



HYBRID WORK MODEL AND WORKING MOTHERS

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Abstract

Hybrid working is the buzzword today – but is it really the best solution for working mothers? The hybrid work presents new opportunities for working mothers. The hybrid work model might be a spontaneous after-effect of the pandemic. However, many see this as a favourable situation for women, especially working mothers. The aim to study the effect of hybrid work model on working mothers. The objectives were to study working mother's preference for Hybrid Work Place, to find out working mother's perception of challenges of the hybrid work model, list down the benefits of Hybrid Workplace for Working Mothers and to suggest ways workplaces can modify their policies that can help them retain their talented working mothers. 100 working mothers participated in this study. A self-structured questionnaire was made to collect information related to the effect of hybrid work model on working mothers. Snow ball technique was used to collect data online. Google form was circulated to working mothers to collect data. Percentages were calculated to analyse the data. This paper weighs in on what the future holds for working mothers at the workplace.

Key Words: Hybrid Workplace, Working Mothers

Introduction

Hybrid work is a flexible work model that supports a blend of in-office, remote, and on-the-go workers. It offers employees the autonomy to choose to work wherever and however they are most productive.

The pandemic has been a particular challenge for working mothers. Millions of mothers have chosen to prioritize their children's care during this difficult time, often at the expense of their careers as they've felt forced to leave the workforce. The ones who have remained in the workforce may be suffering from severe burnout and stress (Ely and Padavic, 2020). Many mothers have basically added the equivalent of a part-time job to their already over-packed schedules. And this is just the beginning, as the ones who left the workforce will also earn less when they return.

Yet, if there has been one silver lining for some working parents, it's that employers have learned the benefits of flexibility and supporting a work-life balance through a sort of trial by fire. Companies can no longer pat themselves on the back for simply providing perks like backup child care or onsite mothers' rooms.

The hybrid model is a long-overdue structural change that should have happened when women first entered the workforce in mass numbers. Not everyone has the privilege to be productive in the one-size-fits-all time slot we've inherited. Flexible work supports a blended existence, eliminating the impossible expectation that we can balance it all.

How hybrid working can empower women in the workplace

Hybrid working has emerged as an important driver of empowerment for the female workforce, both globally and in India. This is being driven by a flexible work culture introduced by hybrid working that has accelerated post the pandemic and is making both, the workplace, and workspaces more attractive to women. In the Indian context,

this assumes significance because the female labour force participation rate has continued to fall over the last three decades, and assumes even greater relevance given that the country continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is estimated that India is likely to see a jump in its urban women's workforce by 10 percent in 2023. By this estimate, the available employable talent pool of women will increase to approximately 92 million in urban India. Research from McKinsey (2022) shows that women's roles were 1.8 times more vulnerable in the pandemic than men's – but it is not just job losses that have affected women's careers over the past two years. It is estimated that housework in India for women increased by almost 30-40 percent during the pandemic. This led to a larger number of women either dropping out or reducing their involvement in the workplace.

For the hybrid model to work optimally, employers need to take a people-led approach – empowering employees to make their own decisions about how and where they work best. For women with families or child-rearing responsibilities who have continued working or are seeking to get back to the workplace, the benefits of hybrid working cannot be ignored. It offers them the best of both worlds – the ability to be close to their homes and families without compromising on work productivity or professional growth. No longer faced with an either/or situation, hybrid working now empowers them with more choices and opportunities than before, both at the workplace and at home.

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected women – partly because of existing gender inequalities in society. A study by StatsCan. (2021) shows that women's feelings of burnout have increased during the pandemic and that the gender gap has widened, with women now significantly more exhausted than their male counterparts. The good news is that organisations realise the value of women in the workforce, with many already wondering what they can do to support their female employees in the months and years ahead. Offering flexibility is emerging as a key tool which has unprecedented potential to support women's wellbeing, family lives and career aspirations. By enabling employees to split their time between home, firms can boost their productivity and growth at the same time as helping to improve work-life balance for their workforce, especially women.

Already adopted around the world by companies the hybrid model offers an array of benefits. Fewer long commutes mean employees can reclaim quality time with family and friends. The division of time between home, the office and a local flexible workspace have advantages for women who are in situations where, pre-COVID-19, caring responsibilities and domestic work fell mostly on their shoulders. In a hybrid world, balancing the demands of work and home is made easier. Perhaps more importantly, where both partners can work in a hybrid manner and undertake an equal share of household chores and childcare, a levelling of the playing field is possible. While women may find new freedom and energy to step up at work, their partners – whatever their gender – will be able to enjoy more involvement at home. Putting people first Companies must create clear hybrid working plans if they want to ensure the new world of work is a fairer place for women. Flexibility needs to become ingrained in work culture – it should not be seen as something that needs to be 'earned'.

The hybrid model is not only transforming working life but is also playing a decisive role in enabling gendered divisions of labour to fade away. As this happens, a greater number of employers are embracing 'the whole person' at work via hybrid strategies that are flexible enough to allow for parents' evenings and medical appointments, but clear enough to ensure productivity is maintained or even improved.

A young workforce is more at risk of quitting if asked to return to the office full-time. Hybrid working improves recruitment and retention cycles, for men and women both, which helps boost productivity, support healthy company culture, and bolster the bottom line. It will potentially de-risk employers from high attrition rates commonly seen among millennials. For women, some of whom often feel they are expected to work as if they have no family, and parent as though they have no job – the benefits of this new openness and flexibility are both important and welcome. If executed well, the hybrid model has the power to transform the work lives of women, as much as it is helping deliver lasting change for all.

Types of hybrid work models

These are the four most common hybrid work models:

1. Flexible hybrid work model

Employees choose their location and working hours based on their priorities for the day. For example, if they need to spend time focusing on a project, they can choose to work from home or in a coffee shop. If they want a

sense of community, need to meet with their team, attend a training session or join a town hall, they can choose to go into the office.

This model offers freedom and flexibility for individuals to determine where and when they work. It builds a trust-based relationship with employees, which increases loyalty and job satisfaction and expands talent pool, leading to more diverse thinking and improves the bottom-line due to cost savings on office space and travel. The main challenges are it is difficult for employees to find a suitable day or time for in-person teamwork, lack of visibility into how many people are going to the office on any given day and if the building has the capacity to support them

2. Fixed hybrid work model

The organization sets the days and times employees are allowed to work remotely or go into the office. For example, it could be that certain teams go into the office on Mondays and Wednesdays, while others go in on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Or an organization could allow everyone to work from home on pre-determined days each week. This model increases opportunity for in-person collaboration and team building, gives employees the option to schedule appointments or run quick errands on certain days of the week and provides the ability to easily forecast office capacity. There are challenges too, lack of individual choice, which could lead to a loss of productivity if employees aren't in the optimal setting for the work that needs to be done and inability to reduce office space

3. Office-first hybrid work model

Employees are expected to be on-site but have the flexibility to choose a few days a week to work remotely. Google plans to adopt this type of model where employees work in the office three days a week but have the option to choose two days for working remotely. This model allows flexibility and individual choice and helps maintain company culture and community but there is lack of visibility for employees around who will be in the office and when inability to accurately forecast how many employees will be in the office on a given day.

4. Remote-first hybrid work model

Employees work remotely most of the time with occasional visits to coworking spaces or the office for team building, collaboration, and training. In this model, the company may not have an office space and instead relies on team members in the same area to get together when they see fit. This increases productivity and job satisfaction for employees who want to work remotely most of the time and provides the ability to reduce costs by reducing or eliminating office space. The challenges are that there is potential for employees to feel isolated and increased challenges maintaining the company culture and community.

Working parents, and mothers in particular, have spent decades trying to juggle their personal and professional lives. The louder call for work-life balance and flexibility is a more recent phenomenon, previously stifled by the fear from working mothers of having employers deem them less capable or less committed than their male counterparts (Stroh,2004).

Extensive research findings have established that women are often disadvantaged relative to men in the workplace (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl, 2013). There's currently less research about the effects of working remotely, but it's becoming clear that hybrid work arrangements often create power differences between those who are in and out of the office, and there are good reasons to expect that people who work remotely are likely to be disadvantaged, regardless of their gender. So, women who work remotely can find themselves disadvantaged. This research tries to find out the consequences of hybrid work model on working mothers.

Aim: To study the effect of hybrid work model on working mothers

Objectives:

1. To study working mother's preference for hybrid work place
2. To find out working mother's perception of challenges of the hybrid work model
3. To list down the benefits of hybrid workplace for working mothers
4. To suggest ways workplaces can modify their policies that can help them retain their talented working mothers

Methodology

100 working mothers participated in this study. A self-structured questionnaire was made to collect information related to the effect of hybrid work model on working mothers. Snow ball technique was used to collect data online. Google form was circulated to working mothers to collect data. Percentages were calculated to analyse the data

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

1. Age of respondents

The results showed that the maximum number of respondents (56%) were between the age group of 36-45 years followed by 23% respondents between the age group of 46-55 years and the least respondents (21%) were from the age group 25-35 years.

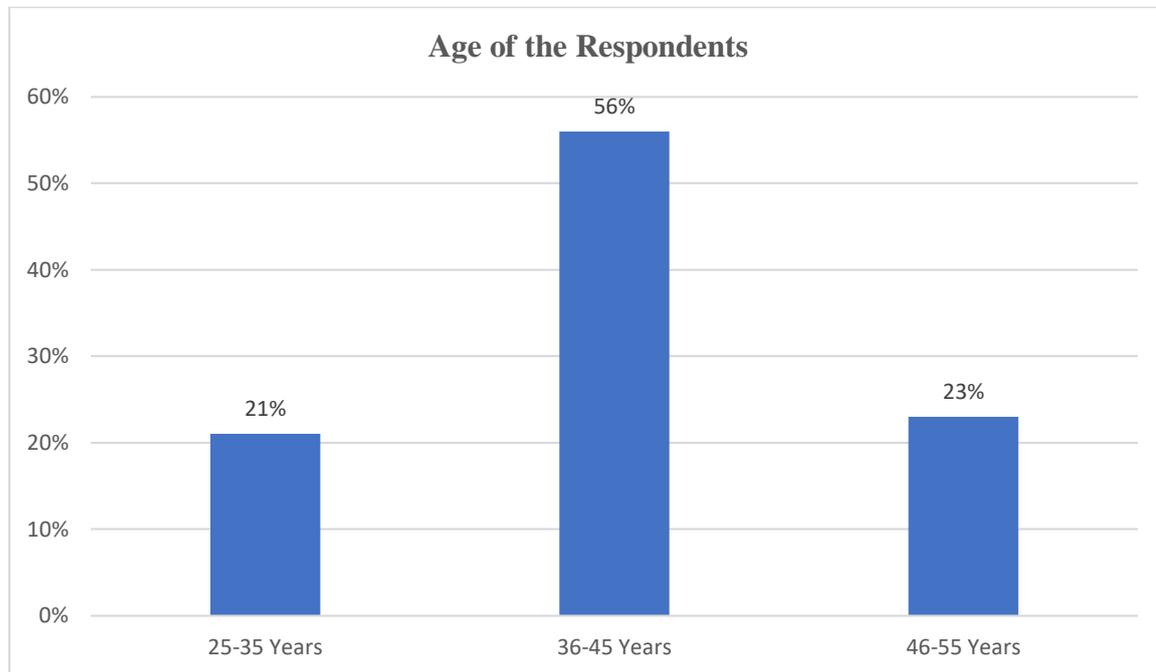


Fig.1: Age of respondents

2. Preference for Hybrid Work Place

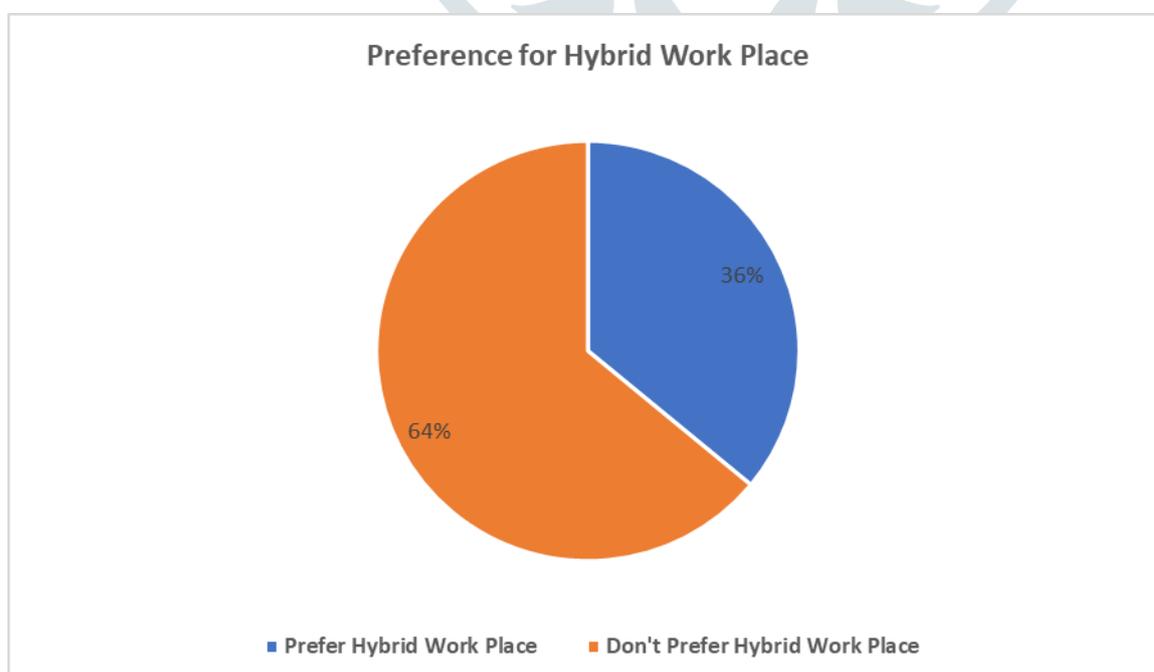


Fig.2. Preference for Hybrid Work Place

The results showed that 64% of the respondents prefer hybrid workplace. During the COVID-19 pandemic hybrid work emerged as a viable work arrangement and used virtual collaboration tools to remain productive. Now, after realizing the benefits and challenges of remote work, organizations are adopting hybrid work models to extend greater flexibility to employees while maintaining the in-person interactions that are crucial for the company community and culture.

3. Challenges of the hybrid work model

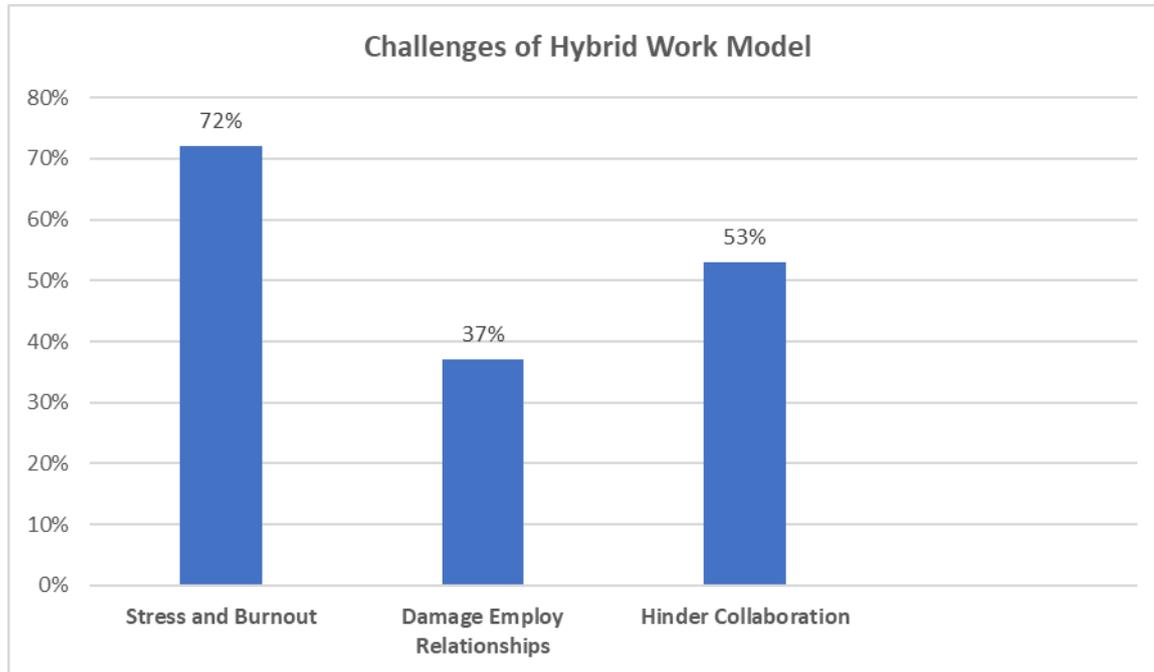


Fig.3. Challenges of the hybrid work model

It is seen that 72% of the responded that stress and burnout is an important challenge they face on hybrid mode followed by hindrance in collaboration (53%) and damaged employ relationships (37%).

The pandemic has been a particular challenge for working mothers. Millions of mothers have chosen to prioritize their children's care during this difficult time, often at the expense of their careers as they've felt forced to leave the workforce. Studies have shown that women often find it harder to build networks and develop advocates who will strongly support them in their careers. At the same time, working remotely makes it harder to develop mentoring or sponsorship relationships, because you're less visible to those who might take an interest in your welfare and advancement. There are fewer opportunities to connect informally or strengthen relationships (Ely and Padavic, 2020).

Research on stereotypes confirms women are often assumed to be less committed to their work and careers than men, especially if they're mothers, working remotely increases their risk of being viewed as less committed than their in-office colleagues, since their hard work away from the office is less visible to their peers and managers (Baker, Avery, & Crawford, 2007). Women who work remotely full-time very rarely or never spend time with their colleagues in person. These risks are likely to be less acute in a flexible hybrid system, where the challenges of working remotely can be at least partially overcome by increased opportunities to build networks and develop mentors, more ways to demonstrate commitment visibly, and lower barriers to speaking up during the periods of co-located work.

According to multiple surveys, even in best-case-scenarios where both the mother and father in a family worked remote, the moms were still twice as likely as the dads to be primarily responsible for housework and childcare. The result: many were unable to focus and perform at the same levels they had when they worked in-office, especially with the added stress of juggling home schooling and childcare during Covid-19.

Benefits of Hybrid Workplaces for Working Mothers

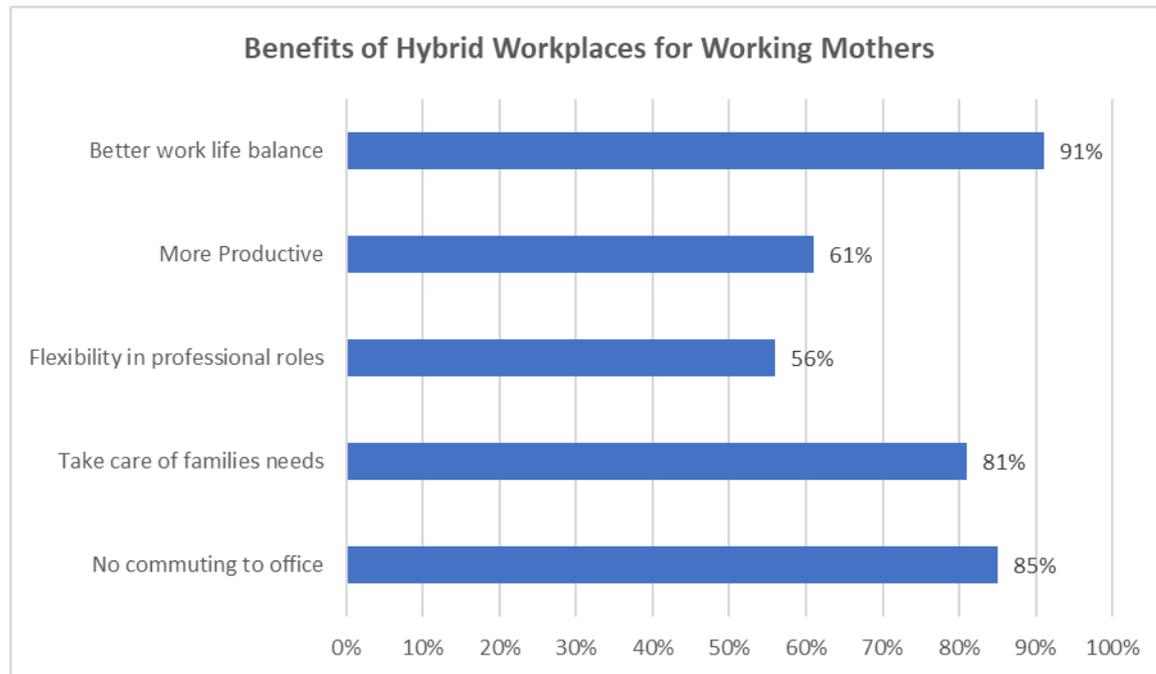


Fig.4. Benefits of Hybrid Workplaces for Working Mothers

The shift to hybrid work brings considerable benefits to both employees, businesses, and the environment. It promises to deliver increased flexibility, productivity, and job satisfaction for employees. For the business, it improves the bottom line and expands the talent pool. And the reduction in travel and office spaces leads to a more sustainable future.

91% of the respondents feel that better work life balance is an important benefit of hybrid workplaces for working mothers. The other benefits like more control over their time, making it easier to manage their families' activities (81%), in addition to the time and money they save by not commuting (85%).

Working mothers also feel the hybrid workplaces provides the ability to work remote or leave the office without guilt on days when children are sick or other unanticipated needs arise. Gives working parents the flexibility to schedule remote work/non-commute days around children's early morning or evening school programs and extracurricular activities. Flexible work supports a blended existence, eliminating the impossible expectation that working mothers can balance it all. By offering flexibility on where they work, organisations can ensure that women employees are not left feeling burnt out,

Conclusion

It can be concluded that working mothers remaining in or returning to the workforce, hybrid workplaces present five key benefits:

1. Provides the ability to work remote or leave the office without guilt on days when children are sick or other unanticipated needs arise.
2. Gives working mothers the flexibility to schedule remote work/non-commute days around children's early morning or evening school programs and extracurricular activities.
3. Allows mothers to be even more focused in the office and be their best selves in meetings with co-workers, managers and executives by reducing the stress and burnout around taking care of things at work and at home.
4. Lends to a more equal and manageable distribution of household and childcare duties if parents select to work remote on different days.
5. Gives working mothers flexibility in their professional roles that they might otherwise be hesitant to request, and the option to apply for roles that they might otherwise pass up because of strict in-office requirements.
6. Hybrid workplaces will empower working mothers to better manage the hybrid role of both employee and parenthood.

Its high time that companies must focus on creating policies that provide more work-life balance for working mothers and create a work culture that gives them the on-the-job support they need. Balancing motherhood and work is one of the trickiest acts but working mothers leave no stone unturned while juggling between diapers and deadlines. But according to a recent news report, 50% of working women in the country leave their jobs to take care of their children at the age of 30. Even among those who manage to return, 48 percent drop out within four months of re-joining the workforce” (LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company,2022). Its high time that companies must focus on creating policies that provide more work-life balance for working moms and create a work culture that gives them the on-the-job support they need.

Here are some ways workplaces can modify the policies that can help them retain their talented working moms for long.

Maternity Leave

Maternity is a time when a mother undergoes concerns about the health of her own and her baby, family matters and the corporate world should try to understand the concerns and look out for possible ways to keep mothers stress-free and relaxed. During such times, a minimum of 6 months of full pay maternity leave can be provided so that a mother can manage her personal roles. Along with this, it is also suggested to personally visit and keep a check on the associated mothers and their babies to know how they are doing as it helps in maintaining a sense of belongingness.

Work from Home

Most women quit their jobs post-maternity leave as it's tough for the new mother to get back to work with a little one at home. So an extended work from home or hybrid way can help mothers bond well with their baby, take care of the physical needs. This will keep the working mom stress free too and as said a “happy employee is more productive and dedicated”.

No question asked Leave

A mother barely thinks of taking leave for herself as she prioritizes everything above her so organizations can implement a “no question asked leave” policy for everyone in their employee welfare toolkit. This way working mothers can take a day off just to relax and spend quality time with little ones.

Flexibility & Balance

Mothers on WFH can be provided with flexibility while not being bound to fixed working hours. Since working from home with a little one for a long time can get tough, therefore, flexibility for mothers can include early login and freedom to determine their work schedules, this will help drive productivity and performance too.

Medical Assistance

Every parent wants their child to get the best medical treatment and associated facilities during and post-delivery. Hence, workplaces can provide their peers with insurance to seek the best medical aid possible where the new born child also gets covered under it. Companies can also provide childcare benefits making childcare accessible and affordable to empower working mothers to balance their responsibilities.

Apart from policies, empathy also plays an important role to make working moms at the workplace comfortable and stress-free. Human Resource personals should reach out to mothers as this takes the weight of asking for help off their shoulders and shows that the company cares for them.

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