



National
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**An Exploratory Study into the Mental
Health Experiences of Employees who
do not Maintain a Good Work Life
Balance**

Tanya Boon
17334386

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Abstract

The aim of this research study is to explore the mental health experiences of employees who do not maintain a good work life balance with a specific focus into the employees within the retail sector. The research which was conducted using a quantitative research method focused on three main areas around the topics of work life balance and mental health. The three main research questions which arose from the research were to examine the mental health challenges experienced by employees, to understand the different symptoms and most felt emotions of those employees experiencing a mental health decline due to an unsuccessful work life balance and to assess how current well-being policies can be challenged and changed in organisations. The research study, which followed the quantitative method, was obtained from 21 participants from the retail sector. The survey included questions based around the areas of workplace, current work life balance levels and current mental health experiences. The aim of the research study was to examine if the employees feel that a work life balance is attainable within this sector and to examine if the mental health experiences of these employees were repetitive around the discussion of work life balance. Having a large sample size was the aspiration of the author but unfortunately the study only reached 21 participants.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

Mental health and work life balance are two terms that are often heard in the same sentence together. In the following research paper the two topics will be further discussed to uncover their effects when negatively combined together on employees, with a further focus on employees, within the retail sector. What the research will provide to the reader is a further look into the experiences that employees in the retail sector often have when not maintaining a good work life balance relationship. The paper will focus primarily on the mental health challenges that employees within the retail sector face in their day-to-day life, the different symptoms and most prominent emotions felt when dealing with a decline in mental health in the workplace due to an unsuccessful work life balance and how a work life balance can potentially be challenged and changed in the working environment to include all employees. Work life balance can mean something different to every employee, depending on their wants and needs in their current stage of life, but its basis is to provide an employee with an equal amount of time between their work life, their home life and enough time to sleep to become well rested for the next day. If an employee feels that an organisation is not allocating sufficient time to balance all three needs this is generally where the first negative emotion begins to show. For the organisation this may show itself as a reduction in morale and loyalty and for the employee it may show itself as an ignorance to take care of their daily needs or a reduction in previous pastimes they may have had a passion for. What can be considered when discussing work life balance is “the idea of equality between professional and personal roles; none is more important than the other”(Rusu,2018). Further on to his discussion Rusu (2018) goes on to describe equality between professional and personal roles to be the equivalent to a pair of scales, that neither of the sides is to be higher than another to achieve a good balance. Balance in this term can be considered to be the same input mentally and physically into both the professional and personal role.

For the purpose of this research, when discussing the topic of mental health it will be referred back to the description from Mentalhealth.gov (2021) as the way a person may think, act and feel with an affect on a persons physical, emotional and social well-being. In terms of employees this can have an affect on their daily work tasks, how they handle periods of stress

within the workplace or the ability to be present in the working day. No two employees will experience the exact same mental health struggles and no two recovery paths from a decline in mental health would be the same. If an employee feels free to discuss or share their mental health struggles, it could improve the relationship between the organisation and employee and potentially reduce the absenteeism levels from employees by allowing them to tackle the issue when it first arrives instead of after a long period of time when it has become unmanageable. When examining the research and findings of the data collected by surveys, mental health will be measured by the increasing symptoms of anxiety, stress, headaches and reductions in concentration levels for the purpose of this study. It should be noted that these are only some of the many symptoms that can be felt when going through a mental health decline and a mental health decline can vary from person to person.

When looking at past research of the topics mental health and work life balance together most studies focus on corporate setting or medical professionals in the working environment and students during third level education, which leaves a large gap in research for the retail sector. This large gap in past research allows for this study and more to identify the needs of the employees within the retail sector and potentially a motive to change how their work life balance is currently being affected.

1.1 Motivation and rationale

The motivation for this thesis comes from the recent changes to the working world due to the coronavirus pandemic which began in March 2020. From previous experience in the retail sector the authors' motivation comes from previous conversations with other employees around the topic of work life balance pre and during the current coronavirus pandemic. While many offices and working environments shut down or moved to a working from home environment, the retail world continued to trade with an extreme amount of pressure put on management and their employees in store. This pressure came in the form of understaffing in some areas of the business, fear of the pandemic whilst having to maintain trade and a higher workload for some with increased cleaning and social distancing measures in place. Organisations had to act quickly and put a big focus on the health of their employees and the protection of their well-being during this time. To help with these issues some organisations redeployed employees from one sector that may have not been in operation during this time to a busier sector to help those employees who felt overwhelmed with the exceeding pressures

from the coronavirus pandemic (René Vader, 2021). As the coronavirus pandemic is still a global issues affecting thousands, a recent study from Almohtaseb, A. *et al.*, (2021) suggests that by increasing communication and putting in place strategic leadership plans it can help reduce the stress and uncertainty employee may be feeling during this time.

The retail sector can be very unpredictable in many ways. For employees the unpredictability comes in the form of employment scheduling and when their working days will be. From the business' perspective this model of working is to essentially provide a 'real-time' strategy for customers. This strategy is to align the number of employees to how busy the organisation is predicted to be, based on previous indicators such as season, time of day and events happening around the local areas (Boushey and Ansel, 2016). While strategically this business model makes perfect sense for an organisation it in turn pushes all of the risks onto the employees putting further stress on them and their work life balance (Boushey and Ansel, 2016). This leads to many employees feeling unable to plan their weeks ahead of time due to the lack of preparation from managers with rosters. This form of employment instability "*can undermine family economic security and worker well-being*" (Lambert *et al.*, 2019). For many employees this form of pressure can cause strain to their family demands or school/college requirements increasing stress and potential other health/mental health issues. Recent research from Lambert *et al.*, (2019) showcases that it is a feasible approach for management to plan and schedule the roster to have readily available to employees at the beginning for the month for the next four week period, and while research had yet to determine the satisfactions levels that employee are receiving from this change, it begs the question; why haven't all retail management managed to implement this scheduling process?.

The research into work life balance continues to grow due to the widespread actions of working from home for most employees, yet the research does not include the balance for those still continuing to work within the retail environment. For this reason, the author is keen to understand the impact that retail employees have experienced in this working environment both pre and during the pandemic and their ability to maintain their work life balance due to the unpredictable nature of the retail environment.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

The following literature review will provide for the reader an understanding of the basic definitions of what a work life balance is to be considered and the past research that has been drawn from it. This chapter will look further into the importance of a successful work life balance for employees, with a further looking into employees within the retail sector, and the mental health experiences that these employees can potentially be exposed to. The author will explore what the motivational factors of a successful work life balance would look like to different employees in the retail sector and if previous research showcases if there is significant factors that differ between males and females when it comes to a work life balance being attainable.

Another research aim is to provide the reader with an understanding of the basic definitions of mental health from registered medical sources and past research into the different types of mental health disorders experienced by different people. The author will also research further into how mental health plays a role in determining how successful ones work life balance could be considered and the importance in looking after ones mental health from a personal view and from an employers view.

To understand fully how an unsuccessful work life balance can have such an effect on an employees mental health, both topics must be individually researched to be able to provide an in-depth knowledge. The final research aims to uncover if there is a positive correlation between a lesser work load or hours and a positive mental health experience.

2.2 Work Life Balance

As mentioned previously, work life balance is not a one size fits all procedure that companies can put in place without the consideration of staff. Different employees have different needs depending on their age, location and family status. The definition of work life balance is varied from author to author, Barik (2020) defines the idea of work life balance as the distribution of time spent by the employee between their work and home life. Barik goes on

to describe that there are some factors that are significantly increasing the demand from employees to have a balanced work and home life, these factors include; family structure and workplace demographics. Family structure can have a big impact on an employees need to find a balance in the work life. Askari, R. *et al.* (2021) suggests that working activities such as “*overtime duties and inflexible work shifts might cause a disparity between work and life duties*” (Askari, R. *et al.* 2021) continuing that without acknowledging the home life duties due to these working activities it can significantly increase stress levels within an employee and after long periods of time can reduce an employees quality of life. The idea that work can only affect the home life in consideration to work life balance is untrue, “*work-family conflict is bi-directional*” (Kaushal, P. 2019). Work-to-family conflict is discussed in the terms of job demands, travelling and paid time off causing disruptions and arguments within the family domain, the idea of family-to-work conflict is often not referred to when discussing work life balance. Family demands such as childcare, visiting relatives or potentially caring for a family member does not stop when it comes to the working environment. These are often duties that must continue during the working time potentially by others and picked up by the employee once the working day is done. These family duties can more often cause problems in employees performance, time keeping and concentration levels during the working day.

Another definition of work life balance is to be able to prioritise appropriately between the needs of work life; career and ambition and lifestyle; health, leisure and pleasure (Anisha and Melvin, 2020). Work life balance according to Anisha and Melvin (2020) is again a big component of how someone views their quality of life but in different terms to how Askari, R. *et al.* has determined it to be. Anisha and Melvin (2020) suggest that it goes beyond influencing the behaviour of people in and out of the work setting but also how they perceive friendships and relationship patterns in their lives. As most adults will spend most the their day within the working environment it can give the employee a sense of restriction around their day and potentially their life. It is mentioned that the employees work life balance needs will change three times in their life, firstly when they are beginning their career single or unmarried, secondly if they enter into marriage or long term relationships and lastly when they are nearing retirement.

As previously discussed, family duties have caused rise to the need for a work life balance in the past several years. The discussion around males, females and work life balance has been researched by many; Dhingra and Dhingra (2021) examines that if there are differences in the

expectations of roles between spouses it can potentially cause conflicts between family and work roles. Tensions tend to rise with two majority factors; when the employment status of the female is not previously determined and when the male is preoccupied with his career opportunities. Work life balance has come to light in recent years due to the advancement of females in the working world, the narrative of a women being only to serve the needs of her family still exists in some countries to date. While the degree of what the balance is will vary from woman to woman it is still a key aspect for all women to understand fully before entering into any job. With an ambition for more women to enter into senior or leadership positions, Brue, K.L. (2018) goes on to further discuss that it is an growing necessity for women to know how their work and non-work obligations will be handled before they will be fully committed to entering into the leadership role, leading for their concerns around a work-life balance to be one of the main reasons why women are underrepresented in higher positions in organisations.

2.2.1 The important of work life balance

Past research suggests that there are some potential factors as to why the need for a balanced work and home life has increased in recent years. These factors include “*family composition, increasing reluctance of long work hours, increase in the number of female workers and technological developments*” (Anyim, F. *et.al.* 2020). The topic of reluctance of long working hours is one of the biggest factors when discussing work life balance, it generally disturbs the accessibility to achieve a balanced work life and can cause added stress to the employee if their hours are varied and not fixed from week to week (Dhingra and Dhingra, 2021). Flexibility in the working week has now been added in to many contracts for employee since the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. This allows the employee to determine their own start and end time once their weekly hours have been met. This type of flexibility in the working week allows the employee to organise and plan their life to try meet their needs, positively impacting the satisfaction they feel from their working life (Dhingra and Dhingra 2021). The positives from flexibility in ones working hours can be the ability to meet the obligations of family life and simplify the ability to care for dependants within their family (Dhingra and Dhingra 2021). A study by Hanglberger (2010) determined that by allowing employees to decide on their own working hours it had an overall positive effect on their job satisfaction levels compared to those employees who stayed with their fixed hours. In summary to his research Hangleberger (2010) stated that apart from full-time employees

gaining satisfaction from the flexibility of their working hours, organisational working hours only played a small role in the overview of job satisfaction.

Technology is continually changing and growing in organisations at a rapid pace, thus making it difficult for organisations to keep up with the ever changing advancements in technology. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, organisations had to quickly adapt to new technology advancements and implement them faster than they ever had anticipated to. There are a few pros and cons for both organisations and employees with the most recent technology developments being added into the working world. One of the biggest positives to come from technology advancements is the ability to add flexibility to the working environment for employees. By allowing flexibility in the workplace we are giving the employee the ability to reduce the need for commuting and allowing them to be present whether that be virtually or physically from many different locations around the globe (Nagy, 2020). While the ability to be flexible is great in the beginning, it can lead to a blurred line of work life and home life. With the advancement of home laptops and company phones, the expectation from companies to be readily available to the organisation can further blur that line for the employee. Research from Holden and Sunindijo (2018) suggest that the majority of technology advancements unfortunately have a negative effect on the employees. The research states that when employees are given the opportunity of flexibility, the presence of a work device in the home life can often become difficult for the employee to set a boundary around their working time (Holden and Suninijo 2018).

There is an emphasis on the importance of work life balance for a number of reasons, the main reason being the health and well being of the employee. When employees are not given enough time to sufficiently rest between periods of working time it can potentially effect how their physical and mental “battery” repairs itself (Brauner, *et.al.* 2019). Overtime and increasing hours of work can significantly decrease a persons ability to repair after the working week as they have essentially moved into the hours the body has deemed to be resting (Brauner, *et.al.*, 2019). By having that balance between the work and home life it can essentially contribute to a healthier and potentially more successful working life (Schmitt, *et.al.*, 2008)

2.2.2 The drive behind a successful work life balance

Going back to the previous statement that work life balance does not look the same for all employees, the same statement still stays true for the motivational factors behind the need for a successful work life balance. What one motivated an employee when they first began working (e.g. Money) could not be valued in ones life now and instead a new motivational factor (e.g. safety) could have replaced it. Just like work life balance, the drive behind motivation grows and changes with the age and family status of an employee.

Motivation is defined as the rational or reasoning behind starting or continuing a task (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014) and that reasoning will look different for every employee. When looking towards work life balance as a motivational factor as a whole, it could be considered to be an intrinsic form of motivation, which is a form of motivation where the employee feels a form of validation from the work they are producing and their ability to develop their skills (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014). Intrinsic motivational factors could also be considered to be what someone needs to be self assured and protected in their work and personal life. When looking at a persons needs, Maslow (1971) has determined a hierarchy that is believed to fulfil an employees needs first and then wants to allow them to feel fully secured in their work and home life. Maslow's hierarchy of needs determined that when the lowest need becomes satisfied then next highest need takes on the dominant role in life until the hierarchy is accomplished and self-fulfilment is achieved. It should be noted that the lowest need does not disappear, it is still present but considered as dormant in the act of motivation in the employees life (Armstrong, 2012). While the five needs that Maslow (1971) provides starting at the bottoms of the hierarchy; physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem and self-actualisation, are a good starting point these needs will not be in the right order for everyone. The idea of satisfying one need before moving on to the next should be considered by all but the way that this can be achieved will differed from employee-to-employee (Armstrong, 2012).

A recent study participated by 2,500 workers (1% of the workforce) in Iceland found that a reduction to a 4-day working week has been a overwhelming success (Alda, 2021). Since the research has gone public and due to its success over 85% of the country's workforce has agreed to allow their employees to adapt to this new working pattern. The trial consisted of the 2,500 employees reducing their weekly hours to 35-36 hours per week while also

received the same wage as their previous 40 hour contracted week. The drive behind the research study is due to the continuous changes to automation and technology in the working environment but also due to the fact that employees are wanting a better work life balance with the ability to spend more time with their families. Due to the coronavirus pandemic the need to look at different ways of working for employees has had a rapid increase as many employees do not want to return to the pre-pandemic working environment they once lived. The results of the study were as follows; for employees it showed through their well-being with many employees feeling less stressed and more energetic, allowing them to participate in more activities such as previous hobbies they once had or exercise. From the employers side of the results showed that productivity can and has increased in some case. The overall result of the research was that employees felt that they're work life balance has increased with a more harmonious balance between the two variables (Alda, 2021).

2.2.3 Work life balance in the retail sector

The working day within the retail sector is very different of that normally considered when discussing the impact of work life balance on employees. Previous research normally focuses on the effects of those employees working "*a standard nine-to-five workweek*" (Henly and Lambert, 2014). When discussing the retail sector we will look furthermore at the definition by Henly and Lambert (2014) as a nonstandard work hour, which is considered to be unpredictable working hours (e.g. early morning or night shifts, weekend or overnight work). The wording "unpredictable" has been used as these hours tend to be changed and removed from employees within a very small time frame, as well as scheduling of these hours only completed sometimes hours before a shift could start (Henly and Lambert, 2014).

The idea of a work life balance within the retail sector can sometime be hard to achieve, this is due to a number of reasons but the main focus is on; unpredictable working hours/weeks and unpredictable scheduling drafting. The unpredictability of working hours can put a big strain on an employees ability to plan or organise their life. Not knowing the exact days or hours they are weeks in advance can put a hold on employees being able to achieve certain things in the life such as the ability to book health appointments or commit to providing care for dependants in immediate family members (Henly and Lambert, 2014). Further to the unpredictable of working days, these employees within the retail environment then have to be

cautious of scheduling changes last minute to their rosters. The ability to not be able to plan ahead of time can have major impacts of these employees and their life outside of the working world. Relationships and friendships will be the first to become strained and unattainable in this kind of environment and can have a major effect on the mental health of the employee.

Henly and Lambert (2014) continue to suggest that strain from an unpredictable working week is one of the biggest causes of work-life conflicts within retail workers. Previous research has shown that stress levels in employees were increased when scheduling of shifts were only given with limited advance to the working week. This form of stress creates a negative impact of morale within the working environment and can reduce employee performance for the organisation (Henly and Lambert, 2014). The idea of formal flexibility, where employee can negotiate with management in advance of the scheduling, could be potentially beneficial to this type of working environment. It would allow the employees to seek certain days which may suit the needs of the week for personal reasons and allowing them confirmation of what the week ahead looks like (Henly and Lambert 2014).

Within the retail sector, employment is heavily made up of female workers. In 2019, women in Ireland took up 62.2% of all retail jobs (Central Statistics Office, 2021). This percentage was an increase of women in retail roles compared to its 2008 figure of 60.7%. While women take up more than half of the retail workforce, it is still uncommon to see them in senior management positions within the retail sector.

2.3 Mental Health

Mental health can be defined as an “*emotional, psychological, and social well-being*” (MentalHealth.gov, 2021). When experiencing issues with one's mental health it can affect how a person acts and feels towards different situations that they may have once been able to handle. The World Health Organisation (“WHO”) (2021) advocates that the protection and promotion of one's mental health can be observed as a crucial concern for societies and communities alike. It suggests that the topic of mental health should be studied and talked about further than just within the health sector but also included in educational sectors and labour organisations (WHO, 2021). Stress can be a major factor in how one's mental health is affected, how they relate to others and how they are able to manage making choices

throughout their life. It is important for people to understand the early warning signs of their mental health deteriorating and what they can do to prevent a serious decline in their health.

Currently, Ireland has one of the highest rates of mental health issues being recorded within all of Europe (Mental Health Ireland, 2021). In terms of figures that is 18.5% of the Irish public being recorded as suffering from a mental health issue. These issues can range from anxiety to depression to misuse of drugs/alcohol. A survey done by the Irish government showed that in 2015 men recorded a higher positive mental health score compared to women, with a difference of 4.7% (Gov.ie, 2021). A higher positive mental health score was indicated by participants as having feeling of *“full of life, calm and peaceful, lots of energy, and had been a happy person in the pervious 4 weeks”* (Gov.ie, 2021).

Since the recent coronavirus pandemic in 2020, mental health issues among individual have risen with this having an affect on their personal and home lives. A recent study by Jones (2021) shows that not only were employees noticing the change in their mental health but organisations were also noticing this change in their employees. Willis Towers Watson (“Willis”) (2021) believe that the coronavirus pandemic will have a large impact on employee wellbeing and mental health. Willis (2021) recent survey suggest that over 77% of employers are willing to expand or change their current policies to allow more employees to access mental health services within organisations. A separate study from Willis (2021) also found that 38% of employers are going to revise their current health care plan in 2021 to benefit the employees and their mental health. When looking to change the health plans in place within an organisation Willis (2021) suggest that employers should look at a few areas before going ahead with new plans. One of the most important areas is that the culture of the organisation aligns with the promotion of health and mental health within the organisation. By having management promoting and engaging in discussions around mental health it can reduce the stigma from employees and encourage a health working culture.

2.3.1 Mental Health and its role in a work life balance

The link between an employees work-life balance and their mental health has never been more clear. There are many issues in an employees work life that can lead to a decline in their mental health. Kamerāde, D. *et.al*, (2019) discuss that some of these issues include redundancy, replacement for A.I technology and a rise in long term unemployment levels. A

study done by Norberto, M. J. *et al.* (2021) showed that people aged 30-40 were most affected when it came to long term unemployment in terms of their mental health, with an anxiety disorder being the most frequent disorder discussed. It would seem that without a position in employment and family pressures building (e.g. dependants to care for) many turned to medical consultations with the underlying issues being stress or anxiety related. When discussing the effects of redundancy on the mental health of employees it can be related to the emotion of grieving for the individual, this will be likely to include the stages of grieving for the employee such as anger and denial (Anaf *et al.*, 2013). The process of redundancy can almost act as a trauma to the mental health of an employee due to the range of emotions that will be felt throughout the process (Anaf *et al.*, 2013). As mentioned previously, the topic of working hour is commonly discussed in conjunction with mental health. Looking further into the debate of longer working hours research studies have indicated that an employees health and well-being is negativity impacted due to the increase of hours in the workplace. It has been suggested that with few exceptions a 48hour work week is the highest an employee should work to be able to achieve satisfaction between their work-life and home-life, and if not followed it could lead the employee towards the feeling of burn-out and work-related stress issues (Kamerāde, D. *et.al*, 2019).

When looking at the role of work life balance and the strain it can put on an employees health when not balanced, it is important to look at the satisfaction one feels from their job. The need for a balanced work to home ratio is becoming increasingly important in many peoples lives recently and when demand from both sides rise it can cause increased tension and stress on the individual (Ross and Vasantha, 2014). The type of stress mostly felt by these employees is a raised blood pressure level, increased heart rate and when experiencing this type of stress for long periods of time can potentially lead to feelings of depression (Lunau *et al.*, 2014). Suggestions of ways employees can overcome these stressors and try to achieve a balanced work and home life are as followed: the consideration of a 4-day week, a working from home policy, holding virtual meeting so that employees do not have to attend the workplace to participate and encouragement to the employees not to check emails and text messages from work during home hours (Ross and Vasantha, 2014). Recently in Ireland a new code of practice has been put in place to give the employees the right to disconnect from work and encourage them to practice a better work life balance (The Irish Times, 2021). The term ‘disconnecting from work’ includes not having to respond to emails or message and not

having to answer telephone calls outside of the working hours, allowing the employees to “switch off from their jobs” (The Irish Times, 2021).

When experiencing a decline in one's mental health, the simple day to day task can often become difficult quite quickly, so what does that mean for an employer and their daily work tasks that need to be achieved? There is a growing need for employers to recognise their employees mental health, such as if the employee has a preexisting condition within the mental health category and essentially their safety round peak periods of stress and intensity within the work environment. Considine *et al.*, (2017) suggest that the work environment is the best place to discuss mental health issues and address the issues surrounding mental health and their employees. One of the reasons for this suggestion is due to the fact that many adults spend a significant amount of their life within the workplace and it should feel as a safe environment for them. It could potentially be discussed as a safe place for intervention if an employer sees fit for the employee struggling with a mental health challenge (Considine *et al.*, 2017). With new well-being policies and procedure being put in place to look after and care for the employees mental health, it would seem fitting that an intervention to happen in the workplace so that the employer can openly discuss the options or treatments that are in place to help the employee. (Considine *et al.*, 2017). Employers should be aware of the signs of mental health challenges in employees and the triggers that increase or elevate these emotions so that help can be offered when these characteristics are noticed at the beginning and not when the employee is actively struggling. When employees are experiencing mental health challenges in the workplace it can have effects on the way they perceive how their performance and productivity levels really are compared to how their employer perceives them to be (Vonderlin *et al.*, 2021). Vonderlin *et al.*, (2021) suggest that while all management have a role to play in helping employee during mental health struggles and to prevent them, it is really the supervisors role to be the bridge that helps these employees gain what they need from well-being policies within the organisation. By providing the correct leadership style, the supervisor can build a trust-worthy relationship with the employee to be able to confide and discuss these issues as they arise while also being the link to management when extra support is needed. By having this type of environment within an organisation it can lead to a higher morale and engagement from employees.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction and Research Questions

The following section will discuss what the research aims to uncover from the surveys conducted and identify what research questions and hypotheses will arise from the above literature. As discussed previously, work life balance is varied from author to author and furthermore from employee to employee. The apparent gap in the literature provided allows the author to further study this area of work life balance with effects it can have on an employees mental health with a further look into those employee within the retail sector. In the following chapter the form of data collection (e.g. surveys) will be explained further for the reader to be able to understand both topics along with the reasoning for the sample group and the ethical considerations the author must take into account. The following is the main research question, the research objectives and hypotheses determined from the above literature.

3.1.1 Main Research Objective

The main research title of this study is:

An Exploratory Study of the Mental Health experiences of retail workers who are not achieving a healthy Work Life Balance.

As previously mentioned in the literature review the two topics combined almost make a form of a scale, that when one topic becomes high on the scale, or needs to be prioritised for a while, the other normally falls to become less important in the employees life during that time. In order to fully explore the study of the two topics, the following research objectives have been drawn up to help further the study.

3.1.2 Research Objective One

To examine the mental health challenges experienced by employees

3.1.3 Research Objective Two

To understand the different symptoms and most felt emotions that employees experience when experiencing a mental health struggle.

3.1.4 Research Objective Three

To assess how current well-being practices and procedures can be challenged and changed in organisations.

While there are many forms of experiences that employees can feel when they are experiencing mental health struggles. The main purpose of this research is to see if in a workplace setting the same experiences are felt by many employees. This is to give employers a better idea for ways that they can improve their health and well-being initiatives to help reduce these experiences in employees.

3.2 Hypotheses

In relation to the research questions that have arisen from the literature review a number of hypotheses could also be considered.

3.2.1 Hypotheses One:

Mental health challenges directly affect the employees' ability to participate well in the workplace.

3.2.2 Hypotheses Two:

The emotions and symptoms of employees experiencing an unhealthy work-life balance will be repetitive.

3.2.3 Hypotheses Three:

Current well-being policies do not reflect the needs of employees today.

3.3 Sample Group

The sample groups chosen for this research project is a randomised sample of retail worker. The definition of a retail worker is “*a person who works in a store selling goods to the public*” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021) with the retail environment including “grocery, drug and convenient stores” (Small Business Chronicles, 2021). There are two forms of sampling techniques outlines by Saunders *et al.*, (2012) they are a “*probability or representative sampling*” technique or a “*non-probability or judgemental sampling*” technique (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). For the purpose of this research the author will be following a probability or representative sampling technique. Saunders *et al.*, (2012) outlines that this form of sampling to normally associated with a survey-based researching technique, where the author will have to reach a conclusion based on the evidence of the research and the number of people surveyed for the research. For a standard probability sampling it is recommended to have upwards of 50 participants. That was the aim for this author but unfortunately for this study we will only have 20 participants. This form of sampling was chosen to give the participants anonymity with no form of linking the information back to them directly. By choosing the form of an anonymous survey it allows the participants to give their honest answer with fear or embarrassment (Co:Census, 2021). The topic of mental health can sometimes but viewed as a taboo subject and therefore can be difficult to give an honest answer without fear behind the participants.

3.4 Research Strategy

While no research strategy is superior to another, there are some strategies that suit the needs of the research better than others or that will be able to answer the questions asked from your research better than another while meeting the needs of your objectives (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Saunders *et al.*, (2009) goes on to further discuss that it is not unheard of to combined one or more of the strategies together to benefit the needs of the research. Some of the main research strategies set out and considered by Saunders *et al.*, (2009) are “*experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research*” (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

For this research study the research strategy chosen has been “*survey*”. While this research strategy may not provide as wide of a range of data as others it is useful in “*exploratory and descriptive research*” (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

3.5 Research Design

The objective of the research study is to measure the impact of an employee mental health compared to an unhealthy work life balance. The design path that the research will follow will be a quantitative cross sectional research design. Quantitative data is the examining of all relationships amount different factors that are continually changing in the world (Ingram-Broomfield, 2014). Quantitative data allows the author to research large sample sizes at once while also allowing to analyse the data in a statistics format. By including the cross sectional aspect of the research it will allow the author to examine the two variables being measured at the same time and is purely observational research. For the research to be reliable it is ideal to have a large sample size, unfortunately for the purpose of this research only 21 participants took part in this survey. By using the format of google forms the author had no control over the environment or concentration levels of the participants as it was available to them for their completion at a time that suited them best. Due to the nature of the survey being conducted online participants may have completed the survey with outside variables influencing their decision such as stressful work days or impending work or family obligations.

3.6 Data Collections – Questionnaires

This survey was designed and developed by the author which contained an information section, invitation section, GDPR regulation section, a consent section, workplace related section, current work life balance section and a mental health section. The survey was conducted in the form of questions where the participants chose between a scale of highly disagree to highly agree with two additional question at the end giving the participant the option to tick one or more boxes with the addition to add their own outcome. The survey was delivered through the means of google forms.

Data collected in the form of a questionnaire is the most common used form of data collection with a survey being a sub section or specific type of questionnaire. A survey is best

used to capture a persons “*attitude, beliefs and opinions*” (Phillips and Stawarski, 2008) around a certain topic where as a questionnaire would be able to gather a wider range of data feeding from these attitudes and beliefs to “*specific improvement statistics*” (Philips and Stawarski, 2008). The author then must choose the type of questions to be asked during this survey, which would distinguish what is classified to as a survey from it being referred to as a questionnaire. Surveys will include a yes/no type answer or a scale of satisfied to dissatisfied while questionnaires may use open-ended or multiple-choice questions (Philips and Stawarski, 2008).

3.7 Pilot Study

By conducting a pilot test before handing out a survey it allows the author to get feedback as to whether the survey flows for the reader and if any errors are noted before the initial handout of the survey. Pilot tests can be conducted with a small group of people to identify any changes that need to be made proper to its reveal to its audience (Philips and Stawarski, 2008). By allowing for this initial feedback to come through and to fix any potential issues before giving it to its target audience, it will allow for an easy read for the participant, hopefully being able to “*alleviate potential confusion, which sometimes negatively influences participants willingness to respond*” (Philips and Stawarski, 2008). A pilot test can also be used to determine for the author the sample size needed for the study. This will allow the author to know whether the study is feasible for the intended size groups before the research has been conducted (Menon *et al.*, 2021).

A pilot study will be used for the purpose of this research to indicate to the author the flow of the survey and the ability to answer the questions in the form of a scale.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The need to be ethically considerate is of growing important within research and the general business environment. The biggest concern when conducting research is that no physical, financial or social harm comes to the participant (Polonsky and Waller, 2004). As the reason for conducting the research is to understand and facilitate the learning of the author and how it influences the working world, but the author must still be aware of the potential harm that a participant may face during the research process. For this reason as list of ethical problems

that may arise has been completed. These includes “*preserving participants’ anonymity, involving participants in research without their knowledge and selling under the guise of research*”(Polonsky and Waller, 2004) just to name a few. In all research studies participants must always be voluntary, with no force or coercion for the participants to participate in the study. It should always be stated that the participant has the choice not to be included in the research and they are simply just invited to participate within the study with a clear understand of what is being asked of them and and that there will be no negativity surrounding them upon not wanting to participating within the research (Polonsky and Waller, 2004)

For the purpose of this study, an invitation and a consent section was included at the beginning of the survey to ensure that participants understood their part within the research and understood that it was not mandatory to participate.

3.9 Conclusion

The author has finalised that the following research survey will follow the sampling techniques set out by Saunders (2009) under the heading of probability sampling. The sampling of probability will be used in the context of quantitative and cross sectional research. By using a cross sectional sampling techniques it will allow the author to gather large quantities of data quickly along with allowing the author to investigate different variables at the same time. The author considered the ethical implications of the research study due to its nature about mental health which can cause triggers to some people, the survey approach was used to allow participants to give anonymous answers in a form of a scale and to not hinder the participants physical or mental health.

There are a number of limitations that occurred within this research. As the research survey was only delivered through the contact of the author which entail only delivered to a select few within the retail environment. Therefore, the participants included within the research were not as diverse or varied as the author had wanted. This can potentially influence the results as it will not indicate the wide variety of the retail environment, but only a small sample group within it.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

Within this chapter the research findings and results from the completed surveys will be analysed and discussed. The survey in discussion used quantitative methods to explore the link between an unsuccessful work life balance and a reduction in employee mental health. The survey, which was distributed to different contacts of the author with responses remaining anonymous, was completed by 21 participants. The data that will be further used in this chapter will all be provided from the research results.

4.2 Reliability Test

A reliability analysis was carried out on the perceived scale which was made up of 12 “Likert-Type” questions. The Likert scale is the use of a scale where the participants rate the statement provided from either 1-5, 1 usually meaning strongly disagree and 5 usually meaning strongly agree. To provide the author with a reliability score, Cronbach’s alpha was used to calculate the score of the questionnaire. When using Cronbach’s alpha to look at the reliability of a scale, the author should aim for a score of 0.7 or above for the research study to be considered reliable.

For the purpose of this study, the 12 questions were broken down into 3 categories, the first 4 questions were aimed towards the current workplace of the participants, the second 4 questions of the study were aimed at the current level of work life balance that the participant is experiencing and the last set of 4 questions were aimed at the current mental health experiences of the participants.

4.3 Current Workplace Questions

The scale of the first 4 questions, “current workplace of the participants”, showed the author a slightly lower than average score of 0.606 on Cronbach’s alpha. Out of the three scales it is the only set that shows a lower than average reliability score. **Table 1.1** shows the reliability statistics achieved from the author’s first set of questions.

Table 1.1 Reliability Statistics: Current Workplace

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.606	.604	4

The questions provided to the participants during this sector of the survey included how satisfied they are in the current workplace and if they thought that receiving feedback from their management would increase their wanting to contribute more in their place of work. For this section of the survey the Likert scale was used in the form of 1= highly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree and 5= highly agree.

Table 1.2 shows the correlation matrix between the 4 questions asked of the participants. If this study was to be replicated to a larger audience, Cronbach's alpha suggests that the 4th question included in the first section of the study should be removed as it does not correlate correctly towards the reliability of the survey. The r value when perfectly correlated shows a 1.0 correlation, for question 4 in the study it shows as a weaker question as all r values show in a minus format.

Table 1.2: Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	VAR00001	VAR00002	VAR00003	VAR00004
VAR00001	1.000	.705	.599	-.224
VAR00002	.705	1.000	.552	.095
VAR00003	.599	.552	1.000	-.070
VAR00004	-.224	.095	-.070	1.000

Table 1.3 allows the author to further enhance this point as it shows that by removing the 4th question from this part of the survey the reliability of the survey increases from .606 to .815, suggesting that the first part of the survey would then be considered to be very reliable.

Table 1.3: Item-Total Statistic

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
VAR00001	11.05	5.448	.550	.626	.413
VAR00002	10.71	5.114	.708	.584	.303
VAR00003	11.67	4.433	.530	.392	.406
VAR00004	10.71	8.714	-.081	.177	.815

4.4 Current Level of Work Life Balance

The second part of the survey conducted of 4 question focused on the current level of work life balance that the participants are achieving. Questions asked within this section of the survey included if the participant thought at their current working hour contract they were able to maintain a healthy work life balance and if they believe that a healthy work life balance is attainable at their current place of work. The Likert scale was used again in the format of 1= highly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree and 5=highly agree. **Table 1.4** indicates that this scale is very reliable with a Cronback’s alpha of .866.

Table 1.4 Reliability Statistics: Current Levels of Work Life Balance

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.866	.853	4

Table 1.5 shows that within this section of the survey most questions correlate together well with all but one variable showing the author an r rate of over 0.3.

Table 1.5: Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	VAR00005	VAR00006	VAR00007	VAR00008
VAR00005	1.000	.345	.844	.884
VAR00006	.345	1.000	.206	.538
VAR00007	.844	.206	1.000	.736
VAR00008	.884	.538	.736	1.000

4.5 Current Mental Health Experiences

The last section of the survey included the current mental health experiences that the participants may potentially be feeling. The type of questions asked in the section of the survey included if negative emotions are affecting their ability to contribute to the workplace effectively and if negative emotions are affecting their ability to contribute to their home or social life effectively. The last section of the survey has followed the previously discussed sections of the survey by asking these questions in the form of the Likert scale, 1= highly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree and 5= highly agree.

Table 1.6 shows that this section of the survey is also highly reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .866. **Table 1.7** also shows the author that all questions within this sector are compatible with one another as all variables have a score of above 0.3.

Table 1.6 Reliability Statistics: Current Mental Health Experiences

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.866	.874	4

Table 1.7: Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	VAR00009	VAR00010	VAR00011	VAR00012
VAR00009	1.000	.523	.453	.428
VAR00010	.523	1.000	.814	.787
VAR00011	.453	.814	1.000	.797
VAR00012	.428	.787	.797	1.000

Tables 1.8, Table 1.9 and Table 2.0 all show the scale statistics of each individual sector of the survey. Each scale shows that mean and standard deviation of the different variables.

Table 1.8 Scale Statistics: Current Workplace

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
14.71	9.314	3.052	4

Table 1.9 Scale Statistics: Current Level of Work Life Balance

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
15.29	11.314	3.364	4

Table 2.0 Scale Statistics: Current Mental Health Experiences

Scale Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
11.67	16.733	4.091	4

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

What will be examined in this chapter is a further discussion of the findings from the research study and a final look at what the study has aimed to achieve. The aim of the overall study was to examine the mental health of workers who do not have a healthy work life balance. The sub sections of the study were to examine the mental health challenges experienced by the employee, to understand the different symptoms and most felt emotions of those employees experiencing a decline in mental health due to an unhealthy work life balance and to assess how current well-being policies can be challenged and changed in organisations to benefit these employees more.

The data collected was gathered from the 21 participants of the research survey. From the research gathered it shows the author that while majority of the participants believe that a healthy work life balance can be attainable in their current workplace there are other factors that are hindering the employee from achieving it such as increased workload and reduction of staff in store. The research study also noted that when employees are not achieving the balance between work and home life they can notice their stress levels increasing and a reduction in their concentration as the two most prominent emotions.

5.2 Work Life Balance

From the research carried out by the author, 42.4% of the 21 participants had agreed or highly agreed that they were able to maintain a healthy work life balance at their current working hour contract. This shows the author that less than 50% of the participants feel that they are able to maintain a health work life balance showing the need for further study or changes to be made within the retail sector. In general participants felt that while they were satisfied with the current place of work and their contribution levels within the organisation most were not able to achieved the level of home and work life balance that they desired. When employees do not achieve this form of balance in their life it can lead to further disruptions in either sides of the balance. For the work side or essentially for the employers, it can lead to problems in retention levels if employees are not being able to balance both home and work life. How organisations encourage the balance of work and home life or how they try to help

from their end can be a demanding factor of retention or in gaining talented staff for the organisation (Houssein *et al.*, 2020). For the employee, the ability not to be able to balance their work and home life can have many effects on them. Some of these effects are negative emotion, low energy and sleeping disorders, all of which can directly impact on the employees ability to maintain and complete day-to-day tasks (Tomazevic *et al.*, 2014).

Looking at research questions one and three, which relate closely to the area of work life balance, we can see that participants are opened to the need for a change in the way work life balance currently is in some organisations and what can be done to help improve this.

Previous research has shown how successful a 4-day working week can be in organisations and from the authors research study many employees are encouraging this to be tried and tested further. 81% of the 21 participants from the research study highly agreed that a 4-day working week would greatly help them in the ability to achieve a healthier work life balance than what they are currently experiencing. Another area that was also discussed in the research study was the level of feedback that employees are receiving from their employers. Previous research indicated a positive relationship between work life balance and employer relationships. By having this form of strong relationship between employer and employee it can provide excellent benefits in terms of receiving all forms of feedback and reviews (Rani *et al.*, 2011). The research study carried out by the author shows that 38.1% of the 21 participants are either dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied with their current feedback levels they are receiving from their organisation and that 71.4% of the 21 participants either agreed or highly agreed that they would be encouraged to produce a higher contribution to their workplace if they received better feedback or a regular form of feedback from their employer.

5.3 Mental Health

Research Question two relates closely to the topic of mental health and allows the author to further look at the “different symptoms and most felt emotions” that the employees would feel during a decline in mental health due to an unhealthy work life balance. There was an equal amount of responses for the most experienced emotion with 71.4% of the 21 participants equally agreed that increased stress levels and reduction in concentration levels were the two most commonly felt emotions. The second most common emotion or experience felt in a mental health decline was an increase in anxiety for 61.9% of the 21 participants. This showcases for the author that many employee feel or experience similar mental health

challenges when dealing with a unhealthy work life balance. For 33.3% of the 21 participants they felt that they agreed or highly agreed that those negative emotions mentioned previously were affecting their mental health relating those emotions back to an unhealthy work life balance. By being able to achieve a healthy work life balance it can give employees a sense of consistency which can enable them to better meet the demands of the job and reduce the impact on their mental health (Haar *et al.*, 2014).

5.4 Hypotheses Discussion

5.4.1 Mental health challenges

Hypotheses one proposed that mental health challenges directly affected employees ability to contribute to the workplace effectively. The results from the research study did not in fact support this statement as 52.4% of the 21 participants felt that their emotions neither affected or took away from their ability to contribute effectively to the workplace. What the research found was that while only 19% of the participants agreed that their mental health challenges affected their ability to contribute to the workplace, 33.3% of the participants felt that instead it had an impact on their home or social life. This hypotheses should be rejected as the research does not show a direct affect on the employees ability to contribute to the workplace effectively.

5.4.2 Emotions and mental health experiences

Hypotheses two proposed that the emotions and symptoms of employees experiencing an unhealthy work life balance will be repetitive throughout many employees in the workplace. While it has previously been mentioned that mental health experiences differ from person to person throughout life, this hypotheses will be discussed only in the terms of work life balance. From the research study conducted by the author it shows that there are four main symptoms or emotions that resonate with over 50% of the participants. These emotions/symptoms are increased stress levels - felt by 71.4% of the 21 participants, reduction in concentration levels – felt by 71.4% of the 21 participants, anxiety – felt by 61.9% of the 21 participants and headaches – felt by 57.1% of the 21 participants. For the question in the research study, the participants were given the choice to also add their own option to their answer with only three participants including emotions that were not already

given in the question. These emotions were overstimulation, feeling of inadequacy and frustration – all of these answers were only 4.8% of the overall feelings or emotions. The results from the research study indicate that while some of the emotions and symptoms could be considered repetitive there is always the option that some employees could feel completely different emotions or symptoms than one another.

5.4.3 Current well-being policies

Hypotheses three proposed that current well-being policies do not reflect the needs of employees today. Results from the research study indicate this statement to be somewhat true. The biggest indicator from the research study conducted by the author was the question surrounding the idea of a reduction to a 4-day working week, with 81% of the 21 participants highly agreeing that a 4-day working week would help them to attain a healthy work life balance. Relating back to the literature review, the success of the recent study in Iceland shows the positive impacts that a 4-day working week can have on employers and employees. Employers could potentially improve the participation levels from employees while also allowing the employees to gain a better working life balance (Alda, 2021). For employees this could considerably reduce their stress levels within the organisation and allow them some time to participate in activities they once enjoyed and gain back some time to work on their well-being.

Another area that the authors research study look into was the employees feedback levels. From the research conducted only 38% of the 21 participants either agreed or highly agreed that they feedback they were currently receiving from management was helpful in regards to how they are contributing to the organisation. Feedback is essential to how an employee views their satisfaction level within an organisation, with 71.4% of the participants either agreeing or highly agreeing that it would significantly increase their wanting to increase their current contribute levels to their organisation. Following back into the literature review job satisfaction is critical to employers and employees. For the employees, satisfaction can come from many different aspects within the organisation such as feedback or communication levels throughout the organisation, as they feel more encouraged to work if they are receiving this vital communication (Kamal Abdien, 2019). As for the organisation, by the employee feeling job satisfaction it can majorly decrease employee turnover and their wanting to look around for new employment (Kamal Abdien, 2019).

5.5 Limitations of the Research

From the research study conducted, the author has gained an in-depth understanding of both topics; Work Life Balance and Mental Health. Since completing the study the author has found areas in which the research could be developed further to gain a better understanding of the two topics under the title of an exploratory study. The main limitation that the author had noted was the sample size of the research group. Due to some time constraints the author was not able to reach as many participants as they had hoped. The ideal aim for any quantitative research study is to aim for 50 participants or more, but unfortunately, for this study the author was only able to attain 21 participants.

Only one method of research was chosen for this study due to some time constraints, if the research was to be researched again, the author would suggest a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative research. A mixture of surveys and interviews would greatly add to this research study as the author would be able to get generalised anonymous results for the surveys but would be able to gather a deeper understanding and knowledge of the kind of mental health challenges that some retail employees experience.

Another limitation that the author came across in their study was due to an error in the original research survey as there was no question included in the demographic asking the participants which age category they fell into. With this question added into the study the author could have had a further look into if age was any factors into those employees experiencing mental health challenges due to an unhealthy work life balance.

Overall the findings of the research indicated that workers who do not have a good work life balance do experience mental health challenges ranging from a few to many different emotions being felt during this period. One recommendation that could be made to someone who is looking to further the research is to gather a larger sample size from a variation of retail workers and to include both quantitative and qualitative research methods to further analyse the challenges that employees experience while working within the retail sector.

Another recommendation for anyone looking to further the research study would be to allow for more time to complete both methods of research as suggested above. Due to time constraints from the author they were not able to achieve the intended research of using both

methods but would recommend it for further research as it would add to the research to give better findings for employers.

5.6 Timeline for Implementing Recommendations

For the recommendations made the author would suggest to allow for 4 weeks for each method of research. For the survey this allows the researcher to reach as many participants as possible for the study while also allowing for the employees to take their time and participate at a time that may be quite or convenient for them, potentially giving the author a more conclusive final result. For the second method of research, interview, this allows for scheduling the interviews with those participants who are willing to participate at a time that is reasonable or convenience for themselves.

5.7 Conclusion

The aim of the research study was to explore the mental health experiences of those employees who do not have a good work life balance. From completing the study, the author feels that they have gained an in-depth knowledge to what the experiences of these employees are during a mental health challenge. The research was chosen in the form of a quantitative method to allow the participants to freely answer the questions on the anonymous survey without fear or embarrassment of being recognised. Due to some limitations during the authors research it would be recommended for further research to be done in this area to give employers a better understand of the needs of these employees and how to adjust their well-being policies to better help employees mental health.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to examine if there is a link between an unhealthy work life balance and a decline in employees mental health. The study took a further look at the different experiences of mental health that some employees may feel compared to other. The research took the form of a survey and had 21 participants included within the research. Those 21 participants all came from a retail background. From the findings of the research, the author was able to study two key areas in further detail; work life balance and mental health.

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the key aspects that came from the research study and see the comparison to the past research as mentioned above within the literature review. The author will be able to reach a conclusion based around the research objective mentioned above. After reaching a conclusion the author will further discuss the recommendations to be made drawn from the research study.

6.2 Mental Health

The first research question discussed by the author was: *“to examine the mental health challenges experienced by employees”*. From the research study conducted by the author, out of the 21 participants in the study 42.9% stated that the biggest cause to their experience with an unhealthy work life balance was a reduction to team members or staff members in store. The second most noted cause to experiencing an unhealthy work life balance was an increased workload. It can be considered that these two causes primarily relate to one another as when there is a reduction of staff within store the workload is put onto the remaining employees. This can cause stress or anxiety to build within these employees and negatively impact their mental health.

The second research question mentioned by the author was: *“to understand the different symptoms and most felt emotions”*. As previously mentioned in the literature review, mental health experiences or challenges are different for every person, it is the *“emotional, physiological and socially well-being”* of each individual (MentalHealth.gov 2021). The

purpose of this research was to examine if in the working environment the mental health challenges were repetitive in the majority of employees. Previous research had gathered that an anxiety disorder was one of the most common mental health experiencing felt by employees, the same cannot be said for this research study. From the research carried on and the 21 employees who participated, the most felt emotions when experiencing a mental health decline from an unhealthy work life balance was “*increased stressed levels*” and a “*reduction in concentration levels*”. From the research study 71.4% of the participants felt these two emotions equally the most during the time of a reduction in their mental health.

From the research study, anxiety was the third highest emotion felt by those employees experience an unhealthy work life balance. Past research has shown that an unsuccessful work life balance or a reduction is one side of the balance (such as family conflict during a certain period of time) can lead to a rise in employee absenteeism. This absenteeism is not always view as a negative absenteeism, it might give the employee the time to deal with the issues and return to the workplace fully focused (Thomas and Hersen, 2002). Due to the increase in stress levels felt by employees world wide from the coronavirus pandemic, some organisations are taking the extra step to help combat these feelings. Software company “SAP” have now began to offer employees a paid-day off to focus on their mental well-being (Employee Benefit News, 2021).

6.3 Work Life Balance

The third research question mentioned by the author was: “*to assess how current well-being policies can be challenged and changed in organisations*”. Previously discussed in the literature review, the most common type of employee well-being policy included in organisations is the ability to have flexibility within the working week for those who work a standard 9-5. For those in retail there are very little policies to protect their well-being due to the nature of the shift work. With many employees roster changed last minute or no patten in their working week it is clear that working policies are not made with the retail environment in mind.

From this research study, two key factor was looked at when discussing their current workplace, these two topics were: “*The working week*” and “*employee feedback*”. Firstly looking at the working week, over 80% of the 21 participants agreed that a reduction to a 4-

day working week would help them in the ability to attain a healthy work life balance. A recent study from Iceland shows an overwhelming success in their study of 2,500 participant (1% of the country's workforce) who reduced their working week to 4 days (Kelly, 2021). What this meant for both the organisation and the employee is that productivity levels and serviced remained the same as they were when employees worked a five day week and employee well-being increased with stress levels reducing for those who participated in the study. As for employee feedback, from the research conducted by the author 38.1% of the 21 participants found that when they received feedback from their employer it increased their wanted to contribute at a higher level to the organisation. 38.1 % of the 21 participants also stated that they are currently dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied with their current feedback levels in their organisation. Past research has shown that when employees are dissatisfied with the communication within their organisation they tend to leave that organisation due to this reason alone (Kamal Abdien, 2019).

6.4 Recommendation

As this research study did not met the expectations of the author in terms of participants, if the research was to be replicated it would need to be researched by a larger group of participants to be able to determine the need of the wider retail environment.

From the research study, one of the main recommendations to give employers is to reevaluate their employee well-being policies and ensure all employee are aware of these policies and procedures within the organisation. With the influx of employees mental health deteriorating due to the coronavirus pandemic, organisations should update or review their well-being policies to ensure that they are in tandem with what the world is currently experiencing. By ensuring that employees are aware of the well-being policies within the organisation , this showcases to the employees that the organisation understands the need for employee well-being and encourages them to participate or use any of the services that are provided by the organisation (e.g counselling services or reduction in gym memberships).

The second recommendation to be made to employers is to examine their scheduling of the working week for employees. From the research conducted by the author, 38.1% of employees agreed that their current working hours were attainable in the ability to achieve a healthy work life balance, thought, 81% of participants agreed that reducing to a 4-day

working week would further help them in their ability to achieve a healthier work life balance. While this recommendation would need more research at a higher participant levels it could be something for organisations to consider in the further. A recommendation that could be achieved it for organisation to complete the scheduling of employees shift patters in advance of their current work week. By allowing employees to know of their shift patter in a fortnightly advance it could potentially reduce stress or anxiety within the employees and potentially reduce absenteeism within the organisation.

Chapter 7: Personal Learning Statement

My time during the Masters programme has been a challenging experience due to the move to online learning, but the experience of completing my dissertation during this time has taught me many life skills that I can apply to most areas of my personal and professional life. During the process of my dissertation my working life changed and I am grateful for the HR position that I am currently in, but as I changed from a part-time schedule to a full-time schedule I had to significantly work on my time management skills to ensure I was keeping up with both college and work life.

From my research I was able to fully understand and gain much needed knowledge around the topics of work life balance and the experiences of employees with mental health challenges during this time. The literature review provided a detailed history of both of work life balance and mental health experiences and the effects these have on employees with a further focus on employees within the retail sector. By further examining the area of work life balance and retail employees it showcased for the author the apparent gap in the literature for employees in this area and the need for further research to be conducted.

If further research was to be conducted in the area, a bigger scale of participants would be needed to give employers a detailed understanding of how employees are currently feeling in terms of their mental health and work load and what employers can do as an organisation to help and benefit employees better in terms of their mental health.

What I have gained from completing my dissertation is the ability to manage by time efficiently between different tasks and the ability to prioritise when needed. I am grateful for this new skills but wish that I had achieved this prior to my research methods as this was when it was needed most. I am grateful to be able to research a topic that I feel passionate about and have a much clearer understanding of how I could potentially help me further employees and change the status quo within this area of the working world.

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