

Women Striking Balance between Work and Personal Life during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of National Capital Region of India

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses and draws out valuable insights on how women juggle between work-life during the pressing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic in National Capital Region of India (Delhi-NCR) and aims at reviewing the challenges women face to achieve a sound psychological and physiological balance in their lives. The research aims at studying working women and homemakers in Delhi-NCR to understand the challenges they faced during the sudden emergency of COVID 19 in maintaining work life balance and the parameters that helped them overcome these challenges. In order to achieve the desired outcome of the challenging role played by women as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, daughter-in-law's, grandmothers along with being a working woman; the research aims at understanding the mental and physical barriers they faced on a daily basis and the factors that stressed them the most.

Keywords: Women; Pandemics; Balance; Stress; Work-life.

Introduction

The extensively acknowledged and accepted job of women is childbirth, be spouses and mothers, do the cooking and other household chores; they deal with men and are subordinates to male position (Haralambos & Heald, 2016, pg. 442). Even in the most developed societies women have to face some or the other way of subjugation. These conceptions are applied, somewhat, to basically every known society. The most essential division of work has all the reserves of being established on sex or sexual orientation. There are men's activity and women's activity ascribed in the easiest hunting and gathering groups to most complex industrial social orders. As far as the rewards of prominence, riches and influence are connected to sexually orientated jobs, women constantly fall off to an extremely terrible place. Be that as it may, with the rise of Women's Liberation Movement, two principle positions have risen up out of the discussion. First, keeps up that the sexual division of work and disparity between the genders is resolved somewhat by naturally

or hereditary based contrasts among people. Secondly, the individuals who contend that sexually orientated jobs are socially decided to contradict the position and imbalance between genders result from socially developed force connections.

Historically, the division of labor has evidently been carved out on the basis of sexes and while analyzing the theories of sociologists and anthropologists like Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox who propounded the concept of '*the human biogrammar*' (Tiger & Fox, 1972) to explain the genetic and biological basis of division of labor between sexes. These anthropologists challenge the social researchers. They assume that individuals carry on essentially the way of life what they call human '*biogrammar*'. The Biogrammar is a hereditary based program, which inclines people to act with a goal in mind. Although the biogrammar structures of people are comparable in numerous regards, there are significant contrasts between them as asserted by the advocates of this hypothesis.

Tiger and Fox argue that compared to women, men are more aggressive and dominant. These qualities are hereditary; specifically, they result from differences among male and female hormones. These distinctions are halfway because of hereditary legacy from man's primate precursors and mostly because of a hereditary transformation of hunting lifestyle. They are answerable for the security of the band and for coalitions or wars with different groups. Consequently, men hoard the 'position of intensity'. Since Tiger and Fox consider dominance to be a 'sex linked characteristics' (Haralambos & Heald, 2016, pg. 443), it apparently recommends the over-loaded fantasies encompassing the viewpoint of a dynamic woman.

By correlation, women are conditioned by their biogrammar to reproduce and take care of children (Haralambos & Heald, 2016, pg. 444). The essential nuclear family consists of mother and child. In their words, 'nature intended mother and child to be together' (Haralambos & Heald, 2016, pg. 444). Henceforth, the division of work is completely represented for a woman inside the limits of a house and the man designed up to look for the family.

Furthermore, G. P. Murdock propounded the concept of '*biology and practicality*' (Murdock, 1986). Even though, other anthropologists work from totally different assumptions. They see natural differences among people as the premise of sexual division of work in society. In a diverse study of 224 social groups going from hunting and gathering groups to present day country states, Murdock inspects the exercises assigned out to people. He discovers tasks, for example, hunting, gathering and mining to be predominantly male jobs, cooking, assembling wild vegetables, water carrying and making and fixing garments to at great extent female job. He expresses that, 'a man with his superior physical strength can better undertake the more strenuous tasks, such as, lumbering, mining, quarrying, land clearance and house building. Not handicapped, as is woman by the physiological weights of pregnancy and nursing' (Haralambos & Heald, 2016, pg. 445). Thus, the favorable circumstances innate in a division of work by sex apparently represent its all-inclusiveness.

Talcott Parsons examined on the same lines of genetic and biological disposition as the former anthropologists and consequently propounded the concept *biology and the 'expressive female'* (Parsons, 1964). Similar arguments are advanced to represent the role of women in industrial society. Talcott Parsons sees the isolated nuclear family in modern industrial society specializing in two essential functions: the socialization of the young and the adjustment of adults (Haralambos & Heald, 2016,

pg. 446). Parsons illustrates the woman's role in the family as 'expressive', which implies she gives warmth security and emotional support. This is fundamental for effective socialization of the young. This is considered her major contribution to the second function of family i.e. the stabilization of adult personalities. The male provider spends his working day competing in an accomplishment-oriented society. This 'instrumental' role leads to pressure and anxiety. The expressive female relieves this strain by providing the breadwinner with affection, considerations and understanding. Thus, existing organic differences represent an obligation of familial solidarity inside social orders.

It can be evidently noted that they suggest that women were biologically different from men consequently stating that sexes are further differed upon their physicality and hormonal responses- like men being accorded with the task of higher strain tend to become more aggressive however women are compartmentalized to be as more emotionally expressive and nurturing thereby assigning them with roles of caregiver rather than the breadwinner. This perception persists from the generation of hunters and gatherers up until today despite the advent of feminist movements.

Whereas, sociologists like Ann Oakley's '*cultural division of labor*' (Oakley, 1974) is highly critical of this biological basis on which division of labor is categorized. She claims that this preconceived notion of men- women relationship and the western and male eyes theorized roles. She further explains that there is an array of societies in the world wherein roles of sexes are either reversed or are jointly shared. Turning to present-day societies, Oakley notes that women form part of many armed forces, particularly those of China, Russia, Cuba and Israel. In Indian about 12% of laborers on building sites are women and in some Asian & Latin American countries a quarter of labor force in mines are females. She even comments on perceptions like the absence of a motherly figure does not necessarily affect the condition and emotional bond and competence of a child. Moreover, stating that some sort of distance between the mother and the child makes the former less irritable compared to a full-time mother.

Ernestine Friedl gives another clarification to the sexual division of work and male predominance. Like Oakley, she reinforces a social clarification-taking note of the astonishing variety in sexual orientation jobs between social orders. For instance, she sees that in certain social orders, activities, for example, weaving, earthenware making, and stitching are believed to be 'normally' men's undertakings, in other's this is predominantly the role

of women (Friedl, 1975). It is noteworthy that in social orders where men perform such undertakings, these convey higher prominence than during the ones where their female counterparts perform them. Friedl sees this, as an impression of male predominance, which she keeps up, exists somewhat in all social orders. She characterizes 'male strength' as a circumstance wherein men have profoundly particular access, despite the fact those not being generally selective privileges to those exercises to which society concurs the best worth and the activity of which grants proportion of command over others.

She further remarks that the level of male strength is an outcome of the recurrence with which men have more significant rights than women to resources outside the household gathering. This movement carries incredible prominence and capacity to the man's capacity. She checked it by looking at a couple of hunting and gathering societies. Thus, Friedl's thoughts are original and intriguing and uncover an entrancing transaction among science and culture.

Sherry B. Ortner attempts to give an inclusive explanation to the universal devaluation of women. Ortner claims that it isn't biology as such that attributes women to their status in society yet how each culture characterizes and assesses biology (Ortner, 1975). In this manner, if this universal evaluation is changed it could help endeavor adjustment in female subjection.

The universal evaluation of culture as superior to nature is a fundamental reason for devaluation of women. Women are seen as closer to nature than to culture; henceforth degraded when contrasted with men (Haralambos & Heald, 2016, pg. 452). Their characteristic working is identified as reproduction, maturity adding up to their fundamental tendency, for example, nurturing of a newborn child. Consequently, institutions like family are connected more with the expressive duty of women which is closer to nature. And institutions, like, legislative matters, warfare, religion, are subsequently an undertaking for men. However, Ortner's argument contains certain insufficiencies but it does contain a significant legitimacy. It contains a general clarification for a universal phenomenon of the below average status of women.

Women and Industrialization as examined by Ann Oakley has traced the changing status of women in British society from the eve of the industrial revolution to the 1970s. She claims that, 'The most important and enduring consequence of industrialization for women had been the emergence of the modern role of housewife as "the dominant mature feminine role"' (Haralambos & Heald,

2016, pg. 454). During the early phases of industrialization, which Oakley dates from 1750 to 1841, the factory steadily replaced the family as the unit of production. Women were employed in factories where they continued with their conventional work in textiles. The primary significant change, which influenced their status as workers, was an advancement of industrial facility acts beginning in 1819, which gradually limited child labor (Haralambos & Heald, 2016, pg. 455). As a result, children became increasingly dependent on their parents and necessitated care and supervision, a role which fell on women. From 1841 to the advent of 'First World War' in 1914, a combination of pressures from male workers and philanthropic reformers confined female employment in industry. Women were seen by many male factory workers as a threat to their employment (Haralambos & Heald, 2016, pg. 455).

Victorian Ideology, particularly the versions of the upper and middle classes, expressed that a women's place was in the home. Queen Victoria reported, '*Let women be what God intended, a helpmate for man, but with totally different duties and vocations*' (Hudson, 1970, p.46). Oakley claims that during the second half of the 19th century these attitudes began to filter down to the working class. Thus, a combination of factors included the ideology, the banning of child labor and restrictions on the employment of women, locked the majority of married women into the mother-housewife role (Haralambos & Heald, 2016, pg. 456).

Each of these approaches shares objectives and purpose that they see their subjects from a women's point of view, yet they vary in the way they are accomplished. Feminist observers are pragmatically dedicated to the investigation of men in the light of woman's view. Women's liberation movement sprung from struggles of women's exploitation. Postmodern Feminism is the term used to depict the fractured replacement to the approach caused by the breakdown of sisterhood and Marxism. It recommends the utilization of Feminist Observation as it endeavors a more extensive and a more sensible clarification to women.

In the current scenario of societies in the world women face dynamic kinds of personal and professional stressors ranging from work deadlines to emotions of guilt and separation from their off springs. Author Kaveree Bamzai's book *No Regrets: The Guilt Free Woman's Guide To A Good Life* (Bamzai, 2019) elucidates on the challenges they face while being a mother and professional all at the same time while maintaining a sane and stable mental health. In order to understand the complexity

of a woman we must dig deep into their personal goals, dreams and desires to uncover the true woman.

Since, time immemorial pandemics have devastated generations, dynasties and even civilizations leaving behind profound effects on societies. They have shaped our societies in different aspects. Historically, we have witnessed numerous outbreaks of infectious diseases which were either considered the wrath of gods or a consequence of man’s actions. In a long successions throughout history, pandemic outbreaks have decimated societies, determined outcome of wars, wiped out entire populations, but also paradoxically, cleared the way for innovations and advances in sciences (Scheidal, 2017, p.291–313).

Historically, the same premise of quarantine evident in Black Plague, Spanish Flu, SARS, Ebola, Zika Virus has been in play during COVID-19 as well. Despite its successes and failure in containing a pandemic the institution of quarantine still remains in effect presently as a highly regulated, nationally and internationally governed public health measure available to combat contagions (Tognotti, 2013).

Methodology

In the light of the above mentioned circumstances research has been conducted on women (Employed and Homemakers) in order to unveil the life they live in the pressing circumstances of a global pandemic while striking balance between their mental health and their ascribed duties be it personal or professional and how women deliver in such competing circumstances and still remained or tried to remain same in the challenging situations. The study had its focus on review of literature, surveying the affected population in the area and analysing the statistical outcome of survey to conclude the effect of pandemic in the given circumstances.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 suggests the age group of the surveyed women and shows that 48% of women surveyed lied between the age group of 18–27 years, 28% lied between the age group of 28–37 and 47 and above category was nearly 10%. This age group was choosen keeping in mind that most of the women start working after 18 years of age and work till 60 years of age. This work group was divided into three parts to address different kinds of responsibilities a woman has to bear at different stages of life.

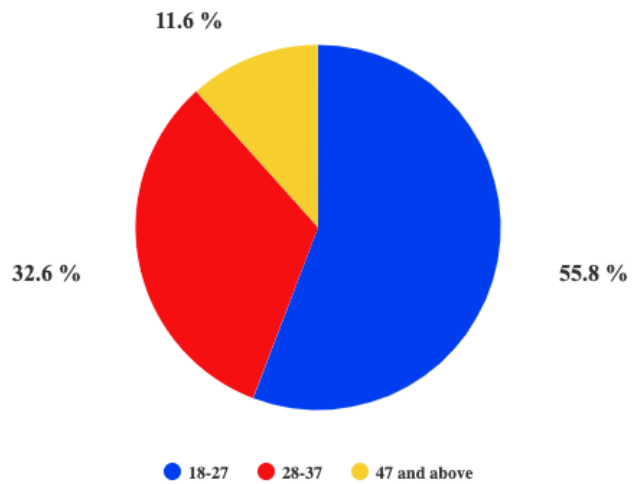


Figure 1

The women selected were divided in four categories as single, married, divorced/separated and widow to understand the harmony between work -life during different kind of personal circumstances. Figure 2 gives the statistical analysis of the marital status and the data obtained represents that 48% of these women are single, 28% are married and about 16% to 8% are divorced/separated/ widowed women.

After categorising women in four parts according to their different personal circumstances the difference of the type of work they are engaged in was also studied. Figure 3 studies the area of employment women was involved in, which suggests 62% women were employed in private sector followed by entrepreneurs at 18% and public sector workers at 8% along with homemakers at 13% respectively.

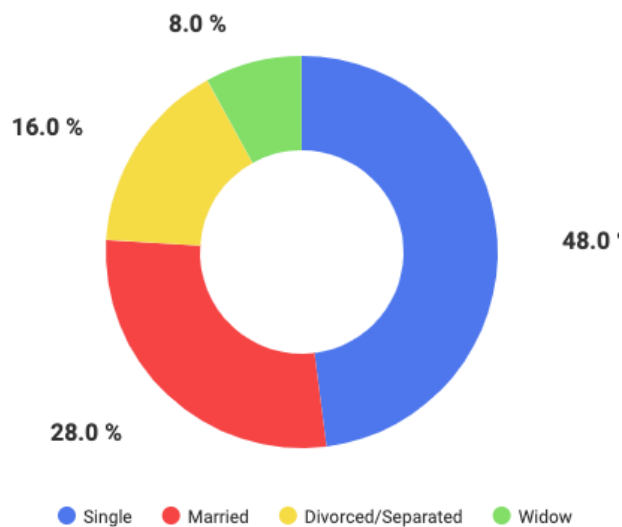


Figure 2

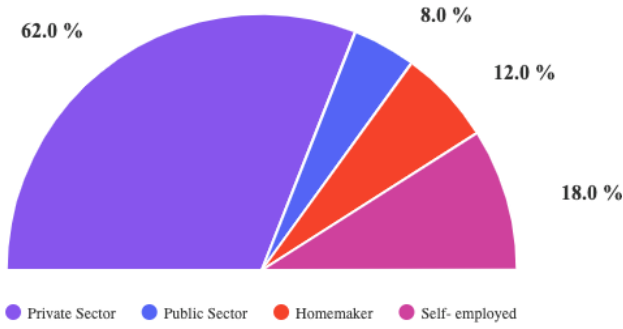


Figure 3

It is a known fact that money solves a lot of problems in the life of a human being. To understand women’s struggle between work and life it was also necessary to understand the amount of money they were drawing so they were divided in four categories. Figure 4 indicates that a major portion of women have a monthly salary of 60,000 INR and above depicting a more metropolitan standard of living, encompassing more reliance on lifestyle and financial independence which supports mental health. However, the sample also covers women from aspirational category with 20% of them drawing monthly salary between 40,000–60,000 INR, 24% of them drawing monthly salary between 20,000–40,000 INR and 6% earning below 20,000 INR.

Children take away a lot of personal time in a women’s life. Most of them are worried more about their children than about themselves. To understand their personal engagement it was also studied that how many of them had children to look after apart from all other work. Figure 5 depicts that 68% of women have no offspring and women having offspring are 32% in this study. Therefore, the results showcased would speculate differently ordered priorities for women in terms of the time management and psychological stressors they go through.

Figure 6, 7 and 8 represents that during the worldwide shift in the structure of industry functioning, majority of women i.e. 54% have been working from their respective

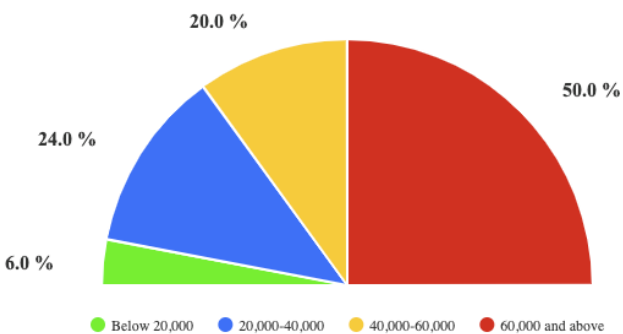


Figure 4

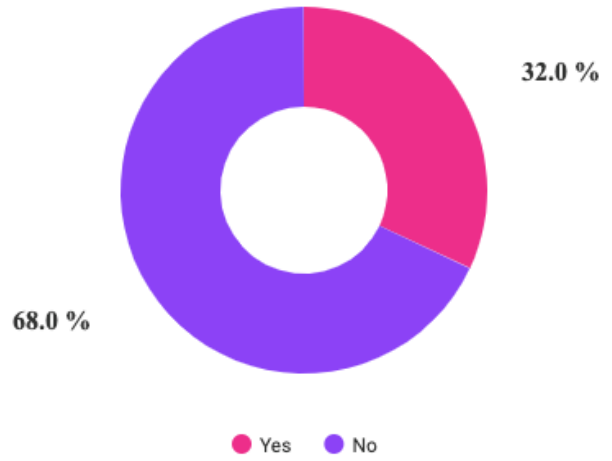


Figure 5

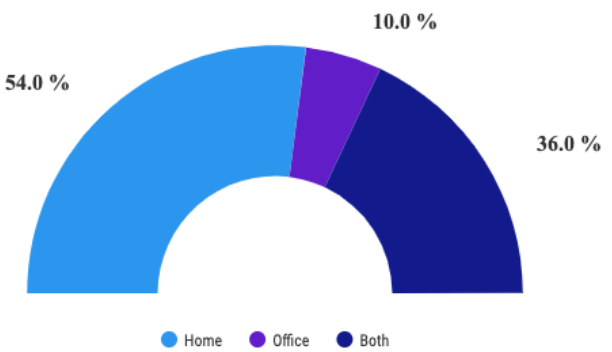


Figure 6

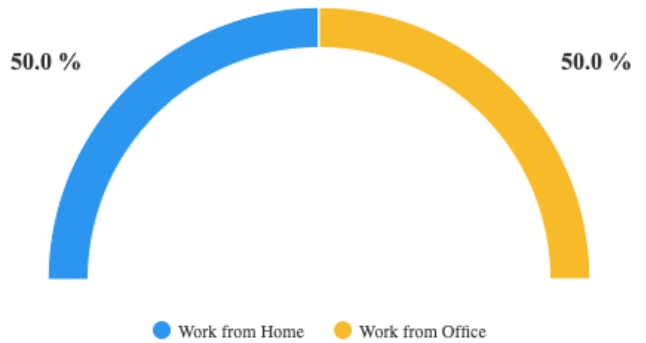


Figure 7

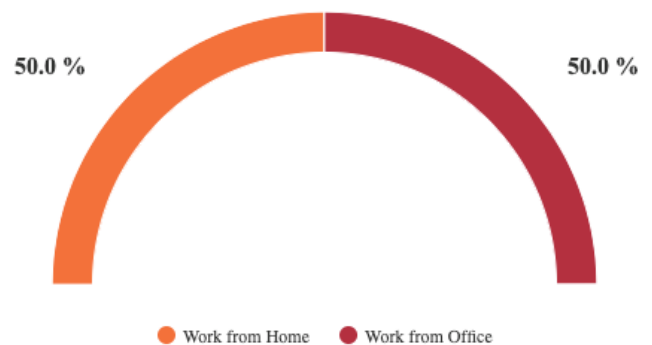


Figure 8

homes. 10% worked from office and 36% worked from office as well as home depending on situation. This survey was made to understand how much time women got to carryout the house hold cores and look after their children.

Figure 9, 10 and 11 represents the time management of the selected demographic in a day in performing varied activates. The results reverted by the respondents

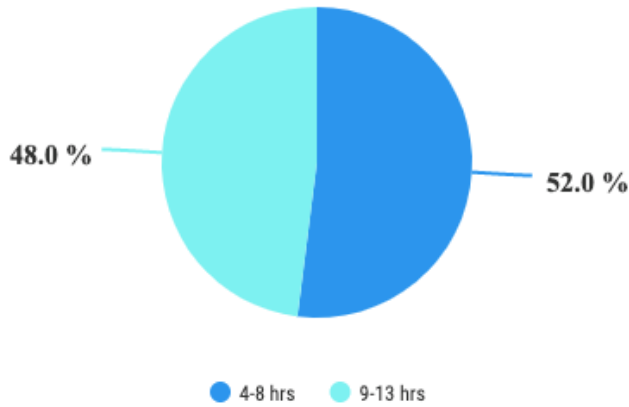


Figure 9

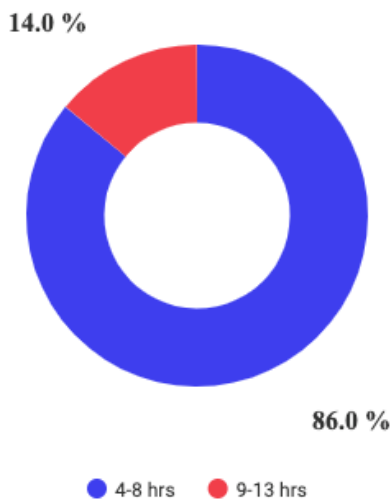


Figure 10

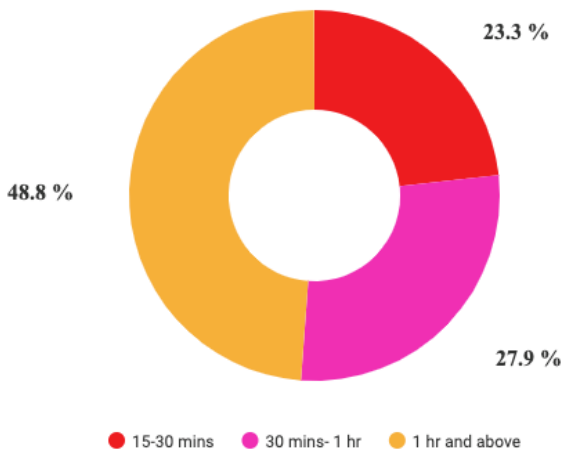


Figure 11

suggests that due to the shift of work like situations at home the hours spend on a regular basis have expunged from a minimum of 8 working hours to about 9–13 hours a day as the quote goes “you are practically living at work.” With subsequently effect the time devoted to personal needs and household chores had also been shared with immediate members of their own house.

Figure 12 and 13 depict the analysis obtained by the sample which reflects that women have preferred to consciously indulge in more and more physical activities to combat pandemic but also to get mental balance and consequently de-stress in dynamic situations. Moreover, 66.7% of the demographic was successful in performing that as well.

Figure 14 depicts that the selected demographic engaged in varied recreational activities to maintain a healthy mental life during this Pandemic. With this in concern, newer activities like reading, painting, cooking, gardening etc. have also surged. Hinting towards reliance on more holistic wellness approach by workingwomen.

Figure 15 depicts that the data manifested a new need for women to work from home presently also need to



Figure 12

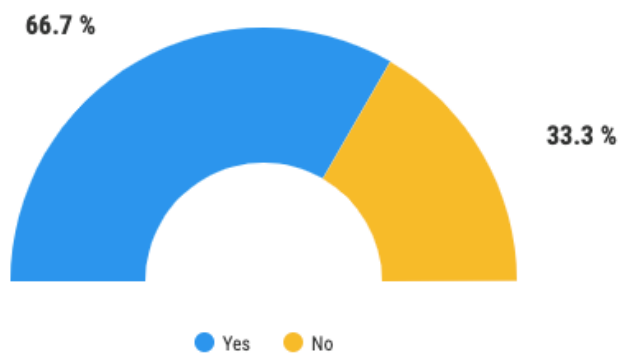


Figure 13



Figure 14

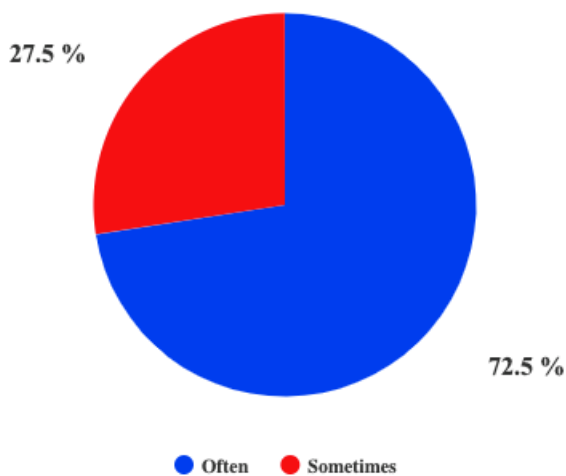


Figure 15

return to site of their office as a part of their old version of normal. Highlighting the pondering nature of the shift in the normal for women and its consequent impact on them.

The result derived from the research done on a wide population of women suggests that, whether they were single, married, widowed or divorced or whichever area of employment they were in, the initial stressor during the Pandemic occurred because of shortfall in money they were spending every month. This directly made an impact on their spending and other lifestyle habits and was further aggravated in the case of women with children as they have to deal with the expenses incurred to homeschool them.

Besides the monetary aspect, women throughout the study were seen to be overwhelmed with the lack of work-life concept as now their office exists inside the house. But with relaxation in lockdown rules, women were again forced to shed away their newly adapted mechanism of working in the house and dwindle between

house and office in such trying circumstances which is represented in Figure 6 and suggests that though 54% of women were working from their houses, 10% had to go out and work in the formal environment of an office and 36% women were struggling between both. Besides the stress generated out of adaptability, women were more prone to catching the virus as well adding to their pre-existing stressors.

By Figure 9 it becomes evident that on an average woman were spending 4–8 hours of their day on working, moreover, the second task they devoted their most time was on activities pertaining the household like chores, kids and family as depicted in Figure 10, leaving only a window of an hour for their personal needs (Figure 11).

In order to minimize the impact of stressors on their mental and physical health, women took up an array of physical activities like running/walking, yoga/Pilates and home workout to eliminate surface level stressors to cope with the shrunk work-life environment. Moreover, as suggested in Figure 13, 66% of them were successful in performing these activities. Besides this, Figure 14 depicts that women engaged in varied recreational activities as well to maintain a healthy mental life during this Pandemic. With this in concern, newer activities like reading, painting, cooking, gardening etc. have also surged. Hinting towards reliance on more holistic wellness approach by workingwomen.

Conclusion

Nora Ephron in her commencement address at Wellesley in 1996 said, *“Of course you can have it all, as long as you embrace the mess”* (Bamzai, 2019, p.50). Moreover, Vanderkam says, *“We don’t build the lives we want by saving time, we build the lives we want, and time saves itself”* (Vanderkam, 2017). These exemplary remarks tell us a lot about not being fanatic about things we cannot perform in a day as we all our humans. One day of laxity would not shatter world peace!

It can be noted that the pandemics have had considerable impact of the lives of women, as they are required to manage the household while juggling with their professional responsibilities. Moreover, in the present circumstances, women are more likely to develop professional anxieties and mental disorders as quarantine due to the pandemic leaves little room for any personal escape when compared to men in society. As per the recent study *“The Shadow Pandemic”* administered by UN Women committee the report reflected that during

quarantine worldwide 1 in 3 women experienced physical or sexual violence by and imitate partner. Alongside women were also eroded by the concerns of well-being of their family members being exposed to the virus that as a result gave rise to a passive stream of anxieties about the new normal around the world. As an attempt to pacify these anxieties women during this quarantine resorted to methods and ways to combat these uncertainties by taking up hobbies and activities to keep them mentally engaged in order to understand the need for positive outlook and balanced mental health rather than resorting to fear of unknown.

According to the *International Labour Organization (ILO)*, 'it is still women who shoulder three-quarters of all unpaid care work' (Uchoa, 2020), with this remark in light the research uncovers that women with children had to largely take up the task of self-teaching their kids and tend to other family members. It is believed that domestic activities ranging from household chores to tending children is largely considered a woman's job. This aspect has put women under a lot of pressure to perform tasks adequately especially during pandemics as they face difficulty in managing time to create harmony in their work-life due to the shrinkage in the concept on indoors and outdoors. This aspect is adequately highlighted in BBC World Service article stating: "Mothers are worried that they're putting themselves at risk of redundancy, or getting into trouble at work because they haven't been able to perform as well as they usually do and even if women feel their jobs or incomes are relatively safe, many are saying they just cannot carry on like this for much longer" (Uchoa, 2020). Thus, it is putting women under a lot of pressure to perform tasks that were organic to them before this Pandemic and the consequent lockdown.

Furthermore, with the monetary aspect in mind, it can be noticed that women are far more vulnerable to being dismissed from their jobs if a company faces economic crisis during the Pandemic, as also stated in BBC World Service, 'However, if the company got into trouble or if there was a crisis, they were much more likely to withdraw their support for the female candidate' (Uchoa, 2020). This also leads to a crippling company image as stated by Corinne Post, from Lehigh University in the US state of Pennsylvania, "It's hard to find another explanation, other than those biases around women's commitments or whether they are really working as hard as they should" (Uchoa, 2020). Moreover, women lying in lower income category had to undergo the most evident form of hardship that is of financing their household during Pandemic and subsequent lockdown. Though "the world has made huge improvements towards gender equality in the past

50 years, but it will be at least another century before men and women close the gaps in the workplace, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF)" (Uchoa, 2020).

It can be evidently inferred out of the research that due to Covid-19 Pandemic women were bombarded with various structural and functional challenges but more or less they devised ways to get accustomed to the new normal to keep the engine running to manage harmony in state of chaos.

Competing Interest Statement

All authors have read and approved the manuscript and take full responsibility for its contents. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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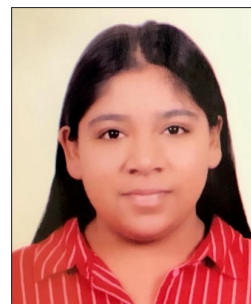
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