

# **Robotic Life of Casino Employees: Exploring Well-being Dimensions in the Gambling Industry in Malaysia**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose** – Employee well-being in a casino work environment is crucial for the quality of work-life and employees' performance. This study examines the dimensions of well-being at a casino in Malaysia to gain deeper insights into employee challenges and motivational factors to arrive at practical mitigation efforts.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study adopted a qualitative approach involving 14 semi-structured interviews with casino employees in Malaysia. Interviews lasted 30 minutes to 2 hours at a time when Covid-19 was raging in 2021. Responses were coded using NVivo software to delineate the contents into analytical categories of well-being dimensions.

**Findings** – The findings suggest that employees at the casino face challenges in achieving work-life balance. Employee's well-being suffers from insufficient break time, irregular working hours affecting family time, managing customer temper tantrums, and lack of emotional support systems and remunerations altered by the pandemic. Women employees were particularly vulnerable.

**Research limitations/implications** – The findings suggest a need to create better working conditions and address well-being with counselling support for stress management, a balanced approach by employers to the 'customer is always right' mantra, creating promising career pathways and supervisors to have better oversight of workaholics. The research focused only on one casino, and there was limited access to management departments for an organizational perspective.

**Originality/value** – This study adds to the body of knowledge on employee well-being in the context of a casino. It suggests hospitality and tourism organizations review their human resource practices that would ease the stresses at the workplace and create support systems to promote employee well-being. Crucially, in a pandemic crisis, well-being dimensions must be accommodating and integrative to employee sentiments, sensitivity and self-actualization.

**Keywords** Quality of Work Life, Well-being, Employee perspective, COVID-19, Motivations, Stress, Support Systems

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Most employees spend much of their life in workspaces, so the quality of work life (QWL) influences one's overall well-being and work performance (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Taheri *et al.*, 2019). Scholars defined employee well-being based on various indicators such as felt happiness, satisfaction (Rasool *et al.*, 2021), job security (Dawson *et al.*, 2017), heavy work investment through work engagement and workaholism (Shimazu *et al.*, 2015), supportive organizational climate (Kim *et al.*, 2019), and employee empowerment (Krishnan, 2012). A related concept is a Quality of Work Life (QWL), referring to an individual's perception of their work and the broader working environment, including physical features of the work environment, working hours, career opportunities, and work-life/family balance (Kim *et al.*, 2020; Wan and Chan, 2013). In this study we will use the term employee well-being relating broadly to the “overall quality of an employee’s experience and functioning at work” (Grant *et al.*, 2007, p. 52).

Knowing what makes employees appreciate their work and what they find challenging for the hospitality and service sector industries is essential. Satisfied or happy employees are more likely to be retained, which is especially important for an industry characterized by a shortage of employees and high turnover rates (Guilding *et al.*, 2014; Stergiou and Farmaki, 2021). Employees form a crucial part of hospitality or leisure organizations for organizational success. Therefore, refining employee well-being should be an important goal for any organization (Chan *et al.*, 2019). Casino employees' well-being is considered an asset for service delivery, resulting in better employee performance and ultimately affecting customer retention and casino profitability (Prentice, 2018). A favourable relationship between human resource (HR) practices and the well-being of employees is a win-win situation for both employees and managers (Salas-Vallina *et al.*, 2021).

Whilst the concepts of work well-being and QWL have been applied to various organizational contexts (Diener, 2009; Rasool *et al.*, 2021; Ryff, 1989), research into the hospitality sector, particularly in the casino industry, is rare (Wan and Chan, 2013), representing a research gap. Furthermore, Covid-19 brought about unprecedented and severe impacts on all levels of the service and hospitality sector, which requires a re-evaluation of the well-being of employees in the industry (Prentice *et al.*, 2021). There is limited research on casino employees due to the nature of the industry, which shields its employee data (Chon and Hsu, 2006; Li *et al.*, 2017). Previous research on casino employees studied the effects of satisfaction and organizational commitment on turnover intentions (Aho, 2019; Chan and Ao, 2019), job insecurity (Cheung *et al.*, 2019), employee gambling behaviour (Zeng *et al.*, 2021), casino profitability (Prentice, 2016) and the impact of sexual harassment (Tsai *et al.*, 2022).

Most of the existing research on casino employees is quantitative (Youn *et al.*, 2019; Zeng *et al.*, 2021), and recent studies suggest more qualitative research to gain deeper insights into motivational factors for Casino employee satisfaction and well-being (Chan and Ao, 2019). Moreover, to the authors' knowledge, no study has been conducted on Casino employee well-being in Malaysia. The few studies of casino-related research in Malaysia mainly focused on customer retention by investigating the relationship between service quality, player segments, and customer retention (Prentice *et al.* (2012); or productive gambling businesses in Malaysia

(Rathakrishnan and George, 2021). This qualitative research explores the dimensions and influences of casino employee well-being in the regional context of Malaysia. There are three unique features to this work. First, addressing the well-being of employees in a casino context which represents an under-researched setting due to the industry shielding its employee data. Second, research concerning casinos is novel in the regional context of a predominantly Muslim country such as Malaysia where Muslims are forbidden to gamble. Third, the research was conducted during Covid-19 and contributes to the emerging findings of employee well-being during the pandemic.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Dimensions and influences of employee well-being***

The last decades have seen a growing number of studies exploring employee well-being in different organizational contexts (Danna and Griffin, 1999; Diener, 2009; Warhurst and Knox, 2022; Yadav *et al.*, 2021; Rastogi *et al.*, 2018, Grote and Guest, 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). Employee well-being demonstrated various positive organizational outcomes, for instance, organizational performance, job satisfaction, work engagement and avoidance of burnout (Ilies *et al.*, 2015). Previous studies investigated employee well-being in different industries, including the hospitality and service industry, education industry, cultural contexts and even under various economic conditions (Diener, 2009; Ponting, 2020; Warhurst and Knox, 2022). Considering the positive organizational outcomes of employee well-being, it is essential to understand its dimensions, influences, and consequences, especially in an unprecedented crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the hospitality and casino industry highly depends on employees and their positive interactions with guests (Chan *et al.*, 2019), making the well-being of its employees a crucial factor for success. To understand employee well-being in a casino context, it is useful to conceptually distinguish between dimensions (what is employee well-being) and influences or determinants (by what and how is employee well-being influenced).

#### *Dimensions of employee well-being*

In this study, we employ a holistic understanding of employee well-being which incorporates psychological, economic, social and physical dimensions (Grant *et al.*, 2007; Rath *et al.*, 2010). A critical conceptual distinction has been made by differentiating objective and subjective dimensions. Objective dimensions entail such factors as income, health well-being (life expectancy or health insurance), and subjective dimensions, including perceived QOL. Subjective well-being refers to hedonic experiences that minimize negative impacts (Voukelatou *et al.*, 2021). Ryan and Deci (2001) distinguish between the individual hedonic approach aimed at happiness, pleasure and avoidance of pain versus the personal eudaimonic approach focused on self-actualization.

Grant *et al.* (2007) introduced the three interdisciplinary critical dimensions of well-being: health (physical), happiness (psychological), and relationships (social). Psychological well-being refers to the subjective experiences of individuals, while physical well-being relates to "both objective physiological measures and subjective experiences of bodily health" (Grant *et al.*, 2007, p. 53). Social well-being entails an individual's embeddedness in networks with friends, co-workers, and other groups. The quality of such relationships is linked to trust, reciprocity and other support structures. Rath *et al.* (2010) further highlight the role of

economic (financial) aspects and propose a combination and interaction of five elements of well-being: (1) Career well-being relates to an individual liking what they do every day; (2) social well-being focuses on solid relationships with others who encourage personal development; (3) financial well-being refers to individual's economic life and achieving financial security; (4) physical well-being highlights good health and enough energy to get things done efficiently, and (5) community well-being emphasizes a sense of pride and connection with the area and community within individual lives and works.

### *Influences on employee well-being*

Well-being is presumably influenced by three sets of factors, including (1) work setting factors such as health, safety risks and dangers, (2) personality traits such as locus of control and self-efficacy, and (3) occupational stress (Danna and Griffin, 1999). Jobs can be stressful, especially in times of crisis, urgency, work peer pressures, long hours and in an uncomfortable work environment. These factors can influence employees' physical and psychological well-being (Montgomery et al., 2018). In contrast to such studies by Rath and associates. (2010), who mostly deciphered positive elements of individual well-being, other researchers identified negative factors. For instance, Schabracq and Cooper (1998) proposed three major harmful disruptions to employee well-being: dysfunctional situations (e.g., inadequate job demand, poor management); intrusions (e.g., unfair treatment, conflicts with others); and environmental change (e.g., change in culture, technology, economics). Occupational stress decreases well-being and can be a risk factor for organizations (Quick and Henderson, 2016). The potential sources of occupational stress can be work overload or underload, shift work, conflicts at work, job insecurity, poor communication, a negative work-life-balance, and issues to manage work and family (Danna and Griffin, 1999). Diener *et al.* (2009) proposed new measures of well-being by integrating "negative feelings" and "negative thinking", such as anger, anxiety, vulnerability, and sadness.

The perception and experience of employee well-being can further be shaped by different demographic characteristics (Kim *et al.*, 2018), economic status, social class (Ryan and Deci, 2001) and socio-cultural backgrounds (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Regarding gender, women in the hospitality and tourism sector earn less than men (UNWTO, 2019) and are more likely to be the target of interpersonal abuses such as sexual harassment in the workplace (Buchanan *et al.*, 2008). Whilst data frequency and impact of gender-related harassment is scarce, studies indicate that every fourth employee in hospitality encounters harassment at work (Morgan and Pritchard, 2019). Low autonomy at work and unsafe work conditions are critical concerns for casino employees, particularly female workers (Clouser *et al.*, 2018; Tsai *et al.*, 2022). Gender is a visible social category at work. In many cases, women face more challenges in obtaining economic capital than men, especially during a financial crisis (Pines *et al.*, 2010). Diener's (2009) work shows differences in the perceived and reported well-being across cultures, which may be influenced by income, levels of trust, homogeneity of society, and openness to show emotions. Cultural values and the notion of collectivism versus individualism also influence the importance of job security (Probst and Lawler, 2006).

### *The role of Covid-19*

However, the conceptualizations of employee well-being reviewed above still need to consider the unprecedented severe impact of the pandemic. Covid-19 has disrupted working conditions and led to new challenges at the workplace, including additional health and safety protocols,

changing standard operating procedures, and staffing issues (Prentice *et al.*, 2021). Such changes have shaken the labour force and work environments, causing intense stress both at the individual and business levels in addition to societal pressures.

To improve employee well-being, it will be vital to maintain and further improve current levels of job quality following the economic shock caused by COVID-19 (Knox and Warhurst, 2022). Organizations need to improve worker well-being within the organization while guaranteeing minimum standards, monitoring job quality, ensuring compliance and making necessary adjustments for employee job security. Grote and Guest (2017) emphasized the importance of work design and argued for regenerating QWL to promote employee well-being, further highlighting the need for interdisciplinary research.

Recent studies started to explore the role of Covid-19 at the workplace and highlighted shifts towards more flexible work and work-from-home arrangements (Reuschke and Felstead, 2020), issues of work safety (Iheduru-Anderson, 2021), and mental well-being in work and everyday life (Tušl, *et. al.*, 2021). Hence, we seek to contribute the emerging findings regarding Covid-19 in the workplace and, more specifically, to the employee well-being in a casino context in Malaysia.

#### *The job demands-resources model*

Besides the above discussions on dimensions and determinants of well-being, scholars proposed conceptualisations to evaluate employee well-being and occupational stress (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Demerouti *et al.* (2001) proposed the job demands-resources model, assuming that each occupation bears its own specific risk and stress factors which can be categorised into two types, job demands and job resources.

Job demands "refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). These may include high work pressures, challenging customer interactions, and a problematic physical work environment. Employees encounter stress and react negatively when job demands are overwhelming. Job resources allude to physical, psychological, organisational and social parts of occupation, which can diminish job demands and the related costs (Demerouti *et al.*, 2017). Such job resources include management support and trust in their employers, facilitating greater freedom in workplace decisions and demonstrating employee contributions with recognition and rewards. The job demands-resources model predicates that job resources can create a favourable impact and reduce the level of stress. It contains most of the dimensions and influences (determinants) proposed by scholars of employee well-being. Hence, the job demands-resources model has been used in various organizational contexts to evaluate employee well-being. However, researchers found individual resources and characteristics (personal resources) as well as external structural forces and factors (environmental change) as significant aspects of employee well-being. Therefore, the authors are guided by these essential concepts of well-being, leading to a holistic understanding of well-being dimensions and influences in the gambling and casino industry in a Malaysian context. The present study aims to extend the scholarship on work-related well-being, particularly in the hospitality and casino industry, by deciphering both negative and positive aspects of the employee experience.

## ***2.2 Well-being and quality of work-life in the casino industry***

The concepts of Quality of Life (QOL) and Well-being are used interchangeably by researchers and have been widely used in the hospitality and tourism contexts (Uysal *et al.*, 2016; He *et al.*, 2019). Kim *et al.* (2018) found that corporate social responsibility in the hotel positively affected QWL, and employees' QWL and job satisfaction affect their overall quality of life. Their research also suggested that hotels should actively engage in various programs to promote employees' well-being within the company to increase their overall quality of life (also see Su and Swanson, 2019). Low level of employee well-being when overflowing into the other domains of life leads to life dissatisfaction and makes an employee less productive when confronting life challenges (Agarwal, 2020).

Whilst research on employee well-being in the hospitality and tourism context has become more prominent in recent years, applications to the casino industry are scarce. Employee well-being is critical for hospitality and tourism organizations to retain skilled workers who are essential assets needed to meet the demands of the industry (Kim *et al.*, 2018; Wan and Chan, 2013). Therefore, understanding the factors affecting employee well-being in the casino industry will add value to the literature.

The working environment directly affects all kinds of well-being, including general and job-related well-being (Ariza-Montes *et al.*, 2019). Researchers emphasized the unfavourable working conditions of the gambling industry, especially casinos (Clouser *et al.*, 2018) which are considered highly stressful (Teoh *et al.*, 2019). Employees must follow strict procedures and rules while monitoring the customers and games and collecting and offering money to the customer while recording the game results cautiously (Wan and Chan, 2013). Additionally, working in the gambling industry can be very physically demanding (Wan and Chan, 2013).

Moreover, casino employees' communication style directly affects customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty to the casino (Hwang and Park, 2018). Therefore, employees need to tolerate certain emotions and demonstrate positive emotions while serving the gamblers, which consequently makes employees face high emotional exhaustion and burnout (Chan *et al.*, 2015; Teoh *et al.*, 2019). In addition, casino employees are frequently exposed to unhealthy environments, such as closed environments with no windows and cigarette smoke (Wan and Pilkington, 2009). Considering such stressful conditions, it is necessary to evaluate the factors which affect employee well-being to enhance satisfaction and quality of their work life.

According to Wan and Chan (2013) job characteristics, work environment, workplace relationships, human resource policies, and workgroup relationships are significant factors that increase the QWL of casino employees and consequently decrease the turnover rate. A high work-life balance among casino employees can make employees more satisfied and productive while lowering employee turnover and organizational costs (Wan and Chan, 2013).

Researchers found that understanding employees' opinions of their work experience will help managers improve employee well-being, organization proficiency and effectiveness (Jaiswal, 2014), and organizational performance (Magnier-Watanabe *et al.*, 2020). In the competitive gambling industry market, qualified employees that can attract and retain profitable customers are seen as an investment for the organizations. The good service performance of casino employees significantly affects the gambler's retention rate and, ultimately, casino profitability

and revenues (Prentice, 2018). Therefore, it is essential for gambling organizations to look after their employees.

Casino employees work irregular working hours, especially night shifts, weekends, and public holidays. These working conditions, in addition to stress from demanding customers, often create out-of-sync social gathering time and familial relationships, which may lead to isolation (Suk Ha *et al.*, 2018). Research found that job satisfaction and organizational commitment will influence work-family conflict and employee turnover intention (Chan and Ao, 2019; Chan *et al.*, 2015; Chau, 2019). Hence, casino managers should understand the needs of their employees to retain them. Future research on casino employees from the various departments of the organization was suggested to provide a deeper insight into motivational factors for Casino employee satisfaction and well-being (Chan and Ao, 2019). Given the importance of employees in hospitality, particularly in the gaming industry, and considering the demanding nature of the job and the unfavourable work environment of the casino, it is crucial to pay attention to employee well-being in the industry.

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1 Setting and research design***

There is only one official casino in Malaysia (i.e. the Genting casino in Pahang state), and it is large in scale. The casino attracted 17 million visitors with net sales of RM4.5 billion in 2019. The casino is located inside Resorts World Genting (RWG), one of Malaysia's most popular holiday destinations. Situated at the peak of Genting Highlands in Pahang, Malaysia, RWG is a premier integrated leisure and entertainment resort with approximately 10,500 rooms across seven hotels, theme parks, entertainment facilities, attractions, dining and retail outlets, and business convention facilities (Genting Malaysia, 2020).

The research focused on exploring the perceptions and experiences of casino floor employees regarding the quality of work and work well-being. Existing research on QWL in the hospitality industries predominantly relies on quantitative studies (Kara *et al.*, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Muskat and Reitsamer, 2019; Su and Swanson, 2019), which may not offer a deep understanding of employees' individual perspectives. The current study investigates the attributes that affect the quality of work-life and well-being of hospitality employees in the casino industry. A qualitative approach was more appropriate because the study relied on gaining in-depth insights from respondents and their experiences as employees at the casino and during the Covid-19 crisis. Moreover, research into casino employees' perspectives of work and well-being is relatively rare, which justifies a more exploratory research approach (Wan and Chan, 2013). Research into subjective well-being relates to how persons feel about themselves and how they perceive and experience life and work, which can best be understood through qualitative analysis.

#### ***3.2 Data collection***

To explore employees' well-being in casino contexts, the researchers conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with casino employees, covering the following broad topics: casino

environment, benefits and aspects of good work-life, challenges and characteristics of bad work-life, work relationships, and future outlook. Each topic included a set of open questions, including a range of probes, such as: Can you describe your typical working week in the casino? Can you think of any aspects contributing to a good work-life in your current job? What opportunities do you have to advance your career in the casino industry? All research participants were casino floor employees holding different positions such as supervisors, the croupier (dealer), assistant managers, and managers (see Table 1). Participants were approached through two research team members' personal contacts. The sampling strategy is thus based on convenience sampling, utilizing research participants who are accessible and meet the scope of the research.

Table 1. Respondents' profile

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Role in the casino</b>	<b>Length of service in the current Casino</b>
Naagesh	Male	Late 30s	Indian	Supervisor	Over 15 years
Chandran	Male	Late 40s	Indian	Supervisor	Over 15 years
Eshana	Female	Early 20s	Indian	Groupier	1-4 years
Maggie	Female	Early 50s	Chinese	Supervisor	Over 15 years
Maira	Female	Mid-20s	Indian	Groupier	1-4 years
Pranit	Male	Mid 40s	Indian	Supervisor	Over 15 years
Lekha	Female	Early 50s	Indian	Supervisor	Over 15 years
Ravi	Male	Early 20s	Indian	Supervisor	7 years
Aadesh	Male	Early 30s	Indian	Supervisor	5-9 years
Daanesh	Male	Early 40s	Indian	Supervisor	Over 15 years
Liu	Male	Mid 40s	Chinese	Supervisor	10-14 years
Chen	Male	Early 40s	Chinese	Supervisor	10 years
Yan	Male	Early 30s	Chinese	Dealer	5-9 years
Zhao	Female	Early 30s	Chinese	Dealer	5-9 years

Face-to-face interviews with the respondents were set in advance and took place throughout 2021. The time and date of the interviews were adapted to the respondents' work schedules, and the interviews were conducted at locations where the respondents felt comfortable such as a hotel, coffee shops, and private homes. Qualitative interviews are most effective when research participants feel safe and relaxed (Kwortnik, 2003). Before starting each interview, a participant information sheet was provided to all interviewees, explaining the project objectives, procedures, right to refuse or withdraw, risks and discomforts, benefits, confidentiality, and contact information. Furthermore, the research ethics approval was shared and explained beforehand. In protecting respondents' identity and keeping with standard research practices, we use pseudonyms for all the research participants discussed here and do not disclose details about their age, exact job position, or other personal details. The interviewers asked permission for voice recording. Ten of the 14 interviews were recorded, while the remaining were documented through note-taking. Interviews were conducted in English, Tamil, and Malay, depending on the interviewers' and respondents' backgrounds. The length of the interviews varied between 30 and 120 minutes, depending on the respondents' knowledge, experience, and willingness to share.



### 3.3. Data analysis

The authors used data-driven content analysis based on qualitative coding strategies adopted from Corbin and Strauss (2008). The interview data were systematically coded using NVivo software. This allowed for a clear delineation of the themes and categories, context, explanations and patterns identification of converging and diverging experiences from the data (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The final analytical step, called selective coding or theoretical integration, is the process of linking categories, validating these links and eventually refining the resulting theoretical construction and the development of a storyline (Strauss and Corbin, 1996). To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the interview data and its interpretations, researchers validated the analytical process through the "triangulation of investigators" (Kreftnig, 1991, p. 219). Hence, all authors contributed to the analytical categories, which are summarised in Table 2 and further presented in the findings section.

Table 2. Summary of analytical categories of casino employees' wellbeing

<b>Themes (Job Demands and Resources)</b>	<b>Categories (Dimensions and attributes)</b>	<b>Concepts and attributes</b>
Personal Resource	Sociodemographic determinants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gender</li> <li>● Ethnicity</li> <li>● Working experience</li> </ul>
Job Resources	The good working life (physical well-being)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Economic dimensions: High salary, Overtime, bonus (financial benefits)</li> <li>● Medical &amp; social dimensions: medical cover, fringe benefits, investment in life events</li> </ul>
	Work relationships (social well-being)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Among employees: friendly versus gossip, jealousy, work politics</li> <li>● With management: supportive versus careless</li> <li>● Work politics and racialised experiences</li> </ul>
Environmental change	The impact of Covid-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Covid-19</li> <li>● economic losses: loss of benefits</li> <li>● changing working hour</li> <li>● increased stress</li> </ul>

Job Demands	Challenging social job characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social isolation</li> <li>• Shift work</li> <li>• Insufficient sleep</li> <li>• Robotic life and routine</li> <li>• Limited breaks and rest time</li> <li>• Work-family conflicts</li> </ul>
	Challenging physical environment and health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smoking areas</li> <li>• Bad air/ventilation</li> <li>• Noise pollution</li> <li>• Crowded environment and SOPs</li> </ul>
	Psychological stress from interaction with customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with rude behaviour</li> <li>• Dealing with aggressive behaviour</li> <li>• 'Customers is always right' attitude</li> <li>• Gendered experiences</li> </ul>
Career Limitations	Limited career advancement and future perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No future</li> <li>• Limited career developments</li> <li>• Quitting the job</li> <li>• Lack of alternatives</li> </ul>
Coping	Coping strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical exercise</li> <li>• Spirituality</li> <li>• Positive memories</li> <li>• Lack of institutional support</li> </ul>

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

This study aimed to explore the well-being and QWL perceptions of casino floor employees in Malaysia's only official casino. Findings were analytically divided into themes, categories and associated concepts and attributes (Table 2) and were then further linked, validated against existing research, refined and trimmed towards more conceptual constructs (see themes in Table 2). Our findings are underpinned by the well-being concepts on the basis of the "personal resource", "job resource", "environmental change", "job demands", and additional findings on "career limitations". On the one hand, these include dimensions and characteristics on the individual and company level (personal resource, job resource), which offer opportunities and benefits. Conversely, they represent challenges and disadvantages related to an external environment and job-inherent challenges (environmental change, job demands, limitations). Consequently, these negative dimensions lead to various strategies casino employees practice to cope with these challenges.

#### ***4.1 Personal resources as sociodemographic determinants***

Personal resources significantly influence service workers' employee well-being, especially during a crisis such as a pandemic (Krok *et al.*, 2021). Our findings referred to gender and ethnicity as personal resource factors affecting casino employees. Personal resource refers to an individual's endowment with social or economic resources and socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, status, or ethnicity (see Table 1). 36% of our respondents (5 from 14) were female (Table 1), for whom the casino environment can bring additional challenges, especially regarding harassment. Female employees experience much discourtesy and ostracism compared to male employees, which results in adverse outcomes for career well-being (Miner *et al.*, 2019). Wan and Chan (2018) found that male casino employees perceived less promotional fairness and advancement than female employees. At the same time, female employees perceived more injustice regarding supervisory support and decision-making authority inside the organization.

Moreover, 64% of our respondents were Indian/Malaysian, while 36% were Chinese/Malaysian. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country, with the majority being ethnic Malay, followed by populations of Chinese and Indian descent. In the casino, employees are predominantly of Chinese and Indian descent since ethnic Malays are Muslim and hence prohibited from working in the casino. Regarding promotion, interviewees highlighted the role of work politics and expressed that career advancement is easier achieved with a specific ethnicity. While ethnic diversity can positively influence employee well-being and the working environment (Jaiswal and Dyaram, 2018), hospitality employees commonly report racial discrimination (Shum *et al.*, 2020).

#### ***4.2 Job resources of casino employees***

##### *Physical well-being*

Job resource factors associated with the dimension of physical well-being illustrate the positive aspects of working at a casino in Malaysia. Such factors are linked to objectively measurable indicators such as a relatively high salary and fringe benefits. Most respondents highlighted the relatively high salary and the additional income through over-time as attractive. For example, Ravi (Interview 8), stated:

I worked in an F&B [food and beverage] Outlet. I worked there for around one and half years [ . . . ]. I changed work because of the [higher] salary. [ . . . ] Income-wise, here it is much better. Here I can save more money. [ . . . ] My lifestyle got really much better.

Whilst the standard working time per day is eight hours, many interviewed employees look for opportunities to do overtime to increase their basic salary. Aadesh (Interview 9) shared:

To be honest, we get a higher payment when we do overtime. And, of course, I bought a car and a house because of the casino salary, and I also got married because of the salary.

Other economic benefits which were mentioned by the respondents include increments, bonuses and allowances. If the casino customers win a huge amount of money, they will sometimes give a big tip to the employees. According to Liu (Interview 11), "entering other hospitality businesses is much easier when you have working experience as a casino employee on your resume." This shows that a casino career may be temporary and a potential stepping stone for other careers in hospitality. However, low wages and fringe benefits contribute to high turnover rates (Wan and Chan, 2013), especially if the overall work-life balance is low. The need to make extra money through overtime also leads to prolonged and intensive working hours and a compulsion to work incessantly, a phenomenon called Workaholism (Oates, 1968).

In addition, the employer provides fringe benefits such as medical insurance as well as food at the premises and accommodation located within 15-40 minutes walking distance from the casino, where two, three or four employees share rooms. These points, as well as the convenience of an air-conditioned environment, which is preferred over working outside in the tropical heat, were also highlighted by Maggie (Interview 4).

Many people work here because of the salary and the air-conditioning; food and accommodation are free, and there will be not many expenses.

Respondents evaluate these economic benefits as clearly positive, especially in relation to previous jobs they had. They also emphasize that their income allows them to save money, reduce their debt, and spend the money on crucial items and events in their life, including housing, cars, holidays with their family, and marriage. One respondent highlighted an additional advantage of working in the casino concerning improving her English language skills. For this young woman, the daily interaction with casino patrons helped develop her English vocabulary and confidence in communication.

### *Social well-being*

'Work relationships' and the development and mobilization of social capital within the workplace can also constitute a job resource (Demerouti *et al.*, 2017). Good and supportive work relationships, both on a horizontal level among colleagues with similar job functions and on a vertical level with one's (line) managers, are essential attributes of a good QWL (Wan and Chan, 2013).

Cooperation, respect, recognition and mutual support are important attributes of a good quality of work. While some respondents highlighted good relationships among colleagues and a friendly atmosphere where employees support each other when needed, the majority also pointed to issues of gossip and jealousy.

Relationships between co-workers are, hmm, it all depends on the individual because there are good and bad people. But of course, there is a lot of gossip here, especially when it comes to promotions. (Chandran, Interview 2)

Jealousy was also highlighted in our conversations with casino employees. Since career advancement opportunities are limited, issues surrounding promotion and the uneven distribution of overtime and overall salary contribute to resentment. There is a perception of unfairness and a need for clear criteria regarding promotion opportunities. Research

participants also referred to "a lot of politics", the perception of "favouritism", and the challenge of working with and competing against employees of different ethnic, linguistic, and national backgrounds.

The work relationships and the perception towards the management are also mixed. On the one hand, line managers were described in a very positive light, as in the case of Maira (Interview 5). However, areas of concern include situations where employees receive different directions and instructions from the management team, as Pranit (Interview 6) shares:

There are many things I do not like here; for example, there is the AM and the GM, so AM will ask to do something, and GM will ask to do another thing at the same time. And I will be in the middle; I will suffer to implement that. But this is now normal to me already.

Casino employees also feel that the management is mainly interested in taking care of their customers, as reflected in the 'Customer is always right' attitude described below.

They think about money only. They don't care about the staff. The management is like this. They are all thinking about money, money, money, money, and how they make money. They want to take care of the customer only, not take care of the staff. (Nagesh, Interview 1)

The discussion of these horizontal and vertical relationships shows, on the one hand, a positive and supportive environment but, on the other hand, also signs of a toxic work environment, where employees perceive and experience gossip, jealousy, work politics and less caring management. In other words, work relationships can lead to positive or negative outcomes.

#### ***4.3 Environmental change by Covid-19***

COVID-19 significantly influenced employee well-being. The pandemic led to economic losses for employees since the company reduced the working hours (especially overtime) and cut down on other benefits such as bonuses and allowances. The casino was closed for visitors from 18 March 2020 to 1 September 2020. Then, under the Restricted (RMCO) Movement Order, it operated 12 hours daily and eventually returned to its 24 hours operation. From an employee perspective, this had several negative consequences. First, many of the economic benefits described above have been reduced significantly, especially in relation to increasing one's basic salary through overtime and bonus payments. Respondents made very strong comments on how the pandemic affected their working life and economic situation: "Covid-19 ruined" a once "good working life" (Chandran, Interview 2) and many new and young employees resigned from their job "because they couldn't afford a living or meet their financial commitment nowadays. Covid-19 was ruining the situation here. There is no OT [overtime], and salary has been low" (Lekha, Interview 7).

I really cannot handle my life with this basic salary. They said after Covid, and once things settle, they will consider starting to give back the bonus. (Chandran, Interview 2)

Because of the limited operations of the casino, various employees left or had to leave their job. According to our respondents, the number of Casino employees dropped from approximately 15,000 (pre-COVID-19) to 9,000 as of February 2022. As agreed upon by staff members and the management, employee schemes such as the Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) and retrenchment packages were offered. Almost 3000 staff members were retrenched, and part-time employees and contract staff members' contracts were terminated (Interview 2, Chandran). However, when domestic tourism in Malaysia re-emerged and SOPs were relaxed, the number of casino patrons increased, as further explained by Daanesh (Interview 10).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, they [the management] sacked a few employees and now [since more casino customers could return], there is a lack of employees. It is quite hard to handle now. The day-by-day customer ratio has been increasing, but manpower is not increasing.

Many remaining employees are thus confronted with a situation where they experience economic challenges blended with increased stress levels at work. Aadesh (interview 9), stated.

But now, because of Covid, the salary has been very low, we couldn't manage to cover the expenses. For my daughter, we need to spend a lot as well. Then my loan all got pending. It has become so stressful, mentally and physically, just because of lack of money.

Furthermore, during COVID-19, the casino introduced new technologies such as AI for payment calculations. Some of the employees feel insecure and worry that technology may replace their job in the future. Independently from Covid-19, employees experienced various unfavourable conditions and situations as part of their everyday working life. These are further discussed in the following section.

#### ***4. 4 Job demands of the casino environment***

This research identified various challenging job demand factors influencing employee well-being on social, physical, and psychological dimensions.

##### *Social demands: isolation*

Casino employees face intensive and sometimes long working hours. Moreover, the location in the Genting highlands means that employees either need to live in the provided residence adjacent to the casino or they live in the Klang Valley, where also the capital city Kuala Lumpur is located. In the latter case, road trips of one to two hours (one way) are needed to reach the working place. Consequently, many employees have limited time for family, friends and other social connections. Chen (Interview 12) shared:

After so many years of working, I lost many friends because of my working hours, and I mostly stay alone while not working; I prefer to come to work instead of feeling alone; I asked my managers to give me more working time.

Due to the unhealthy working hours, the employees develop feelings of isolation. Similar to this response, a few other interviewees also showed a high tendency to spend their time in the workplace instead of with their family and friends. Yan (Interview 13) further explained:

Sometimes when I start my work, I forget my daily meals. There are days I find myself standing for more than 6 hours without taking any rest. The point is, I don't even know how to stop [to work].

Moreover, employees are not allowed to use their phones during their work, and many respondents reported that they missed important calls during their working time, for example, concerning the death of a family member or the sickness of their children.

### *Social demands: Shift work, routine and robotic life*

One major challenge for most interviewed participants is the regular shift work. Casino employees are divided into four groups (A, B, C, and D) which function in a 24 hours rotation involving morning, afternoon, evening and night shifts.

I don't like to work the morning shift because night shift, once we finish work, we straight go and sleep; however, once the morning shift ends, we don't know what to do. (Maggie, Interview 4)

Nagesh (Interview 1), who has been working in the shift mode for over 15 years, feels being treated in a very mechanical way.

Sometimes, the company think our body is like a computer. Click, shut down, sleep. Click, wake up, wake up, like that, they think like that. Let's say, you see, sometimes I work from 11 am until 7 pm, then suddenly I jump to start at 6. Sometimes I am working until 8 am, until 4 pm, and straight away jump to 12:00.

These shift working times were also frowned upon by other respondents who further shared that they “don't have time to pursue or focus on any other things” (Lekha, Interview 7) and that regular shift work leads to “problems such as tiring, lack of sleep and freshness” (Pranit, Interview 6).

This shift schedule is even more challenging for employees who stay in the employee residence, where three to four people with different shift times stay in one room. Since they all may need to work at different times, they have to set the alarms differently and thereby wake up the colleagues who try to rest after their shift. Another related issue is the routinization of the job. Moreover, they cannot use their personal phone or email during working hours, which would help break up some of these routines.

Research participants described how some colleagues became "mad" people who "talk to themselves" and pass you by but do not even look at you. Work has become a "robotic" life over the years (Interview 1, Naagesh; Zhao, Interview 14). According to Zhao (Interview 14):

the longer you stay in the organization, you find they depend less on your individual capabilities. They ask less about your opinion, give you less autonomy, and your job becomes like this: wake up, go to work, drink coffee, serve customers, smile forcefully, do the same things every day, submit reports, go back, sleep and again and again.... you become like a robot.

Employees perform the same practices over the years in a rather mechanical way which in combination with shift schedules can lead to further social isolation.

### *Social demands: Limited breaks and rest time*

Many research participants stated that they do not have enough time to rest. The work in the casino is demanding both physically and psychologically. Employees report that they have four days off per month which is insufficient time to regain strength and to spend time with the family, as respondents highlighted. They further reported limited flexibility for their preferred time of leave. Work frustration occurs, as Eshana (Interview 3) shared when the management does not allow annual leave when employees need it: "They will give the reason that another person is already allocated on the date".

Employees further expressed that they need more time during their breaks. Breaks last for 20 minutes and are three to four times per eight-hour day. However, leaving and returning to the casino workplace from a coffee shop or even the toilet already takes half of the break time Maira (Interview 5) explains:

The work I do is very stressful mentally. There is no more time for the break because this is very crucial; from the casino to the café, it takes five minutes, and coming back to the casino also takes 5 minutes. So there are only 10 minutes of time left. Sometimes there is not enough time to go to the washroom. This is very rushing and tiring.

Social job demands are extreme in the casino work context and are driven by social isolation, shift work, routinization and robotic life, and limited time to rest and work-family conflicts. Such work contexts are further challenged by a non-conducive physical work environment, as further discussed in the following section

### *Challenging physical environment and health*

The research shows that most employees are vulnerable to unhealthy lifestyles due to the physical environment they are exposed to. One of the most reported issues in our conversations with employees is the work in smoking areas. Most respondents were non-smokers but had to work in indoor-smoking areas.

Health problem, one more thing I want to highlight to you. The casino, to a large extent is a smoking environment. That means I'm a passive smoker. [. . .] I never smoke, I never drink alcohol, but here I am, a second-hand smoker; consider second-hand smoker, this is more dangerous smoking. Sometimes the customers smoke and straight away blow the smoke to our face. (Nagesh, Interview 1)

Another research participant, Yan (Interview 13), did not smoke when he started to work at the casino. However, through passive smoking, he started to smoke by himself actively and eventually became a chain smoker consuming two packages per day.

Employees perceive the working environment as poorly ventilated. Respondents described the working place as "quite bad because of lack of oxygen" (Pranit, Interview 6). Noise pollution is another attribute that contributes to a negative QWL. The casino has a noisy environment with many slot machines and loud talks by employees and customers, making the job nature even more challenging:



The sound. They play like music in the casino, which makes it all louder. Also, the customers' voices will be louder than that. (Maira, Interview 5)

Moreover, some employees raised their concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19. The casino is an indoor space and currently runs at 30 per cent capacity. Yet, respondents feel that the casino environment is getting crowded again and worry about some of the customers' behaviour, as expressed by long-term employee Daanesh (Interview 10).

Nowadays [since COVID-19], inside the casino environment is not safe for us here because of the capacity and the crowded space. [ . . . ] They do not follow the SOP as malls do, and there is no time limit [for customers]. On the other hand, customers sometimes do not change their masks; we do not know whether they bathe or not.

Many casino employees reported work-family conflicts and struggled to balance family life and work. Especially those who are parents feel guilty and overwhelmed for not being able to spend adequate time with their families.

Working is challenging also because we have to take care of the family. I also talked openly with my husband that I don't like working here at all. (Maggie, Interview 4)

Working beyond regular shift hours leaves them with limited family and social time, which can contribute to work-family conflict. Employees stated that night shifts hindered their social activities and family gatherings. Multiple attendances required meetings by supervisors in the evenings and even at weekends, making employees devote their time to their job instead of family.

#### *Psychological stress from interaction with customers*

Occupational stress is generated by the employee's heavy job demands, high work overload, including overtime, time pressures, shift work, and the physical attributes of the casino environment as described above. However, another dimension that greatly influences the QWL in casinos is customer interaction, which can often be very challenging and occur frequently. Asked how often one experiences situations where it is really difficult or challenging with the customers in the casino, Naagesh (Interview 1) stated.

If let's say I'm working, for example, 25 days, 25 days I work, around 15 days to 20 days, I need to face issues with customers.

Some customers may get angry due to gambling losses and show rude attitudes, while casino employees are required to tolerate insulting behaviour with a smile. Such situations include rude or aggressive customer behaviour.

If they lose, sometimes they are rude, this means it will show their worst behaviour, they will scold us in bad words and they also will scold our family, and there are customers who throw the cards at us. (Aadesh, Interview 9)

Customers can become verbally quite aggressive, as Naagesh (Interview 1) further illustrates.

'F-u-c-k's, then 'mother-fucker', so they throw these words at us, and we need to control ourselves. We cannot fight them. The company rules say that the customer is always right. One thing, you need to control yourself. Any problem, you need to control yourself.

Employees struggle with this 'customer is always right attitude, especially when encountering rude or aggressive customers whose behaviour harms the motivation of employees. In some instances, customer behaviour becomes more aggressive and involves physical violence, as the following accounts demonstrate.

A customer was very rude, and when he lost the game, he took the chair and banged my co-worker. So my co-worker did the same thing back to them because no customers have the right to bang or scold. Then my higher officers came and settled the problems. (Maggie, Interview 4)

For female employees, the casino work environment can bring additional challenges in the context of sexual harassment.

As a girl starting to work here, I fear the workplace. But it all depends on our thinking and mentality. If our thoughts are good and positive, the working environment also will be better. What is bothering me is that sometimes the customers, especially the gents, look at a girl with the wrong intention. (Maira, Interview 5)

This way, the casino context reproduces gendered experiences and patriarchal capitalism that disadvantages women in a male-dominated workforce.

#### ***4.5 Career Limitations***

Career advancement in the casino industry in Malaysia was described as very poor, which can be explained by the casino's monopoly in the country (Prentice *et al.*, 2021). Respondents made strong statements such as "There is no future here" (Maggie, Interview 4). Nagesh (Interview 1) further explains the monopolist position of the Casino in Malaysia:

No future means, in Malaysia, there is just one casino; if you say, "I resign", unfortunately, they terminate, and you cannot move forward to another casino in this country. No more casinos in Malaysia, just one casino only.

Promotions are minimal, and an international career in the casino industry, for example, in neighbouring Singapore or Macao, was not desired, especially for those with a family in Malaysia. Most research participants think about quitting their job. Reasons are manifold but include limited promotion opportunities, concerns about their mental health and a desire to find another job that allows more time for the family. As Maira, Interview 5, shared:

Yes, I do have the thought of quitting the job because of mental health. After quitting the job, I prefer to study and work, and I plan to get another job.

The pandemic forced many employees to reduce their working hours and or take on other jobs. This exposed them to other working experiences and the realization that the work-life balance for casino employees is relatively bad, especially compared with other jobs.

There is no work-life balance here. [. . .] My routine during the lockdown was better; I also worked part-time as a lorry driver. I love that working life more than this. Because whatever it is, I will go back home and have dinner, lunch and breakfast with my family.

That life is much better than the casino environment. If I got a salary around RM 3K and more, for sure I will resign. (Aadesh, Interview 9)

At the same time, some of the respondents started to reflect upon their priorities in life, making them consider job alternatives with a better QWL and work-life balance.

The psychological and physical demands of the job, as well as the lack of proper family time, are the main reasons for this rather pessimistic outlook, as has also been documented in existing research (Wan and Chan, 2013). However, the findings of this research also add a new aspect to this phenomenon. The forced break during Malaysia's Movement Control Order caused respondents to experience a different lifestyle where they suddenly had more time for their family and needed to take on new part-time jobs. They realized that a working and social life outside the casino has many advantages. Hence, they started to seriously rethink their priorities and start looking for alternative jobs with a preferable work-family balance.

#### ***4.6 Coping strategies***

Employees developed various coping strategies to deal with the casino environment's mental and physical stress. These include physical exercises such as going to the gym or morning walks. The need for such exercises was highlighted by some of the respondents, such as Chandran, who stated.

We should take care of ourselves when we work here. So, I started to walk in the morning and do some exercises. (Chandran, Interview 2)

For other respondents, religion or some form of spirituality helps overcome their negative work experiences. Maggie (Interview 4), for example, reads prayers to relax. Others try to activate positive memories by singing and thinking about their family during work.

To help me cool down, I sing songs to myself; in my heart, I sing about the day, sing about the flowers, then sing about the last time I visited my girlfriend, now she's my wife. [. . .] good memories are important, just thinking about my kids. (Nagesh, Interview 1).

Whilst employees developed a range of coping strategies at the individual level, psychological support provided by the institution itself is limited. Nagesh (Interview 1) responded to the question about the company's role in providing psychological support or training in helping to deal with conflicts and stress.

I think for two or three years there was nothing [no organized psychological support], then suddenly they provided a programme like this. A briefing, a meeting to talk about psychological issues. But this is not enough.

After analyzing the sociodemographic determinants of employee well-being (personal resource), perceived positive aspects of casino work-life (job resources) and the various

challenges (environmental change by Covid-19, job demands, and career limitations), this final theme shows how casino employees cope with these difficulties. Findings show that research participants developed multiple strategies, including physical exercises, searching for spirituality, and activating positive memories, especially about their family. However, at the same time, more institutional support is needed. These findings thus suggest more organizational support and training for dealing with a mentally demanding job and highlight the role of experienced and trustworthy supervisors or line managers who can improve the organizational culture and work climate between colleagues.

## **5. Implications**

### ***5.1 Theoretical implications***

In the fast-changing hospitality industry, determining employees' well-being at work is vital to hospitality and tourism organizations which are service sectors and highly dependent on their employees. This research contributes to the emerging body of knowledge on well-being of casino floor employees, a group within the hospitality industry that just recently received more academic attention. The casino workplace environment represents a very different context from most existing studies and other hospitality and service sector contexts. Job demands in the casino industry are exacerbated through a difficult physical environment where smoking is allowed in indoor areas and a unique psychological setting where customers may be euphoric when winning money but may become aggressive when losing.

Similar to other studies in the hospitality industry, most respondents expressed negative statements and feelings about their shift schedules (Chan and Ao, 2019; Wan and Chan, 2013). For our respondents, these schedules are very tiring and contribute to a strong routinization and machine-like behaviour, referred to as a “robotic” lifestyle. There is limited research on the routine nature of a job and its impact on individual well-being. Routine work schedules are associated with psychological distress, poor sleep quality, and unhappiness (Schneider and Harknett, 2019; Hobbel *et al.*, 2022). These, as well as our findings, thus stand in contrast to previous research conducted by Avni-Babad (2011), which showed that the routine nature of work contributes to a more secure, safe, and confident state of work well-being. Moreover, balancing work duties and family is another issue experienced by many of the respondents. It is well documented that long hours at work impact work interference with family time and would eventually lead to depression and stress-related health problems (Major *et al.*, 2002).

In times of crisis, job demands can be further exacerbated, and well-being dimensions must be accommodating and integrative to employee sentiments, sensitivity and self-actualization. Malaysia was strongly hit by the pandemic, which led to domestic and international travel restrictions, various lockdowns, and many businesses' shutdowns (Foo *et al.*, 2020; Wijesinghe, 2021). The individual income losses experienced by most casino employees came along with increased levels of occupational stress and experience limitations in their career development. Such factors make respondents consider alternative job opportunities. These findings differ from a recent study by Tan *et al.* (2020) who showed that employees experienced more stress and anxiety during the isolation of the lockdown than during work. For many of the casino employees, however, the lockdowns were also an opportunity to spend more time with their families, which under normal working conditions is very challenging.

The physical environment in the casino setting in Malaysia is not conducive to employees' health. Non-smokers are exposed to indoor smoking areas and insufficient ventilation systems while simultaneously experiencing noise pollution through music and frequent conversations. Whilst smoking has been banned in all restaurants and eateries throughout Malaysia, the casino continues to allow smokers. Existing research shows that individuals exposed to smoking areas face health problems such as coronary heart disease and other respiratory diseases (Stayner *et al.*, 2007).

Another significant aspect of work demands in everyday work life stems from the psychologically stressful interaction with customers. Dealing with rude and aggressive behaviour from customers who lose money is common at casinos and not observable in other hospitality and service sector industries. Yet, casino employees are instructed to maintain a welcoming face and are not allowed to show any emotions, following the unquestioned mantra that the customer is always right. High levels of work stress among casino employees have also been confirmed by similar studies (Wu and Wong 2008). Due to the specific working environment, employees are vulnerable to various physical and emotional problems (Anderson, 2007). The high level of stress can result in the use of drugs and alcohol, gambling and unnecessary eating habits (Wu and Wong, 2008). Research showed that refining employee well-being and reducing the level of stress can have many advantages for organizations, such as better performance and reduced absenteeism and sickness rates (De Neve *et al.*, 2013).

In principle, the research is congruent to previous studies (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Demerouti *et al.*, 2017; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) using the job demand resource model. However, findings show that the demanding work conditions at the casino are only exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Further control measures and skeletal staffing meant the resources available to pacify employees with financial rewards and career progression favourably was also limited.

This study provides a theoretical contribution to the hospitality industry, specifically the casino industry, by applying and extending the job demand and resource model to Malaysia's gambling industry. Personal and relatively well-perceived job resources, including financial and medical benefits, stand in contrast to a highly challenging social, physical, and psychological work environment. In addition to these jobs resources and demands, our study integrated external forces (environmental change in the context of an unprecedented crisis) and internal forces (limitations regarding career development) to the understanding of employee well-being in casino contexts.

## ***5.2 Practical implications***

The identified job demands, such as challenging physical and social work conditions, stressful interaction with difficult customers and lack of institutional and management support, have been exacerbated during the pandemic. The findings suggest a need to create better working conditions and address well-being with counselling support for stress management. In addition, a balanced approach by employers to the 'customer is always right' mantra is suggested, along with creating promising career pathways and supervisors to have better oversight of workaholics. However, the issue is that even if the management is cognizant, it would be

challenging to address all the issues under circumstances where the customer base is shrunk by restrictions on movements and a reduced business profit.

As the employees have identified, there are non-resource-demanding efforts that the managers on the ground can make to alleviate the emotional or psychological well-being. Some of these solutions suggested are meditation, anti-smoking and drinking campaigns, and group exercises at the workplace. These suggestions also align with creating a hedonic experience approach as advocated by Voukelatou *et al.* (2021) and Ryan and Deci (2001). Time allocation for these efforts may have a small impact on staff deployment time. It can create a healthy and motivated workforce at a time when the casino business itself is undergoing tremendous financial stress.

Furthermore, managers can take a variety of training approaches to improve employee well-being. For instance, training and improving employees' technical and interpersonal skills can create a positive working environment and improve the sense of security and well-being. Health design studies show that employee break areas with windows that allow lights can reduce emotional stress and positively influence employee satisfaction (Nejati *et al.*, 2016). This strategy has been used in hospitality organisations such as Hilton Hotels (Staley, 2018) and Marriott International (Miller, 2018). This suggestion may not be suitable for limited-budget hospitality organisations, but it can be considered a valuable investment to maximise staff well-being and effectiveness for casinos.

Lastly, employees can also play a part in their understanding of the business environment and challenges, especially concerning the impact of the pandemic and other crises. The identified well-being dimensions focus on individual personality traits and their responses to adverse conditions. Under extraordinary circumstances, the situation also calls for the employees to make lifestyle adjustments as the casino undergoes turbulent times. Therefore, like many businesses hard hit in Malaysia and elsewhere, there needs to be a sacrifice for comfort of the employees as well. As much as we could identify and advocate the casino's management to initiate flexible working hours, create better stay-in accommodation and adopt adjustments on customer-centric approaches, this can only work as far as they can stretch dollars earned from the business and the willingness of the staff to temporarily accept the limitations of the business to fulfil such expectations. Hence, work-life balance will see-saw between the demands of the family and workplace and consequently between the three primary well-being dimensions. The testing of time and resilience on both businesses and employees is very much a factor of how much each can give in to the other.

## **6. Conclusion and limitation**

The findings highlight the voices of casino employees in Malaysia's under-researched gambling industry. While the study contributes to a better understanding of employees' well-being, the problems they face and how work intersects with family matters, it also has its limitations.

First, although qualitative interviews allowed the researchers to elicit and decipher respondents' perceptions, opinions, and experiences, additional on-site and participant observations among casino employees could enrich the existing qualitative data. An immersive field study would allow us to compare the reported experiences with actual observations and further enhance data

interpretation. Second, the research in the casino industry has been difficult to undertake since human resources are very protective of employee and consumer information in the industry; therefore, it was impossible to collect data from many employees, and qualitative results cannot be generalized to the context of well-being. Future research may adopt a quantitative approach to conduct inclusive research on employee well-being using the current study's findings.

Third, the present study only focused on one casino in Malaysia. However, as mentioned earlier, the research on employee well-being can generate different results in different cultural and demographic backgrounds. Moreover, future studies can focus on the demographic characteristics of the respondents from different destination settings. Finally, the results of our qualitative research interestingly found mostly negative factors affecting employee well-being. In contrast, much previous literature on employee well-being found positive factors that affect well-being, such as various job resources and personal resources. Therefore, it would be worth it if future research develops a comprehensive framework of both positive and negative factors that affect employee QWL that provides a more in-depth understanding of the context of well-being.

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