

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PREFERENCES OF WORKING FROM HOME IN DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES: COMPARISON BETWEEN GENDERS

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Abstract

Covid 19 transformed the workplace, altering the physical workspaces to a virtual model, i.e., Work from Home ('WFH') mode. This shift created new issues for companies never dealt with before, like increased spending on the safety of their employees and a decline in the interest of the human resource at work. In this context, the study compares the preferences to work from home among different genders among 174 respondents belonging to different sectors using descriptive research. The comparison between different sectors indicates that preferences depend on the sectors. The study's limitations are that the respondents are from persons who are known acquaintances, as going out and interviewing the was difficult due to the prevailing situation of COVID-19. To adapt to the changing workplace, organizations need to adopt flexible policies to improve employee work experience to accommodate both works from home and physically working employees.

Key words: Covid-19, Workplace, Work from Home, Preference to work, Gender

Introduction

The pandemic accelerated transformations in the workplace have challenged the traditional roles and structures. Covid 19 changed how a company operates, and the managers now are grappling with people management strategies. The lockdown imposed witnessed the workplace shift from a physical mode to a Work from Home (referred to as 'WFH'). With work from home (WFH), people spent more time on laptops and phones. This pandemic affected the employees' physical health and the employees' mental health. The pandemic exposed various issues in terms of employees not having health insurance, digital access, lack of space to work from home, increasing caregiving responsibilities, exposure to domestic violence, loss of jobs and putting oneself at greater risk due to the nature of the job. In addition, working women had to handle their housework and family too, due to which they felt overburdened. The "Women in Workplace 2020" study found more women feeling exhausted than men. Men and women both have their responsibilities, and not giving proper time for family and work increases their work stress and anxiety in their lives. Generally, the accepted norm seems to be that women prefer to work from home more than men to spend time with their families.

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The international labour organization (ILO) (2020) estimates that 195 million full-time workers will lose their jobs worldwide this year (ILO 2020). Employees have to learn new skills that increase their employability in the digital area. The significant difficulties during the pandemic were organizations continuity, striving to reduce possible harmful effects of working from home help the workers set priorities. On the other hand, less socialization during the pandemic affects the employee's mental health. HR has to respond to this challenge by doing digitally meetings or online to take care of the motivation and productivity of employees. Online working also makes it difficult to control and monitor employees' activities. The potential solution that managers are using is online dashboards and digital data for accessing workload and performance.

The Covid-19 pandemic created new issues for companies never dealt with before, like increased spending on the safety of their employees, a decline in the interest of the human resource at work, and a shift to a hybrid workplace model. The Deloitte Global report 2020 indicates that the pandemic has taken a severe toll on women, with the majority becoming less optimistic about their career opportunities. Around seventy per cent of the respondents felt that their workload had increased, and more than 50 per cent of the respondents complained of harassment or non-inclusive behaviors in their workplaces during work from home situations. In addition, many respondents were also planning to leave the workforce within the next two years. Different genders are said to exhibit Risk aversion and apply incentive efforts in different manners in the workplace (Philosophy of Biology, 2007). present the meta-analysis of 150 psychology studies shows that although women are significantly more averse to risk, women are in some situations (Byrnes et al.,1999). New perspectives of gender also interlude in the experiences and preferences of working from different industries.

In addition, the study argued that situational or contextual factors were important for the experiences and preferences of both genders whilst working (Nierderle & Vusterlund,2007). Work from home is not unquestionably a new thing for the IT sector as there was an option to WFH prior to COVID-19, but after COVID-19, the WFH trend became the norm. The teaching sector was another sector WFH was adopted to teach due to the circumstances to prevent earning loss. This study examines these issues in different sectors and compares the preferences to work from home among different genders.

Literature review

Companies shifted to WFH due to the lockdown and the safety of the employees. WFH is not a new concept, as the companies usually call it flexible work, telecommuting etc. The crux of this kind of work was that it gave flexibility to the employee to execute his work at home at their own pace using technology. It was the Covid-19 that forced many businesses to opt for this mode as they had no other alternative to keep the businesses going. The initial mention of WFH refers to it as 'telecommuting' or 'telework (Messenger & Gschwind,2016; Nilles, 1988), over a period referred to in different terms like flexible workplace, remote work or e-workspace. In all these modes, technology is used to execute one's work, providing flexibility to work from not a designated physical office space but at the employee's convenience (Grant et al., 2019).

Certain jobs like financial, IT, management, and education can be done in a WFH mode . In contrast, it cannot work in healthcare, hospitality, farming, manufacturing and cargo services (Dingel & Neiman, 2020). There is an increase in a WFH mode of working. However, studies indicate that it has both advantages and disadvantages. Some of the advantages are saving time of commute (Grant et al., 2019), reducing work-life conflicts (Grant et al., 2019), higher productivity, job engagement (Delanoeije & Verbruggen, 2020). The disadvantage is that remote workers can experience communication issues with their line managers, even with the use of ICT technologies (Rysavy & Michalak, 2020), engenders an overlap between work and family-related concerns (Bouziri et al., 2020)

As per recent studies, women faced many mental health issues during the pandemic. The main reason behind it was that women had to work from home and work for home, which resulted in a lot of imbalances between the health and mental state of women. Men also did work from home during the pandemic. However, the study indicated that the burden of working women during the pandemic increased as most women had to balance between office and domestic work (Deshpande, 2020). For women, the number of working hours increased during the pandemic as they had to perform domestic and professional work, which led to less time for their sleep, which resulted in a lot of health issues like stress (Chauhan. P, 2021). Therefore, the pandemic has resulted in women shouldering more responsibilities at home and work.

In contrast, some employers have dealt with the issue where the women employees are satisfied with their careers. However, reports indicate that women are not choosing to return to work even after the situation normalizes as they juggle caregiving and career. Research conducted by McKinsey shows that around 1,000,000 people working in different sectors dropped out, of which 80% were women. In addition, most employees, irrespective of gender, experience limitations while working from home because they cannot focus only on the work at home. Hence, the family expects to spend time with the family too.

Objective of the Study

The study's objectives are

- (a) To understand the issues faced by different genders during WFH and
- (b) To identify the differences in the preferences of Work from Home among different genders in different industries.

Research Methodology

The study conducted from October 2021 to November 2021 adopted a descriptive research design. This method helps to cast light on issues through data collection, enabling a better description of the situation. The sampling technique used in this study is convenient random sampling. The questionnaire administered online consisted of three sections covering

- (a) Demographic profile,
- (b) Work from Home questionnaire and
- (c) Impact on Genders.

Out of Two hundred four responses collected, 174 complete responses were analyzed with the help of pie charts and bar graphs.

Data Analysis

The demographic profile of the respondents is as per Table1. The data revealed that most respondents had at least four members in their family.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Gender	Male	55.6%
	Female	43.6%
	Other Gender	12.2 %
Industry	Information Technology	18%
	Teaching	13.4%
	Banking	13.4%
	Manufacturing	10.5%
	Healthcare	19.2%
	Retail sector	22.7%
	Telecom sector	2.8%
Age Group	20-30	80.8%

Impact of COVID-19 on Preferences of Working From Home In Different Industries: Genders

	31-40	11%
	41-50	7%
	51-60	0.6%
	60 and above	0.6%
Area that you belong to	Rural area	8.2%
	Semi Rural Area	18%
	Semi Urban	11%
	Urban	62.8%

The data indicates that 68% of respondents did not work from home before the Covid 19 lockdown, and 32% of respondents had worked from home before the covid 19 lockdown. The maximum percentage of employees that had colleagues working from home or working flexitime before covid was 5% -8%, whereas during covid 19, lockdown or working flexitime was between 63% - 72%.

Employees' average number of work during evenings/night before the lockdown was between 6-12 hours, and an average number of hours worked by employees during evenings/night after the lockdown was between 10-14 hours. Most respondents indicated increased workload hours as the primary negative experience, followed by distractions at home increased work stress (Table 2). When the respondents were asked to indicate their preference for WFH, the majority (44.3%) preferred to Work From Home. The primary reason they indicated for their preference was that they could spend more time with the family, followed by the fear of catching the virus, spending time on other things and saving commuting time.

Most respondents felt that the managers supported the employees during WFH in the Covid-19 lockdown period and will continue to support even if they continue with WFH after the lockdown (Table 4 and Table 5).

Table 2: Negative experiences of WFH during covid

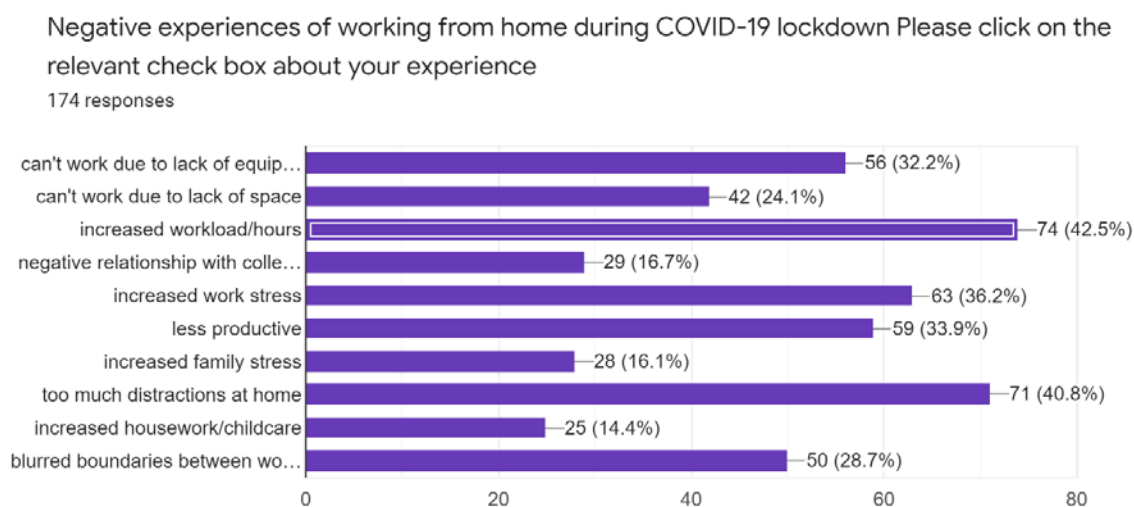


Table 3: reasons to Work from Home

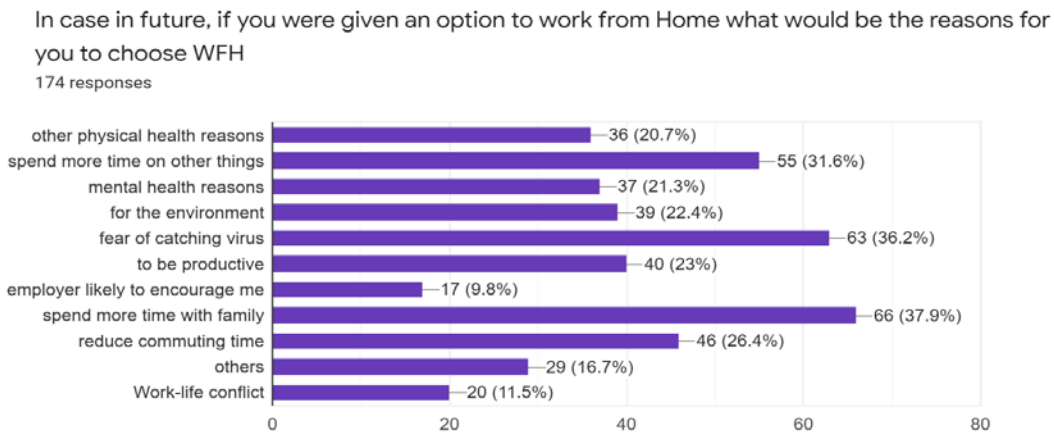


Table 4: Perception of management support during WFH in covid19 lockdown

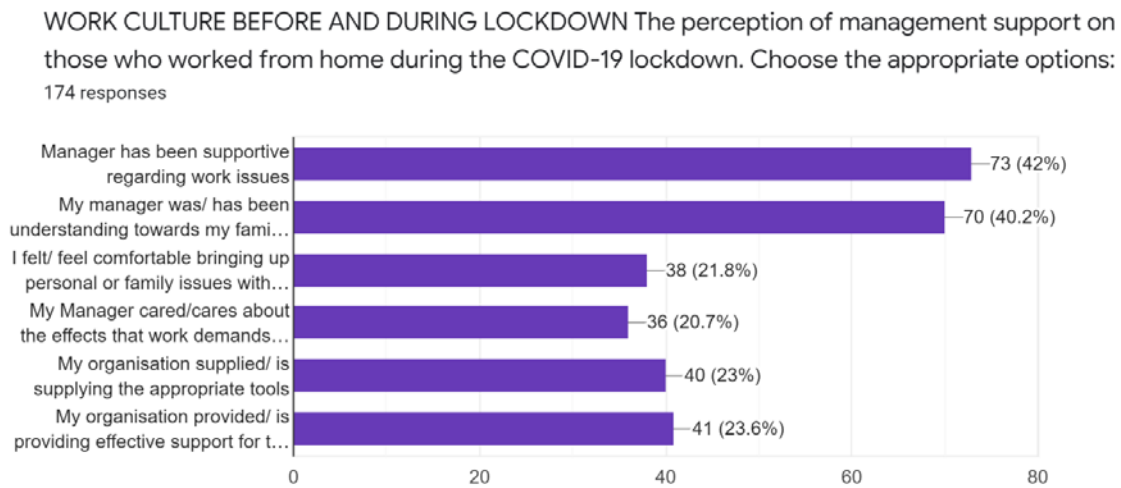
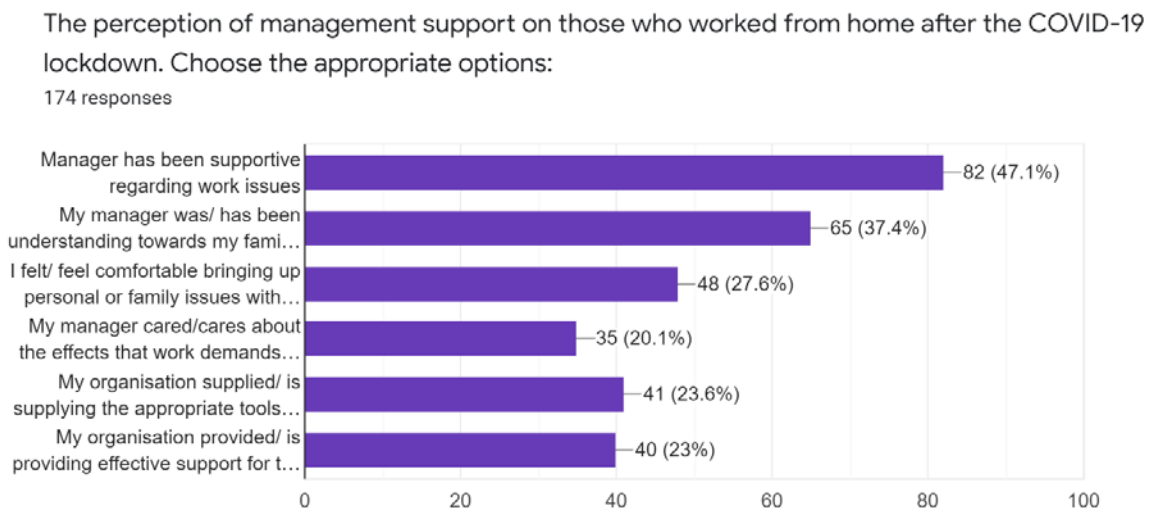
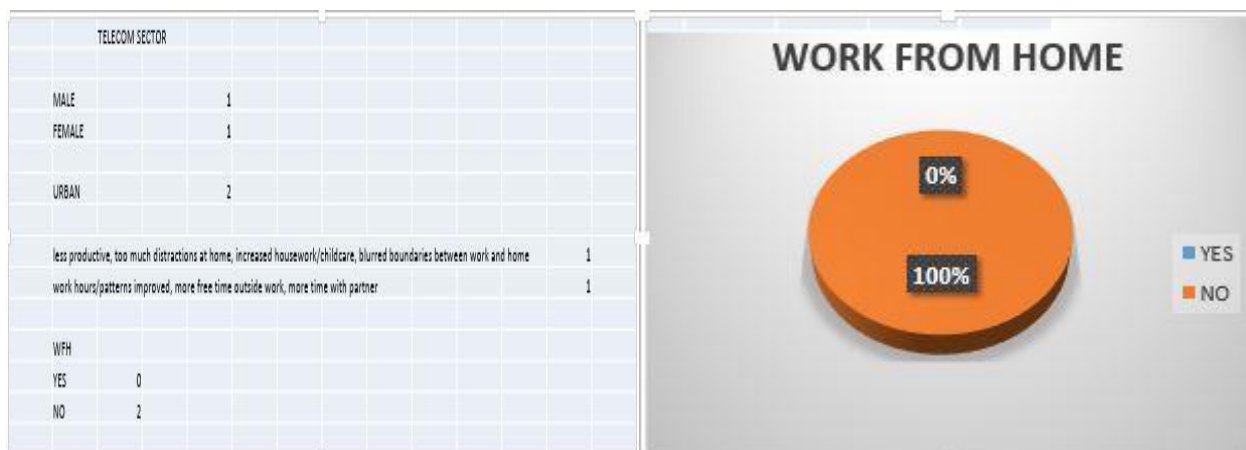


Table 5: Perception of Management Support on WFH after Covid-19 lockdown



Sector-wise Analysis

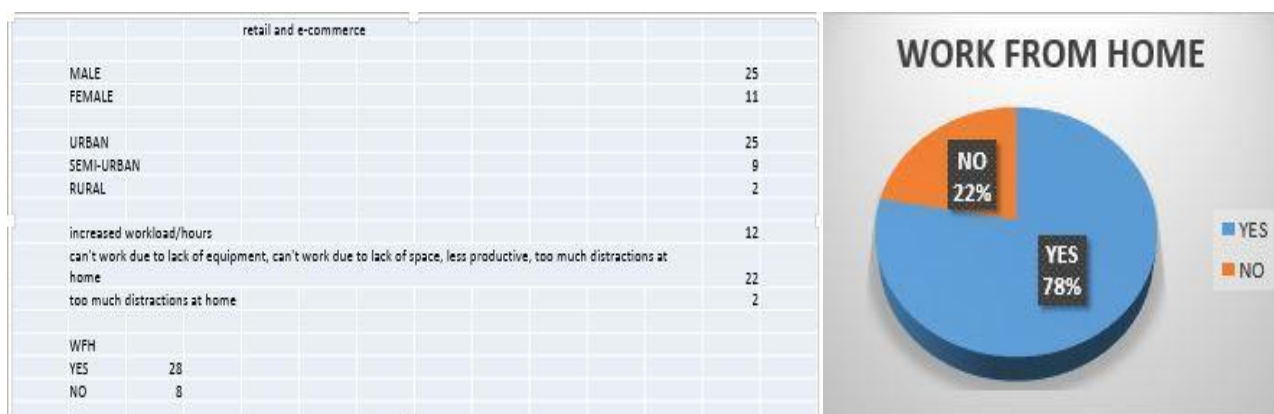
Telecom Sector



In the telecom sector, there was no difference in the gender in the preference for working from home.

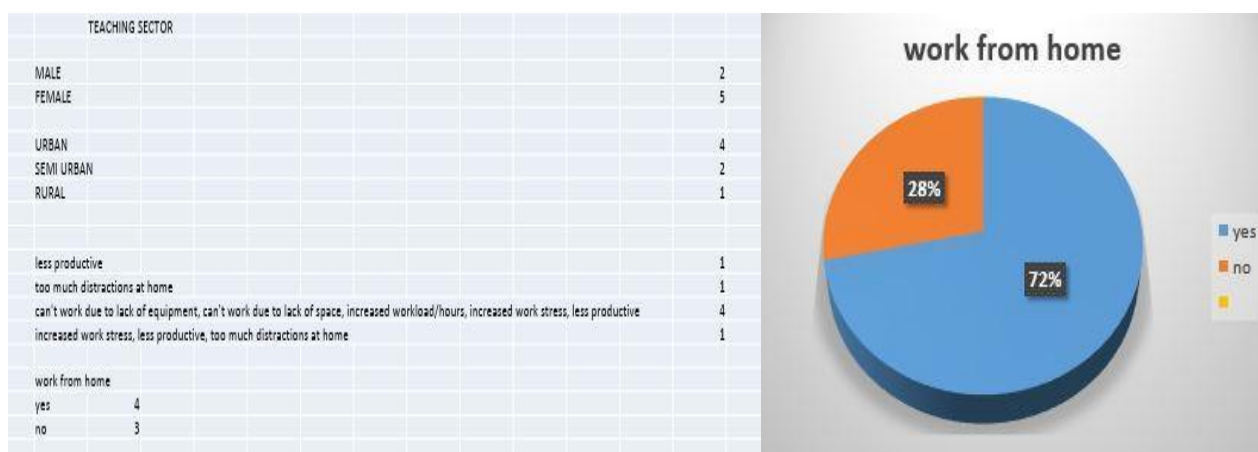
Retail and e-commerce

In this sector there was a difference in the gender preference for working from home with maore males preferring to work from home.



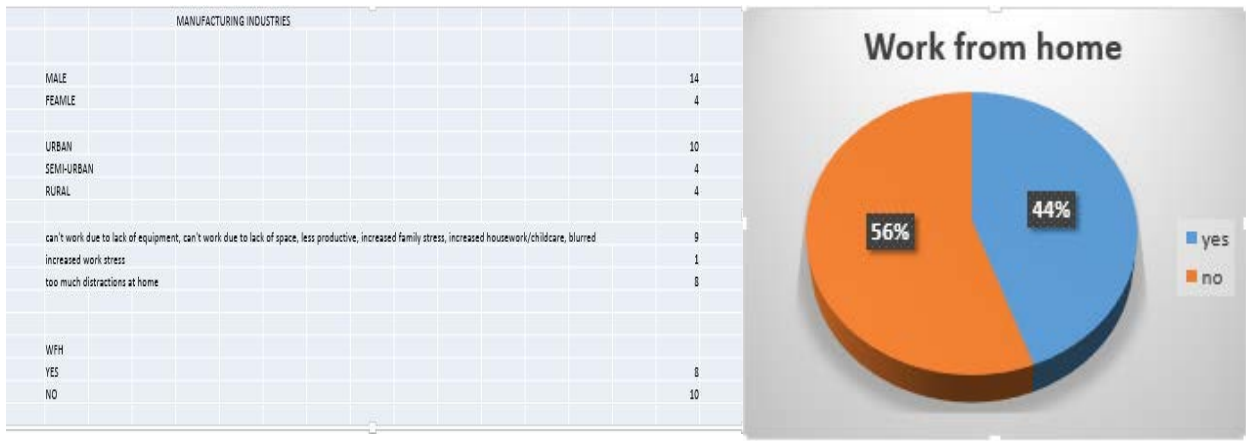
Teaching Sector

In this sector, there was a difference in the preference to work from home with more female preferring to work from home.



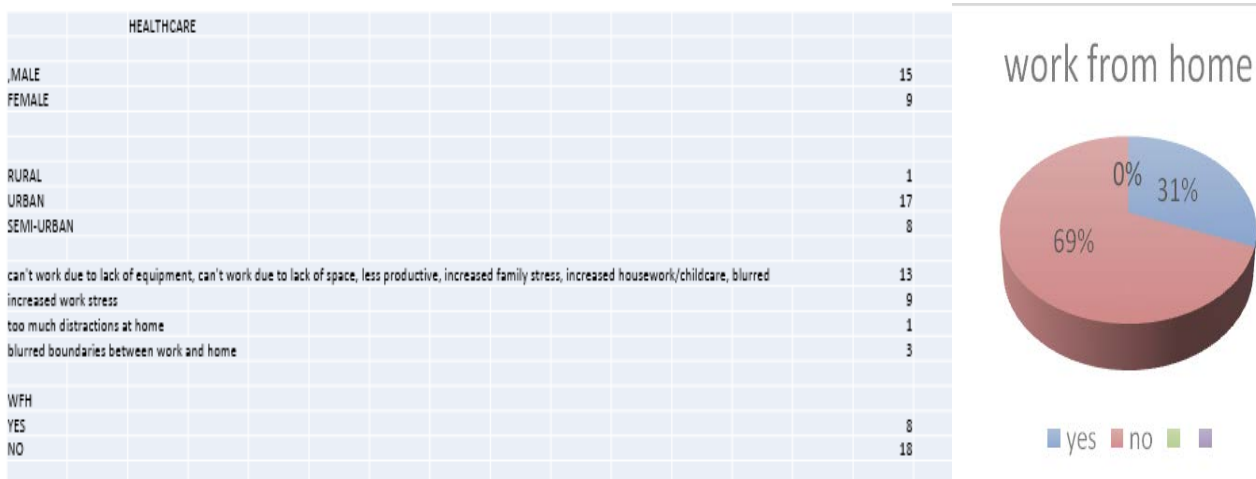
Manufacturing sector

In this sector both the genders did not prefer to work from home did not prefer to work from home



Healthcare sector

In this sector also there majority respondents did not prefer to work from home, there was no difference in preferences terms of gender.



Banking sector

In this sector, majority preferred to work from home and more preferred to work from home.



Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a massive problem for all people. In the context of dramatic changes worldwide due to pandemics, organizations need to respond and adapt to the alterations and accordingly manage the workforce. The comparison between different sectors indicates that preferences depend on the sectors. The companies can be more flexible and lenient to understand their workforce and lifestyle. Moreover, frequent meetings and follow-up programs can help connect and reduce the gap between the management and the workforce. The study's limitations are that the samples covered have been from people who are known acquaintances, as going out and interviewing the actual workforce was difficult due to the prevailing situation of COVID-19. The International students faced difficulties as they belonged from different regions with no lock-down. Thus, organizations need to adopt flexible policies to improve employee work experience to accommodate both WFH and physically working employees in the future.

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