order to increase the reliability of this study's research findings, it was also considered necessary to use enough

verbatim quotations. Accordingly, in order to provide the reader with a better understanding of how the data were collected and interpreted, the researcher included direct quotations from the original data in the final report. (Bless *et al.*, 1995).

3.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

In this chapter the researcher has given a detailed presentation of the research methodology used for the study. Starting with the research paradigm and the approach adopted, the researcher described how these methods are appropriate for the study. In addition, the data collection methods and the reasons for selecting one method over another were described. The steps that were followed while collecting and analysing data were described in the chapter as a guide and a reference.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of this research is to look into how COVID-19 influenced academics' work-life balance in South Africa. Thus, the study focussed on understanding the work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown by examining the experiences of academics who work remotely from home. The researcher presents and discusses results of the study in this chapter. The chapter begins by assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work-life balance of UKZN academics. This is followed by a representation of the factors contributing to the work-life balance or imbalance of the academics during the pandemic lockdown. The chapter further examines the mechanisms used by the employer to help academics to attain a desirable work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown. Thereafter the chapter assesses the role of family members' support given to the participants while teleworking from home. Finally, the chapter discusses the research findings relative to existing literature.

4.2 EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF ACADEMICS AT UKZN

The advent of the Coronavirus pandemic has forced a large part of the South African Higher Education Sector employees to work remotely from home. This ensured the continuation of “business as normal”. This section builds on these issues and moves on to explore the non-work performance of UKZN academics and the stress or challenges experienced during the pandemic lockdown as well as the participants’ perceptions of their work-life balance during the pandemic. In summary, this section presents the results of the investigation into the effects of teleworking from home during the 2020 pandemic lockdown and its implications for work-life balance.

4.2.1 The effect of COVID-19 on academics’ careers

The purpose of this theme is to understand how COVID-19 has affected the academics’ career. This question was motivated by the fact that the pandemic has changed the work processes of institutions of higher education, including the staff having to adapt to the new normal, which is working from home. The participants clearly described how working remotely during the

pandemic has had a significant impact on their physical and psychosocial wellbeing and their careers. While most of the participants reported that their careers had been negatively affected during the pandemic lockdown, a handful of the respondents associated the pandemic lockdown with a positive effect. These are some of the responses received:

It has changed a lot. We all know that not all homes are conducive for this change, so for me the impact now was, getting used to, I had to change my room into an office setup since we do not really have a study room at home. (Respondent 9, January 2021).

The global pandemic has been devastating and stressful. I feel as if the pandemic has affected my career which has a short-term impact and potentially a long term one as well. As an academic I have a keen interest in research – especially research that involves going out into the field and collecting data. Due to the pandemic, the restrictions imposed, and the risks involved I was unable to continue with my research-related interests and activities to some extent. So, in the short term, while trying to establish myself further I was restricted in terms of research activities. I am unable to pursue independent and joint-research activities and as a result I lost out on valuable time that I could have capitalised on to build networks and collaborations – both intra and interdisciplinary. So, my output was negatively affected, and I feel that if we were not amidst a global pandemic, I would have achieved much more. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

COVID-19 has affected my love for being an academic and helping students. The part I enjoy the most with being in an academic environment is engaging with students, because it is different to engage with students online and in a personal context. It has affected my schedule greatly because now in an environment where I should be focussing on my family, children, wife, I have to focus on multiple things such as answering emails, communicating with students, colleagues, prepare meetings, Zoom, engage in conferences, write papers in an environment that I believe is not conducive for an academic. (Respondent 7, January 2021).

I'd honestly say because of online learning I do more of students work than I do with my research activities. I felt so discouraged because I didn't touch my PhD study at all. I am behind to a point I am finishing the work I had to do last year now in January. (Respondent 9, January 2021).

The data collected demonstrates how academics at UKZN are facing complication and stress as they try to juggle work and personal obligations while working remotely from home. For academic mothers, instead of writing papers and focussing on maintaining their career outputs prior to the pandemic, they devote most of their time to caring for their children and doing household chores.

They describe their experiences during the pandemic as struggling to keep their careers on track. As a result, the heavier duties endured during the pandemic lockdowns increase the negative effects on their careers of teleworking from home. Many participants described working from home as a nightmare, overwhelming, challenging and stressful, with work and non-work obligations overlapping, while some participants linked working remotely from home with flexibility, autonomy, improved productivity and performance. Furthermore, many respondents indicated that adapting to the “new normal” and/or online teaching itself were challenging. They also acknowledged that it limits fieldwork and data collection and limits class engagement, which is an important aspect of their careers. This was linked with poor work productivity and performance. Thus, morale, work productivity, and work performance were generally low, and this was often because many of them felt that adapting to the “new normal” and teaching online was very challenging during the pandemic lockdown and was having a negative effect on their careers. These issues were recognised as a significant problem by several respondents. The negative impact on their careers was distressing to the participants. The loss of productivity in terms of research and publications was associated with the negative impact that COVID-19 is having on UKZN academics’ careers. Subsequent findings show that working parents (especially, academic mothers) are particularly vulnerable to pandemic-related disruptions that may compromise their ability to support their families and engage in productive research and publishing. Thus, the fear of a negative impact is greater in vulnerable groups such as working parents (especially mothers) and those with unconducive household conditions.

4.2.2 The impact of COVID-19 on academics’ work-life balance

The widespread adoption of teleworking from home and the arrangements made for remote working during the pandemic have recently been among of the most controversial topics in social sciences. In describing how these changes varied across the whole spectrum of work-life relations during the pandemic lockdown, most of the respondents acknowledged that household environments (or household situations), working long hours, an increased workload, and struggling to maintain a balance between their work and life roles did in fact impact on their work-life balance.

The pandemic definitely upset my work-life balance and there has been a struggle to maintain a balance ever since we started the lockdown. Personally, I feel as if I was more committed to work during the pandemic in comparison to attending to my personal and family responsibilities. Previously, before we entered into the lockdown, I would ensure that I maintained my work-life

balance by dedicating the necessary time to each. For instance, my work week consisted of Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm that was strictly dedicated to my work responsibilities. Non-negotiable. I would also be available during this time for work, consultations, research and whatever else my role required. After 4pm I would leave the office and then dedicate the remaining time for my personal interests and family. This also allowed me to recuperate for the next day of work. I am also furthering my studies, so I ensured that I dedicate a considerable amount of time on my weekends to that. So basically, before the pandemic I had a well-balanced plan and this routine kept me going. I had defined spaces and times for defined activities. However, when the lockdown started, I feel as if I was working much harder at home. I feel like there was no boundary between my work and personal space and the work element of my life overflowed into my personal time that I should have been dedicating to self-care and family responsibility. I feel like because of the challenges that the pandemic brought – especially for the university – we were working extra hard to firstly find solutions to everyday challenges and ensure that we were available and attending to all the issues and challenges that we were presented with. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

I was struggling to balance work and family responsibilities. As a wife, I was expected to perform all my wifely duties, cook for my family, clean and do washing and other household chores. Due to the national lockdown, we had to send our helper home to her children and family, my kids are still young, and they cannot really assist with chores. My husband is also an academic in one of the universities. So, can you imagine the stress. However, my husband was helpful but to a certain extent. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

It has changed a lot. We all know that Not all homes are conducive for this change, so for me the impact now was, getting used to, I had to change my room into an office setup since we do not really have a study room at home. Also making sure that I have proper internet. Even though we had DATA from working but sometimes it was not enough for online teaching. (Respondent 9, January 2021).

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that many respondents perceived the effect of COVID-19 on their work-life balance to be very devastating. Most of them referred to not having a designated space or room as an office as a limiting factor to attaining a desirable work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown. In addition, others also acknowledged that teleworking from home during the pandemic lockdown was not conducive because they were often distracted by having to play other family roles. Many participants described their home settings as not to

being conducive to remote working, since they are still expected to perform their domestic roles while attending to their professional obligations. This is particularly challenging for working mothers. For example, Respondent 8 said that she struggles to strike a balance between work and life since she is expected to perform her “wifely duties” and still must care for her children, who are still young and dependent. This is a classic description of what is called work-family conflict. This suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis is having an impact on the work-life balance of UKZN academics during the lockdown. Most respondents reported that it was difficult to balance work and home during the pandemic lockdown because of longer working hours and a greater work load.

4.2.3 The impact of COVID-19 on academics’ wellbeing

The coronavirus pandemic outbreak has taken a heavy toll on the well-being of employees globally. One of the aims of this study is to describe how it is affecting the wellbeing of UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown. When asked how COVID-19 has affected their wellbeing, some participants responded as follows.

Yes, COVID-19 has affected my emotional well-being, also my finances, as I lost some of my businesses that are not related to academia. (Respondent 2, February 2021).

Yes, employee wellness is of paramount importance to me – as this affects my overall productivity. Some of the major factors that affected my well-being was fatigue, burnout, stress and anxiety. It really was not the easiest to deal with all of this. I did maintain my productivity and I made sure that I was committed to completing all my tasks but the truth of the matter is that beyond all of this I was living in fear – of my friends and family dying. To add to that there was no clarity on the end-point of where we are heading during this pandemic. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

Thank God we got to keep our jobs; however, COVID-19 is emotionally draining. During the lockdown it was worse because I had to spend the whole day with my family. My role before the lockdown was to pick them up from after care at school, my helper would assist with preparing food and other things for the children. Therefore, I was very frustrated and emotionally exhausted. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

Yes, definitely I am for the wellbeing of us because I am working, the transactions were more mentally. It was more tiring, because you constantly had to remain at home, responding to emails check emails and do online classes. I almost felt like it was affecting psychological because of how

we constantly work all the time. Physically, I also get sick often, I was getting the flu half the time. My immune system was weak because I wasn't really resting, so I had to adapt, exercise in the garden, go for a run to sort of balance the stress I was going through. (Respondent 9, January 2021).

Most of the respondents reported increased levels of physical and psychological distress since they started working remotely from home. The specific reasons behind these experiences and/or feelings are plural, but they are all to some extent linked to the inability of UKZN academics to separate work and home spheres during the pandemic lockdown. Many of the respondents claimed that teleworking from home during the pandemic lockdown has increased their workloads, which has resulted in working long hours, thereby resulting in poor physical and mental wellbeing. Respondents in this survey cited poor immune systems, burnout, exhaustion, anxiety, and stress as well as other psychosocial distress as factors affecting their wellbeing while working remotely from home during the pandemic lockdown. As acknowledged by most of the respondents, this is mostly linked to an increased workload and working longer hours. Many respondents also reported that teleworking from home also blurred the boundaries between their work and non-work roles and challenged their work-life balance and as well as their wellbeing during the pandemic lockdown. Thus, this study suggests that UKZN academics were unable to separate their personal and work lives during the pandemic lockdown, which may in turn have had a significant impact on their wellbeing following the Coronavirus outbreak. For working parents, the impact on their wellbeing did not just result from work taking up a lot of time and/or increased workloads, but also from the difficulty of managing work and family life during the pandemic lockdown.

4.2.4 Assessing academics' performance of family duties during COVID-19

Although the long-term effects of the pandemic lockdown on family life cannot be effectively evaluated at this stage, the study also focussed on understanding how UKZN academics perform their family duties during the lockdown. Thus, what follows next are some of the participants' perceptions regarding the effect of COVID-19 on their performance of their domestic duties during the pandemic lockdown.

Luckily for me I do not have any children currently. So, my family responsibilities were mainly centered around caring for my husband and mother – these two are adults so they did not pose so much of a challenge. I do think that my situation would have differed if I had children. I could

continue to care for my family as they were not demanding of me and they understood that I needed to continue with my work schedule. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

I am staying alone, therefore my house chores were the same, nothing hectic, the only difference was that I was home all the time. (Respondent 5, February 2021).

I am the only support system for my family, since it has been a difficult period for me, it became difficult to see to them to my full potential. (Respondent 6, February 2021).

I'm unsure whether I performed well. One minute my phone is ringing while I am having dinner with my family because a student needs assist, I have to supervise students and divide my time because students, students have different topics, and you are expected to supervise at least 5 students. (Respondent 7, January 2021).

It was bad. Luckily, I live with my parents for now, so if I was not cooking. Someone else was able to cook. I was less helpful, even now I am less helpful, for example now I am dealing with marks. I told my parents that today we can go buy take away because they are busy and I will not be able to cook. (Respondent 9, January 2021).

The findings of this study clearly indicate that family life during the pandemic lockdown was one of the most significant roles of UKZN academics while working remotely from home. This presented a lot of challenges, especially for working parents and those living with other family members since family responsibilities became more intensified during this period. As a result, there was often a conflict between family responsibilities and work responsibilities. Some participants described how challenging it was to manage both family and work roles from the same environment. Others said that their family responsibilities were often intersected by work obligations, which often resulted in a conflict between work and family. Respondents with children described their children as being demanding, which often interfered with their work schedules, thereby leading to work-family conflict. On the other hand, those without children reported minimal work-family conflicts. Others even acknowledged that because they do not have children, they were able to maintain a desirable family role as compared to those with children. Living alone was also associated with minimal family responsibilities during the pandemic lockdown. Therefore, the results of this study revealed that how well the participants performed their family responsibilities during the pandemic lockdown was contingent on the composition of their households, their gender, and whether or not they received support from other family members.

4.2.5 Academics' perceptions of work-life balance during COVID-19

It is true that telecommuting from home during the pandemic lockdown curb the spread of the Coronavirus and avoids disruptions in the operation of educational institutions caused by social distancing. While working remotely can be convenient and cost-effective, the pandemic lockdown may have some negative outcomes for employees. For instance, they may have difficulty in balancing work and life. This study seeks to shed light on these issues by describing UKZN academics' perceptions of work-life balance during the COVID-19 .

Life is never balanced. However, during COVID-19 there were so many blurred lines between work and personal time, therefore work and life will balance some days and don't on other days. (Respondent 2, February 2021).

I think this pandemic was both good and bad for work life. Good because it allowed you more space and freedom to interact with your family and pursue your personal interests as well as engage in self-care. That is if your work schedule was not as demanding. However, it was also bad or negative. I do believe that work-life balance was disrupted during this pandemic. We had to transition to working from home, adapt to virtual means of continuing with tasks and change to electronic or online methods. This balance is compounded currently more by stress and fatigue and the boundaries that should have been drawn for what is dedicated to work had been over stepped – many times. This pandemic has then blurred the work-life balance and made it even more unachievable than it was previously. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

It is easy to balance work and life if you are staying alone, with no children and family, basically there isn't much commitment. Therefore, I was able to balance work and my personal life. also, you can perform all duties at the comfort of your home without any conflict. However, I couldn't travel, which is the way I enjoy myself. Therefore, it was easy to balance work and life during COVID-19 . (Respondent 5, February 2021).

I was working 24/7, day and night, responding to emails, marking assignments, and supervising students. There was no cut off time for work which made it hard to allocate time to work and family evenly. There was no boundary line between the two, hence why they were frustrating. At some point I didn't know what I was doing. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

The results pertaining to the perception of work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown show that some of the respondents acknowledged that their working hours during the pandemic lockdown were blurred. Some even added that there was an overlap between their work and life

roles, even though efforts were made to draft out a daily schedule that promotes a smooth flow of daily activities while working remotely from home. Others even went on to argue that regardless of their planning and time management arrangements, there was no balance, there were no boundaries between their work and life roles during the pandemic lockdown, resulting in poor work-life balance among UKZN academics during the pandemic crisis. The above-mentioned challenges are an inevitable outcome of the increased workloads, longer working hours, stress and fatigue, and the irregularities of attending to students' needs. In addition, the simple composition of some households (e.g. not having children, staying alone) was perceived by some respondents as an easy way to balance work and life. Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrate that even though teleworking from home during the lockdown was advantageous to some academics, there is an overwhelming consensus that the COVID-19 pandemic has made the work-life balance even more unachievable than it was before the pandemic.

4.2.6 Academics' experiences of family or work-related stress during COVID-19

The outbreak of the pandemic has forced employees to learn to adapt to and navigate a situation that has never been experienced before and to find innovative solutions for the challenges that are arising in many parts of their operations (their work and family roles). The ability to assess the nature and extent of employees' family-work conflict while they work from home could assist organisations aiming to devise mechanisms aimed at improving and sustaining their wellbeing. Thus, in this study the researcher focussed on evaluating some of the family or work-related challenges UKZN academics are experiencing during the pandemic lockdown while working remotely from home.

Yes, both. However, I do feel like my stress was more work-related than personal. Sometimes my home environment would not be the most ideal situation to continue with work but I had to continue anyway. I feel like I had to mentally prepare myself daily to continue and complete my work. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

These are stressful times for everyone. I think about work every time, so being at work is not different from being at home. Basically we are working 24/7. (Respondent 7, January 2021).

Yes, children are too demanding, and you need to give them undivided attention, yet UKZN has so many deadlines to adhere to. Everything was frustrating during the lockdown. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

Yes, work wise, it was the workload because we are used to teaching large numbers but online platforms are different, therefore it brings a whole new anxiety, marking assignments, marking online is different from marking hard copies. We had to prepare and record videos. It would have been different with students who are from advantaged communities. But most of our students are from disadvantaged communities. Now our students were experiencing several challenges including networks. Some did not attend classes not because they did not want to but circumstances. Therefore, in whatever you do you need to accommodate them. It was stressful for me and as a black lecturer I understand their challenges, however, there are things we cannot change. Some did not have laptops. (Respondent 10, January 2021).

The results of this study reveal that working remotely from home, the conduciveness of the home, and children being too demanding were described as some of the focal points that result in work-family conflict during the pandemic lockdown among the UKZN academics. As a result, many of the participants reported that they were prioritising their work-life over their home-life. Here, many respondents focussed on the long working hours, extreme work pressure, increased workload and work-family conflicts as critical challenges UKZN academics face in their daily lives during the pandemic lockdown. Furthermore, several respondents reported that they worked longer hours beyond their work roles due to their primary domestic and family obligations, thereby affecting their overall wellbeing and work-life balance. Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrate that increased workloads and longer working hours have also fuelled academics' work-family conflicts.

4.2.7 Academics' level of productivity during COVID-19

The relevance of the existing literature on teleworking from home can be questioned in the context of the extraordinary circumstances of the lockdown, especially as it relates to productivity and/or performance. Thus, this study sought to assess and explore the productivity levels of UKZN academics working remotely from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the participants' views are displayed here.

It seems I was more productive during this time than ever before perhaps because of constrained movement. (Respondent 1, February 2021).

My level of productivity was very high on level 5 as I could only leave the house for essential things only. This gave me enough time to spend on writing journal articles and book chapters and

student supervision. It remains the most productive time in my academic life. (Respondent 3, February 2021).

For me I was very productive, however I had to work at night, even after midnight to accommodate all my students, the problem is I had to keep on teaching because not all students attended classes on Moodle. The marking was madness. In terms of supervision. I will graduate 6 students this semester. (Respondent 5, February 2021).

Extremely overwhelming and very low productivity. There has been very little productivity with research in this regard. This affected the financial aspect as well. (Respondent 6, February 2021).

I would say that my productivity was hindered so much. Because I prefer waking up in the morning going to work with a clear mind set to help students, to drive the department towards success, you know, so being at home in an uncondusive environment where I have little children running around hindered my productivity. At home I had to attend to every immediate thing unlike when I am at work someone will attend to it you know. But yeah, when the lockdown started the break was nice. I tried to put in the work but eventually it got straining because of the environment. (Respondent 7, January 2021).

I was productive with teaching, but I didn't publish anything last year. I am only graduating two students, also that is if they make it. I would say the level of my productivity was very low. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

These findings show that some of the respondents described their level of productivity during the pandemic lockdown as being very productive. However, while not mentioned as frequently by academics with good social support, several of the respondents with poor social supports described their productivity level as being poor during the pandemic lockdown because of how they juggle work and life. The reasons for not achieving a good level of productivity and/or performance during the pandemic lockdown are due to the overlapping of work and personal life. Additionally, they added that there was no distinction between work and non-work, which made it difficult to maintain a stable schedule that could result in their achieving a good work-life balance, ultimately leading to higher productivity. For those with good social support or living alone, flexibility and autonomy is a central dimension of their improved level of productivity during the pandemic. Their main causes of their achieving a good work-life balance and higher productivity was their increased flexibility and autonomy, and working from home. Additionally, they claimed that it allowed them to manage their roles effectively in both work and non-work situations.

4.3 FACTORS AFFECTING WORK-LIFE BALANCE DURING COVID-19

Several factors indicate that the pandemic crisis is accelerating the trend of home-based work, perhaps permanently (Bloom, 2020). The possibility of this happening depends partly on how employees perceive working from home during the pandemic lockdown and how it impacts on their work-life balance. Why? Because studies on telework have found that a typical teleworker had a home office, digital devices, and an internet connection even before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Furthermore, even if they worked from home on a regular basis, they could still go to the office in order to complete those tasks that they could not perform from home. Also, they did not have to take care of their children or do household chores during their working hours while teleworking. On the other hand, most people who started working remotely from home at the beginning of 2020 faced very different challenges from those who were already engaged in teleworking prior to the pandemic lockdown. What follows presents the main factors influencing academics' work-life balance or imbalance at UKZN. The main findings of this study demonstrate how the transition to working remotely from home affected both objective and perceived aspects of a desirable work-life balance among UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown.

4.3.1 Technological advancement and its importance during COVID-19

The advent of the COVID-19 crisis has significantly emphasised the importance of technological advancement in all countries. Without such advancement many countries across the globe and many organizations would have experienced a tremendous loss of their workforce during the pandemic crisis. Again, without technological advancement the catastrophic outcomes on both public health and the global economy would have been unimaginably damaging during this crisis. Some respondents gave eloquent accounts of the limitations associated with technological advancement in the country and how this has led to a work-life imbalance during the pandemic lockdown:

Its importance was heightened as well as its limitations. Inequalities became apparent - those with technology and those without – digital inequalities. Poor connectivity affected the delivery of lectures from home. (Respondent 1, February 2021).

Teaching online was difficult at first. Many students did not have materials such as smartphones and laptops. Some did not even have a network or internet in their homes. Also working from home during COVID-19 included assisting kids with their schoolwork, which is demanding. I would

say COVID-19 reached us when we were not ready to offer online classes as the institution. (Respondent 2, February 2021).

Technology is extremely important. Even though I am a young academic you would be surprised to know that I am not as technologically advanced as you may think. I am aware, however I do prefer traditional methods – like hardcopies and physical contact. So this pandemic has taught me that we constantly need to update our knowledge of new methods and systems of doing work and connecting with each other. This allows for more flexibility as well as efficiency. Technology has been my backbone during this time – and had it not been for technology I basically would have gotten absolutely nothing done. Technology really did play an integral role in the continuation of work and it also allowed for a new platform of communication – between students, colleagues and others. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

Technology advancement is important during COVID-19 , however if you are not well-informed you were left out during COVID-19 , the university provided trainings on Moodle and other learning programmes that are useful such as Zoom and Teams. However, the timeframe to learn and understand this new mode of working was little. Technology is good but not for everyone. Yet it is important. Although technology is good and vital, students who are in the rural areas are disadvantaged due to network issues and the affordability of resources. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

The concept of work-life balance and work-life imbalance was described by various respondents in various ways with respect to technological advancement. The results of this study demonstrate that digital skills, access to digital resources, socioeconomic factors, and social inequalities during the coronavirus pandemic lockdown have also fuelled UKZN academics' work-life conflicts (imbalance). In their work-life experience during the pandemic lockdown, UKZN academics described how digital skills, students from disadvantaged communities, students lacking laptops, poor internet connections, and not having sufficient data have a tremendous negative impact on their work-life balance during the lockdown. Many accounts centred on the impact of digital resources such as laptops and quality internet connections – especially from the students' perspective – on the work-life imbalance. In other words, the lack of digital resources was felt by the UKZN academics to have a larger effect on the online learning experience, quality, and performance of the respondents. Furthermore, socioeconomic circumstances also influenced the accounts UKZN academics gave of how most of their students are from disadvantaged communities and therefore cannot afford the digital resources needed for online learning such as

laptops or smartphones. This, they reported has had a negative impact on their experience of online teaching and performance, thereby negatively affecting their work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown.

4.3.2 Academics' perceptions of online learning and working from home during COVID-19

The pandemic lockdown and social distancing have imposed many challenges on the South African education sector, human resource management, and employees. In the wake of school closures and the transition to online learning, many working parents are now managing their families and children during office hours. Juggling online teaching from home, childcare, and family (or personal life) obligations during the pandemic lockdown can also influence the lived experiences and perceptions of academics relative to work-life balance or imbalance. This suggests that adapting to the “new normal” and/or online teaching itself can be challenging. While the experiences and perceptions of UKZN academics about online learning and working remotely from home during the pandemic lockdown are not univocal, most respondents gave eloquent accounts of the challenges they encountered, including descriptions of the physical and emotional distress they experienced:

Online learning is limited by connectivity, and availability and non-availability of electronic gadgets. Online removes the human touch found in face-to-face contact. Illustrations that required drawing could not be presented. Numbers in attendance were small and were dwindling as the lecture progressed. (Respondent 1, February 2021).

Online learning is suitable for students who affords DATA and Wi-Fi, who has laptops or computers in their home. But not good for students who do not have means to buy these. Also, online learning hinders class engagements, debates, and presentations. Also, it does not allow students a chance to consults with us. I still prefer face to face teaching in actual fact. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

Working from home is a problem, my mother is also working at UKZN, but medical school. Working from home was quite awful since I am not staying alone. To be honest there was a clash in terms of space, sometimes we will be running classes at the same time. The online is sort of a problem because not everyone was able to participate. I bought a new laptop, and I was sorted. But it was not nice not seeing students not attending classes because of the lack of resources, so sometimes you had to write a text to students to assist them. Some submitted handwritten assignments. (Respondent 9, January 2021).

I would say we are not ready for online learning, due to the fact that students have different challenges, including the fact that the majority of our students are from disadvantaged homes therefore they cannot perform well without proper resources, the university provided equipment to students, however, how do you use data and laptop in an area where there is no network... We are not ready in a sense that we do things as we go there is no manual of doing things. People who are not exposed to technology would experience challenges. We are not ready as a society at large due to issues such as load shedding, lecturers cannot be expected to conduct tests more than once to accommodate students who are affected by load shedding. (Respondent 10, January 2021).

As indicated by the participants in this study, the Coronavirus pandemic and social distancing have imposed many challenges on UKZN academics. As a result, teleworking from home as a response to the Coronavirus pandemic crisis has given rise to a “new normal” institution and academics have to suddenly deal with it. Here, most participants described that the transition to this “new normal” not only complicates the relationship between the employer (the institution) and the employees (the academics) but also negatively impacts on the relationship between the academic staff and the students. As indicated by the participants in this study, most students were unable to participate in the online learning due to a lack of resources such as laptops and good networks. This is impacting on the work-life balance of many academics in UKZN since they are expected to accommodate every single student – resulting in a greater workload, working round the clock, and poor class participation. The participants also explained that the university was not ready for online learning due to the lack of resources that many students suffered, especially the absence of digital resources. In addition, the fact of working remotely from home, the conduciveness of the home, and children being too demanding were described as some of the factors that were producing work-family conflict during the pandemic lockdown. Another challenge that was reported, especially by working mothers, was the struggle to juggle teaching online and attending to the demands of their children and husbands, who were also at home. Some even went as far as describing working from home as a problem due to the inability of achieving a “balance” between work and family life. Hence, many respondents reported that they were prioritising their work-life over their home-life. Online teaching from home has most adversely affected academics who value social interactions as the centre of their careers. During the pandemic lockdown, all of the participants expressed frustration at the lack of face-to-face class interaction. Also, the lack of direct class engagements with students decreases the level of job satisfaction because of online classes, poor attendance, the lack of digital resources, and poor internet connections, which hinder the possibility of transmitting knowledge and of tailoring

classes to the different students' needs. Many participants identified these issues as a significant obstacle to achieving a work-life balance. Hence the negative impacts they were experiencing.

4.3.3 Changes in workload during COVID-19

Social distancing is one of the most effective preventative measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. By definition, social distancing precludes academics and students from gathering in lecture halls, learning studios, or small-group seminar rooms. As a result, UKZN has quickly transitioned its entire curriculum to online formats in response to the pandemic crisis. Both staff and students are forced into online learning. For the majority, it has been their first time experience of online learning. However, the profound effects of this transition on the workloads of academics have not been critically investigated. Hence, this study seeks to investigate if there have been any changes in the workloads of UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown.

Like I said, I had to work at night because students were not adhering to deadlines due to a lack of resources at home, so the workload increased. (Respondent 5, February 2021).

Yes, I have taken on much more during this time in order to ensure the smooth running of the programmes. Student issues have been numerous. (Respondent 6, February 2021).

The workload was increased drastically as I have mentioned that I work even at night. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

I have already mentioned that the workload was increased due to the unexpected change. (Respondent 10, January 2021).

Already the findings of this study have highlighted how the increased workloads of UKZN academics have negatively impacted on their wellbeing and work-life relations. Some of the respondents said that they had to work long hours due to the increase in workload during the pandemic lockdown. This, they said, resulted in burnout, stress, fatigue, and poor wellbeing. Similarly, in answer to questions about whether there have been any changes in their workloads during the pandemic lockdown, most of the participants in this study indicated that their workloads had increased immensely, and said this resulted in them working long hours. Here, most of their accounts centred on the transition to online learning and how they had to juggle their work and family responsibilities. Engaging simultaneously in online teaching from home, childcare, and family (or personal) obligations also resulted in an increased workload during the lockdown. They also said that it resulted in fatigue, burnout, and psychological distress and impacted on their

wellbeing and ultimately on their work-life balance. Therefore, many respondents focussed on their long working hours, extreme work pressure, poor wellbeing, and work-family conflicts as critical challenges they were facing.

4.3.4 Academics' experience of performing all family-related responsibilities while attending to work activities during the pandemic lockdown

While the idea of working remotely may resonate well with some employees, others may find it very challenging and difficult. As earlier stated, during the pandemic lockdown, working remotely from home is not a matter of choice but is compulsory to all employees (and even to those who were previously working remotely). However, working remotely from home during the pandemic lockdown comes with a set of challenges that are different and unique. Thus, how these challenges impede the working experiences of employees' family- and work-related responsibilities will define the future of working remotely from home. This study therefore investigated the experiences of UKZN academics in performing all their family-related responsibilities while attending to their work activities during the pandemic lockdown.

It has always been a challenge because family requires attention. It cannot be work all the time. (Respondent 1, February 2021).

If I am being honest it was not as bad as others may have experienced – like I mentioned previously – I do not have any children and my husband understood the needs of my job so basically, I was not expected to perform any major commitments during office hours. Occasionally I would be requested for household assistance or care but it was not demanding to the extent where it affected my work productivity. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

I think I had already answered this question, I was able to perform all my roles, I don't stay with my family therefore everything was alright. (Respondent 5, February 2021).

It was extremely difficult and I found it difficult to cope. (Respondent 6, February 2021).

I performed all I had to do, however there was a clash at all times. (Respondent 7, January 2021).

I couldn't perform any family duty without receiving a call from work or with regards to work. The interference was there but I am a wife and a mother at the end of the day. Therefore, I was juggling what I could. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

The findings of this study revealed that performing family-related responsibilities during the pandemic lockdown was almost as challenging as performing work-related responsibilities – especially for working parents. The composition of the academic's households, such as the number of people in the household, their marital status, and whether or not the participant has children were some of the main factors that defined the quality of experiences for the participants in performing their family-related responsibilities during the pandemic lockdown. Reflecting on their experiences of teleworking remotely from home, most of the respondents described how difficult and challenging it was for them to perform all their family-related responsibilities while attending to their work activities. The findings highlighted that childless and single academics had a positive experience of performing all their family-related responsibilities as compared to working parents and those with poor social support. Thus, these results indicate that the ability to effectively perform all family-related responsibilities while attending to one's work responsibilities is contingent on a number of mediating factors like one's household composition, gender, and marital status. The research findings therefore indicate that the balance between performing all family-related work effectively and effectively attending to one's work responsibilities is largely contingent on the composition of the households, the gender, and the marital status of UKZN academics. In conjunction with the increased workloads, the results of this study further suggest that having children, being a mother, and having poor social support limits the ability of some academics to perform all their family-related responsibilities.

4.4 MECHANISMS IN PLACE TO ASSIST ACADEMICS TO ACHIEVE WORK-LIFE BALANCE DURING COVID-19

The unprecedented challenges ushered in by the pandemic crisis today have reshaped the way organisations are structured and managed in South Africa. During these hard times, leadership styles are being transformed, and novel organisational issues are emerging that require innovative and concerted responses. The crisis is drastically reconfiguring the South African higher education sector, employment, education, and care. The findings of this study suggest that academic parents and academic women with caregiving responsibilities experience disproportionate disadvantage. As a result, one can argue that the COVID-19 pandemic is providing a context in which the South African higher education sector is evaded its responsibility to ensure academic parents' (especially academic mothers') full participation in the workforce. To ensure academic mothers' full participation in the workforce, it is critical to assess how universities in South Africa are supporting their academic staff to balance teleworking from home and caring (family-related

responsibilities). Trying to juggle work and family responsibilities during the pandemic lockdown is a theme discussed by many parents (especially mothers) in this study. Of course, the research findings highlight that men and academics who are single are aiming for the stars, while working parents' (especially academic mothers') publication and productivity track records are suffering – not to mention their wellbeing. This is much like the “baby penalty” that haunt mothers at every phase of their academic careers. The accounts of the working parents (especially the mothers) in this study illustrate that this period of time-shifting and work time reorganisation could affect their academic careers in the long run. Based on the research findings, for academic mothers caring is not just limited to caring for children, but it also includes caring for their partners. It is evident that even at their best, academics mothers have time-consuming responsibilities that simply prevent them from focussing on their own thoughts.

Moreover, as already demonstrated in this chapter, living alone, single, or childless during a crisis such as COVID-19 provides its own set of challenges, affecting academic productivity and work-life balance for UKZN academics. Clearly, the research findings highlight that the demographic information of UKZN academics is important to assessing and understanding their challenges, productivity, and work-life balance experiences during the pandemic lockdown. How they experience these issues during the pandemic lockdown is to a certain extent contingent on their demographic profiles. Thus, how the organisation (UKZN) attempts to alleviate or control these challenges with diversity, equity, and concerted interventions and programmes is critical to ensuring an ever-increasing productivity and sustaining a desirable work-life balance for UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown. Therefore, exploring and assessing what mechanisms UKZN has put in place to assist academics to achieve a work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown is fundamental to facilitating healthy lives, high levels of productivity and ultimately a desirable work-life balance among academics (especially academic mothers).

4.4.1 Employer support during COVID-19

The accounts of most UKZN academics in this study remind us that adapting to the COVID-19 crisis while working remotely from home during the lockdown is not a linear experience. It may be especially discouraging and challenging if you start off in an unconducive environment and/or have a great deal on your plate and little or no social support. Also, given how quickly UKZN transitioned to online learning, with limited time for sufficient planning and arrangements, it is no wonder that some UKZN academics consider working from home as being a “nightmare”. Thus, having the right organisational support during these hard times could be instrumental in improving

the wellbeing, productivity, and ultimately the work-life balance of UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown.

Counselling was virtual for staff members. (Respondent 2, February 2021).

The university provided various essential support for us as the academic staff, particularly in relation to online learning and assessment procedure. (Respondent 3, February 2021).

The school made sure that we have all the material required, including laptops and WiFi, therefore I believe I had the support from the employer in terms of the teaching resources. (Respondent 5, February 2021).

The training support was provided for the online teaching of the course, but in terms of the emotional support none was not present, instead they were pushy with deadlines. I think they did say there are counselling services we could use. (Respondent 9, January 2021).

The analysis of the data generated two themes related to ways in which UKZN is attempting to assist its academic staff to achieve a desirable work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown. The first theme concerns *management support* that is provided to UKZN academics so that they may play their work roles efficiently while working remotely from home – particularly the provision of training, digital resources, supervision, and online support systems. The second theme specifically focusses on how UKZN is providing emotional support to its employees during the pandemic lockdown, which can be seen in how conscious the management is of its employees' welfare and how effectively the management is providing this psychosocial support to its employees. The support includes counselling services and wellness support, and the purpose is to facilitate a balanced relationship between work and personal life. It is critical to understand here that these two mechanisms employed by the university are in many ways interlinked to each other. For example, some respondents regarded the supervision provided to them during the pandemic lockdown as emotional support that motivates them to deliver their services effectively. However, others considered the lack of support or supervision during the pandemic lockdown as a setback to maintaining a healthy relationship between work and personal life.

4.4.2 Programmes provided by the employer to assist academics to manage the work-life balance while working from home during COVID-19

During the lockdown, academics have had to take on whole new responsibilities and/or personae. For example, in this study we have already seen how academic mothers have to navigate

telecommuting from home while juggling childcare and other family-related responsibilities, as well as coming to terms with their own intersecting identities. Thus, exploring how UKZN academics telework from home, their wellbeing, how they are coping during the COVID-19 crisis and what programmes are being provided by the University to assist them to manage their work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown is an essential component of this research study.

Psychosocial support was always available to both staff and students. (Respondent 1, February 2021).

Like I mentioned previously there were a series of online webinars and online support systems that were made available university-wide to assist staff. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

Most were academic related as the University needed to cope with the huge and sudden change. Work life balance, I have not received any assistance in that regard. (Respondent 6, February 2021).

Newsletters were made available via email, web seminars, counselling services were available via a Zoom meeting, you had to make an appointment. (Respondent 7, January 2021).

None that I know of. If there was I didn't know of them. (Respondent 10, January 2021).

They provided training on how to teach online and training on Moodle and stuff like that. (Respondent 11, January 2021).

As this study has shown quite clearly, one of the challenges academics at UKZN are facing during the pandemic lockdown is juggling their work and non-work roles. A key challenge encountered by UKZN academics during the lockdown involves poor physical and mental wellbeing. While teleworking from home during the pandemic lockdown, they describe how strained they are and how their stress level is increasing due to the many factors already highlighted such as job quality, household composition, skills and resources, home conduciveness, and many more. The difficulties associated with the work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown, particularly the gendered interactions, the conflicts in the workplace, the circumstances of households, the job quality, and mental demands, have prompted the university to provide emotional support to its academic staff to facilitate a suitable work-life balance. Many of the accounts of the participants centred on how the institution provided online counselling services and/or wellness support for all interested staff. Others also mentioned that the provision of newsletters by the institution also gave them some sort of mental support during the pandemic lockdown. While most of the respondents

acknowledged that the institution provided emotional supports to its staff, a few claimed that no emotional support was being provided by the university.

4.4.3 The working resources made available during COVID-19

The Coronavirus pandemic crisis has brought about important changes in the South Africa higher education sector. Due to the lockdown, campus-based activities have had to be transitioned from face-to-face learning to an entirely virtual model in a blink of an eye. To ensure that this transition was smooth, UKZN provided its employees with some working resources to make it possible for them to work remotely from home. The following accounts describe the working resources made available to UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown:

My laptop, although I had to buy my own printer and stationery. (Respondent 1, February 2021).

The university provided various resources, with the most important being internet access. (Respondent 3, February 2021).

I was provided with a laptop and a router as well as data to continue my tasks that were needed. This was of importance. I was also given access to much needed software that is available through the university. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

After the trainings they provided support, there was a resource pack online, including catch up videos. (Respondent 9, January 2021).

The participants in this study described management support such as training, the provision of digital resources, and online support systems during the pandemic lockdown as important stimulants of their work-life balance. Some respondents also reported that in order to help them to adapt to the “new normal” the university management was kind enough to provide emotional support during the pandemic lockdown. They reported that this was huge boost to academics who were juggling work and family life during the pandemic. Concerning the provision of training and digital resources, all the participants reported that the university provided them with such tools as digital devices in some cases and internet subscriptions in the majority of the cases.

4.4.4 The nature of the supervision received during COVID-19

The global disruption caused by the 2019 coronavirus has been unprecedented, and is presenting supervision challenges to the large research university, UKZN. Thus, this section describes the

nature of the supervision received by the UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown while working remotely from home. Whether the supervision is effective or ineffective has the potential to either promote or hinder the attainment of a desirable work-life balance among UKZN academics. It is vital that such organisations should provide their employees with the right supervision when necessary. The following participants gave eloquent descriptions of the nature of the supervision they were receiving during the pandemic lockdown:

Supervision from the reporting manager was good because of the monthly meetings whereby we shared progress on the various work we were doing and challenges we were experiencing. (Respondent 3, February 2021).

If you are referring to supervision from line managers – then I would say that my line manager ensured that she was available to assist and advise on any challenges with current tasks that we were challenged with. Additionally, at the school level, management was also available to assist with any issues. If you are referring to the nature of supervision of students for research, then I can say that this was severely affected unfortunately. Many of our students were reliant on contact methods of supervision and research completion. Many struggled to adapt and adjust to online teaching, learning and communication. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

There was no supervision. We just had to adhere to university deadline and perform our duties as per usual. (Respondent 5, February 2021).

The supervision was poor. Many people didn't work which made our work difficult. (Respondent 9, January 2021).

I would say the supervision was minimum. We have meetings there and there. (Respondent 11, January 2021).

The accounts of most of the participants indicate that organisational support such as supervision is helping UKZN academics to manage their work and non-work responsibilities efficiently. Another point of emphasis was the flexibility of schedules, schedule deadlines, and work volumes, as well as the co-operation of supervisors and co-workers. Only a few respondents reported not receiving any supervision support from the organisation, despite its not being often mentioned in the survey.

4.5 SUPPORT FROM FAMILY MEMBERS DURING COVID-19

It is undeniably a serious issue that the skewed care demands on academic parents (especially mothers) telecommuting from home could lead to individual career disadvantages and gender inequality on a large scale, going forward. This study has already demonstrated that positive relationships (e.g. between husband and wife) and social support (e.g. from family members or friends) predict or facilitate the development of a quality work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown while the subjects are working remotely from home

4.5.1 The role of family support in helping academics manage work-life balance during COVID-19

While teleworking enables most South Africans to work safely from home, the education sector in the country is particularly impacted by telecommuting. Having the right amount of family or social support during the pandemic lockdown could go a long way towards assisting UKZN academics to achieve a desirable work-life balance. What follows next is a descriptive account of the role of the family in assisting academics to achieve a desirable work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown:

Like I said all my chores are limited. Children and wife performed the majority of chores. (Respondent 2, February 2021).

My family was very supportive in understanding my work hours and ensuring that we also maximize on family time. In a nutshell, my family provided a conducive environment to execute my tasks. (Respondent 3, February 2021).

They were understanding of my daily commitments – therefore they ensured that I was given the space and time to conduct my tasks without any, or very minimal distractions. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

My husband assisted with some duties at home, for example washing dishes and cooking light meals. However, everything else was on me and actually this brought disagreements in most cases. (Respondent 8, February 2021).

They did play some role, but they were not around. It would have been different if they were around. (Respondent 11, January 2021).

When asked about the role their families played in helping them manage a desirable work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown, most of the participants reported that the psychosocial support received from their families and friends was instrumental in their maintaining a healthy relationship between work and personal life during the lockdown. Others centred their accounts on the mediating role of self-motivation and family support in their maintaining a quality work-life relation during the pandemic lockdown. These results suggest that having the right amount of support from members of their families plays an important role in helping employees to manage a desirable work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown while working remotely from home. The absence of it could only end in a catastrophic outcome, especially for working mothers.

4.5.2 Academics' self-determination in executing their work-related duties during COVID-19

Adapting to the “new normal” has been proven in this study to be challenging to all the respondents. While their experiences of, perceptions of and challenges relating to working remotely from home are not univocal, it is therefore important to understand how they manage to stay focussed in terms of executing their work-related responsibilities.

It is being mindful of one's total responsibilities. One cannot allocate disproportionate time to one task. There ought to be a balance. (Respondent 1, February 2021).

I stayed focussed through dividing my tasks throughout on a daily basis and also setting targets that I had to meet. This ensured that I was able to meet all the targets while also engaging on further research duties that could contribute to my career development. (Respondent 3, February 2021).

I had to develop a fixed routine. I also had to plan and prepare a timeframe accordingly and I had to make a concerted effort to maintain that. I also realised that dealing with any challenges immediately eased the burden – as it was becoming difficult to address challenges swiftly – just because in the beginning there was a lot of uncertainty and often lack of communication. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

It's not like I had a choice, hahaha. I created my own routine, where I would exercise, just to keep my mind away from the lockdown, eat and start grinding because the pandemic was not with us forever, so I have to continue with work and be productive. Keep moving, you know. (Respondent 5, February 2021).

I dedicated times and ensured that I stuck to it which was extremely difficult given the issues faced.
(Respondent 6, February 2021).

Regarding the techniques and strategies that UKZN academics employ to stay focussed during the pandemic lockdown, the participants talked chiefly about planning, time management, and self-motivation. This involves streamlining work responsibilities, making time for relaxation and physical exercise, and creating a designated workspace. In summary, it means having a well-balanced plan. Of course, having a daily work schedule or having a clear work schedule was acknowledged by most of the respondents as instrumental in their maintaining a healthy work-life relationship. However, implementing or ensuring the smooth running of a daily work schedule during the pandemic lockdown was more difficult for respondents with children and those living with other family members. Nonetheless, amidst the challenges that come with working remotely from home, some respondents highlighted that the proper management of time and resources ensures a meaningful relationship between work and life during the pandemic lockdown. Thus, achieving a sense of balance between work and life was obtained through planning, including allocating time for work and rest (exercise), which had to be adhered-to to promote quality wellbeing during the pandemic lockdown – to maintain the balance between work and life.

4.5.3 Managing family-related roles, chores, and other responsibilities during COVID-19

With reference to maintaining a balance between their work and their personal lives, most of the participants acknowledged that their working hours during the lockdown were blurred. Some even added that there was an overlap between their work and their life roles, even though efforts were made to set a daily schedule that promoted a smooth flow of daily activities while working remotely from home.

It is about time management. Manage your time properly, knowing your responsibilities.
(Respondent 1, February 2021).

I was able to manage it through a family schedule developed when we started working from home. This ensured family responsibilities were attended during the established time, while also ensuring a balance for work and life. (Respondent 3, February 2021).

So, I basically ensured that I was available during office hours for work-related purposes strictly. Occasionally if I needed to be available outside of these hours then I would do so – but to ensure

that my family responsibilities were taken care of I had to be strict about work time and family time. (Respondent 4, March 2021).

It was within those moments of diarising my work schedule, I also had to make time for my family. I made sure between 5 and 8 is family time during the week, Saturdays I work and Sunday for sure was definitely my family time because at the end of the day I have to keep myself informed. (Respondent 7, January 2021).

These accounts also demonstrate how setting up clear work schedules and self-motivation enables UKZN academics to maintain a positive family role and still discharge their other responsibilities during the pandemic lockdown. The participants reported that self-motivation and facilitating conditions at home, as well as the support of family and friends, played a significant role in their ability to manage their family obligations effectively during the lockdown. These results highlight the importance of promoting conducive household environments to improve the emotional wellbeing of academics and their families as well as to promote a desirable work-life relation for academics during the pandemic lockdown.

4.6 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The prime purpose of this study was to investigate and explore the relationship between the work and personal lives of UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown. The research findings are discussed in this section and related to the findings in the literature reviewed relative to the research objectives

4.6.1 The impact of COVID-19 on the work-life balance of academics at UKZN

The first research question sought to understand how COVID-19 is affecting the work-life balance of academics in UKZN. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic UKZN academics have been facing stress and complications as they juggle their time between work and non-work commitments as they work remotely from home. The participants report feeling strained and more stressed than usual, using terms and phrases like frustrated, stressful, overwhelming, increased workload, disrupted, difficult to manage, struggling, fatigue, burnout, anxiety, highly paranoid, poor immune system, demotivation, emotionally draining, working remotely was a nightmare, unachievable, affected my career, tiresome, upset my work-life balance, no boundary, no balance, working hours are blurred, working 24/7, children were too demanding, overlapped, affect my

finances, affect overall productivity – to convey their anxiety. In this way the participants clearly describe how working remotely during the pandemic is having a significant impact on their physical and psychosocial wellbeing, thereby affecting their work-life balance, which in turn affects their overall productivity. Even though most of the participants expressed their work-life relationship during the pandemic as stressful and difficult, with implications for their physical and/or psychosocial wellbeing, some of the respondents described their experiences as being productive and as resulting in good work performance. They enjoyed their flexible working hours and their relative autonomy. There are those who also described their experiences as having both positive and negative impacts.

Some accounts demonstrate how working mothers deal with the responsibility of raising their children, maintaining their homes, and balancing work and home responsibilities during the pandemic lockdowns. As demonstrated in this study, most of the working mothers described how the division of labour in the household affects their work-life balance and ultimately their performance during the lockdown, because their husbands prioritised the division of labour differently. On the other hand, those who were living alone or living only with their partners reported minimal levels of stress. They summed up their experiences of working remotely from home as being productive and flexible. They acknowledged that this allowed them to craft out work schedules to enable them to cope with work and life effectively during the crisis. This is particularly noteworthy because flexibility, autonomy, and remote working have often been presented as solutions to work-life balance, particularly for women, while improving parental opportunities to achieve a successful work-life balance (Gatrell *et al.*, 2014; Wheatley, 2012). As previously established in this research, some parents said that their family and work boundaries were becoming blurred as a result of the stress they were experiencing. Parents, especially mothers and employees with poor home working conditions, may find teleworking from home difficult due to the frequent interruptions of their task time and space by intrusions from other responsibilities. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g. Wheatley, 2012), which have already documented the complexities that come with working from home in uncondusive conditions. While Alon *et al.* (2020) argue that the pandemic lockdown will result in permanent changes in working practices, this study argues that having flexible working hours and teleworking must be weighed carefully in favour of working parents (after taking gender into consideration) and those with a difficult working environment.

Furthermore, having the (digital) skills and resources available during the pandemic lockdown was perceived by all the participants as being vital to achieving a decent work-life balance. As a

result, it is not surprising that digitalisation still figured prominently in their professional activities during the pandemic lockdown. The importance of digitalization has increased during the coronavirus crisis in South Africa. Online learning at UKZN has emphasised the social inequalities in the country. Of course, the pandemic lockdown has accelerated the digitalisation of education in the country, but it has also exacerbated the social inequalities in terms of accessing quality education during the pandemic. While the South African education sector sees remote learning as a temporary bridge to getting back to the usual reality, it is hard to say for sure how prepared the sector is to carry out business “as usual”. The study demonstrates how nearly all the respondents admitted that the lack of digital resources from the students’ perspectives has a negative effect on their struggle to maintain a desirable work-life balance.

Of course, online learning allows UKZN academics to continue their work roles to a significant degree, but using information and communication technology (ICT) at UKZN has led to many challenges since a large proportion of its students come from disadvantaged communities and/or are unable to access the necessary digital resources for online learning. This also has a significant stressful impact on UKZN academics’ work-life balance as a result of the long working hours they have to put in to try to accommodate every student. These research findings are in agreement with those of recent studies that suggest that the transition to using ICT in South African universities cannot be easily implemented. This could create many challenges because a large proportion of the curriculum presently in use was not originally designed for online or remote learning (Motala & Menon, 2020; Hodges *et al.*, 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020) and many students do not have the required devices, internet access, and/or resources needed to study online (Motala & Menon, 2020; Rahiem, 2020a,b; Assunção & Gago, 2020). In addition, a significant proportion of the UKZN academics are not properly skilled for online teaching (Motala & Menon, 2020; Quezada *et al.*, 2020). The rapid transition from campus-based activities to working and studying from home during the pandemic lockdown has therefore produced many socioeconomic challenges for the UKZN community which negatively impact on the academics’ work-life balance. These results are consistent with the argument that the transition to online learning in South Africa has resulted in many socioeconomic challenges for the education sector, not only in South Africa but in other countries as well (Schiff *et al.*, 2020; Huang *et al.*, 2020; Farooq *et al.*, 2020; Kapasia *et al.*, 2020; Sobaih *et al.*, 2020). All of these challenges make adjusting to working remotely from home particular demanding and challenging, and are impacting on the work-life balance of UKZN academics during the pandemic.

4.6.2 Factors of work-life balance or imbalance during COVID-19

The second research question examines the factors contributing to UKZN academics' work-life balance or imbalance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to its massive and unparalleled adoption and varying outcomes, telecommuting from home and more generally remote working arrangements are undoubtedly one of the most widely discussed topics in the social sciences at present. This study reveals that the factors contributing to academics' work-life balance or imbalance during the pandemic lockdown are not the same for everyone, and depend largely on the nature of workers' households, the conduciveness of the home and the availability of social support as well as the worker's own decisions. In describing how these changes have varied across the whole spectrum of work-life relations during the pandemic lockdown, most of the participants acknowledged that the household environment (or household situation) impacted negatively or positively on their work-life balance and ultimately on their work productivity. For example, they acknowledged that the nature of the subject's household, such as the number of its members, the marital status of the subject, and whether they have children, influences the work-life balance or imbalance during these periods. Consistent with recent studies, the participants in this study support the argument that working from home is not suitable for people who are living in small houses, as it requires the availability of an appropriate space in which to perform daily work tasks (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020).

Reflecting on their experiences of working from home during the pandemic lockdown, the participants described how certain factors either facilitated a desirable work-life balance or hindered the achievement of a desirable work-life balance. The research also found that most academics lacked private rooms specifically designated for work, and did not have adequate digital skills, digital devices, and/or internet connection. As if that were not enough, most of the students that the academics are supposed to teach online are from disadvantaged communities and lack adequate digital devices and/or proper internet connections. Adding to that, most of the academics who started working remotely from home during the pandemic lockdown in March or April 2020 were doing so for the first time and on a full-time basis. This study has also revealed that one of the main factors contributing to the nature of the work-life balance is the quality of academics' jobs during the pandemic lockdown. Academics' job quality was also one of the significant determinants of academics' wellbeing during the pandemic lockdown. Here, academics' job quality or work-related factors refers to a range of features, including both objective aspects of work (such as working time, duration, planning and scheduling, workloads, intensity, flexibility)

and perceived aspects of employment that have been proven to significantly impact on employees' wellbeing (such as physical and mental health, motivation, and perceived career prospects). The analysis of all these dimensions combined paints a picture of the factors contributing to academics' work-life balance or work-life imbalance. Of course, it is worth noting that academics' views on working remotely from home also depend on a number of mediating factors such as family composition, gender, and personal attitudes.

In terms of social support, the support of the husband and other family members was regarded as essential since working mothers with this support reported having a more satisfactory work-life balance than those without it. This suggests that the support of husbands and other family members was considered important during the study. Unfortunately, some working mothers reported it was difficult to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance because of the lack of cooperation from their husbands in doing household chores. Due to their multiple roles, women often work long hours and dedicate more time to their work than men, creating work-life conflicts. (Uddin *et al.*, 2020). These findings suggest that the juggling of working mothers' domestic obligations and their work obligations during the pandemic lockdown create significant pressure which makes it very difficult to manage both roles. Working mothers face additional challenges in being both ideal homemakers and mothers as well as earning a living during the pandemic lockdown due to societal and cultural expectations. The study shows that working mothers experience a great deal of conflict between their roles during the pandemic lockdown, negatively impacting on their work-life balance and performance. In this study and in others, such as Zhang *et al.* (2020), it is shown that excessive effort has several physical and mental consequences that have become more apparent during the pandemic lockdown. The research findings indicate that the progress and contributions of working women are influenced by societal customs, gender norms, and family circumstances and issues.

In addition, the results further illustrate how working parents - particularly mothers - are more frequently interrupted with household chores, which is in line with the evidence from studies conducted prior to and during the pandemic lockdown that working parents' time (especially mothers') is fragmented more frequently (Collins *et al.*, 2020; Collins, 2020; Sullivan & Gershuny, 2018). Likewise, a study conducted during the lockdown showed that mothers are most likely to have to juggle work and family responsibilities (Andrews *et al.*, 2020), which indicates that working mothers often have to manage work and family responsibilities simultaneously. As with Bryson and Deer (2010), the research findings are also consistent with the theory that time is gendered, as some mothers reported that their husbands had greater control over their time at work to tend to nonwork-related matters. This is in accordance with previous studies conducted prior to

the onset of the pandemic, which argues that parents' use of time is largely gendered (Friedman, 2015; Bryson, 2016) and recent studies conducted during the pandemic lockdown which reveal that mothers' responsibilities at home have increased during the lockdown (Manzo & Minello, 2020; Craig & Churchill, 2020). The research finds that the responsibility for running households lies more on mothers' shoulders, as explained in several accounts given by the participants in this study. This is a demonstration of how menial work is centred more on working mothers and is central to their "gendered realities" (Robertson *et al.*, 2019).

In addition to blurring the lines between work and non-work commitments, the participants described how working from home also posed challenges regarding their work-life balance. The study suggests therefore that academics at UKZN have been significantly affected by the period of lockdown following the Coronavirus outbreak, particularly in regard to the balance between their work and personal roles. The most frequently raised negative effects of working remotely from home included feeling constantly present at work, the blurred boundaries between work and leisure time, and lost communication with co-workers (Dolot, 2020). Taking these findings into account, this study has demonstrated that the perceived impact on academics' work-life balance of remotely teleworking from home largely depended upon the circumstances of their households, their skills and resources, their quality of their jobs, and their genders. Due to increased workloads, blurred working hours, and longer hours, the balance between work and family life – understood here as the capability of an employee to strike a desirable balance between work and non-work roles – has been drastically impacted upon during the pandemic lockdown. The imbalance has been caused not only by a lot of time being taken up by work and/or increased workloads, but also by how stressful and challenging it is to balance work and family life.

4.6.3 Mechanisms in place to assist academics to achieve work-life balance during COVID-19

The third research question sought to understand the mechanisms being employed by UKZN to assist academics to achieve a desirable work-life balance during COVID-19. Much research has highlighted the significance of organisational support to facilitate and cultivate a desirable work-life balance in employees. The findings of a 2019 study indicated that employers' concern about work-life balance can have a positive effect on recruiting and retaining employees, and improving job satisfaction (Kelliher *et al.*, 2019). The findings in this study reveal that putting mechanisms in place, such as counselling, providing resources for academics to work remotely, and providing

supervision played a significantly positive role in improving UKZN academics' wellbeing and productivity, and ultimately improved the quality of their work-life relations during the pandemic. These conclusions are consistent with the arguments that stress the importance of organisations promoting flexible working conditions and implementing work-life balance strategies in order to improve employee productivity (Jackson & Fransman, 2018; Jones & Taylor, 2017). Because of the organisational and social support received from colleagues and the university, some of the participants in the current study were able to say that they had maintained a desirable work-life relation. These findings are in agreement with those of other studies on how employees may gain a desirable work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown through receiving social and organisational supports from supervisors and co-workers (Uddin *et al.*, 2020a; Uddin *et al.*, 2020b).

4.6.4 Support from family members during COVID-19

The last research question sought to understand the type of support that UKZN academics received from their family members during the COVID-19. The research findings are in agreement with the argument that when workers receive support from their families they tend to excel at their workplace (Vyas & Shrivastava, 2017). This research revealed that most of the respondents who received good family support during the pandemic tended to be productive and were able to attain a desirable work-life balance during the lockdown. On the contrary, those with poor family support reported that it was challenging to achieve a desirable work-life balance during the lockdown. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies that show that employees' unhappiness due to receiving poor family support negatively impacts on their work-life relations (Vyas & Shrivastava, 2017; Fayyazi & Aslani, 2015).

Working parents' accounts given in this study illustrate quite well how they manage their households and work as well as the increased responsibility that comes with being a working parent. It is quite unfortunate that the data collated for this study demonstrate that in some households the father is merely an observer while the mother has more responsibilities and carries the burden of family life (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019). This tends to intensify the psychological exhaustion that mothers are feeling during the lockdown (Hennekam & Shymko, 2020). These examples demonstrate how the pandemic lockdown has brought to light the role of women as household managers (Curran *et al.*, 2015; Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019). Women have to plan and organise everything to do with the family and as well as everything to do with their work, which

adds more workload to working mothers and impacts on the quality of their work-life balance. These results support the findings of the study conducted in Australia that shows that working women (especially mothers in academia) reported that they were unsatisfied with the division of labour in their households during the pandemic lockdown (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2020; Manzo & Minello, 2020; Craig & Churchill, 2020).

Working mothers tend to dedicate more time to household chores than men, which results in an imbalance between the work and non-work roles (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2020; Manzo & Minello, 2020; Craig & Churchill, 2020). We note the statement made by one of the participants in this study, as documented in Section 4.5.1, who complained how the division of labour at home brought disagreements in most cases (Respondent 8, February 2021). The invisible mental work during the lockdown affects the everyday wellbeing of working mothers as well as their job satisfaction, and ultimately their work-life balance. Additionally, women's responsibilities during the pandemic have increased, since they are sometimes responsible for getting their husbands in the role of their children's fathers to assume additional roles in the household. Research has shown that women encounter challenges in managing work and family and report decreased levels of job satisfaction related to difficulties in teaching, research, and discharging their service responsibilities (Denson *et al.*, 2018).

For those with good social support or living alone, flexibility and autonomy is a central dimension of planning and time management such as work organisation, ensuring that tasks are planned and executed. They are able to prioritise their responsibilities and schedules, a fact which leads to improved productivity and therefore to the achievement of a desirable work-life balance. For such participants, flexible work schedules, autonomy, and working from home were deemed the most important factors for an effective work-life balance as well as for improved productivity. They claimed that the lockdown has offered them greater flexibility and freedom to manage their work and non-work roles effectively. Overall, the net effect of their autonomy and flexibility in planning and time management has been positive and has led to their achieving a desirable work-life balance. While it is only a small proportion of the study's sample that held this position, this result confirms earlier findings that the flexibility arising from being able to work from home is key to sustaining a desirable work-life balance (Andrew *et al.*, 2020; Powell & Craig, 2015). Here, the flexibility and autonomy of teleworking from home allows certain groups of employees to focus on their work without neglecting the responsibilities of their families, resulting in the easiest integration of work and personal life. The current research findings are consistent with those of recent studies that find that teleworking from home requires discipline in terms of setting

boundaries between work and home (Kniffin *et al.*, 2021; Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). Here, we see that those who maintain a well-balanced work plan reported to be more productive during the pandemic lockdown.

4.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, many families have had trouble in keeping up. The drastic measures taken to prevent a public health disaster (e.g. working remotely from home) have changed how people engage with others and live their lives. In this chapter, the researcher gave a detailed reflection of the experiences of UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown while working remotely from home. Starting with the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on academics' work-life balance, the chapter documented the pros and cons of online teaching for UKZN academics. The results of the study demonstrate that the experiences of confinement and working remotely from home during the pandemic have been particularly detrimental for academic mothers and their trajectories, those with unconducive household situations. Academic mothers are not just seeing their careers and metrics lagging behind those of their male colleagues and/or those of other women without children but are also compromising their mental and physical health by making sure everything works well through a triple shift of housework, childcare, and work productivity and performance – ultimately to the detriment of their work-life balance.

The results further highlight that the transition to online teaching has also resulted in digital and technological adjustments among UKZN academics. The transition to remote learning, the use of digital platforms, and the transition to working and learning remotely from home have also highlighted the socioeconomic inequalities among UKZN students, which significantly impact on UKZN academics' work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A summary, a conclusion, and the recommendations derived from the research findings are presented in this chapter. The limitations of the study are also discussed in the chapter. The conclusions arrived at from the research findings are presented according to the research objectives. Using the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants, the research was able to draw conclusions on how working remotely during the COVID-19 lockdown impacts on academics' work-life balance and ultimately on their overall work productivity.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

The main purpose of this study was to understand how COVID-19 is affecting the work-life balance of lecturers at a South African university. To achieve this goal the primary investigator set out to achieve some prerequisite goals such as determining how working remotely from home during the pandemic lockdown impacts on academics' career, wellbeing, productivity and ultimately on their managing the relationship between their work roles and their non-work roles. These secondary goals were foregrounded during the literature review. It was also deemed important to reach an understanding of the nature and concept of a work-life balance and the challenges associated with employees' work-life relations. In order to be able to argue for the possibility that academics' work-life balance relative to telecommuting from home during the pandemic lockdown could be perceived as a determinant promoting a desirable work-life balance or the converse it was deemed necessary by the researcher to develop a theoretical model with the additional aim of establishing the factors that could potentially facilitate work-life balance or imbalance during the pandemic lockdown. Thus, both the introduction and background to the study and the literature review in Chapter Two are based on literature that exists locally and internationally on the subject matter of the study. After taking these fundamental, the researcher proceeded with the investigation. Thus, using the lived experiences and perceptions of the study's participants (who are UKZN academics) on their work-life balance while working remotely during the pandemic lockdown, the study explored the challenges of work-life balance during the COVID-19 and their implications on academics' wellbeing, careers and productivity. The study

also examined how online learning during the pandemic lockdown while working remotely from home impacts on UKZN academics' work-life relations.

This research study was explorative, descriptive and qualitative in nature. An interpretivist and/or constructivist philosophical paradigm was adopted in collecting and analysing the data required. This allowed the researcher to use both semi-structured and in-depth interviews to obtain relevant data from the participants in the study. The researcher was this able to conduct a thorough study of the work-life balance of UKZN academics during the pandemic while working remotely. The completion of this process was crucial to achieving the research objectives and answering the research questions. The research methodology used by the researcher was significant, appropriate, and valuable.

The following chapters of the study examined the effect of the Coronavirus pandemic crisis on the work-life balance of the participants.

Chapter One presents an overview of the research problem. It states the problem, the research objectives and the questions.

Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to the research phenomenon. Here the researcher focusses on understanding the cultural and historical background of the notion of a work-life balance. The rationale for reviewing the literature was therefore to establish an understanding of the theoretical basis for the research instrument used in this study.

Chapter Three provides the rationale for the research design and approach. The chapter also discusses the population and sampling strategy used in the study. The chapter also covered the method of collecting and analysing the data.

Chapter Four presented the data analysis and discussed the research findings.

Chapter Five summarises the findings of the research and provides recommendations for future research and policy regarding the work-life balance of employees working remotely from home during the pandemic lockdown.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS: THE MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

This section presents findings derived from the qualitative research study that has sought to understand the effects of COVID-19 on academics' work-life balance in a South Africa university. These conclusions are based on the major findings and therefore on the objectives of the study.

5.3.1 The impact of COVID-19 on the work-life balance of academics at UKZN

The first research question sought to understand how COVID-19 affects the work-life balance of academics in UKZN. The accounts of the UKZN academics prove that telecommuting from home during the pandemic lockdown has a significant effect on academics' career, wellbeing, performance and ultimately work-life balance. Although the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants in the study are not univocal, they show by and large that remotely teleworking from home during the lockdown comes with a whole new set of challenges and limitations. The drastic measures which have been implemented to curb the spread of the coronavirus have meant making drastic changes and have severe implications, especially for working parents' participation in everyday life (work and family relations). The accounts of the participants in the study revealed that remotely teleworking from home during the pandemic lockdown was even more challenging for academic mothers and their families. They felt frustrated, burned out, fatigued, distressed, and overwhelmed. Having to discharge both domestic and work responsibilities can make maintaining a good work-life balance extremely difficult. The pleasant expectation that women should be ideal homemakers and mothers, translated into the challenges of working and raising children, adds another layer of difficulty for working mothers. Academic mothers are experiencing intense inter-role conflict during the pandemic lockdown, which negatively affects their wellbeing, their career trajectories, their performance in both roles, and ultimately their work-life balance. These findings suggest that academic mothers' productivity and contribution is limited by gendered, societal, cultural, and family norms.

Additionally, although the change in working conditions during the pandemic lockdown has negatively affected parents with children, single academics and those without children were also affected. According to this study, most of the respondents reported increased levels of psychological and physical distress because they had to telework remotely from home during the pandemic lockdown. The specific reasons behind these narratives were many, but they are all linked to some extent to the inability of UKZN academics to separate their work and family roles during the pandemic lockdown. Many of the participants talked of not having a designated space or room for an office as a factor limiting their ability to attain a desirable work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown. In addition to the inability to segregate between work and family space, others also acknowledged that teleworking from home during the pandemic lockdown was not easy because they were often distracted by having to play family roles. Many participants described their home settings as not being conducive to telecommuting from home, since they

were expected to perform their domestic roles while still attending to the responsibilities of their jobs. Having a poor immune system, burnout, fatigue, anxiety, stress and other psychosocial disorders were among the outcomes mentioned by the participants as the negative effects of working remotely from home. As acknowledged by most of the participants, this is mostly linked to increased workload and working long hours. This study therefore suggests that the inability of UKZN academics to segregate between work and their personal lives during the pandemic lockdown has significantly impacted on their wellbeing, productivity and work-life balance.

While this is not often mentioned, this study shows that teleworking from home could for some academics during the pandemic lockdown be an alternative work system which could improve their performance and ensure a desirable work-life balance. Added to the increased level of productivity, the results shows that these participants can live both their work lives and their personal lives with much ease during the pandemic lockdown. Thus, we can also conclude that the current research findings demonstrate that telecommuting from home may also act as a variable mediating the relationship between teleworking remotely from home and employee performance during the pandemic lockdown. This suggests that, telecommuting from home during the COVID-19 pandemic is a determinant of employee performance to specific groups, even though conditions are abnormal. however, this is not a definitive indication that their work-life balance is affecting these employees' performance. Even those participants who reported better performance during the pandemic lockdown also complained about the increased workload and the longer hours, and are experiencing distress while teleworking remotely from home during the pandemic lockdown.

5.3.2 Factors of work-life balance or imbalance during COVID-19

The second research question examines the factors contributing to UKZN academics' work-life balance or imbalance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of the current research show that the transition to online learning in the South African higher education sector has resulted in technological challenges and/or adjustments, especially in the area of digital skills acquisition among academics. More so, the results show that the use of digital platforms for remote learning and the transition to working and learning remotely from home have also highlighted digital and socioeconomic inequalities within the country – especially among its students. Here, most of the study's participants told how the transition to online learning not only complicates the relationship between the employer (the institution) and the employees (the academics), but also negatively impacts on the relationship between the academic staff and their students. In other words, the

findings show that digital skills, access to digital resources, socioeconomic factors, and social inequalities during the pandemic lockdown have served as determinants of UKZN academics' work-life conflicts. While technological advancement was described by almost all the participants as instrumental in ensuring the continuity of business as normal, some of the respondents argued that they do not think that the university was ready for online learning. The participants in this study described how a lack of digital skills, students being from disadvantage communities, students lacking laptops, students having poor internet connection and not having sufficient data have a tremendous negative impact on the participants' work-life balance. Here, most of their narratives were centred on the impact of the need for digital resources such as laptops and quality internet connection – especially from students' perspective – on fuelling academics' work-life imbalance. In other words, the lack of digital resources was felt by the participants to have a large effect on their online learning experience, quality, and performance. They also described how most students were unable to participate in the online learning due to their lack of resources such as laptops and networks, which invariably affected the work-life balance of their teachers since they are expected to accommodate every single student, resulting in an increased workload, longer working hours, and poor class participation.

Furthermore, academics who regard social interaction as a core part of their role are the ones who have suffered the most in the transition to online teaching. Because of the lack of face-to-face class interaction during the pandemic lockdown, they all reported feeling frustrated. Due to the lack of direct class engagements with students, the research findings also show that the lack of online classes, poor attendance, lack of digital resources, and poor internet connections also hinder communication and tailoring classes to individual students during the pandemic lockdown. This they reported has a significant impact on their experience of online teaching and performance, thereby negatively affecting their work-life balance.

In addition, the current research findings revealed that the appropriateness of academics' homes and the composition of their households (such as the number of household members, their marital status, and whether or not they had children) were some of the main determinants of attaining a quality work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown. Reflecting on their experiences of telecommuting from their homes, most of the research participants described how difficult and challenging it was for them to perform their family-related responsibilities while attending to their work activities during the pandemic lockdown. These results show that childless and single academics had a positive experience of performing family-related responsibilities in addition to work, as compared with working parents and/or those with poor social support. These results

therefore indicate that to being able to effectively perform family-related responsibilities while simultaneously attending to work activities depends on a number of mediating factors such as the conduciveness of the house, the composition of the household, the gender and the marital status of the subject.

5.3.3 Mechanisms in place to assist academics to achieve work-life balance during COVID-19

The third research question sought to understand the mechanisms employed by UKZN to assist academics to achieve a desirable work-life balance during COVID-19 . Because of the spread of Coronavirus, academics have been forced to switch from traditional classroom instruction to online learning. This has brought about radical changes in how academics function today. In the wake of these shifts, the employers and employees have been faced with new challenges but also provided with new opportunities to be innovative in balancing work and family responsibilities. It is evident from the current research findings that balancing family and work roles for academics with children of school age, inadequate social support, and unconducive household situations is a significant challenge. It has been determined in this study that academic mothers are required to care for their partners as well as their children, which ultimately has a negative influence on their work-life balance. A key finding in this study was that single and childless academics are able to balance their work and academic productivity in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, the current research findings indicate that the demographic profiles of academics is significant in assessing and understanding their challenges, productivity, and work-life balance experiences during the pandemic lockdown. Therefore, organisations attempts to alleviate or control these challenges with diversity, equity, and concerted interventions and programmes are critical to ensuring an ever-increasing productivity and sustaining a desirable work-life balance for academics during the pandemic lockdown.

Concerning the strategic plans put in place by the institution to ensure a quality work-life balance of its academic employees during the pandemic, the current research findings indicate that the institution has provided management and emotional support to its employees to execute their responsibilities effectively while working remotely from home. Here, the management support theme is concerned with providing support to UKZN academics to execute their work roles efficiently while working remotely from home – particularly via the provision of training, digital resources, supervision, and online support systems. On the other hand, the emotional support

theme is concerned with how conscious the university management is of the wellbeing of its employees and how effective the employees find these psychosocial supports provided by the management to be. These includes counselling services and wellness support provided to the UKZN academic during the pandemic lockdown to promote a balanced relationship between work and personal life. For instance, while some of the respondents regarded the supervision provided to them during the pandemic lockdown as an emotional support that motivated them to deliver their services effectively, others considered the lack of support or supervision during the pandemic lockdown as a setback to maintaining a healthy relationship between work and personal life. Regarding the provision of training and digital resources, all the respondent reported that the university provided them with such tools as digital devices in some cases and internet subscription in most the cases. Therefore, the current research findings suggest that the strategies (management and emotional) to support and encourage the participants of this study to adapt to the challenges that come with working from home during the pandemic lockdown are in place.

5.3.4 Support received from family members during COVID-19

The last research question sought to understand the type of support that UKZN academics are receiving from their family members during the COVID-19 . The current research findings indicate that skewed care demands on academic parents (especially academic mothers) working remotely from home during the pandemic lockdown translate into a negative impact on their career, their productivity and ultimately their work-life balance, which is undoubtedly a serious issue. Accomplishing a desirable balance between work and family duties is a growing concern for working parents and those with poor social support. The findings of this study definitely present mounting proof of the connection between work-life imbalance and poor wellbeing and performance among academic mothers and those with poor social support. It is definitely not surprising, then, that the findings reveal that academics with good social support who are single and childless reported high levels of productivity. For example, the results show that positive relationships (e.g. between husband and wife) and social support (e.g. from family or friends) predict or facilitate a quality work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown while working remotely from home. It further suggests that social support (psychosocial support) and employees' self-motivation influence their work-life balance, which also has a mediating effect on work-life imbalance (burnout, fatigue, and psychological distress). Experiencing some type of conflict and negative spillover between work and family while remotely teleworking from home during the

pandemic was associated with diminished wellbeing and performance among those with poor social support (including mothers in academia). The current research therefore suggests that having the right amount of support from family members plays a significant role in helping academics to maintain a desirable work-life balance during the pandemic lockdown while working remotely from home. The absence of it has a catastrophic outcome, especially for working mothers and/or those with poor social support.

Furthermore, the current research reveals that planning, time management, and self-motivation were the frequently used techniques and strategies employed by the participants to stay focussed on adapting to the “new normal” during the pandemic lockdown. This entailed streamlining work responsibilities, making time for relaxation and physical exercise, and creating a designated workspace. However, not all the respondents had the luxury of a designated workspace. Thus, while having a daily work schedule or having clear work schedules was acknowledged by most of the respondents as instrumental in accomplishing a decent balance between work obligations and personal (family) roles, implementing or ensuring the smooth unfolding of a daily work schedule during the pandemic lockdown, this was more difficult to achieve for participants with children and those living with other family members. Therefore, this study shows that being self-motivated, having facilitative conditions in the home, and having the family’s and friends’ support is helping some academics to manage their family-related responsibilities effectively during the pandemic lockdown. These results highlight the importance of developing conducive household conditions to improve the emotional wellbeing of academics and their families as well as to achieve a desirable work-life relation for academics during the pandemic lockdown.

From the theoretical perspective used for this study, the current research findings reveal that the effects of work characteristics and the impact of telecommuting from home vary with contexts (Morganson *et al.*, 2010). In this case, they vary with “gendered realities”, marital status, and the composition and conditions of households. This is a clear indication that the job quality of UKZN academics has been shaped by the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the results of this study demonstrate that being socially connected with colleagues and/or friends and families has a different meaning during the pandemic lockdown. As a result, even a little social support has been proven to have strong positive spillover effects among UKZN academics – especially for working mothers. As a practical matter, existing studies and the findings from this study indicate that working at home during the pandemic lockdown is not easy in every job, a fact which highlights the need to identify what types of jobs and people could benefit from this strategy. Unfortunately, following the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, working from home is not

an optional strategy as people are forced to work from home to curb the spreading of the virus. Consequently, by leveraging the characteristics of teleworking and its associated outcomes), the current research findings provide valuable evidence for human resource managers to boost workers' job productivity, performance, and wellbeing (their work-life balance) through re-modelling teleworking to appropriately meet the needs of the current context (the new normal) among UKZN academics, suggesting that the characteristics of teleworking should fit the new model of remote working from home to attain quality work performance and wellbeing (work-life balance) among UKZN academics (Bélanger *et al.*, 2013).

In addition, from the theoretical standpoint, unintended outcomes occur when teleworking characteristics do not match individual or task requirements. For example, it was found that work-family conflicts occur where there is unequal division of labour among couples and limited autonomy for teleworkers. Drawing from the study of Kinnunen *et al.* (2006, p. 149), “negative work-to-family spillover was most strongly related to low well-being at work (job exhaustion) and next strongly to low general well-being (psychological distress), whereas the negative family-to-work spillover was associated with low well-being in the domain of family (marital dissatisfaction)”. The spillover theory was especially useful in this research because the findings of the current study demonstrated that the Coronavirus pandemic crisis and the measures that have been taken to curb the spread of the virus have disrupted UKZN academics' lives and their activities – particularly in relation to work and family. This had led to increased workloads, fatigue, burnout, distress and job dissatisfaction, feelings which affect the domains of work and life of the respondents. The spill-over effect was useful for this study as it described the impact of the pandemic lockdown on the work-life balance and productivity of the respondents. However, for the most part the lockdown alone is having major impacts on the income, job security, fieldwork, production, and overall performance of UKZN academics.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered for interventions and further research in the field of human resources and job satisfaction:

- The current research findings suggest the need for comprehensive research and studies in the area of human resources (HR) and the remote working of academics during the pandemic lockdown to understand how household conditions and “gendered realities” impact on accomplishing a decent work-life relation. With reference to interventions, South African universities (especially UKZN) should assess the conduciveness (or

compatibility) of remote working from home and the working conditions of its academics during the pandemic lockdown. This would allow the institutions to adequately tailor the needs of their employees to the situation.

- This study finds that teleworking from home is an alternative work system during the pandemic crisis. However, for telecommuting from home to be carried out optimally, cooperation between the employer and its employees is required. In this case, support from the university's management is the most important thing for the facilitation of good employee performance. On the other hand, it takes commitment for each academic to be able to differentiate between work and non-work obligations.
- As noted in this study, the lack of digital resources and/or appropriate socioeconomic conditions among the UKZN students and the composition of households impact on the work-life balance of UKZN academics during the pandemic lockdown. Future studies or research may include academics from other universities in the country and compare their experiences and perceptions during the pandemic lockdown in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of socioeconomic status, digitalisation and gendered perspectives relative to the work-family conflict as potentially informed by differences in societal and family role expectations. Specific consideration needs to be given to the needs of academics in the poor social support profile (especially mothers). Academics in this profile are barely surviving, and sooner or later will break down.
- Online learning from home or teleworking from home requires a lot of material support and supplying it could significantly enhance this experience. However, as noted in this study, bringing the work laptop home and providing staff with basic resources is not in itself as effective in promoting online learning at UKZN and ultimately a work-life balance among academics as is sometimes implicitly assumed. Academics' experience of teleworking from home would be significantly improved if the institution demonstrated its support by providing both employees and students – quickly and without difficulty – with the necessary resources to enable them to adjust to online learning and their working environment. What, one may ask, is the point of moving to online learning if the students are not available or effectively engaging in the learning?

5.5 DELIMINATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The University of KwaZulu Natal is the only South African university that is studied here. This university has five campuses and they are all based in KwaZulu Natal Province. This prevents the researcher from obtaining knowledge from universities outside of KwaZulu Natal. Therefore, the outcomes of the current research can only be generalized to the University of KwaZulu Natal to a certain extent and not to the entire community of South African universities. Another limitation is that all interviews were conducted via ZOOM, which is an online platform that does not allow the researcher to engage with and observe participants' body language during interviews. Further, it was not easy for the researcher to recruit participants due to the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The gist of the research has been summarised in this chapter. Thereafter the chapter has presented the conclusions of the research and made recommendations for future research and interventions.

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A

Campus

Position

AGE		
Between 25 - 35		
Between 35 - 45		
Between 45 - 60		
Over 60		
Gender	Male	Female
Marital Status	Single	Married
Education	Masters	PhD

SECTION B

Interview Guide for Academic Lecturers

"Work-life balance experiences during COVID-19 : A case of academics at a South African university"

- Introduction
- Observant of protocols and discussion of ethics guiding research.

A. Impact of COVID-19 on work-life balance

1. What is your understanding of work-life balance?
2. What is your view of the effect of COVID-19 on your career?
3. As an academic would you describe the impact caused by COVID-19 on work-life balance?
4. As an individual, is employee wellness important to you, if yes, how COVID-19 affected your well-being?
5. How well did you perform on your family duties during COVID-19 ?
6. What is your perception of work-life balance during COVID-19 ?
7. Did you experience any family or work-related stress during COVID-19 ?
8. How would you describe your level of productivity during COVID-19 ?

B. Factors of work-life balance or imbalance during COVID-19

9. In your own opinion, how would describe technology advancement and its importance during COVID-19 ?
10. What do you think of online Learning and working from home during COVID-19 ?
11. Personally, were there any changes in the workload during COVID-19 ?
12. What was your experience in performing all family-related responsibilities while attending work activities?

C. Mechanisms in place to assist academics to achieve work-life balance during COVID-19 ?

13. How would you describe the support provided by your employer during COVID-19 ?
14. What programs were provided by the employer to assist you to manage work-life balance while working from home, during COVID-19 ?
15. Did your work culture allow you to work from home during COVID-19 ?

16. What workings resources were made available to you during COVID-19 ?
17. How would describe the nature of supervision received during COVID-19 ?

D. Support from family members during COVID-19 ?

18. What role did your family play in helping you manage work-life balance during COVID-19 ?
19. Based on Your experience, how did you manage to stay focused in terms of preparing, teaching, and research activities?
20. What did you manage family-related roles, chores, and other responsibilities during COVID-19 ?

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT LETTER AND FORM

CONSENT LETTER

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL (For research with human participants)

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:

Greetings,

I am Lucia Zethu Jali (212546654), a Masters student in Human Resource Management at the School of Management, Information Technology and Governance, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. My contact details are as follows:

Email: Luciazethu@gmail.com

Cellular 074 916 7390

You are kindly requested to consider participating in a research study titled *"Work life balance experiences during Covid-19: A case of academics at a South African university."* The objective of the research seeks to explore the experiences of academic lecturers at the University of KwaZulu Natal on Work Life Balance during Covid-19 Pandemic. The study is expected to include academic lecturers as per their categories, professors, associate professors, senior lecturers and Lecturers. The researcher shall conduct interview with the academics. Interviews will be held on the availability of participants and they will be held via Zoom or Microsoft visuals. Kindly note the following in respect of your participation:

- a. that your participation in this study is voluntary. You have a choice to participate or not. You may also withdraw your participation at any time you deem without giving any reason;
- b. your participation is highly confidential. No one has the right to know of your participation
- c. no incentives, monetary or otherwise is available to participants and no risk is envisaged;
- d. all data, both electronic and hard copy, will be securely stored during the study and archived for 5 years after which all data shall be destroyed;
- e. all information given shall be treated with strict confidentiality and will be analysed strictly for academic purpose.

Kindly note that this study was approved having been screened by the Ethics Board of the School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa with approval no.

In light of the foregoing, your honest response to the questions will be highly appreciated.

If you have any doubt, question or concern, you may please, call on the research supervisor; Dr. Sybert Mutereko (muturekos@ukzn.ac.za; +27312607951) or contact:

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely,



Researcher

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have been informed about the study entitled *"Work life balance experiences during Covid-19: A case of academics at a South African university."*

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researchers at:

Email: Luciazethu@gmail.com
Cellular 074 916 7390

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville
CampusGovan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban, 4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable:

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Signature of Participant Date

Signature/Date of Witness (where applicable)

Signature of Translator (where applicable)

APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



06 January 2021

Miss Lucia Zethu Jali (212546654)
School of Management, IT & Governance
Westville Campus

Dear Miss Jali,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002186/2020

Project title: Work life balance experiences during Covid-19: A case of academics at a South African university

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 23 November 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

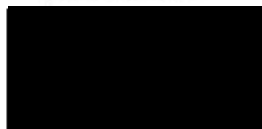
This approval is valid until 07 January 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/ms

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX 4: PERMISSION LETTER



3 November 2020

Lucia Zethu Jali (SN 212546654)
School of Management, IT and Governance
College of Law and Management Studies
Westville Campus UKZN
Email: jali@ukzn.ac.za muterekos@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Lucia

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Work-Life balance experiences during COVID-19: a case of academics at a South African University."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with Academic Lecturers in the College of Humanities (Taking in account the regulations imposed during lockdown ie restrictions on gatherings, travel, social distancing etc. Zoom, Skype or telephone interviews recommended) on the Howard College campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.



DR KE CLELAND: REGISTRAR (ACTING)

Office of the Registrar
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

25 August, 2021

I hereby certify that I have edited a dissertation by Lucia Zethu Jali titled “Work-life balance experiences during COVID-19 : a case study of academics at a South African university.”

I am Professor Alan Brimer, DLitt (UPE), Professor Emeritus of UKZN.

Yours faithfully,

Alan Brimer

