WORK-LIFE BALANCE WHEN WORK MEETS HOME

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ABSTRACT
The COVID 19 pandemic forced a reset on work-life balance for employees across all sectors. For a large number of employees, working from home was a new experience. While many of them found WFH good for the work-life balance, others felt the lack of corporate culture while working at home. This study explored the demographic differences in the preferences people experienced towards WFH. The finding clearly exposed the line between gender preferences. While women prefer time with co-workers at the office, men are more likely to spend free time in recreational activities. People perceive that work efficiency is better in the office, and the future intention to WFH is not clearly formed.

Keyword: COVID19, Work from home, Work-life Balance, Family, Intention to WFH.

1. INTRODUCTION
Work from home is not a new phenomenon in many industries. For example, IT companies have been providing flexible timings and WFH facilities to their employees for years. However, in 2020, when the government imposed the lockdown due to COVID 19 outbreak, WFH was implemented in almost every industry. Indeed, it was a new experience even for the sectors extensively using the internet and online technology. Though this arrangement was convenient to many people, it has also led to the disruption in work-life balance.

A report published by Kent University in the UK discussed how WFH had brought changes in the lifestyles of different demographics and life-cycle stages. While most of the people welcomed the WFH, they agreed to have faced challenges of work-life balance. Still, a recent survey conducted by Ernst & Yong revealed that 54% of the respondents prefer WFH post-pandemic (Bhattacharya, 2021).

In the context of work-life balance, Tietze and Musson (2002) have studied the premise of “work time” and “home-time”. The core of work and life organisation lies in the clear distinction of both the timings (Tietze & Musson, 2002).

This study has the following objectives:
(1) To explore the ramification of WFH in an individual’s work and home life
(2) To discuss the issues and challenges that emerged due to the new work environment and how it has affected genders and other demographics differently.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The available literature on WFH primarily covers two different issues. The first category discussed people’s preference towards WFH, i.e., the advantages and disadvantages people experienced. The second category discussed the increased burden on women due to the new adjustments needed for WFH.

Purwanto et al. (2020) have identified that WFH helped people overcome several issues like getting up early, grooming, travelling costs, traffic hassles, and non-flexible timings. Further, people are happy to get time for family and recreation and the flexibility to work from anywhere. Disadvantages include the lack of infrastructural facilities at home and added cost of electricity and air conditioning. Research conducted on the employees of an IT firm in Indonesia revealed that WFH has improved performance and has given people an opportunity to devote more time to home (Tiroina & Mahdani, 2021). A study conducted by Hatayama, Viollaz, & Winkler (2020), discussed the various amenability for WFH. Jobs requiring meeting people and technical equipment are difficult to manage with online meetings and portable equipment. Internet connection at home is also a significant concern (Hatayama et al., 2020).

A report published by the University of Kent highlighted the positive side of WFH as a preference towards flexible working hours. At the same time, people miss interactions with their colleagues and struggled with a lack of equipment and space (Chung, Seo, Forbes, & Birkett, 2020). A Price WaterhouseCooper’s report on the costs and benefits of WFH outlines that people spent less time in traffic, which resulted in cost savings (Borggreven, 2020b). The negative side of WFH was less collaboration amongst colleagues, low employee engagement, and employee well-being (Borggreven, 2020a).

WFH literature significantly addressed the issue of gender inequality. For example, in a study conducted in Iceland, Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2021) pointed out that household chores are primarily attributed to females. This is even true in a country that is considered to be a “paradise for women”. WFH is difficult for parents with young children as other household responsibilities disrupt work time. In addition, especially women have faced the mental stress of meeting the work requirements while dealing with the young children seeking continuous attention. While women tried to do their best, their mental state has been tired, frustrated and anxious. At the same time, women are also responsible for keeping the mental and emotional well-being of the family.

Further, Power (2020) highlighted how WFH had increased the burden on women. Working women have been a part of the care economy (family needs), paid economy (professional needs) and emotional economy (mental well-being needs). COVID 19 has increased the unpaid part of the responsibilities and overlapped and overshadowed the paid one.

While people struggle with work-life balance issues, many companies are looking at a bright future with WFH. Large technology firms like Google, SAP, Facebook and Accenture have given their employees an option to WFH even with vaccination (ET Bureau, 2021). Amazon has allowed its employees to WFH two days a week (ET Panache, 2021). In addition, more and more...
people are refurbishing their homes to make them work-friendly.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
This research aims at exploring the preferences of WFH through exploratory research. First, a qualitative analysis of eight research papers was done using ATLAS.ti software. The codes were generated from the key issues and findings of these research papers. The codes and their respective sentiment density are mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1: Sentiment Analysis Summary

| Codes                  | Sentiments | Negative | Neutral | Positive |
|------------------------|------------|----------|---------|----------|
|                        | Balance    |          |         |          |
| Children               | 6          | 17       | 30      | 12       |
| Facilities             | 3          | 0        | 5       | 2        |
| Family                 | 18         | 16       | 24      | 24       |
| Female                 | 13         | 24       | 41      | 28       |
| Flexible               | 8          | 5        | 13      | 9        |
| Gender                 | 12         | 6        | 24      | 16       |
| Household              | 5          | 6        | 10      | 11       |
| Job Satisfaction       | 4          | 0        | 4       | 4        |
| Low Job Motivation     | 3          | 1        | 3       | 4        |
| Male                   | 3          | 10       | 18      | 11       |
| Married                | 8          | 3        | 6       | 8        |
| Meeting people         | 0          | 1        | 1       | 0        |
| Personal life          | 1          | 0        | 1       | 1        |
| Privacy and Security   | 1          | 0        | 1       | 1        |
| Productivity           | 2          | 0        | 2       | 2        |
| Save money             | 1          | 0        | 1       | 1        |
| Social Distancing      | 3          | 3        | 7       | 1        |

The visual representation of the same in the Sankey diagram is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Sankey Diagram
Secondly, open-ended discussions with working professionals, self-employed, services professionals and academicians were conducted. Finally, a list of ten favourable and 14 unfavourable statements are created, as given in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive of Variables

| Variable | Description                                           | Mean  | Standard Deviation |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| FAV1     | Avoid travelling                                      | 3.45  | 1.199              |
| FAV2     | Availability of freshly cooked home food              | 3.36  | 1.300              |
| FAV3     | Flexible work schedule                                | 3.34  | 1.310              |
| FAV4     | Quality time with family                              | 3.75  | 1.081              |
| FAV5     | Others at home can help with work                     | 2.13  | 1.102              |
| FAV6     | Can balance household chores along with work          | 3.17  | 1.223              |
| FAV7     | More time to socialise with friends                   | 2.47  | 1.181              |
| FAV8     | Spare time to pursue hobbies                          | 3.30  | 1.269              |
| FAV9     | Avoid interactions with co-workers                    | 2.10  | 1.116              |
| FAV0     | Reduced expenses                                      | 3.71  | 1.129              |
| UNFAV1   | No office pranks and gossip                           | 2.95  | 1.276              |
| UNFAV2   | No non-work conversations with colleagues             | 3.16  | 1.270              |
| UNFAV3   | Not able to supervise subordinates work               | 3.04  | 1.149              |
| UNFAV4   | Cannot meet external stakeholders for work            | 3.04  | 1.219              |
| UNFAV5   | The office environment is good for cross learnings    | 3.99  | 1.055              |
Further, the literature review and the interview process revealed that these differences were not equally relevant for different demographics. Therefore, statistical analysis was conducted to explore the differences amongst genders, marital status, age groups, people with or without children, people living with the elderly, type of residence, family type, and sectors. Further, a combination of these factors was also explored to understand their effect.

4. DATA COLLECTION

The responses were collected on favourable and unfavourable statements using a 5 point Likert scale where 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree and 5-strongly agree (Vagias & Wade, 2006). The respondents were also asked for their perception of efficiency when working from the office against working at home. Finally, they were asked about their intention to work from home. The data was collected using an online questionnaire from July 2020 to October 2020. The details of the responses are given in Table 3.

The preferences were tested for normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Both tests showed p <0.001 for all the variables. Therefore, all variables are significantly non-normal. Thus, for the hypothesis testing, non-parametric tests were used.

| UNFAV6       | Not able to meet and network with people | 3.64 | 1.179 |
| UNFAV7       | Affects physical fitness                  | 3.66 | 1.150 |
| UNFAV8       | No socialising and meeting friends        | 3.47 | 1.218 |
| UNFAV9       | No snacks/tea/coffee otherwise provided by the employer | 2.19 | 1.063 |
| UNFAV10      | No recreational facilities otherwise provided by the employer | 2.23 | 1.068 |
| UNFAV11      | Frequently distracted by background noises | 3.33 | 1.261 |
| UNFAV12      | Poor internet stability/network issues    | 3.39 | 1.309 |
| UNFAV13      | More tiring due to longer working hours   | 3.54 | 1.236 |
| UNFAV14      | Family is around all the time             | 2.49 | 1.142 |

Table 3: Demographic and other Variables

| Demographic      | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------|
| Gender           |           |         |
| Male             | 75        | 56.0    |
| Female           | 59        | 44.0    |
| Age              |           |         |
| 21-30            | 83        | 61.9    |
| 31-40            | 27        | 20.1    |
| 41-50            | 20        | 14.9    |
| above 50         | 4         | 3.0     |
| Marital Status   |           |         |
| Single           | 73        | 54.5    |
| Married          | 61        | 45.5    |
| Children         |           |         |
| None             | 92        | 68.7    |
| Yes              | 42        | 31.3    |
5. DATA ANALYSIS

First, the descriptive analysis was conducted using means and standard deviations. From Table 2, it is evident that for the favourable statements, the highest agreement is with “quality time with family” (mean=3.75), followed by “reduced expenses” (mean=3.71). These statements also have the smallest variation amongst respondents. The least agreement is with the statements “avoid interaction with co-workers” (mean=2.10) and “others at home can help with work” (mean=2.13). “Flexible hours” and “availability of freshly cooked home food” have a relatively high agreement but also has the highest variation. Figure 2 shows the visual representation of the level of agreement for favourable statements.

For unfavourable statements, the highest agreement is for “office environment is good for cross learnings” (mean=3.99). The second highest agreement is for the statement “affects physical fitness” (mean=3.66). Both the statements also have small variations. The least agreement for unfavourable statements is for “no snack/tea/coffee” (mean=2.19) and “no recreational facilities” (2.23) otherwise provided by the employer. Figure 3 shows the visual representation of the level of agreement with the unfavourable statements.
Next, the group difference analysis was conducted. Mann-Whitney test for 2-independent samples was used to test the difference between the opinion of male and female respondents. As
shown in Table 4, four favourable statements and three unfavourable statements are significantly different for male and female respondents at p < 0.05.

Table 4: Test Statistics for Gender Differences

| Statements | Mann-Whitney U | Wilcoxon W | Z     | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Rank | Inference                      |
|------------|---------------|------------|-------|------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| FAV2       | 1731.500      | 3501.500   | -2.216| 0.027                  | 73.91     | male respondents agreed more than female respondents |
| FAV4       | 1743.500      | 3513.500   | -2.190| 0.029                  | 73.75     |                               |
| FAV7       | 1687.500      | 3457.500   | -2.432| 0.015                  | 74.50     |                               |
| FAV8       | 1896.000      | 3666.000   | -1.476| 0.140                  | 71.72     |                               |
| UNFAV5     | 1680.500      | 4530.500   | -2.565| 0.010                  | 60.41     | female respondents agree more than male respondents |
| UNFAV12    | 1644.500      | 4494.500   | -2.621| 0.009                  | 59.93     |                               |
| UNFAV14    | 1540.000      | 4390.000   | -3.119| 0.002                  | 58.53     |                               |

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Next, the test was run to identify significant differences in the responses of single and married respondents. The significant statements are given in Table 5.

Table 5: Test Statistics for differences due to Martial Status

| Statement | Mann-Whitney U | Wilcoxon W | Z     | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Rank | Inference                      |
|-----------|---------------|------------|-------|------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| FAV2      | 1696.5        | 3526.5     | -2.407| 0.016                  | 74.57     | single respondents agree more than married respondents |
| FAV7      | 1608.5        | 3438.5     | -2.828| 0.005                  | 75.76     |                               |
| FAV10     | 1683.5        | 3513.5     | -2.501| 0.012                  | 74.75     |                               |
| UNFAV1    | 1951.5        | 3781.5     | -1.230| 0.218                  | 71.13     |                               |

a. Grouping Variable: Marital Status

Since the data consists of four age groups, K-means sample non-parametric test is used to test the difference amongst age groups. Table 6 represents the statistics. Only one statement showed a significant difference amongst the respondents.
Table 6: Test Statistics for Age Groups

| Statement | Kruskal-Wallis H | df | Asymp. Sig. | Mean Rank | Inference |
|-----------|------------------|----|-------------|-----------|-----------|
|           |                  |    |             | 21-30 years | 31-40 years | 41-50 years | Above 50 years |
| FAV10     | 11.8095          | 3  | 0.008       | 75.14     | 51.5       | 64         | 34.38       |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: Age Groups

K-means sample is also used for differences in four categories of types of residents. Table 7 represents the test statistics for the same.

Table 7: Test Statistics for differences in residential status

| Statements | Kruskal-Wallis H | df | Asymp. Sig. | Mean Rank | Inference |
|------------|------------------|----|-------------|-----------|-----------|
|            |                  |    |             | 1RK       | 1BHK      | 2BHK      | 3BHK       |
| FAV5       | 8.383            | 3  | 0.039       | 76.07     | 69.05     | 70.36     | 47.55     |
| FAV9       | 9.158            | 3  | 0.027       | 74.83     | 72.23     | 68.81     | 46.41     |
| UNFAV5     | 9.458            | 3  | 0.024       | 66.02     | 66.21     | 69.07     | 87.95     |
| UNFAV6     | 11.364           | 3  | 0.010       | 59.73     | 66.19     | 61.8      | 91.36     |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: RESIDENCE

Next, the analysis was done, creating different groups of males and female respondents, and 2-sample mean the test was run to test the differences based on marital status. The results are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8: Test Statistics for Marital Status * Gender

| Statements | Mean Rank | Wilcoxon W | Z | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Rank | Wilcoxon W | Z | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | Inferences |
|------------|-----------|------------|---|-----------------------|-----------|------------|---|-----------------------|------------|
|            |           |            |   |                       | Single    | Married    |   |                       |            |
| FAV10      | 441.000   | 1107.000   | -2.924 | 0.003                 | 44.69     | 30.750     |   |                       | single male respondents agree more than married male respondents |

a. GEN = 1 Male  
b. Grouping Variable: MS
Also, the analysis was done after grouping the data into marital statuses. The differences in male and female responses were identified. The significant differences are given in Table 9.

**Table 9: Test Statistics for Gender * Marital Status**

| Statements | Mann-Whitney U | Wilcoxon W | Z     | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Rank | Inferences                                      |
|------------|----------------|------------|-------|------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------------------|
|            |                |            |       |                        | Single    | Female                                         |
| UNFAV12    | 390.000        | 1170.000   | -3.262| 0.001                  | 30        | 45.86                                          |
| UNFAV14    | 490.500        | 1270.500   | -2.142| 0.032                  | 32.58     | 42.99                                          |

a. MS = 1 Single  
b. Grouping Variable: GEN

There is no significant difference identified in people’s responses with children or no children or living or not living with the elderly. Next, the data for single and married male and female respondents living with or without elderly was analysed. The significant differences are given in Table 10.

**Table 10 Test Statistics for Marital Status*Gender*Having Elderly or not**

| Statements | Mann-Whitney U | Wilcoxon W | Z     | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)] | Mean Rank | Inferences |
|------------|----------------|------------|-------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|------------|
|            |                |            |       |                        |                                 |           |            |
| FAV7       | 294.500        | 594.500    | -2.168| 0.030                  | 34.32                            | 24.77     | married male respondents agree more than married female respondents |
| FAV8       | 292.500        | 592.500    | -2.210| 0.027                  | 34.38                            | 24.69     |                                           |
| UNFAV3     | 290.500        | 590.500    | -2.220| 0.026                  | 34.43                            | 24.6      |                                           |
Respondents living with the elderly agree more than not living with elderly

| Statements | Kruskal-Wallis H | df | Asymp. Sig. | Mean Rank | Inference |
|------------|-----------------|----|-------------|-----------|-----------|
|            |                 |    |             | Alone     | with friends | Nuclear Family | Extended Family |          |
| FAV6       | 11.1389         | 3  | 0.011       | 100.5     | 18.75     | 64.53    | 71.16   | people living with friends agree least with the statement |
| UNFAV13    | 11.8837         | 3  | 0.0078      | 28.39     | 98        | 70.85    | 66      |          |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: FAMILY

Sector-wise comparison and the results are reflected in Table 12:
Table 12: Test Statistics for Sectors

| Statements | Kruskal-Wallis H | df | Asymp. Sig. | Mean Rank | Inference |
|------------|-----------------|----|-------------|-----------|-----------|
|            |                 |    |             | Corporate | Academi cs | Self-emplo yed | Public Sector |           |
| FAV5       | 10.650          | 3  | 0.014       | 61.42     | 87.23     | 63.94      | 71.64      | Academicians agree more than others |
| FAV6       | 8.847           | 3  | 0.031       | 61.68     | 79.04     | 94.19      | 66.5       | Self-employed and academicians agree more than others |
| FAV10      | 8.919           | 3  | 0.030       | 71.38     | 49.98     | 68.44      | 86.07      | Public sector employees agree most, Academicians agree least |
| UNFAV13    | 21.234          | 3  | 0.000       | 76.27     | 48.5      | 27.94      | 74.71      | Public and private sector agree maximum, self-employed agreed least |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: SEC

Finally, the intention of the people to WFH in future was assessed. Figure 4 shows the visual representation of people’s perception of the efficiency in work at home vs office. Clearly, people felt that efficiencies are more at the office. Given that, people are not able to form the intention to WFH. Figure 5 provides the visual representation of the intention to WFH.
6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
The first discussion is about the difference of opinion between genders. Male respondents are more inclined towards favourable statements. They get freshly home-cooked food, have time to spend with family and friends, and pursue hobbies. Married males appear to like the latter two more than married females. On the other hand, female respondents majorly agreed with unfavourable statements being surrounded by family during work hours and are affected by poor
Moreover, female respondents missed the learning environment of the office. Evidently, these differences are due to work plus home responsibilities for married female respondents even during work hours. As a result, married female respondents did not get much time to socialise or pursue anything else. However, the single female does agree that they got more time to interact with friends than married women. Next, single male and female respondents liked getting freshly cooked food, talking to friends, and reduced expenses than married men and women. However, they also missed office gossips more than married ones. Also, single men liked the reduction in expenses more than married men.

Single female respondents seem to miss office recreation and internet speed than married women. Between single men and women, differences occur in two unfavourable statements – internet facilities and being surrounded by family all the time. Evidently, female respondents are affected more than male respondents. Married men disliked missing subordinates more than married women.

Age groups wise analysis showed aged 21-30 years are most relieved due to reduction in expenses, and 50 and above are least affected by such reduction. People living in big houses (3BHK) seems to be preferring the office environment. They agreed more that they do not get to explore cross-learning and cannot meet or network. Instead, they agree less with the statement that people at home can be of any help. They preferred office interactions.

There are no significant differences found in the liking or disliking of people having or not having children. However, single males living with the elderly agreed more on the availability of freshly cooked home food and spare time for family and friends. On the other hand, single female respondents liked that they get to pursue their hobbies due to the presence of the elderly in the family. Also, single men not living with the elderly disliked not being able to socialise due to lockdown. There is no significant difference found in the opinion of married men living or not living with the elderly. However, married females not living with the elderly appear to be missing office pranks. They also feel that their physical fitness is affected.

Next, people living with friends cannot balance work and household chores. On the contrary, people living alone find work more tiring due to long hours. The academicians agreed that they could get help from others and balance work and household chores. However, they do not agree to have saved expenses. Self-employed also agreed to manage work-life better than other sectors and disagree with having put more working hours. Public sector employees appear to be saving expenses but are also putting in more working hours. The employees in the private sector also feel that they are putting more hours into work.

Though people believe that it is more efficient to work from the office, they are not sure if they want to go to the office in the future. Other than the advantages of WFH, safety from the pandemic also can be the reason for the same.

The findings of this research direct towards a mixed arrangement that can create a balance between work efficiencies and comfort of home, savings and overall well-being, post-pandemic. Employers should consider providing flexibility to employees to WFH. In the cases where physical meetings are necessary or specific equipment to be used, employees can work from the office.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The findings of the paper revealed that the WFH has significantly distorted the work-life
balance. The issues related to gender disparities surfaced even with this small sample. While men utilise more spare time in recreation, women have to prioritise their household liabilities, which is difficult without support. Private and public sector employees see an increase in overall working hours. This research could not find any implications due to the responsibilities of young children. Also, there is no significant difference in the preference or intention to continue to WFH across demographics.

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