University of Kent

Kent Academic Repository

Razzak, B.M., Saridakis, George and Georgellis, Yannis (2025) *The impact of robotic working patterns on employee work life and job satisfaction: evidence from ethnic minority businesses in the UK*. Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies, 17 (3). pp. 774-788. ISSN 2053-4604.

Downloaded from
https://kar.kent.ac.uk/106946/ The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from
https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-06-2024-0215

This document version
Author's Accepted Manuscript

DOI for this version

Licence for this version
CC BY-NC (Attribution-NonCommercial)

Additional information
This author accepted manuscript is deposited under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC) licence. This means that anyone may distribute, adapt, and build upon the work for non-commercial purposes, subject to full attribution. If you wish to use this manuscript for commercial purposes, please contact permissions@emerald.com.

Versions of research works

Versions of Record
If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts
If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in ***Title of Journal*** , Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries
If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies).

The Impact of Robotic Working Patterns on Employee Work Life and Job Satisfaction:

Evidence from Bangladeshi restaurants in Greater London

B M Razzak
Greenwich Business School
University of Greenwich, UK
B.Razzak@greenwich.ac.uk

George Saridakis
Kent Business School
University of Kent, UK
G.Saridakis@kent.ac.uk

Yannis Georgellis
S P J Global
S P Jain London School of Global Management, UK
yannis.georgellis@spjain.ac.uk

Abstract

By aligning the 'Small is beautiful' and 'Bleak house' theories, we examine how robotic working patterns (RWP) in Bangladeshi ethnic minority businesses affect employees' working life (EWL) and job satisfaction (JS). Using information from 40 face-to-face interviews of employees from 20 Bangladeshi restaurants in Greater London, we find that workers are treated as 'robots' (such as the 'Bleak house'). Owners expect them to perform multiple tasks, have many responsibilities, work long shifts, without any holiday allowances. Consistent with the 'Small is beautiful model', there are no written employment contracts and acute staff shortages. Thus, we contribute to the job quality and SMEs literature by offering new qualitative-based findings on the negative impact of robotic work patterns on employee work life and job satisfaction in ethnic minority SMEs.

Keywords: *Ethnic minority business, job satisfaction, job quality, robotic working pattern, SMEs.*

1. Introduction

Efficient work patterns, high-quality employee working life, and job satisfaction are an integral part of successful organisations (see Dhamija et al., 2019; Drobnič et al., 2010; Pot and Koningsveld, 2009; Saridakis et al., 2020). Efficient and desirable work patterns imply a supportive organisational environment. In such an environment, employees are self-directed, self-motivated and their expectations are met. On the contrary, robotic work patterns (RWP) are associated with employees carrying out multiple tasks and responsibilities (Razzak et al., 2022). They are working long and irregular shifts, are intensively monitored, and are having few breaks and unsatisfactory holiday allowances (Wright and Pollert, 2006). RWPs imply that employers treat their workforce as machines (i.e., 'Bleak house', Wilkinson, 1999; 2004) to the detriment of employee working life (EWL) quality (see Laar et al., 2007; Truss et al., 2006).

Focusing on small firms, existing research identifies two broad types of EWL (Wilkinson, 1999). The 'Small is beautiful' model represents firms that foster cooperative work relationships and effective people management with enhanced communication (Razzak et al., 2022; Wilkinson, 2004). Another type is the 'Bleak house' characterized by autocratic leadership and poor working conditions (Ram and Edwards, 2003). To be satisfied at work and enjoy a high-quality working life, employees need to feel they are treated fairly and their job has many attractive features (Akehurst et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2011). Job characteristics affecting EWL typically include pay, flexible working arrangements, annual leave, work hours, and a safe, healthy work environment. Other job attributes impacting on EWL encompass organisational culture, managerial support, and career development opportunities (Truss et al., 2006). We here argue that RWPs are prevalent in ethnic minority owned SMEs and are disruptive for the quality of employee work life and spur feelings of dissatisfaction.

Ethnic minority Small and Medium- Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the UK have a reach history of contribution to the economy, traced back to 1946. The 'Indian Restaurants' segment

of the catering industry is an example, with more than 12,000 restaurants, mostly Bangladeshi-owned, employing more than 90,000 employees and nearly annual turnover of £4billion (Khandaker, 2016). Bangladeshi SMEs have an especially important role in Greater London, where Bangladeshis own more than 2,500 restaurants (Khandaker, 2016). As such, they have spurred much interest among academics, practitioners, and policymakers. According to Wilson (2017), UK Bangladeshi restaurants face a shortage of both staff to prepare the food and customers to consume it. An acute shortage of chefs is threatening hundreds of popular restaurants and causing two or three curry houses to shut down every week across the industry (Wilson, 2017; Khandaker, 2016; Robinson, 2016; Haq, 2015). This shutdown negatively affects existing restaurant employees. Job insecurity poses a threat that aggravates mental stress, causing concern for the growth and success of the industry.

Our main purpose here is to examine the impact of RWP on EWL and JS by drawing on information for Bangladeshi-owned SMEs in the restaurant sector. Specifically, we seek answers to two main research questions: *How do robotic working patterns affect the performance of Bangladeshi SMEs in the restaurant sector?* And *What are the causes of job dissatisfaction in the Bangladeshi SMEs in this sector?* Finding answers to these questions will shed light on the relative importance of the 'Small is beautiful' versus the 'Bleak house' scenarios about employee working life in ethnic minority SMEs. Despite a resurgent interest in smaller enterprises owned by ethnic minorities (Razzak et al., 2022), most of the existing empirical research on job quality and employee workplace well-being is based on large firms.

2. Literature review

Prior research confirms the importance of employees' career and quality of work life as strong predictors of their life satisfaction (Georgellis et al., 2022; Litsardopoulos and Saridakis, 2022; Litsardopoulos et al., 2021; Sivapragasam and Raya, 2014). Poor employee

working life is associated with greater work-life conflict and it is a major source of dissatisfaction that impact negatively on health and well-being (Clark, 2015; Green et al., 2016; Hughes and Bozionelos, 2007). Such a negative impact is often manifested with higher rates of employee turnover and absenteeism (Saridakis and Cooper, 2016; Stavrou and Ierodiakonou, 2016). An unsatisfactory work life is also a main reason behind employee burnout, although the strength of this link is moderated by autonomy, rewards and recognition, social support, and perceived fairness (Maslach et al., 2001). On the contrary, a satisfactory work life improves employee engagement with positive associated effects on health, psychological well-being and performance (Sivapragasam and Raya, 2014; Truss et al., 2006).

To this end, past research has mainly focused on understanding of what makes a good job and what drives the overall quality of employee work life (EWL) (Clark, 2015; Findlay et al., 2013). Truss et al. (2006) argue that beyond pay, EWL entails employees' occupation, work time, flexible work, annual leave quotas. Laar et al. (2007) suggest that EWL includes career opportunities, general well-being, and working conditions. Other drivers of employee work life quality include sustainable welfare policies (Smeaton and White; 2016), job autonomy (Wheatley, 2017) and leadership styles (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2015). Further, flexible work arrangements have emerged as a key influencing cause of EWL when business leaders embraced the discourse of 'flexible organisation' (Ab Wahab and Tatoglu, 2020; Jooss et al., 2021). Yet, flexible work initiatives, including hours flexibility, have been a source of industrial relations conflict for SMEs sectors such as hospitality and catering (Alves et al., 2007; Leiva et al., 2012).

Existing research has further explored the importance of employee working life and job satisfaction for employee well-being, productivity, and business success (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2015; Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2023; Voordt and Jensen, 2023).

Exploring the antecedents of job satisfaction, Tansel and Gazioglu (2014) identify compensation scales, a feel of accomplishment, and respect from superiors. Storey et al. (2010) find that HR formality can negatively impact employee-related attitudes, such as job satisfaction. However, Saridakis, Muñoz Torres, and Johnstone (2013) highlight a significant and positive correlation between HRM formality and organizational commitment in organizations with low employee satisfaction. This suggests that implementing HR formality in such organizations can have a beneficial organizational impact. Nevertheless, much research is still needed to capture fully the cultural diversity across SMEs in different industries and how they affect work life quality.

In the present study, focusing on EWL in Bangladeshi SMEs, we need to consider contextual factors such as religion and culture (Razzak et al., 2022). Bangladeshi SMEs in the UK are influenced by religion and family tradition, particularly about women's participation in business (Hoque and Awang, 2019; Rahaman et al., 2021). As Ram et al. (2000) point out, 'religio-cultural' reasons often explain the absence of Bangladeshi women from formal participation in business. They argue that a combination of traditional culture and modern prejudice keeps women out of work. Thus, a traditional set-up is preserved in which the husband is the main earner in the household. The SMEs literature further shows that cultural reasons, unique to different ethnic groups, influence business practices, norms, behaviours, beliefs and customs (Salloum et al., 2019). UK SMEs, owned and managed by multicultural entrepreneurs, have embraced diversity in their ways of operating, underlining how cultural differences impact directly on employee work life and job satisfaction (Cunningham and McGuire, 2019).

A strand of the SMEs literature has specifically focused on assessing the relevance of the 'Small is beautiful' vs 'Bleak house' models in explaining employee and business outcomes in the UK context (Sarantinos, 2022). However, there has not been enough research on these

models and their use in ethnic minority small business, especially Bangladeshi owned. Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) contend that 'small is beautiful' because owner-manager informal engagement with their staff fosters dedication, loyalty, and dependability. On the contrary, the 'bleak house' scenario implies neither participation nor communal representation (Wiesner and Innes, 2010). These two perspectives highlight the intricacy and variety of management practices across diverse SMEs (Harney, 2021). Under the 'Bleak house' model, HR practices in SMEs are often marked by lower pay, exploitation of employees, excessive hours and subpar working conditions. In contrast, the 'Small is beautiful' scenario asserts that HR practices cultivate familiarity, with less bureaucratic supervision, and employees forming bonds and sharing mutual goals with owner-managers (Lai et al., 2017). Unlike the 'bleak house' view, the 'small is beautiful' perspective asserts that employee interactions are superior in smaller organisations than in large firms (Della and Solari, 2013).

Nevertheless, given the complexity of HR practices in diverse SMEs, many questions remain unanswered when assessing the weight of the two arguments (Harney and Dundon, 2006; Matlay, 2002). Specifically, the literature reveals a gap in the study of employee work life and job satisfaction in Bangladeshi owned restaurant businesses (Ram and Jones, 2008; Razzak et al., 2022). In this study, we take on to close this gap by examining how robotic working patterns impact on employee work life and job satisfaction in this industry. Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model that our empirical analysis is based on. We hypothesise that RWP reversely affects EWL and JS. The Figure indicates that the predicted effect of RWP on both EWL and JS is expected to be negative, which in turn leads to adverse organizational outcomes. Such organizational outcomes include an imbalance in work-life, job stress, general dissatisfaction with job aspects, and poor business performance.

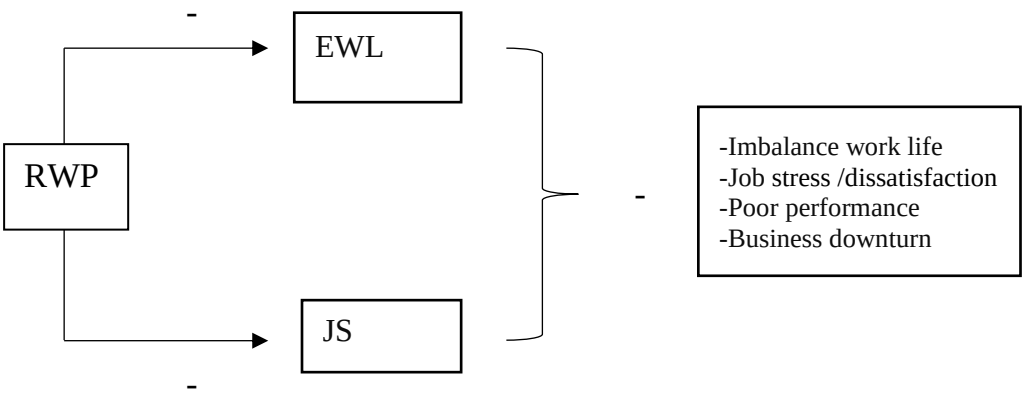


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework.

3. Data and method

This research is based on social research related to robotic work practices, employee work life and job satisfaction in Bangladeshi-owned ethnic minority businesses in Greater London. Following Hasle et al. (2012) and Pajo et al. (2010), we use a convenience sample of 40 employees in 20 restaurants that have between five and 49 employees. We conducted twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews from each enterprise, covering both 'front side' (front of house) and 'kitchen side' (back of house) staff, to ensure that all groups of employees are represented. The former group includes a manager, assistant manager and waiters. The latter group includes chefs, chef assistants and kitchen assistants. However, the restaurant manager oversees and manages both sections. We categorised participants into five groups according to their role: (1) manager (25%), (2) assistant manager (8%), (3) chef (12%), (4) dining attendant and stock delivery (50%) and (5) kitchen support staff (5%). The data analysis for this research is done using the QSR N10 tool. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software package produced by Lumivero, Australia, formerly known as QSR International. In 2012, QSR International released version 10 of its NVivo qualitative data analysis tool, referred to as QSR

N10 (see QSR International, 2013). and the thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Two major themes emerged from this analytical method:

Theme 1: Restaurant workers are treated as Robots, and

Theme 2: Idiosyncratic working environment in Bangladeshi restaurants.

4. Key findings and discussion of the results

We employ the aforementioned two models to assess the quality of the working environment of Bangladeshi restaurants. The 'Bleak house' model shows that employees work in this sector as robots, with high work pressure, job stress and job dissatisfaction. The 'Small is beautiful' model highlights the five key characteristics of this sector, such as preference first restaurant job, flexible job requirements, irregular written contracts, poor market research and acute staff shortage.

4.1 Model 1 - 'Bleak house': Restaurant Workers as Robots

This model highlights employer attitudes and behaviours, which are characterised by domineering and dictatorial management styles (see Figure 2). We find that in Bangladeshi restaurants, workers are treated as 'robots' in that they carry out multiple tasks and responsibilities. Also, they work long hours shifts, take few breaks, submit to rigorous monitoring and have no holidays or other concessions that meet their social needs or interests. In short, they are treated as machines rather than human beings, which degrades their professional identity. This contributes to the high rates of job dissatisfaction in this industry.

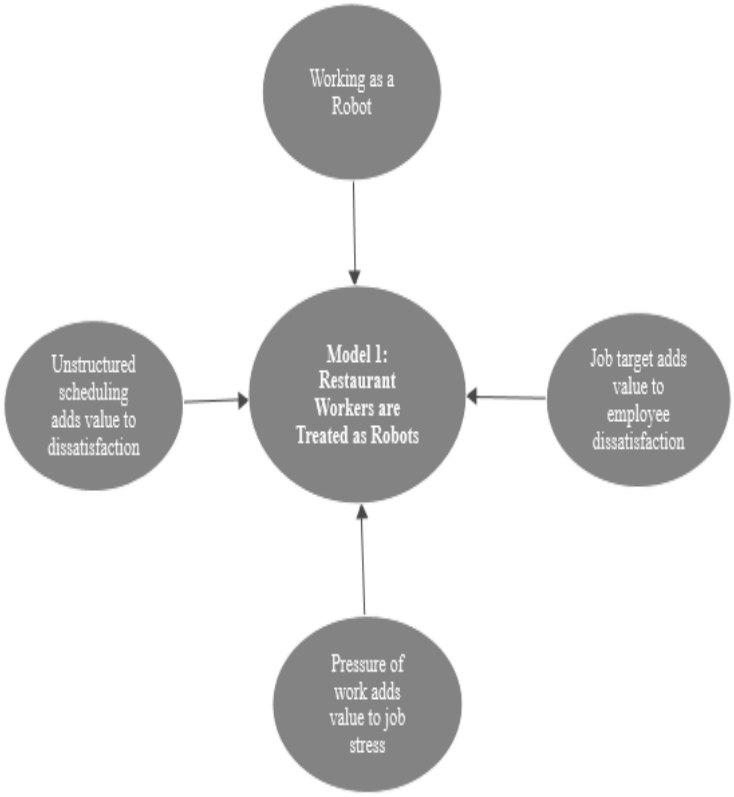


Figure 2. Restaurant Workers as Robots.

4.1.1 Working as a robot

The primary research on EWL underscores some distinctive features of Bangladeshi restaurants within this body of knowledge. For example, workers in Bangladeshi restaurants are treated as robots rather than human beings, and they work like maidservants rather than employees. Bullying and harassment are common practices in these businesses. Employees feel entrapped within employment settings, which creates a 'do or die' attitude among staff. If workers follow employment policies, they can survive in the UK; otherwise, because of their position within the economy and society, employees will face the prospect of losing their job. Consequently, their residential status in the UK will be compromised, and they may be forced to leave the country. Their working life is thus associated with 'silence and soundlessness' about job dissatisfaction. A restaurant manager handles customer service and other sections. He noted his remit to look after many aspects of the restaurant- *'As a store manager, I have to*

do everything such as check the quality of food, restaurant temperature, cleaning, tidying up and checking kitchen equipment. I also manage phone calls for customer service' (Afjal, R17, BR09, Manager). This finding is in line with the 'Bleak house' approach.

Heavy workloads are a common occurence in Bangladeshi restaurants, with full-time workers averaging 50 hours and 6 days of work in a week. It is also found that weekends work, meaning work on Saturdays and Sundays, is mandatory for all workers, whether full-time or part-time. However, Rojina (R06, BR03, Waitress) was not interested in working on weekends when it was compulsory. She notes *that 'I dislike working on Saturday and Sunday because there is much pressure'.*

The research data shows that while many workers felt they were satisfied with their jobs, in reality, unreasonable workloads and long hours harm the employer – employee relationship. One manager works more than 50 hours a week. He explained that *'I do not like this job because I have no personal life as I work 6 days, that is just sleeping and work. As a result, my wife and daughter are not happy because they would like to go out with me, but I cannot give them time at weekends. I have to work as a soldier.' (Afjal, R17, BR09, Manager).* It is obvious, therefore, that work pressure has a direct impact on both service quality and employee dissatisfaction. This is also a factor that directly affects EWL, along with long hours. For example: *'An Assistant Chef explained that sometimes the pay and benefits are important but not all the time. Higher level of work pressure and workload negatively affects EWL (Hasan, BR002, BR04, Assist. Chef).*

At busy times owners can be like watchdogs, constantly harrying and chivvying the staff to work harder and quicker, to the extent of verbal abuse. This behaviour from owners, described as inhuman, is part of a strategy to increase sales and profits. As previously stated, owners can treat workers as machines rather than human beings ('Bleak house'). Therefore, work pressure and heavy workloads negatively affect employee working and personal life,

hinting to low job satisfaction in Bangladeshi restaurants. Various interpretations suggest that the work environment is less likely to be systemised with providing a scheduling system. Mismanagement allows employers or managers to manage staff through coercion. On their part, employees feel they are in a work environment where they are treated like robots, which reinforces the view of a 'Bleak house' approach to managing human resources. Such feelings explain the general dissatisfaction of workers in the Bangladeshi restaurants industry.

4.1.2 Job target adds value to employee dissatisfaction

The job target is psychological pressure, but some employees see this as normal, and some of them see it as pressure. Our analysis identifies both positive and negative opinions. Many respondents have no specific job target, but others do. One waiter stated that he has a weekly sales target and explained that *'We have a target as a minimum sales target. We have a sales target of around £2000 to £2500 a week. Overall, a target is good as we have to work hard. If we do better, we get rewarded or motivated by the owner' (Kamal, R02, BR01, Waiter).* A sales target is common in this sector, and generally, the manager works under pressure to achieve some targets. An assistant manager in a restaurant in Brick Lane, London, notes that *'We have a sales target. Every month we discuss sales if it is up or down, and we find out the reasons. We also consider any occasion and what we have to do on occasion. Figure out what offers we can give for this occasion (Ibrahim, R27, BR14, Assistant Manager).*

4.1.3 Pressure of work exacerbates job stress

A restaurant job is a hospitality job, and job stress is a part of working life in this industry. One restaurant manager noted, *'Obviously, a hospitality job always has pressure, pressure, and pressure, but I have to take it'*. (Shokumar, R30, BR15, Manager). During busy times, the owner and managers pressure their workers. One waiter shared his views on working life with

job pressure *'We get pressure from the manager such as go, quick, hurry and speed up. This is common practice in the restaurant. We must take it seriously because managers follow us and will face problems in my job'. (Azahar, R25, BR13, Waiter)*. However, several respondents stated they feel pressure, particularly at weekends. The pressure of work makes them nervous, which affects their performance negatively. Monir (R29, BR15), a restaurant waiter, explained- *'We face pressure at weekends, and I feel worried. If anybody becomes nervous, they cannot work properly. This is one kind of mental torture in my job as we are not 'machines'.* Therefore, this aligns with the 'Bleak house' approach.

These results support existing studies, suggesting that increased competition in the sector leads to greater job pressures on workers, resulting in downsizing, redundancies, and greater job insecurity (Diaz-Chao et al., 2017). This burdens the remaining staff with extra workloads and increases the pressure on them causing added stress (Lai, Saridakis and Blackburn, 2015). Research further suggests that work pressure is often high and varied, depending on the number of customers and employees that must work at full capacity at a moment's notice while also dealing with conflicting interests between cooks and servers (Mathisen et al., 2008). Oliva and Sterman (2001) argue that under work pressure, service providers struggle to balance the flow of incoming and outgoing orders while keeping reasonable working hours and acceptable service quality. Consequently, work pressure leads to job stress, which puts a large financial burden on organisational performance (Peccei et al., 2019).

4.1.4 Unstructured scheduling adds value to dissatisfaction

Specific timetables are developed to implement restaurant policy and keep the business running smoothly. Schedules help managers to balance their business performance. Kamal (Waiter, R02, BR01) offered helpful views on work schedules *'We have a work schedule for each, such*

as cleaning once a week, including inside, outside and the windows of the restaurant. It is good for everybody as the job is classified. If there is no schedule, we may not clean properly or regularly, and the restaurant will be dirty, which looks wrong, and we will face customer complaints. So, every week we have to follow a schedule for individual tasks'. However, some respondents have a different view regarding work schedules, and one noted that *'There is no schedule in my restaurant, and I think it is good. If there is a schedule, staff may not follow it. So, I think a combination is better than a specific plan' (Kader, R33, BR17, Waiter).*

Kader (R33, BR17, Waiter) claimed he never gets minimum pay. He explained that the '*Restaurant schedule is not good as I have to do two daily shifts. Every day we work an extra 2 hours, but we do not get paid. I will say that I never get minimum pay in this restaurant'.* This is in line with the 'Bleak house' approach. This is a common practice across most Bangladeshi restaurants. Therefore, in some cases, a schedule can help. However, it is difficult for some workers as it conflicts with their diversity and skills, which leads to job dissatisfaction.

4.2 Model 2 – 'Small is beautiful': Idiosyncratic working environment in Bangladeshi restaurants

The model highlights the working environment of Bangladeshi restaurants (see Figure 3). It demonstrates five key factors such as first preference of restaurant job, flexible job requirements, irregular written contract, poor market research and acute staff shortages.

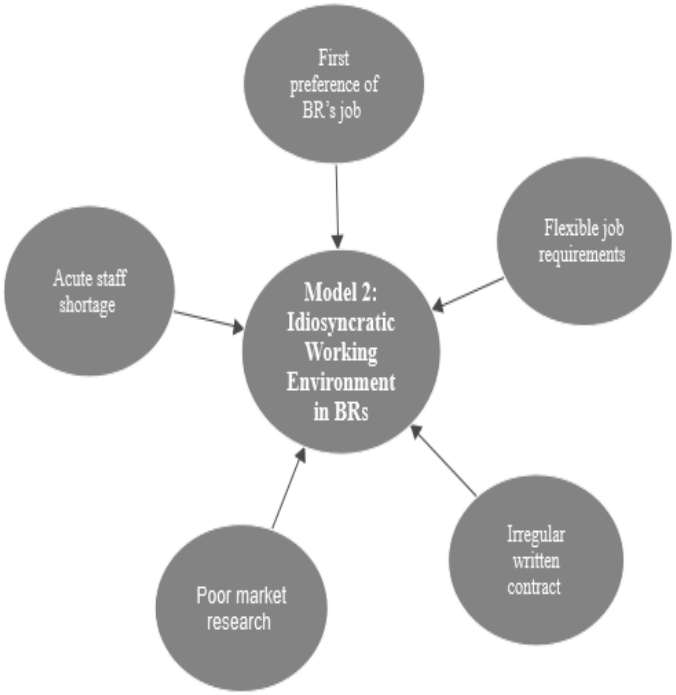


Figure 3. Idiosyncratic working environment in Bangladeshi restaurants.

4.2.1 First preference of BR's job

We found that this industry has traditionally favoured UK Bangladeshi workers getting access to the job market. So, Bangladeshi restaurants act as the first employers for newcomers who are poorly equipped to compete in the job market. The investigation discovers more reasons for joining Bangladeshi restaurants, including lack of competence in English language. Jafor (R23, BR12, Chef Assistant) explained similarly: *'It is my first job in the UK, but I am unfamiliar with the English working environment; all staff are from Bangladesh, so communicating with my colleagues is easy'.* Moreover, Shahid (R01, BR01, Waiter) prefers to work in a Bangladeshi restaurant because his English language skills are not up to standard. He stated that *'I feel comfortable actually because my English is not standard. Here, it is easy to communicate with friends' colleagues, and even with my people ('Small is beautiful'). I prefer to work in Bangladeshi restaurant'.* Such a response is in line with the 'Small is beautiful' argument. We also found that sometimes, family tradition forced workers to join this

sector. For example, one waiter pointed out that his father was a chef and his brother was a waiter. Therefore, he came under family pressure to join. Therefore, workers of Bangladeshi restaurants joined this section because of language barriers, easy access to this sector and family pressure.

4.2.2 Flexible job requirements

We found that some restaurant workers were recruited without any formal recruitment procedure. Sometimes, they visit a restaurant, talk to an owner or manager, and they can start immediately if the owner is happy with them. One waiter, Kamal (R02, BR01), explains that *'In the Bangladeshi restaurants sector, the workers should have some fundamental skills such as writing, speaking and computer knowledge which helps them to provide good customer service. However, in most cases, workers joined this sector without skills'*. Jones and Ram (2010) argue that conventionally Asian firm owners can access co-ethnic workers because of cost-effectiveness. Thus, it can be argued that in line with the 'Small is beautiful' approach, job requirements in this industry are 'flexible', which enables unskilled workers to join but also enables owners to take advantage of their position.

4.2.3 Irregular written contract

In legal terms, a written agreement is a must between employer and employee and is usually provided by the employer to the employee (Employment Act, 1996). However, we found that most participants had no written employment contract with the owner, which increased their anxiety, frustration and insecurity. It also means they can be exploited and dissatisfied about annual holidays and sick leave. A waiter, Abdus (R12, BR06), explained the absent employment contract letter *'I did not see any formal or written policy and procedure in this restaurant. I did not receive any contact letter. So, I am concerned about my job security.'*

The empirical research finding reveals some hidden reasons for the failure of employers to offer contracts or letters of appointment to workers. These include that written documents would prevent owners from terminating workers without any notice; for fear of employees taking legal action, they would have to give the legal minimum payment rates. However, this is beyond the UK employment act 2002.

4.2.4 Poor market research

The key reasons behind a successful restaurant are good reputation, quality of food, owner's business knowledge and experience, a qualified chef, promotional activity, good management and good customer service (Yusof and Aspinwall,1999). However, Bangladeshi restaurants have long been serving traditional foods in traditional settings rather than exploring contemporary foods and improving customer service. The empirical research identified the key reason for this is poor marketing research, which explains partially why Bangladeshi restaurants are losing new and young customers (Haq, 2015). Moreover, new entrants enter the UK restaurant industry, such as Turkish restaurants, with a great success. To overcome these, market research is necessary to understand client demands and expectations to create new products and services to satisfy them.

4.2.5 Acute staff shortage

We found that the key barriers to the business success of Bangladeshi restaurants are a lack of qualified chefs, skilled workers, poor management and strict immigration policy. Bangladesh Caterer Associations (BCA) predict that due to the shortage of skilled staff could be 10 to 15 restaurants close every week (Khandaker, 2016). Therefore, the adoption of modern and competent business strategies is crucial for the recovery of the industry. This includes recruitment of skilled and educated staff, professional training for existing employees,

investment in research and development, and implementing government regulations. These activities can motivate younger Bangladeshis to join the restaurants industry to ease pressure from the acute shortage of skilled staff.

The primary research shows that sales and profits have declined over the years. The key reason is a shortage of labour, unfavourable government policies for immigrants, and new entrants in the industry. Delwar (R40, BR20), a restaurant manager, stated *'Now business is not okay. There is a staff shortage due to the government's strict policy. Besides, more competitors have entered this market, for example, Turkish, Chinese and UK retail stores- Tesco's, Sainsbury's and Morrisons, etc. and they sell frozen foods that are cheaper than restaurant foods'*.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Ethnic minority-owned businesses in the UK are a significant and growing feature of the private sector and play a key role in economic and social life (Ram and Jones, 2008). Government figures show that there are 300,000 EMBs (six per cent of all privately-owned businesses), which contribute nearly £30b to the UK economy (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). Bangladeshi-owned enterprises make up most of the ethnic minority business population and produce £4b yearly (Khandaker, 2016). The main businesses of Bangladeshi SMEs are in the food industry; a rapidly expanding industry, despite some evident fluctuations (Wilson, 2017). However, there has been little research on Bangladeshi restaurants and the wellbeing and working conditions of their employees (Razzak et al., 2022). Our study is among the first to examine the working pattern of Bangladeshi ethnic minority business, paying attention to identify how robotic work practices affect employee working life and job satisfaction.

This paper makes a significant contribution to existing research. First, earlier research suggests that employee working life is largely focused on employees' occupation, working hours, annual leave and pay and benefits (Truss et al., 2006). However, our primary data reveals that workers are treated as 'robots' as they perform multiple tasks, have many responsibilities, work long hours and have little holiday entitlement (such as 'Bleak house'). Second, previous studies show that job satisfaction correlates with motivation, work patterns, working conditions, organisational policies, pay and other benefits (Haile, 2015; Raza et al., 2015). Our primary data shows that although Bangladeshi workers have a first preference to work at Bangladeshi restaurants, they are dissatisfied due to a lack of job flexibility, job security and absence of written contracts. Thus, they worry and feel anxious about their job stability and survival in this industry.

Our findings offer a novel insight into a unique working environment. In general, the study's findings are in line with existing literature on employee work life (e.g., Truss et al., 2006; Laar et al., 2007; Sivapragasam and Raya, 2014). But, this is one of the first pieces of research on Bangladeshi ethnic minority business that explores dimensions of employee work life quality. By extending the recent work by Razzak et al., (2022), our study contributes new evidence to inform the ongoing debate on employee work life and job satisfaction in SMEs under the prism of Wilkinson's (2004) 'Small is beautiful' and 'Bleak House' theoretical arguments.

The SMEs literature often adopts one of two types at the opposite ends of a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum is the 'Small is beautiful' type depicting SMEs with a positive and harmonious HR function with little bureaucracy and family friendly initiatives. At the opposite end, the 'Bleak house' type captures the reality of SMEs with HR initiatives associated with hidden conflict, instability, and authoritarianism. Most SMEs fit within this spectrum, giving credence to these two theories and their predictions. Our research findings on Bangladeshi

ethnic minority business suggest that the ‘Small is beautiful - Bleak house’ framework can be used to assess the quality of employee working life in these SMEs. The findings further suggest that many of the ethnic minority business in our sample fit characteristics closer to ‘Bleak house’ end of the spectrum. Our qualitative evidence points to a relatively low quality of employee working life defined by job insecurity, poor work-life balance, multiple job roles, challenging workloads and demanding working hours.

The two empirical models developed here have some important practical implications. This research can benefit Bangladeshi-owned and other ethnic minority business in the UK. The study raises the level of understanding of the association between robot working practices, employee working life and job satisfaction. The ‘Bleak house’ model highlights employer attitudes and behaviours, which are characterised by domineering and autocratic management styles. The model has demonstrated some important factors that impact the work situation of employees in Bangladeshi restaurants. This may support owner-managers to refine their HR strategies and improve the work conditions of employees. The ‘Small is beautiful’ model highlights important features of the working environment of Bangladeshi restaurants. It demonstrates five key factors such as first preference of restaurant job, flexible job requirements, irregular written contract, poor market research and acute staff shortage. Thus, this model can help to improve the Bangladeshi restaurants businesses and other ethnic minority business (see also Razzak et al., 2022).

However, we recognise that a large-scale analysis is needed for generalisability to reach statistical significance and confirm the theoretical predictions of the two models. Yet, it is important for a larger-scale survey to consider the contextual nature of the problem due to the diversity of cultural norms, religious views, and employment practices across SMEs in different sectors and geographical localities.

References

Ab Wahab, M. and Tatoglu, E. (2020). Chasing productivity demands, worker well-being, and firm performance: The moderating effects of HR support and flexible work arrangements. *Personnel Review*, *49*(9), pp.1823-1843.

Akehurst, G., Comeche, J. M. and Galindo, M. A. (2009). Job satisfaction and commitment in the entrepreneurial SME. *Small Business Economics*, 33(3), pp. 277-289.

Alves, P., Bouquin, S. and Pocas, L. (2007). Working time in European SMEs. *European Review of Labour and Research,* Vol.13, No. 75, pp. 74-93.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, pp.77-101.

Clark, A.E. (2015). What makes a good job? Job quality and job satisfaction. *IZA World of Labor*.

Cunningham, J. and McGuire, D. (2019). Business support and training in minority-ethnic, family-run firms: the case of SMEs in Scotland. *Human Resource Development International*, *22*(5), pp.526-552.

Della Torre, E. and Solari, L. (2013). High-performance work systems and the change management process in medium-sized firms. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *24*(13), pp.2583-2607.

Dhamija, P., Gupta, S. and Bag, S. (2019). Measuring of job satisfaction: the use of quality of work life factors. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, *26*(3), pp.871-892.

Diaz-Chao, A., Ficapal-Cusi, P. and Torrent-Sellens, J. (2017). Did small and medium enterprises maintain better jobs during the early years of the recession? Job quality

multidimensional evidence from Spain. *European Management Journal*, *35*(3), pp.396-413.

Drobnič, S., Beham, B. and Präg, P. (2010). Good job, good life? Working conditions and quality of life in Europe. *Social indicators research*, 99, pp.205-225.

Dundon, T. and Wilkinson, A. (2018). HRM in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In *Human Resource Management* (pp. 194-211). Routledge.

Findlay, P., Kalleberg, A.L. and Warhurst, C. (2013). The challenge of job quality. *Human Relations*, 66(4), pp.441-451.

Georgellis, Y., Clark, A.E., Apergis, E. and Robinson, C. (2022). Occupational status and life satisfaction in the UK: The miserable middle? *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 204, pp.509-527.

Green, F., Felstead, A., Gallie, D. and Inanc, H. (2016). Job-related well-being through the Great Recession. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 17, pp.389-411.

Haile, G.A., (2015). Workplace Job Satisfaction in Britain: Evidence from Linked Employer–Employee Data. *Labour*, 29(3), pp.225-242.

Harney, B. (2021). Accommodating HRM in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): a critical review. *Economic and Business Review*, 23(2), pp.72-85.

Harney, B. and Dundon, T., (2006). Capturing complexity: developing an integrated approach to analysing HRM in SMEs. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 16(1), pp.48-73.

Haq, M., (2015). South Asian ethnic minority small and medium enterprises in the UK: a review and research agenda. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 25(4), pp.494-516.

Hasle, P., Limborg, H. J., Kallehave, T., Klitgaard, C. and Andersen, T. R. (2011). The working environment in small firms: responses from owner-managers. *International Small Business Journal*, 30(6), pp. 622-639.

Hoque, A.S.M.M. and Awang, Z. (2019). Does gender difference play moderating role in the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing and Bangladeshi SME performance? *Accounting*, 5(1), pp.35-52.

Hughes, J. and Bozionelos, N. (2007). Work-life balance as source of job dissatisfaction and withdrawal attitudes: an exploratory study on the views of male workers. *Personnel Review*, 36(1), pp. 145-154.

Jones, M. V., Coviello, N. and Tang, Y. K. (2011) 'International entrepreneurship research (1989–2009): a domain ontology and thematic analysis', *Journal of Business Venturing*, 26, pp. 632–659.

Jones, T. and Ram, M. (2010). Review article: ethnic variations on the small firm labour process. *International Small Business Journal*, 28(2), pp.163-173.

Jooss, S., McDonnell, A. and Conroy, K. (2021). Flexible global working arrangements: An integrative review and future research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review*, 31(4), p.100780.

Khandaker, P. (2016). Bangladesh Caterers Association UK [Online]. Available at:

http://www.bca1960.com/index.php/2012-08-22-16-56-48/about-bca.html (Accessed: 15 December 2013).

Laar, D. V., Edwards, J. E. and Easton, S. (2007). The work-related quality of life scale for healthcare workers. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 60(3), pp.325–333.

Lai, Y., Saridakis, G. and Blackburn, R. (2015). Job stress in the United Kingdom: Are small and medium-sized enterprises and large enterprises different? *Stress and Health*, 31(3), pp.222-235.

Lai, Y., Saridakis, G., & Johnstone, S. (2017). Human resource practices, employee attitudes and small firm performance. *International Small Business Journal*, 35(4), pp. 470-494.

Legislation.gov.uk (1996). Employment Rights Act 1996 [Online]. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/contents (Accessed: 3 October 2023).

Legislation.gov.uk (2002). Employment Rights Act 2002 [Online]. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/22/contents (Accessed: 3 October 2023).

Leiva, D., Sanchez-Vidalb, M. E., and Cegarra-Navarro, J. G. (2012). Work life balance and the retention of managers in Spanish SMEs. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(1), pp. 91–108.

Litsardopoulos, N. and Saridakis, G. (2022) The harmony and conflict arising from couples' employment status. *Applied Economics Letters*, 29 (18), pp. 1715-1718.

Litsardopoulos, N., Saridakis, G. and Hand, C. (2021). Does the accumulation of self-employment experience impact life satisfaction? *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, 16. Article Number e00259.

Mathisen, G.E., Einarsen, S. and Mykletun, R. (2008). The occurrences and correlates of bullying and harassment in the restaurant sector. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 49(1), pp.59-68.

Matlay, H., (2002). Industrial relations in the SME sector of the British economy: an empirical perspective. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 9(3), pp.307-318.

Maslach, C. Schaufelli, W.B. and Leiter, M.P. (2001). Job burnout, *Annual Review of Psychology,* 52, pp. 397-422.

Nanjundeswaraswamy, T. (2015). Leadership styles and quality of work life in SMEs. *Management Science Letters*, 5(1), pp.65-78.

Nanjundeswaraswamy, T. (2023). The mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between leadership styles and employee commitment. *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences*, 39(2), pp.286-304.

Oliva, R. and Sterman, J.D. (2001). Cutting corners and working overtime: Quality erosion in the service industry. *Management Science*, 47(7), pp.894-914.

Pajo, K., Coetzer, A. and Guenole, N. (2010) 'Formal development opportunities and withdrawal behaviors by employees in small and medium-sized enterprises', *Journal of Small Business Management*, 48(3), pp. 281–301.

Peccei, R. and Van De Voorde, K. (2019). Human resource management–well-being–performance research revisited: Past, present, and future. *Human resource management journal*, *29*(4), pp.539-563.

Pot, F.D. and Koningsveld, E.A. (2009). Quality of working life and organizational performance-two sides of the same coin? *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, pp.421-428.

QRS International (2013). An Overview of NVivo [Online]. Available at: https://download.qsrinternational.com/Resource/NVivo10/nvivo10-overview.pdf (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

Rahaman, M.A., Luna, K.F., Mite, S., Islam, M. And Wafik, H. (2021). The effect of entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation and gender on business performance: An

empirical study of SMEs in Bangladesh. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 8(6), pp.741-746.

Ram, M. and Jones, T. (2008). Ethnic minority businesses in the UK: An overview, in Oliveira, C.R. and Rath, J. (eds.), *Migrações Journal* - Special Issue on Immigrant Entrepreneurship, n. 3, Lisbon: ACIDI, pp. 61-71

Ram, M. and Edwards, P. (2003). Praising Caesar not burying him: what we know about employment relations in small firms. *Work, Employment and Society*, 17(4), pp.719-730.

Ram, M., Sanghera, B., Abbas, T., Barlow, G. and Jones, T. (2000). Ethnic minority business in comparative perspective: the case of the independent restaurant sector. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 26(3), pp. 495-510.

Ram, M., Sanghera, B., Abbas, T. and Barlow, G. (2000). Training and ethnic minority firms: the case of the independent restaurant sector, *Education and Training*, 42(4/5), pp. 334-341

Razzak, B.M., Idris, B., Hasan, R., Saridakis, G. and Hansen, J.M. (2023). The impact of Covid-19 on struggling ethnic minority entrepreneurs' business strategy: the case of Bangladeshi curry houses in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*.

Razzak, B.M., Blackburn, R. and Saridakis, G. (2022). Employees' working life and performance of UK ethnic minority restaurants: a qualitative approach. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 29(1), pp.47-67.

Raza, M.Y., Akhtar, M.W., Husnain, M. and Akhtar, M.S. (2015). The impact of intrinsic motivation on employee's job satisfaction. *Management and Organizational Studies*, *2*(3), p.80.

Robinson, N. (2016). Who will cook your Indian curry?, BBC News, 16 May [Online]. Available: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36378655 (Accessed: 19 July 2016).

Sarantinos, V. (2022). Key issues in small business management: 'Small is beautiful' or a bleak house in the Brexit backdrop. In *Small Business Management and Control of the Uncertain External Environment*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Saridakis, G. and Cooper, C.L., eds. (2016) Research handbook on employee turnover. New Horizons in Management Series. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham. UK.

Saridakis, G., Lai, Y., Muñoz Torres, R. I. and Gourlay, S. (2020). Exploring the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment: an instrumental variable approach. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 31(13). pp. 1739-1769.

Saridakis, G., Muñoz Torres, R. and Johnstone, S. (2013). Do Human Resource Practices Enhance Organizational Commitment in SMEs with Low Employee Satisfaction? British Journal of Management, 24 (3). pp. 445-458.

Sivapragasam, P. and Raya R. P. (2014). Exploring the link between job quality and employee well-being: An empirical study. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Management Research and Innovation*, 10(4):267-77.

Smeaton, D. and White, M., (2016). The growing discontents of older British employees: Extended working life at risk from quality of working life. *Social Policy and Society*, *15*(3), pp.369-385.

Stavrou, E. and Ierodiakonou, C., (2016). Entitlement to work-life balance support: Employee/manager perceptual discrepancies and their effect on outcomes. *Human Resource Management*, *55*(5), pp.845-869.

Storey, D.J., Saridakis, G., Gupta, S.S., Edwards, P.K. and Blackburn, R. A. (2010). Linking HR formality with employee job quality: the role of firm and workplace size. *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 49, No. 2, pp. 305– 329.

Tansel, A. and Gazîoğlu, S. (2014). Management-employee relations, firm size and job satisfaction. *International journal of manpower*, *35*(8), pp.1260-1275.

Truss, K., E. Soane, C. Edwards, K. Wisdom, A. Croll and J. Burnett (2006). *Working life: employee attitudes and engagement.* London: CIPD.

Yusof, S. M. and Aspinwall, E. (1999). Critical success factors for total quality management implementation in small and medium enterprise. *Total Quality Management*, 10(4/5), pp. 803-809.

Voordt, T.V.D. and Jensen, P.A. (2023). The impact of healthy workplaces on employee satisfaction, productivity and costs. *Journal of Corporate Real Estate*, *25*(1), pp.29-49.

Wheatley, D. (2017). Autonomy in paid work and employee subjective well-being. *Work and Occupations*, *44*(3), pp.296-328.

Wiesner, R. and Innes, P. (2010). Bleak house or bright prospect? HRM in Australian SMEs over 1998-2008. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 48(2), pp.151-184.

Wilkinson, A. (1999). Employment relations in SMEs', *Employee Relations*, 21(3), pp.206-217.

Wilkinson, A., Dundon, T., Marchington, M. and Ackers, P. (2004). Changing patterns of employee voice: case studies from the UK and Republic of Ireland. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 298-323.

Wilson, B. (2017). Who killed the curry house? Why has Britain turned its back on its favourite food and shut out the people needed to cook it, *The Guardian*, 12 January, p. 29.

Wright, T. and Pollert, A. (2006). The experience of ethnic minority workers in the hotel and catering industry: Routes to support and advice on workplace problems, *ACAS report* [Online]. Available at: http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/0/b/03-06_1.pdf (Accessed: 16 August 2024).