



## Managing a Sustainable Work-from-Home Scheme: Library Resiliency in Times of Pandemic

Joseph Yap and April Manabat

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# **Managing a Sustainable Work-from-Home Scheme: Library Resiliency in Times of Pandemic**

Joseph Yap and April Manabat

Nazarbayev University, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan

## **ABSTRACT**

The resiliency of librarians is tested once again with the devastating occurrence of the pandemic situation worldwide. As a result of the global scare, many libraries have shut down as prescribed by the governments to minimize physical contact and stop the spread of viruses. Yet, libraries live up to its mandate in serving the information needs of its patrons. This report documents the role of libraries in Kazakhstan during the pandemic and how libraries responded quickly to avoid disruption of programs and services. This document also describes some of the “new normal” initiatives and strategies libraries have adapted to respond to the needs of their clients. On the other hand, librarians are stepping-up and making enormous efforts to manage their call of duty to provide and distribute factual and reliable information to all its stakeholders. Adapting to a change of working environment also needs to be looked into. Since the start of work from home in mid-March 2020, was there a change of lifestyle? What factors affect their work productivity? An online interview among select library staff who can speak and understand English is conducted.

**Keywords:** Resiliency; Pandemic; Covid-19; Sustainability; Work-From-Home

## **INTRODUCTION**

It takes a pandemic to halt the regular administrative and business operations of an entity, worse a country. A domino effect takes place in all sectors of a society starting from tourism, education, entrepreneurship, and practically all industries interconnected with economic and intellectual developments. A pandemic is a threat to humanity as the spread of the infectious disease crosses international borders (Kelly, 2011). In these trying times, we are urged to be responsive and get back to our feet. No matter how difficult the situation is, we remain resilient.

Resiliency during pandemic is an active positive effect libraries do practice to ensure services continue although limited. In a global landscape, social resilience is seen as the ability of a system to bounce back again despite the emergence of unavoidable disturbances caused by environmental changes (Adger, 2000; Cretney, 2014). The spread of the coronavirus remains

volatile and uncertain. Library management should be quick in deciphering what to do in this kind of health crisis that blindly attacks all citizens. This report documents the role of libraries in Kazakhstan during the pandemic and how libraries responded quickly to avoid disruption of programs and services. Furthermore, this paper narrates some of the “new normal” strategies libraries have initiated to respond to the needs of their community. Librarians’ stepped-up and made remarkable efforts as front liners by providing health and medical information and ensuring that access to information is never disrupted. While it was difficult to balance work-from-home due to varying factors, this document also shares the experiences of Kazakh librarians during the pandemic outbreak.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Kazakhstan is a landlocked country in Central Asia which gained independence in 1991 (UNDP, 2020). It is surrounded by Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. According to Kazakhstan’s country data published in IFLA’s library map of the world, there are 697 academic libraries reported in 2018 (IFLA, n.d).

Libraries and librarians are essential assets in every society. The value they exhibit is important and timely as we deal with so much information, thus avoiding information disorders. Due to the pandemic, lockdowns were introduced to limit the spread of the virus. Libraries were not spared and they have to follow government regulations.

Academic libraries in Kazakhstan during pre-pandemic times normally operates a 12-hour shift or less (ie. Al Farabi Library (9:00AM-8:00PM); L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (8:00AM-8:00PM); Nazarbayev University Library (8:30AM-8:00PM). In Kazakhstan, library services started going virtually in mid-March 2020 following a state of emergency announced by the president of Kazakhstan on March 16, 2020 (Shayakhmetova, 2020). Librarians were asked to stay home and prompted to start providing partial or fully online access and online services.

This study aims to answer the following questions: since the start of work from home in mid-March 2020, what library resiliency strategies have they initiated or struggles they encountered while working from home? Was there a change of lifestyle or routine among Kazakh librarians brought about by the pandemic? What factors affect their work productivity?

## **METHODOLOGY**

Online structured interviews are conducted via a virtual meeting platform. Zoom was used to perform the online interview. In-depth analysis of recorded interviews was employed in this study. Descriptive analysis was used to share the stories of librarians during lockdown periods

caused by the pandemic. Purposive sampling was used to identify English speaking librarians from academic libraries. The authors considered only those who can speak and understand English. The librarians were chosen based on a referral system. Most Kazakh librarians only converse in Russian or Kazakh as their vernacular. Translation was possible but for convenience of interpretation and time required for translation, only those who speak and understand English were included in this study.

The questionnaire and consent form were approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee. The questions were divided into two categories (see Appendix A). The first part identified activities initiated by the library during the lockdown and quarantine period. The second part dealt with the work from home experiences. During the interview, the participants were asked again if they read the consent form and if they had questions about its parts (procedures, risks, benefits, compensation, confidentiality and privacy). Parts of the consent form were reiterated most especially the voluntary nature of the study. Once the participant agreed with no objections, the online interview started.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Pandemic is Global**

It was in early December 2019 when a number of people in Wuhan, China had been infected with an undetectable disease. With manifestations ranging from mild flu-like symptoms up to cataclysmic acute respiratory disease, it is hard to predict that this dreadful disease would soon take the lives of so many across the globe in just a span of months (Al-Dadah & Hing, 2020). Given the increasing number of cases outside China and its severe effects that cannot be contained, World Health Organization (WHO) was left no choice but to declare the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic on 11 March 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020).

The declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic has led to closure of various establishments and institutions. As all government efforts were geared towards “flattening the curve” by minimizing physical contact and face-to-face interactions, strict lockdown and quarantine measures were put in place. As an effect, many companies and institutions were forced to drastically change some operational procedures. From working in physical offices, a sudden shift to working-from-home set-up has become the new trend. Even libraries, as a third place, were not exempted in this new kind of set-up.

### **Libraries are Affected**

The rapid spreading of COVID-19 across the globe has paved the way to close down some establishments and institutions like libraries. Considered as third place where interactions and conversations are being encouraged, libraries are heavily affected by the shutdown (Bruxvoort,

2016). Closing the physical library doors to limit, if not to avoid physical contact, means opening even more doors of challenges and opportunities that the libraries as well as the librarians are facing.

In a recent survey conducted by the Public Libraries Association (PLA) from 24 March to 1 April 2020, it provides a snapshot of how public libraries were affected by the pandemic in the United States. The study revealed that almost 2,545 public libraries continue to work in various innovative ways despite the closure of the library building such as extended access to electronic resources, creation of online programs such as virtual storytelling, and performing some corporate social responsibility initiatives such as printing of face shield and volunteerism (American Libraries, 2020a). In a separate survey conducted by American Libraries Association (ALA) from 12-18 May 2020 revealed that 3,800 libraries from various sectors has also undergone some shifts in the library services by providing access to digital content, online learning, introducing virtual programs, and involvement in community crisis response (American Libraries, 2020b). With all of these initiatives, the library has continuously managed to prove its worth even in these trying times.

The physical closure of libraries led to staff working from home to deliver all possible online library services to patrons. To safeguard both their jobs from furloughs or layoffs and most especially their health, libraries decided to shift to skeletal staffing and to eventually work-from-home set-up, allowing their staff to continue their work remotely (Hardenbrook, 2020; Randall & Burke, 2020). With the sudden shift of the mode of work, it is not surprising that the challenges such as provision of technology and maintaining productivity will also be encountered.

### **Resiliency in Libraries**

The pandemic proved that libraries as service providers adapt to changes in times of great information need. Library studies connected to resilience in times of pandemic is scarce and this study attempts to share the Kazakh experience. Libraries are social spaces and it is one of the places that were equally affected by the global spread of the Coronavirus. Xu and Kajikawa (2018), defined resilience as “the capacity of systems to absorb recurrent natural and human perturbations in order to maintain their function and regeneration ability or to transform to a new desirable state. This explores systems’ adaptability and transformability” (p. 239). Taking into account the definition of resilience, we can also say that librarians must have the “ability to cope, respond to change and return to a degree of normal functioning in a crisis” (Cretney, 2014, p. 629).

### **Characteristics of Resilience: Flexibility**

This characteristic when applied to the library gives them the ability to adjust quickly to the demands of the situation. If a natural disaster, tragedy or health outbreak happens, the library can stand still and recreate or repurpose programs and services.

## **Redundancy**

This characteristic is essential in libraries to provide continued support to its services. Going virtually online requires more support, more attention, and more workers to satisfy the needs of the online users. As expounded by Xu and Kajikawa (2018), redundancy “provides compensations for the loss of functionalities in order to avoid systems collapse (p. 244)” Moreover, redundancy becomes a great reserve in case disturbances happen (ie. staff on leave and needs immediate replacement or back-up, e-book vendors cannot deliver on time in times of crises, etc.). This term is described in supply chain management when “one supplier fails due to delivery problems, at least one more supplier is still available to ensure the delivery of parts” (Fraccascia, et al., 2020).

## **Diversity**

Resilience can be achieved if there is a joint effort between the stakeholders and the library. Being sensitive to what they need in times of crises is important. Libraries have to offer various options and ways to reach their users to provide information.

## **Connectedness**

Mental health needs to be addressed during negative situations. Both library workers and their users experience different levels of disturbances in every catastrophe. Various kinds of stress can be bad for our psychological well-being so we have to promote and create a better atmosphere in these trying times. To be resilient, there must be a feeling of connectedness. As Chandra et al. (2013) mentioned, “social connectedness such as neighbor-to-neighbor reliance is critical for community resilience because it can help communities to exchange resources, to support each other, and to respond and recover together” (p. 1183).

## **New Normal for Libraries**

While most of the libraries remain physically closed, some libraries are gradually re-opening their doors and testing the waters to what would actually work in the new normal. In an attempt to bring back normalcy in the library setting while observing standard precautionary measures such as wearing masks, proper hand washing and social distancing, libraries have been doing some space redesigning to lessen the physical and social interactions between and among library users and personnel. Keeping a distance of at least one meter, libraries were forced to rearrange some areas, marking certain spaces where patrons can pay the library a visit for less than an hour to borrow some materials. In countries such as Germany and China, phase re-openings of library buildings were considered allowing patrons to get some library materials (Bibliotheca, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020).

Limiting physical and social interactions is now being equated to increasing contact-less and touchless library services. Making it more significant as ever, libraries are now investing in self-service borrowing kiosks, contact-less hand sanitizers, and cloud Library checkouts through

mobile applications among others (Bibliotheca, 2020). Taking into account protecting both library personnel and users, library staff wore personal protective equipment (PPE), gloves and masks as medical frontliners do. Temperature checks for all before entering some library areas were also in place ensuring body temperatures are normal.

### **Kazakh Libraries Before the Pandemic**

Libraries in Kazakhstan function the same with most of the libraries around the world. Libraries in Kazakhstan underwent drastic change in its educational and research system over the past decades and is adopting a more Western educational approach affecting library operations, Kazakhstani libraries and librarians continue to redefine its role to be a valuable asset in the academic community (King, et al., 2013). With the presence of international student populations, faculty, and staff, the internationalization of some academic institutions in Kazakhstan allows libraries to practice international standards. Even before the pandemic hit the country, just like other libraries, Kazakh libraries also focus on user needs that involves information literacy and reference services that were generally offered in a face-to-face format allowing students to interact with the librarians and vice versa; and supporting students research that provides library instructions on how to search, evaluate, understand, and cite information sources critically (Emmelhainz, 2019; King, et al., 2013).

Electronic and online resources are also made accessible for the academic libraries in Kazakhstan through national licensing projects which aim to establish cooperative initiatives in resources acquisition and promotion (Bekbalaeva, 2017). Despite the fact that some Kazakhstani libraries tend to still be quite restrictive on how to access some of their collections, thus avoiding open stacks systems, availability of electronic and online resources allows libraries to provide a wide array of collections to their patrons (Emmelhainz & Bukhtoyarova, 2016; King et al., 2013).

### **How Libraries Have Responded in Kazakhstan**

Just like most of the libraries around the world, libraries in Kazakhstan responded on almost the same level. When the pandemic escalated in the country during the early months of 2020, libraries were forced to physically close its doors and extend access to their clients through various platforms. For instance, online campaigns (NU Library, 2020) such as stress-relief posts and COVID-19-related information guides were served hot to library clientele to help them thrive during the pandemic. Access to print materials such as digitization initiatives and even limited book delivery service were put in place to make sure that library materials will be accessible to patrons. Strengthened and extended access to online resources even off campus were ensured by providing some information and links to free resources (NU Library, 2020). Use of simplified online submission systems of documents for institutional repository that does not require physical interactions as well as video tutorials were put in place (NU Repository, 2020). Extended access to digital content and online visibility has been the name of the game where libraries need to ensure

that all library materials, programs and services will be made available to users, whenever, wherever.

From skeleton staffing to work-from-home set-up, Kazakh libraries have also adapted this kind of work mode. Valuing both employees' and patrons' needs, health and well-being, libraries continuously served their patrons through various ways even if the staff works remotely. However, just like any other libraries, Kazakh libraries also encountered challenges in terms of technology and personnel preparedness.

### **Work from Home and Managing Work-Life Balance**

Work-from-home set-up in libraries is not really a new thing. Whether with the escalation of a pandemic or relating to some personal matters, working remotely can be an option for the workers depending on their nature of work. In a traditional set-up, librarians are expected to work physically with their clients as the materials they are dealing with are mostly print. However, the pandemic triggered changes in library services, thus, telecommuting or working from home became an option (Boeninger, 2020). The use of telecommuting, coupled with collaboration, has been evident in both articles written by Duncan (2008) and Rysavy and Michalak (2020). Duncan (2008) documented her experiences in this kind of set-up and how she thrived with her work through telecommuting. During this global pandemic, this kind of set-up has become the new norm on how the Goldey-Beacom College library was able to handle a dramatic work shift with the use of technology and by collaborating effectively (Rysavy & Michalak, 2020). Ensuring safety of staff health while keeping their jobs has always been one of the top priorities.

Maintaining work-life balance should also be considered. The work setup may vary and it is very much fitting that workers should know how to create such balance to ensure that productivity and efficiency of workers is still being achieved. Though technological and personnel preparedness will always come as a challenge, support from the library administration has been a very important factor for this to be realized.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on referral and insider knowledge, 17 Kazakh librarians who can speak and understand English, in a beginner to intermediate level, were invited to participate in the study. To be equally represented, the invitation included librarians working outside of the capital of Kazakhstan. The researchers also balanced the inclusion of respondents by ensuring that there will be no prejudice to sex and civil status. Nine agreed to be part of the online interview yet only six completed the task. Three cancelled or did not show-up due to various understandable reasons (ie. feeling unwell, a newborn, or did not reply again). Others declined the invitation because of other important activities that they needed to prioritize. In total, only four academic libraries were represented in this study.



Each interviewee is coded to anonymize their identity. All interviews were less than 40 minutes. Table 1 below is a summary of the respondent's profile who completed the interview:

Table 1. Respondents profile

<b>Librarian</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Civil Status</b>	<b>Library</b>
L1	Nur-Sultan	Female	Married	A
L2	Nur-Sultan	Female	Single	A
L3	Pavlodar	Female	Single	B
L5	Nur-Sultan	Female	Married	C
L8	Almaty	Female	Married	D
L14	Nur-Sultan	Male	Single	A

Interview questions were divided into two main sections: the first part aimed to know the operations of the library when the pandemic occurred in Kazakhstan. The second part focused on the librarians' work-from-home experiences and how they managed to handle it.

Out of the four academic libraries, two remained open with limited library services and two shut down the physical library with online services in place. Quarantine started in mid-March and with the recommendation of the State Commission for Ensuring a State of Emergency, major cities were on lock-down and movement of people was restricted. Eventually, it was advised to work from home.

Libraries are one of the most important agencies in the academic and public sector. Most library users feel the importance of libraries when they can't borrow nor return printed materials due to quarantine. Fines are waived and users can extend the use of print materials. Because most libraries do not have enough access to e-resources, it became a challenge. Libraries have to adjust with the recent times and think about strategies they can introduce to their users. Among the strategies Kazakhstani libraries implemented are the following:

- Book Delivery for Faculty / Pick-up Stations (Curbside)
- Book Return for Graduating Students
- Document Delivery
- Scanning by Request
- Self-paced/Asynchronous and Synchronous IL Sessions

- Simplified Submission System of Documents for Repository
- Strengthened Access to Online Databases Off Campus
- Use of Mobile Technologies / Virtual Reference

Disaster management or pandemic preparedness should be in place after this experience. Some libraries were not ready for this situation especially those with no online resources. In reality, there are print materials with no e-book versions available and if there are, they become accessible using access codes from vendors which are expensive and unsustainable. Library workers at the frontline are also at risk as they deliver or pick-up print books as requested by faculty members. Scanning is an option in some libraries as long as they respect the national copyright law. Since the pandemic struck close to the end of an academic semester, only those with an online system can clear any outstanding records of a graduating student or a resigning staff member. In some cases, not all librarians are ready for the virtual environment, especially those who are technology challenged. The use of mobile phones are heavily exhausted to send reminders and meeting updates. Some libraries are not ready with the service of offering online catalog. During this pandemic, those with IT skills and knowledge prove to be self-reliant.

Libraries have the responsibility to disseminate information at all times especially if it affects their readers and users. During this pandemic, a library can be a partner in social transformation by sharing updated authentic news and health information. Some libraries created LibGuides to enlighten users and help them find out where to get the latest and factual health information. Some libraries post medical information in their social media sites and where to access COVID-19 related research studies and data. Meanwhile, some did not participate in realizing their purpose of disseminating information.

Adapting to the new normal and quick decision making is important during these trying times. Some libraries are now preparing their physical library once they open again. Prior to lockdown, academic libraries installed hand sanitizers, provided masks and gloves to library users. Temperature checks will be implemented at the entrance or gates of the library. Libraries are still concerned with how they are going to check out print materials and if they can accommodate a huge request of e-textbooks. Because of this, they still do not have the final plan to prepare for the physical set-up but one respondent said they are re-arranging their chairs and tables to observe physical and social distancing.

Following the definition of resilience by Xu and Kajikawa, table 2 summarizes how libraries in Kazakhstan take advantage of the crisis and manage to be resilient.

Table 2. Library Resilience in Kazakhstan

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Example 1</b>	<b>Example 2</b>	<b>Example 3</b>
Flexibility	Print books can be extended and fines are waived.	The librarian goes to work to scan limited pages of print materials when there is no e-book equivalent.	Flexible working hours for those living with family and children.
Redundancy	Patron services staff are rotated as to when they come physically to work to process requests for book delivery. Those vulnerable can stay at home temporarily for the whole duration of quarantine to answer online requests.	Having both print and e-book copies of the same title to be used for virtual classes.	Having more than two e-book vendors who can efficiently provide bulk requests. Some vendors experience business disruptions and can't fulfill requests.
Diversity	Different e-book formats are considered and disseminated.	Library offers both self-paced (asynchronous) and synchronous virtual IL sessions.	Social media accounts are active in promoting various services and programs. Libraries are now into sharing more events in YouTube and other social media sites.
Connectedness	Showing care by launching stress-related virtual activities for those who are interested.	Listening to the demands of the community and finding ways to deliver requests (ie. book delivery).	Letting staff members use library equipment for work-from-home set-up.

Just like any other academic libraries around the world, Kazakh libraries are keeping an eye on the best practices that are happening worldwide so they can adapt it locally. The intention

of the report is to share what is happening on the ground based on few examples as elicited in the interviews.

One librarian lived alone making it easier to work without noise but being alone still depended on the kind of home environment. At most, one librarian lived with five family members. Table 3 summarizes the number of family members lived with the librarian and how this number of people affected their work from home experience. As most of the participants lived together with family members, they experienced some difficulties while working from home. Among those challenges are the following:

- Difficult to concentrate due to noise and other factors
- Going out to send documents to use net cafe
- Home not conducive for working during hot summer
- Internet connection unstable
- Laptop is old to install more programs
- No extra room to be silent
- Presence of children and other family members
- Sharing of laptop with other household members
- Time management due to house chores

Table 3. Number of family members living together

<b>Librarian</b>	<b>Number of Family Members Living Together</b>
L1	4
L2	5
L3	3
L5	3
L8	4
L14	1
Average	3.33

Surprisingly, there were librarians with no difficulties and were enjoying their stay at home since there is no rush needed while working.

Certain things have also changed while working from home, it affected each worker. This may be true to all working classes that have no choice but to stay home and work. These workers are also fortunate to have work during a pandemic. While one librarian said there is no change brought about by the pandemic, some mentioned that their daily routine and lifestyle have changed during the last five months. Below are their responses:

- Doing house chores in between work
- Late lunch
- Helping siblings with studies during morning which means work shifts late in the afternoon to night
- Waking up late/ Start working day late
- No regular work time

With more than 150 days at home, people miss their daily routine of going to work especially if they have been doing this for quite a long time. It is apparent as most of them miss their colleagues and having in-person meetings with them. They needed a dose of physical activity and interaction. Daily rides going to work is also another feeling they miss. By simply using public transport and having it as a personal space is something they value when they are stuck at home. Some librarians are used to having a fast and reliable internet connection and this attachment made them realize that it is better to work in the office. Being in the office in the comfort of their own workstation and personal space is also a major factor they are missing to attain a quiet working environment. This leads them to converting a part of their homes as a temporary working space. Surprisingly, one of the respondents mentioned that it is not necessary to have a quiet space when working.

With the work-from-home set-up, it should also be considered that aside from having your own area, personal computers are very much important. Since most of the tasks will be carried out online such as virtual reference services, checking electronic collections or even basic encoding or excel works, computers and laptops will be needed. Most participants have their own laptops or computers while some found the need to borrow their office laptops or computers to perform such tasks since some of the software and programs and even files were already installed or saved in these devices.

Coupled with the personal gadget is having a stable internet connection. Ensuring stability of the connection will help in accomplishing assigned online tasks faster. When it comes to internet stability, the majority of the respondents have stable internet connections and do not experience major connection issues. Only one participant had connection issues, leaving him no choice but to

go to a nearby internet shop to send very important emails or documents.

Having a work schedule is important to the respondents. While time flexibility is also being taken into account, dedicating at least eight (8) hours of work every day is more amenable for all the respondents. While some tried to maintain or stick to the same schedule as if they are working at the office (e.g. 8:30AM – 5:30PM), others adjusted their work schedules (i.e. works at night) due to fast internet connection and following the 8-hour work rule.

Work-from-home set-up allows workers unlimited access to their kitchens, pantries or toilets which also allows them to take some breaks while working. Breaks such as taking a simple snack or lunch, quick stretching or walking, and even going to toilet breaks are important to workers to help them focus on work. While some respondents followed the same lunch time as if they are working at the office, for some workers who are already married, this is not the case. They also needed to perform household chores alongside with their work, thus, some of them tend to take late lunches or will just take a snack when their time permits.

Adjusting to the work-from-home set-up has been quite challenging to workers. One such adjustment is the limited, if not lacking physical interactions or transactions that most workers should do to accomplish such tasks. All respondents believed that most of the library issues and concerns will be solved immediately if they are physically working at the office. Securing original signatures, signing license agreements, and works dealing with print materials were some of the tasks that needed to be carried out and be resolved if workers are working at the office.

Productivity is the ratio of outputs to inputs (Krugman, 1994; Kumaraswamy, 1997). Taking into account employees' efficiency, productivity keeps businesses and operations rolling. To keep personnel healthy and safe while providing continuous library service, libraries were forced to adapt the work-from-home set-up. When asked about productivity, some of them find themselves more productive working at the office due to the nature of their work. Majority of them felt that they could find themselves productive in either set-up.

Open communication is very much essential to ensure smooth flow of work. Since work-from-home set-up has been the new norm for almost six months, virtual meetings and video conferences were organized. While some meet at least twice every week, others meet at least once in a month especially if there are urgent matters or big decisions that require inputs from other staff members and brainstorming. Since stable internet connection should be in place to ensure clear communication, some opt to communicate through social media platforms or online messaging such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger.

For some participants, the work-from-home set-up may give an impression that workers have been free-up for some time as they are not required to travel to work. This gave them the perception that workers should be given additional tasks on top of their designated duties. While some of the respondents believed that they do not have additional tasks to perform, some of them

were given IT-related tasks to carry out some work smoothly such as training colleagues with the online work.

With regards to the amount of workload, the majority of the respondents believed that there is no difference with the work-from-home set-up as compared to working physically at the office. However, two of the respondents felt that they have heavier workload since they are doing more tasks while working from home.

Taking into consideration workers' experiences for the past six months, most participants preferred striking a balance between working-from-home and working at the office. Some suggested that there should be at least three days working at the office while two days working at home. For respondents who have children, having this kind of balance seemed to be a good option. On the contrary, two preferred working at the office as they believed that having an office routine is better as well as social interaction.

Given that this might be the "new normal" in the coming weeks or months, respondents felt the need for some revisions in the operational policies of the work-from-home set-up. This pandemic brought a drastic change to how people do things and this new set-up has become a challenge for everyone. While some found having a strict work schedule okay, respondents preferred more flexibility in terms of work schedule, provision of some equipment such as laptops, additional benefits that would be essential for working from home such as connection allowances, and changing some procedures such as strengthening virtual reference services and allowing electronic formats of documents. These changes in the operational policies would greatly help library personnel to focus on work and provide efficient service to clients even working at home.

## CONCLUSIONS

The 2019 novel coronavirus that shutdown almost all services, partially or completely, including libraries, challenged us to strengthen and review our institutional policies, services, and programs. Libraries and librarians learned to think and apply library management judiciously and made sure their mandate is to serve the information needs and interests of the community to which they serve. The balance to provide the needs of the stakeholders and the responsibility to protect the life of a librarian which acts as a frontliner is considered. Kazakh libraries are committed to their promise of upholding the right and access to information. Although difficult, some managed to scan books and deliver what is expected from them. These trying times exhausted all possible library innovative practices and strategies to fulfill the user's needs. Being resilient and responsive, just like any other library in the world, makes Kazakh libraries worthy to be recognized for their passion to extend their services in times of pandemic. They continued virtual reference services, strengthened access to online databases, book deliveries at the curbside, scanning services, and

many other virtual services. It is acknowledged that librarians felt challenges while working from home but it does not mean they will stop from responding to patron's needs.

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### Appendix A: Interview Questions (21 questions)

#### A. Library Operations

1. When did your library close when the pandemic escalated in Kazakhstan?
2. What strategies/new services have you introduced to continue providing services to your users during pandemic?
3. What were the struggles or difficulties you encountered in implementing these strategies?
4. How did your library help in disseminating health information to combat the spread of coronavirus?
5. How are you preparing your physical library for the new normal? When do you intend to re-open?

#### B. Work-From-Home Experiences

1. How many family members do you live with?
2. What difficulties do you encounter while working from home (presence of children, other family members, etc.)?
3. What routine has changed while working from home?
4. What do you miss the most about going and working in your office?
5. Is quiet space an important factor when working at home? Do you have your own work space or workstation at home?
6. How about equipment, do you use your own computer or laptop?
7. How about internet stability? Do you have connectivity issues? How did your employer support you?
8. How much time do you spend working from home? Do you still follow the stipulated schedule or work shift (e.g. 40hr/week; 8AM-5PM)?
9. Do you follow the same lunch time as scheduled? Or how many times you take breaks (break from seating, break from looking at the computer screen)?

10. Are there library issues you can solve immediately when you are in the office compared when you are working from home? Can you provide examples?
  11. Would you say you are productive when you are working from home or working in the office?
  12. How often do you conduct virtual meetings with your colleagues to ensure smooth operations while at work-from-home set-up?
  13. Were you given additional tasks to perform on top of your usual task (e.g. reference-related tasks for non-reference librarians, etc.)?
  14. In terms of the amount of work, do you think that the workload you have in the work-from-home set-up is quite heavier compared to when working at the physical office setting?
  15. Would you prefer to work from home? Why or why not?
  16. Given that this might be our “new normal”, if you were given the chance to revise some operational policies that affect the WFH scheme, what are those (e.g. provision of internet/communication allowance, flexible working hours, provision of computer equipment, etc.)?
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### **About the authors**

Joseph Yap serves as the Subject Librarian for three graduate schools at Nazarbayev University, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. He is in-charge of the schools of Business, Education and Public Policy. He is given the title of Senior Expert Librarian and is also acting as the Information Literacy Coordinator. His research publications can be found here: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7852-1047>

April Manabat is an Expert-Librarian and currently the Subject Librarian for School of Sciences and Humanities at Nazarbayev University. She has more than a decade of experience in librarianship and has written and presented papers on collection development, media and information literacy, and academic librarianship.