

# **EXPERIENCES AND PREFERENCES OF WORKING FROM HOME IN DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES: COMPARISON BETWEEN GENDERS**

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## **Abstract**

Working from home has emerged as the only available option to sail through the storm called COVID-19 pandemic that has recently overwhelmed the various worldly aspects such as the economies, Societies as well as the Political aspect of life across the globe. Due to unforeseen panic and fear of the loss of lives of many, a number of organisations, both public and private, resolved to suspend working from the office as a resort, leading to the emergence of various connected issues which are capable of very likely impacting the economy and society in a reverse motion. The employees have showcased different perspectives and preferences regarding the declaration which mandated maintaining physical distance.

This report aims to study and analyse the different perspectives of employees belonging to different industries regarding the “work-from-home” concept and the subsequent gender-specific challenges faced by them. The study will help the managers in strategizing the work related policies for similar situations

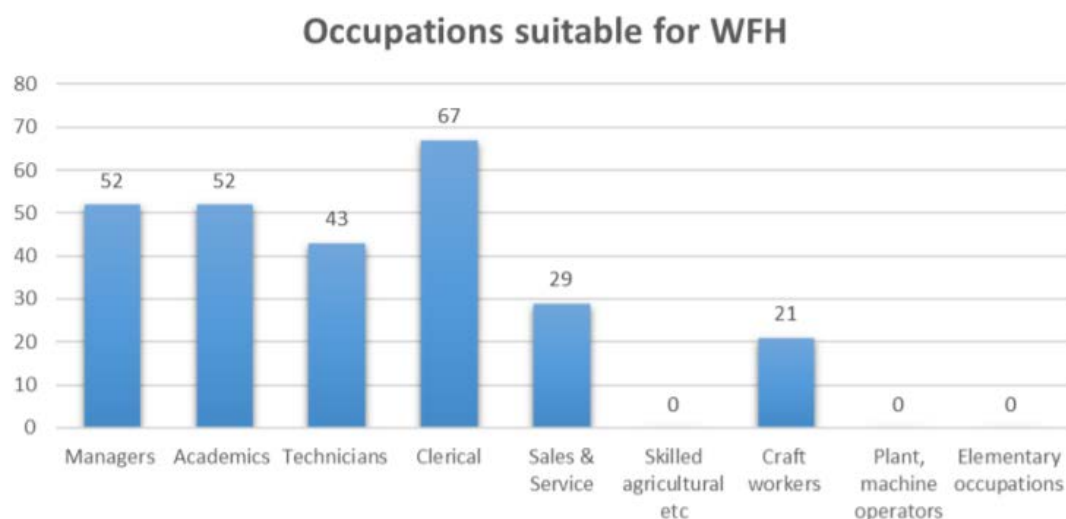
## **COVID 19**

The outbreak of Novel Covid-19 pandemic was actually a novel phenomenon faced across the globe. Since its very onset in December, 2019, the pandemic has been evolving in all aspects. The Indian subcontinent witnessed the first case in February, 2020, followed by its rapid and massive spread across the nation, amidst a brittle healthcare system. Worldwide imposition of lockdown came as a real surprise, which shook the economy immensely. Organizations were shut, employees and workers from all categories were unclear regarding the future prospects. In the absence of knowledge about the nature of the disease, the pattern of spread and the associated threats, life saving strategies gained the status of the top priority, rhyming with the saying “Jaan Hai to Jahaan Hai”. With a haphazard situation prevailing all around, new volumes of mandates kept on coming up which were capable enough to effect all the walks of a normal life. One such mandate was to maintain social distancing for the sake of containment of the viral spread. This emerged as a blow to the entire economy which came to a standstill. In order to cater to the situation, the seldom acclaimed concept of “Work from Home” emerged as a saviour. Organizations which were capable to go with the concept, like IT sector, Educational institutions, banking sector, etc., immediately switched over to the new working format in no time, leaving little or no space for the organizational workers to adjust to the new norms.

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The underlying motive was to extend support to the dwindling national economy as well as to safeguard the employees against the unknown hazard.

### **The work from home concept**

Although the concept of Work from home is not a new one and has been in existence since past many years, the heroic status can be accorded to the same owing to the role it played in the pandemic era. While the work from home concept was once introduced to cater to the highly hyped “work-life-balance” phenomenon, it was never accepted as a substitute to the usual work routines. It emerged as the only resort while physical distancing was identified as the only way out to curb the spread of the disease. The work from home concept or culture can be understood as the phenomenon where the jobs would be taken up and attended to by the employees, virtually, without going about being physically present at the work station. The advances in the field of information technology have been a great support for the new culture, without compromising over the productivity benchmarks (Shareena & Mahmud Shahid, 2020).

The concept led to the preservation of the economy, which otherwise could have faced drastic consequences in the wake of the pandemic. Not only organizations and institutions, but individual employees and resultant households were financially safeguarded against the crisis. Work could be continued from a place away from the work station and the ends could be met, although major starting troubles were faced.

### **The Associated Challenges**

The novel concept allowed for handling the panic-led situation, which was also the need of the hour. But amidst all the hassle, a number of unforeseen challenges surfaced making way for a tougher situation for the employees. On one hand they were finding it difficult to work in the absence of requisite facilities, whereas on the other hand family oriented or self-oriented responsibilities were building an extra pressure in the prevailing situation.

The primitive WFH concept was conceived with respect to a normal situation, where in the unforeseen elements were typically minimal, as compared to the WFH concept developed to fight over the pandemic led situation, which could be characterized by fear of unknown, unforeseen future, physical and emotional breakdown.

A vast array of challenges were being faced in connection to the WFH concept. Time management emerged as an immensely obvious challenge faced by employees working from home (Davis, 2020). This is so as in addition to organizational work; one needs to multitask with respect to house hold activities as well. Having access to a work-supportive environment is yet another challenge faced by the employees during the WFH era. Having proper availability of IT infrastructure is a significant requisite for WFH culture and interestingly yet another challenge. Distraction caused by the additional household responsibilities took a toll upon the regular efficiency and productivity meter of the employees.

**The gender specific story**

The argument regarding difference between male and female counterparts of the workforce has been a critically acclaimed matter. The suitability and the subsequent inclusion of females in the workforce has long been a matter of discussion. On the other hand, it has been but a proven fact that work knows no discriminations. But ever since the work was forced to be taken back to the dwelling premises, gender based disparities have become glaringly visible. The extended online meetings, topped with responsibilities on the home front have been clearly developing pressure over the employees which was somewhere leading to a compromise regarding the overall productivity and efficiency which the employees were able to portray if they were working from their official work places.

Although it is not being claimed that females work more than the male counterparts, but in a country like India, where the onus to address the household chores primarily lies upon the females, the pressure built up was extremely high. Consequent to the social distancing mandate, household helpers and maids were not available, which enhanced the work pressure altogether.

With schools and day cares being shut, toddlers and school-going kids were confined to the home boundaries, alongside the online classes which were again rendered as an additional responsibilities regarding of the parents or the care-takers at home. This again was an element capable of interfering with the productivity of the employees, especially, working mothers, who already juggle a lot with their everyday responsibilities. With COVID induced exigencies, life was not the same anymore. Sailing through the burden of daily chores, never-ending caregiving, and the professional life requisites became a daunting task for working mothers. As stated by Bloom, a senior fellow at the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR), working through unsuitable places, with kids around, it leads to a disastrous productivity for firms, (Source: <https://news.stanford.edu/2020/03/30/productivity-pitfalls-working-home-age-covid-19/>). The office-based work culture usually separates the work and life components for the employees. But Covid induced scenario led to clubbing of official and home tasks. The extended work hours led to the drenching out of the physical, emotional and mental strength of both males and females equally, but the additional home-based responsibilities stretched apart the disparity which was more skewed towards females. Additionally, work pace slowed down leading to a not so favourable prospects for growth in the form of missed opportunities to excel. This was not the case of male counterparts, who found it relatively easy to concentrate upon their career progression even in the wake of Covid.

With a majority of employees dwelling in confined apartments, space has always been a matter of concern. With limited resources and amidst all the struggle, it becomes difficult to figure out a private space for work, limiting ones productivity. The socio-psycho status of women was also at stake since there was a lack of “Me-Time” for the working women.

**Analysis**

A survey was conducted among the employees from different sectors to ascertain the issues faced by both the male and female employees during the WFH rein. A comparative analysis has been mentioned below:

Working Females approached:120

Working Males approached: 185

Variables	Percentage	N
Working Women with children		
Yes	65	78
No	35	42
Total	100	120
Online classes of children		
Yes	69	54
No	31	24

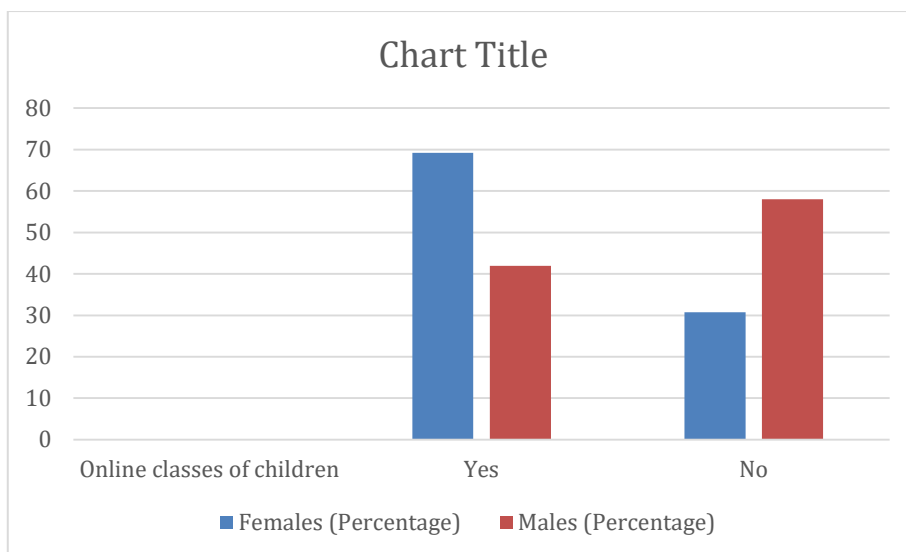
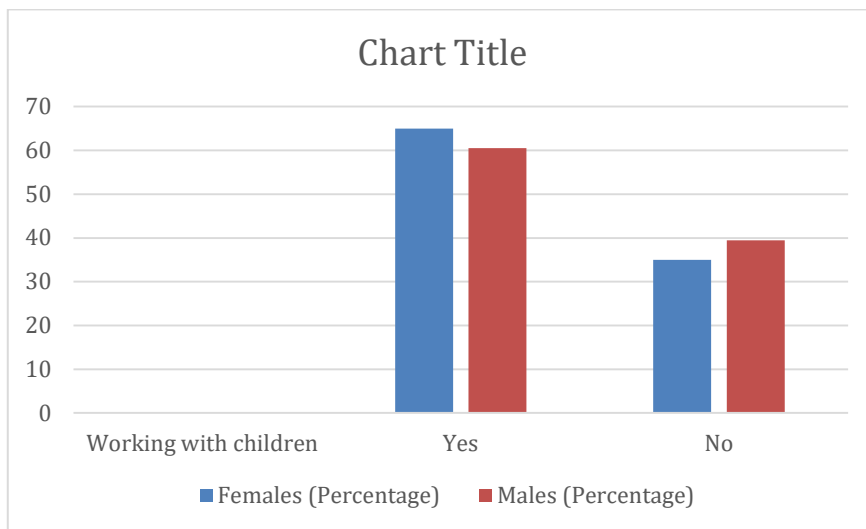
Variables	Percentage	N
Working Men with children		
Yes	61	112
No	39	73
Total	100	185
Online classes of children		
Yes	42	47
No	58	65

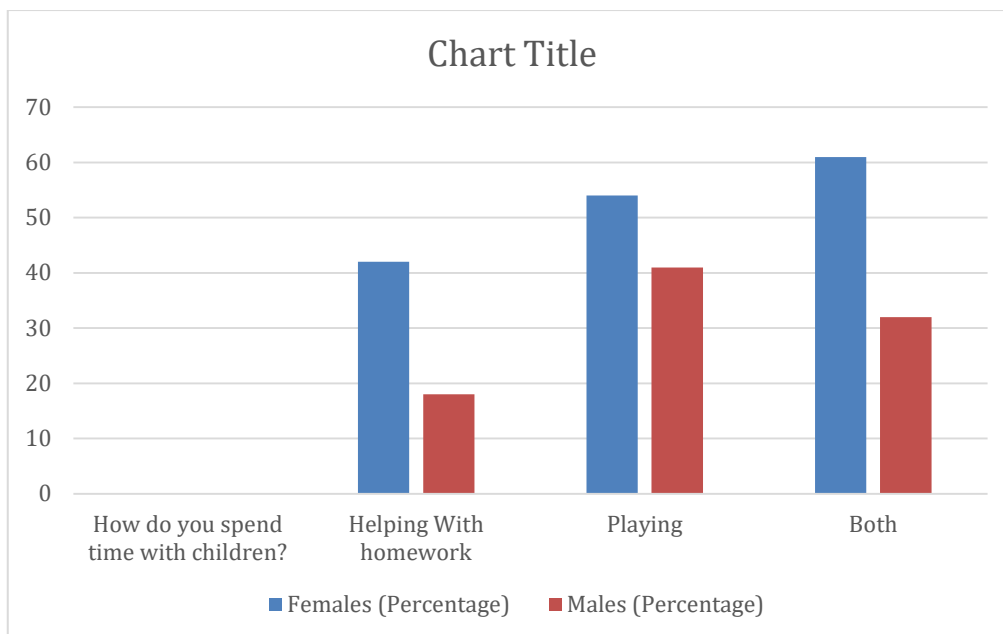
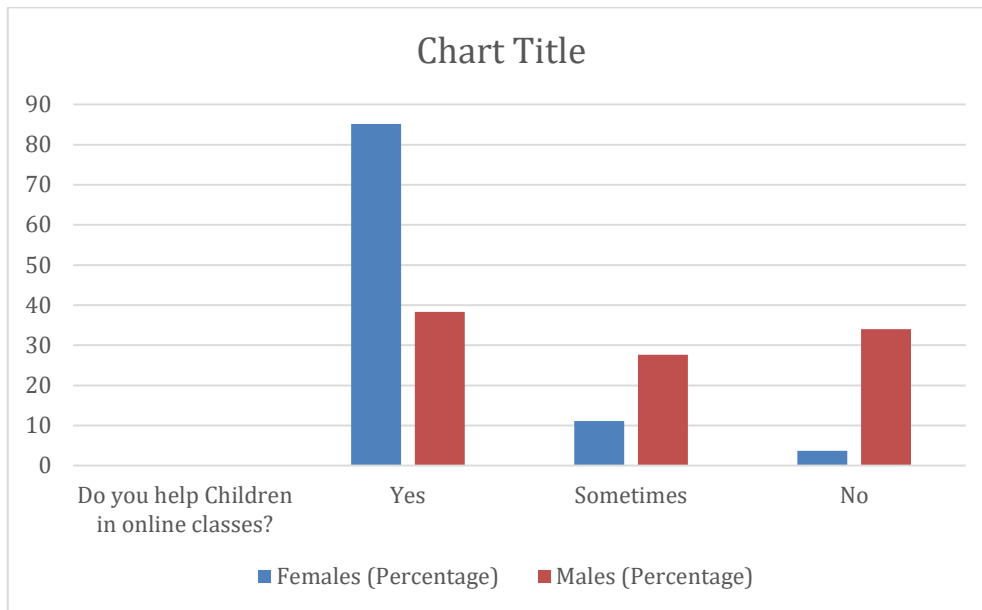
**Experiences and Preferences of Working From Home in Different Industries: Comparison Between Genders**

Total	100	78
Do you help Children in online classes?		
Yes	85	46
Sometimes	11	6
No	4	2
Total	100	54
How do you spend time with children?		
Helping With homework	42	
Playing	54	
Both	61	

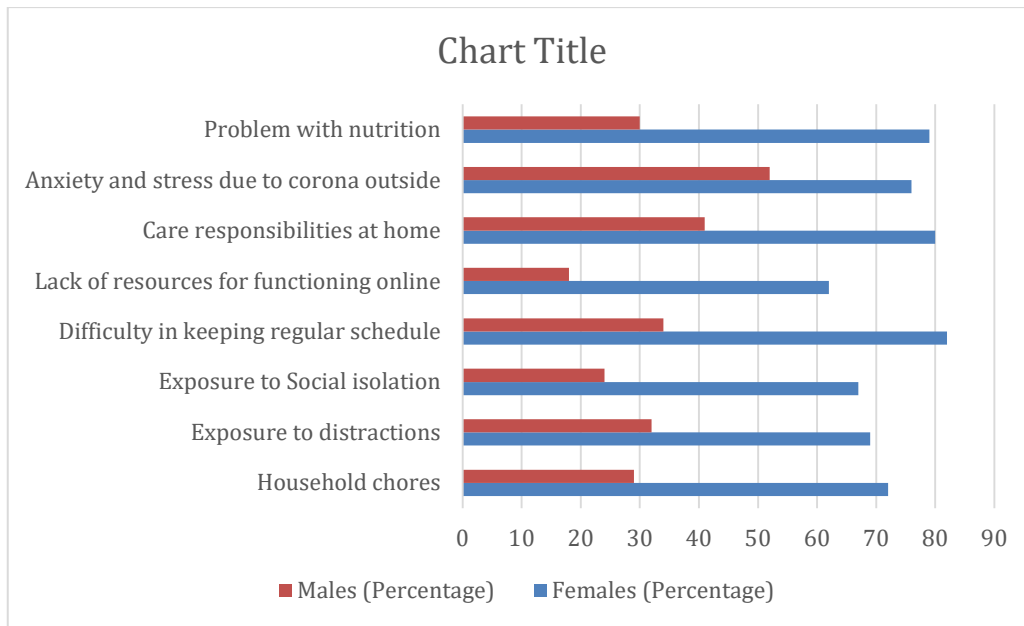
Total	100	112
Do you help Children in online classes?		
Yes	38	18
Sometimes	28	13
No	34	16
Total	100	47
How do you spend time with children?		
Helping With homework	18	
Playing	41	
Both	32	

**Graphic Representation**





<b>Challenges faced in WFH</b>	<b>Females (Percentage)</b>	<b>Males (Percentage)</b>
Household chores	72	29
Exposure to distractions	69	32
Exposure to Social isolation	67	24
Difficulty in keeping regular schedule	82	34
Lack of resources for functioning online	62	18
Care responsibilities at home	80	41
Anxiety and stress due to corona outside	76	52
Problem with nutrition	79	30



**Conclusion**

COVID is here to stay in one form or the other. This means that the switching between online and offline work formats will prevail for the near long future. Looking at the consequences of WFH mode, it has been evident that working females faced much more issues as compared to the working males. It must be the responsibility of the HR people to strategize the practices to pave way for enhancing the productivity of women and to lower down the stress levels of employees, especially for women counterparts.

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