

# Study of Psychological Stress Among Employees due to Work from Home during COVID-19 Lockdown in Indore City

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## ABSTRACT

When the world came under the coronavirus lockdown, millions of people started working remotely. This paper explores and studies in detail, various articles and research papers that highlight the stress of employees while working from home. Also this paper tries to study the stress of employees during COVID-19 pandemic. It is a study on the productivity of employees and the impact of working remotely on the stress level of employees. It is a discussion on the difficulties and challenges that an employee could face while adopting this mode of work. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the factors that motivated an employee for working in this mode. Indore, the commercial and educational hub of Madhya Pradesh, is a Tier 2 city in India and the most densely populated major city in the central province. The greater metropolitan area of Indore makes it a city of about 3 million inhabitants. It is an industrial, cosmopolitan city, called as Mini-Mumbai and the population of Indore belongs to different parts of India. When the epidemic began in March 20, Indore turned into the coronavirus infection hotspot in Madhya Pradesh, and was under curfew for more than two months. Many people were grappled with reality of working from home for extended periods of time.

This present study examines the impact of work from home culture during the stressful situation of COVID-19 pandemic on the employees based in Indore city. It also focuses on the performance, productivity and creativity of employees while working remotely. A sample of 173 employees has been taken. Data has been classified on the basis of gender, age, marital status, qualification and the dwelling area of employees. Furthermore, it also studies the factors acting as motivators and occupational stressors for the employees when they are a part of the work from home culture.

## 1. Introduction

The traditional office landscape is changing. Working from home is not a new concept in the IT and BPO industries, but due to the sudden COVID-19 lockdown, telework was accepted in many other industries. Where organizations like Twitter and Square offered 'work from home forever' options to employees and Facebook announced 'work from home permanently', small organizations also changed their working pattern to get suited to the new working culture and allowed employees to work from their homes. Engineers, information technology employees, HR executives, consultants and knowledge workers found it feasible to work remotely. While the employees from finance, insurance, and companies that have proprietary applications found it hard to shift to telework. In manufacturing sector, the organizations struggled to sale their products through websites. The number of remote employees increased tremendously. Organizations started getting access to the tools and solutions necessary to make remote work feasible and productive. The employees, as a choice or as a force, accepted work-at-home culture with the help of far-reaching global technology implications - virtual desktop infrastructure, advanced software and applications, high speed internet network.

Work from home (WFH) gives an imagination of an employee hanging out on the sofa, trying to squeeze out a normal day's work via VPN over a cacophony of kids or dogs, but the reality is different. WFH sounds great on the surface but the experience brings frustration, when the home environment brings distraction, or the continuous use of virtual screen gives strain and headache. The boundaries between work and life have almost disappeared. The COVID-19 lockdown restricted all kinds of domestic help, which enhanced the stress of working people.

The traditional 9-to-5 working schedule, became its way out. The office world, where physical papers were sent from desk to desk, suddenly changed to electronic gadgets and devices. The enhanced ability to communicate and operate has created an expectation for the employees to be always available. The digital technology made the communication instant and cheap, but it dissolved the working space and hours of employees. Thus, they are expected to be available for work round the clock. Now it is thankless to work for a mandatory job, assigned through a phone call or email during odd hours or weekend.

Indore being the hotspot of corona infection faced curfew along with the prolonged lockdown. The movement restriction, coupled with the stress of monetary losses and job insecurities

caused anxiety among employees in Indore. Working people, trapped indoors, getting little physical exercise and the corona news updates had an adverse effect on their physical and mental health. The lockdown, had a bad impact on the social life of employees. Spending hours inside the home, with little or no human interaction undoubtedly gives an isolated feeling. By working from home, one may miss office friendships, which make work life more enjoyable. It also lacks motivation - as when one is not required to wake up early to get to the office, one will decide to sleep in. Working in pajamas, not getting the typical social norms of the workplace are not good for motivation levels. If an employee is not surrounded by people with different thought processes, there is hardly any source to be innovative or to come up with brilliant ideas. Thus, the WFH may lack teamwork.

The work from home has a positive side as well. Flexibility goes hand in hand with accountability in this telework culture. Breaks can be taken at any moment and it is allowed to eat lunch at any weird time. There could be a flexible work routine of one's own choice. Telework saves travel time and travel expense of an employee. They can get rid of crowds and traffic. There is no need to look presentable all the day while working. It was never as easier as to be at home and have a balance between office work and household chores. When employees spend more time with their families, they don't feel the need to take vacation. Also, employees will take fewer sick leaves as they may still get work done while taking rest in between.

One is allowed to choose the working space of any kind in this mode. The internet facility available in present day, gives option to access files from anywhere and get connected to anyone in just a click. Being in touch with colleagues virtually, makes the work enjoyable and effective at the same time when the employee is physically alone and more focused on the task. It also reduces the chances of office politics.

Thus, the flexibility of working schedule, working space and better work-life balance proves to be motivating factors for the employees resulting in improved employee retention. Better productivity and efficiency in work is also observed in the WFH. Keeping the corona effect in mind, WFH gave best option to keep the official work in progress while maintaining health and safety measures.

Recent studies have supported the idea that telework can increase productivity and decrease official stress. Companies that encourages and support the remote work protocol, actually saves money in the long run. Organizations saves expenditure to be done on working space and travel expense of employees. For employers telecommuting can limit absences and increase productivity. Present paper is aimed to study the motivating factors along with the stressors while WHF during corona effect. It also tries to compare the stress level of male and female employees in the given situation. It aims to study the psychological stress of working people in Indore city during lockdown.

## 2. Review of Literature

Lots of research work has been done in this area. Various articles and research papers that are published focusing on the stress of employees and the effect of lockdown on psychology of employees have been studied. Some important

studies conducted in this area have been discussed in the following paragraphs:

**Your Amigos Foundation (Kochi-based NGO), (April 2020)** explored the physical, social, psychological and financial effects of work-from-home, during COVID-19 lockdown, on 165 working professional of different age groups drawn across the country. 49% respondents were experiencing WFH for the first time in their careers. 55.2% claimed to have worked for more than usual office hours, 91% complained do doing so without receiving due incentives and 59% complained of increased workload. The overall impact of WFH during lockdown was more stressful and lethargic.

**Rita Zeidner (March 21, 2020)** explained the result of the corona virus pandemic on the working staff of the organizations. Most of the companies allowed only a few staff members to be present in the office physically. The newest co-workers were greeted by only these members. The new workers, after completing required paperwork, were immediately sent home with required devices as laptops etc. to learn the assigned tasks and start their work. Meetings of the office with team leaders and co-workers were conducted over technical platforms as videoconferencing etc. The paper explains the factors that had impact on employees during this period.

**The Economic Times (April 30,2020)** says that Indian IT industry made WFH mandatory during lockdown. As a result, 90% employees worked from home (65% from metros & 35% from small towns). Indian IT industry transitioned to WFH model smoothly, without lowering quality or productivity and provided business continuity to clients. It also resulted reduced operating costs by 50% to 70%. It had a impact on society as well. It resulted in equitable distribution of wealth by giving opportunity to many. Women got better chance to be a part of economy by getting employment. It also reduced the migration of small town people to metros, etc.

**Society For Human Resource Management (2020)** conducted a survey on 700 people telecommuting during the Covid-19 pandemic to study the advantages and challenges of WFH and identified reduced commuting time, better work-life balance, spending more time with family as the best part of WFH and lack of collaboration with colleagues, difficulty in unplugging at the end of day and distractions as the major challenges of WFH.

**Nicholas Bloom, Liang, John Roberts, Ying, (2013)** conducted the first randomized experiment in a Chinese firm. The research was done on the employees that were working from home. 16,000 employee of the firm were the part of this famous experiment and research. Study was based on the performance of employees of CTrip which is a NASDAQ-listed Chinese firm. A 13% increase in performance of employees was observed in the mode of remote working. Out of this 13% employees, 9% employees were working some extra minutes of their shift period and were taking fewer sick leaves or breaks during shifts. 4% of the employees gave their higher performance per minute. The workers who stayed in the office showed no negative spillovers. Not only the performance level

of employees was increased, but also remote working had a positive impact on the psychology of the employees. Work from home reported higher satisfaction in employees and gave a improved psychological attitude scores. This also resulted in reduction of their job attrition rates up to 50%. The researchers have found that the work from home culture is becoming popular in the U.S. and Europe with the rapidly rising number of workers accepting this mode of work.

**Carter (2016)** studied and explained through the statistics that 65% of the workers find themselves more productive when they work from home as compared to the traditional way of working from office or corporate rooms. The workers who think that their performance is better in office or traditional workplace is only 7%. Thus the study shows the increasing fondness for remote working among employees. The study also emphasis on the disadvantages of telecommuting. Over burden of work, continuous isolation and in adequate tools to work with connectivity issues are some major problems of the workers when they are not in office environment. In the corporate world, these problems are considered important as they affect the professionalism of the employees.

The **Forbes Stats** emphasis on a different problem in telecommuting. This is the lack of relevant information about the work or way of accomplishing task with the employees when they are physically away from their office. 44% of telecommuters face the confusion in the instructions given by the team leaders or managers. They also feel isolated to have a proper discussion for better clarity in the instructions for work. According to **MicroExec(2013)**, 88% of employees like to depend on video conferencing or other virtual meeting platforms to have a better discussion and get clarity of work. Also in work from home workers feel craving for social interaction which is automatically fulfilled while working from office. Work from home can improve the professionalism of work if effective management of projects is done, also if some measures are taken as submission to be done prior to the deadlines, choosing under promise than under delivering the given work. There are some more factors that affects the professionalism of work in remote working mode. At home employees are likely to be distracted more than in office. The day to day chores, taking care of children or other family members and the household activities may distract the worker from the official work. Lack of a proper time table and a dedicated space to work effects the performance of an employee. A fixed schedule and a dedicated work space help to maintain the professionalism even while working from home. Working etiquettes namely the body language, dressing at webinars or keeping the work area clean are some another major reasons which affects the professionalism if the employee is working from home.

**Varshney, Parel, Raizada, Sarin (April 2020)** studied and explored the effect of lock down on people. They found that the people were under fear of the potential effects of the disease and its transmission, Their study explained that COVID-19 drastically effected the general public and it had psychological impact over them. This initial psychological impact had a relationship with physical symptoms in individuals. The conclusion of the study indicated that there should be a

systematic and longitudinal estimation of the psychological needs of the people so that the government can formulate holistic interventions for affected people.

**Nicholas Bloom, Stanford Talk (2017)** conducted a study in China's largest travel agency for about two years and observed its 500 employees. The Stanford Study concluded that productivity of workers is increased by 20 percent when they work from home. This increased productivity is equivalent to an extra working day per week. The change in the way of employees' working during the telecommuting mode cause the increase in their productivity. The study explains that in work from home, workers take fewer breaks and sick leaves. Also employees are capable of doing more work from home in the same time which they could be doing from office. It was found that remote working is more supportive and flexible for women. Thus organizations can attract and retain more women employees by allowing work from home culture.

**Brooks (2020)** studied and found that quarantine has some psychological impact as confusion, anger and stress. These can be considered as post-traumatic symptoms. The Brooks team has explained that if the quarantine duration is longer, the stressor factors have more impact. These stressor factors can be fear of infection, frustration or financial loss. A longer quarantine also cause boredom, inadequate information, and stigma during the pandemics.

**Lee (2007)** researched over stress level and psychological distress of several acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) survivors. The research team found that after one year of the outbreak, stress level in such survivors is high; in comparison with control subjects. The Lee research also found that this stress continues to stay high without signs of decrease.

**Tripathi, Bhattacharjee (2012)** worked over the study of outlook of people. They concluded that the experience or feeling of stress can be eliminated if there is a change in the way people look at things. If the "threats" are taken as "challenges", stress can be eliminated or reduced. Employees should be made to find the situations as an "opportunity" instead of a "crisis". Thus everything depend on the way to conceptualize the events. Altering the outlook can make employees feel less threatening and stressful. An individual can become more capable of avoiding the effects of chronic stress by this process. When people don't perceive a situation as a threat, then the body's stress response is deactivated more quickly.

**Reddy, Vranda, Atiq Ahmed, Nirmala, and Siddaramu (2010)** found that there are negative influences of family-work conflict (FWC) and work-family conflict (WFC) on employees which results in lower life satisfaction. The size of family, the age of children and members in the family are some variables that influence the level of WFC and FWC. The experience of WFC and FWC also have impact of some other variables as the work hours and the level of social support. The consequences of these variables have much impact on psychological distress and wellbeing of employees.

**Kumar, Yadav (2014)** examined the major sources of stress among working people. The study found that there are several variables as household responsibilities, job demands, lack of support, lack of facilities and infrastructure that cause stress in working individuals. The other stress causing factors can be having too much responsibility, having more work load, inability to give time to family, inability to learn enough to take higher responsibilities. Vague and unclear directions while working also increase work stress of workers.

**Modi (2012)** emphasized in this research paper that stress arises due to many factors and causes. The study talks about the stressors in working women. Working women are lying on to the same face stressors practiced by working men. Women are also facing the exceptional stressors such as inequality, social disconnection, and work/home classes. Thus there are more stress causing factors among women employees.

**Rupietta, Kira; Beckmann, Michael (2016)** investigated and found that the employees, who work from home are more productive in comparison to the employees who work from office. Implementing work from home can prove to be a more beneficial strategy for organizations as working from home has a statistically significant positive effect on work effort.

**Ward (2017)** concluded in the research that because of the high levels of positivity surrounding that an employee gets in a work from home culture, employee gets motivated and the work performance improves. It impacts positively on employee which can have positive effects on employee well-being and employee work life balance. This also develops job satisfaction in working individuals. The motivation and increased standard of work performance finally gives a positive effect on the organization. Work from home proves beneficial to organizations as they can retain their staff and achieve more from their employees.

**3. Objectives**

1. To study the stress of employees in the condition of restrictions due to lockdown.
2. To examine the factors acting as stressors and motivators in work from home mode.
3. To study the impact of lockdown on productivity and efficiency of employees while work from home.
4. To identify differences in the stressors of male and female employees.

**4. Research Methodology**

**Research Design**

In order to study the objectives framed to explore the stress factors that had impact on the productivity and work efficiency of employees due to the unusual and uncommon condition of COVID-19 lockdown, the present study was carried out. This study was also being done to identify the stress factors and motivation factors for the employees when they telecommute.

**Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

The present research is an exploratory research that helps to determine the psychological effect of lockdown on the working people. Since the research is purposed to study the employee stress in a given condition of work from home during lockdown in the Indore city, thus a survey was conducted in the limits of Indore city. Survey instrument was administered as Google Forms to respondents and a valid sample of 173 respondents was included for the purpose of analysis.

**Data Collection and Tools of Data Collection**

A self-designed questionnaire was used by the researchers as no standard questionnaire was available for the present study. Modern paper free data collection method was adopted wherein the questionnaire using Google Form was distributed in various WhatsApp groups of which the researchers are participants. The opinion of employees of various sectors as IT industry, education sector, medical and healthcare department, banking and insurance sector, was collected in the form of Google Survey Forms.

**Data Analysis Tool**

Principal Component with Varimax Rotation as the basis of the analysis with a description of demographic details and conclusion for the same.

**Analysis**

Survey data collected for the study was tabulated using MS-Excel and further data analysis was performed using IBM-SPSS version 21.0. For analysis, the survey instrument was classified into two sections; i.e. gender based demographic details: Male84 and Female89.

In the first section, **Male84** i.e. the data collected from male employees, the Cronbach alpha reliability was derived .722, which is reported to be good for the data set.

| TABLE 1:KMO and Bartlett's Test                  |                    |         |
|--|--------------------|---------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. |                    | .708    |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity                    | Approx. Chi-Square | 512.254 |
|  | Df                 | 136     |
|  | Sig.               | .000    |

Further the data was subjected to Principal Component Varimax Rotation with Kaiser normalization which resulted into 3 factors having Eigen value of above 1 and total cumulative

variance of 52.35%. The rotated component matrix is given below:

**Labelling of the Factors for Section 1, Male84**

1. Work-Efficiency and Productivity
2. Stressors
3. Availability of Resources

| Statements as Factor loadings  | Factors |      |      |
|--|---------|------|------|
|  | 1       | 2    | 3    |
| 11. You were able to express yourself clearly in the online mode of working.                                     | .817    |      |      |
| 17. While working from home you were more productive as compared to working from office.                         | .777    |      |      |
| 2. Working from home increases work efficiency.  | .755    |      |      |
| 10. Good Communication and clarity of instructions was given by your organization.                               | .710    |      |      |
| 12. Your family supported your work from home.   | .619    |      |      |
| 3. Flexible work routine is necessary for enhanced output.   | .511    |      |      |
| 9. Official documents and resources were easily available for working from home during this period.              |         |      |      |
| 5. A balance can be maintained between work and family life while working from home.                             |         |      |      |
| 15. Lack of social and recreational outdoor activities increased anxiety and depression.                         |         | .665 |      |
| 16. You felt a threat of wage-cut and joblessness during COVID-19 lockdown.                                      |         | .664 |      |
| 14. There is data security concerns relating to work from home.  |         | .643 |      |
| 1. Work from home during COVID-19 lockdown was stressful.  |         | .638 |      |
| 13. Working from home affects negatively your privacy.   |         | .536 |      |
| 8. Availability of high speed internet connection and smart technology equipment increase the work productivity. |         |      | .809 |
| 6. A specialized training for work from home, provided by the organization, improves working.                    |         |      | .778 |
| 7. The better understanding of gadgets and functions of applications ease the online work.                       |         |      | .712 |
| 4. A fixed work place at home improves work performance.   |         |      | .517 |
| Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.<br>Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.          |         |      |      |
| a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.   |         |      |      |

In the second section, **Female89** i.e. the data collected from female employees, the Cronbach alpha reliability was derived was .765.

|  |                    |         |
|--|--------------------|---------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. |                    | .655    |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity                    | Approx. Chi-Square | 363.892 |
|  | df                 | 136     |
|  | Sig.               | .000    |

The data was subjected to Principal Component Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization which resulted into 6 factors having Eigen value of above 1 and total cumulative variance of 64.55%. The rotated component matrix is given below:

**Labelling of the Factors for Section 2, Female89**

1. Stressors
2. Motivator
3. Work Efficiency and Productivity
4. Preference
5. Provision
6. Facility

|  | Component |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1         | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 1. Work from home during COVID-19 lockdown was stressful.                                | .706      |   |   |   |   |   |
| 15. Lack of social and recreational outdoor activities increased anxiety and depression. | .706      |   |   |   |   |   |

|  |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 13. Working from home affects negatively your privacy.   | .686 |      |      |      |      |      |
| 5. A balance can be maintained between work and family life while working from home.                             |      | .809 |      |      |      |      |
| 6. A specialized training for work from home, provided by the organization, improves working.                    |      | .640 |      |      |      |      |
| 7. The better understanding of gadgets and functions of applications ease the online work.                       |      | .606 |      |      |      |      |
| 9. Official documents and resources were easily available for working from home during this period.              |      |      | .806 |      |      |      |
| 11. You were able to express yourself clearly in the online mode of working.                                     |      |      | .806 |      |      |      |
| 10. Good Communication and clarity of instructions was given by your organization.                               |      |      | .667 |      |      |      |
| 2. Working from home increases work efficiency.  |      |      |      | .809 |      |      |
| 16. You felt a threat of wage-cut and joblessness during COVID-19 lockdown.                                      |      |      |      | .525 |      |      |
| 17. While working from home you were more productive as compared to working from office.                         |      |      |      | .509 |      |      |
| 3. Flexible work routine is necessary for enhanced output.   |      |      |      |      | .820 |      |
| 8. Availability of high-speed internet connection and smart technology equipment increase the work productivity. |      |      |      |      | .632 |      |
| 4. A fixed work place at home improves work performance.   |      |      |      |      |      | .650 |
| 14. There is data security concerns relating to work from home.  |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 12. Your family supported your work from home.   |      |      |      |      |      | .585 |
| Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.   |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| a. Rotation converged in 30 iterations.  |      |      |      |      |      |      |

**5. Conclusion**

Various elements are associated with the stress and productivity in telework mode. The opinion of male and female respondents working online during lockdown can be understood by the details of Table 2 and Table 4.

The first section of the research, Male84, included study on male employees. The first factor, Work-Efficiency and Productivity of male employees was enhanced in the work from home mode as they were able to express clearly in the online mode. They found themselves more productive and their work efficiency increased in this mode. The second factor was the Stressor. The male employees found the lack of social and outdoor recreational activities as the main reason for stress, followed by the threat of wage-cut and joblessness along with the data security concerns. The third factor was the Availability of Resources. The main component in improving the work during work from home was the availability of high-speed internet connection and smart equipments followed by the specialized training given by the organizations and the better understanding of gadgets and applications. The detailed contributing factor with the sub factor loadings is given in the Table 2.

The second section of the research, Female89, resulted into six factors. The first factor was the Stressor. Female employees responded the COVID-19 lockdown situation as the most stressful one, followed by the lack of social and recreational outdoor activities. In the second factor, Motivator,

female employees accepted that there was a work-life balance while working from home and the specialized training provided by their organization improved their work. The third factor was the Work Efficiency and Productivity, where the female employees found that the availability of resources followed by their ability to express themselves clearly in the online mode, enhanced their performance.

As a fourth factor, Preference, female employees preferred to work online because working from home increased their work efficiency. For the fifth factor, Provisions, the flexible work routine given in the online mode was most liked by the females. The availability of high-speed internet connection and smart equipments also played a part in this factor. As a sixth factor, Facility, women demanded a dedicated work place in home to perform better. The detailed contributing factor with statement factor loadings is mentioned in the Table 4.

Employees in Indore, under the effect of coronavirus, shifted the mode of their working to online and faced many challenges. Many employees, including females experienced the WFH for the first time. They were stressed due to the new mode of working, lockdown situation and the spreading disease. However, the WFH was found to be more productive by many of them.

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