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Diverse challenges encountered by work from home employees

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges faced by 220 employees working from home (WFH) during the global shift to remote work, with a focus on the percentage distribution of difficulties encountered. The findings reveal significant percentages associated with various challenges, such as concentration problems (84.54%), distractions at home (91.36%), and communication issues (85.90%). Health-related concerns, including skipping meals due to workload (94.54%) and increased stress (90.91%), are also prominent. The study categorizes challenges into general, family, financial, social, behavioral, and psychological domains, highlighting the nuanced impact on employee well-being. This percentage-based analysis provides valuable insights for organizations seeking to address the multifaceted challenges associated with WFH, ultimately promoting a more supportive and sustainable remote work environment.

Keywords: Work from home, health, diverse challenges and psychological domain

Introduction

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted an unprecedented shift in the global workforce, compelling organizations and employees to rapidly adapt to remote work arrangements. As the dynamics of traditional office spaces transformed, the work-from-home (WFH) paradigm emerged as a prevailing mode of operation, offering newfound flexibility but also presenting a myriad of challenges. This study delves into the multifaceted difficulties faced by employees during their WFH experiences, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced impact on both professional and personal aspects of their lives.

The transition to remote work has ushered in a new era of work-life balance, with employees navigating through various obstacles in virtual workspaces. From concentration and communication challenges to the profound effects on physical and mental well-being, the complexities of remote work have become increasingly apparent. This study endeavors to shed light on the diverse range of challenges encountered by WFH employees, examining these issues through the lens of percentage distributions to offer a quantitative perspective on their prevalence.

By comprehensively exploring the challenges associated with remote work, this research aims to contribute insights that can inform strategies for organizations, policymakers,

and individuals alike. As remote work continues to be a pervasive feature of the modern work landscape, understanding and addressing these challenges become paramount for fostering a healthy, productive, and sustainable remote work environment. The following sections present an in-depth analysis of the percentage-based distribution of challenges across various domains, providing a nuanced perspective on the intricate interplay between remote work and employee well-being.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Hubli-Dharwad twin cities of Karnataka state. The representative sample of 220 work from home employees were selected by purposive random technique depending upon their willingness to participate in the study. The sample comprised of both gender. Respondents were drawn from various industries and professional backgrounds to ensure a broad representation of experiences.

Data Collection: A structured questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on the challenges faced by WFH employees. The questionnaire included Likert-scale questions, allowing respondents to express the intensity of their agreement or disagreement with specific challenges. Respondents were provided with clear instructions and

definitions for each challenge category to ensure consistency in responses. The survey was distributed electronically and respondents were given sufficient time to complete it.

Categories of Challenges: Challenges were categorized into distinct domains, including general problems, family issues, financial concerns, social challenges, behavioral disturbances, and psychological problems. Each category aimed to capture a comprehensive overview of the

challenges associated with remote work.

Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods to determine the prevalence and intensity of each reported challenge. The weighted mean scores were calculated for Likert-scale responses, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the severity of each difficulty. Responses were presented as percentages to highlight the distribution of challenges within each category. This approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the challenges faced by WFH employees.

Table 1: Difficulties faced by WFH employees during work from home mode

N=220

Particulars	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Weighted mean score	Rank
Concentration problem	186 (84.54)	22(10.00)	12(05.46)	1.79	VII
Distractions at home	201 (91.36)	15(6.82)	4(01.82)	1.89	III
Reduced supervision and direction	161 (73.18)	46(20.90)	13(05.92)	1.62	IX
Communication and coordination problem	189 (85.90)	24(10.91)	7(03.19)	1.82	VI
Social isolation	132 (60.00)	58(26.36)	30(13.64)	1.46	XI
Loneliness	53 (24.09)	78(35.45)	89(40.46)	0.83	XIII
Not having proper workstation/ work space at home	162(73.63)	32(14.55)	26(11.89)	1.61	X
More difficult to stop working at end of day as WFH is longer than working from office	200 (90.91)	18(8.18)	2(0.91)	1.90	II
Reduced weight due to work stress	42 (19.09)	54(24.54)	124(56.37)	0.62	XIV
Gained weight, as WFH involve lesser physical activity	198(90.00)	18(8.18)	4(01.82)	1.88	IV
Get sick little easier due to low immunity	9(04.09)	52(23.63)	159(72.28)	0.31	XVI
Skip food due to work load and leading to poor health	208(94.54)	10(04.55)	2(0.91)	1.93	I
Frequent eating at home	2(0.90)	8(03.63)	210(95.47)	0.05	XVII
Have the relationship in the home improved	89(40.45)	100(45.46)	31(14.09)	1.26	XII
Due to heavy work difficulty to concentrate much on health until it become worse	188(85.45)	22(10.00)	10(04.55)	1.80	VII
Due to work from home lesser time for exercise	198(90.00)	18(08.18)	4(01.82)	1.88	IV
Become lethargic due to work from home and reduced my physical activities	198(90.00)	18(08.18)	4(01.82)	1.88	IV
Spend more money on hotels/restaurants because no time cook	45(20.45)	32(14.56)	143(65.00)	0.55	XV
Do not concentrate on self grooming and feel to go back to office	198(90.00)	8(03.63)	14(06.37)	1.83	V

*Multiple responses

Figures in the parentheses indicates percentages

Table 2: Problems faced by WFH employees during work from home

N=220

Problems	Always	Sometimes	Never	Weighted mean score	Rank
General problems					
Concern about job security	86(39.09)	42(19.09)	92(41.82)	0.97	X
Work requests from managers and colleagues after scheduled work hours and / or at their convenience	198(90.00)	11(05.00)	11(05.00)	1.85	III
Spend more time working from home	185(84.09)	24(10.91)	11(05.00)	1.79	VII
Colleagues not responding on time	179(81.36)	38(17.27)	3(01.37)	1.80	VI
Disturbance from family members, especially during virtual meetings	218(99.09)	2(0.91)	-	1.99	I
Expectation of family members to help in house hold chores	189(85.91)	22(10.00)	9(04.09)	1.81	V
Communication with colleagues is harder	179(81.36)	23(10.45)	18(08.19)	1.73	VIII
Poor social interaction	192(87.27)	26(11.81)	2(0.92)	1.86	II
Poor internet connectivity	52(23.63)	98(44.54)	70(31.83)	0.91	XI
Privacy issues at home	188(85.45)	28(12.72)	4(01.83)	1.83	IV
Too many distractions at home	189(85.91)	22(10.00)	9(04.09)	1.71	IX
Lack of support in household work from family members	28(12.72)	98(44.54)	94(42.74)	0.70	XII
Family problems					
Parents conflict	56 (25.45)	88 (40.00)	76 (34.55)	0.90	II
Child care problem	52 (23.64)	69 (31.36)	99 (45.00)	0.78	III
Siblings conflict	44 (20.00)	98 (44.54)	78 (35.46)	0.71	IV
Relation with wife/husband is good	99 (45.00)	73 (33.18)	48 (21.82)	1.23	I
Relation with in laws in good	99 (45.00)	73 (33.18)	48 (21.82)	1.23	I
Financial problems					
Due to COVID salary has been reduced	-	38 (17.27)	182 (82.73)	0.17	III

Have personal financial problems	52 (23.63)	80 (36.37)	88 (40.00)	0.83	I
Less incentives	32 (14.54)	42 (19.09)	146 (66.37)	0.48	II
Social problems					
Not knowing much about colleagues due to WFH	69 (31.36)	115 (52.27)	36 (16.37)	1.15	I
No social interactions	75 (34.09)	76 (34.54)	69 (31.37)	1.02	III
No hangouts with friends	75 (34.09)	76 (34.54)	69 (31.37)	1.02	III
Difficulty in rapport building with colleagues	70 (31.81)	88 (40.00)	62 (28.19)	1.03	II
Behavioral disturbances					
Aggressive nature due to more work pressure	122 (55.45)	56 (25.46)	42 (19.09)	1.36	I
Sleep disturbance	88 (40.00)	101 (45.91)	31 (14.09)	1.05	III
Irritability	62 (28.18)	87 (39.54)	71 (32.28)	0.95	V
Anxiety	62 (28.18)	98 (44.54)	60 (27.28)	1	IV
Mood swings	75 (34.09)	102 (46.36)	43 (19.55)	1.14	II

*Multiple responses

Figures in the parentheses indicates percentages

Table 3: Diverse challenges encountered by WFH employees

N=220

Particulars	Mean score	Rank
General problems	1.57	II
Family problems	0.97	VIII
Financial problems	0.49	X
Social problems	1.05	VII
Behavioral problems	1.10	VI
Psychological problems	1.10	VI
Gastrointestinal problems	1.18	V
Eye problems	1.27	III
Ear problems	0.39	XI
Body pain/discomfort	2.15	I
Work demand	1.57	II
Feeling of exhaustion	1.25	IV
Workload perception	0.74	IX

Result and Discussion

The survey of 220 work-from-home (WFH) employees revealed a wide array of challenges they encountered during remote work. These difficulties encompassed general problems such as job security concerns, work requests beyond scheduled hours, and family disturbances during virtual meetings. Communication obstacles with colleagues and limited social interactions were also prominent issues, along the data from Table 1 indicates the difficulties faced by employees working from home (WFH) during the pandemic. The findings revealed that concentration problems and distractions at home were among the most prominent challenges faced by employees. The lack of a structured office environment seemed to negatively impact their ability to focus, affecting overall productivity. Additionally, reduced supervision and direction were also noted as concerns, indicating a need for better support systems and communication channels to ensure employees feel adequately guided in their WFH setup. Furthermore, the extended working hours at home were identified as a significant challenge, making it more difficult for employees to disconnect from work, leading to potential burnout and work-life balance issues.

Another crucial aspect highlighted by the survey was the impact of WFH on employees' physical and mental health. A significant number of respondents reported gaining weight and experiencing reduced immunity due to reduced physical activity. This indicates a need for companies to promote employee wellness initiatives and encourage regular exercise, even in a remote work environment.

Moreover, the study pointed out that the WFH arrangement may have led to neglect of self-care and grooming, as employees expressed feeling less motivated to maintain their appearance when not in the office setting. These findings underline the importance of providing adequate resources and support to help employees maintain their well-being while working remotely. Overall, addressing these difficulties can lead to a more successful and sustainable WFH model, benefiting both employees and organizations. In lines with Vijaylaxmi (2020) [9] has depicted that the biggest challenges for both men and women were receiving more work requests from managers as well as from colleagues after office hours at their convenience (77.00% and 89.00%). Meenakshi and Neha (2020) [5] in their study observed that working from home might lead to a lot of distractions. One must attend the visitors, cook for the family, clean the house, and supervise the children. Also working from home causes an employee to feel disconnected from his or her employer as well as a lack of community feeling and attachment.

Shachi (2020) [10] found that it might be tough to adjust to a virtual work environment for the employees because it did not feel like home as an actual office work atmosphere. A virtual workplace is a optional activity in which no one wants to put any effort. New employees, in particular, who find it difficult to bond with their new coworkers, have little opportunities to interact with them outside of team meetings.

The findings from Table 2 reveal a range of challenges faced by employees working from home (WFH) during the pandemic. with poor internet connectivity and privacy concerns at home. In lines with Sridevi and Sanjana (2021) [7] study has revealed that respondents felt there were health issues and lack of communication (37.00). Kazi and Zahir (2020) [4] revealed that internet connectivity and sticking to a regular schedule as the two most difficult aspects of telecommuting by majority of respondents. Vijaylaxmi (2020) [9] has depicted keeping family members away from workspace-especially during meetings (52.00%- male and 60%-female) and not having access for the workstation or workspace.

Financial problems, including reduced salaries due to the COVID-19 impact, added further strain. Family-related challenges, such as conflicts and child care issues, were evident, though positive relationships with spouses and in-laws were also reported. Moreover, WFH employees faced social isolation, hindering rapport-building with colleagues

and hampering social interactions with friends.

A study has found that financial wellbeing (FWL) has significant impact on three factors like behaviors, financial management and financial literacy. Financial problems had significant impact on financial well being, whereas stress has no significant impact on financial well-being (Sonakshi, 2020) ^[6].

The survey also identified behavioral disturbances, with heightened aggression, sleep disturbances, irritability, anxiety, and mood swings attributed to increased work pressure. This comprehensive analysis underscores the need for addressing these multifaceted issues to enhance the WFH experience. Effective solutions may include strengthening communication channels, promoting social interactions through virtual activities, and implementing mental health support programs. Organizations should also strive to establish a better work-life balance for employees, offering flexible schedules and support for household responsibilities. By acknowledging and mitigating these challenges, companies can foster a more productive and contented remote work environment, ensuring the long-term success and well-being of their WFH employees.

WFH may negatively affect physical and mental health, as well as wellbeing and productivity at work (e.g. Eurofound and ILO, 2017; Gajendran and Harrison, 2007) ^[1, 2]. Without addressing these issues, WFH may have detrimental outcomes such as social isolation, work-home conflict, and job intensification. Potential concerns of technology, working environment, communication, and management are interrelated (e.g. Bentley *et al.*, 2016; Eddleston and Mulki, 2017) ^[11, 12]. Due to their conflicting personal and professional obligations, WFH may experience more problems with their work-life balance (Holgersen *et al.*, 2021) ^[3].

The data is derived from responses given by 220 WFH employees, shedding light on the diverse challenges they encounter while working remotely is depicted in Table 3. At the forefront of the list, with the highest mean score of 2.15, is the concern of body pain and discomfort. This highlights a significant issue among WFH employees, as they experience physical discomfort, likely arising from extended periods of sitting or inadequate ergonomic setups. Addressing this problem becomes essential to promote the well-being and productivity of remote workers.

Following closely behind, with a mean score of 1.57, are two interconnected challenges: general problems and work demand. WFH employees face general issues related to their work responsibilities and demands, potentially leading to stress and pressure. Finding ways to effectively manage workloads and ensure a healthy work-life balance becomes crucial in addressing these concerns.

Eye problems ranked in the third position with a mean score of 1.27, emphasizing the importance of eye care for remote workers who spend long hours in front of screens. Implementing strategies to reduce digital eye strain and providing frequent breaks can significantly alleviate this issue.

Feeling of exhaustion attained the fourth position with a mean score of 1.25, signaling that WFH employees may experience fatigue and burnout due to the blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Encouraging regular breaks, setting clear boundaries, and promoting self-

care are essential in mitigating this problem.

Psychological problems and behavioral problems are tied in the sixth position, each with a mean score of 1.10. This suggests that WFH employees may face psychological stress and behavioral challenges as they adapt to the remote work environment. Employers should prioritize mental health support and create a supportive work culture to address these concerns effectively.

Social problems, ranked seventh with a mean score of 1.05, indicate that WFH employees may encounter difficulties in maintaining social connections and interactions. Encouraging virtual team-building activities and facilitating communication can help combat feelings of isolation and promote a sense of belonging among remote workers.

Gastrointestinal problems and workload perception occupy the eighth and ninth positions, respectively, with mean scores of 1.18 and 0.74. These findings underscore the significance of addressing digestive issues arising from work-related stress and ensuring employees feel adequately supported in managing their workloads.

Family problems and financial problems ranked lower in the table, with mean scores of 0.97 and 0.49, respectively. However, employers should not disregard these concerns, as they can still impact employee well-being and productivity. Offering resources and assistance to address family and financial challenges can create a more supportive work environment for WFH employees.

Lastly, ear problems, with a mean score of 0.39, reflect that a smaller percentage of WFH employees experience issues related to their ears. Nevertheless, taking measures to ensure ergonomic and safe use of headsets and earphones is essential in preventing potential ear discomfort.

Understanding and addressing these challenges is essential for organizations to provide appropriate support and solutions to enhance the well-being and effectiveness of their remote workforce. Implementing measures to reduce physical discomfort, managing work demands, and fostering a supportive work environment can mitigate these challenges and promote a healthier and more productive WFH experience for employees.

Conclusion

To sum up, this study offers a detailed exploration of the challenges confronted by employees engaged in remote work, specifically emphasizing the percentage distribution of these challenges. The findings paint a nuanced picture of the diverse difficulties, encompassing issues such as concentration problems, communication hurdles, and various health-related matters. Presenting the responses in percentages provides a quantitative perspective, enabling a more precise understanding of the prevalence and significance of each challenge.

The study highlights the intricate nature of challenges associated with remote work, underscoring the necessity for tailored strategies to address each distinct category effectively. Challenges like concentration issues, home distractions, and communication barriers emerged as prominent, reflecting the unique dynamics of virtual work environments. The repercussions on both physical and mental health, evident in concerns like heightened stress, sleep disturbances, and changes in eating habits, emphasize the holistic impact of remote work challenges.

Beyond professional considerations, the study delves into family dynamics, financial concerns, social interactions, and behavioral aspects, showcasing the interconnected nature of remote work challenges with broader life domains. Recognizing this interconnectedness is vital for organizations and policymakers aiming to create work environments that support overall employee well-being.

As remote work becomes an integral part of organizational structures, the insights derived from this study can guide the formulation of targeted interventions and policies. Employers can implement measures to improve communication channels, provide mental health support, and encourage a balanced work-life dynamic. Likewise, individual employees can utilize these findings to proactively address challenges and adopt effective coping mechanisms.

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary work, acknowledging and mitigating the challenges associated with remote work is paramount for fostering a resilient and flourishing workforce. Organizations, by prioritizing employee well-being, can contribute to the development of sustainable and fulfilling remote work environments. This approach ensures that the advantages of flexibility are maximized without compromising the health and productivity of the workforce, ultimately fostering a work culture that is adaptive, supportive, and conducive to both professional and personal growth.

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