

Original Research Article

Telework: job satisfaction during work from home among IT professionals in India: a cross sectional study

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ABSTRACT

Background: The untoward events of COVID-19 led to the enforcement of work from home (WFH) for nearly every wage earner across the globe. One of the several fields that saw its implications was the IT sector. We conducted the following study to understand how the IT techies have been affected by the shift in their workspace- from their cubicles at work to the tables at home and the implications of this shift on their general and mental health.

Methods: A cross sectional study was conducted in January 2021. A Google form was circulated among IT professionals. Sample size was calculated by universal sampling technique. Data collected was entered in MS Excel and analysed using SPSS version 26.

Results: Among the 47 received responses, the mean age group of the study sample was 20-30 years. 73.9% felt that personal obligations interrupted their work which led to increased frustration. There is also a rise in the incidences of backpain and eyestrain. The mean stress score of the study sample was 17.85 ± 5.729 and though 80.9% felt they had a comfortable place at home to work, 62.52% of them wished to return to their workplace.

Conclusions: Better innovative strategies need to be thought of and implemented to help employees have an efficient work-life balance.

Keywords: COVID-19, Mental health, Work from home, Workplace

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is the feeling of self- motivated, content and satisfaction at one's job.¹ It comes if our expectations about our work and even the surroundings of the workplace are comfortable. These feelings mainly stem from the feeling of job security, career growth and the knowledge of work life balance. However, due to the rapid change of pace in the work place and the never-ending competition that one faces, one often forgets to take a break and enjoy their jobs. We often neglect our own health and the well-being of our loved ones. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, one was suddenly confined to their homes and companies had to come up with alternatives to continue sailing the work boat. Work from home is a modern work approach wherein due to internet and technological advances one

can be physically at a remote location and yet be available to fulfill their obligations at work.¹ Though termed to be a modern approach, the concept of WFH can be traced back to hunter-gatherers.³ Primarily during the industrial revolution, there was a massive change from WFH to working in office spaces provided by the employers. However, due to the unprecedented events of the COVID-19 pandemic and its highly contagious nature, the age- old concept of WFH was re-born.

WFH has several advantages over the usual workspace. Since one is surrounded by their peers and colleagues one has a more disciplined schedule at their workplace. One has better time management, grows interpersonal skills and develops a stronger bond with their colleagues and superiors.⁴ Even in our study when asked what they missed the most about their workplace, majority replied

that they missed the time spent with their colleagues-whether it was the water cooler talk, the tea breaks or the after-work dinner parties.

WFH too has its own advantages. One gets to plan their own office timings thus providing them the opportunity to help their partners in the daily chores. The daily commuting time is saved thus enabling them to spend more time with the family and have a better work-life balance. One also gets to design their own work-space at home and wear their attire of choice thus adding to their comfort.⁵

Several of the industries around the globe had to modify their working environments to tackle the ongoing pandemic while trying to keep their industries alive. One of the sectors that saw this shift was the IT industry. Though their work revolves around their desktops, through this study we wished to see if WFH has changed their relation with their desktops- how their work, health and personal relations affected/ was affected by WFH.

METHODS

This study was done using online Google questionnaire form. The questionnaire consisted of 4 parts: i) demographic profile: age, gender, job designation, working atmosphere at home, lifestyle at home, home-schooling, sharing of chores, ii) general effects of the lockdown on daily events such as commuting expense and amount of time spent with dear ones, iii) perceived stress scale, and iv) overall WFH experience.⁶

This was a cross-sectional study done using a Google form questionnaire through voluntary submission. The study was conducted in January 2021. The form was circulated among known IT professionals and their colleagues. Sample size was determined by universal sampling technique. Data such as name, phone number, etc. were not collected thus ensuring anonymity of the participants.

47 participants successfully completed the questionnaire and submission of the form was considered as their consent to the study. Perceived stress scale: this is a 10-item, 5- point scale graded from 0-4, 0 being never and 4-very often. The participant answers the questions based on their experiences over the last one month, preferably as quickly as possible. The scoring is as: 0-13 low stress, 14-26 medium stress and 27-40 high stress.⁷

The data collected was stored as MS Excel spreadsheet and statistical analysis was done using SPSS version 26 (licensed to JSSAHER).

Statistical tests

Demographic data were summarized using frequency tables. The stress scores were categorized according to the cutoffs provided in the questionnaire.

RESULTS

A total of 48 participants were studied. Among them, 30 (62.5%) were males and 18 (37.5%) were females.

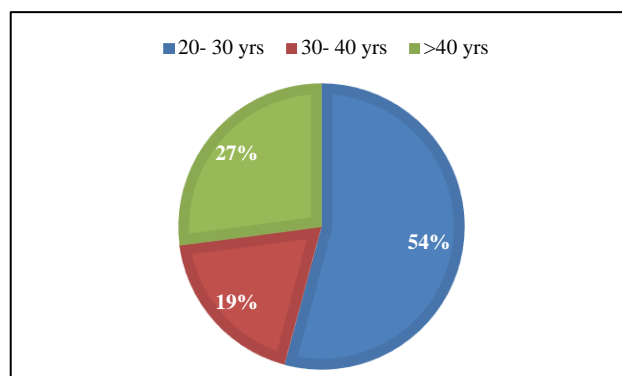


Figure 1: Age distribution of the population.

The age distribution of the study population is shown in Figure 1. From the figure we find that majority (54%) of the study participants were of 20-30 years age group, followed by 27% of >40 years and 19% of 30-40 years.

The study participants had been working for a range of 1-16 months from home. Majority (31.3%) had been working for the past 10 months from home.

Table 1: Summary of the working conditions at home for the participants.

Variables		n	%
Do you have a comfortable place to work at home?	Yes	38	79.2
	No	10	20.8
Do you feel you are working extra hours during WFH?	Yes	29	60.4
	No	11	22.9
	Sometimes	8	16.7
Do feel there is more flexibility in your working hours during WFH?	Yes	32	66.7
	No	16	33.3
Do personal obligations cause more interruptions?	Yes	35	72.9
	No	13	27.1
Do the interruptions add to the frustration at work?	Yes	17	35.4
	No	10	20.8
	Sometimes	21	43.8

From Table 1 we find that 79.2% of the participants felt they had a comfortable place to work at home. Nearly 60% of them felt they had to work extra hours due to limited office resources and 36.1% of them felt that at least 2 hours of work had been added due to the same. However, 66.7% felt they had more flexibility in their work hours.

72.9% felt their working hours was interrupted due to personal obligations which caused frustration in 35.4% of them.

Table 2: Summary of the technology related opinions of the study participants.

Variables		N	%
Do you feel comfortable teleconferencing from home?	Very inconvenient	6	12.5
	Mild discomfort	27	56.3
	More comfortable at home	11	22.9
	Indifferent	4	8.3
Did you have to learn a technology to cope with WFH?	Yes	20	41.7
	No	28	58.3
Did you feel frustrated while trying to cope with the technology?	Yes	11	22.9
	No	37	77.1
Which of the following supplies added to your expenses?	Internet	33	68.8
	Computer	1	2.1
	Printer and other office supplies	2	4.2
	Table and chair	1	2.1
	None	11	22.9

Table 2 shows a summary of the technology related opinions of the study participants. While 56.3% of them faced mild discomfort while teleconferencing from home, 22.9% felt more comfortable at home than at work.

The average time spent in- front of the screen was 9-12 hours for 44.2%.

One of the benefits of the lockdown was the time spent to bring about self-care routine changes which has been summarized in Table 3. 68.8% of the participants said that they had increased consumption of homecooked foods and 12.5% said that they had increased consumption of outside food.

Participants were questioned about their experience with home schooling. From Table 4 we found that though 22.9% of them did not face a problem, 20.8% felt that homeschooling was a burden as time had to be spent with their children and/ or home-schooling was not the appropriate way for a child to learn. Many parents felt that children were being deprived of the joy of learning when among friends and felt that they were unable to do justice to the learning years.

Table 3: Summary of diet and physical activity alterations during WFH.

Variables		N	%
Did WFH aggravate/ initiate any health problem?	Backpain	7	14.6
	Eyestrain/ headache	7	14.6
	Backpain and eyestrain	13	27.1
	Emotional stress	2	4.2
	Acidity	4	8.3
	None	15	31.3
Have you started exercising during WFH?	Yes	27	56.3
	No	21	43.8
How has your diet changed?	More outside food	6	12.5
	More homecooked food	33	68.8
	No change	9	18.8
Do you feel you are taking more snack breaks when at home?	Yes, fruits	14	29.2
	Yes, snacks	16	33.3
	No change	18	37.5
Have you started a new activity to combat the stress?	Gym	5	10.4
	Gardening/ household activities	2	4.2
	Meditation	5	10.4
	Yoga and meditation	8	16.7
	Walks	15	31.3
	None	13	27.1

Another benefit of the lockdown period was the balancing of work-life. This was reflected upon the sharing of household chores among partners. Nearly 56.3% of the participants agreed that their spouses were taking part in helping them with the domestic duties.

When the participants were asked to list 2 benefits of work from home (Table 5), majority of them felt the

reduction in commute and thus the reduced cost and stress of travel was the prime benefit. Others mentioned benefits such as more family time, comfort at home, increased savings, flexibility in working hours and above all a healthier diet due to more access to home cooked food.

Comparing the stress scale scores, it was found that males had an average score of 17.57 ± 6.13 and females had an

average of 19.28 ± 5.13 indicating that females had more stress than males.

Table 4: Summary about home- schooling and personal choices.

Variables		N	%
Has home schooling become a burden?	Yes	10	20.8
	No	27	22.9
	NA	11	56.3
Why is home- schooling a burden?	Time has to be spent with the kid	4	8.3
	Children are not learning the appropriate way	4	8.3
	Difficult to manage kids and work	2	4.2
	Not a problem/ NA	38	79.2
Is your partner helping with the household chores?	Yes	27	56.3
	No	21	43.8
Has your commuting cost (gas/ commuting fare) reduced?	Yes	37	77.1
	No	11	22.9
Has your expenses due to eating (coffee, meals, birthday contribution) reduced?	Mild	1	2.1
	Moderate	13	27.1
	Significant	23	47.9
	No change	11	22.9
Is there an increase in fulfilment of social needs (calling friends and family, chatting, text)?	Yes	35	72.9
	No	13	27.1
Has your work- life balance improved due to hours saved during commute, getting prepared for the job, etc?	Yes	36	75
	No	12	25
Do you feel there is an improvement in your leadership and team work behavior?	Yes	33	68.8
	No	15	31.3

Table 5: Summary of the personal views of participants about work from home.

Variables		N	%
2 benefits of WFH	Time saved during commute	14	29.2
	Travel expenses saved	9	18.8
	More family time	7	14.6
	Health benefits	1	2.1
	No difference	17	35.4
Overall were you happy with WFH	Yes	31	64.6
	No	12	25
	Indifferent	5	10.4
What do you miss the most about your workplace?	Colleagues	22	45.8
	Discipline/fixed working hours	13	27.1
	Indifferent	13	27.1

Table 6: Summary of the stress scores among males and females.

Stress scale category	Males		Females	
	n	%	n	%
Low	10	33.3	4	22.2
Moderate	15	50	11	61.1
High	5	16.7	3	16.7
Total	30	100	18	100

From Table 6, we find that the majority of the participants, males and females had moderate degree of stress during Work from home. Upon using Chi-square test for the difference in stress scores among males and females, no statistical difference was found ($p=0.693$).

It is interesting to note that though 80.9% participants had a comfortable place to work at home, 62.52% of them wished to return to their workplace. The prime reason for this was that they missed their colleagues and friends and the workplace environment.

DISCUSSION

The pandemic has transformed the way people work, and an increasing number of individuals are choosing to work from home. Unlike traditional work patterns, this strategy has limits and has had a considerable influence on both businesses and individuals. Thus, this study aimed to understand the job satisfaction level of people during work from home and to address the need for employee skill improvement, psychological stress and work-family balance.

In this study 79.2% of the participants felt they had a comfortable place to work at home. Nearly 60% of them felt they had to work extra hours due to limited office resources and 36.1% of them felt that atleast 2 hours of work had been added due to the same. However, 66.7%

felt they had more flexibility in their work hours where as in the study by Moretto et al among mobile working advantages, the most appreciated was saved travel time (82.4%).⁸

72.9% felt their working hours was interrupted due to personal obligations which caused frustration in 35.4% of them but in the study by Moretto et al 39% of the subjects self-perceived to be less stressed.⁸

While in our study 56.3% of them faced mild discomfort while teleconferencing from home, 22.9% felt more comfortable at home than at work, the average time spent in- front of the screen was 9-12 hours for 44.2% and when asked about health problem in our study 27.1% complained about increased eyestrain and back pain but low back pain was referred by 41.2% of home workers and neck pain by 23.5% of them and neck pain worsened in 50% of home workers, while low back pain did not exacerbate in 47.6% of cases in the study by Moretto et al.⁸

Participants were questioned about their experience with home schooling. Though 22.9% of them did not face a problem, 20.8% felt that homeschooling was a burden as time had to be spent with their children and or home-schooling was not the appropriate way for a child to learn. Many parents felt that children were being deprived of the joy of learning when among friends and felt that they were unable to do justice to the learning years. But in the study by Costa et al out of 94 respondents 13 respondents felt that children affected their working performance.¹⁰

When the participants were asked to list 2 benefits of work from home, majority of them felt the reduction in commute and thus the reduced cost and stress of travel was the prime benefit. Others mentioned benefits such as more family time, comfort at home, increased savings, flexibility in working hours and above all a healthier diet due to more access to home cooked food which were some of the benefits mentioned according to the Article from click time- the advantages of working from home which are as follows- flexible schedule, custom environment, cozy clothes, easier access to make calls, knock off some weekend to-do's, no office distractions, zero commuting, save money, forget crowds and traffic, more time with loved ones.

In our study it is interesting to note that though 80.9% participants had a comfortable place to work at home, 62.52% of them wished to return to their workplace. The prime reason for this was that they missed their colleagues and friends and the workplace environment but in the study conducted by Bhattarai et al, out of 96 samples 35 were dissatisfied and 61 were satisfied working from home out of which majority dissatisfied were females (23) and majority satisfied were males (47).⁹ Adults were more satisfied then young and among the dissatisfied young employees, the main reasons for dissatisfaction, based on the extra questions asked, seem

something around their social needs, for example hanging out with colleagues, missing the party lives, coffee shop gossip, and alike, which is not fulfilled working virtually. where as in the study by costa et al almost all of the subjects (94) were satisfied with their work performance despite the pandemic period. And in the study by Moretto et al.⁸ Out of 51 respondents, Thirty-nine percent of the subjects self-perceived to be less productive but less stressed, while 51% were equally satisfied.

This study has few limitations. Larger sample needs to be evaluated to generalize the findings for the entire IT sector. The study was conducted only for IT professionals and hence the results cannot be generalized to other professions. Further studies need to be done to understand how WFH has affected the work- life for other professionals.

CONCLUSION

Though work from home has several benefits for the overall health and well-being of the person while also increasing their productivity, there should be a common ground wherein one can also reap into the life of workplace. Instances could include occasional online events for all the employees to participate into, frequent messages from the company to remind the employees that they are still a part of the family to name a few.

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