

**WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE ON REMOTE WORK AND FLEXIBILITY:
NAVIGATING THE NEW NORMAL**

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ABSTRACT

In the ever-evolving landscape of work, remote work amid flexible arrangements have gained momentum and revolutionized the way people approach their careers. These new modes of work offer unique opportunities and challenges particularly for women workers. This article delves into the perspective of women on remote work and flexibility, exploring their experiences, insights and the impact on their personal and professional lives. This study attempts to find various aspects of work-life balance amongst working women through a survey of 250 women working in different sectors who were earlier working from home or had started doing telecommuting recently. The sample unit was chosen on convenient sampling technique and Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the self-developed questionnaire. Principal component factor analysis findings revealed that to empower work life harmony, work family enrichment, emotional support and organisational culture plays a vital role. The results also indicated that respondents experienced organisational stress and emotional pressure to maintain work life integration.

INTRODUCTION

Women's work-life balance refers to the ability of women to effectively manage their professional commitments and personal responsibilities, ensuring that both areas of their lives are given adequate attention and satisfaction. Achieving a healthy work-life balance

is crucial for overall well-being, career satisfaction, productivity and personal fulfilment. As technology continues to advance and workplaces become more flexible, virtual jobs have opened up new opportunities for women to thrive professionally while maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Virtual jobs, also known as remote or telecommuting positions (Bloom et al., 2015), allow women employees to work from the comfort of their homes or any location outside of a traditional office setting. This alternative work arrangement offers several advantages that have contributed to its growing popularity. WFH have expanded the pool of employment opportunities available to women, especially those who may face geographical constraints or limited access to traditional job markets. This enables them to access positions in industries and organizations that were previously out of reach, opening doors to diverse career paths and remote collaboration with colleagues from around the world.

By eliminating the need for a daily commute and reducing time spent away from home, virtual jobs promote better work-life integration for women employees. They can allocate more time to self-care, family, hobbies, and other activities that contribute to overall well-being, resulting in increased job satisfaction and productivity. Virtual jobs often mitigate certain challenges faced by women in the workplace, such as unconscious biases, gender-based discrimination, or limited opportunities for career advancement. Remote work allows women to focus on their skills, contributions, and performance, rather than being judged by external factors.

However, the perception of employers regarding remote work by women employees can vary depending on various factors such as industry, organizational culture, and individual beliefs. Some employers may express concerns about communication and collaboration when women employees work from home. They may worry that the absence of face-to-face interactions could hinder teamwork, idea sharing, and building strong relationships among team members. They may grapple with how to effectively evaluate the performance of women employees working remotely. There are concerns about the engagement and motivation levels of women employees when working remotely. Employers may need to implement strategies to maintain a sense of connection, provide regular feedback, and foster a positive work environment to keep remote workers

motivated and engaged. They may need to develop new evaluation methods and metrics that take into account the unique circumstances and outcomes associated with remote work.

When working from home, the boundaries between work and personal life can become blurred. It can be challenging to separate work tasks from household responsibilities, leading to feelings of being constantly "on" and difficulty in finding time for relaxation and self-care. Indian culture often places a strong emphasis on family and traditional gender roles. Some families may have expectations that women primarily focus on household responsibilities and care giving. As a result, the perception of work from home by women employees can be influenced by these cultural expectations, leading to mixed reactions. Work from home may be viewed positively as it allows women to fulfil their professional duties while also attending to household responsibilities, childcare, and elderly care. The flexibility offered by remote work can be seen as a way to maintain a harmonious work-life balance despite the changing landscape, some families and communities may still hold stigmas or judgments against women working from home. Women may face scrutiny or pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, leading to challenges in balancing work and family expectations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work from home became a widespread practice during the COVID-19 pandemic as organizations and individuals adapted to the challenges posed by the global health crisis. It led to a momentous curiosity among researchers to study on the various dimensions of working from home.

Lord (2020) in his paper took in-depth look at the move to remote work during pandemic and found that remote work like other consequences and aspects of the pandemic was deeply rooted in broader social issues. The move to remote work had the potential to alleviate historic inequities which arise from the demands of the modern workplace – demands which have led women to occupy lower-paying positions.

Bhattacharjee,S.(2020) conducted a study on viability of telecommuting as an alternative of daily commuting by women in Mumbai region. The results revealed that working from

home was not welcomed and majority of the respondents felt that it has increased to stressful life and lack of peace.

Tanja van der Lippe et al (2020) studied firms supporting work from home as a result of rise in advances in communication technology. The authors focus not only on individual workers but also the potential influence of co-worker engagement. The study maps the influence of co-workers working from home on individual and team performance. The study uses unique data from a large-scale survey involving nine European countries, 259 establishments, 869 teams and 11,011 employees to show that the impact of working from home by co-workers on performance. While working from home may be useful for some workers, it does bring issues for them as well. The study demonstrated that co-workers working from home negatively impact employee performance.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The notion of remote works or popularly known as work from home is demanding and debateable issue in the present-day scenario. Organisations are seriously considering as remote jobs can lead to significant economic advantages and enable organizations to tap into a global talent pool without geographical limitations. Since remote work is gradually becoming the new normal, the present study was conducted to gain insight about workingwomen's Perspective on work from home and its flexibility.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

- 1.To provide insights into the perception of women regarding remote work
- 2.To find out organisational, societal and personal factors on acceptance and utilisation of remote work.
- 3.To address the potential barriers faced by women while working from home.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, the target population was women employees working in different organisations who have recently started working from home due to pandemic or who were earlier also working from home. Female employees working in education sector, banking and insurance sector, hospitality, manufacturing and other service sectors participated in the survey. Convenience sampling technique was used to select a sample of 260 respondents. Data was collected with the help of a self-developed questionnaire

consisted of 18 statements regarding work interference with family life, family support in managing work ,organisational support, impact of work life harmony on physical and psychological well-being etc. Cronbach's alpha reliability co-efficient was .723 for 18 items in the present study.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The sample comprises of female employees of different demographics.68% of the respondents were in the age category of 30-40. Around 89% of the employees were married and 58.8% of them were from nuclear family background, while 41.2% of the respondents were living in joint families. 15.7% of the respondents working in state owned organisations while 61.4% of the respondents belonged to private sector organisations participated in the survey.22.8% of the female employees were working in semi government institutions.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table 1 Showing Results of KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.882
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1441.5
	Df	153
	Sig.	.000

Source :primary data

Bartlett's test of sphericity was used to explain the hypothesis that the variables are uncorrelated in the population. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was applied to measure sampling adequacy to examine appropriateness for factor analysis. High Value (>.5 to 1.00) indicates that data is fit for exploratory factor analysis. Results entered in Table 1 revealed that KMO measure of the18 items in the scale is (0.882) which is more than 0.5 and Bartlett's sphericity is (0.000). Hence data is appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 2 Showing Total Variance Explained (Principal Component Analysis)

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.474	30.409	30.409	5.474	30.409	30.409	4.231	23.504	23.504
2	1.524	8.467	38.876	1.524	8.467	38.876	2.178	12.100	35.604
3	1.422	7.900	46.777	1.422	7.900	46.777	1.862	10.347	45.951
4	1.109	6.160	52.936	1.109	6.160	52.936	1.178	6.542	52.493
5	1.028	5.709	58.645	1.028	5.709	58.645	1.107	6.152	58.645
6	.960	5.333	63.978						
7	.871	4.837	68.815						
8	.738	4.097	72.912						
9	.710	3.943	76.855						
10	.657	3.649	80.504						
11	.617	3.430	83.934						
12	.582	3.232	87.167						
13	.556	3.088	90.255						
14	.431	2.395	92.650						
15	.404	2.243	94.893						
16	.372	2.066	96.958						
17	.281	1.560	98.518						
18	.267	1.482	100.000						

Table 3 Loading of Scale Items in factors by Principal Rotated Factor Matrix

Remote Job Components	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
FACTOR I :TREPIDATION					
Feel uncertain about your progress in your organisation	.707				
Facing mental stress due to juggling between online meetings and household chores.	.691				
Employer is unreasonably demanding and gives harder task	.674				
Overburdened with household chores and office work, you have stopped taking care of yourself	.630				
less important jobs are assigned to female employees.	.565				
FACTOR II:ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE					
Your organisation expects to be online after working hours		.608			
The sanctity of limited working hours lost when you work from home		.595			
your organisation respects the work timings		.595			
FACTOR III : REMOTE WORK ENVIRONMENT					
How often do you keep to a regular working schedule at home			.677		
Satisfied with work from home arrangements			.675		
Have dedicated workplace at home			.635		

FACTOR IV: FAMILY SUPPORT					
Emotional support from partner/family when overloaded with work				.850	
Indian family system is ready to embrace and respect women doing remote work				.630	
FACTOR V :EMOTIONAL PRESSURE					
Mental and physical stress is taking a toll on personal relationship				.765	
Miss the precious time with family due to work from home.				.675	
Responsibilities at home adversely affect job performance				.657	
Unable to take care of children due to work pressure				.602	

Source: Primary data

Table2 shows principal component analysis which is used to determine the minimum number of factors that will count for maximum variance in the data. The table 1 showing initial eigen values for the factors are as expected in decreasing order of magnitude as we go from component 1 to component 18. Each component has a quality score called as eigenvalues. Components having high eigenvalues (at least 1 and above) represents our real underlying factors. Similarly, the total variance accounted for by all components is 18 which is equal to the number of variables .Factor 1 (Trepidation) accounts for the variance of value 5.474/18 .Similarly factor II (Organisational Perspective) accounts for 1.524/18, Factor III (Remote Work) has a value of 1.422/18, factor IV (Family Support) has 1.12/11 whereas factor V (Emotional Pressure) has 1.028/18 of the variance. So, the present study has total 5 factors explaining 58.645% of the cumulative variance. Table 3 shows loading of scale items in factors by using Varimax principal rotated factor. Hence, there are 5 factors related to perception of female employees with regard to working from home.

DISCUSSION

The landscape of work has undergone a remarkable transformation, with remote jobs emerging as the new normal. This shift has brought about a paradigm change in the traditional office-based work model. By eliminating the constraints of physical office spaces, women now have the freedom to work from any location, balancing their personal and professional commitments more effectively. By considering this background, the present study was conducted on 260 working women doing remote jobs to have an insight regarding telecommuting with respect to family support, impact of remote jobs on their career advancements, work life balance emotional support and pressure. Principal component factor analysis indicated respondents' perception on five factors i.e. trepidation, organisational outlook, remote work environment, family support and emotional pressure.

Flexibility offered by remote work to women employees enables them to achieve a better work-life balance. By eliminating the need for commuting and providing more flexible schedules, women can better manage their personal responsibilities, such as childcare, eldercare, or other family commitments. This flexibility contributes to their overall well-being and satisfaction. On the flip side, Remote work can blur the boundaries between work and personal life, making it challenging for women to separate their professional and personal responsibilities. This may also create obstacles for career progression, and advancements as women may be overlooked for promotions or leadership opportunities due to a perceived lack of visibility or limited access to influential networks. It is important for organizations to address these disadvantages and create an inclusive and supportive remote work environment.

Supportive family dynamics have a significant impact on women's remote job satisfaction. When families provide understanding, encouragement, and assistance, women experience enhanced work-life balance, reduced stress, increased motivation, and emotional well-being. This supportive environment creates a positive foundation for women to excel in their remote jobs, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and overall fulfilment.

Remote jobs can sometimes lead to increased emotional pressure and stress for women. The lack of separation between work and personal life, combined with the demands of

remote work, can create feelings of overwhelm and burnout. The pressure to constantly be available and productive can take a toll on women's mental and emotional well-being. On the positive side, this can also create emotional pressure that drives self-motivation and accountability. Women may feel the need to prove themselves, meet deadlines, and perform at a high level without the presence of direct supervision. This self-imposed pressure can be a catalyst for productivity and job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Remote jobs have brought about significant changes and opportunities for women employees. While there are challenges and considerations to navigate, the overall impact of remote work on women has been empowering and transformative. Remote jobs have provided women with increased flexibility, work-life balance, and the ability to overcome geographic limitations. They have also enabled women to break free from traditional workplace constraints, challenge gender biases, and pursue entrepreneurial endeavours. However, it is essential to acknowledge and address the potential disadvantages that women may face in remote jobs, such as isolation, limited visibility, and the impact on career progression. Organizations must strive to create inclusive remote work environments, offer support systems, and provide equal opportunities for growth and advancement.

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