

Work from Home (WFH), COVID-19, and Its Impact on Women

*Debarun Chakraborty*¹

*Shrirang Altekar*²

Abstract

COVID-19 may have forever transformed the way we work by changing views toward working from home (WFH). Half of the individuals who were employed before the pandemic are now working remotely. A rising number of organizations, including Facebook and Twitter, announced that they would allow people to work remotely permanently as they see for themselves that quality work can be done remotely. Productivity can be increased even in occupations that no one dreamed could be done online. Under these circumstances, women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Women's domestic experiences, health, job, and financial well-being have all been badly impacted. The pandemic has not only hampered women in the present, but it has also harmed their prospects. This commentary discussed the increased implications of work from home connected with COVID-19, and that the impacts on women need to be understood urgently.

Keywords : COVID-19, women, WFH, pandemic

JEL Classification Codes : M10, M14, M19

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Due to the global spread of the Coronavirus and the resulting lockdown, a substantial number of businesses have adopted a work-from-home (WFH) strategy (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Several big companies, including Facebook and Google, have already extended the WFH period to their employees or are considering employing remote workers on full-time payroll since it is proven to be more productive and feasible (Bonacini et al., 2020 ; Chakraborty, 2021). Even though the first COVID-19 case was recorded over a year ago, it is clear that the pandemic's impact on the future of work is here to stay (Couch et al., 2020 ; Chakraborty, 2018). Even though the world is nearly at a stop, women are nonetheless driven to seek many possibilities at once (Chakraborty, 2019a ; Chakraborty, 2019c). In reality, the ability to work from home has provided an additional option for women who had previously left their professions due to domestic duties (Chakraborty, 2020 ; Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the stress associated with isolation, many female entrepreneurs found it easier to maintain a work-life balance (Chakraborty, 2019b ; Uddin, 2021). Simultaneously, many women have wanted to start or resume their jobs in recent years. The WFH option is a godsend for women who have had to abandon their jobs due to prior familial obligations (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012). In the aftermath of the pandemic, remote working has evolved into a work-style revolution

¹ *Deputy Director & Associate Professor*, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Nagpur (Constituent of Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune), Nagpur - 440 008, Maharashtra.

(Email : debarun84@gmail.com) ; ORCID iD : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0754-1120>

² *Director & Professor*, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Nagpur (Constituent of Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune), Nagpur - 440 008, Maharashtra.

(Email : director@sibmnagpur.edu.in) ; ORCID iD : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0762-1681>

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(Koohsari et al., 2021). The pandemic is hastening the workplace's transition to gender fairness and inclusion (Couch et al., 2020). Businesses will be more likely to experiment and learn more about the newly created work culture (Bonacini et al., 2020 ; Chakraborty et al., 2019).

Indeed, the capacity to work remotely and flexibly and a greater understanding of the importance of empathy and inclusive leadership allow for greater diversity in the workforce (Chakraborty, 2019d ; Chakraborty & Biswas, 2020 ; Stacciarini & McDaniel, 2019). Every board meeting now includes employees who bring their professional talents and circumstances to the fore (Hughes & Rog, 2008). It's a window into the homes and personal lives of co-workers. Today, everyone appears to be a gig worker, with work hours no longer limited to 10 am to 6 pm (Felstead et al., 2003). People are less concerned with who is behind the screen doing the work and at what time of the day they are doing it. These features open the door for more women, intercity personnel, and people from various backgrounds (Biswas, & Chakraborty, 2019 ; Kumar et al., 2021). With the shifting dynamics of the globe, now is the ideal time for women to reskill and take advantage of the work-from-home possibility (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). If COVID-19 has thrown your job, company, or career into disarray, being at the cutting edge of knowledge is one of the most acceptable ways to capitalize on the situation — not just in terms of technical abilities but also in terms of soft skills (Chakraborty, 2020 ; Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). In the information age, it's critical to select the correct path that fits your overall career goals and the industry's trajectory. Embrace the situation with confidence, whether it's through distance learning courses, online courses, or certificate courses in a specific skill area.

Work from Home in COVID-19 and Its Impact on Women

The present pandemic has exacerbated inequalities that have impeded women's careers for years, threatening to derail progress toward gender equality in the workplace (Clarkson et al., 2020). The remote working style prompted by the pandemic has allowed for a healthier work-life balance by eliminating commuting times and increasing flexibility and control over working hours (Venter et al., 2021). That isn't the case for everyone after a year of working from home as women shoulder more household and child-care responsibilities than their male partners and remote working has harmed mothers (Reid & LeDrew, 2013). Working from home blurs the line between work and home life, increasing the risk of burnout (Hoffman et al., 2020). Women are frequently subjected to higher performance expectations than men. Women's advancement through the corporate ranks may be slowed due to these disparities in performance standards (Dezsö & Ross, 2012).

Domestic abuse instances spiked after India went into lockdown in March 2020, and it's unclear whether this issue has lost some public attention due to a drop in occurrence or reporting (Ray & Subramanian, 2020). According to data patterns derived from routine surveys, women are more likely than males to have lost their jobs due to the economic impact of the Covid outbreak (Pinchoff et al., 2021). In general, women have lost more income than males, resulting in financial insecurity that can lead to sorrow in a patriarchal society (Kabeer, 1997). Those with jobs have had to work from home under various circumstances (Zentgraf, 2016). Women have always carried a disproportionate share of household responsibilities, and home lock-in conditions have added to the stress. Then there are the additional demands of Covid-care and self-isolation, which are also ascribed by gender (Lewer et al., 2020).

In these unhappy and unfair times, women are dissatisfied with their jobs, which should serve as a wake-up call for employers to implement relief measures. Work-life balance has been thrown out of whack due to heavy workloads at home and office duties. Many people say they've pondered about quitting their jobs as their stress levels have risen (Williams et al., 2015). Most women in India are less optimistic about their jobs than before the pandemic (Ghosh, 2020). Even before the pandemic, women's labor force participation rates in India were decreasing. While supply-side reasons for the fall predominate in the literature, demand-side answers are more persuasive (van Dijk et al., 2008).

The pandemic will exacerbate an already dire situation (Mishra & Rampal, 2020). In India, all frontline health personnel are women (Deshpande, 2020). They are underpaid and have strict labor obligations (Mishra & Rampal, 2020). Aside from the apparent absence of personal protective equipment, there have been allegations of attacks on them while conducting their daily household surveys to assess the disease's spread (Maji et al., 2021). As a result, their employment is exceedingly dangerous, yet they receive no compensation or protection (Deshpande, 2020). Overall, the medium-term picture for women workers appears gloomy, whether they are conventional WFH workers or are now working from home due to the pandemic (Maji et al., 2021). We should take advantage of this problem in the future to reorganize the current system, which both discourages women from entering the labor force and underpays them once they do (Sharma & Vaish, 2020). Hopefully, this will pave the way for a shift toward greater equality in-home gender norms (Cardel et al., 2020). Many firms will continue to allow employees to work from home after COVID-19. Corporate leaders and allies, regardless of gender, should ensure that they are doing everything possible to promote gender parity for women in the virtual and physical workplace (Vohra et al., 2015).

Practical Implications

Our viewpoint draws on a wealth of lived experiences shared by women to address some key takeaways from working through COVID-19 in different industries to influence existing and future WFH policies (Klowden & Lim, 2021). We discovered that WFH regulations have a wide range of effects on women, including the possibility of conflict between our professional, familial, and social lives. Women's WFH experiences are frequently multifaceted. Although WFH arrangements have not been legally legitimized as valued and productive for women in ways that recognize the value of the person and their life experience, not just the component that is paid, for some, WFH is their primary job type (Russell et al., 2009). The pandemic's mass experience poses a significant challenge to prospects based on a collective and quickly applied paradigm, rather than one that caters for gender nuances and gives time for adjustment.

The WFH experience has highlighted some of the structural impediments women face in advancing their careers in highly competitive sectors for which industries have shown scant accountability. While the COVID-19 WFH experiences have been difficult, they also can positively impact employment markets and academic work practices, provided the diversity of experiences and ways of working is recognized, accepted, promoted, and supported (Couch et al., 2020). WFH has a lot of flexibility, which allows for more female participation and diversity in the workforce. People who may struggle to engage in onsite workplace-based 10 am to 6 pm roles can be involved in the workforce with flexible and supportive WFH rules and environments, especially those who experience hurdles to having a separate, accessible space to complete their work. Caregivers, parents, persons with disabilities, and those who are geographically dispersed are all examples of this.

The organizations may accomplish quick expansion and input from a wider spectrum of independent thinkers by fully adopting WFH policies and the dimensions of gender in academic labor, beyond those now privileged to attend and sustain attendance in face-to-face contexts (Dash & Chakraborty, 2021). The sight of domestic and professional worlds merging (through videoconferencing) has the ability to mainstream this reality in a positive and affirming way, legitimizing academics and their contributions to society as individuals who offer value to professional academic environments (Jenkins, & Smith, 2021 ; Singu & Chakraborty, 2021). As the pandemic fades, women must continue to talk about their COVID-19 WFH experiences and advocate for different gender and context-sensitive career possibilities. This can significantly increase female engagement in various industries and societal roles in a productive and long-term manner. This type of intervention will be critical for developing and retaining the next generation of women. It should be a priority now, more than ever, given COVID-19's disproportionate influence on women's career paths, which will be felt for some time.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have wreaked havoc on virtually every aspect of global business and life. These shifts will almost certainly last the life of the pandemic or be employed frequently as countries go through cycles of pandemic spikes, lockdowns, relaxations, and then the next spike, and so on. Many people, both men and women, will lose their jobs if economic activity is halted. When economies fail, many informal occupations are jeopardized, whether directly in the informal sector or indirectly in the formal sector. Recessions have a gendered impact on employment losses, although not always in the same direction. During previous recessions, men lost more jobs than women. However, some say that this time around, women are more likely to face the brunt of job losses due to the nature of enterprises that are facing protracted closure or the prospect of permanent closure. The pandemic has been particularly difficult on women. However, in the future, we have the chance to influence systems and structures to give more benefits and equity for women — and for individuals to help one another in empowering and enabling women to improve their circumstances and create fulfillment.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

We also discuss some of the study's limitations and make some recommendations for further research. The study is entirely based on India, and we have talked about the Indian context. It is quite possible that in other countries' perspectives, the results are different. Furthermore, the study is on the context of WFH, COVID-19, and its impact on women, but the findings might be different if it is a normal situation.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Debarun Chakraborty generated the conceptualization and did the review for the study. Dr. Shrirang Altekar did the revision and writing of the commentary.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this commentary.

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About the Authors

Dr. Debarun Chakraborty is working as a Deputy Director & Associate Professor in Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Nagpur. His areas of interest are consumer behavior, services marketing, rural marketing, and marketing research. He has published six books with different publishing houses in Management and written more than 50 articles in different international journals indexed with WoS (ESCI & SSCI), Scopus, ABDC, & ABS. He is also the editorial board member of different journals under Taylor & Francis, Sage, Wiley, Emerald, and IGI Global.

Prof. (Dr.) Shrirang Altekar is working as a Director & Professor at Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Nagpur. He has extensive knowledge of technical and non-technical areas of business and has been involved in running businesses at the strategic level. He comes with an industry background of 23 years and has academic experience of 15 years as well, with over 10 years of experience as a Director. He has worked in consulting, advisory, and learning and development capacity with several corporates in the FMCG, insurance, manufacturing, chemical, pharmaceutical, and aviation sectors.