

SCOPE-ILO Study on the Impact of Working from Home (WfH) on Women Executives and Managers in PSEs in India

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☐ **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

☐ **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

☐ **METHODOLOGY : TWO-TIERED APPROACH**

☐ **FINDINGS**

❖ **SIX DIMENSIONS OF WfH**

❖ **SURVEY FINDINGS (n=1969)**

❖ **KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (KIIs) (n=78)**

☐ **RECOMMENDATIONS**

☐ **GUIDELINES FOR A GENDER SENSITIVE WORK FROM HOME (WfH) POLICY IN PSEs**

☐ **WAY FORWARD**

- Study: Part of ILO-SCOPE's larger joint initiative: "empowering women executives in PSEs"
- Study: second in series. The previous study - "women in leadership and management in public sector undertakings in India" (2018)
- "Work from Home (WfH)" arrangement was one of the key recommendations of the previous study
- COVID-19 declared pandemic - catalyst in adopting WfH arrangement.
- Revisit the same set of women executives (i.e. E4-E9 Level) in PSEs – advantages and challenges; whether this is a long term sustainable solution

Specifically, the study objectives included:

- a. To investigate the impact of the Work from Home (WfH) arrangement on Women Executives/Managers in PSEs in India; also its long term sustainability
- b. To draw particularly upon the experiences of women executives in PSEs in adopting the WfH work arrangement

With regards to the above, the study explored the specific impact of WfH on women in PSEs who may be playing multiple rather a triple role simultaneously that of *“employees, caregivers, and managers/leaders”*

- **Two-tiered approach**: Both quantitative and qualitative method
- **On-line Survey**: Administered through Survey Monkey to **E4–E9** level women employees in 201 SCOPE member organisations. **1969 women employees** from 50 SCOPE member PSEs participated. The online survey had 26 questions (4 open ended: approx.8000 views)
- **Key Informant Interviews** (KIIs): Comprised interviewing top managers or decision makers of 22 selected PSEs. A total number of **78 KIIs** were conducted of which **14 were CMDs; 21 were Heads of HR; 22 were Supervisors/Team Leaders of a unit; and 21 were women in senior management and decision making positions.** In addition, **Director General (DG), SCOPE** was interviewed.

Six Key Dimensions of WfH Arrangement

- i. A well-defined Work from Home Policy with unambiguous terms and conditions
- ii. Provide Safe environment to employees to work without apprehensions
- iii. Identify critical support systems to ensure continued operations
- iv. Decentralize decision making based on ground situations or circumstances
- v. A robust communication system with suitable digital/technological support
- vi. Well defined measures to assess productivity; besides, well defined metrics to assess performance

Did the respondent work from home (WfH) following COVID-19 declared pandemic and subsequent lockdowns? (Q5)

Worked from Home (WfH) following COVID-19 declared pandemic	No of Respondents		Continuing to work from home (at the time of Survey)	No of Respondents
YES	939 (47.69%)		YES	91 (4.62%)
NO	201 (10.21%)		NO	1451 (73.69%)
ONLY FOR A LIMITED DURATION	829 (42.10%)		PARTIALLY/ ON A ROTA I.E. ROSTER BASIS	427 (21.69%)
TOTAL	1969		TOTAL	1969

At the time of the Survey, only a marginal percentage of women i.e. 4.62% were continuing to work from home. Most had returned to office

What are the key work-related challenges faced while working from home? (Q14)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Infrastructure facilities and tools (e.g. Internet Connectivity; Availability of Power Supply, access to printer, etc.)	65.72%	1,294
Managing Engagement, Productivity and Reporting of Teams	24.83%	489
Assessing or Measuring Performance	21.23%	418
Real-time Benefits of Face-to-Face Interaction Lost in Delayed Replies and Other Interruptions	48.25%	950
Loss of Informal Knowledge Sharing (e.g. sharing experiences/ideas that kept team members connected on a personal level)	43.12%	849
Extended Decision-making time, also Enforcing the decisions	23.11%	455
Implementing Policies, Policy Changes and Regulations	12.24%	241
Protecting company data without the risk of any data breach incidents and malware attacks.	20.92%	412
Ensuring the safety and well-being of team members	14.63%	288
Maintaining positive attitudes and motivation among staff	29.00%	571
Providing up-to-date information and guidance to staff regarding how to protect themselves and what to do in case of suspected infection	13.81%	272
Any Other, Please Specify:	10.77%	212
Total Respondents: 1,969		

Three things stand out in terms of key work related challenges: i. Infrastructure Facilities and Tools; ii. Real time Benefits of Face to Face Interaction Lost; and iii. Loss of informal knowledge sharing that kept colleagues connected on a personal level.

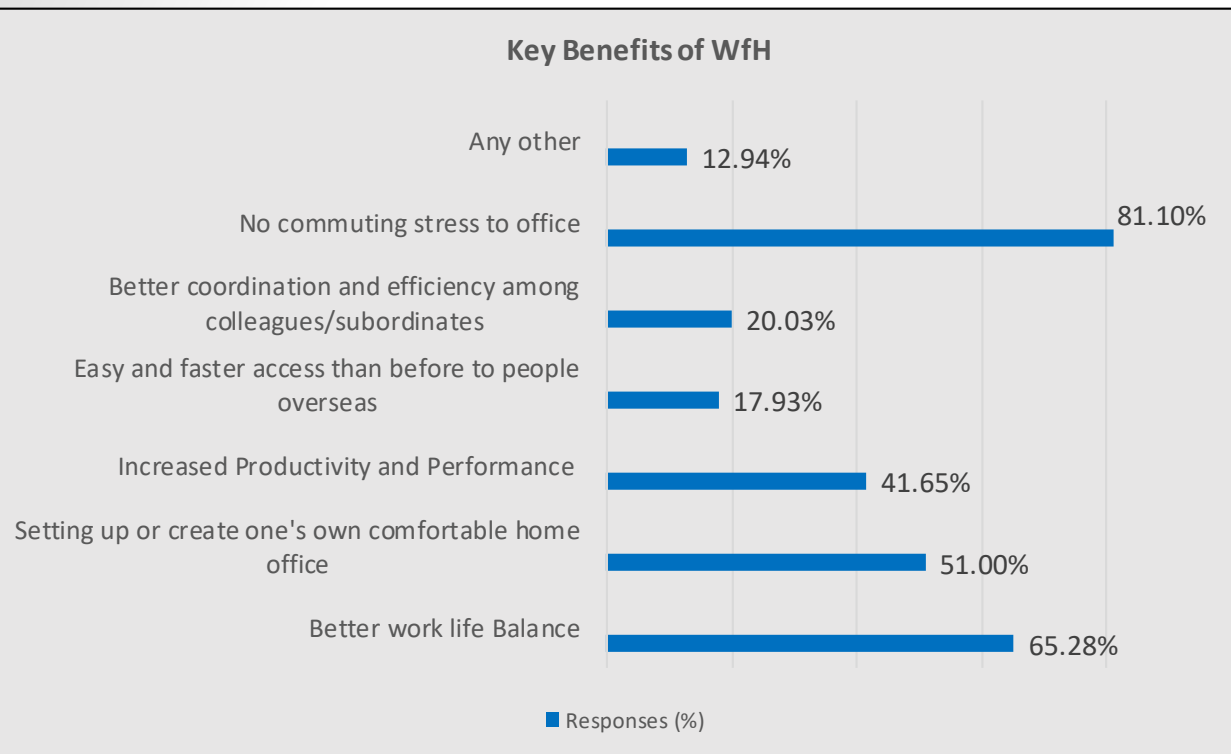
Two other challenges (Q15) were highlighted : a. getting preoccupied with unpaid care work (49.01%; n=965) and b. blurred boundaries between work and personal life (55.41%; n=1091):

“It made me realize that working hours need to be defined as calls/ discussions used to be happening even after normal working hours”.

“There was no clear demarcation between office hours and personal time. Bosses expected, since we are working from home, we will be available round the clock”

Some respondents used the open ended questions in the survey to share another aspect i.e. “issue of trust”

What are the key benefits of working from home? (Q17)



While citing the key benefits, **there were no glaring adverse or negative impact of WfH cited (Q19).**

One aspect highlighted by the respondents ($n=400$) was “heavier workload with long working hours”. Other than this, there were concerns that it can weaken connectedness with team members ($n=324$); also, it may affect the visibility of one’s work within the organisation ($n=264$).

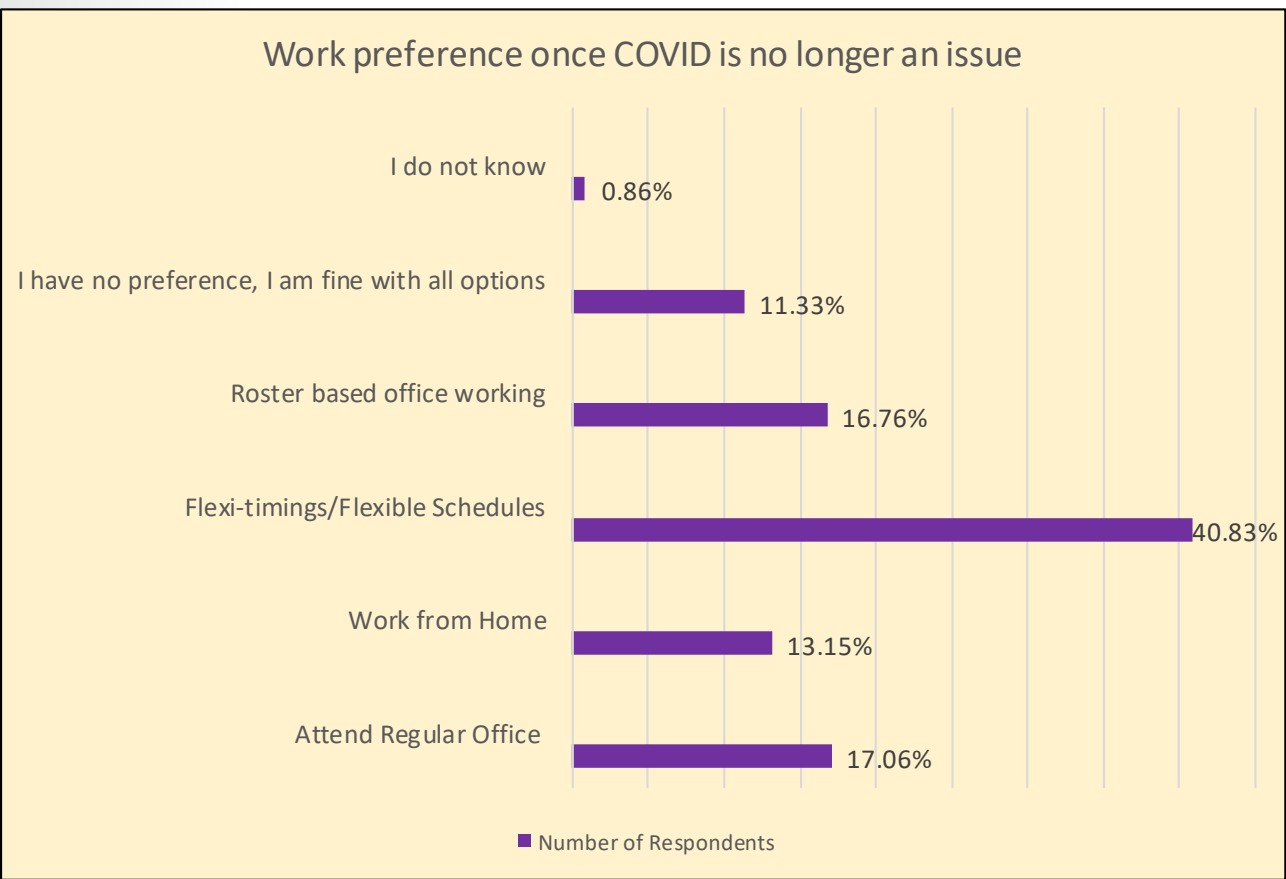
Unequivocally the **key benefit** cited was “no commuting stress to office” (81.10%; $n=1579$).

Even though a high percentage (65.28%) of respondents included better work life balance as one of the benefits of WfH -

Many added a rider to it such as, “*If there is a well-defined policy, better work life balance may be achieved through this arrangement*”

“Policies must be in place defining protocols with provisions of required infrastructure to make working at home more productive”.

Given a choice or once the COVID pandemic is no longer an issue, how would the respondent prefer to work? (Q22)



*The **most preferred choice** for women employees - once COVID is no longer an issue, is **not Work from Home but flexi-timings/flexible schedules combined with roster based office working***

What measures can companies' take to enhance employee engagement and facilitate work of remote employees (i.e. as employees working from home)? (Q23)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Communicate Work Expectations	47.49%	935
Set Clear Rules that establish the times when people must be available	64.30%	1,266
Help Managing Workloads	28.29%	557
Manage Periodic Virtual Meetings Efficiently	45.91%	904
Ensure/Make Arrangements for employees' physical and mental welfare (e.g. stress management, safety)	40.43%	796
Analyse important tasks and track progress on a time bound basis.	44.49%	876
Better Security Policies to Support Remote Work	31.28%	616
Provision of Childcare facilities	30.83%	607
No Measure is required	2.59%	51
I do not Know	3.76%	74
Any Other (please specify):	4.22%	83
Total Respondents: 1,969		

The **top 5 areas or aspects with regards to WfH arrangement that requires firming** include:

- i. Setting clear rules establishing people's work hours under WfH arrangement
- ii. Communicate work expectations
- iii. Manage periodic virtual meetings efficiently
- iv. Analyse important tasks and track progress on a time bound basis
- v. Ensure/make arrangements for employees' physical and mental welfare (e.g. stress management, safety, etc.)

During the work from home arrangement, did the respondent experience any kind of threat or any act of violence and harassment by family members or anyone else which made her feel unsafe and uncomfortable? (Q16)

Though it may not appear to be a significant percentage i.e. 1.32%; 26 out of 1969 responded in positive to the questions whether they experienced any harassment or any other untoward act by family members or anyone else which made them feel unsafe and uncomfortable during the WfH arrangement

OTHER FINDINGS:

(Q13): Respondents who had an additional role of managers/supervisors felt: there will be a need to change the supervisory techniques in a work from home arrangement; also some indicated: adopting new techniques to assess performance of subordinates. Presently, this included for example, individual and weekly goal setting; attending/participating in virtual team meet-ups, etc.

(Q18): The findings revealed a high rating for support from colleagues during the Pandemic. This team spirit and coordination was later emphasised by senior management interviewed in different PSEs. **The lowest rating i.e. 1 was on “company’s providing with tools and resources needed to do jobs remotely and stay connected (e.g. pay for home internet; provide for any hardware/equipment).”** It may be added that the rating varied in different PSEs owing to the tools and resources provided to employees in each PSE to undertake jobs remotely. Some companies seemed to have made the digital and remote transition much faster than some others.

Women who found themselves juxtaposed in a triple role i.e. as employees, caregivers, also supervisors/team leaders (some quoted in the report), **articulated one thing upfront** i.e. as an employee, and more so if in a leadership role, their focus is to achieve company's objectives. ***Gender cannot come in the way to achieve company objectives***. However, they indicated: carrying out full time work in decision making roles can be efficiently performed if they have a strong support system to take care of their household/caring responsibilities.

During Pandemic support system lay paralyzed i.e. there was no crèche, no domestic help taking care of elders, etc.; as a result, the working woman had to bear the brunt of it. But they did their best to bring a balance, and move ahead to achieve to the extent possible in both fronts, nevertheless, "it is/was challenging". **It is challenging playing multiple roles, and therefore it is important that it is understood by everyone - both in the organization and at homes, to enable better productivity and contribution of women work force.**

Overall, there was a **mixed response** to adjusting to the new norm of WfH

Indication: Many now – having experienced the WfH arrangement, may not prefer it on a long term basis

Inference: WfH was tried out during the most challenging circumstances which may have added to the pressure on women to fulfill more demands expected by them from families, merely because they were at home

It may not have been so demanding with a normal support system operating (Pre-COVID). Also, amongst other things, lack of a dedicated and compliant workspace, with inadequate IT infrastructure at home was cited as a challenge, at times discomforting to stay focused on work. Some (27.48%) even noted a lack of inspirational work atmosphere at home.

1. The senior management and the decision makers interviewed under Key Informant Interviews (KIs) in the PSEs were **unanimous in their opinion that while the WfH was a necessity**, it was forced post COVID-19 declared pandemic and it definitely cannot be applied for the entire company. For them, **the new norm was not specifically the WfH but how to return to function optimally with necessary safety and precautionary measures**.
2. It was **reiterated that the experience of PSEs show that WfH is a sustainable option**; however it cannot be relevant to all departments or units in a company. So each needs to reviews its manpower requirements and functioning of its departments to come up with a practical WfH policy which keeps the company interest as well as employee welfare in place.
3. **KIs confirmed that most PSEs did not have a written WfH Policy**. Based on central and state government directives, periodic guidelines were issued. Mostly these guidelines referred to managing the manpower in post COVID as offices were directed not to work with 100% staff.

4. No PSE indicated to making any significant changes to their performance appraisal systems; however, there was a unanimity that in case of WfH translating into a written policy document, performance appraisal systems would require a thorough review and modification with focus on specific quality deliverables by individuals. **The Heads of Human Resources in particular felt that this was also the right time for them to recalibrate their priorities, focus towards managing remote workforce, digitalize the corporate function, and re-imagine workforce models.** Some of them shared that they have already come out with different ideas and policies to deal with the pandemic.

5. The PSE's main focus was to make their IT system (e-offices; digitization; paperless functioning) **robust;** also make available the needed IT support at home for employees to work without hindrance. **As stated by many of the key informants, 'Operations, Productivity and Performance' even in an exigency could not have been compromised.**

6. The three **biggest concerns** of working remotely were i. Dilution of team dynamics ii. Distractions impacting working and focused approach and iii. Sustained productivity and consistent results.

7. It was felt that even if the levels of productivity of the employees were affected in the initial days of lockdown; with the employees and the line Managers gradually getting acquainted with this new normal, things improved. **In almost all PSEs CMDs shared it with great pride that their employees working from home contributed immensely towards the success of the organisation; and companies were able to achieve similar level of productivity as before.**

8. It was shared that while companies' gave quarantine/COVID leaves, it assured its employees that such leaves had **no bearing on any other leave/privileges of employees** (e.g. women employees' maternity or childcare leave). Further, **all PSEs used various online channels to make their employees stay connected besides connecting for work.** Wellness programmes were also promoted online.

9. Upon asked to **rate their company's WfH Policy on a scale of 1 (very low) – 5 (very high)**, **most PSEs preferred to give themselves a rating of 4**. The reasons cited were primarily three. **First**, there was no written work from home policy; or there was on-going process of developing the policy; or where a policy did exist, a review was being considered. **Second**, a large part of the company's business are related to field operations, also spread/located in far flung areas, where WfH is not possible. **Third**, since there has been no assessment of the impact of the policy or the work from home arrangement as yet, the companies did not wish to rate themselves 5/5. Though they were confident that the WfH arrangement is unlikely to hinder the level of employees productivity; also it will enable employees to meet their aspirations and personal responsibilities.

10. It was also reiterated that any WfH policy is applicable to the company as a whole which has to run on its performance and profits. **Hence, a WfH policy can only be gender neutral i.e. applicable to all employees** except that due considerations and exemptions are given to pregnant women, women with young children, women with aged parent; also people with special needs (both men and women). In fact, in many instances, Head of Units/departments were given guidance to give women (pregnant, etc.) the option to work from home. Nevertheless, it was suggested that any women centric recommendations/guidelines put forth by the present study, would definitely be taken into consideration by PSEs while drafting their respective policies.

One thing unanimously credited across PSEs: was **the resilience the employees showed during the pandemic**. In addition, since each could withstand the pandemic and did not let its operations get affected, all found their business models to be resilient enough to overcome exigencies like COVID19.

10 interconnected recommendations:

- i. Formulate a Work from Home Policy with unambiguous terms and conditions
- ii. Communicate the policy effectively to all employees, also any amendments made to work expectations due to the changing situation
- iii. Provide support for setting up equipment and infrastructure to facilitate work from home/remote working
- iv. Define impact on entitlements, privileges/benefits, compensations, if any
- v. Define metrics of assessment for productivity and performance; analyse important tasks and track progress on a time bound basis
- vi. Define provisions regulating absence and leave
- vii. Carefully draft the secrecy and confidentiality requirements/agreements
- viii. Give proper directives to line managers for WfH to be effective. They must understand their colleagues' WfH arrangements, also discuss issues like burnout, work stress, work/ life balance, mentoring needs etc.
- ix. Manage periodic virtual meetings efficiently; facilitate digital archiving/reporting by employees
- x. Ensure/make arrangements for employees' physical and mental well-being; policy to succinctly cover medical and insurance benefits.

❑ The recommendations were concretized to develop a set of guidelines:

“Guidelines for a Gender Sensitive Work from Home (WfH) Policy in PSEs”

❑ The Guidelines were further shared and discussed with select key informants (i.e. 1 CMD; 2 Head-HRs; 1 Senior Management; and Director General –SCOPE) before giving it a final shape

❑ The **Guidelines can be read in attribution to the three roles (employees, caregivers, leaders) executed by women in particular**

❑ *Some of the Guidelines are applicable to all genders; some guidelines are overlapping. A working from home policy - integrating these guidelines, is recommended to ensure that employees, now and those joining in future are clear about working from home practices.*

THREE RATIONALE BEHIND GUIDELINES:

- Flexibility and customization are important elements in a WfH arrangement
- The unpaid work women do is one of the biggest barriers they face to reaching their potential in the workforce
- Women often need to make additional efforts to structure their day, and compartmentalize their roles to be productive and add-value to what they do

14 POINT- GUIDELINES (EXCERPTS)

- a. Spelling out clearly, and in written, both the employers' and employees' obligations under any such work arrangements
- b. Training & Sensitizing Line Managers and Supervisors on WfH Modalities and Expectations
- c. Besides availability expectations, communicating work expectations i.e. communicate clearly the work allocations (e.g. agreeing upon individual tasks and responsibilities, which is measurable in terms of task fulfilment, achievement, also success).
- d. Giving due attention to pregnant and lactating women, women in need of ante and post natal care; also women with special needs besides single parents.
- e. Determining the technological needs of employees working from home (e.g. it could be hardware, software, high-speed internet connections, learning skills, etc.) so as to perform tasks assigned efficiently through ITC services.

SCOPE & SCOPE TASKFORCE (Network of Champions):

- i. Promote the Guidelines among PSEs in the SCOPE membership; and within their organizations
- ii. Consider feed back from management to adapt to organisation's requirements
 - SCOPE can facilitate converting the Guidelines into a customised Toolkit in line with organisational requirements, and facilitate any PSE working to develop its WfH/Remote Working policy
- iii. Revise and finalise guidelines as required; adopt the guidelines
- iv. Overall, by sharing the study with multiple stakeholders, SCOPE can encourage PSEs to integrate the Guidelines within their WfH/Remote Working Policy

THANK YOU