

Work from Home & Work for Home: Indian Working Women through the lens of Post Pandemic Period

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly reshaped the work-life balance for Indian working women, blurring the lines between professional and domestic roles. This paper explores the dual burden of "work from home" and "work for home" that women experienced during and after the pandemic, with a focus on the post-pandemic period. The study examines how societal expectations and traditional gender roles intensified domestic responsibilities, while the shift to remote work increased professional workloads. Drawing on a gendered lens, it explores the intersectionality of gender, class, and socio-economic status, highlighting how women from different social strata faced varying challenges. Middle and upper-class women often navigated the pressures of balancing extended work hours with household duties, while lower-income women in informal sectors dealt with job insecurity and lack of resources. The paper also discusses the impact of these pressures on productivity, mental health, and career progression. Finally, it proposes policy recommendations aimed at fostering gender equality, including flexible work policies, accessible childcare, and better mental health support. The research calls for systemic change at both organizational and societal levels to ensure sustainable empowerment for working women in India, especially in a post-pandemic world.

Keywords: *Work from Home, Work for Home, Gender Equality, Indian Working Women, Post-Pandemic, Domestic Responsibilities, Intersectionality.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic or other advancements forced a change in the general work environment from what was usual, which is working from the office environment. Thus, this change was highly challenging for the Indian working women first, because it crossed over with well-established gender norms that surrounded both employment and domesticity. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, employed women in India were pulled double tasks at the workplace and were expected to handle a lot of housework too, now known as the second shift (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Nevertheless, the pandemic has further exposed these issues since women were to work under 'Work for Home' in addition to 'Work from Home' (Ottmann, & Noble, 2021). These dualisms have far reached implications for women's work-life interface, wellbeing, promotional opportunities and representation. This paper proposes to assess Indian working women in this post COVID-19 era and understanding the new wave of blending work and family spheres.

1.2 Research Objectives

The major research objectives of this present study are to analyze how Indian working women perceive their work experience especially during the 'Work from Home' and 'Work for Home'. Specifically, the study aims to see how freelancing has affected women's working experience and advancement over the career level. To analyze how working women are affected by the rise in domestic responsibilities. To examine the power relations between men and women in telecommuting contexts and post COVID-19 expected household chores.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in revealing post-pandemic social challenges that working Indian women have to face, with the focus on 'Work from Home' and 'Work for Home'. This study focuses on how today's society is still expecting women have the sole responsibility to take care of their family and household. This study insights into how gender disparity is still existed within the family and society at large. It is shown that workload and productivity challenges affected working women to grow in their professional field, it even become more harder when office come into home during pandemic. Therefore, it is important to understand these dynamics in order to design policies that aim at enhancing gender parity in both work places as well as in the domestic chores. (Lekha & Kumar, 2024).

1.4 Methodology

This research work adopts qualitative method to assess the double-bubble burden of Indian working women during the post pandemic period and working for home and working from home. Data regarding work-life balance, professional productivity and household responsibilities of employed women from cross-sectional socio-economic background of different cities in urban and semi-urban India were collected through an online open-ended questionnaire, telephonic as well as face to face interview method.

Qualitative data were also collected from 30 participants through semi-structured interviews in order to capture the participants' detailed perception and experience, as well as how they managed the expectations and roles according to gender during the phase of post-pandemic transition. To select participants, purposive sampling was used which guaranteed that candidates were from different professional fields such as information technology, education, health and informal sector and others. The measures taken in the present research respect the ethical guidelines, including informed consent, and voluntary participation, as well as confidentiality of the participants. This work uses qualitative narratives to address the methodological issue, which in turn identifies the two-fold challenge faced by the working women of India in the post Covid-19 paradigm.

2. Conceptual Framework

In the context of the post-pandemic period, '**Work from Home**' refers to the practice of employees performing their professional tasks remotely, typically from their residences, using digital tools and technologies. This shift was particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a large portion of the workforce transitioning to home-based work due to lockdowns and health concerns (Chatterjee, 2021). On the other hand, '**Work for Home**' pertains to the increased domestic labour that individuals, especially women, undertake while managing their professional responsibilities. For many working

women, **'Work for Home'** has always been an essential part of their routine, but the pandemic intensified these duties as the boundary between personal and professional life blurred (Bennett, 2021). Together, **'Work from Home'** and **'Work for Home'** represent the dual roles that women navigated during the pandemic, with implications for their well-being and career advancement.

Before proceeding it's pertinent to define what 'Work from Home' and 'Work for Home' mean. In connection with further development of the post-pandemic world, 'Work from Home' presents the phenomenon identified as the employee's performance of professional duties away from the workplace, often in their homes, with using the information and communication technologies. This change was especially apparent during the COVID-19 crisis when most employees in the formal economy were forced to work from home due to restrictions and safety concerns (Chatterjee, 2021). As the pandemic expanded the boundary between work life and home life got blurred especially for the working women. Combined, 'Work from Home' and 'Work for Home' are the two concepts that referred to the duality of women's position throughout the pandemic, in terms of their health perspective as well as promotion prospects.

3. Impact of the Pandemic on Indian Working Women

The social change that was probably most felt by women in the workspace was transitions from Office to 'Work from Home'. This shift, which has been further shifted by the ongoing pandemic, means that changes occurred on the technology used, communications, and the ability to address the professional work organization and conduct within a home environment. Although some females received this shift positively high job satisfaction, and flexible working schedules (Chatterjee, 2021), most of them challenged the flexibility as blurring the work and home divide. The investigations that were conducted showed that working women especially those from the two income homes had it even harder when it comes to setting up their home office space because of space limitations (Kumar & Mehta, 2021). Flexibility of boundaries created by coronavirus between work and home increased feelings of work exhaustion and burnout. Moreover, social distancing with the colleagues minimized interaction with other employees, which erased networking possibilities and future promotion for many females; this indicates that remote work hinders visibility (Bennett, 2021).

3.1 Psychological and Emotional Effects of Remote Work

Stress, burnout, and the impact of working from home have affected the mental health of many female employees in India, more so in the time of the pandemic. The transition to remote working caused feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and exhaustion. However, some women said that they appreciated the flexibility because they did not enjoy interactions with co-workers (Bennett, 2021). At the same time, others claimed they felt lonely since they did not get to socialize with other people during their work time. Similarly, while balancing both career and home responsibilities increased the level of concern and stress (Kumar & Mehta, 2021). Research indicates that women were more susceptible than men to "burnout" while performing these two tasks because their emotional work was often unseen. The absence of the dichotomy between work and home problems made mental health worse, and people became expected to always be responsive for work and take care of their families (Chatterjee, 2021). These factors rendered overall decrease in women's well-being for many of them.

3.2 Increased Domestic Responsibilities

Post pandemonium effects increased expectation of the Indian working women to perform more domestic tasks primarily due to home office work which erased the distinct line between the working life and home life. When it comes to COVID-19 changes in labour patterns and impact on employees, the studies pointed out that women contributed to domestic work as childcare or eldercare, cooking and cleaning whereas men did not relatively redistribute these tasks within families (Deshpande, 2020).

This incision in domestic work was again, topped by the absence of domestic helps during lock down, thereby adding the productivity pressure and home chores to women professionals. The just mentioned 'double burden' also affected productivity and caused stress, physical and mental illness in addition to affecting working-class women especially in organizations with patriarchal cultures that upheld traditional gender roles of women as subordinates to men and as care givers in families (Hochschild and Machung, 2012).

It also highlighted the necessity of much need gender sensitive policies such as fairness in partitioning housework and other workplace friendly measures which bore the brunt on women causing burnout.

3.3 Workload and Productivity during the Pandemic

The pandemic led to a change in the working profile and efficiency of working women of India since work from home emerged as a new trend. Several women revealed that, the demands at the workplace rose due to hours being extended and expectations for women to always be constantly connected online which eliminates the work-life balance. A study shows that women experienced difficulties in and distractions at workplaces; lack of workspace during a pandemic; and poor support from their organizations (Jasrotia & Meena, 2021). For women in informal sectors, losing structure of work environments also impacted their ability to organize tasks well (Deshpande, 2020). The study stresses the need to have these support mechanisms that include enhance policies on women working and providing care at home during disruptive periods.

4. Work from Home: Opportunities and Challenges for Indian Women

COVID-19 broke the professional dynamics of Indian women workers, augmenting them with twisted workloads and capacities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic more women started working from home and were exposed to long working hours as there were higher expectations of availability online. This problem was made worse by the blurring of lines between the work and home environments since the home became the new workplace (Carreri & Dordoni, 2020).

4.1 Increased Workload

The switch to working from home brought out the growth of career responsibilities. Seemingly indistinct line between organizational and personal work domain resulted in many women working overtime till late into the night. High organizational pressures arising from virtual meetings and work demands along with low work from home configuration including restricted access to technology and spaces, all wetted the stress (Jaisrotia, et al., 2021). Female managers stated that they received an increased load of managerial tasks, as they were supposed to monitor a team's productivity during teleworking and take care of both the emotional and practical well-being of their subordinates.

At the same time, domestic activities ranged spiking during the pandemic moment. Lack of domestic helpers and the closure of schools made it compulsory for women to juggle between domestic and working stuffs. Research reveals that Indian women cog spent 30% more time on house chores than their counterparts pre pandemic which distracted them from work (Deshpande, 2020).

4.2 Productivity Challenges

Negotiating between paid and family/market work meant that femininity's practical enactment was accompanied by efficiency loss. Female participants stated that they are interrupted quite often when working from home, contributing to their children's online classes or homeschooling, cooking, and caring for others. These distractions affected their focusing, timely work completion and overall efficiency as before the pandemic broke out (Chowdhury, 2021). There was also a reduction of structure work stations, for instance, fixed office structures that improve productivity. Because most of the sampled women lived in joint families, they had more tasks to perform in the family than their husbands did; senior family members, particularly grandparents, had to be taken care of. Furthermore, no professional contact with peers hindered cooperation and creativity primarily women in arts or executive positions (Ghosh, 2022).

4.3 Sectoral Variations

The disruptions of workload and productivity due to the pandemic were also dissimilar across sectors. Female IT and service workers reported increased stress as work required them to be present online and adjust to new ways of working. On the other hand, women engaged in the informal economy, own small businesses, or work in low-wage jobs including domestic workers were expelled, experienced job losses, low wages or reduced income, and increased poor care working conditions. These dual pressures ailed to generate priceless worry in form of legitimate strains beside known monetary strain (Jastoria et al., 2021).

4.4 Psychological Impacts

The double shift the working women had to juggle between workplace and home endeared them more stress, anxiety and likely to be burnt out. Not being able to separate home from work due to overlapping boundaries led to burnout, with most women admitting that they cannot adequately juggle between work and motherhood. Studies also show that these psychological effects affected mainly the mothers and women living in patriarchal structures of the family where feminine roles are valued more (Chauhan, 2022). This work has shown that a number of women have gone through depression as their work is not getting any importance by their spouse and family members. They are getting overburdened while juggling with both office work and household chores. Many said that they were on the verge of separation, get demoralized and felt disrespected by their counterparts. Interestingly some said as being an Indian woman, they have an inherent mindset that women will take care of the family and that is the basic idea, on that basis they take most of the responsibility which ended up with utter exhaustion to balance both office and home.

5. Gendered Perspectives in the Post-Pandemic Era

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the expectation and gender stereotype for working women of India that they are solely responsible for the household chores. In patriarchal cultures women obtain full-time employment as well as cook for the family, clean, wash clothes, and complete other household chores. This expectation rose During the pandemic increase in schools and childcare centers' closure and lack of

domestic workers, where women engaged in such kinds of unpaid works (Chauhan, 2022). A preview into these societal expectations shows that it forced women to choose between family and work by making them work with little time or leave the workforce altogether, work with reduced hours or quit (Deshpande, 2020). Further, the culture imposed the women employee's stereotype of women being homemakers and this was often used to challenge the professionalism of women, thus propping up emotion stress and inadequacy. Such patterns or imprints of gender also prevailed on how labor was divided in households across the world. Research shows that men offered negligible effort toward family chores, and the responsibilities continuously remained on women to work and manage their households Ghosh, 2022). These dynamics underscore the importance of developing new cultural paradigms of people's mutual commitments and gender-pleasant behaviors at home and in the workplace.

5.1 Intersectionality of Gender and Class in Indian Context

Firstly, the gendered and classed experiences of working women in India is a central argument that this paper makes while exploring the impact of the post Covid-19 on women. Socio-economic differences and gendered scripts gave women enhanced, complicated effects of their experiences in their distinct social classes. Some of the positive impacts of pandemic on women were that women from middle and upper classes, despite having greater load of household work, got the boon of remote work and digital accessibility. But, their twofold role as employees and managing households resulted in work and family conflict and burnout (Ghosh, 2022). In contrast, women from the low-income bracket/Informal employment/non-employed women experience a different sort of violations. Women were most impacted on issues of layoffs, wage cuts, and employment insecurity. Due to lack of or severely restricted access to technology for working remotely, many women in this category had to turn to informal forms of earning a living, including home-based employment or unpaid caregiving (Chauhan, 2022).

Moreover, traditional male-female role expectations acted to heighten the challenges of women of all classes. Lower-class women had no opportunity for negotiation on issues to do with family labor as the structures were strictly patriarchal. These intersections increase the overlaps in the policies related to minority sex and income, in order to support all women to empower themselves and recover.

6. Changing Perceptions and Gender Equality Post-Pandemic

During COVID-19 pandemic, gender inequalities were brought to the foreground but at the same time a conversation about equal division of work at home and work outside the home, slowly the process toward egalitarianism has begun. When 'Work from Home' became the new norm, the visible two-shift working scenario in households drew attention to the gender unequal distribution of work. Analyzing empirical work, Chowdhury (2021) pointed out that the families started noticing the gender division of labour where some men started taking up more care work than before, although only to some extent. Even organizations understood the plight of working women during this period of pandemic appropriate measures were initiated. Still, as was seen on the above discussion, parity between men and women for considerable improvement has not been realized. There are social barriers which include embedded rationality and gender prejudices as well as absence of supporting state policies. But the pandemic has stimulated several discussions on gender equality and such discussions served as the precursors for advanced cultural and organizational change. These walks show the need to continue fighting for women's rights and to promote policies that would foster change in a post COVID-19 world Settings:

7. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The post-pandemic period presents an opportunity to address the systemic challenges faced by Indian working women through targeted policy interventions. Recognizing the dual burden of professional work and domestic responsibilities is crucial for fostering gender equity in both workplaces and households.

Policy Implications

The pandemic revealed significant gaps in workplace policies, especially in terms of flexibility and support for women. The lack of adequate childcare facilities, rigid work schedules, and insufficient mental health support hindered women's ability to balance their roles effectively (Deshpande, 2020). Similarly, patriarchal norms and societal expectations exacerbated women's domestic workloads, highlighting the need for cultural shifts alongside policy changes (Chowdhury, 2021).

Recommendations

- a) **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Organizations should implement flexible schedules, remote work options, and hybrid models to accommodate women managing dual responsibilities.
- b) **Childcare Support:** Government and employers should invest in accessible childcare facilities, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, to ease the domestic burden on working women.
- c) **Equitable Division of Labor:** Awareness campaigns should be launched to promote shared domestic responsibilities within households, targeting entrenched gender norms (Ghosh, 2022).
- d) **Skill Development and Digital Inclusion:** Policies should focus on upskilling women, especially those in informal sectors, to enhance employability and access to technology.
- e) **Gender-Sensitive Workplace Policies:** Organizations must adopt diversity and inclusion frameworks, including paid family leave, mental health programs, and support networks for women employees.
- f) **Legislative Reforms:** Strengthening labour laws to protect women's rights in both formal and informal sectors is critical for ensuring job security and fair wages. Addressing these areas through coordinated efforts between policymakers, employers, and civil society can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for Indian working women in the post-pandemic era.

8. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically redefined the professional and personal landscapes for Indian working women, bringing to light the persistent gender inequalities they face. This research highlights how the convergence of 'Work from Home' and 'Work for Home' during the pandemic intensified their dual burden, challenging their mental health, productivity, and overall well-being. Societal expectations and entrenched gender norms continued to place women as primary caregivers, often at the expense of their professional growth.

While the pandemic exposed these inequities, it also catalysed conversations around gender equality. Some positive developments emerged, including greater organizational acknowledgment of women's challenges and the introduction of supportive measures such as flexible work arrangements and mental health initiatives (Bhattacharya & Ghosh, 2021). However, these efforts remain uneven and insufficient without systemic reforms.

The study underscores the importance of addressing the intersectionality of gender and class. Women in lower-income groups faced heightened vulnerabilities due to job insecurity, limited access to technology, and a disproportionate domestic burden, highlighting the need for inclusive policies that account for socio-economic disparities (Chowdhury, 2021).

Looking forward, achieving gender equity requires a multi-faceted approach. Policy recommendations include promoting shared domestic responsibilities, providing affordable childcare, ensuring workplace inclusivity, and offering skill development opportunities. Beyond workplace reforms, societal transformation is critical to challenge patriarchal norms and support women's holistic empowerment.

The post-pandemic recovery offers a chance to build a more equitable society where the contributions of working women are recognized and valued. A collaborative effort involving policymakers, organizations, and families is essential to ensure sustainable progress and equality for Indian working women in both professional and domestic spheres.

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