

WORK FROM HOME DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The year 2020 has been an extraordinary year as it has taught us how adaptation is the only way to survive against all odds. Humans unlearned many things and created many new-normal in both social and economic lives. Work from home (WFM), which was earlier a choice of few, became a compulsion world over (except for few countries). The present paper attempts to look into the impact of work from home across the globe. The paper is based on empirical data collected from 310 respondents across 54 nations. Factors studied include time, comfort, gadgets used, and positive aspects of WFH. The paper also gives insight into personal, financial, technical, and work-related challenges faced while working from home during Covid-19 lockdown. An attempt has also been made to explore the coping strategies adopted by the respondents. Gender-wise analysis has been done to bring out gender differences, if any, on the aspects covered in the study.

Key Words: *Challenges, Coping strategies, Covid-19, Gender, Work from home*

1. Introduction

Novel corona virus or Covid-19 has had an unprecedented impact on human life across the globe. To prevent the spread of the virus, the key public health response by majority of country governments was to maintain social distancing. And, to encourage the practice of social distancing full or partial restrictions were imposed on internal and international movements, public gatherings,

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public events, schools and other academic institutions, offices and businesses thereby confining people to their homes. These lockdowns resulted in closing of all outside activities except the essential services.

A major approach for maintaining social distancing adopted by many governments, whether in lockdown or not, has been to encourage employers to allow their employees to work from home. As a result, by mid-April 2020, 59 countries had implemented telework for non-essential publicly employed staff (ILO Policy Brief, 2020). According to Yeung (2020), the world's biggest work-from-home experiment has been triggered by coronavirus.

Although the concept of work from home, remote work, and telecommuting has been a hot topic of debate for several decades as a measure to bring about work-life balance and improve the quality of life, yet, policies regulating WFH are still not in place in many countries/organizations.

Combining work and living space is not a new phenomenon and has existed since hunting-gathering stage of human civilization. This trend continued during the medieval times when “Domesticity was a focal point of early work-from-home activities. Managing the home meant multitasking and managing resources, finances, and the division of labour. Boundaries between home and work-life, if they existed at all, were blurred at best” (Reynolds and Bibby, 2017).

Dishman also argues that remote work is not a “new” perk and has been around for about 1.4 million years (Dishman, 2019). Industrial revolution marked the real beginning of working-outside home model. Factories required people to leave their homes to come and work on a machine, thus giving rise to the need of separate working and living places. With industrial revolution other sectors also developed such as banking, retail etc., creating office workspaces where individuals worked together in coordination to achieve organizational goals. Development of transport system made commuting to work easier and working outside home became an accepted phenomenon. The working style of offices underwent major changes with invention of communication tools like telephone, telegraph, electricity and typewriter, which made offices more transformative.

By 1980s many companies had adopted the concept of Flexi-work. IBM pioneered the concept by installing “remote terminals” in several employees’ homes during that time, and the programme flourished to such a point that by 2009, 40percent of IBM’s 386,000 global employees were already working at home (the company noted that as a result it had reduced its office space by 78 million square feet and saved about \$100 million in the US annually) (Kessler, 2017). Today, telecommunications and information storage systems have developed to a point where information transfer among remote workers occurs “as effectively” as between collocated workers.

2. Work from home prior to Covid-19

Based on data from 118 countries representing 86 percent of global employment, the ILO estimates that 7.9 percent (approximately 260 million workers) of the world's workforce worked from home on a permanent basis prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Employed workers accounted for 18.8 percent of the total number of home-based workers worldwide, with wide variation between high- and low-income countries. Globally 2.9 percent employees were working exclusively or mainly from their home before the pandemic (ILO Policy Brief, April 2020).

International Workplace Group (IWG) conducted a study among 18,000 professionals working in a variety of sectors from over 96 countries and revealed that two-thirds of the global employees work from home every week. The study also found that over half the employees (53 percent) in India work remotely for at least half a week or more. One of 10 employees work away from the main location of their office, five times every week (Remoters, 2020).

The number of people telecommuting in the US increased 159 percent between 2005 and 2017 (Hering, February 2020). Vilhelmson and Thulin (2016) found that "telework has become a routine for over 20 percent of all gainfully employed" in Sweden. According to the Office for National Statistics, only 5 percent of the UK labour force worked mainly from home in 2019, but over a quarter had some experience of home working (McCarthy, April 2020).

3. Work from home during Covid-19

Based on a survey of a small sample, a rough estimate is that 35 percent of workers are working from home in Brazil (XP investments). Another such survey (Sapiens) found that 22 percent of Ukrainians are either teleworking or tele-studying from home (ILO Policy brief, 2020).

A survey of 250 large firms in Argentina conducted on March 23, 2020 found that 93 percent of the firms had adopted teleworking as a policy in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Berg et al., 2020). In Britain half of all employers said that by late-April, 2020 the bulk of their staff was working from home (Sharma, 2020). Another research found that 60 percent of the UK's adult population was working from home during the Coronavirus lockdown (Lilly, 2020). Nearly five million Canadians started working from home in response to measures for preventing the spread of Covid-19 (Jen, 2020).

A large volume of research has been carried out on the potential of home-based work during the Covid-19 crises. According to Dingel and Neiman (2020), 34 percent of American jobs "can plausibly be performed from home". According to Albrieu, Foschiatti, Gasparini and Guntin, 26 percent to 29 percent of Argentinian, and between 20 percent and 34 percent of Uruguayan workers

are in occupations that can be done remotely; while Boeri et al. (2020) estimates the home-based work potential as 24 percent for Italy, 28 percent for France, 29 percent for Germany, 25 percent for Spain, and 31 percent for Sweden and the UK (Berg et al., 2020).

However, research on work from home, remote work, telework points towards the fact that work from home is restricted to knowledge workers and people who do most of their work on computer (Ojala and Pyöriä, 2017). According to Desilver (2020), telework is more common among the affluent people from private sector rather than state or local governments. Some jobs by their very nature cannot be performed away from worksite.

The potential of working from home varies across occupations and physical and information technology infrastructure (which supports remote working) across the world. People in developed countries are more capable of working from home than in developing countries. Differences in occupational structure alone account for a difference of ten percentage points between the workers in advanced economies and developing ones (13 percent for developing economies against 23 percent for developed ones) (Berg et al., 2020).

Mani and Tomar (2020) measured the suitability of diverse occupations to work from home in India. They found that occupations requiring higher human proximity had lower suitability to work from home. However, certain occupations requiring high human proximity may, with the use of technological innovations, be done from home; for example, teaching.

The present study is based on the premise that, the research regarding suitability of occupations to work from home, technological support required, and income and educational background of employees cannot be extended to the present context as employees during Covid-19 lockdown were not working from home as a choice but as a compulsion. Working from home during lockdown (WFHDL) is not same as working from home (WFH) in normal times, because WFH entails that it is a personal choice that employees are making, while WFHDL is a compulsion. For WFH an employee makes required arrangements for working comfortably, but during lockdown one had to adjust with the available infrastructure and resources. When an employee works from home as a choice, the other members of the family might/might not be at home, children may go to school, spouse/other family members may go to work; but during lockdown everyone was forced to stay at home. A home is not equipped for official work and therefore people are more likely to face problems and challenges while carrying out official work at home.

The main objective of the study is to explore if there are differences in personal, financial, psychological, and familial issues and challenges faced by female and male employees while working from home during Covid-19. The study also examines how the nature of the jobs affected their work experiences and what coping strategies were adopted by the respondents.

The study is based on primary survey for which data were collected from the working population of different countries (during the period May-August, 2020) using convenience sampling. A questionnaire was designed using Google Form and the link was shared with working population across different countries.

Responses were received from 310 people from 54 countries. There were 167 (52.28 percent) females and 147 (47.57 percent) males among the respondents. The respondents were divided into four age groups 20-30 years (15.21percent), 31-40 years (41.10 percent), 41-50 years (29.13 percent) and 51-60 years (14.89 percent).

Majority of the respondents (21.61 percent) were working with public sector, followed by central government (20.97 percent), 19.68 percent were from private sector, and 19.03 percent were from state government. The percentage of self-employed respondents was 8.39 percent. Remaining respondents were from MNCs, NGOs, international organizations, and others. Maximum respondents (both female and male) were from middle management, followed by senior management. More than 50 percent of respondents had worked for about 10 years. More males than females had worked for 10-20 years, while the opposite was seen for more than 20 years of service.

Around 88 percent of the respondents reported working from home during Covid-19 lockdown. More males (89.12 percent) than females (86.50 percent) were working from home during lockdown. Among males, majority of those who did not work from home were from junior management level; among females, they were from middle management level.

4. Findings of the Survey

The findings are presented under three sections: (a) factors like time spent on official work during a day, gadgets used to work from home, comfort in working from home, positive aspects of working from home; (b) The survey covered personal, technical, psychological, financial, and work-related challenges faced while working from home during Covid-19 lockdown; (c) Coping strategies adopted by the respondents.

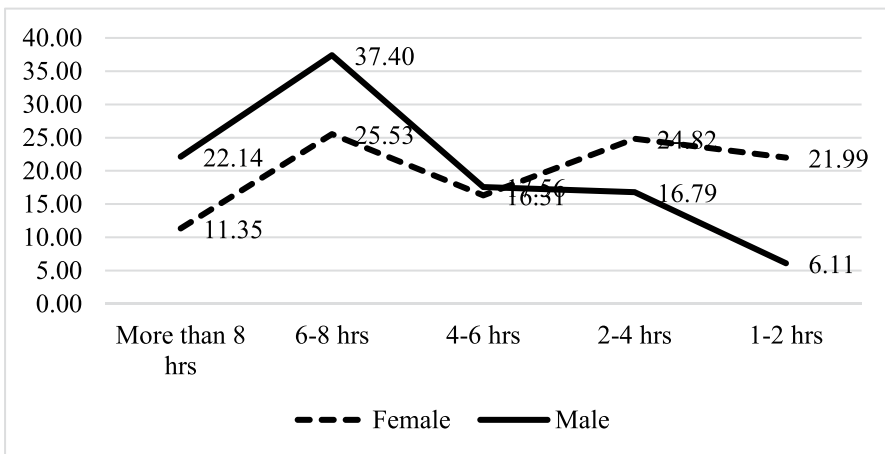
4.1 Factors related to work from home during lockdown

(i) Time spent on official work during a day

An inquiry into the time spent on official work during a day revealed that majority of the respondents (31.25 percent) had spent 6-8 hours in a day doing official work, followed by 20.96 percent who worked for 2-4 hours. Percentage of respondents who spent 4-6 hours and more than 8 hours on official work is 16.91 percent and 16.54 percent respectively. Only 14.34 percent of respondents spent time between 1-2 hours on official work.

Gender-wise analysis (Figure 1) shows that percentage of males who spent more than 8 hours on official work is almost double than that for females. In a similar trend higher percentage of males has reported working for 6-8 hours doing official work. There is not much difference among females and males who have reported to work for 4-6 hours in a day from home. A reverse trend can be seen where the number of women who have reported to work for 2-4 hours is more than that of male respondents. Women reporting to work for 1-2 hours daily on official work are around 3.5 times that of males. Thus, it can be said that females have reported working fewer hours per day on official work than males. This can be best understood in terms of accepted gender roles whereby women have to devote more time in domestic activities, which might be the reason for less time spent on official work as they had to carry out dual responsibility of household work as well as official work.

Figure 1: Gender-wise comparison of time spent on official work during a day (percent)



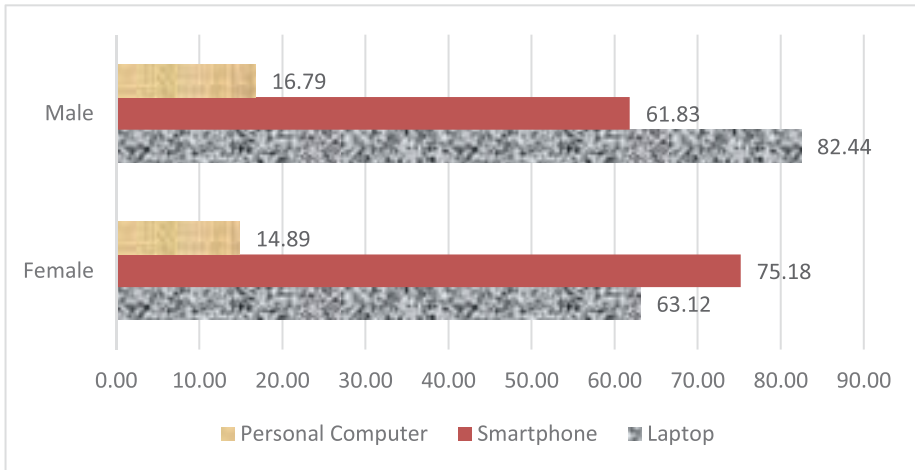
Source: Study Survey

(ii) Gadgets used to work from home

As lockdown due to Covid-19 was one of the main reasons that people were working from home, it can be presumed that people did not have access to facilities and infrastructure that were available at their offices. From among the respondents, 72.43 percent used laptops, 68.75 percent used smartphones and only 15.81 percent used personal computers while working from home. Most of the respondents reported using more than one device to do their work, depending on the requirement of other family members.

A gender-wise comparison shows that majority of males (82.44 percent) used laptops while majority of females (75.18 percent) used smart phones to work from home (Figure 2). In the case of personal computers also the usage by males is more than that of females.

Figure 2: Gender-wise comparison of gadgets used while WFHDL (percent)



Source: Study Survey

These results are in line with several studies that have documented that one of the most enduring technological inequalities is the gender divide whereby women lag in ownership of technology and development of technological skills.

Men own and use computers and internet more than women, spend more time online, take more technology classes, and show more motivation to learn digital skills (Cooper, 2006; Correa, 2010). There are cultural and psychological factors also that may constrain certain people, such as women, from using technologies even when they have access (Terry & Gomez, 2010).

According to Haan (2004) and Van Dijk (2006), a digital divide has emerged along the lines of previously existing social divides. New technologies have benefitted those who already had access to other resources at greater rate than people who had fewer resources (Dixon et al., 2014). The findings of the present survey seem to be in line with these studies.

(iii) Comfort in working from home during lockdown

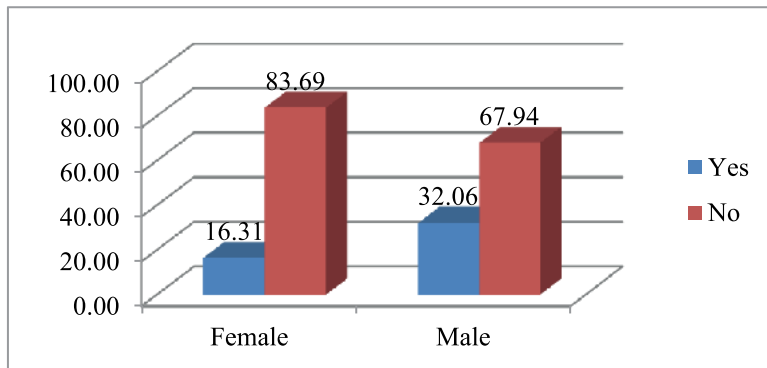
In response to the query “Are you comfortable working from home?”, 72.39 percent of females were comfortable working from home as compared to 63.27 percent of males. Overall, 68.06 respondents were comfortable working from home, while 32.9 percent were not comfortable working from home.

Table1: Response to “are you comfortable working from home”? (percent)

Response	Female	Male	Total
Yes	72.39	63.27	68.06
No	27.61	36.73	32.9

Source: Study Survey

In addition to this, respondents were also asked if they had designated room for themselves to attend to their official work? Figure 3 reflects that 83.69 percent females had no designated room to attend to official work while working from home as compared to 67.94 percent males. During lockdown all members were forced to stay indoors and perform their activities from home; therefore, it might not have been possible to have a space/room totally devoted to one person. These findings may be indicative of social status and gender divide in a family where men’s work is still considered important than that of a women and women have to take care of children and perform other household duties also.

Figure 3: Response to “did you have a designated room to yourself while WFHDL?” (percent)

Source: Study Survey

(iv) Positive aspects of working from home during lockdown

The respondents found ‘saving travelling time’ as the most positive aspect of working from home (69.85 percent), followed by ‘can manage both household and official work’ which was reported by 67.65 percent respondents. ‘can look after family members’ was reported by 54.41 percent respondents, ‘can work as and when required’ by 52.94 percent, ‘higher productivity’ by 30.15 percent, ‘saved from workplace politics and gossip’ by 29.41 percent and ‘more informal environment’ by 24.63 percent respondents. Around 9.19 percent respondents reported reasons like safety during Covid-19, saving money on travel, less distractions, time to do other things as some other positive aspects of work from home.

Gender-wise responses given in Table 2 show that more females have reported ‘can manage both household and official work, can look after family members, can work as and when required and are saved from workplace politics and gossip’ as the positive aspects of lockdown, while more males have reported ‘save travelling time, higher productivity, and more informal environment’ as positive aspects.

Table 2: Gender-wise responses regarding positive aspects of WFHDL (percent)

Reasons	Female	Male
Save travelling time	65.25	74.81
Can manage both household and official work	75.18	59.54
Can look after family members	65.96	41.98
Higher productivity	21.99	38.93
Can work as and when required	58.16	47.33
Saved from workplace politics and gossip	31.21	27.48
More informal environment	17.73	32.06
Others	10.64	7.63

Source: Primary Survey

These findings are in line with the advantages of work from home cited by other researchers. Work-life balance (76 percent), family (44 percent), time savings (42 percent), and commute stress (42 percent) have been the top four reported reasons why people seek flexible work (Reynolds, 2018). Kiss (2020) considers flexible working hours, no office distractions, and more time with family as the positives of working from home.

A survey conducted by YouGov in partnership with USA TODAY and LinkedIn found that 54 percent of professionals aged 18-74 years reported that working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic has had a positive effect on their productivity, mainly due to saved time in commuting, fewer distractions from co-workers and fewer meetings (Smith, 2020).

Bloom et al. (2015) in a WFH experiment at Ctrip, a 16000-employee Chinese travel agency, found that Chinese call-center employees who worked from home were 13 percent more productive than employees in a control group, because they took fewer breaks and made more calls per minute. They were also happier and were less likely to quit their job.

These findings are corroborated by the findings of this study whereby more than 65 percent of respondents have cited ‘managing both household and official work’ and ‘saving travelling time’ as the positive aspects of working from home during the pandemic.

4.2 Challenges faced while working from home during lockdown

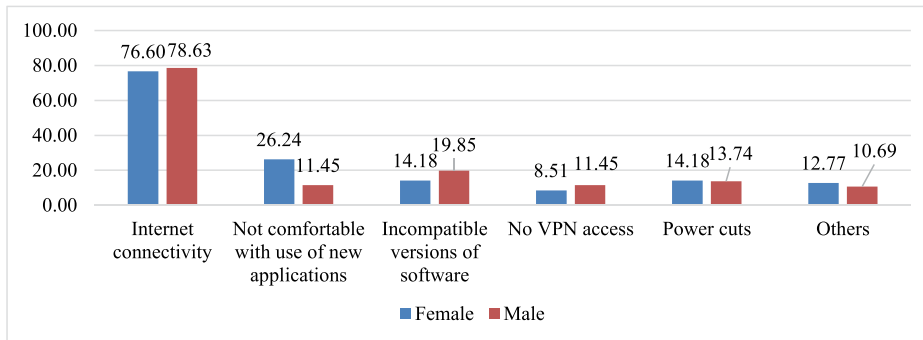
(i) Technical challenges faced during WFHDL

The respondents were asked about the technical challenges faced by them while working from home during lockdown. Their responses reveal that internet connectivity was a major challenge faced by most (77.57 percent) of the respondents.

Other technical challenge faced was the use of new applications. 19.12 percent respondents were not comfortable using new software/applications. Around 17 percent respondents faced issues due to incompatible versions of software; power cuts were reported by 10.29 percent of respondents; 9.93 percent respondents faced difficulty due to lack of VPN access to their official server/computer. 11.76 percent respondents have cited overheating of mobile battery due to overuse, non-availability of mobile/laptop, server issues, non-accessibility of colleagues as some other technical issues faced by them.

A gender-wise analysis shows that more females are not comfortable with use of new applications as compared to males, while more males have reported incompatible version of software as compared to females (Figure 4). For other issues, there is no remarkable difference between the responses of male and female respondents.

Figure 4: Gender-wise responses on facing technical challenges (percent)



Source: Primary Survey

Internet issues have also been reported by others as a major technological challenge (Gaskell, 2020).

(ii) Personal challenges faced while WFHDL

Majority of respondents (61.40 percent) found balancing household work and official work as the biggest personal challenge, followed by managing time (44.12 percent), increased workload (40.81 percent), lack of fixed routine (38.97 percent), disturbance to family (37.13 percent), demands of family (29.78 percent), sharing of gadgets with other family members (25 percent), and health problems (22.06 percent).

A gender analysis of responses (Table 3) presents an interesting picture. One finds that majority of female (71.63 percent) and male (50.38 percent) respondents consider balancing household work and official work as the major personal challenge while WFHDL; however, there is a difference of around 21 percent in their responses. More (55.32 percent) females consider increased workload as the second major challenge faced by them on personal front as compared to only 25.19 percent of males who feel the same. From data analysis one finds that around 40 percent and 25 percent of female respondents had family members below 10 years and above 60 years of age respectively as compared to around 31 percent and 18 percent of male respondents. This may be a reason for increased workload and struggle to maintain work-life balance among females.

Table 3: Gender analysis of personal challenges faced while WFHDL (percent)

Responses	Female	Male
Balancing household work and official work	71.63	50.38
Time Management	46.10	41.98
Sharing of gadgets with other family members	31.91	17.56
Increased workload	55.32	25.19
Lack of fixed routine	33.33	45.04
Health problems	28.37	15.27
Demands of family	39.01	19.85
Disturbance to family	36.88	37.40

Source: Study Survey

Another factor where there is a glaring gender difference in responses are demands of family, which has been reported by 19.16 percent more females as compared to males, sharing of gadgets with family members has been reported by 14.35 percent more females than males. 13.1 percent more females have reported health problems as compared to male respondents and 4.12 percent more females consider managing time as a major challenge.

On the other hand, 11.71 percent more males have reported lack of fixed routine as a challenge compared to females. Disturbance to family as a challenge does not have significant difference among females and males, however, about 37 percent of the respondents found it disturbing to the family.

Findings of the present study reflect prevalence of socially assigned gender-specific domestic roles, whereby women are responsible for household chores and care of family members. Several other studies carried out during lockdown present a similar picture. A 2020 study by the Ministry for Women, New Zealand points out that women are more likely to have additional financial and caring responsibilities for extended family members during Covid-19. Research by

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scientists from the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Zurich during March and April, 2020 showed that working women in the UK, Germany and the US did more childcare and home-schooling across all wage brackets, compared to men with similar earnings. Amongst the population working from home, women spend significantly more time homeschooling and caring for children (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). A survey carried out in the US, UK, France, Germany and Italy, found that working women during Covid-19 spent an average of 15 hours a week more on unpaid domestic labour than men (Krentz et al., 2020). According to Hutt (2020), women would be expected to work longer hours while juggling domestic responsibilities of childcare and care of other family members during Covid-19. Brennan (2020) found that married or partnered heterosexual couples in the U.S. continue to divide household chores largely along the traditional lines.

A University of Melbourne survey suggests that in households with children, parents are putting in an extra six hours a day of care and supervision, with women taking more than two-thirds of the extra time (Savage, 2020).

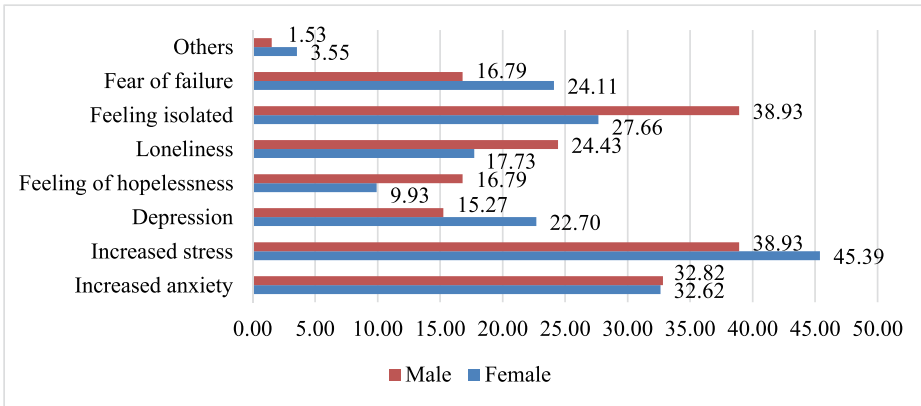
Research carried out prior to Covid-19 also reiterates that women spend more time doing household chores as compared to men. On an average day, 83 percent of women and only 65 percent of men spent some time doing household activities (Blanco, 2016). A UK study found that women spend approximately 16 hours on household chores as compared to around 6 hours spent by men (McMunn et al., 2019). Beaugregard et al. (2019) have pointed out that for families that had limited space and resources, it meant vying for space and equipment with other family members.

(iii) Psychological challenges faced while working from home during lockdown

Increased stress has been the most significant psychological challenge according to majority of respondents (42.28 percent), followed by feeling isolated (33.09 percent), increased anxiety (32.72 percent), loneliness (20.96 percent), fear of failure (20.59 percent), depression (19.12 percent), and feeling of hopelessness (13.24 percent). 2.57 percent respondents viewed lack of concentration, fatigue, boredom as other psychological challenges faced by them.

A gender-wise analysis shows (Figure 5) that more females have reported increased stress, fear of failure and depression as major psychological challenges faced by them, while more males considered feeling isolated, feeling of hopelessness, loneliness as major challenges. Increased anxiety was reported almost equally by both genders.

Figure 5: Gender-wise responses regarding psychological challenges faced during WFHDL (percent)



Source: Primary Survey

Increased stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness as reported by the respondents of this study are in line with the findings of other researchers. According to Robello (2020), working from home can cause feeling of isolation and disconnection among some people as they miss opportunities of regular social interaction and connection with co-workers. A survey by US-based anonymous professional network Blind also reveals that 56.4 percent of employees, across biggies like Facebook, Google, and Apple, are facing anxiety and loneliness (Kashyaap, 2020). According to Nicolas Bloom of Stanford Institute of Economic Policy Research, working from home during coronavirus lockdown has been affected by four factors: children, space, privacy and choice. He feels “extended periods of working from home will not only kill office productivity but is building a mental health crisis as people will feel isolated, lonely and depressed at home. According to Bloom, face-to-face meetings are essential for developing new ideas and keeping staff motivated and focused (Gorlick, 2020).

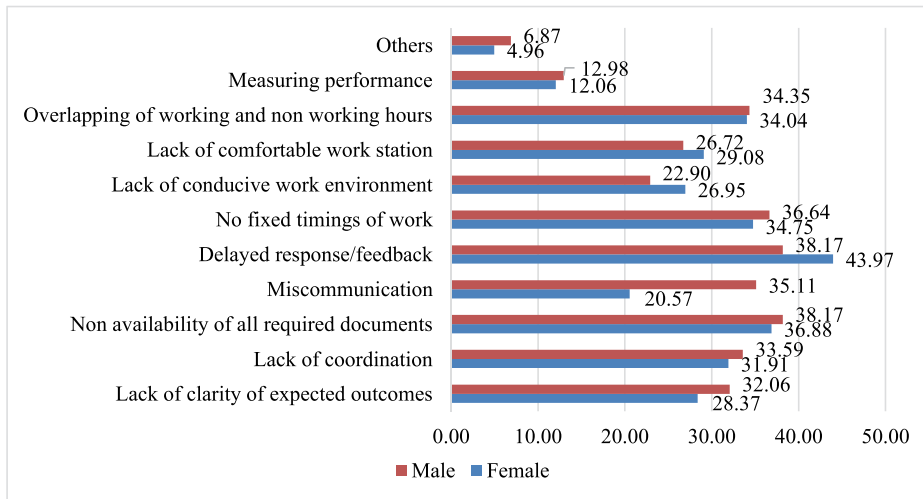
The findings of the study are also supported by Indian Psychiatry Society highlighting an increase in reported cases of mental illness by 20 percent due to uncertainties related to work, finances, health and increasing stress in relationships within a week of the start of the nationwide lockdown (Singh, 2020).

A survey by Mavericks India found that covid crises have impacted the mental health of 27 percent of Gen-Z and 19 percent of millennials. The survey also found that men have experienced greater social disconnect as compared to women owing to forced confinement during the lockdown. On the other hand, women have been found to have negative impact on their mental health due to additional workload at home (Mavericks India, 2020).

(iv) Challenges related to work itself

Delayed response/feedback was considered as a major work-related challenge by 41.18 percent respondents, followed by non-availability of required documents/information (37.50 percent), no fixed timing of work (35.66 percent), overlapping of working and non-working hours (34.19 percent), lack of coordination (32.72 percent), lack of clarity of expected outcomes (30.15 percent), lack of comfortable work station (27.94 percent), Miscommunication (27.57 percent), lack of conducive work environment (25 percent), measuring performance (12.50 percent). Around 6 percent of respondents have reported duplication of work as a challenge.

Figure 6: Gender-wise responses to challenges related to work itself (percent)



Source: Primary Survey

Looking at gender-wise responses, one finds no substantial difference (less than 4 percentage points) in the responses of males and females to work related factors except for miscommunication, which has been reported by 35.11 percent of males as compared to 20.57 percent of females; and delayed response, which has been reported by 43.97 percent of females as compared to 38.17 percent of males.

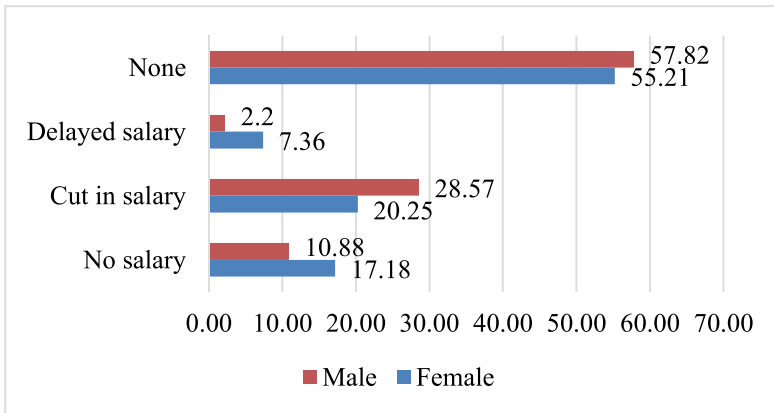
Research shows that being “always on” and accessible by technology while working remotely leads to the blurring of work and non-work boundaries, particularly if you work from home (Russell, 2019). Greer et al. (2014) reported “lack of adequate work-related resources including technological equipment and files stored at the main worksite that are required to perform work-related tasks while teleworking”, and “managing and monitoring teleworker performance”. Efficient communication is especially important for working

from home practices as the team members are dependent on each other and it is a challenge for the supervisors to coordinate, as each of them are physically in different places (Geer et al., 2014). According to a report (Buffer, 2020), lack of communication and collaboration, and loneliness continue to be top challenges for remote workers and remote organizations.

(v) Financial Challenges during work from home due to Covid-19

Majority of respondents (56.45 percent) did not face any financial challenge as there was no cut in their salary. However, cut in salary was reported by 24.19 percent respondents, 14.19 percent faced delay in receiving salary and around 5.16 percent did not receive salary because of Covid-19 lockdown.

Figure 7: Gender-wise responses to financial challenges (percent)



Source: Study Survey

Gender-wise responses (Figure 7) show that 17.18 percent females did not receive any salary as compared to 10.88 percent males; cut in salary was reported by 28.57 percent males and 20.25 percent females. 5.16 percent more females reported delay in salary than males.

Evidence suggests that women are at risk of suffering more than men economically due to impact of Covid -19 (WTO, August 3, 2020; ILO). However, a more detailed study on economic aspects is required to draw such conclusions from the present study.

5. Coping strategies adopted while WFHDL

5.1 Coping with working from home during the lockdown

Nearly 50 percent of respondents connected with friends and family through various apps, followed by entertaining themselves through watching entertainment sites/channels (48.9 percent), exercise (47.79 percent), learning/doing new things (34.56 percent), reading/writing (30.51 percent), meditation

(28.31 percent). Pursuing hobbies was adopted by 23.16 percent to cope with lockdown and 19.85 percent took out “me” time to cope.

Looking at responses by males and females, one finds that there is not much difference in the responses for all categories except for pursuing hobbies, which was used by 17.02 percent females as compared to 29.77 percent of males as a coping strategy.

Table 4: Gender-wise responses on coping with work from home during lockdown (percent)

Responses	Female	Male
Taking out “Me” time	21.99	17.56
Hobbies	17.02	29.77
Meditation	28.37	28.24
Reading/writing	29.79	31.3
Learning/Doing new things	32.62	36.64
Exercise	46.81	48.85
Entertainment	47.52	50.38
Connecting with friends and family through Apps	51.06	50.38

Source: Study Survey

As has been discussed earlier, people faced stress and anxiety due to lockdown and social interactions helped them to overcome loneliness and to vent their feelings.

In order to adjust to work from home during Covid-19, psychologists have suggested that one should dress up for the day, create boundaries, follow a routine, arrange online meetings, exercise, learn something new and be in touch with friends/colleagues (Cole 2020; Thomas, 2020).

Statistics show that men are more likely to participate in sports, exercise, or recreation on any given day (21 percent) percent as compared to 16 percent of women (Blanco, 2016).

5.2 Attitude towards Working from home after lifting of lockdown

When asked if they would prefer to work from home after Covid-19 lockdown is lifted, only around 28 percent employees gave affirmative responses in while 38.39 percent did not prefer to work from home and 33.53 percent were not very conclusive about it. Not much difference is seen in preferences of male and female respondents regarding working from home after lockdown is lifted (Table 5).

Table 5: Gender-wise responses regarding work from home after lifting of lockdown

Responses	Female	Male
Yes	26.95	28.57
No	37.13	38.78
May be	33.53	32.65

The findings of the study indicate that majority of the respondents were not very eager or indecisive about work from home after lockdown is lifted. This is in contrast to findings of different scholars. Mehrotra (2020) in a survey conducted with 560 employees of small, medium and large enterprises in Delhi-NCR, Mumbai and Bengaluru found that 93 percent employees were anxious about returning to their offices on fear of their health being compromised. Around 73 percent expected employers to enforce work from home as an ongoing process, while 81 percent said that they would resume going to office only in batches. Another survey found that 72 percent of the Indian employees were apprehensive about safe commute to work and workplace sanitation and cleanliness, while 42 percent considered using shared workspaces as a challenge (HRK News Bureau, 2020).

Studies have found differences in attitude of people of different countries towards returning to work. A study carried out in June 2020, suggests that staff in the US and UK were more negative about returning to their workplace than their counterparts in Germany, France, Italy, Mexico, Singapore and Spain (Financial Times, 2020).

A survey (Maverick, 2020) found that sentiments towards ‘work from home’ differ between generations. The survey also found that most of those living with their families (75 percent) are finding working from home to be challenging than those who are living alone. Only 7 percent of respondents of the present study were living alone while 38percent were living with four or more family members.

6. Conclusion

The study shows that working from home during Covid-19 was different than the usual work from home which was practiced by few tech-workers who could do their jobs outside the office prior to Covid-19 as an option.

The policy measures adopted across the globe to limit the spread of Covid-19 made work from home inevitable. The study which had 310 respondents found that although there were many positive aspects of work from home, it also posed many personal, psychological, technological, and work-related challenges to the workers. Internet connectivity was the major technical challenge, balancing household work and official work emerged as the biggest personal challenge, increased stress as a

psychological challenge, delayed response/feedback was cited by most as a major work-related challenge. Majority of respondents at the time of the study had not faced any major financial challenge. Connecting with friends and family as a coping strategy was reported by majority of respondents.

From gender perspective, the study found that around 60 percent of male respondents spent more than 6 hours per day on official work as compared to 37 percent female respondents. On the other hand, about 67 percent females have reported working less than 4 hours per day on official work as compared to 22 percent males.

With regards to gadgets, around 82 percent males used personal laptops as compared to 63 percent females. The use of smart phones was higher in females (75.18 percent) as compared to males (61.83 percent). Likewise, more males (32.06 percent) had a room for themselves to work from home as compared to (16.31 percent) females. The study also found that more females than males personal challenge of balancing household work and official work (71.63 percent and (50.38 percent respectively), increased workload (55.32 percent and 25.19 percent).

Looking at psychological challenges, it was found that more females than males felt isolated (38.93 percent and 27.66 percent) and lonely (24.43 percent and 17.73 percent respectively). More females have reported no salary and delay in salary than males. Not much difference is seen among female and male respondents (less than 4 percentage points) with respect to work related challenges and coping strategies. Not much gender difference is found in attitude towards work from home after lifting of lockdown. It can be concluded that while some of the factors of working from home during Covid-19 had positive influences on the employees, some other factors had negative influences and there is a need for policies to be formulated keeping this in mind. Significant changes will have to be made in the way work is currently carried out and physical layout of workplaces. Policy makers need to strengthen broadband services and put in place rules and regulations that govern the practice of work from home.

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