‘**WORK FROM HOME**’ **TO** ‘**WORK FROM ANYWHERE**’**: A STRATEGIC HRM** **JOURNEY** COMFORTING FROM COVID ABERRATIONS

(With special reference to the specific scenario in Hyderabad, India)

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A**bstract:**

Work from home (WFH), rechristened in its latest journey as work from anywhere (WFA), a new normal in the existing circumstances, has become the most sought-after strategic HRM prospect being favored during those agonizing years of the Covid-19 pandemic. In effect, this facility has resulted in survival options for a large chunk of vulnerable working milieu who were unable to commute to their work in mitigating the spread of the dreaded virus. Today, this arrangement has brought succor to both the employers and employees seeking alternative work possibilities, especially in the fast-paced metropolitan industrial hubs in India and elsewhere in the world. The practice of WFH/WFA, of late, has become a policy priority for governments and private sectors across the globe. The study here provides a unique insight as to how well WFH/WFA works and plays an important role in upcoming policy formulations that would help reconstruct the ongoing structure of working hours, allowing more and more flexibility in the working sphere with a human face. Using an exploratory research framework followed by a SWOT analysis, the study investigates the continuing exploits faced by its stakeholders. Further, it highlights impacting factors on the workers’ physical and mental well-being while pursuing WFH and also provides a foundation for considering how to best support a positive WFH experience along all verticals. In-depth discussions based on critical reviews and related recommendations have been developed for future policy guidelines. Associated with usual pros and cons, this study will also sincerely caramelize if this working facility will remain as a mere transitory element responding to the exceptional circumstances alone, or whether it could beneficially trigger a permanent arrangement in the years ahead.

Keywords:Commute, Caramelize, Mitigating, Strategic, SWOT, WFA

I. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic mercilessly engulfing almost every nook and corner of the world, has unimaginably challenged society, forcing people to reinvent a wide range of alternative practices, from work to leisure, to basic travel and also varieties of daily life schedules. The virus has impacted economically an array of businesses to a complete standstill. While there were countless warnings, from those working in public health, the challenges remained substantial that required vigorous planning, training, and facilitating.

COVID-19 disease, believed to have first surfaced in Wuhan, China, has begun attacking the human population since December 2019. It was part of a virus family that caused the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in South East Asia in 2002 and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak in 2012. The main mode of virus movement is respiratory droplets carried through close contact with other people. The extensive use of face masks, maintaining social distancing measures, and the practice of good hand hygiene was suggested as the best weapon to combat the viral spread. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 as a global health emergency on 31 January 2020 while the first confirmed case in India was, however, noticed on March 24, 2020 [[[1]](#footnote-0)].

Before the pandemics, the idea of WFH around the business world was merely a casual thought, used sparingly, and never weighed to be an alternative. Tons of doubts among industry captains were aroused over its efficiency in modern times. Could it be a solution for working without distractions and being able to manage a work-life balance (WLB) without compromising productivity? These are important questions that this paper aims to tackle through its subsequent deliberations. Though the pandemic was unwelcomed, yet had provided us a unique opportunity to analyze the implications of WFH in greater detail

The dreaded virus spread worldwide with alarming agility, with over 100 million officially confirmed cases and over 1.8 million confirmed deaths as of 31 March 2022, and the number has been swelling consistently, though at a lesser pace, as per yearend WHO 2021. As the coronavirus continues to spread its killer wings across the globe albeit, in different avatars, a wide majority of governments have imposed and re-imposed strict lockdowns with the closure of a host of several businesses and banned people gathering to keep hospitals from the threats of being overwhelmed.

Before the arrival of the pandemic, discussions on the future of WFH were fluid, but for the very cause of business survival amidst the pandemic, a decision favoring the WFH option was ultimately considered by those grasping HR professionals around the world. The WFH practices have been employed widely in the U.S., Europe, and many other developing countries across several countries including India. Updated WFH guidelines were notified by incumbent governments for their employees, while advisories were sent to employers of private organizations, as a precaution to prevent further spread by reducing social contact.

Demography of the pandemic has appeared with many variants starting with alpha, beta, gamma, delta, and omicron and the latest is the onset of Omicron XE. It is now understood with certainty that the effects of this disease are here to stay. Companies around the world did adapt to this new way of working by introducing new policies and learning along the way forward. While social media institutions like Twitter asked their employees to WFH since the start of the coronavirus pandemic as early as January 2020, other social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, alongside Google have decided further to extend their WFH until December 2022, as of now.

There have also been discussions about adopting WFH as a permanent aspect for some profiles and we are looking into remote working ecosystems in the time to come. More than half of Facebook’s employees are expected to be working remotely till 2030. Such policies have come to light keeping in view the safety and comfort of the employees.

This paper, in the course of its further discussions, will also introduce ‘WFA’, a term that typically covers working from anywhere, as per the executors’ comfort of operation. Working away from the traditional office is increasingly finding a strategic opportunity in today’s world. The phenomena have been studied under numerous, partially overlapping terms, such as telecommuting, telework, virtual office, remote work, location independent working, home office, and a host of other similar verticals.

II. Literature survey

Extensive literature surveys in the context suggest that people with WFH need flexibility for different reasons. Initially, taking safeguard against the virus spread, besides home-working is a typical solution for those who need to look after their dependent children, and elderly people at home, while seeking a better WLB and the comfort of an alternative work environment.

The WFH concept was first mentioned by Nilles in 1988, then known as “telecommuting” or “telework” which Messenger and Gschwind also mentioned in 2016. WFH has been defined in various terms over the four decades, as remote work, flexible workplace, telework, telecommuting, e-working, etc. These terms refer to the ability of employees to work in flexible workplaces, especially at home, by using technology to execute work duties as per Gajendran and Harrison 2007; Grant [2019](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25741292.2020.1863560#). Telecommuting was described by Gajendran and Harrison 2007 as an alternative work arrangement in which employees perform tasks elsewhere that are normally done in primary or central workplaces, for at least some portion of their work schedule, using electronic media to interact with others inside and outside the organization.

A recent study by Dingel and Neiman 2020 uncovered that about 40% of the job could be completed at home during the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., such as financial work, business management, and professional and scientific services. Some jobs, especially those related to the domains of healthcare, farming, and hospitality, however, have no scope to be performed from home.

Researchers, Mello 2007; Robertson, Maynard, and McDevitt 2003 while listing the advantages of WFH mentioned that its scope is not limited to only reduced commuting time, avoiding office politics, using less office space, increased motivation, improved gender diversity e.g. women and careers, healthier workforces with less absenteeism and turnover, higher talent retention, job satisfaction, and better productivity but also adds to raise employees moral manifold. Further studies already evidenced these benefits; for example, the research in the Greater Dublin Area by Caulfield in 2015 found that employees save travel time and value travel time. Some studies by Collins and Moschler 2009; Delanoeije and Verbruggen 2020; point out that telework can reduce turnover rates and increase employees’ productivity, job engagement, and job performance. Similarly, e-working can increase productivity, flexibility, job satisfaction, and WLB, including reducing work-life conflict and commuting as per Grant 2019. Additionally, Purwanto 2020 argued that WFH could support employees in terms of flexible time to complete the work and save money on commuting.

There are certain drawbacks of WFH too, such as employees working at home having to pay for electricity and the internet costs themselves. It was observed by Collins and Moschler in 2009 that workers were isolated from their coworkers, and managers were concerned about productivity status while working from home. Moreover, the relationship between coworkers could also be harmed as per Gajendran and Harrison, as evidenced by their exclusive research done in 2007. Additionally, employees might be distracted by the presence of young children or elderly family members along with blurred boundaries between work and family life that lead to overwork while working at home as claimed by Baruch 2000; Grant 2019; Kazekami 2020. In a similar vein, the management of boundaries between work and family of remote workers as Eddleston and Mulki 2017 revealed that WFH relates to the inability of remote workers to disengage from work.

III. Routing for the **investigation**

Extending the researcher’s connection to the topic combined with his professional exposure to WFH, which has referenced Hyderabad, a city credited as one of the industrial powerhouses in the country, and also to examine if this work arrangement would remain just as a transitory phase responding to only for exceptional circumstances, or whether it could be a permanent arrangement in the coming days too? Herein, two major exploratory factors i.e., organizational and individual-family were taken into consideration. The researcher aimed to scrutinize how best these factors influence WFH.

Studies have found that organizational factors are crucially involved in the work of the employees. For example, it would include employers extending support to WFH employees' operational needs like providing cost of infrastructural facilities, arranging training in the use of technology, and organizational communication. Other factors include employees’ well-being, trust extended by colleagues, managers, and IT support from the organization.

Individual and family factors include self-discipline, self-motivation, self-organization, self-confidence, ability for independent work-handling, time management skills, computer literacy knowledge, etc. A study revealed that the number of working days and the time a person spent in WFH, also have impacts on work-family conflict [[[2]](#footnote-1)]. Apart from individual factors, family factors also have their bearing. The size of the living area, the number of family members sharing the accommodation, the number, and age of rearing children, the elderly dependents' availability for the individual working space, and the number of people present when working at home are of high importance.

Alongside the exploratory investigations, the researcher has also combined situational SWOT analysis that may help to carry out further investigations covering the ongoing experience of employers and employees in the city.

III. Learning objectives

To study the overall impacts of factors like social, behavioral, and physical on the well-being of WFH practitioners during the pandemic [[[3]](#footnote-2)] ;

* Discuss the darker sides of full-time WFH noticed during the pandemic and measure the potential benefits for both employers and employees.
* Summarizing the sample characteristics and variables assessed in the survey of workers who had switched over to WFH, and;
* Discussing the effects of WFH on physical and mental well-being.

IV. Testing methods

Online questionnaires, from September to December 23, 2021, were activated through networking. Participants were chosen through emails, social media platforms, and newsletters. Random sampling is used to extend the selection process. Eligible participants were identified by an initial screening that asked if the participants spent most of their work time at an office desk and had been forced to accommodate WFH due to the pandemic. After thorough scrutinizing 1123 responses were found to be suitable. Multiple regression techniques were judiciously used to deliberate on various physical and mental health issues. The questionnaire included a total of 28 Likert-type categorical and open-response questions. Questions about different factors of norms of demographics, home, and occupational environment, home-office environment, and other information relative to primary dependent variables on work performance, physical and mental well-being, etc. were included in the overall scheme. Data focused on factors associated with changes in physical and mental well-being. Further, additional data from open questions were analyzed separately.

V. WFH: Possible outcome

To limit the print size of this study, the researcher apologizes for genuinely avoiding the cumbersome mathematical calculations brought into the script and instead preferred to give more time to useful deliberations on the issue. The study mainly highlights factors that impacted workers’ physical and mental well-being while doing WFH and provides a foundation for considering how best to support a positive WFH experience[[[4]](#footnote-3)]. The pandemic has drastically altered every aspect of people's work and life. In response to the containment policies in vogue, companies, organizations, and institutions encouraged their employees to work remotely from home to stay safe. The WFH concept emerged in India in the early 2000s, when remote technologies started taking wings and allowed workers to use WFH to avoid commuting, access flexibility in their schedules, and achieve a better WLB. During the unwelcomed entry of the pandemic, many workers were advised to perform WFH full-time, which redefined the conventional concept of WFH that was typical only for certain types of work and on an occasional basis. A spectrum of companies is now assessing if operational costs could be substantially decreased by reducing the required office space[[[5]](#footnote-4)].

Companies counting gains from WFH noted several direct benefits to employees. Significantly, WFH zeros daily commuting time and offer workers the flexibility to take care of their families. Allows employees to decide the best productive time to work, avoiding distractions from coworkers, especially encountered in open-plan offices. With an array of options available to WFH, workers in need to respond to an assured healthy lifestyle WLB program, feel free to call a break from their work that supports physical and mental health. When pursuing WFH, workers can facilitate more control of environmental factors. Indoor environmental quality (IEQ) factors like air quality, lighting, temperature, humidity, noise, ergonomics, etc. are important for workers' physical and mental health. IEQ factors largely influence a worker’s comfort, which impacts satisfaction[[[6]](#footnote-5)].

However, every comfort is always accompanied by a rider. Benefits aside, numerous negative aspects of full-time WFH have also been noticed. Employees at home forgo socializing with colleagues, face decreased physical movements. Extended hours of screen exposure while in full-time WFH lead to fatigue, tiredness, headaches, and eye-related symptoms. Further, blurred WLB may sow the seeds to detach mentally from work and increase stress and anxiety leading to severe hypertension.[[[7]](#footnote-6)].

The situation that forced abrupt shifts to WFH accompanied by factors associated with the pandemic provided a unique context for exploring the relationship between WFH on physical and mental well-being. The most apparent impacts on health are due to social and behavioral factors. In particular, the extended stay-at-home mandates during the pandemic contributed to generally depressed and anxious feelings, often leading to changes in routines and eating habits. Changes in physical activities and subsequent variations in food intake had interacted with other stress related to WFH that together directly impact physical and mental well-being[[[8]](#footnote-7)].

In a nutshell, the pandemic has altogether created a new environment for considering both work and home life within the discussion of WFH. A detailed understanding of the factors in this new environment that relate to physical and mental well-being is instrumental to ensuring positive impacts for office workers who might opt for WFH in near future. Specifically, employers and employees alike require insights on how to provide the best work conditions for workers who either voluntarily decide or are directed to take WFH such that negative health impacts are minimized.

This study aimed at (1) understanding the imminent change of physical and mental health being perceived after WFH, (2) identifying how the re-casted changes in lifestyle and home environment would influence physical and mental well-being after WFH, and (3) investigating how the IEQ affect physical and mental well-being during full-time WFH [[[9]](#footnote-8)]

While measuring different impacts, the researcher at its first instant, took to the lifestyle and home environment factors that gave them access to overall physical activities pursued through standing, step counting, physical exercises like walking, running, biking and on intake of foods, healthy or junk. The next priority fell on the occupational environment with the varying number of working hours, workload expectations, and distractions.

In the arena of home-office environment measurements, satisfaction with the IEQ factors related to the home workspace was rated concerning unhindered availability of lighting, both natural and electric, visual glare, etc. Satisfaction with the thermal environment on the average indoor temperature and humidity, air quality, and level of noise decibel.

In the category of physical and mental well-being, the physical front comprises various ailments, viz. Musculoskeletal discomfort; cardiovascular like chest pains, blood pressure, heart rate disparity; digestive problems; eye-related problems; mental health issues like anxiety sadness; insomnia; low motivation or slowed actions; mental stress, mood swings; social isolation or decreased interest in social engagement.

V.B Data analysis

For all those lifestyles and home environments, including occupational, home office, physical and mental well-being variables, descriptive statistics were calculated. Performed Pearson correlation analyses that were executed to examine individual associations among all continuous variables, including physical and mental well-being. Correlations were designated as weak (0.30 to 0.50), moderate (0.50 to 0.70) or strong (>0.70). Independent sample t-tests were used to test the significance of the difference in physical and mental well-being status across groups based on dichotomous questions. Alongside, linear regression models were constructed to understand how worker demographics, environments of lifestyle, and home, occupational, and home office factors affected overall physical and mental well-being statuses. All dependent variables were willingly dummy coded. Reference demographic variables were “business and office” for occupation, and “less than 50k” for income of median earnings for full-time workers. The reference category for the multi-level home office environment variable was “I have a dedicated room for work activities” since this is the ideal WFH condition for a workspace. After examining factors related to overall physical and mental well-being, an exploration of potential associations with the number of negative health issues was conducted. Multinomial logistic regression and chi-square tests were used to examine relationships for all continuous and categorical variables, respectively, as predictors for the number of new physical and mental health issues. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS v. 26 (IBM) and significance was set at.05.

## **V.B.1 SWOT analysis w.r.t. Hyderabad**

India’s 5th largest city, Hyderabad, has been chosen for the analysis. as the city possesses the requisite potential for the purpose. Hyderabad is considered one of the most technologically advanced places in the world, with approximately 82% of its working population being internet users (The World Bank Group report 2021). It is very likely that most people here already have the necessary basic requirement, i.e. reliable internet connection, for WFH. However, it seems hard for the majority of the population to carve out a dedicated workspace in its multi-generational congested homes. Since the practice of WFH is relatively new to Hyderabad, it is essential to identify the potential and pitfalls of WFH by using a SWOT analysis that might help to scrutinize the WFH situation in the city. The analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to WFH with a particular focus on Hi-Tech City, Hyderabad, was carried out, and presented in Table 1 below, which is self-explanatory[[[10]](#footnote-9)].

Table 1

SWOT Analysis on Hyderabad, India

| Analysis | Work from office | Work from home |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Strength | Facilities for networking/face-to-face interactions;  Avenues for collaborations; Avoids misconceptions/ease of supervision; a greater sense of belongingness; Separation: work and family life; Better inductions for new entrants; Greater access to technology; Fewer chances of information pilferages. | Flexibility; No office distractions; Freedom and autonomy; No commuting, saves time; Familiar environment; Less stress; Money saving on office rent; Work-life balance. |
| Weakness | Lacks flexibility; Sedentary lifestyle; Office politics; Noisy surroundings; Wasting time in unnecessary meetings; Higher operational expenses; Commuting costs. | Evidenced distractions through the household, and family pressures; Communication barriers; Lack of supervision; Lack of hardware  supports; Blurred work and personal life; Unhealthy lifestyles. |
| Opportunity | Maintains professional appearance resulting in long-lasting relationships with valued clients. | No mental tension. Appreciable WLB. Support to family members. |
| Threat | Higher cost of operations; Traffic-related air pollution and likely exposure to dangerous road accidents. | Compromised cybersecurity; Lack of privacy to safeguard corporate/ employee/ customer data; High competition….employees may surrender to dual loyalty. |

*Source: NBER Working Paper [No w27612] 2021.*

## **VI. Discussions**

The pandemic gave the world a viable option to experience the effectiveness of WFH, which had long been a desired work avenue for many, especially in a place like Hyderabad where an increasingly dual-family workforce exists[[[11]](#footnote-10)]. The responsibility of aged parents and or young children coupled with a demanding work environment has become a challenge in questioning the futility of WLB for the city's working millennials. Preliminary studies on the employers’ and employees’ reactions to the ongoing WFH syndrome in this city, it appears that the changed working format is favored. However, looking ahead into it, many gaps are found in the current WFH structure, and as a result, more dissatisfaction is found to have surfaced because of the lack of concrete policies to carry out effective home working.

It is now aptly clear that some glaring issues are being overlooked so far that need to be addressed on priority. A study highlights unhappiness because of either no or limited access to supporting office documents[[[12]](#footnote-11)].This could be attributed to ill-preparedness in assessing the situation well in advance which has resulted in inconsistency for the delayed output from the employees and a lack of flexibility, and tolerance by employers. The studies also suggest that the pursuing work culture of Hyderabad makes practicing WFH less favorable for workers, who often miss the distinction between personal and professional spaces The researcher’s survey additionally features that married employees above 30 years or older who live in multi-generational households with in-laws, parents, and children have to undergo through many distractions and imbalances between work and home life.

It is noticed that the special arrangement allowed people to WFH mitigate the outbreak in Hyderabad as well as elsewhere in the country, the current WFH procedure seriously lacks clear-cut administrative guidelines as well. For instance, there used to be a genuine controversy and confusion over whether adverse weather conditions, if any, would require workers to work at home or would they be eligible for time off like it was in the traditional work arrangement. Thus clear guidelines or explicit direction is of utmost essential.

As evidenced by another survey conducted during the country's second COVID-19 wave between May and July 2021 by the Mental Health Association of India, over 70% of respondents were found to have symptoms of severe stress syndrom[[[13]](#footnote-12)]. WFH in this pandemic era has to bear many negative consequences, especially on WLB. Nonetheless, amidst many upheavals through the time of the pandemic, in WFH extension has reshaped the traditional way of working into a potential future work and saved many families from imminent starvation.

VI.A Dependency on WFH: Reactions from industry

When India's largest infotech and outsourcing company, TCS, with around 450,000 employees on board, reported that it would move 75% of its employees (Anand Shefali, December 26, 2021, ET) to WFH permanently by 2025, it created a huge stir. But most HR experts think Tata will be an exception, not the rule.

Experts, from many industrial biggies in India until earlier to 2020, believed that WFH, which was once strictly no-no to them, had toed the line once the advent of Covid-19 engulfed the globe with its killer pangs. That anyway benefitted employers in substantially lowering the exorbitant office costs, and many employees today revealed that they were more productive at home and happy in saving time in commuting [[[14]](#footnote-13)].

Yogi Sriram, former head of Group HR and now an advisor at L & T, an engineering and IT conglomerate, said "Yes, this is the beginning of a change,". However, quickly adds that he doesn't envision a drastic change in the offing shortly. Further, Sriram also quips, "I don't buy the TCS’s 75% work from a home claim. WFH is not going to become a universal principle in companies. It's going to be restricted only to certain roles for a certain period. Ideally, companies are expected to create hybrid WFH models and give employees a choice as to whether they want to work remotely or not. Everybody who has done WFH for a while would long to go to an office".

Many employees may not welcome permanent WFH due to their compelling personal challenges of non-availability of essential physical infrastructure at their home facilities[[[15]](#footnote-14)]. In the job hubs of Hyderabad, where real estate is very expensive, many professionals live in small two or three-bedroom apartments along with their partners, children, or parents. "Where is the space for an exclusive home workstation?" said Sheetal Sandhu, Gurgaon-based Group CHRO for CRA, credit ratings, and research firm. Many Young professionals, such as those who recently graduated from college, live in paying-guest accommodations or share apartments, which provides them with little space or privacy, besides the availability of patchy wi-fi connectivity[[[16]](#footnote-15)].

Young people also lose out on experiential learning if they work alone. "If I see my manager in a meeting, there's a lot of stuff that I can learn from what he's eventually delivering," said Devatree Ritikanth, a 29-year-old yoga trainer for a Hyderabad-based wellness company. In a digital meeting, however, "one doesn't get a sense of the emotional part at all." Then there are the intangible benefits. "I don't go to the office just to work; it's also fun to go to an office," said Devatree.

For many employees, especially those from poorer economic strata, going to an office also brings social prestige. "Getting ready to work, dressed for success, it's a matter of psychological pride," said Devatree. That's taken away in a permanent WFH model[[[17]](#footnote-16)].

VI.B Challenges for Companies

While remote work is ideal for individual efforts, it may put a dent in collaboration, impromptu meetings, and making new connections with colleagues. This was one reason that IBM, which had around 40% of its staff working remotely for over a decade, reversed its policy in 2017 and asked people to come into the workplace. Learning and development also can suffer in a fully WFH setting. Though information can be shared via a digital medium, learning is much more than just a kind of mere transmission. The ability to evaluate the given knowledge and create new knowledge and be creative, needs a physical presence.

Permanent remote working impacts camaraderie and the connectedness that employees have with the organization. In a physical office setting, managers go from desk to desk to say ‘hello’ while performing an 'empathy check' on colleagues and keep chatting on topics that have nothing to do with their job which is a lot harder to do virtually.

VII. WFH: Advantages And Disadvantages

The Internet entered our lives not so long ago. Everything has started changing dramatically very fast since then. Innovations apart, due to the availability of some services which are operated online, today’s lives became easier. As such, it has become pretty common that companies to allow their employees to WFH. Of course, it depends on a person’s individual choice if s/he likes WFH instead of being at the office. This way of work has its advantages and disadvantages (Table 2) because it does not appeal to be attractive to everybody, every time, and everywhere [[[18]](#footnote-17)].

Table 2

Advantages and disadvantages of WFH

| Srl | Advantages | Disadvantages |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Saves money and time for both employees and employers. Commuting expenses, lunch breaks, wasting time in traffic jams, etc. reduce substantially. | The Concentration shatters because the home office provides absolute liberties to choose from - one can reach the fridge anytime, make a cup of coffee, turn on the TV or find another way to get away from work at will. |
| 2. | Professionals do have computers/laptops or tablets at home with associated infrastructures. | The feeling of loneliness might appear, and people may get melancholic while working from home. They try to compensate for this lack of communication by surfing social media- Facebook or the like. |
| 3. | As per one's comfort, one can schedule his/her time to work taking care of home needs. This liberty enhances productivity. | Other People who know that one is at home may not understand that he/she attends to work as well. So, they do not mind bothering, calling, or visiting whenever they need or want. |
| 4. | When not disturbed by colleagues at home, one can enhance unpredictable efficiency. | If one encounters some work problems, he/she might feel stressed. In the office, usually, it would not happen, because the colleagues could extend help to solve. |
| 5. | WFH doesn’t mean "home" alone. The workplace may be shifted anywhere as per one’s convenience- a coffee shop, a favorite park, or somewhere on a beach at the seaside. | For some people, the fridge at home and eating at will might add to improper dietary indiscipline. If a person is used to eating a lot, then having a fridge somewhere nearby, while working is not such a good idea. |
| 6. | Unnecessary interruptions, and unimportant meetings can be avoided if you are safely working at home hidden from any possible interruptions. | Sometimes people might lose a boundary between work and home and might forget that they are still working and need to take a break. |

*Source: Health app CALO Mama 2020*

To summarize, it is necessary that everybody should try to find one's way of working. Only this way, the work will be performed most productively.

VIII. WFH: To end soon?

While announcing its quarterly earnings, Infosys said it will follow a hybrid model going forward. Contrary to an earlier stand, TCS was planning to call back 90% of its employees to the office by the third quarter of 2022. But, in a sudden turn of events, the company halted its policy to recall. While in Wipro fully-vaccinated employees started going back to the office in March 2022 after a hiatus of about 23 months.

India's leading IT companies like TCS, Infosys, Wipro, and HCL Technologies have chalked out their plans to discontinue WFH, which they have been following for their employees over the last 21 months, as India has already achieved the 200 crore vaccination mark. IT bellwether TCS has said it will call back its employees to their office soon as 70% of them have been fully vaccinated and around 95% have received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, the company plans to gradually get its workforce back in the office by the end of this year,” Milind Lakkad, CHRO of the company said, while announcing the updates regarding the earnings for the quarter ending in March 2022.

Earlier, TCS, the country's biggest outsourcer, was planning to call back 90% of its employees to the office by the beginning of 2022. But now the company says 25% of its employees will continue to work from home till 2025 depending on the requirement. For those who will start coming to the office, the company has ensured full safety for them.

Infosys, the country's second-biggest outsourcer, is also planning to follow a hybrid work model going forward. “With over 93% of employees of Infosys in India having received at least one dose of ‘vaccination’, we are now preparing to embrace the hybrid work model. We have equipped employees with the resources they need to be productive, cyber secured, stay connected, and maintain a WLB. Our talent strategy also factors in expanded hiring pools that include new communities and work locations,” said Pravin Rao, COO, Infosys.

The WFH model followed by many service-oriented companies during the pandemic helped companies keep their employees safe while saving on rent, electricity costs, and other operating expenses. Many IT companies, however, also witnessed a drop in employee productivity as many techies are milking the opportunity to earn dual income by taking up gig projects. Experts say this is the prime reason why many large IT companies want their employees to work from the office by December 2022 at the latest.

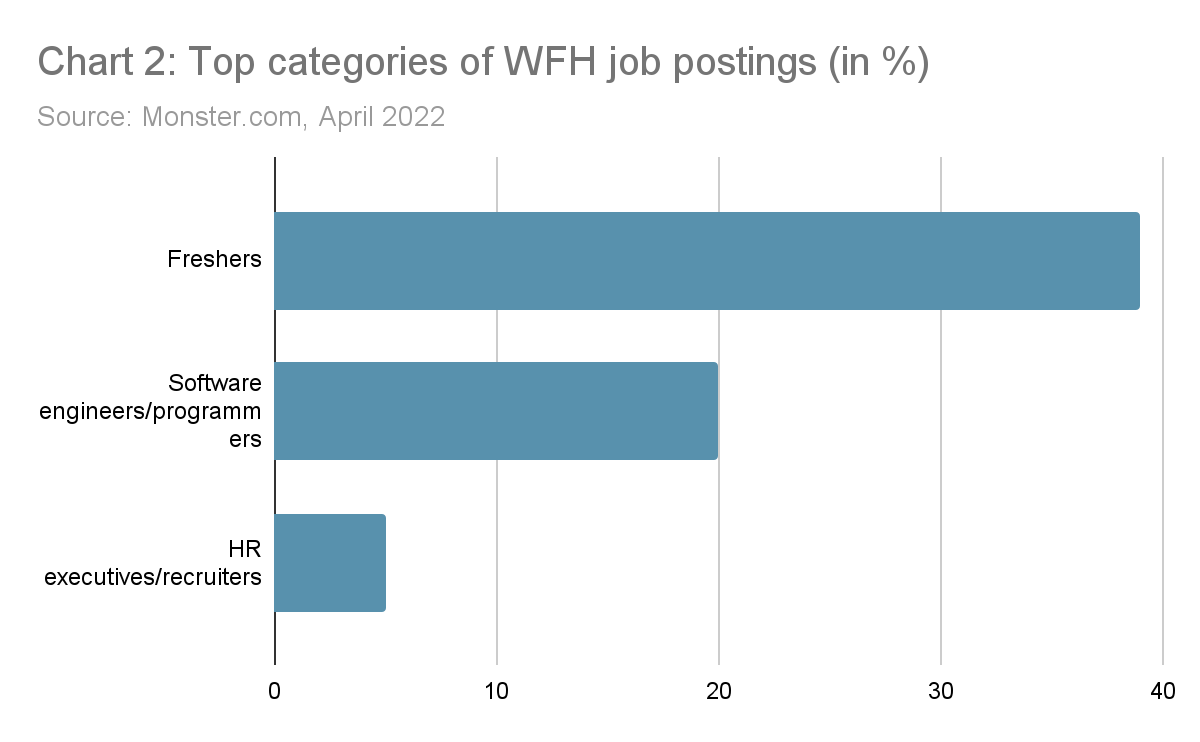
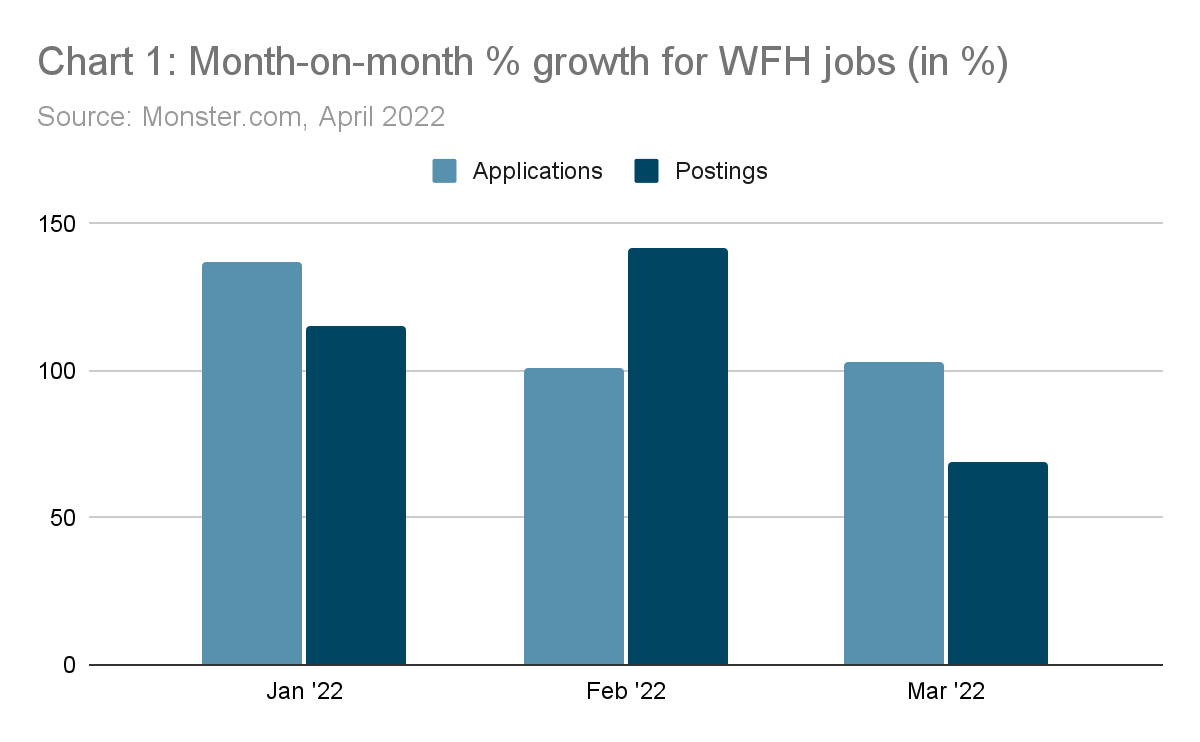
Meanwhile, in Wipro fully-vaccinated employees have started coming back to the office from January 2022 after a hiatus of 18 months as the country's third-biggest outsourcer is also following a hybrid work model with fully-vaccinated workers coming to the office two days a week. Wipro Chairman Rishad Premji last month announced on Twitter, saying, “After 18 long months, our leaders @Wipro are coming back to the office starting January 2022, twice a week.

HCL Technologies has already started asking its senior employees to come to the office at least twice a week, while others must attend the office once a week as per requirement. “We do expect momentum to increase by the end of the calendar year 2022. This is the policy that we have at this point,” Apparao VV, CHRO of the company said.

VIII.A Stop Press: Offices likely to reopen, but WFH roles remain top choice

Is it commuting relief or the comfort of a home office? After the second Covid wave subsided, there may have been a reset in the way people work — either from the office or in a hybrid way - but WFH remains a hot favorite among job applicants. Many organizations worldwide have adopted the hybrid work culture, which has emerged as the future of work. Notwithstanding a few bouts of the intermittent surge of pandemic cases, and considering the decline in the number of affected over the past few weeks, Hindustan Unilever (HUL) has moved to hybrid ways of working.

Assessment technology provider Mercer-Mettl’s CEO Siddhartha Gupta said, “While one reality is that face-to-face interactions are more creative and problem-solving, WFH is a time-saver. It also allows for deep thinking which usually one would not get in an office environment. Both have their pros and cons.” Some organizations continue to offer the work-from-anywhere (WFA) option for employees. Travel tech firm Sabre is one such to introduce a global WFA program that provides their team members with a selection of flexible work arrangements. According to the recent Monster data, 39% (Chart 2) of total WFH jobs were posted for freshers, which accounted for the highest share across functions.



Hyderabad is now back to the salt mines, especially for its IT employees. Albeit reluctantly, they are getting ready to switch back to the work from office culture, which they had almost forgotten. About 40 percent of the six lakh employees working in over 1,500 IT and ITES companies in Hyderabad, who had moved out to different places in the country, are now slowly returning to the Telangana capital as the severity of the pandemic is on the wane. Leading IT firms, including HCL Tech, Wipro, TCS, Infosys, and several others have either asked or are getting ready to ask their employees to bid adieu to WFH and get back to the routine of working from the office sooner than later.

VIII.B WFH: Important features

Remote work has clear benefits, but no situation is guaranteed to be perfect. Understanding the reasons as to why WFH – as well as the reasons not to – can go a long way in learning how to perform WFH successfully. The features are,

i) Flexible working hours: One has the liberty to choose his/her working hours and can speak with the manager to fix a working hour that may suit. Often a person may have chores to finish since s/he is a part of the family and may have certain duties that need to be done. So it’s always better to keep flexible working hours; ii) No physical separation between work and leisure time: When the workplace is one's home; and home is the workplace, then the mental separation between the personal space and the workspace is not there anymore. This could take a toll on one’s mental well-being and the idea of unwinding in familiar spaces which may not be familiar anymore; iii) No commuting: One saves up on fuel or travel because s/he has the comfort of their place to work out from. Working from home does help save money and expenses that aren’t needed anymore; iv) More time with family: Spending time at home means spending even more time with one’s family. Complaints of not spending enough quality time with the family get nullified; v) Less human interaction: A person may have family around him/her, but still, need peers and friends to socialize. For that one needs a separate group of friends to cope with the stress that may be happening at home; vi) Healthier lifestyle: Various studies confirm that remote workers eat healthier when working from home because of having options of having self-access to favorite food selection and the luxury of flexible time. When people have the time and space; giving food preferences a thought is what is next; vii) Hard to switch off: A remote worker sleeps at home, and works there too. Because of this, it becomes hard to separate private life and business life. One’s whole life revolves around work and it becomes a little difficult to turn off and detox which would have been done under normal circumstances.

IX. Discussions

The study is aimed at examining the innumerable effects of lifestyles, homes, and occupational factors on the physical and mental well-being of individuals who had transitioned to WFH, at will or forced, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The empirical data, collected during the research, indicate decreased status of physical and mental well-being. Reduced physical well-being has correlated effects with reduced mental well-being, each directly impacted by gender as well as income level.

Female workers and workers with an annual income of less than three lac, were reportedly found to have two or more new physical and mental issues than the male workers and workers with higher income[[[19]](#footnote-18)]. The researcher’s findings align with another recent survey which noted that female workers have a higher risk of depression while in WFH during the pandemic as it is more challenging for women, since females tend to be more accountable for all household chores and other domestic activities[[[20]](#footnote-19)]. The working mothers usually feel double the pressure at home due to a lack of support with homeschooling and taking care of underage children. In the same vein, individuals with lower income often experience a lack of job security which can directly increase anxiety and manifest into other physical and mental health issues.

The contributing effects of various lifestyle factors on physical and mental well-being are consistent with the findings in the literature. On average, respondents reported decreased overall physical activities which may have been due to stay-at-home restrictions and overall disruptions of personal routines. Even though one is restricted from many activities, continuing moderate exercise during WFH, such as walking, taking active short breaks, and playing with children, can be beneficial for health. Decreased physical and mental well-being was noted in those individuals that reported an increase in food intake, especially junk food, resulting in weight gain and other physical health issues, such as fatigue and digestive disorders [[[21]](#footnote-20)].

In addition to the pandemic contributing to a shift in behaviors, the stay-at-home orders also led to a unique WFH situation for individuals who live with their families. Having an infant at home is a precursor for better overall mental well-being. Similarly, when a toddler is at home that brings a positive vibe of physical well-being.

Unfortunately, a previous survey found that more than half of the respondents reported not paying attention to ergonomics while WFH [[[22]](#footnote-21)]. In addition to the workstation itself, WFH allows workers to adjust the lighting, temperature, and ventilation according to their personal preferences. Previous research has found that good IEQ at a workspace helps to improve workers’ comfort and reduce distractions to achieve higher productivity at work, which in turn can boost the health and well-being of occupants.

While this research study provides a deep insight into numerous important factors to be considered in supporting the physical and mental well-being of workers who are undergoing WFH, multiple limitations should also be acknowledged in the interpretation and use of these findings. It is important to note that these data were obtained during the days of the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, the findings are not meant to directly represent those of traditional WFH circumstances and may not replicate the health status or experiences once the restrictions and WFH became increasingly routine.

**X.** R**ecommendations**

In the absence of legally binding legislative guidelines available at the moment in the country,the recommendations appended below include a series of possible actions that could be initiated by the Government to make WFH more attractive and feasible in a local context.

1. For accomplishments in the short run, the Government should consider: i) Introducing formal regulative measures in formulating a robust WFH guideline for both employers and employees; ii) Taking into due considerations for all COVID-19 risk assessment into account while developing the guidelines; iii) Providing adequate measures suitable to different sectors; iv) Safeguarding stakeholders genuine expectations in the guidelines; v) Specifying minimum requirements for technology training for virtual offices; and for technical back up for WFH.  
2. In the long run, the Government should consider: i) Reexamining from time to time the possibility of remote working becoming the new normal; ii) Reviewing the status of current labor legislation and ensuring that the labor insurance policies are extended to WFH; iii) To encourage MSMEs to adopt WFH measures by providing subsidy and other incentives; iv) Strengthening the ongoing WFH practices, and; v) Promoting family-friendly employment cultures and practices.

XI. Conclusions

## This study, as is revealed through its preceding paragraphs, makes a pertinent point that the most sought-after ‘distress-time’ rescuing option, WFH, could not stand apart as the panacea for the vulnerable workforce. While full credit in WFH remains, the expectations in its current form cannot be compromised. Adequate guidelines and policies are needed from the government to be in place to properly regulate and make WFH attractive and feasible. Proper policy planning and implementation are of absolute necessity in adapting online works remotely. During the COVID19 pandemic scare, the decision to suspend in-person meetings and work was implemented swiftly, but without sufficient guidance to carry on flawlessly. Workers were vastly left unaware of what WFH meant to them and the lack of adequate resources required for enforcing the change, like software, access to official documents and proper working space, etc. were found wanting. Proper skilling was required if the practice needed to be a feasible option for the new normal.

The pandemic had devastating effects on lives, more so on the poorer chunk of the society, and depending upon its severity clamping lockdown was inevitable. Many people were starving and became jobless and in such a situation, WFH/WFA was a good option that brought much-needed relief to those hapless bandwagons. The concept of WFH has evolved before the pandemic though, during the days of turmoil, amidst this critical scenario, people across the nations were more inclined to embrace WFH rather than commuting for a 10-5 job under risk. The credit for success, however, goes to advanced software technologies like Slack, Skype, Google Hangouts, and Zoom- and not to forget email and texting.

Under the safe canopy of WFH, it is not essential these days to regularly visit the office to become an effective workman. Every important work can be performed effectively from one’s home office. It would continue to be a very powerful instrument if employers too did acknowledge the benefits accrued from the arrangement. Companies that push the WFH facility, may enhance employee productivity, lower organizational expenses, and can reduce turnover. As a saving grace, the inevitable experience gained from the COVID 19 disaster that forced a major quantum of a vast global workforce into embracing WFH/WFA, ultimately helped both employers and employees to survive.

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