

Flexible Working Arrangements and Job Satisfaction of Public Sector Employees with Reference to Post COVID- 19 Situation in Sri Lanka

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Abstract— Due to the COVID-19 (Corona Virus 2019) Pandemic, Flexible Disease Arrangements (FWAs) have become a timely need. The emergence of the constructs of FWAs (Part time work, Work sharing, Flextime, Compressed work week, Home-based working) resulted from technological development. This study utilizes quantitative method and a qualitative approach. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of personal attributes on employee satisfaction with reference to the mediating effect of the intention of public sector employees towards FWAs. Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behaviour models are utilized and the variables such as attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control (Independent Variables), employee satisfaction (Dependent Variable) and intention towards FWAs (Mediating Variable) are used in the study. The population of the study comprises of public sector workers of the Western Province. Convenient sampling method is used to select 100 employees in the public sector. Data are collected through a survey method using an online questionnaire. The study concludes that the attitudes and perceived behavioural control have a positive influence on the intention of public sector employees towards flexible working arrangements while subjective norms do not influence on the intention of public sector employees. The study finds it significant that employees are more interested in FWAs in order to have more satisfaction in their career life.

Keywords— Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs), job satisfaction, intention, public sector

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Work flexibility has become a vital approach in many organizations following economic liberalization, technological advancements and increased concern on human resources (Nawaratne, 2013). FWAs are gaining popularity as it is safe, convenient and also encouraged by the government. With the current situation, about 136 countries have initiated some form of FWAs (Paskov, 2020). Applying FWAs are beneficial to employees due to work life balance, autonomy and productivity benefits they gain from FWAs (Bond & Galinsky, 2006; Kattenbach et al., 2010; Nadler et al., 2010; Wickramasinghe & Jayabandu, 2007). Employers are benefitted from high productivity, effectiveness, performance, profits and growth (Giovanis, 2018). The most significant concern about FWAs is the impact of flexibility towards employee satisfaction. Therefore, this study aims to explore FWAs as an effective solution to workplace issues in the public sector.

B. Problem Statement

Employee satisfaction has become a timely consideration of the public sector in Sri Lanka. The fixed work schedule causes dissatisfaction due to colleagues' chatter, daily commuting in public transports, wasted time and energy on roads, verbal instructions and increased risk of corona virus spread etc. (Kulathunga, 2020). Employees of the Private sector experience more satisfaction than the public sector therefore it is necessary to take measures to improve the job satisfaction of public sector employees (Velnampy, 2009). If not properly managed, it is not successfully contributing towards country's expectations as public sector is the nation's main service provider (Dissanayaka & Fernando, 2016; Nafael, 2001). Therefore, this study addresses the intention of



public sector employees about FWAs to improve job satisfaction and how personal attributes such as attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control affects intention and job satisfaction.

C. Research Objectives

The study has three main objectives; to identify the factors affecting employee satisfaction in the public sector, to examine whether there is a mediating effect of FWAs towards employee satisfaction in the public sector and to identify the most influential factor towards employee satisfaction in the public sector.

D. Literature Review

Sri Lanka needs to implement global employment strategies such as Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs). Once employees get seasoned to FWAs they rarely move out to another organization where flexibility is not offered (Wickramasinghe & Jayabandu, 2007). Flexibility is vital for any private or public organization for survival (Browell & Ivers, 1998). There are many appealing FWA options for managers to choose from such as parttime, compressed work week, teleworking (homebased working), work sharing and flextime. Flexibility in amount of work-time, workplace, and workload can be enhanced by adopting one or few of FWA schemes ideal to the organization's best interest. FWAs gain popularity due to several reasons such as the conversion of single income households to dual income households hence there is a strong need to balance both work and family demands. Also since millennials are the future of should provide work work, organizations flexibility (Konczak et al., 2011). Both men and women desire FWAs, but men want the chances to work with psychological feeling in the day and good employment opportunities while women seek for FWAs to reduce stress, have a better work life balance and save time (Ciarniene & Vienazindiene, 2018).

The main theoretical framework underlying this study is Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). This research utilizes a model derived from TPB and TRA to empirically examine the contribution of employee attitudes, Subjective Norms (SN) and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) towards the intention of public sector employees towards FWAs (Ajzen,

1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1967). Attitudes mirror a person's evaluation of acts dependent on the associated consequences and value of those consequences for the person (Stavrou & Ierodiakonou, 2011). The same study suggests that it is necessary for employees to have positive attitudes towards FWAs in order to easily adopt them. Subjective norms indicate the pressure by significant others on the individual about performing the behavior (Stavrou & Ierodiakonou, 2011) which can also be expressed as the sense that a person has about engaging in the behavior. For instance, peer behavior has a powerful impact on employees to select FWAs (Ko & Kim, 2018). According to the study the impact can be intensified when introducing FWAs to employees because they rely on their colleagues who have experienced FWAs before. Perceived behavioral control indicates employees' perception of how convenient it is for them to perform a certain action (Ajzen, 1991) All these three constructs attitudes, subjective norms and behavioral control are assumed to be related to the intention of employees to perform certain behaviors (Stavrou & Ierodiakonou, 2011). As in this case, engagement in FWAs. Thereby the independent variables are attitude, subjective norms and behavioral control while Intention towards FWAs act as the mediating variable. The most critical variable of the study is employee job satisfaction which is the dependent variable.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study is a descriptive research which attempts to collect and analyze quantifiable information. This study is based on the philosophy of epistemology which explores the common acceptable knowledge to address the established facts. In this context specifically, a positivistic philosophical position is used where specifically tailored research questions and hypotheses which can be analyzed and evaluated. This study takes a deductive approach by developing hypotheses from existing theories before testing (Silverman, 2013). In this study, a survey strategy is used in order to collect extensive, reliable and rich data as it is the ideal strategy for this study because the study is descriptive by design. This research uses the mono method (only quantitative method) to gather, analyze and generalize the



Researchers gather data from the target sample via a structured, online questionnaire and analyzed them quantitatively. The time horizon for the study is cross-sectional. These stages are followed when proceeding with the study.

B. Hypotheses

According to the conceptual framework, this research study is conducted based on the following hypotheses.

- H.1. Intention about FWAs mediates the impact of attitudes towards job satisfaction.
- H.2. Intention about FWAs mediates the impact of subjective norms towards job satisfaction.
- H.3. Intention about FWAs mediates the impact of perceived behavioral control towards job satisfaction.
- H.4. Intention about FWAs has a direct effect on job satisfaction.
- H.5. Attitudes have a direct effect on job satisfaction.
- H.6. Subjective norms have a direct effect on job satisfaction.
- H.7. Perceived Behavioral control has a direct effect on job satisfaction.

C. Conceptual Framework

In the current study, independent variables are Attitude, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioral Control, while Job Satisfaction is the dependent variable and Intention towards FWAs is the mediating variable. This conceptual framework is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). According to Ajzen (1991), Attitude, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioral Control are the contributing factors towards Intention which in return impacts Behavior. In this conceptual framework, Intention towards FWAs mediates the relationship between Job Satisfaction with Attitude, Subjective norms and Perceived Behavioral Control.

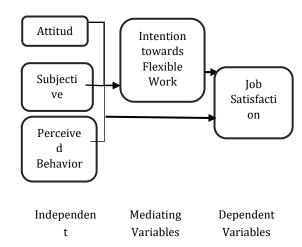


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Source: Developed by Authors

III. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A. Results

In order to evaluate the respective variables several demographic and general characteristics of the selected sample are analyzed after collecting the responses from the online questionnaires. The population for this study is selected as public sector employees in Sri Lanka. However, considering the time constraints, the population size is narrowed down to public sector employees in Western Province. Western province reports the highest number of employee participation in public sector; 20.3% in Colombo, 7.3% in Gampaha, 4% in Kaluthara districts respectively (Department of Census and Statistics, 2016). Out of the 100 respondents, most of them have a good educational level considering that there are 26% postgraduates and 25% undergraduates. Majority of them (41%) work in educational institutes. The majority of them are teachers (28%) and another 20% in management positions. There are 67% female workers and 33% male workers. Considering the age groups, the majority belongs to 21-30(41%) years and another 39% belongs to 51-60 year category. Out of 100 respondents only 43 (43%) state that they have been using FWAs for quite some time while 19 respondents (19%) report that they may have been using FWAs before. Forty-six respondents (42.20%) state that they have never used FWAs before. Out of the ones who are



accustomed to FWAs, a majority (56.6%) have been teleworking (home based working).

To test the consistency in the data, first the reliability is checked. Reliability is measured by Cronbach's Alpha value which is often used to measure the internal consistency of an instrument (Heale & Twycross, 2015). If the Cronbach's alpha value is more than 0.6, it is considered as the lower limit of acceptance (Hair et al., 2010) while the Cronbach's alpha value is said to be more reliable if it exceeds 0.7 it is considered as highly reliable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, Cronbach's values for all the variables have exceeded the threshold point of 0.6 hence they can be considered as reliable and deemed suitable to conduct the research.

Table 1. Reliability of the Variables

	Cronbach's	Number of
	Alpha	Items
Attitude	0.699	3
SN	0.691	3
PBC	0.622	3
Intention	0.816	5
FWA	0.010	3
Satisfaction	0.894	6

Source: Sample Survey 2020

In this study Pearson Correlation is used to measure correlation between variables which is the most popular method of finding association between variables to identify correlations among the direct and indirect (Nettleton, 2014).

Table 2. Correlation of Direct Relationships

Hypothesis	Pearson Correlation	Significce Value
H4	0.687	0.000
Н5	0.516	0.000
Н6	0.325	0.001
Н7	0.579	0.000

Source: Sample Survey 2020

Results from Table 2 show that intention towards FWAs and job satisfaction has the most significant positive association which has a significance value of 0.000 (p<0.05) and a Pearson correlation value of 0.687 (r<+1). Therefore, this hypothesis (H4)

can be accepted. Similarly, H5, H6 and H7 can be accepted.

Table 3. Correlation of indirect relationships

Hypothesis	Pearson	Significance
	Correlation	Value
H1	0.422	0.000
H2	0.175	0.087
Н3	0.565	0.000

Source: Sample Survey 2020

Results from Table 3 show that all the hypotheses regarding the indirect relationships (H1-H3) can be accepted except for H2. Hypothesis 2 indicates a mediation effect by intention towards FWAs on the subjective norms and job satisfaction. This hypothesis is rejected because of the low significance (p>0.05) and low association (r=0.175). Intention about FWAs mediate the impact of attitudes on job satisfaction, which is moderately associated (r=0.422) and is significant (p<0.05). Similarly, H3 can be accepted. After the correlation is carried out the obtained results showcase that all the direct and indirect relationships within this study have correlation values that falls between +1 and -1. Therefore, all the hypotheses from H1-H7 can be accepted as valid hypotheses except for H2 as shown in tables 2 and 3.

To determine the effect of independent variables on dependent variables, regression is utilized. In this study there are multiple variables therefore the multiple linear regression is carried out to predict the outcome of a dependent variable. The model summary table showcases the strength of the relationship between dependent variable and the model. In this study, R is 0.662, which shows that the relationship between variables is moderately strong. In this study, the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.439. This suggests the notion that Job Satisfaction is influenced by 43.9% by Attitude, Subjective Norms and Behavioral Control, while other causes explain the rest (100%-43.9%=56.1%).

Table 4. Model Summary

Model	R	R. Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.662a	0.439	0.421	0.523

Source: Sample Survey 2020



ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) table examines whether the model is acceptable from a statistical viewpoint. The regression row shows information regarding the variation accounted by the model while the residual row depicts the information about the variation which is not accounted by the model used under the current study. The ANOVA table of this study indicates a probability level of significance value of 0.000. Therefore, the probability (0.000) is much smaller than 0.05, then the multiple regression models can be used to predict employees' job satisfaction. Alternatively in other words, Attitude, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioral Control have a significant effect on job satisfaction.

Table 5. ANOVA Table

Model		Sum of	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.086	3	6.695	24.508	$0.000^{\rm b}$
	Residual	25.679	94	0.273		
	Total	45.765	97			

Source: Sample Survey 2020

In the coefficient section it displays the significant value for attitude as 0.02 which is less than 0.05; therefore, it has a partial significant effect on job satisfaction. The significance value for subjective norms is 0.014 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be interpreted as it has a partial significant effect on job satisfaction. Meanwhile Perceived Behavioral Control has a significance value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05, which can also be interpreted as Perceived Behavioral Control having a significant effect on job satisfaction, which has the most significant impact.

Table 6. Coefficients

Model		Unsta ndard ized B	Coeffi cients Std. Error	Standa rdized Coeffic ients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Cons tant)	0.514	0.424		1.214	0.228
	Attitu de	0.281	0.087	0.280	3.220	0.002
	SN	0.146	0.058	0.199	2.512	0.014

PBC	0.439	0.091	0.416	4.842	0.000

Source: Sample Survey 2020

For testing the mediating effect among variables the Sobel test is carried out using the online Sobel Test calculator (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001). It determines if the effect of an independent variable is reduced, after including the mediator. If it results in a significant reduction, it proves the mediation effect is statistically significant. The results which are obtained from the test are depicted in Table 7. Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) states that mediating effect of a model should be significant when p < 0.05. The test results obtained from Sobel test indicate that there are mediating relationships between attitude and perceived behaviour control towards the dependent variable except for the relationship of subjective norms. Due to the absence of mediating effect by intention towards FWAs on subjective norms and job satisfaction, H2 is therefore rejected and it can interpret the low significance and correlation value of the subjective norms and intention towards FWAs in correlation Table 3.

Table 7. Mediating Effect of Attitudes towards FWAs

	Models	Sobel Test Statistics
Attitude	Intention towards FWAs	3.909
Subjective Norms	Intention towards FWAs	1.682
Behavioral Control	Intention towards FWAs	4.597

Source: Sample Survey, 2020

B. Discussion

The first objective of the study is to identify the factors affecting on employee satisfaction in public sector. Researchers hypothesize that intention towards FWAs, attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control affect employee satisfaction in public sector (H4-H7). All the hypotheses are proven to be true as per the results obtained in Table 2. It is discovered that intention towards FWAs has a direct effect on job satisfaction. i.e. H4, valid. Further it is found out that if employees have positive attitudes towards FWAs, it has a direct effect on job satisfaction i.e. H5, valid. Subjective norms are also found to be affecting job satisfaction. Subjective norms are measured by worry, guilt and peer behavior and found that they affect the intention. This holds H6 to be true as well. Perceived behavioral control also



has a direct impact on job satisfaction. If an employee perceives that he can easily perform the behavior (in this scenario, the implementation of FWAs) he can gain more satisfaction. Therefore, H7 also holds to be true. Hence it can be stated that attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control directly impact on employee satisfaction of the public sector employees.

The study's second objective is to examine whether there is a mediating effect on FWAs towards employee satisfaction in the public sector. At the initial stage, researchers hypothesize that the three independent variables (attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control) positively impact towards public sector employees' intention, thereby resulting in employee satisfaction (H1-H3). However, the results from the Sobel test show that the mediating effect of intention is not that apparent in the relationship between subjective norms and job satisfaction. The correlation test also supports the findings of the Sobel test due to the low significance value in this relationship. Therefore, authors have to reject the second hypothesis because there is no mediating effect from the intention on subjective norms and job satisfaction. However, Sobel test results show that there is a mediation effect by intention in the two relationships between the other variables; attitude and job satisfaction and between perceived behavioral control and job satisfaction. This proves the H1 and H3 to hold true and H2 to be invalid. This finding contrasts with the assumption derived from Stavrou & Ierodiakonou (2011) that all the independent variables affect the intention of FWAs. This study finds that the relationships between only two personal attributes are mediated by intention, which are attitude and perceived behavioral control.

The third objective is to identify the most influential factor towards employee satisfaction in the public sector. As per the regression analysis results, it is proved that intention is the most influential factor towards employee satisfaction (Table 5). The intention has the most powerful association with job satisfaction as per the results obtained in Table 2. It can be because both attitude and perceived behavioral control also affect intention. However out of the three personal attributes (independent variables), Perceived Behavioral Control has the most significant effect on job satisfaction surpassing those of attitudes

and subjective norms according to the results from Table 2 and Table 3 implying that if the employee perceives pursuing FWAs are easy then it impacts his intention the most. The findings of this study state that employees are able to feel a wholesome level of happiness when they are allowed to practice FWAs, provided within an employee friendly environment. It is observed that both male and female employees prefer flexible working which is consistent with the findings of Ciarniene & Vienazindiene (2018). Employees report higher satisfaction when they are offered FWAs which justifies the vitality of work flexibility as stated by Browell & Ivers (1998). Overall, this study suggests that implementing FWAs in public sector organizations is a good way of enhancing employee job satisfaction.

IV. CONCLUSION

The current study contributes to fill a gap in the existing literature by generating new knowledge on FWAs. FWAs have become a worldwide practice due to the plethora of benefits they offer to many stakeholders namely employees, employers and society making it a win-win situation for every party. Although past literature has ample studies emphasizing on the aforesaid benefits of FWAs there are not enough studies done to measure the employee intention towards implementing FWAs and job satisfaction specially in the public sector of Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study contributes in fulfilling an empirical research gap. Further this study is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1967) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) which remain as highly significant models to explain human behaviors. The study has realized the research objectives after completing the study. The findings indicate that employees have a positive intention towards implementing FWAs in publicly owned work settings. Therefore, this study suggests FWAs can be the solution for improving public sector productivity while enhancing the satisfaction of public sector employees in Sri Lanka. This research can benefit the public sector employees to decide whether to implement these new strategies. To enhance employee satisfaction FWA options such as teleworking, part-time, shift work, compressed work week and work sharing options can be used to optimize benefits for both employee, employers and national economy.



A. Limitations And Recommendations

In this study a sample of Western province public sector employees are selected, which makes it challenging to make generalizations to population sizes therefore there exists room for future research for conducting similar studies with a sample that can be generalized in order to make the results applicable to a large population or it can be carried out within a different geographic location. Although this study is done using the quantitative method only, future research can use qualitative method as well in order to get further insights about employee intentions. The current study also utilizes a pre-established theory as the foundation to conduct this study, however, new studies can utilize new models and theories. In this study, online questionnaire is distributed; hence some employees work in different fields such as educational institutes, health institutes, ministries and departments etc., but in different quantities in each field which makes it hard to benchmark how the public sector employees' intention towards FWAs change across different fields. There exists a gap to measure employee intentions of employees in one specific field or comparing employee intentions across the fields. There is room for future research to carry out qualitative research, utilizing a sample size that can be generalized, using a new model or using different preestablished models and how employee intentions vary with the field they work and their geographical locations.

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