



Work from Home: Experiences of Employees via Health Behavior and Well Being

Sandeep Bhardwaj (Research Scholar, Baba Mastnath University, Rohtak, Haryana)

Dr. Hema Singla (Associate Professor, Faculty of Management and Commerce, Baba Mastnath University, Rohtak, Haryana)

Abstract

Work from home is a practice that was followed since the last few decades. But after COVID 19, work from home practice became popular throughout the worldwide. Apart from many benefits that it provided to the employees it has some consequences also. There are a number of studies that have reported both positive and negative effects of WFH on productivity, depending on skills, education, tasks or industry. Work from home has consequences on the health behavior as well as on the well-being of the employees. This present study tried to find out the effect of work from home on the health and well-being of the employees. It was found from the previous review of literature that it has negative impact on the health of the employees.

Introduction

Work from home is known by many names namely: remote working, work shifting, telecommuting, e-working, virtual working and distance working. Work from home has a long history since the time of 1800.

For instance, in the 1970s, remote work was thought to be a means to minimize the heavy reliance on the importation of fuel for transport, and work arrangement for future telework. Furthermore, some small businesses used part of their home for provision stores (selling simple groceries, among other items)¹.

Furthermore mainly work from home (WFH) emerged in the early 2000s, when telecommuting technologies started to develop and workers could WFH to avoid commuting, provide flexibility in schedules, and achieve a better work-life balance



WFH has been studied as a form of telework and mobile working or under the banner of telework, which has been defined as follows based on a comprehensive literature review: Telework is “a work practice that involves members of an organization substituting a portion of their typical work hours (ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time) to work away from a central workplace—typically principally from home—using technology to interact with others as needed to conduct work tasks”. As a work practice, WFH means that an employee performs work-related activities from their home rather than being physically present at an employer location, typically using digital technology.²

WFH is an employment arrangement in which employees are not required to physically report to a central place of work, such as an office building, warehouse, or retail shop, etc., but instead work from their home or any offsite location (remote work, (RW)) while keeping communication with colleagues and performing duties using telephone, email, and virtual conferences (telework, (TW)).

WFH falls into the category of remote work; existing research has identified factors that increase employee job satisfaction of remote work, including income, working hours, free time, appropriate physical activity, the frequency of remote work, work location, social interaction and technical support, position, company training, relationship with supervisors and environmental conditions at work.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, many organizations have made changes to their operations, introduction of WFH arrangements, despite the fact that many of these organizations lack the necessary experience and are opposed to WFH by their respective professional communities (Kramer and Kramer, 2020)³.

Even two years after the outbreak of COVID-19, physical distancing measures are still ongoing, and the level of individuals working from home (WFH) is quite high. Working from home (interchangeably referred to as telework or remote work) is not a novel concept, as it had been practiced to some extent in the pre-COVID-19 era.

The declaration of a new virus known as COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus, has stunned people all around the globe. As this virus spreads quickly and vaccines are limited or nonexistent, thus making it difficult to contain the pandemic, as no safeguards



against viral transmission have occurred. In addition, due to difficulties in the economic pace, this has had significant impacts on all aspects of life, including livelihoods and businesses⁴.

Therefore during the COVID-19 pandemic, working from home unquestionably became one of the most extensively employed techniques to minimize unemployment, keep society operating, and shield the public from the virus.

However companies are increasingly enabling their employees to work from home for several reasons, including cheaper office rent costs, improved work–life balance, travel-time savings, and minimizing the spread of the deadly virus.

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To diagnose the scenario of working from home.
2. To investigate the effect of WFH on the health of individuals.

Review of Literature

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted the global economy in different ways. In particular, the radical shift to teleworking has significantly changed the way people work. The question of whether the new work from home (WFH) style will remain highly present in our society depends on its effects on worker productivity. However the effects of teleworking on productivity are not yet clear. Via surveys conducted at four manufacturing companies in Japan, researchers identify possible drivers of productivity changes thanks to WFH. The conclusions are as follows: (i) after excluding the time-invariant hypothesis component of individual productivity and distinct trends specific to employee attributes, they find that productivity declined more for workers who worked from home than for those who did so not (ii) their analysis shows that poor teleworking setups and communication difficulties are the main causes (iii) Third, they find that the mental health of workers who working from home is significantly better than workers who cannot work from home. The results suggested that if appropriate investments can be made in upgrading WFH configurations and Facilitating communication, WFH can improve productivity by improving employee health and well-being⁵.



Well-being has always been a topic of interest for individuals, organizations and policy makers. Covid-19 pandemic created this is extremely relevant as employees have been forced to work from home due to successive lockdowns imposed by Governments. This situation has raised concerns about the well-being of employees because of the implementation of these strict measures. In their study, they examined the direct and indirect effects of adaptability, work-family conflicts and organizational response on employee well-being through the mediating role of perceived stress. Data was collected from 184 employees working in various organizations in Malaysia and analyzed using Smart-PLS structural equation modeling with bootstrapping procedure. The results indicated that the organization response, work-family conflict, and adaptability directly affect perceived stress and well-being, with the exception of organizational factors. Additionally, perceived stress was found to play a mediating role in the relationship of organizational response and work-family conflict with well-being but not adaptability⁶.

Very few studies have been done recently on the effects of working from home on mental health. It is also questionable whether older literature was up to date before the current Covid-19 outbreak or not. The growing trend of working from home presents a golden opportunity to explore this topic in depth. Crawford et al. (2011) conducted a study to shed light on the lack of literature linking remote employment and health. The overarching goal of the study is to fill this knowledge gap by gathering and analyzing information from various sources about remote workers and the effects of this trend on their well-being from three distinct perspectives: social, economic and psychological.

Data was collected using qualitative methodology, including semi-structured interviews. 12 HR employees participated in this research. They had all worked remotely before Covid part time and since Covid it has been full time. Researchers used semi-structured interviews to better understand how remote workers' experiences affect their well-being due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Microsoft Office themes were used to record and transcribe the interviews.

To achieve the research objectives of this study, thematic analysis was used to establish five overarching themes. To draw conclusions, the positive and negative effects of remote work on people's health and happiness was drawn. Due to the current Covid 19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews within the same organization were not possible, which



constitutes a limitation of this study. It is doubtful, due to the unknown future, whether this study actually reflects the current state of affairs⁷.

Working from home is a well-known concept in the IT industry and is gradually attracting the attention of non-IT professionals and sectors as well. This article reviews the nature, advantages, necessity and disadvantages of working from home from employer perspective and employee perspective. Data was collected from nine IT organizations and have been analyzed using various tools and techniques to draw the conclusion of this note research. It also integrates the opinions shared by employees and managers through qualitative analyzes and quantitative data that illustrates the current work from home scenarios in the IT industry and its possibilities solutions to overcome difficulties⁸.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has made a large part of the population workforce unable to come to work, in order to mitigate the spread of the virus. This has induces a change in the working arrangements of millions of employees towards work from Home (FMH). The objective of this study was to assess the impacts of teleworking on health of workers and analyze the important stress factors among each category of social factors, mental and physical well-being. Approximately 30% of participants reported continuity of FMH considering physical and mental problems, while more than 50% preferred WFH given the social impacts. Subjective responses of two people online surveys were analyzed to understand factors associated with holistic health. Although some are unhealthy behaviors appear to have become worse, other healthier behaviors as well emerged. Due to the flexibilities offered, WFH may continue to operate in some cases. To make this arrangement feasible and contribute effectively to productive work, organizations will need to implement formalized decisions on continuity of the WFH model based on the individual impact analysis taking into account demographic and professional variables of different workers. Based on the study recommendations were made for longitudinal studies to investigate the dynamics remote work⁹.

Work from home suitable for whom?

Work from home suits for the employees whose work can be performed with minimum supervision and no physical presence needed for completing the assigned tasks.



IT, ITES and some of the computer-based jobs can be performed from home as the computer and internet play a vital role in such kind of employment. WFH may not be suitable for the majority of the tasks such as banking, railway, classroom teaching, manufacturing industry and construction-related work as the jobs demand a definite necessity of the physical presence of the employee at the office or site to perform the assignment.

WFH has become part of everyday life for many employees, and it can be assumed that a growing proportion of weekly working hours will continue to be performed at home in the future. In Germany, there are different regulations regarding remote workplaces¹⁰.

Impact of Work from Home

Beyond that, scholars initially investigated the associations between WFH and employee job satisfaction in terms of individual needs

Several studies have also reported both positive and negative effects of WFH on productivity, depending on skills, education, tasks or industry. For example, Etheridge et al.¹¹ reported that in the U.K., while workers who have increased their intensity of WFH reported substantial productivity increases, those who previously always worked from home, women and those in low-paying jobs suffered the worst average declines in productivity. The paper also reported that declines in productivity are strongly associated with declines in mental well-being. Using firm surveys, Bartik et al.¹² reported that employers think that there have been less productivity losses from remote working in better educated and higher paying industries. Dutcher indicated that WFH may have positive effects on productivity in creative tasks but negative effects on productivity in dull tasks. In summary, although there has been a rapid accumulation of studies on WFH and productivity, the reported evidence is mixed, and we believe that additional evidence on when WFH is productivity-enhancing is needed.

Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic has a big impact on the views of employees and employers. In a study by Bonin and colleagues, up to 93% of the employees surveyed would like to have the option of WFH even after the COVID-19 pandemic. Most employees want a hybrid model with workdays in the office as well as workdays in the home office. Reasons for this from the employee perspective include, e.g., increased subjectively perceived productivity, higher job satisfaction, higher autonomy, and better work-life balance. From the perspective of occupational health, it is also important to assess the



potential health effects of WFH. The following section summarizes empirical findings on possible health effects of WFH.

WFH allows employees to choose working at times when they are most productive, and WFH can be beneficial for avoiding distractions from coworkers, especially in open plan offices. With options to WFH, workers can take a break from their offices and focus on organizing an individualized approach to their work-life balance that can promote a healthier lifestyle, a benefit for both physical and mental health. Finally, workers may have more control of environmental factors when WFH; indoor environmental quality (IEQ) factors (eg, lighting, temperature, humidity, air quality, noise, ergonomics, etc.) are important for physical and mental health of workers¹³.

Employees' Health in Home Office

A growing number of studies examine the health effects of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic. These may not be directly comparable to studies conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic that depict “normal” WFH conditions because of specific differences (e.g., rushed transformation process, low technical equipment). Studies of telework report both positive and negative health effects, and the overall effect is poorly understood, with positive health effects seemingly predominating.

On the one hand, telework offers some health-promoting effects. For example, the work environment at home can promote concentration, reduce the number of interruptions, and allow for more privacy. WFH during COVID-19 allows some employees more flexibility in terms of working hours, which may be associated with positive psychosocial outcomes. However, in another study, nearly 34% of home office workers reported that they split their work time between evenings and weekends, leading to a decrease in recovery periods. This is reinforced by the general tendency for working hours to increase during WFH, which, in turn, can have negative health consequences, e.g., on sleep quality and physical and mental health.

Moreover, contact restrictions to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting WFH may lead to social isolation. Isolation while WFH can also have negative health effects. Isolation can lead to the feeling of loneliness, which is a stressor that is associated with various health consequences, such as heart disease or mental illnesses, e.g., depression and



anxiety disorders. Loneliness, especially prolonged loneliness with no clear end, is a major contributor to depression and suicidality. In this context, loneliness can significantly reduce life satisfaction and thus increase the risk of suicide.

Overall, the question of whether WFH is beneficial or detrimental to health is multi-faceted and complex. To contribute to developing practical measures in occupational medicine and to better understand the health consequences of WFH, we examine individual characteristics of WFH in this study. The focus is on the following research questions: What characteristics of working from home positively or negatively influence health, i.e., work ability and stress-related physical and psychological symptoms? And what characteristics of working from home positively or negatively influence job satisfaction?

From a theoretical perspective, the effects of WFH on individual health and well-being are ambiguous. In general, WFH is expected to increase flexibility, which, in turn, might affect labor as well as health outcomes. On the one hand, WFH might have a positive impact on individual health and well-being through the following channels. First and most intuitive, WFH eliminates commuting and the corresponding stress. Second and related, in the case of WFH, the time that does not have to be spent commuting can be used for regeneration or physical activity, such as exercising, promoting total health. Moreover, commuting might be characterized by adverse health effects such as exposure to air pollution due to traffic jams when riding by cars. Third, WFH can help workers to reschedule constraints as well as to reconcile family and work life, particularly in the presence of young children. Consequently, it might improve the individual's work-life balance. Fourth, WFH might allow patients to recover from surgeries or illnesses smoothly at home instead of providing full working hours. Fifth, a reduction in social contacts due to WFH might lead to being less exposed to infectious diseases such as, most recently, the COVID-19 virus, but in principle other regular diseases such as classical influenza. Finally, WFH might ease the caring challenges associated with individual health issues or disabilities, especially in the case of severe handicaps¹⁴.

On the other hand, individual health and well-being might be negatively affected by WFH. First, WFH can be harmful by increasing the individual stress level. Working and living in different places enable us to separate both crucial parts of daily life and to tune out issues and problems related to one part while being active in the other. This separation



vanishes during high-intensity WFH and might result in increased stress when employees are trying to cope with both issues simultaneously. Second, WFH could also lead to excessive working beyond the usual office hours, which in the long run might have adverse effects when experienced on a substantial level. Third and related, WFH could release the pressure to be permanently reachable also on weekends. Due to corresponding concerns, some prominent companies have decided to shut down their mail servers on weekends to protect their employees' health. Fourth, WFH might amplify isolation and loneliness. Although video conferencing via the internet has become a widely accepted and important tool for interpersonal interaction, real social interaction continues to be an elementary need of humans. Fifth, WFH can be characterized by having bad posture and inappropriate work surfaces, when the employers are not legally obliged to take care of these issues. Sixth and last, the positive aspect of WFH in the case of minor sicknesses might be beneficial in the short run but might have negative health consequences in the long run when employees do not take enough downtime.

Current scenario

Some of the organizations that had provided an opportunity to work from home have withdrawn the option due to some facts and observations (Mahlon Apgar, 1998). Organizations that never opted for WFH have started giving the opportunity by considering the employee's requirements and cost factors related to the organizations.

Some of the organizations are continuing with the WFH with some appended policy based on the contemporary improvements in the industry and organization. Initially, this concept was familiar with IT based organizations as there are not much physical interactions and delivery can be performed remotely. Nowadays this practice opted by various Non-IT organizations, where the job can be completed from home with less impact. A year back, IBM had called thousands of WFH Employees back to the office, while other companies have disbanded their offices and had permitted employees to work from home

But along with the benefits of WFH, negative impacts on physical, mental and social health follow (Xiao, et al., 2021) (Oakman, et al., 2020) (Eddy, 2021). Thus WFH model impacts holistic health of humans. This study was taken up to explore the impact of WFH on



various health aspects among people of varied age-groups, different gender, varied work profiles and different family background.

Outcomes of WFH

Key messages Remote work from home has both positive and negative effects on mental well-being. Positive effects include: (i) Work-life and work-family balance is the most commonly reported favorable outcome of remote work from home. (ii) Reduced stress and strain due to reduced work-life/work-family conflict, more job control, and the lack of a commute to work. (iii) Opportunity for professional development, increased job satisfaction and less distractions. Negative effects include: (i) Poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression, and burnout. (ii) Increased work-life/work-family conflict. (iii) Increased experiences of stress and or strain; mental overload; time pressure, the lack of schedule and emotional exhaustion contribute to these experiences. (iv) Increased loneliness & social isolation¹⁵.

Multiple terms are used in this field: Telecommuting, telework, remote work, distance work, and virtual office are different terms referring to the same concept. The most commonly used terms in the literature include telework, remote work, and work from home. - Remote work from home and telework from home may provide the most accurate description of those working from home, away from the central organization.

Poor mental health is a risk factor for a number of chronic physical conditions and may impact one's ability to remain in the work force. Further, the workplace itself may pose a risk to mental health. The National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety has outlined risk factors for poor workplace mental health, including: psychological support; organizational culture; clear leadership and expectations; civility and respect; psychological job demands; growth and development; recognition and reward; involvement and influence; workload management; engagement; work-life balance; psychological protection from violence, bullying and harassment; protection of physical safety, and other chronic stressors. It is important to recognize that some of these risk factors may be more significant than others, depending on the work environment, and some may be more burdensome for employees who are working remotely from home working from a remote home office poses a number of



challenges, including workplace isolation, increased job stress, decreased job satisfaction, and poor communication, to name a few.

With virtual work from home being on the rise, in combination with the large-scale adoption of working from home due to the present-day pandemic, the need to better understand the impacts of virtual work from home has become significant. The body of evidence on the implications of working from a virtual home office has grown and so too has the need for synthesis of the available knowledge.

References

-
- ¹ *Remote work vs. work from home: All you need to know*. Gable. (n.d.).
<https://www.gable.to/blog/post/remote-work-vs-work-from-home-all-you-need-to-know>
- ² Niebuhr, F., Borle, P., Börner-Zobel, F., & Voelter-Mahlknecht, S. (2022). Healthy and happy working from home? effects of working from home on Employee Health and Job Satisfaction. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(3), 1122. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031122>
- ³ Kramer, A., & Kramer, K. Z. (2020). The potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on occupational status, work from home, and occupational mobility. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 119, 103442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103442>
- ⁴ Jain, T., Currie, G., & Aston, L. (2022). Covid and working from home: Long-term impacts and psycho-social determinants. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 156, 52–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2021.12.007>



-
- ⁵ KITAGAWA Ritsu & KURODA Sachiko & OKUDAIRA Hiroko & OWAN Hideo. (2021, February 2). *Working from home: Its effects on productivity and mental he*. Discussion papers. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/eti/dpaper/21024.html>
- ⁶ Al-Jubari, I., Mosbah, A., & Salem, S. F. (2022). Employee well-being during COVID-19 pandemic: The role of adaptability, work-family conflict, and organizational response. *SAGE Open*, 12(3), 215824402210961. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221096142>
- ⁷ What is the impact of remote working on employee well-being within a ... (n.d.). <https://norma.ncirl.ie/5886/1/cecilekizenga.pdf>
- ⁸ Ramasamy, Dr. K. (2020, May 27). *Introspection of work-from-home in IT industry*. SSRN. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3588381
- ⁹ Impacts of “work from home” model on human health. (2021). *International Journal of Environment and Health Sciences*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.47062/1190.0301.05>
- ¹⁰ Healthy and Happy Working from Home? Effects of Working from Home on Employee Health and Job Satisfaction
- ¹¹ Etheridge, Ben & Wang, Yikai & Tang, Li, (2020). "Worker productivity during lockdown and working from home: evidence from self-reports," ISER Working Paper Series 2020-12, Institute for Social and Economic Research.
- ¹² Bartik, Alexander, Marianne Bertrand, Zoe Cullen, Edward Glaeser, Michael Luca, and Christopher Stanton, 2020. “The Impact of COVID-19 on Small Business Outcomes and Expectations,” The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2020.
- ¹³ Xiao, Y., Becerik-Gerber, B., Lucas, G., & Roll, S. C. (2020). Impacts of working from home during COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental well-being of office workstation users. *Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, 63(3), 181–190. <https://doi.org/10.1097/jom.0000000000002097>
- ¹⁴ Wells, J., Scheibein, F., Pais, L., Rebelo dos Santos, N., Dalluege, C.-A., Czakert, J. P., & Berger, R. (2023). A systematic review of the impact of remote working referenced to the concept of work–life flow on physical and psychological health. *Workplace Health & Safety*, 71(11), 507–521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21650799231176397>



- ¹⁵ Yu, J., & Wu, Y. (2021, December 15). *The impact of enforced working from home on employee job satisfaction during COVID-19: An event system perspective*. MDPI. <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/24/13207>