

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND WORK-LIFE IMBALANCE:
ADAPTING STRATEGIES TO MAXIMISE THE JOB PERFORMANCE WHILE
WORKING FROM HOME (A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY FROM THE
EMPLOYEES OF PAKISTANI ORGANIZATIONS)

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered the work landscape, accelerating the adoption of remote work and exposing profound challenges related to work-life balance. This paper explores the phenomenon of work-life imbalance during pandemic, examining the specific pressures and disruptions caused by this ‘new normal’ work strategy experienced by IT professionals and computer scientists. This study also focuses on remote working and how it impacts the employees’ management of work and the anthropology of the internet that has been changed in the recent years because of the virus. Therefore, utilizing qualitative methodology, in-depth online interviews were conducted from 20 professionals. Key factors contributing to work-life imbalance, such as blurred boundaries between work and personal life, increased workload, and constant connectivity, were identified and analyzed. In response to these challenges, the paper presents various strategies adapted by individuals to restore equilibrium and enhance productivity while working from home. These strategies include the use of technology for effective communication and collaboration, the creation of dedicated workspaces, time management techniques, and practices for maintaining mental and physical well-being. The participants also emphasized on the importance of organizational policies that support flexible work arrangements and employee well-being. The findings reveal that remote working has both positive and negative points and it is concluded that hybrid working model is more helpful in mitigating work-life imbalance to foster a sustainable and healthy work environment in post pandemic scenario in Pakistan.

Keywords: Work-life balance, remote work, COVID-19 pandemic, work-life imbalance, work-from-home strategies, employee well-being, flexible work arrangements, organizational support.

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INTRODUCTION

Diverse pandemic diseases have affected humans in different ways throughout the past, affecting people's health and way of life negatively. Its effect on the greater level is upon education, work-life balance, human psychology, work environment, and economy. Bienkowska et al. (2022) highlight that many epidemic diseases spread throughout such as Spanish flu, Hong Kong flu, AIDS, and the Asian flu. In 2019, a new virus spread COVID-19 from China and has affected the whole world in 2020 as it has been called a global pandemic. Limiting social interaction was done as a precaution to stop the coronavirus from spreading further (Hasan, Rehman, and Zhang, 2021). Researchers revealed that covid effected the work strategies across the globe (Zoonen,etal 2021). There have been substantial changes in the timing, location, and manner of work, as demonstrated by the widespread implementation of remote work directives (Lopes and Couto etal, 2024; Zoonen,etal 2021) According to Rehman, Sultan and Ahmed (2023) majority of the global organizations authorized 81% of their employees to take use of work-from-home options. With the advent of COVID-19, there is a major change in the work environment in Pakistan also, businesses focus on the work from home with the proper guidelines.

Communication, information networks and work-from-home practices have been made possible by developments in light of the internet; as these parameters have the attention of anthropological scientists. Despite early advancements in the progressive nature of the internet which brings enormous changes in the lifestyle of workers and the advancements have been more pervasive in existing habits and power structures, rather than sensational. The implementation of repression causes an increase in the usage of internet traffic, especially for training, remote divisions, commerce, and entertainment (Candela, Luconi, and Vecchio, 2020). In Pakistan, the adoption of this new-normal remote work has been fraught with unique difficulties. The country's diverse socioeconomic landscape means that not all employees have equal access to the necessary technological infrastructure, reliable internet connections, or even a conducive home environment for work. These disparities have exacerbated stress levels and reduced productivity, as employees struggle to juggle professional duties with domestic responsibilities. Additionally, cultural factors and family dynamics play a significant role in shaping the work-life balance, making the Pakistani experience distinct from other global contexts.

The new change in the work environment results in work imbalance as the work-life balance has become erratic resulting in telecommuting, as the representatives' capacity for execution, accountability, and fulfillment has decreased. In this way, the employee's effectiveness is also jeopardized as they struggle to maintain their focus which causes a deterioration in both levels such as in their performance and presentation (Wright et al., 2022). Reduced worker performance results in a reduction in the association's overall production as the employees deal with obstacles to achieving the best aims within the allotted time and their diminishing performance also affects how effective they are in the work environment (Kumar and Nayar, 2021) This study tends to highlight how this new-normal impacted the work-life balance and what strategies IT professionals have adopted over the years of pandemic outbreak. Through the experience of working remotely for almost three years this study sheds light on both positive and negative impacts of working from home. This research paper aims to delve into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance in Pakistan, providing a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by employees and organizations. It will explore the socio-economic and cultural factors that influence work-life dynamics and examine how these have been disrupted by the pandemic. By identifying the specific issues and stressors affecting Pakistani workers, the paper will propose targeted strategies to enhance work effectiveness while promoting a healthy work-life balance. These strategies will include organizational reforms, policy recommendations, and practical tools for employees to better manage their time and responsibilities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of my study include the following.

1. To explore the role of working from home in examining the work-life balance of employees.
2. To examine the strategies people have adapted for effective remote working.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is significant because it explores more nuanced experiences of work life imbalance caused by remote working for almost three years after pandemic outbreak. This study informs how IT professionals have adapted new strategies to improve their work-life balance and enhanced their productivity. Since the covid is almost over and traditional office routines are being resumed by many professionals, this study informs us about the preferences of employees to continue remote work or returning to office space. This study is more significant because there is yet no qualitative research to explore this phenomena in detail.

This section presents the existing literature on Covid-19 and its impact on work-life balance and the implication of spill-over theory in this regards. This section also highlights the anthropology of internet and its significance in day to day life of employess.

REMOTE WORKING AND COVID-19

Working from home was not an option for all employees before the pandemic as it brings many challenges to them. In this regard, Wang et al. (2021) state that due to the current situation, prior to the Coronavirus, the majority of workers had little to no experience working remotely, and neither they nor their associations were set up to assist with this training. Currently, a significant portion of the global population must telecommute due to the exceptional Coronavirus pandemic that flare-up in 2020, which has unintentionally sparked a thorough global investigation of remote working. Di Martino and Wirth (1990) state that working remotely is defined as “an adaptive work strategy is in which employees work in locations other than their primary workplaces or production offices; the expert has no direct interaction with employees there but can communicate with them via phone or email; using inventiveness” (p. 529). Ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen (2020) state that in particular, work-from-home is becoming more common in many organizations. While employees may be better able to assess their own problems, it can be good to have both their employers and managers in order to evaluate an employee’s viability and success at work. While there are many issues including poor correspondence, procrastination, melancholy, and work-home interference. Furthermore, Gomez et al. (2020) highlight that remote working is a burdensome task as it is crucial to emphasize the real workspace where tasks are carried out and open spaces are vital factors in the execution of collaborative work (collaborating), as well as in improved methods for working (shrewd work). The organizations promote the growth and improvement of people that are determined to achieve complete prosperity in the workplace by improving working conditions, resulting in making a proposal to make remote work as a successful procedure in terms of HR capability, the working environment, and the advancement of society as a whole.

Multiple countries have experienced an organic market shock as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. Lockdowns and other social segregation tactics have had a direct impact on the creation, use, and exchange of models. In a managerial context, remote working is examined and offers several benefits from a financial, environmental, and social standpoint mostly, because working from home eliminates the need to commute to an office, and visiting a co-working space takes less time and distance. Considering this, remote job contributes to the management of upsetting natural issues and the advancement near the genesis of urban areas and networks (Kylili et al., 2020). Furthermore, the rate of the Coronavirus can be used to predict the number of people moving to remote work, and younger people were destined to do so. Additionally, a higher percentage of data workers including executives, professionals, and related vocations are likely to shift toward telecommuting and have fewer cutbacks and vacations. If

there is hysteresis, people discover better ways to work remotely and organizations evolve the pandemic-driven changes that could foretell long-lasting effects on the relationship between work and society. It's important to continue monitoring how the concept of remote work evolves and to consider both the immediate and long-term effects of changes brought on by pandemics (van Zoonen et al., 2021). Malti (2020) states that the efficiency and working conditions of most associations have been damaged by the coronavirus pandemic. Due to the pandemic's impact on development and the temporary closure of workplace premises, associations have had to make arrangements for personnel space to work in some capacity after the implementation of lockdown protocols around the world.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND COVID-19

Work pressure and the ability to perform the working activities, telecommuting have a significant impact on how employees feel during work. Irawanto, Novianto, and Roz (2021) highlight the work-life balance in Indonesia and state that for Indonesian specialists, telecommuting is a different pace of work that encourages career fulfillment as a continuation in a working environment. Telecommuting is an indication of success for the organizations in the context of a collectivist society. Finding a balance between lighthearted and serious activities was seen as a positive sign and, in some situations, might boost the experts' sense of fulfillment from their work; on the other hand, it could be addressed to alleviate work pressure. The experts also seemed to have a strong connection with their families. If employees are required to work from home, the impact of work pressure on their job satisfaction is the opposite of what it would be in a traditional work place.

Furthermore, Hjalmsdottir and Bjarnadottir (2021) highlight that for some families, the prolonged COVID-19 outbreak has been extremely difficult and continues to be, as the unusual steps have been taken to stop it from spreading to have drastic effects on how well people are supported in their daily lives and social interactions. The mothers and their families found it difficult to overcome the most formidable obstacles, and they expressed feelings of unhappiness and being outmatched. Despite recent improvements in orientation uniformity, extreme events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can inspire situations that may not be guaranteed to focus on in the busy daily routines or people rejects to notice such situations. When families were forced into work-from-home due to lockdowns and social restrictions, women encountered an uneven distribution of work that made them busier in their daily routines and have difficulties gaining some acknowledgment from their respective family members.

The sudden onset of the coronavirus pandemic forced the organization to operate its operational activities under a work-from-home model. The functional movement frameworks have unanticipated modifications having an impact on how workers balance serious and enjoyable activities. The interplay between web preparation and web initiative promotes a healthy balance between easier and more serious pursuits leading to job motivation (Wiradendi Wolor et al., 2020). However, work inspiration has a crucial and positive influence on how representation is carried out. Given this, it is reasonable to conclude that work inspiration significantly influences representative execution. The benefit is that maintaining a good work-life balance can boost creativity; nevertheless, employees' motivation may suffer on rare occasions when there is an excessive amount of work. Negative outcomes, such disputes with family members, might arise from an imbalance between work and personal life (Amin et al., 2020).

The need to protect workers' health has increased as a result of the labor force, and firms must prioritize employee safety and well-being in order to build trustworthiness and a lasting organizational impact. Therefore, it is crucial to take into account representatives' balance between serious and enjoyable activities during the digitalization process (Gigauri, 2020).

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE INTERNET

The need to remotely reproduce or have computer-mediated encounters was ordinarily paired with in-person human interactions which motivates the computerized upset. Miller and Slater

(2020) highlight that all correspondence, whether it involves exchanging words or money, has a virtual perspective because pictures and other forms of media portray how people assist one another. It frequently incorporates mental creativity and the ability to bridge the gap between perception and reality. The place of virtualism is deliberation and this is part of the change leading to continued high levels of commerce where the global market serves as the primary framework for financial decision-making rather than the nation-state. Grimshaw and Hart (1995) state that the reliance on extra theoretical forms of communication opens the door for real individuals to be connected very distantly and in very significant ways. This dual evolution is communicated by the potential of “augmented reality” from one perspective and robots whose complexity faced by the users couldn’t possibly understand, and from another perspective, real-time interactions that are “good” and genuine (p. 46-64). Escobar et al. (1994) point out that advances in data and communication; in light of the Web have facilitated the emergence of new types of networks and open practices such as the peculiarities of anthropological analysts’ scrutiny. The Web’s technological advancements along with all the text and media that it contains, are social innovations, therefore, human sciences are suited for further investigation of communicative execution phenomena.

In regard to employees’ deterioration, Anton (2009) highlights that job performance issues have been linked to a wide range of effects, most of which are detrimental and have an impact on both; the well-being of employees and the operation of associations. Job strain can result from receiving contradictory or overlapping requests (job struggle) as well as from having insufficient information to accomplish one’s work (job ambiguity). Furthermore, Thamrin (2012) states that by doing preparation, guiding, and supporting the recurrence of cooperation to achieve self-completion and it is possible to increase representatives’ exhibition by giving thought and scholarly excitement to individuals. More thought should go into the internal and external pay of representatives and additionally, innovators can serve as role models that keep coming up with ground-breaking ideas, even today, when it comes to navigation. Therefore, it is extremely likely that it will improve employees’ satisfaction, which will be shown in their performance. Foote and Tang (2008) highlight that HRM is a tool that aims to improve an association’s display by methodically comprehending and regulating the concerns relating to the employees and their work environment. They highlight that the problem with their study is the lack of clarity and mindfulness among the workforce on the importance of occupation fulfillment and its impact on their effectiveness, execution, and loyalty. Despite the importance of occupation, fulfillment of needs is the authoritative responsibility and many organizations still don’t give this subject enough thought since senior management is unaware of its importance and how it affects the behavior and performance of workers.

This research focuses on the work imbalance due to Coronavirus and what ways employees adapted over years to mitigate this imbalance. Previous work focuses on the positive aspects of COVID-19 and work-from-home but this research will also highlight the imbalance created through this shift.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature, and the technique employed for the data collection is in-depth interviews. Initially pool of questions were generated and posted on social websites like linkedin and facebook. Those people who participated and gave elaborated responses in the comment section, they were contacted. Those professionals who belonged to Pakistan, and lived in twin cities Rawalpindi and Islamabad with an experience of working remotely were approached through messenger and after taking their consent video calls through whatsapp and zoom were conducted with them for in depth interviews. Regarding online interviews, Hinchcliffe and Gavin (2009) state that researching synchronous interviewing’s is related to the use of instant messaging as early investigations consist of offline data. Total 20 respondents were interviewed, 14 of them were males and 6 were females because the ratio of women in IT

profession is far lesser than men in Pakistan, National average of women in IT sector is 20% (PASHA, 2022) The online interviews were recorded with the prior consent of the interviewees. Later these interviews were transcribed, themes were generated and data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework employed for this research is the Spillover theory (Staines, 1980). The spillover theory (Staines, 1980) hypothesizes the circumstances in which there is a positive or negative spillover between the work microsystem and the family microsystem. Research shows spillover in terms of time, energy, and behavior that is typically negative if work-family interactions are rigorously controlled in time and space. Spillover is of two types; positive and negative. The *negative spillover*, suggests having insufficient resources to manage various jobs in both domains (work-from-home and familial relationships) may lead to stress and strain in the other (opposite; negative) direction. Serious family disputes or catastrophes become difficult for people to concentrate on their work, which considerably reduces their production. Negative spillover is the term for this phenomenon and has been linked to mental illnesses including depression in numerous research with working adults from Sweden, the Netherlands, the United States, and Australia (Cooklin et al., 2016). Zedeck (1992) states that when work is boring or tedious, employees become “lazy,” which then results in an unwillingness to do things at home or with family members. Negative spillover is the conflict between work and non-work and is most usually characterized by various sorts of friction and interference. The *positive spillover* means that through a certain effect, flexibility and adaptable plans can also be expected to improve relationships between hierarchical culture and work-home impedance. Overall, defining the intervening impact of adaptability would provide a chance to develop innovative technologies at a more practical level, either lessening negative work-home impedance or strengthening positive work-home blockage. Therefore, what is obtained in the office could positively overflow into the home. For instance, resources and opportunities from work can be used to progress development and improve working conditions at home (Voydanoff, 2004).

RESULTS

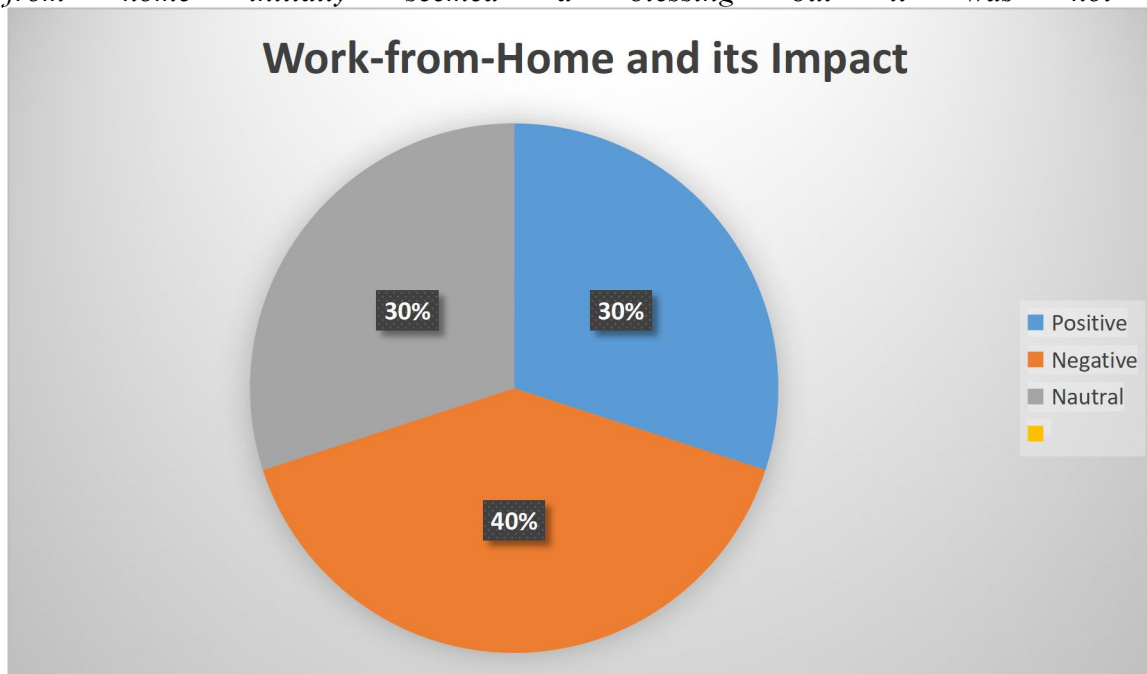
Because of the social segregation requirements imposed by the organizations due to the Coronavirus, participants who previously worked in an office space were directed to work from home. However, it's important to keep in mind that organizations that allowed home working arrangements were entirely distinct from any emergency remote working circumstances that existed before this virus. Firstly, none of the participants had the option to telecommute, albeit administrative rules required them to do so. Secondly, a sizable section of the organization's workforce, not just a few representatives or groups, was anticipated to telecommute. Thirdly, because there was such a high risk of contamination and fatalities, representatives were more stressed than usual about their own, their families, and their coworkers' well-being. Fourthly, many of our respondents worked in shared spaces with other tenants of the family, which led to disruptions and difficulty concentrating on work tasks. And lastly, the closure of sports offices and the lack of social interaction with anyone outside of their immediate environment had a similar negative as a positive influence on our members' physical and psychological well-being. Therefore, it is important to consider that our findings are in light of the difficult working and daily settings that our participants had to deal with.

WORKING-FROM-HOME AND IMBALANCE

The term “work-life balance” (WLB) is frequently used in organizations, especially big ones, and is typically intended to be at the center of a company's corporate government aid that has gained prominence in public discourse (Gragnano et al., 2020). The burden of specific modifications in organizational administration as well as in workers' behavior and activities has been brought about by the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, task execution is in general highly extensive and it is impossible to predict exactly which aspects of it are affected by the Coronavirus

pandemic. In general, the execution takes into account of factors including the effectiveness and type of the task, representational skills, the interpersonal traits of the workers, and the degree of target accomplishment. The coronavirus affects movement restrictions at work, salary declines, specialized joblessness, way of life changes due to interpersonal connections, changes brought on by separation, changes brought on by social distance, and so forth, as well as changes in people's dispositions around them.

The sudden restrictions and lock downs to prevent coronavirus left many people in despair. The fear of attracting virus, its viral nature and having no knowledge to deal with this emergency state was terrifying. One of the respondents, Aaiza shared her experience after sudden lock down, “ *we all were shocked when we received the email from HR that office will remain close for uncertain time, this uncertainty made me anxious, We just heard of pandemics from our ancestors but the first-hand experience of any pandemic, which was so severe in its nature, made me suffer through depression. it took me sometime to process the whole situation and working from home initially seemed a blessing but it was not easy.*”.



Total 20 participants were interviewed, 30% of them appreciated the work from home strategy to enhance their productivity and considered it as a positive factor contributing in their work-life balance. Sana, an IT Professional with 14 years of overall work experience and three years of WFH experience shared, “*I always fascinated WFH before Covid but was not allowed by the organization to telecommute, later due to social distancing I was directed to work from home and I just loved it, I had better work-life balance in these three years, the flexibility to work has brought ease in my life. The time I used to get ready for my office and travelling is now my ‘me time’, I do yoga and start my day with a very positive energy which enhances my productivity and I am super satisfied with this work strategy*”. Other positive impact of working from home reported by respondents to maintain stability and build a relationship with their family members who may have been lost in the daily commute and travelling cost. On the other hand, there were 40% of the respondents who reported that WFH has negatively impacted their work-life balance. The flexible hours of working were hindering to maintain a work schedule which was resulting in lower work performance and a constant stress to accomplish the task. Married women and male respondents were struggling more to find a balance between their work and family life while working remotely. Unmarried women or women with no children were able to maintain the balance and found WFH an amazing experience. A male respondent *Fakhar* who shortly after

joining his job at a multinational organization got to work from home due to covid was not happy with the situation. He shared, “ *I was very excited for my selection in my organization and everything around me got settled but covid happened and we all were directed to work from home. The lack of routine and new required learnings of job and work from home put me in a feeling of ciao. I suffered a lot in the first year of WFH, excessive work hours, switching to work and family activities simultaneously and the constant stress to perform better made me anxious and effected my sleep patterns. With time I am learning new skills and strategies to find the work-life balance. But still I aspire to return to office routine*”. A female respondent Jazba, with an experience of 8 years in IT sector narrated her experience of working from home as, “*Biggest challenge of WFH is to strike the balance and maintain a routine, before the birth of my son I was better able to focus on my work but now it is altogether a different case, it is very difficult to make a work routine with him, I work only when he is asleep or my husband is home to take care of him*”. Rest of 30% respondents described that work from home has both positive and negative impacts, they liked the flexibility to work from anywhere but at the same time, juggled to maintain a balance in their work and family life. The factors contributing to this imbalance were connectivity issues, excessive long hours of work, blurred boundaries, lack of routine, large families, and having no space to work. A male respondent Sajid shared, “ *You know cost of living is very high in Islamabad, I live in a joint family system and we have only one room, that I share with my wife, turning it into a dedicated workspace was highly difficult due to lack of space, I cannot concentrate on my work in daytime so I work a night and this is impacting my physical and mental health, I wish we can be benefitted from both work from home and going to offices*”. The respondents revealed that they work for roughly seven or eight hours nonstop; however, because telecommuting entails a lot of disruptions, such as running errands for the family and child care, they have to finish their allocated work by late afternoon or evening. As a result, workers who work remotely can run errands on their own, and HR managers don't have to keep a tight eye on their work-related activities. Therefore they adapted certain strategies to work effectively from home and maintain a work-life balance.

WAYS TO ADAPT REMOTE WORKING

As work from home strategy prolonged and many global work protocols were employed by majority of the organizations to improve the productivity of the employees. All the respondents unanimously gave weightage to the role of HRM to provide facilitative environment to improve the performance of employees. One respondent Mehran who was working in a multinational organization, expressed gratitude towards his company and specially HRM to provide him a safe and healthy environment to work, he said, “*I am very thankful to my organization because they have very strict policy about the health and safety of the employees, initially when the virus spread there was panic all around about its cost of treatment, but I had no worries in this regard because of health policies of my company. Secondly, they encouraged and appreciated us while working from home and trained us to strategize our work schedule to avoid the work-life imbalance*”. Recent researches are also acknowledging the role of HRM in adapting remote work. Other strategies than organizational support adapted by the respondents were as follows,

SETTING A ROUTINE/WORK SCHEDULE

After juggling with haphazard work schedule, 16/20 respondents shared that they learnt the importance of routine work, with the organizational support they sought a flexible routine for themselves according to their family types and life styles.

PRIORITIZING TASKS: A key strategy shared by the respondents was that they learnt to prioritize and Focus on essential tasks and learnt to delegate or say no to non-critical activities to manage workload effectively. Rukhsana shared, “*Before Covid I never worked from home and I got stressed and felt burnt out initially, it took me almost six months to accept all the situation, managing family and work while being home. I realized the importance the prioritizing my tasks,*

I discussed with my husband, who is thankfully very supportive, to help me follow a routine and take care of our toddler when I am working”.

SETTING BOUNDARIES: This strategy to adapt remote working took more time to execute by majority of the respondents, only 3/20 respondents shared that they were very rigid from the start about their work schedule and they never compromised on their work hours, breaks and personal time to maintain the balance. 17/20 respondents shared that they are still facing issues to establish clear boundaries between work and personal time because of diverse cultural reasons, 1) families were not familiar with WFH and they consider it holiday, they don't take this seriously and keep interfering. 2) Married girls had more issues because other family members do not consider their work important and keep involving them in different activities and household chores. In this case it was difficult to set a boundary between work time and personal time. 3) flexibility to work was another profound reason of not being able to set the boundaries, flexibility to work anytime was consuming the time and energy of respondents. Although with time respondents mastered this skill. Aaiza shared, *“now I know the importance of setting clear boundaries because I have seen its positive impact on my work performance and personal life, now I am better able to focus on my work and be more present in my relationships”.*

TIME MANAGEMENT: Majority of the respondents (14/20) revealed that time management technique was the ultimate strategy they have mastered in these three years to maintain work life balance. Shahid shared his experience, *“initially I juggled up with managing time, and I had no time even on weekends because of poor time management, now I have learnt this skill and everything seems sorted out”.*

SELF-CARE: Respondents shared that working remotely in the first instance made them lazy and their health regime changed due to the closure of sports offices and gyms. This inactiveness impacted their physical and mental health. But the continuance of remote work made them realize to prioritize self-care activities such as exercise, hobbies, and relaxation to maintain physical and mental health. A relatively senior IT professional Javed with an experience of 15 years voiced out his acquaintance with remote working, *“Going to office is something I always cherished, it is kind of a process of self care for me, to be healthy and active I always followed a proper health regime then covid happened and I contracted the virus. It was severe, my immunity became weaker, it took me almost 20 days to completely recover and first time in life I got to work from home. My hobby of exercise and eating healthy helped me regain my immunity and focus on my work. Covid made me realize the significance of self care and I shared this process with my team to help them to develop a self care routine to maximize their productivity and physical and mental health”.* Some (6/20) respondents shared that their organizations also helped them in maintaining self-care by providing online sessions and also encouraged them to buy some gadgets/equipments to stay fit, the offices reimbursed this equipment to a certain limit to keep their employees healthy and motivated.

COMMUNICATION: Another important strategy adapted by the respondents was to ‘communicate’ with employers and family members about work-life balance needs and seek support when necessary.

DEVELOPING DEDICATED WORK SPACES: this was one of the most useful strategies to adapt remote working in its truest sense. All the respondents emphasized on the role of dedicated work space in better work performance, balance and its impact on mental health. Having a proper work station helped the respondents to focus on their work and make other family members around to realize the significance of their work. This task was easy for the people in living nuclear setups but difficult for those living in joint family system. Maheen, who was used to go office without any concerns while living in a joint family system faced many issues while working remotely, she shared, *“God knows how I organized space in my room for a double pedestal desk and an executive chair to focus on my work, it was difficult while living in a large*

family to control the circumstances, the noise, interference of family members while meetings with team. Proper work space spoke for itself to take work seriously (laughter...)”

The findings reveal that lockdown due to covid forced majority of the employees to work from home, which was not an easy option to work for many employees. Employees were not trained to work from home and their respective families were not familiar with the situation. At the beginning employees suffered a lot due to lack of optimal work environment and other concerns like connectivity issues, lack of required gadgets, interference of family members and the blurred boundaries between work and personal life which caused work-life imbalance. To rectify this imbalance support provided by the respective organizations of these employees was highly valued. Employees adapted many key strategies to improve their job performance and ensure work-life balance. Even though they have become used with working from home, the majority of them (16/20) indicated that they preferred the hybrid working approach.

They wished to work from home as well as to return to office for better job performance and enhanced physical and mental health. Both men and women preferred hybrid working model to benefit from the positives of both work strategies. *Taania* while comparing both work models expressed, “*for me, work from home was a best option because I could focus more on my work while being home, there were no other official distractions but now I prefer to go office because my son does not let me work at home. Going office 3 days a week and working from home for 2 days is the best model to maintain the work-life balance in my case*”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The job habits of the working staff and employees as well as student education underwent significant change as a result of the coronavirus epidemic. Many organizations have begun to suggest a better strategy for attempting to adapt to these transitions successfully using teleworking or a work-from-home option that is approached from home (Bellman and Hubler, 2020). Numerous companies adopted the work-from-home model which was widely adopted worldwide, including Pakistan. The concept of working from home was an illusion for everyone before the coronavirus outbreak. Since the working methods and technology were not particularly sophisticated and the staff was not sufficiently skilled, working from home requires a calm environment and dedicated work space. Many professionals found this to be a significant difficulty because they live in small homes and lack basic essentials like personal computers or laptops with high-speed internet. For a long time, it has been accepted that successful and efficient work depends on people being physically present in their places of employment. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents experienced initial challenges such as managing work schedules, setting boundaries, and maintaining work-life balance. However, with organizational support, they gradually adapted effective strategies including setting routines, prioritizing tasks, time management, self-care, communication, and establishing dedicated workspaces. The importance of HRM in providing a safe and healthy environment, encouraging flexibility, and offering resources for self-care was universally acknowledged.

The ability of workers to balance work and family obligations depends on the characteristics of their positions and the aspects such as the conditions relating to people and families

Findings demonstrated that according to spill over theory work-from-home can be seen positively in many ways but it is also a source of imbalance among people because it weakens the consistency and motivating elements of their hierarchical culture and managers can help employees adjust their work and home life. It has been established that a creative hierarchical culture, which calls for a higher degree of adaptability in terms of representation has a positive association with time-sensitive impedance. According to the Spillover theory, many people have admitted that their regular routines are entirely turned around and the ability to strike a balance between work and home while telecommuting has declined. Finding a good balance is more important than has ever been because of some people's emotional suffering as 40% of

respondents state that telecommuting is probably not a good fit for everyone's personality or abilities as the representatives might like the routine and structure that working in an office environment provides. They prefer one-on-one interactions with coworkers and find that receiving eye contact from their manager is highly helpful in finishing tasks and reaching their goals. The assistance they require to manage their firm could be negatively impacted by telecommuting as it might not work for everyone because some people may have young children who may not understand boundaries and interfere with their working day. Others might not have the necessary room to set up a suitable dedicated workspace. They state that working from home avoids business interruptions if a professional doesn't have a sufficiently quiet dedicated working environment at home, and they may become easily agitated by family commotions or other members of their family. Respondents shared that these adaptations not only improved their job performance but also enhanced their overall well-being. Despite mastering the remote work setup, a majority expressed a preference for a hybrid working model, combining the benefits of both remote and office work to optimize productivity and personal health. This preference underscores the evolving nature of work environments and the need for organizations to continue supporting flexible work arrangements to maintain employee satisfaction and performance. The experiences shared by employees emphasize the importance of a balanced approach to work, where flexibility, support, and clear boundaries are key to achieving both professional and personal success.

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