



# Covid 19- Work Life Balance For Women Working From Home

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## ABSTRACT

Work-life balance, defined as “a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person’s job and personal life are equal” (Lockwood, 2003) has been a global challenge for decades.

While economic empowerment of women has resulted in greater numbers joining the workforce, they are still disproportionately responsible for the unpaid household responsibilities and caregivers for the family all across the globe. This imbalance has been accentuated by the work from home scenario thrust upon humanity by the ongoing Covid 2019 pandemic. Women working from home had to shoulder increasing responsibility at home while fulfilling responsibilities at work. It became a challenge for them to balance their work and life.

Many studies have examined the impact of work-life balance due to remote work, forced by the ongoing pandemic, but there have been very few studies which have researched on the life of working women in India in terms of their level of work and family stress, job satisfaction etc. The present study aims to address this gap.

The study is based on the primary data collected through online surveys with the help of structured questionnaires from a sample of about 173 women who have been working from home in Delhi NCR during the ongoing pandemic period. This data is presented through charts and tables and is analysed using statistical tools like correlation and regression.

**Keywords: Work Life Balance, Covid-19, Women, Remote Work**

## INTRODUCTION

Work Life balance has become very important in these stressful times. A job that prevents an individual from balancing their work commitments and the need to care for their family members also affects their productivity and quality of work.

Further, the unresolved tensions between caregiving and work represent a major concern for working women. Unpaid household and care work has traditionally fallen disproportionately on women and is generally underestimated and inaccurately measured. Surveys carried out in six countries (Argentina, India, Republic of Korea, Nicaragua, South Africa and United Republic of Tanzania)<sup>i</sup> found that in all of these countries, on an average, women spent double the time than men on unpaid care work. The gender gap was most prominent in India, where women spent ten times more time on such work than men. Unpaid care work is one of the most important factors that affect equality for women, their ability to hone their skills, find highly paid jobs, join in social dialogue and benefit from social protection. The System of National Accounts (SNA) that sets out international standards for the measurement of the market economy conventionally measures only some types of unpaid work in calculations of GDP, for example, work in family businesses and activities such as the collection of firewood and water. It does not count activities such as cooking, laundry, cleaning, the care of children, the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities and volunteer activities. Consequently, women's unpaid contribution to the economy has remained unrecognized in data collection and is insufficiently reflected in policy development. It is also not included in gross national product (GNP) and usually ignored when policy decisions are made. Estimates show that the value of unpaid work can be equivalent to at least half of a country's GDP.<sup>ii</sup>

The unequal share of such work tends to increase discrimination and tensions between the family members, which in turn affects the individuals and their collective well-being. Furthermore, lack of paid parental leave, reasonable and accessible childcare facilities, and other social care services for family members, pushes women with lower pay than their male counterparts, to leave the labour market either temporarily or permanently. Long working hours and inflexible schedules are often significant sources of work-family conflict.

As per a poll conducted with more than 9,500 women<sup>iii</sup> by the Thomson Reuters and Rockefeller Foundations in 2015, Work-life balance is an important workplace concern for women in G20 countries. 44% of respondents found creating a balance between work and home as the toughest challenge they faced, primarily in Russia and few other Asian G20 countries, namely, South Korea, India, China, and Japan. Workplace prejudices were found to be faced maximum by the women of Turkey and India without any complaint.

Managing work-life balance leads to women choosing employment opportunities that are more conducive to handling the role of sole caregiver. Women are also less likely to work for longer hours and avoid travel in addition to taking more leaves and short breaks to fulfil responsibilities at home. This directly leads to reduction in employment opportunities for women and the gender pay gap.

Globally, organisations like the ILO are laying increased emphasis in creating a better work life balance. The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union adopted a Directive,<sup>iv</sup> in 2019, to support a healthy work–life balance. It recommended flexible work and provision of leaves for caregiving.

### **Work From Home amid Covid 2019**

The work from home policy has been perceived as a means of improving an individual's work-life balance because it provides an opportunity to take care of family members. This policy has some advantages and risks at the same time. It is effective in improving the quality of life ( (Azarbouyeh, 2014)), employee happiness, and their work satisfaction.

Choice in working arrangements in the last few years has contributed to the achievement of work life balance, due to the increased flexibility it gives to individuals over when, how and where they work. However, the onset of the pandemic Covid 19 around March 2020 all across the world, changed the way of life for people across the globe. Work from home became a mandatory requirement as the world witnessed an unprecedented spread of the corona virus which had no treatment thereby causing lockdowns.

Though at first it appeared to be a good opportunity to have family time together, however, it created more challenges for women to manage the house responsibilities. Restrictions on movement impacted everyone's lifestyle. The closure of schools for children, restriction on the services of domestic helpers etc during the lockdown further burdened working women with more responsibilities.

The last one and half years of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in worsening of gender equality in the workplace. Women have suffered maximum job and income losses during this period. They have continued to provide essential services in the health and social work sector, often putting their own lives at risk and facing an additional burden of longer shifts at work and additional caregiving responsibilities at home<sup>v</sup>. COVID-19 has resulted in an increase in care demands within most of the households on an unusual scale. However, new evidence shows that women continue to bear the brunt of unpaid work.<sup>vi</sup> This has resulted in employed women cutting down on their paid working hours or to extend their total working hours (paid and unpaid) to unmanageable levels.

## LITERATURE SURVEY

Large number of studies have been conducted during the pandemic to explore how Covid 19 has impacted the work-life balance of employees across the world and the additional challenges for those who were forced to work from home due to the ongoing pandemic.

(Anderson, 2020) examines enforced working from home thrust upon humanity globally due to the ongoing pandemic Covid 2019 and how it may differ from working from home through choice. The study concluded that while both the employees and employers were found to be benefitting from greater autonomy for the choice over their working arrangements, these may not be found where working from home is forced on them.

(Rawat, 2021) studied the work life balance among male and female professionals during the Covid 2019 lockdown. The study recognised that various factors like working hours, family size, job security and job flexibility had an emotional impact on the anxiety and general well-being of working women.

(Butakhieo, 2021) developed a framework based on review on work from home (WFH), teleworking, telecommuting, e-working, flexible workplace, and remote work during the Covid 2019 pandemic in Hong Kong to examine if this work arrangement would be temporary or could it be continued as permanent one. The study concluded that the once desired and favourable WFH did not prove to be a good option for the majority of the workforce.

(Fisher J, 2020) concluded that challenges in maintaining work life balance with remote working may also increase inequalities due to the expected household work likely to fall on women in such a scenario.

(Jaimee Felice Caringal-Go, 2021) explored the work life balance (WLB) strategies of 112 employees working in the Philippines, while they were telecommuting during the Covid 2019 pandemic. The results of the study indicated that employees used a mix of physical, relational and cognitive crafting strategies to balance the demands of work and family during pandemic. Implications of the findings include the need to enhance awareness of employees on these WLB strategies and the ways by which the organisation can support the employees WLB behaviours.

(Irawanto, Novianti, & Roz, 2021) investigated few likely determinants of job satisfaction (such as work-life balance and work stress) for 472 workers in Indonesia, who were working from home. The study concluded that work from home, work life balance and work stress affect job satisfaction significantly. As per this study, work-life balance showed positive signs when workers and their family spent time together, which could increase their job satisfaction, however, in such cases, work stress increased.

(Bhumika, 2020) explored the relationship between work-life balance and emotional exhaustion faced by the 180 professionals while working from home during the pandemic Covid 2019 in India. The study concluded that women felt more emotional exhaustion, compared to men due to an increase in interference in work and personal life during work from home.

Further, a study conducted by McKinsey & Company (October 2020) found that the brunt of Covid 2019 crisis was being suffered by women, both at the workplace and home resulting in their increased stress and exhaustion. Another study conducted by Chicago school (2021) also highlighted that women carried a heavy burden on them during the pandemic, both in terms of physical work and emotional disturbance. A survey conducted in India “ (ET magazine, Mumbai, March 12,2021) got the same results with a sample of 2500 professionals all across India.

No study has been done to study the work life balance of working women during pandemic in Delhi NCR. This paper aims to explore the relationship between remote work and its effect on work-life balance, work stress and job satisfaction of women during the pandemic, in Delhi NCR.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of the study is to analyse the impact of work from home on women thrust compulsorily by the ongoing pandemic Covid 2019 on their work-life balance, work stress and job satisfaction. For this purpose, a conceptual model developed by [Irawanto, D., Reyes, J.S. et al (2021)] has been adopted (Figure 1).

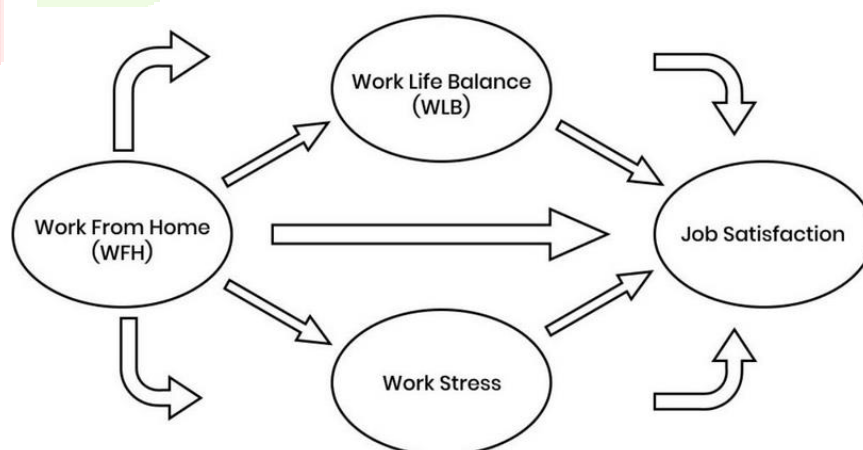


Figure 1 conceptual model for Job Satisfaction

The objectives of the study to analyse various factors having an impact on work life balance due to remote working are as follows:

1. To study how the Work Life Balance during Work from Home is affected by time-use of the respondents (paid and unpaid hours)
2. To study if Flexible Working Hours improve Work Life Balance
3. To analyse whether Work–life balance is affected by support systems available at Work
4. To study whether Stress Levels at Home contribute to stress levels at work and vice-versa
5. Is Job-satisfaction influenced by Stress at Work

## DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper empirically examines the impact of work from home by women forced by Covid 2019 pandemic, on their work-life balance, work stress and their job satisfaction among other factors. The various research studies have identified many variables that are responsible for the work life balance level. Some of these variables comprising of demographic and socio-economic factors are analysed for their effect on Work Life Balance.

The study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected online through a closed questionnaire. Random sampling technique has been adopted to administer the questionnaire to 400 women respondents out of which 173 responses were received. Secondary data has been sourced through published research, books, e-resources, reports from ILO and other organizations and newspapers.

The collected data has been presented through tables and graphs. Regression techniques have been used to analyse the data.

The scope of the study is limited to Delhi NCR region, is gender specific and with a sample size of 173 respondents. Hence the results are suggestive.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A total of 173 responses to the questionnaires were received and analysed to investigate the objectives of the study.

### RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

These are the demographic, social and economic profiles of the respondents.



## Marital Status

Married	77%
Unmarried	23%

Table 1 Marital Status

## Age

Less than 30 years	21%
30 to less than 40 years	21%
40 to less than 50 years	21%
More than 50 years	36%

Table 2 Age

## Education

	Education	Spouse Education
School Level	2%	
Graduate	18%	27%
Postgraduate and higher	79%	73%

Table 3 Education

## Job Level

Junior Level	21%
Mid-Level	39%
Senior Level	40%

Table 4 Job Level

## Annual Income

Less than Rs 10 Lakhs	26%
Rs 10 Lakhs to Rs 20 Lakhs	36%
Rs 20 Lakhs to Rs 30 Lakhs	16%
More than Rs 30 Lakhs	23%

Table 5 Annual Income

## Experience (years)

5 to less than 10 years	17%
Less than 5 years	20%
10 to less than 20 years	22%
20 to less than 30 years	20%
More than 30 years	21%

Table 6 Experience (years)

## Family Structure at Home

Couple	5%
Couple (no Children) with other family members	8%
Couple with Children	36%
Couple with Children and other family members	29%
Others (e.g., staying with friends)	9%
Single	12%

Table 7 Family Structure at Home

Majority of the respondents are married (77%). They are almost equally distributed amongst different age groups, with those over 50 years being the highest at 36%. A high percentage (more than 73%) of respondents and their spouses, are postgraduates and above. Almost 80% of the respondent working women are at Mid or Senior level in their organisation, 63% have more than 10 years of experience and most fall into annual income bracket of 10 to 20 lakhs. 65% of respondents live with children or with children and other family members.

## Time Use-Paid and Unpaid Hours

The division of time-use data between paid and unpaid hours is analysed and presented below.

### Paid Working Hours

Most respondents work less than 8 hours per day as shown in Figure 2.

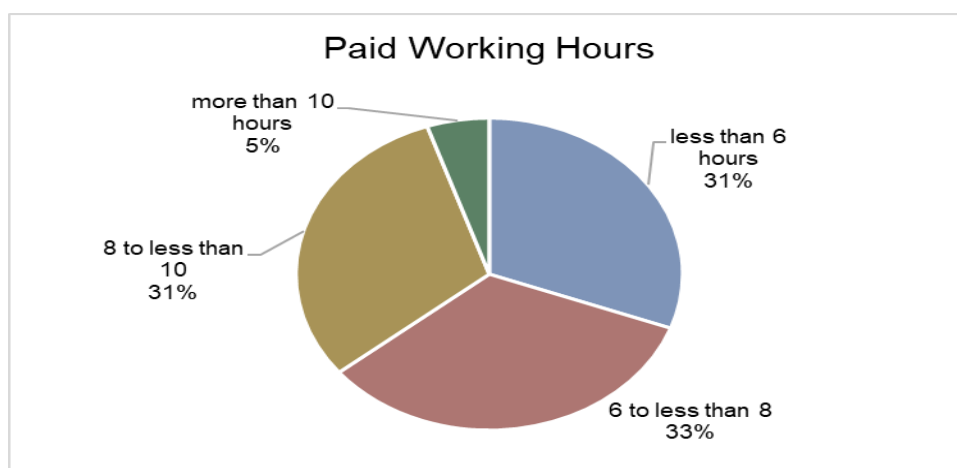


Figure 2 Paid Working Hours



### Number of Unpaid Hours

Most of the respondents spend less than 2 hours every day on self. 66% of respondents spend 2 to 8 hours per day on caregiving responsibilities and 34% spend more than 2 hours on work in their unpaid time (Figure 3).

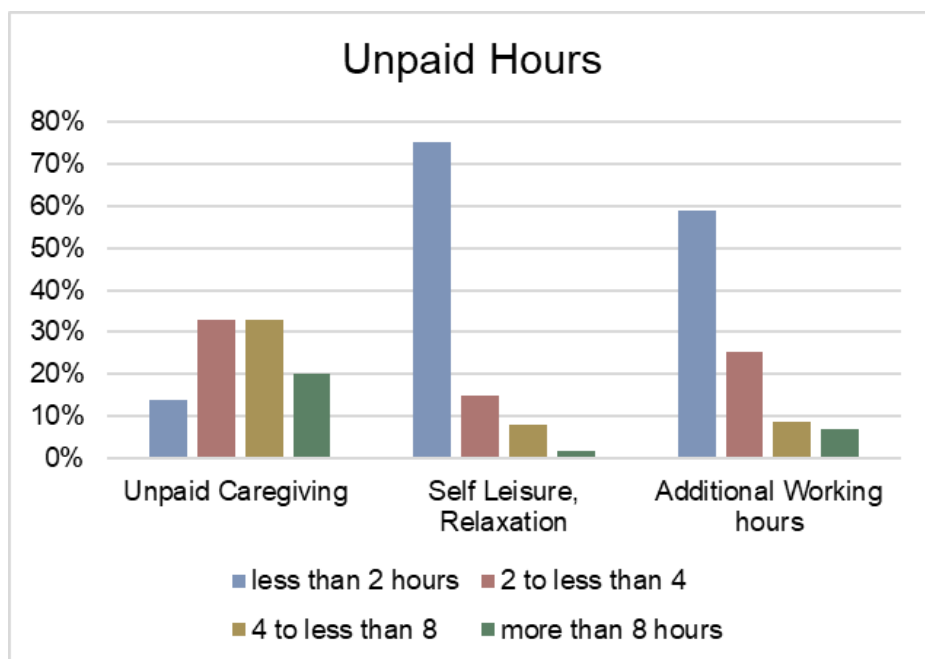


Figure 3 Number of Unpaid Hours

Work Life balance, stress level at work, stress level at home, job-satisfaction are taken as dependent factors to analyse the objectives of the study, with independent factors like demographic profile of respondents, support systems at work and at home and time-use. Regression analysis is used to analyse the same.

**1. To study how the Work Life Balance during Work from Home is affected by time-use of the respondents (paid and unpaid hours)**

Following are the significant factors affecting Work Life balance during remote work with  $p < 0.05$

	<i>P-value</i>
Average number of hours spent on self per day	0.03
Average number of normal Paid Working hours per day	0.60
Average Unpaid household and caregiving working hours per day	0.53
Average number of hours spent on Work in addition to normal working hours	1.00

Table 8 Significant factors affecting Work Life balance

The hours spent on relaxation and personal time had the most influence on the Work life balance during remote work. The numbers of hours spent at work (paid hours) are not found to have an effect on the work life balance.

## 2. To study if Flexible Working Hours improve Work Life Balance

Most respondents believed that flexible working hours improve Work Life Balance, shown in Figure 4.

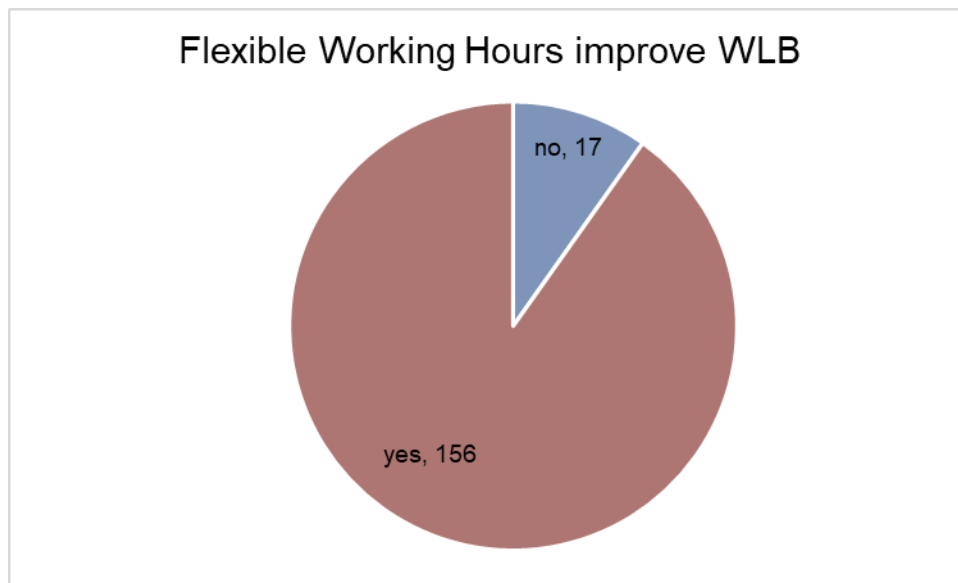


Figure 4 Do Flexible Working Hours improve Work Life Balance

A multiple regression analysis of different factors found that reduction in stress due to family and caregiving responsibilities resulting from flexible working hours is the most significant factor in improving work life balance.

	<i>P-value</i>
Stress Level due to Family and caregiving responsibilities	0.04

## 3. To analyse whether Work–life balance is affected by support systems available at Work

Majority (53%) of the respondents are satisfied with their Work Life Balance with only 12 % reporting dissatisfaction, as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Satisfaction with Work Life Balance

The Work Life Balance is dependent on many factors as brought out by the regression analysis brought out in Table 9.

	<i>P-value</i>
Average Unpaid household and caregiving working hours per day	0.03
Average number of hours spent on self per day	0.02
flexible working hours at work	0.05
Support system at home	0.01
Stress level due to Work	0.01
organization taking initiatives towards improving Work Life Balance	0.00

Table 9 Factors affecting Work Life Balance

The analysis shows that the work life balance is not affected by the support systems available at work although it is affected by the stress levels due to Work. The ability of the organisation to take initiatives towards improving Work Life balance is a contributing factor.

#### 4. To study whether Stress Levels at Home contribute to Stress Levels at Work and vice-versa

##### Stress at Home

Respondents were asked to rate the Stress Level they have due to Family and caregiving responsibilities, on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the most stressful. As many as 25% reported stress at home due to caregiving responsibilities (Figure 6).

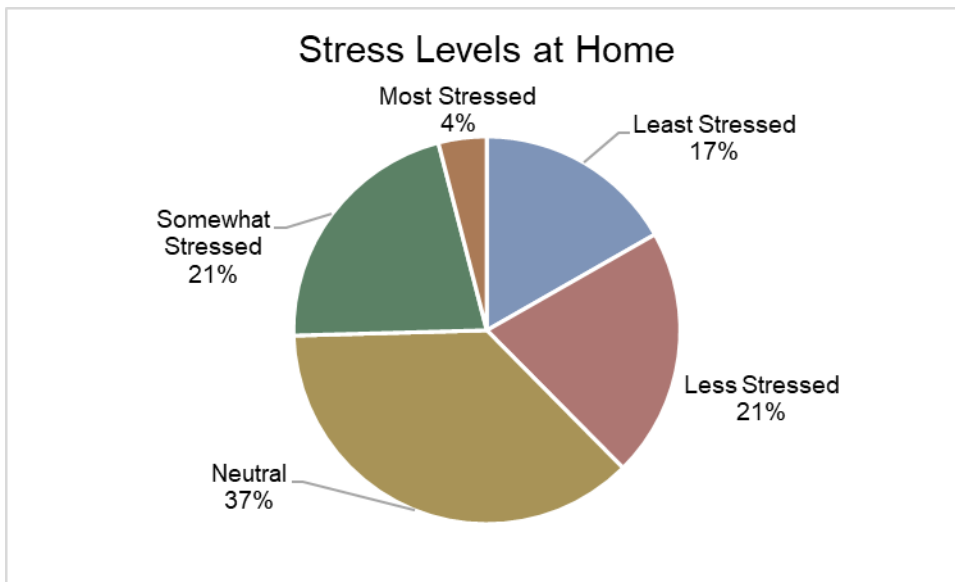


Figure 6 Stress Levels at Home

The reasons for stress at home due to caregiving responsibilities was analysed and the significant factors with  $p < 0.05$ , found to be as shown in Table 10.

	<i>P-value</i>
Marital Status	0.02
Stress level due to Work	0.02

Table 10 Factors affecting Stress levels at Home

### Stress at Work

The respondents rated the stress level they have at work from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most stressful. Compared to 25% respondents reporting stress levels due to caregiving role, the stress at work was reported by 40% of the respondents (Figure 7).

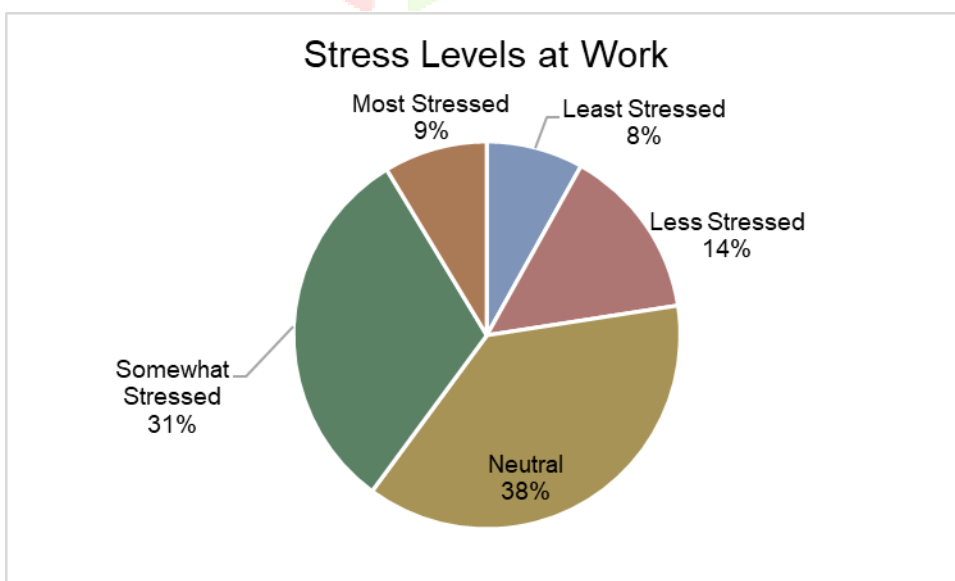


Figure 7 Stress Levels at Work

Multiple regression is used to analyse the relationship between work stress and other factors. The significant factors are listed in Table 11.

	<i>P-value</i>
Family Structure	0.04
Average number of normal Paid Working hours per day	0.00
Average number of hours spent on Work in addition to normal working hours	0.01
Stress Level due to Family and caregiving responsibilities	0.02

Table 11 Factors affecting Stress Levels at Work

A conclusion can be drawn that stress levels at home are affecting stress levels at work ( $p=0.02$ ). Also, the stress levels at work are affecting the stress levels at home ( $p=0.02$ ).

### 5. Is Job-satisfaction influenced by Stress at Work

Respondents rated the satisfaction level at the current job on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most satisfied. Most respondents reported a high level of satisfaction on the job. Respondents were generally satisfied at work with 4% reporting dissatisfaction (Figure 8).

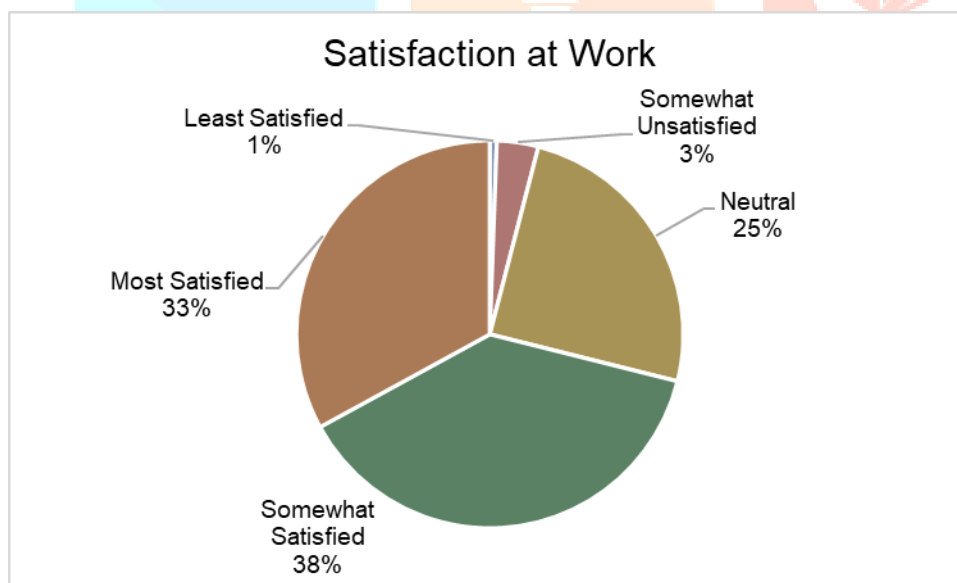


Figure 8 Job-satisfaction

The factors influencing job satisfaction were analysed through multiple regression and are listed in Table 12.

	<i>P-value</i>
Support system at work	0.00
Support system at home	0.05
Stress level due to Work	0.00
organization taking initiatives towards improving Work Life Balance	0.01

Table 12 Factors influencing job satisfaction

The analysis finds out that job satisfaction is affected by the stress levels at work.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

The present study finds that the majority (53%) of the respondents are satisfied with their work life balance. However, remote work from home does not have an influence on the work life balance.

The factors affecting Work life balance include the number of unpaid hours on caregiving, hours spent on self and availability of support system at home. On the work front, provision of flexible working hours, support systems and initiatives taken by the employer towards improving work life balance are the contributing factors. The results of the analysis suggest that remote work from home during the pandemic is not found to be affecting the Work Life balance and is not contributing to other factors like reduced caregiving hours and increased time spent on self-relaxation and leisure.

Stress at Work and Stress at Home influence each other. Stress at home is also influenced by marital status. The stress at work is additionally affected by the number of hours spent working (paid and unpaid) and family structure. Similarly, job satisfaction is influenced by the support systems available at work and at home.

Most of the respondents were not thinking of a job change due to the work life balance. While as many as 49% of the respondents are not considering the change at all, a significant number (16%) are likely to consider a change due to adverse Work Life Balance. The role of the family in supporting the working woman is brought out by this study and factors like family structure, marital status, caregiving hours, support system at home play an important role in stress levels and work life balance.

The role of the employer to create a family friendly work environment including support systems like leaves, short time off for work and childcare facilities at work is important. Company policies that prevent discrimination against women in hiring, job assignment and growth are critical to a better work life balance and job satisfaction in working women. Through the influence of participative leadership, work interference with personal life could be reduced and eventually, stress could be reduced.

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<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.womenatworkpoll.com/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/13/better-work-life-balance-for-parents-and-carers-in-the-eu-council-adopts-new-rules/>

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