

## QUALITY OF WORK LIFE DURING WORKING FROM HOME: COVID 19 PANDEMIC SITUATION

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The COVID-19 pandemic is not only cause turmoil in the health aspect but also spread to the economic sector where most of the economic activity has stopped to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Globally, WHO declared a public health emergency on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 due to contagious disease caused by a new virus known as novel corona virus or COVID-19. This virus started to spread gradually all over the world being declared as pandemic by WHO on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Countries began responding to this severe situation by suggesting their citizens to stay at home and announcing lock down across the nations. Organization's exceptional method of working, prior to Covid-19 pandemic has now become a new normal method to Work from home (WFH) in order to cope up with today's uncertain environment.*

*This paper attempts to throw light on all the aspect of work from home arrangement, providing some food for thought to scholars and academicians. This paper of conceptual nature highlights some of the efforts made by employers that act as factors of quality of work life of employees eligible for work from home arrangement during this pandemic. Due to the prevalence of the unforeseen situation of pandemic, organisations have no other way but to resort to remote work. Business putting priority to quality of work in WFH (Work From Home) arrangement would result in improved employee morale and performance which can help the organisation to achieve its business objectives amidst this pandemic time and gradually resorts to function in the new normal.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Work From Home, COVID-19 Pandemic*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Countries began responding to this severe situation by suggesting their citizens to stay at home and announcing lock down across the nations. As a result, this pandemic crisis threatens the progress of all types of business across the world. In order to survive, organization started replacing traditional approach of person to person transaction or relationships to online or digital platform. At beginning, everybody seems to be happy with this emerging type of arrangements for the sake of their convenience. Companies had responded to this situation by taking measures for securing their employees' health & limiting the spread of virus. A major part of these measures includes recommendation or compulsory for employees to do their normal office work from home which is also called telework or remote work.

In this context, organizations big challenge is to redesign their work in creating a safe, productive & pleasant jobs & lives for employees that will ensure a quality of work life for employees. The current study highlights about how working from home affects quality of work life of the employees. Most of the studies in this regard had been done prior to COVID 19 pandemic situation. After the pandemic, there is less literature available that is highlighting on different issues affecting the quality of work life of work from home. This paper shows a different perspective of understanding the concept of quality of work life in working from home arrangement during pandemic situation. The QWL is an important construct in organizational settings given that it is related to life and job satisfaction, general well-being, organizational and affective commitment, turnover intention, and team spirit etc.

### **Adapting the Change**

When worksites and premises are closed across the entire company as a precautionary measure or as a result of a government directive, companies may be able to implement WFH arrangements to achieve continuity of service, maintain productivity, and preserve jobs while safeguarding the safety and health of workers. In spite of some companies that may already have the practice of WFH, there are many organizations that had started practice of WFH system for the first time, & requires quick adoption of WFH arrangement across the entire organization. Although many companies recognize the benefits of WFH, some have had difficulty making the transition. The main problem was that paperwork was not digitized and the required internal rules and procedures for teleworking were not ready. Concerns over confidentiality of information or possible security breaches can also limit the use of Work from Home. Proper assessments on adaptability can help companies design flexibility into a job in a systematic manner, balancing the needs of the company and its workers.

### **Employer's Responsibility – Ensuring Quality of Work Life**

Organizations should understand that temporary working from home arrangements do not need any permanent compliance towards the terms and conditions of employment rather these way of working may change according to updated government instructions and the changing needs of the organization. Organizations should communicate policy changes or development effectively to every employee within the organization. Many countries across the world had started preparing statutory laws in relation different aspect of work from home or remote working arrangements, working conditions, the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers. For instance, employers should be able to bear all the costs of infrastructure that will support this arrangement starting from operation, functioning, maintenance and repair of equipment. Operationally, managers find it a new experience to manage employee from home. In this context, it is very important that communication should happen regularly and be personal for ensuring quality of work life.

### **Safety and Health of Workers**

Employers should use a system for reporting and investigating injuries, illness or other accidents that happen due to nature of work activities. Even though employers may find it challenging to conduct traditional health and safety risk assessments at employee's home amid COVID 19 pandemic; thus it remains the employer's responsibility to ensure that work should be performed safely from home and adjust the work that is suitable to complete it in a homely environment; employees should have sufficient tools and equipment to work safely from home. Another prerequisite for this new arrangement ties that workers should have relevant information, instruction, supervision, coaching and training that includes measures to deal with contingencies caused due to corona virus. This arrangement should be made in such a way that employee's physical and mental welfare is taken care of resulting into improved quality of work life.

In addition to it, employers should be aware of any increased health and safety risk that may arise from working from home during the COVID 19 pandemic. This could include increased psychological problems related to WFH like rise in job stress and increased electromagnetic radiation to physical body resulting into headaches, migraines, eyesight problems, etc. It could further include pressures due to confinement to home resulting into increased domestic violence to happen because of economic hardship and transformed family demands at household level.

### **Resources Availability at Home**

Employers should provide specific tools, equipment, supplies and technology to set up a sound infrastructure that is needed for doing the required tasks in case of working from home arrangements. Organizations can create a separate help desk or support mail address where employees can troubleshoot issues related to workplace tools, equipment and technology to seek help and support when needed. It is important to clear out about the use of these tools and equipment only for work completion. Setting up a workstation at home and its related maintenance costs are not general reimbursable by employer under any law and practice. But in the present pandemic situation, it should be extended help for workers from employers to bear all the expenses like mobile phone or landline or Wi-Fi cost, internet costs, personal computer or laptop, teleconferencing software or hardware, etc. related to set up infrastructure that will support work from home arrangement. As a result, organization can ensure a quality of work life through implementation of such policy for this new arrangement.

### **Worker's Compensation**

Normally, in industries it is seen that any injury or accidents are incurred during working hours and arising from or while doing work activities in any particular work area that may be covered under workers' compensation policy. This policy is still working in some countries for implementing work from home arrangement. But in other countries, this coverage of WFH arrangement is not considered under any workers' compensation policy. As a result, we can assume that as less number of employees are working on site during the pandemic so the total number of workers' compensation claims could be decreased. It is a challenging part for employers to limit work-related injuries in WFH arrangement because of lack of exposure to their homely environment and possibility of improper use of infrastructure and in home distractions. Employers should ensure employees are aware of the policy like procedures for reporting work-related accidents or ill health. For instance, in case any employee faces ill health or safety concern during working hours at home, he should notify to his supervisor immediately and fill the required form.

### **Training and Development**

It is also important determinant of quality of work life of employees working from home. It ensures workers to get updated with right knowledge and skills to meet with latest technology. They need to upgrade technical skills to use communication tools for WFH in this pandemic situation. Organisation should promote a learning culture depending on work that necessitates different information communication technology skills for doing work from home set up. Online training, online coaching, peer-to-peer learning and continuing support for software and other tools may be required to ensure that workers develop the right skills and abilities to perform effectively from home. This mechanism as one of the important factor of quality of work life that can ensure workers to be motivated, developed, recognized and committed.

### **Work Life Balance**

Working parents may have to faced challenge of balancing responsibilities between WFH for their employer and caring for children whose schools is closed due to Lockdowns. It is advisable that employers and employees should make an

agreement on flexibility in WFH arrangements that would enable worker to effectively balance both work as well as family. Workers must notify and discuss with their supervisors about their situation and ascertain whether changes to WFH arrangement is needed or not for work –life balance. For instance, works hours can be scheduled according to needs of family, temporary changes in reduced workday or work hours and reduced targets, or flexible deadline could help working from home in such unexpected step taken by employers. This would also ensure quality of work life that results into undisturbed mind of work from home.

### **Human Resource Management on Basis of Trust**

Maintaining trust equation between employer and employees is more challenging in WFH arrangement. In absence of face to face setting, managers need to find a new technique to engage, motivate and get work done by workers in WFH arrangement. In respect to WFH, if workers don't trust their management then manager's may loss control and some of the workers may abuse this arrangement. Thus, workers' self-discipline and mutual trust between employers and employees are essential for make WFH successful. Subsequently, WFH arrangement to be effective requires evaluating performance of workers on basis of results achieved. Thus there is need to build mutual trust with everyone in the organisation and establish shared responsibilities with workers through open and transparent discussion about expectations and outputs. This management based on trust could be a factor of quality of work life that would increase employee morale and satisfaction in a WFH situation.

### **Data Security**

As WFH is facilitated with use of technology, there is possibility that all the data could be vulnerable to cyber-attacks resulting into violation of confidential information of organisation. Organisation is advised to have a policy for data security and confidentiality of information in place for a safe WFH processes when they are using their personal laptops to do their work and connect to company network. Employers should provide computers having proper software installed for teleconferencing and for other work related including anti-virus protection, secured virtual private networks or firewalls against cyber threats. Online training and timely reminders can help out for updating the skills in protecting the data. This is another important determinant for ensuring quality of work life otherwise risking their jobs and life later on.

### **Communication**

Without communication between employees & employers it is meaningless in a pandemic situation. Unexpected changes and directives made by Government in response to COVID pandemic, employers and employees are making all efforts to cope up with these developments that make certain modification in work rules thus creating ambiguity among workers. To address this matter, there are many free or low cost software that make communication, collaboration and transparency easier like Slack for team collaboration and instant messaging; Zoom for video conference calls with team members and customers; Google Suite for email, document collaboration, file storage, shared calendar; Moral for team brainstorming workflow collaboration etc. Thus, it is advisable for employers communicate with all workers regularly to keep them informed of updated development related to the impact on company operations, including changes in company policies in WFH arrangement. This would increase employee morale and feel less isolated in WFH arrangement. An important factor affecting quality of work life in a WFH set up.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Grint (2020) in his study observed that the uncertainty due to the new virus known as COVID-19 across the world had remained the way organizations are functioning. It had changed the whole structure of the organization resulting into change in style of leadership.

Choudhry et al, 2020 in their study suggested that working from home or telework or telecommuting have been proposed as an immediate solution to avoid all disruptions caused in the normal state of affairs of the organization.

According WHO (2020), Working from home or remote working permits employees to safely stay at home and work, obeying to the recommendation of social distancing issued by Public Health agencies across the globe.

According to International Labor Organization (2020), in general the term "Working from Home" is a working arrangement in which a worker works from home, using ICT, and still fulfils essential work responsibilities. But in relation to this COVID -19 pandemic, this new arrangement may be used temporarily option to work & committed to organisation. So, it needs to be a shared responsibility & commitment by employers as well as employees to ensure quality of work life and sustainability of organisation.

Various researchers had considered the opportunity to work from a home-based office as a quality of one's objective life circumstances. However, quality of work life is reasonably understood as referring to both subjective and objective components.

Rao (2007) observed that Quality of work life is prescriptive concept; it attempts to design work environment in order to increase the concern for human welfare. "Quality of Work life is the degree to which members of a work organisation are able to satisfy important personal needs through their experiences in the organisation." It focuses on issue of creating a working environment where employees work cooperatively and achieve results collectively.

### **Scope of the Study**

The study is limited to the workers of some companies and therefore the findings of the study cannot be extended to other areas. Personal bias of the response might have arisen while answering a few questions. Results of the study may not be generalised.

### **Objectives**

To measure the various initiative taken by employer during COVID-19 pandemic situation along with employee competencies level to adopting this change in various service as well as manufacturing sector on the basis of demographic variables.

### **Methodology**

#### **Data Source and Method of Collection**

The sample size taken to conduct the research is 150 employees in different companies. The respondents were selected by using convenient sampling technique. In this present study, a self developed questionnaire in the form of statements also used as the tool for primary data collection. Secondary data was collected from earlier research work, various published journals, magazines, websites and online articles etc.

### Sample Size and Sampling

The collected data was analyzed appropriately. The researcher study is regarding quality of work life during COVID-19 pandemic situation. For the purpose of this study, the samples are selected from different strata of employees on random basis in different fields. The sample consists of 150 respondents from different hierarchy levels in different organisation. Proper attention has been paid in selection of the sample.

### Tools and Techniques Used

The important statistical tools and techniques used in the study: Simple Percentage Analysis, t-test and Calculation of Reliability (r) etc.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to find out attitude of employees of various sectors towards quality of work life during working from home during COVID-19 pandemic situations. There is also possibility that the demographics characteristics like age, gender and educational qualification may also affect their views on quality of work life during this situation. Such variables included in the study to examined their impact on the perception towards quality of work life that leads to family life satisfaction. Response is taken from a sample of 150 employees. The tabulated description of demographic details of the sample is presented in the Table-1.

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Sample Demographics**

Frequency Distribution of Sample Demographics				
Sl. No.	Category	Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
01.	Age	Below 25 years	18	12%
		25-35 years	75	50%
		Above 35 years	57	38%
02.	Gender	Male	87	58%
		Female	63	42%
03.	Educational Qualification	Diploma	58	38.6%
		Degree	63	42%
		PG/Others	29	19.3

From the above table, it shows that 50% of the respondents are belongs to 25-35 years of age, 58% of respondents are male and 42% of respondents are graduates.

Moreover, the present study has been conducted through own developed attitude scale. The scale consisting of 20 items/statements were distributed among the respondents and collected back upon filled up by the respondents. In this study, the "split-half" method has been used for testing the reliability which was split into two halves on the basis of odd number( 1,3,5,...) and even number( such as 2,4,6,...) of statement. The scores of even and odd items were recorded separately in order to calculate the correlation coefficient(r).Finally, to estimate the reliability (r) of the scale, the Spearman Brown Prophecy formula was used, where  $r = 2r/1+r$ . The reliability (r) of the present attitude scale has been found to be 0.76 which is moderately equal to 0.85. Now, the constructed scale may be considered as more reliable. Table-2 contains details of the calculation of reliability(r).

**Table 2: Statement Showing Calculation of Reliability (r)**

Odd(x)	X	Square X	Even(y)	Y	Square y	XY	Result
108	-2.5	6.25	114	2.3	5.29	-5.75	<b>Correlation (r) =</b> $257.5 / \sqrt{398.5 * 440.1}$ $= 0.614$ <b>and reliability (r)</b> $= 2r / (1+r) = 2 * 0.614 / (1+0.614) = 0.76$ $= +0.76$
106	-4.5	20.25	120	8.3	68.89	-37.35	
115	4.5	20.25	119	7.3	53.29	32.85	
116	5.5	30.25	107	-4.7	22.09	-25.85	
117	6.5	42.25	116	4.3	18.49	27.95	
103	-7.5	56.25	104	-7.7	59.29	57.75	
110	-0.5	0.25	109	-2.7	7.29	1.35	
100	-10.5	110.25	101	-10.7	114.49	112.35	
121	10.5	110.25	120	8.3	68.89	87.15	
109	-1.5	2.25	107	-4.7	22.09	7.05	
2		<b>398.5</b>	<b>111.6</b>		<b>440.1</b>	<b>257.5</b>	

However, an attitude scales with 20 items/statements describing the attitude of employees towards quality of work life as working from home during COVID-19 pandemic situations. To examine the same a null hypothesis was formulated. The validity of this hypothesis has been tested through t-test (Table-3).

**Table 3: Significant Difference in the Attitude of Employees Towards Quality of work Life During Working From Home During COVID-19 Pandemic Situations**

Sl. No.	Statements in Relate to the Attitude of Employees towards Quality of Work Life during Working From Home	Values	t-test	df	Level of Significance
01.	Employer's responsibility that ensures quality of work life	1.2	Variance= 0.4448 t= 17.586	df=19 tabulated value=1.729 at 5% level	Significant at 0.05
02.	Health and safety of employees working from home ensures quality of work life that improves performance	0.9			
03.	Training mechanism is an important factor of quality of work life that can ensure workers to be motivated, developed, recognised and committed	2.3			
04.	Maintaining trust equation between employer and employees is more challenging in WFH arrangement	1.7			
05.	Employer should be sensitive, adaptive and responsive to needs of workers in a WFH set up	1.8			
06.	Employers should communicate with all workers regularly to keep them informed of updated development related to the impact on company operations including changes in company policies in WFH arrangement	2.1			
07.	Organisation should have a policy for data security and confidentiality of information in place for a safe WFH processes	1.7			
08.	The quality of work life is an important construct in organisational settings given that is related to life and job satisfaction, turnover intention, general well-being, organisational and affective commitment and team spirit	1.5			
09.	Communication is an important factor affecting quality of work life in a WFH set up	2.2			
10.	Proper assessment on adaptability can help companies design flexibility into a job in a systematic manner, balancing the needs of the company and its workers	1.7			

11.	Employers and employees should make an agreement on flexibility in WFH arrangements that would enable worker to effectively balance both work as well as family	1.9			
12.	Unexpected changes and directives made by Government in response to COVID pandemic, both employers and employees are making all efforts to cope up with these developments that make certain modification in work rules which creates ambiguity among workers	2.1			
13.	Organisations should understand that temporary working from home arrangements does not need any permanent compliance towards the terms and conditions of employment	2.6			
14.	Organisation should promote a learning culture depending on work that necessitates different information communication technology skills for doing work from home set up	1.4			
15.	Both employer and employees should understand the concept of quality of work life in working from home arrangement during pandemic situation	1.8			
16.	Organisations should develop a policy to give clear guidance on implementing the work from home arrangements	1.7			
17.	Many organisations are still struggling to transform to new normal of working that leads to job stress, increased anxiety, frustrations, distractions at home that may affect quality of work life and in turn labour productivity	2.3			
18.	Organisation implementing WFH arrangement to ensure good quality of work life which in turn would increase effectiveness of employees as well as organisation	1.5			
19.	Absence of face to face setting, managers need to find a new techniques to engage, motivate and get work done by workers in WFH arrangement	1.4			
20.	Employers should ensure employees are aware of the policy like procedures for reporting work-related accidents or ill health	1.3			

From above analysis we conclude that the calculated value  $t$  is 17.586 which is greater than the tabulated value of 1.729 ( $df=19$ ) at 5% level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected leading to the conclusion that there is a significant difference in the employees towards quality of work life during working from home during COVID-19 pandemic situations. This study attempt to examine the perception of employees working in different respective fields. However, we can conclude that the organisation should implement climate solutions and put them into action that make unhealthier today along with protect our future.

### **Suggestion/Recommendation**

Economy and Environment are two sides of the same coin. This COVID-19 pandemic offers a painful opportunity to re-design our social and economic systems in such a way that transform into a more sustainable way of living. In this situation, an organisation should address the policies that provide emotional support and proper counselling when the worker is irregular or not performing well which may caused by his family situation. The company has to contribute to its positive efforts to make their employee satisfaction .An organisation should focus on workers' welfare like the basic

necessities and hygienic sanitary equipments that will give to the workers psychologically, emotionally and physically fit enough to work.

## CONCLUSIONS

Due to COVID 19 pandemic situation, there is a compulsive and unexpected working from home or telework or remote working arrangement implemented by most of the business houses around the world. Many organisations and their employees are still struggling to transform to this new normal way of working. In such scenario, there is all possibility to emerge with job stress, increased anxiety, frustrations, distractions at home that may affect quality of work life and in turn labour productivity. Therefore, it is important for all organisation those are implementing WFH arrangement to ensure good quality of work life which in turn would increase effectiveness of employees as well as organisation. This research highlights some of the efforts made by employers that act as factors for quality of work life of employees eligible for work from home arrangement during COVID 19 Pandemic situation. With the proliferation of technology, the advantage of working from home is creating a win-win situation for employers as well as employees. COVID-19 and climate change both harms people as pollution is at the heart of both problems so for this everyone should try to improve health and reducing the sources of pollution that drive a large burden of disease around the World. Moreover, Carbon emissions were also down due to falls in coal consumption and industrial output during lockdown. But in India, to provide relief in wake of the rapidly spreading COVID-19 pandemic that derailed the economy, industry has urged the government.

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