

Work-Family-Gender Inequality: Journey Of Women Professionals in Covid19

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Abstract

Covid 19 has disrupted the working life of everyone in a significant manner. This pandemic has spread to almost all countries of the world and because of its contagious nature, maintaining physical distance is a necessity. This has changed the mode of working from attending physical offices to working in the remote set up of one's residential complex. Work from Home has brought about a significant change in the manner of working for all class of employees particularly women. The study is exploratory in nature and analyses the strengths and weaknesses of working from home in the context of female workforce. India has always faced gender disparity in terms of labour force participation, sexual harassment at workplace etc. Work from home, to some extent, addresses these issues and creates a congenial working condition for women provided proper policy guidelines are framed and proper technological support is provided to employees by the organisations. Many companies are already making arrangements to continue with Work from home in hybrid form and it can be comprehensively used as a flexible option in the future.

Keyword: Work from Home, Digital workplace, SWOT analysis, policy framework

Introduction

There has been a paradigm shift in the working pattern of all employees away from their workplace due to the lockdown imposed to combat the deadly corona virus. Work from home has some notable benefits like flexible working hours, diminution of travelling time and it has opened a plethora of opportunities for women specially married women and mothers who can continue to work for their professional growth and also maintaining child care and domestic chores simultaneously. But the challenges are also not limited because of the age old convention that women is primarily responsible for child care and doing household work has also increased mental stresses and prolonged working hours for women. Women are often subjected to more work pressure while staying at home because throughout the day they are expected to strike a perfect balance between domestic chores and office work which is quite challenging at times. As per the latest Mckinsey report it is revealed that the share of women in unpaid- care work has a high negative correlation with female participation rate in the workforce. Women are found to spend an approximate 30% more time on domestic work during Covid19. Due to the lockdown situation while the entire family is at home, women are expected to maintain both professional working life and increased household responsibilities like home schooling, child care, elderly care, domestic chores etc in the same shift. However, with proper understanding of the situation and more transparent policy framework, experts are bullish about the benefits of women working from home in the long run.

SWOT Analysis of Work from Home in the context of women

Comparative effectiveness of working pattern in India for women- SWOT Analysis		
	Work from Office	Work from Home
STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Household chores and office work is not mixed up Proper on the job training to young employees is possible Face to face interaction help in better relation between colleagues and seniors Distraction from child, elderly people at home can be avoided Support from seniors, technical assistance is helpful for smooth operations at office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is easier for married women and elderly people to maintain personal and professional life balance. Diminution of travelling time is helpful for both employer and employee. Maternity leaves, child care leaves, sick leaves can be avoided in some cases Gender disparity and sexual harassment of woman can be mitigated
WEAKNESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is difficult for women to attend office in nuclear families because children and elderly needs to be taken care of. Women tend to take more leaves on account of child health, child schooling etc. Unnecessary office gossips create unhealthy environment in the office. Politics at office, male-female partiality hinders the professional growth of women Sexual harassment, inappropriate treatment with women has been a major reason for low participation rate of women in the workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work life and personal life discipline gets compromised Constant distraction from child and elderly people hinders the concentration at office work. Tiny residential complexes are not congenial for office work. Not suitable for elderly employees to adapt to new technologies (specially in country like India) Unskilled female labourers like house help, child care takers etc become jobless. Absence of defined set of guidelines to monitor the newly adapted work from home and its effectiveness for both employer and employee. Increased work pressure, prolonged working hours affects mental health of women

OPPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young employees get better opportunity to learn from their seniors. • Long term relation with seniors and clients is possible in regular and physical meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married women, new mothers can also work from the convenience of their home. • Leave on account of maternity and others can be reduced • Parents of disabled children can also opt to work and improve their financial condition.
THREATS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Married women and mothers find it difficult to attend office regularly. • Disabled or physically handicapped people cannot attend office regularly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy in data management is a matter of cocern. • Cyber security is an alarming issue

Gender Bias in Covid19:

As per recent survey (*LinkedIn's Opportunity Index, 2021*) it was also concluded that one in five working women in India believe that their firm is displaying gender bias towards its male employees. 85% believed that they are ignored for promotion or job offer. The survey report revealed that even though 66% feel that gender equality has been improved in compare to their parent's age, more than 7 in 10 working women and working mothers feel that managing familial responsibilities often acts as a hindrance in their career development. 63% working women and 69% working mother said they experienced discrimination in work because of familial and household responsibilities. Gender inequality and added domestic responsibilities amid the pandemic have made women's job more vulnerable at this time.

Discussions

Constant rise in Covid19 cases has led Governments across the globe to adopt stringent policies. After declaration of nationwide lockdown on 24th March 2020 by the Government of India, major portion of the population was forced to adapt to the concept of digital workplace in order to curb the spread of the virus. Indian Government has paved the way for smooth functioning of business by introducing accelerated reforms thereby eliminating ambiguity which increased market resilience. Indian IT sector was compelled to eliminate their obsession of employees sign-in and sign-out time and accept the once imaginary concept, WFH. The remote working concept. A is also encouraging a large number of women to join the workforce. A survey conducted by Avtar Group between December 2020 and 2021, revealed that an increasing number of married women applying for jobs during the Covid19 thereby indicating female employees find a better work life integration with WFH. The survey also revealed that 44% of the women job applicants were in the mid-career stage and 20% were married women on career breaks. (*Times of India, 2021*).

TCS, which is one of the largest female employer of the country with over 1,75,000 women has adopted this hybrid working model thereby offering a lot more flexibility to its female employees. From 2016 to 2020, the remote working has increased from 60% to 80%.

Despite the overall favourability seen from Indian women workforce for WFH practices, it is clear that there are glaring issues that needs to be addressed. Besides the usual disadvantages like extended working hours, lack of transparency, coordination troubles, communication problem, mental health issues, sleep deprivation, women workforce is found juggling between home and work, pushing many to even resign from their job. Navigating pressures of family and care giving also develop anxiety and mental health issues among many women. The lack of segregation of professional and personal life is also creating esteem issues among many women. As per a recent survey, 38% of working women said

that they are overburdened with added household work, childcare and eldercare and 43.7% voted for the failure of work life balance (Firstpost, 2021).

WFH in the Covid19 era seems to have many negative consequences on workers life domain nonetheless through the time of pandemic WFH has reshaped the traditional way of working into potential future work.

Conclusion

WFH is inevitable in order to fight this ongoing pandemic but it has not emerged successfully as the only alternative especially in working women. The study aim is to find out the effect of Covid19 and WFH on working women. A careful analysis of the surveys conducted during the pandemic has revealed that the women are juggling between career and personal life thereby resulting in high mental stress and anxiety. With imposition of lockdown and WFH practices, many women are failing to enjoy work life balance in this pandemic which should not have been in the normal scenario. The study revealed positive and negative impacts WFH on working women life balance, it also provides recommendations so that Indian women can work efficiently in the ongoing pandemic.

Recommendations for the corporate houses to ensure healthy working environment for the female employees:

- Corporate houses must not overburden their female employees with extended work and working hours.
- Several recreational activities must be encouraged in between the works.
- Mental health issues of female employees must be addressed. Counselling session must be provided if needed.
- Proper leaves should be given while they are balancing their work and personal life.

Recommendations for Indian Government to ensure healthy working environment for the female employees:

- Introducing a formal set of guidelines for employer and employee.
- To issue set of standards for manufacturing and service sector.
- Encourage healthy employment practices.
- Updating the labour laws under the current situation.
- Technological training and proper infrastructural facilities to promote digital workplace.

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