Remote Work Culture:Physical and Mental Well-being of IT Workers

Lalit Shetty
Subject Expert,Department of Journalism andMass Communication, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune-477037, Maharashtra,

ABSTRACT:

The emerging IT work culture for remote working is popularly accepted during the COVID19 pandemic and many organizations have accepted transformation to work from home culture as a future work strategy. The new culture is widely implemented due to work flexibility, time-saving, and talent acquisition benefits. Remote working is accepted by both organizations and employees for security from virus spread during the pandemic. The research is purposed to study the impact of remote working on IT workers' health. IT workers dealing with the latest technologies prioritized work from home during a pandemic. The aim of the research is to study the impact of work from home culture on their mental health and physical wellbeing by studying the challenges of a new way of working. It is important for implementing future work policies in terms of positive and negative shades of remote work as well as the gender bias impact of new work practices. The researcher studied symptoms of mental and physical impacts on remote IT workers and discussed their reasons. The paper aimed to put health issues faced by the workers while working from home to improve working strategies for their well-being.

Keywords:

Work from home, physical health, mental health, Remote IT work culture, well-being of workers

INTRODUCTION:

Today, the world witnessed new work culture with the emergence of a coronavirus and the spread of a global pandemic in a very short span of time. With the increased number of virus-infected people across the world, an unexpected change to work from home emerged as an alternative in several sectors. On the other hand, the massive impact on human life was the critical public health situation forced for complete nationwide lockdown. According to some studies, the lockdown has an evident impact on India's Information Technology (IT) sector which collectively employs at least four million people. IT field is enforced for the new work practices while organizations became worried about maintaining employee productivity due to sudden change to 'Work from Home'.

The new work culture advantages are not restricted to workforce management. It is thought to increase work autonomy, a key component of work motivation, to increase work performance. Having a sense of control over work time is important for employees to manage

their work-life balance, for good work-related mental health. Digitalization of work information also can help decrease costs with an increase in effectiveness and sharing of information between colleagues. For example, working from home can reduce commuting time with colleagues and costs, decreasing environmental pollution. It can also provide workers a chance to perform their family duties. However, disadvantages of working from home include loss of colleagues' support, unrealistic expectations of availability, and blurred boundaries between work and private lives affecting work-life balance. The impacts of remote working have been ambiguous, and to date, a systematic appraisal of the evidence of work has not been conducted. [1]

Several studies during COVID19 have been suggested that the new work culture has a great impact on the productivity of organizations due to physical and mental impact on employees. Some surveys and research focused on these issues and their positive as well as negative impacts on human health. The work culture led to a significant change in cultural, social, and day-to-day ways of living behaviours as companies aim to have only 25 percent of their workforce to be in office for a hundred percent productive. This became challenging for the employees both working from home and working in an office. The aim of this study is to reveal the impact of remote work on the physical and mental well-being of IT employees.

The new ways of working are disrupting with a high impact on our work, home, and travel schedules, momentarily. Many employees across the globe are fearful of job losses due to the 'new normal' demanding new tactics for managing with an uncertain future. Suddenly many people are directed to working from home and now it is expected to become a norm. It is anticipated to witness major changes in working, shopping, living, playing, and communicating ways of people and also the work across every organization. [2]

According to Charles Goldfinger, "each time a new technology is developed, it brings not a decrease, but an increase in job opportunities, albeit, not necessarily of the same kind as before". The new economy contains huge pools of new jobs with a new technology-oriented work culture that can more than make up for the inevitable loss of traditional jobs. Therefore with positive impacts, it can work as better opportunities for the growth of employees. [3] However, the mental health of Employees impacts productivity, and medical costs are critical human resource issues. Gradually, employers' organizations, as well as trade unions and government policy-makers are recognizing that the social and economic costs of their mental health in the workplace cannot be neglected. Accordingly, the organizations and policy

makers have planned and implemented more flexible and adaptive work practices to retain high productivity.

While working from home, taking care of mental health is as important as physical activity and it is vital to eat nourishing food. It is essential to honor the workplace and to enjoy a positive mindset with a few adjustments like creating a routine and sticking to a schedule. According to people, the best part of working remotely is flexibility in schedule, but organizing those hours makes all the difference. Workers should set a daily schedule or routine with organizing tasks and outlining goals. It helps them mentally prepare for what to expect and easier to work towards achieving the goals, instead of vaguely meandering towards them. This scheduling also prevents distracting tasks and schedules analogue breaks. Organizing time and tasks help to set aside time to escape all forms of digital screens to rest eyes, neck, shoulders, and back. In addition, Scheduling fun activities just like work tasks improve all work and reduce stress for all remote workers to break from work. A focus on hobbies, self-care, and anything else makes them happy for a few minutes every day. 4

RESEARCH REVIEW:

The research is focused on the impact of new trends on the health issues of IT employees during the COVID 19 pandemic. The study relating to poor work-related mental health analyzed the psychological impacts of New Ways of Working, and the quality and quantity of research with systematic reviews and meta-analysis, psychological outcomes were evaluated.

Poor mental health among IT workers is a cause for concern in many countries resulting in lost working days, costing billions to the economy annually. In addition, due to poor mental well-being in Dutch organizations, the number of Dutch workers absent is at the peak among nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.Poor work mental health is a serious issue that needs to understand the psychological aspects of workers today. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the psychological impacts of remote work culture. 5

According to some studies which involved regularly working at home employees, health outcomes like pain, self-reported health, safety, and well-being were reported. The employees also experienced stress, depression, fatigue, and strain with changes in the quality of life, and happiness. These outcomes were strongly depending upon the degree of support by an organization and colleagues, as well as their social connect outside of work, and levels of work to family conflict. The study on the health and work relationship is complex

considering broader system factors to optimize the impact of remote working on the health of workers. For some degree of the foreseeable future, organizations need to implement formalized work from home policies to consider work-home boundary management support with role clarity, workload, performance indicators, technical support, facilitating co-worker networking, and training for managers. 6

Physical health outcomes have been studied in terms of musculoskeletal health where employees are working at home for limited periods. The use of standard guidelines for workstation arrangements has been considered sufficient to manage the physical health of workers. In addition to improved flexibility, working from home has also created other quality-of-life benefits. With decreased commuting time, more family time, improved diets, and reduced health risks from the pandemic were few of the benefits. Some studies highlighted the improvement in inclusivity as team members were more tolerant of differences in working style. According to a study reported, people were more overworked as remote work continues without vacation since they cannot travel reporting a harder time to get back into work.7

The studies discovered that in addition to behavioral and social changes during the COVID19 pandemic, work from home culture in the IT sectorhas also highlighted areas of prerequisite for the physical space in home office environments. They can face an increase in stress due to workspace sharing, poor body mechanics, and prolonged sedentary activity increasing discomfort and pain. According to these studies, office work environments contains central heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, whereas, the IEQ environment at home may not bemanaged. Specifically, working in such a location that is not designed for work can produce unsatisfactory IEQ conditions these conditions have detrimental effects on workers'physical and mental well-being, decreasing overall work performance.8

According to studies,based ongender, health-related outcomes and gender differences in the work from home has an effect of interpersonal and external interactions on work exhaustion. Male employeeshad higher levels of work exhaustion pre and post-implementation of a formal work-from-homepolicy with the increased negative effect of interactions external to the business on work exhaustion. Whereas Females working at home reported higher levels of work exhaustion compared to the office. An increase in job stress is also studied for an inability to disengage from work, and job stress associated with the integration of work into home life. It reveals that work-family conflict is experienced by women due to the inability to

disengage from work and while men experience it due to the integration of work into the family domain.9

METHODOLOGY:

The study on IT work culture is focused on the impact of work from home practices on the physical and mental health of IT workers. The researcher considered several studies and surveys on the well-being of employees for improvement of work culture and put some solutions that various organizations used to deal with health associated with their workers physical and mental or psychological well-being.The research is aimed to reveal the benefits of working from home to improve health as well as security of workers during pandemic from coronavirus spread.

The study explains various factors related to the psychological impact on IT workers including stress, loneliness, depression, happiness. Physical health is impacted through various factors like immobility with pain and fatigue, lack of exercise, and the impact of extended work time due to working at home. According to the researcher, health is related to nutritional food, work engagement, and organizing work to balance work-life boundaries.

The researcher also discussed the impact of permanent remote working on IT workers and the prolonged effect of the new culture emerging as a permanent choice. While the researcher explains the behavioral and social changes in employees due to work from home culture with the possible reasons. There is a difference in impacts on health outcomes according to gender differences which are observed for women.

Discussion:

The researcher found that various health factors affect the productivity of the workers while working from home. It includes the mental and physical health of a person due to the workplace and workload. The study explains the impact of work from home culture on employees working in the IT sector as it is related to the use of technology and the direct impact of the technology in modern working practices becoming a new trend.

Impact on mental health:

For better mental well-being, employment provides five categories of psychological experience that include time structure, social contact, collective effort and purpose, and regular activity. In work from home practices, it is found that workers are burdened with

longer working periods and due to lack of social interaction and physical immobility stress increased in workers. The researcher found the workers experiencing depression, stress, burnout increasing frequent short periods of absence. Mental stress health can affect the working increasing error rate while reducing the productivity of workers due to poor decision making and work planning. Workers may feel a lack of motivation and loss of commitment while working from home for prolonged hours which directly affects the company costs. According to the study mental health directly affect physical health increasing sickness in workers. With an increasing burden and loss of social contact, workers face severe health problems of physical conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease, including ulcers, sleeping disorders, skin rashes, neck- and backache, headache, reducing resistance to infections.[10]

Remote working can be isolating due to disconnected workers from their managers and colleagues. Therefore there is a need for systems that facilitate effective formal and informal co-worker support. Formal co-worker support in teams when people are collocated includes sharing of tasks and incidental problem solving and requires facilitation whilst working from home. In the current situation, the provision of regular face-face online contact opportunities, as well as social support, could replace the day in the office. However, in situations where remote working becomes voluntary, employees are likely to benefit from working in the office to maintain networks.[11]

The researcher observed that IT workers face experience loneliness during working from home without talking to others and due tothe loss of social aspect of chatting and venting about work and life. They can feel isolated with non-connectivity from colleagues and the outer world. The study highlights the impacts of mental disturbances indicating increased anxiety, stress, and pressure during remote working due to lack of time and imbalanced work and personal life. However, working from home requires time management, IT troubleshooting, with higher levels of organization in less convenient settings, and much more. Workers need to switch between these settings multiple times a day whichwill wear out anyone.

According to the study, Depression can happen when workers feel stuck and unable to see progress. While remote workers may not feel as achieving as much as their peers and experience success as in the office due to work lackingrecognition, instant verbal recognition, and the capacity to see work fitting into a bigger work.However, the anxiety, stress, and loneliness of remote working can feeling down and also lead to depression or exacerbate pre-

existing conditions.The researcher studied symptoms of depression including angry outbursts, irritability, or frustration. The workers can experience sleep disturbances, lack of happiness, tiredness, lack of energy while affecting concentration on work, thinking troubles, and increased food craving. These factors lead to physical problems like insomnia and sleeping too much, back pain or headaches, weight gain, etc.[12]

Impact on Physical Health:

According to the study, challenges in working from home through new digital tools may result in broken workflows and also contribute to mental stress and exhaustion. The researcher found that technical challenges resulted in more annoyance and frustration as compared to in-person work, as IT workers were relying so heavily on the digital tools for their work. In addition to the mental stress, there is the additional physical stress on the body due to remaining in one place, as workers no longer need to walk between offices, or walk as far to the restroom or to get coffee, etc. causing physical pain. Remote workers are complaining of sore eyes because of staring at the screen, aches, stiffness, carpal tunnel pain, and back issues. In a study of IT remote workers, most workersspend more time on their electronic devices.

Itis found that people are not moving for an entire day excluding bio breaks or food, which can have the negative effects of spending most of the day sitting. It is highlighted with increased risk of high blood pressure, blood sugar concerns, cancer, and even premature mortality in IT workers. The decrease in movement of remote workers may also be aggravated by COVID19 causing gym closures.They have less exercise than before the pandemic leading to the potential long-term health implications of ubiquitous remote work being serious need to be researched.

According to the researcher, these findings refer to workers' preferences for a biologically safe with a less positive approach about returning to the office. IT employees expressed concerns, anxiety, and even fear of returning to the office due to the challenges of social distancing and continued to work from home full-time. However, it is found that as nearly universal remote work continues, IT engineers are increasingly expressed overworked, feeling burnt out, not being able to stay on top of the email, and feeling overwhelmed. IT workers worked more hours for individual tasks as well as team tasks with increased real or perceived workload feelings of burnout. While dealing with the pandemic and home office ergonomics also affected well-being and productivity in women and people with disabilities.

Longer workdays in remote working including on the weekends were not sustainable and also contributed to existing or impending burnout. 13

The researcher highlights the need to overcome issues in mental and physical wellbeing. Eco therapy by spending time in nature treats anxiety, stress, and depression. Outdoor walks while remote working may help reduce blood pressure and stress hormones. Nature is having more pleasant to focus on like trees and greenery to distract negative thinking in the mind, so that thoughts become less filled with worry. Spending time with beloved people, support from peers is effective as cognitive behavior therapy. Therefore to reduce stress, remote workers spent time each week with friends and family members to help lift. It is important taking on work possible to complete in a day to help in setting boundaries based on limitations, schedule, and workload, without extending workload. Assertiveness with courteous with colleagues and clients maintains respect. Therefore, all the above can help to overcome stress and other health issues while remote working. 14

Impact on Health of Females:

It is found that female workers reported having two or more new physical and mental issues as compared to male workers and workers with higher income. Another study also noted that female workers have a higher risk of depression during work from home. It is found more challenging to work from home for women, as females tend to be more responsible for home activities and household chores. Similarly, lack of job security, tentative work during the pandemic, can directly increase anxiety and other physical and mental health issues in remote workers. 15

CONCLUSION:

The study concluded the impact of remote working in IT culture on workers' health. The workers are affected physically as well as mentally due to prolonged work from home practices. The study highlights various symptoms of disturbed mental health in workers like stress, depression, loneliness, and anxiety. According to the study, mental health not only affects physical health but also has a greater impact on productivity and work-related factors.

The study suggests working on the well-being of IT workers' health for improving quality of life. On the other hand, physical health is also challenged in remote working introducing common problems like pain, headaches, issues in the back and neck due to longer working and increased screen time also affects the health of the eyes, disturbing sleep. Several issues

found in remote IT workers lead to severe health issues like blood pressure, heart problems, and many others.

The study also implies the impact on women's health and challenges are more to work from home due to more responsibilities at home chores and others. The overall impact on the physical and mental health of remote workers must be taken into account in terms of workloads and setting boundaries between work and home life is important for their well-being.

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