Pandemic, remote work & women IT professionals

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Abstract: Studies on work-from-home (WFH) have majorly focused on its usefulness in facilitating work-life balance for women and their retention in the workforce when they tend to drop out after childbirth and domestic constraints. However, feminist scholars have critiqued state and market policies which encourage women to participate in the labour market by working from home. This caution stems from the fact that millions are already confined to the private sphere, bearing a disproportionate burden of care work and staggering at low levels in career and jobs. A case in point is the IT industry which recruits as high as 54% of women at entry-level but proportions decline to less than 2% at C-suite level, as per NASSCOM Report 2018. Women in tech serve as a valuable case for understanding the experience of remote working during pandemic and its effect on the personal and professional lives of working women. Though remote working was not new to women tech workers and had facilitated work-life balance for women, the context of pandemic was uniquely different and it would be a fallacy to assume that the benefits of working from home during normal times would accrue to women during pandemic when they had to confront unprecedented challenges. This paper undertakes a qualitative analysis of the contradictions involved in moving the workplace into the women's home. The study probes why state policies and market policies have fallen short of ensuring WFH works in favour of women. Analysis of in-depth interviews with 51 women IT professionals and HR personnel of IT companies in Bangalore revealed that remote work in pandemic had upended their personal, professional and social lives. This study deconstructs the state and market policies which endorse flexible working for women. The paper concludes with a framework for redrawing and redesigning these policies for strengthening representation of women in the workforce.

Key Words: women in IT, pandemic, remote work, state & market policies, deconstruction

1. INTRODUCTION:

Natural disasters and public health crises have repeatedly demonstrated gender dimensions with a disproportionate impact on women. The global fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic has mirrored this reality in health, behavioural and socio-economic dimensions (Kabeer, Razavi & Rodgers, 2021). The overrepresentation of women as frontline workers placed them at high risk of contracting infections. Globally, women are employed in sectors that have been hardest hit by pandemic such as retail, foodservice, and hospitality industries wherein they have faced huge employment losses (ILO, 2020; Alon et al, 2020). The feminization of labour in the informal sector has also placed women in vulnerable situations wherein they were devoid of any social security benefits and safety-net when the lockdown was announced to contain the spread of the virus (UN Women, 2020). The differential and the disproportionate brunt of pandemic fallout on women is attributed to the recurring intersectionality of disadvantages due to their positionality.

Pervasive patriarchal norms also subject women to intersectional disadvantages. Feminist economists have highlighted that women bore the brunt not only at the site of labour market but reverberations of the same were pronounced in the domestic sphere too(Kabeer, Razavi & Rodgers,2021). Coupled with job retrenchments, pay cuts and high presence in vulnerable contexts with great propensity of exposure to virus, women also confronted multiple challenges on the domestic front. A lockdown on activities and public services led to closure of schools, crèches and other socially or market provided care services which increased the burden of unpaid work on women along with the additional need to take care of those infected with virus (UN, 2020). This care burden imposed an aggravated challenge for women who were engaged in paid employment. Covid mandated social distancing and closure of offices shifted work within domestic walls of home. This implied a collapse of demarcation between personal and professional lives, thus endangering work-life balance. While some sectors had to adopt to the emergent norm of remote work as a novel

experiment, Information technology industries were pre-equipped to readily migrate to the online mode of working. Remote working is a common practice in IT industries. However, the work-from-home mandated by pandemic was unlike work-from-home before pandemic that offered flexibility and facilitated work-life balance (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015). It would be fallacious to assume that the benefits of working-from- home accrued to women in these unprecedented times. The closure of schools, colleges and disruption in care services pushed these responsibilities within the domestic walls. Women being the primary caregivers juggled with childcare, home schooling and caring for the elderly in addition to cooking, cleaning and sanitising tasks while attempting to work from home. Rather than working in a well-appointed home office, women were working in bedrooms and at kitchen tables in the midst of all the distraction from chores, children, siblings, parents, relatives and pets.

The pandemic shock appears to have hit women harder due to the competing demands from conflicting roles and responsibilities (Collins 2020). It was proposed at the beginning of lockdown and containment measures that it would provide a more feasible environment for male members of the family to share the household work. However, preliminary evidence from various studies has shown that there has been little shift in the redistribution of housework during pandemic (Kabeer, Razavi & Rodgers,2021). The resilience of gender norms in the distribution of household labour is attributed to the way gender intersects with various disadvantages received from entrenched patriarchal norms. This intersection produces unique vulnerabilities for women within the complex web of power relations that structure the world and societies around us (Berkhout & Richardson, 2020). These challenges in the domestic context translate into limiting economic opportunities for women and thus compromising their access to resources for economic independence. This is corroborated by the rapid assessment survey conducted by UN Women in 11 Asia-Pacific countries during the period of lockdown in the month of April-May 2020. The survey revealed higher likelihood of women losing jobs and slow recovery post lockdown (UN Women, 2020). Women form a heterogeneous category and their lived reality is shaped by a mosaic of unique experiences based on their regional location,(dis)ability, economic independence, caste, class, race and other such intersecting attributes producing privileges and prohibitions (Berkhout & Richardson, 2020). Women working in the IT industry represent a section who are relatively privileged with prestigious occupational and social status owing to higher education, intellectual capital and economic independence which imparts agency (Calitz, Cullen & Fani, 2020). IT industry is marked with higher presence of women and posits as a gender neutral workplace premised on meritocracy. However, research has revealed the subtle and covert forms of patriarchal prejudices that underline the human resource policies and echo in the IT work culture (Berkhout, & Richardson, 2020). The issues of glass ceiling, gender pay gap, discrimination in promotion and onsite opportunities, exclusion of women from networking opportunities, lack of mentorship and sponsorship, meagre representation of women in leadership positions, sexual harassment, prejudice against women with childcare responsibilities and high mid-career dropout rate of women are pertinent concerns in the IT industry (Dwivedi & Mukherjee,2021).

This study investigated the experiences of women IT professionals during pandemic to understand their challenges in remote working at an unprecedented time. It is essential to keep in perspective that though remote working has been a common practice in the IT sector, remote working mandated by pandemic was in a different context with significant changes at home, in family pattern and in living arrangements. Management practices for remote work did not have supportive polices, resources and practices in place to suit the changed context which necessitated remote working (Ralph et al, 2020). Experts have expressed concerns that in the absence of supportive provisions, women may drop out in large numbers and never return to the workforce (Chung, 2020). This will pose a huge setback to the years of efforts and measures taken for gender inclusion and equality by the IT industry. This study aims to examine this and bring out suggestions for restructuring policies and management norms for remote working which can ensure continued participation of women in the labour force and enable work-life balance for women.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:
This study is focussed on the following objectives:
- To investigate the impact of pandemic on the lives of women IT professionals, primarily in three specific dimensions; personal life, professional life and health.
- To suggest policies and practices that can be adopted to contain the challenges faced by women in remote working, thereby ensuring their continuity in the workforce.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY:
The framework for the study was developed based on the review of studies on work from home, teleworking, telecommuting, e-working, flexible workplace and remote work.The research followed a qualitative approach to study the impact of pandemic on the lives of women IT professionals. Primary data for the research was collected via survey conducted in the months of August-December 2021. Owing to the conditions of lockdown and social distancing norms,

the data was collected via virtual mode through online survey. The survey was designed to gather information on changes in the employees' personal life, professional life and in their health and wellbeing. Questions pertained to respondent's employment status, hours of work, pay-cuts, time spent on housework and childcare, time spent by spouse on housework and childcare, work stress and satisfaction with work-family balance during the pandemic. Non-probability sampling technique was used to make decision regarding the sample population. Specifically, snowball sampling was used to connect with respondents for the survey. The data was analysed using SPSS software. Survey responses were coded and entered in the software for analysis with application of descriptive statistics.

Demographic Details

The study population comprised of 52 women IT professionals of which 48 women continued their jobs via remote work and 4 respondents had discontinued their jobs during pandemic. The respondents were associated with the following IT companies: Wipro, Accenture, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, Oracle, HCL and Capgemini. With respect to the marital status of the respondents, 40 were unmarried, 7 were married, 2 were divorced and 1 was separated. 8 respondents had children. In accordance with the research ethics, informed consent was obtained from all the participants to use their information and inputs for research. Also adhering to ethics, the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents has been maintained throughout the study.

Pandemic and Professional life:

In the wake of COVID 19 mandated lockdown and physical distancing, corporates across sectors resorted to the provision of remote working for their employees. The IT industry with pre-equipped digital infrastructure and pre-existing provision of remote working readily adopted this model to ensure continuity of work (Russell & Eitan, 2021). Work from home has been a significant component of flexible work polices under the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) measures of the IT industry. D&I measures in IT are implemented to build a work environment that embraces diversity via introducing polices that are inclusive for all sections (O'Donovan, 2018). Remote work policy was identified as having potential for retaining women in the company, plugging their mid-career drop-out rate and a feasible solution enabling them to continue with jobs while tending to childcare and other domestic commitments. Data has provided prominent insights into the promise that policy of remote work holds for company's objectives of D&I (PwC, 2021) Women, especially working mothers and those returning to work after maternity break have been able to continue their career in IT by utilising the provision of wfh (Subramaniam et al, 2014). For others, it has enabled to manage the competing demands of domestic and work responsibilities on days when they would have to forgo their salary on account of failing to report to work. In these aspects, remote work has facilitated work-life balance for women employees. However, it would be a fallacy to equate the benefits and experience of working from home under normal circumstances with covid mandated wfh under remarkable changed circumstances. To understand the remote working experience of women in the background of upheavals created by pandemic, it is essential to take into perspective that spatial context of home underwent significant changes during the emergency (Bowlby et al, 1997). The meaning and experience of home for women was substantially changed as socially and market sponsored care functions were shut down and shoved into homes. Along with increased hygiene and sanitisation requirements, rising need of quarantining the sick, caring for those infected with the virus and social distancing, even when indoors, transformed homes into places where women faced new role conflicts and role strains in everyday life. It is a well-established fact that due to the gender division of labour in families, the care responsibilities fall disproportionately on the shoulders of women. For women engaged in paid work, this implied doubling the double burden of work (Fuller & Hirsh, 2018).

While care responsibilities for women increased exponentially, the work polices and norms remained intact. Indeed, it is appropriate to say that work norms have not responded to the changed reality. Work policies which expect consistently high productivity from employees, regular reporting and accountability to the manager, frequent conduct of meetings and strict project deadlines have all evolved in the context of *office as workplace* . 'Office' was designed as a separate and dedicated workspace equipped with all the infrastructure and amenities for employees to perform their jobs with concentration in an undisturbed environment. To replicate the same polices in a drastically different arrangement of *home as workplace* is impractical and will lead to severe impact on human resource of the company, majorly the women workforce (Doling & Arundel, 2022). As revealed by the survey (Figure 1), the professional lives of women were impacted on various counts during pandemic. 60% women reported increase in workload and increase in work-stress, 65% reported difficulty to concentrate steadily at work, 60% also mentioned that they were working more than pre-pandemic time. 60% respondents mentioned that the meetings and calls from their managers had become more frequent and repetitive. Among the various impacts, 35% women experienced a decline in their productivity, 30% said the deadlines were hard to keep up and for 20% women, pressure from their managers had multiplied manifold.

Figure 1: Pandemic and Professional life
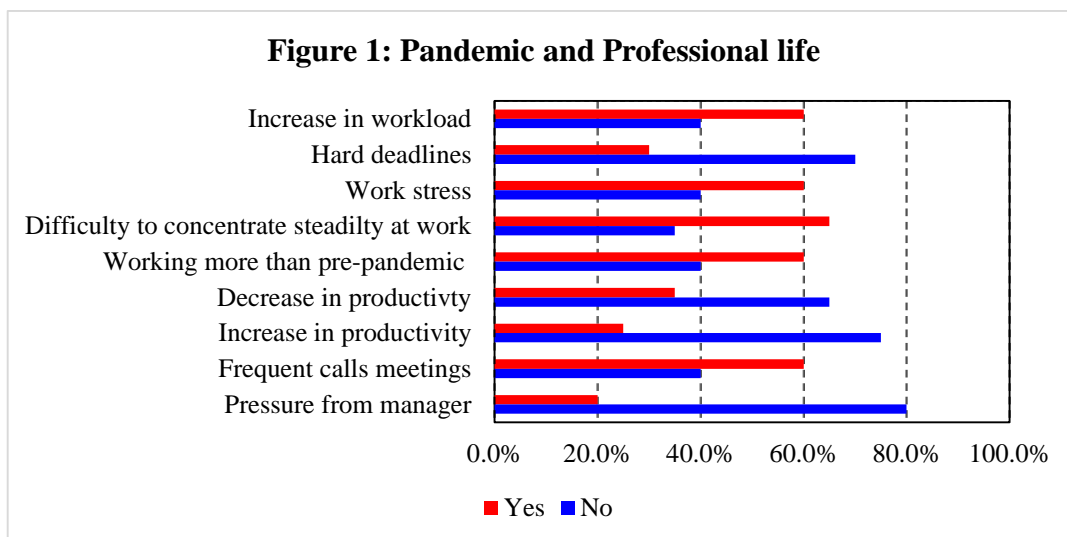
Source: Field data

Literature on the relationship between wfh and work-life balance has explained that this relationship is moderated by not only work related factors but also by the various factors related to home and family arrangements (Ruijter& Lippe,2007). Due to frequent interruption on account of various care obligations at home and other distractions from family members, women employees found difficulty in concentrating steadily at work. Instead of work hours being a period of focused undivided attention on job, they became a succession of interrupted cluster of minutes. Due to the inability to perform with focus and complete the task at hand, respondents experienced a decline in their productivity with work being overstretched as they were taking more hours than they did before pandemic to complete the same task. Women IT professionals also attributed prolonged working hours to the micro management by their managers. The expectation from the managers that employees should be seen online at the company's server and be readily available round the clock because they were working from home presented a significant challenge for women. Research on flexible working has demonstrated that employees availing flexi work option faced increased expectations from the employer related to their productivity, hours of work and meeting punishingly unrealistic deadlines(Caringal-Go et al, 2021). The presumption that since employees were working from home, they can be available round the clock is misplaced, especially in the pandemic. Due to the hard project deadlines and productivity demand from the employees remaining intact with indifference to the changed working environment, women experienced work stress. Work stress was further exacerbated by the news of rampant layoffs and pay cuts which were some of the common measures taken by companies to manage their balance sheets. This led to heightened anxiety among employees as they felt a constant urge to convince the manger of their performance and commitment to work by being accessible round the clock. Owing to these changed dynamics, studies have demonstrated that more women were considering leaving the workforce, shifting to part time jobs or convert to less demanding roles. A study by Mckinsey (2021) has reported that women, especially working mothers are 1.3 times more likely than men to step out of the workforce or slow down their career. Research on the impact of previous epidemics like SARS on working women has shown that women were laid off in high numbers as compared to men (Rao, 2020). Many also had to leave jobs to take care of the domestic obligations. Once situation returned to normalcy, women took longer than men to return to work and a significant proportion of them were never able to return to the workforce. ILO (2021) has warned that if the current trends are not monitored and contained, this may lead to an irreversible loss in the economic participation of women. This posits a grave challenge for the IT industry which has been taking consistent efforts to increase and retain more women in the workforce.

Pandemic, Personal and Family life:

The concept of work-life balance has garnered considerable attention even before pandemic occasioned research around the topic. The significance that the topic has attracted since long is embedded in the conceptualisation of fifth SGD wherein work-life balance forms one of the significant components for empowerment of women (un.org). In the same vein, it stresses to recognize the value of unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family. It is interesting to note here that though work-life balance and unpaid care work factor in the lives of both men and women, however, these concepts have been closely and distinctly associated with women. This association is an outcome of gendered structure of our societies wherein unpaid care work has been exclusively apportioned to women (Rao,2020)

. Gender socialization is embedded in the intersection of power relations and irrespective of the involvement of women in paid labour, the burden of care work is exclusively borne by women. The domain of care work has been spotlighted in the wake of pandemic as policy actions and measures were taken to ensure that care services were not disrupted when the other institutions greasing the wheels of capitalised economy came to a grinding halt. Despite the acknowledgement of the strategic significance of care work, it continues to be devalued and the caregivers continue to be neglected. Critical debates in feminist literature have highlighted the importance of socially reproductive work for sustaining our daily lives and for reproduction of the society and economy (Deshpande 2020). Under the targets and indicators of fifth SDG, corporates and organizations have been called upon to develop an accommodative work environment. An accommodative work environment entails instituting polices, practices and programmes that ensure inclusion and diversity. IT sector ails from meagre representation of women at top management levels as the women who join at the entry level tend to drop out in large numbers during their mid-career (Dwivedi & Mukherjee,2020). Studies to identify the problems and plug this gap have explained that as women progress along the stages of life cycle, their care burden escalates and they walk a tight rope to balance care work and their jobs (Dwivedi & Mukerjee, 2020). The flexion occurs when there is no social support or alternative arrangement which thus leads to a high mid-career drop-out rate. Gender norms also glorify women who sacrifice their career for family needs and therefore with such an affirmation, sacrificing or leaving career for family life have been an accepted practice among women. During pandemic, the challenges related to disruption of work-life balance emerged as the one of the primary issues for majority of respondents (70%). 60% of the respondents said that owing to the overwhelming burden of domestic chores, any semblance of demarcation between professional and personal lives had evaporated. Most of the respondents reported living in nuclear families as dual earner couples. Nuclear families are characterised by household structures that offer more liberty and independence to women as compared to joint families. However, the transition from joint to nuclear families which sprawled during the period when women started participating in the labour market in large numbers has shown its fragility in the pandemic period. Absence of extended family members in the same household who could share the domestic labour and provide social support is unavailable in the nuclear family structure. Also, when women are working from home, the social support mechanisms get wiped off as it is presumed that since they are present at home, they can manage work and home together. This represents a situation of double jeopardy for women due to wrong assumptions and expectations of their employers and family members. On the one hand, employers presume that women will be able to work more in wfh due to the time saved on commute, and family members expect women to manage the chores, childcare and other domestic commitments while they were working remotely. It is salutary that pandemic and lockdown made the care burden shouldered by women more visible as the home dynamics so far were prominently hidden from public scrutiny. Bringing it into limelight, pandemic presented an opportunity to restructure the division of labour within homes on egalitarian lines. However, this may be a lost opportunity as most of the respondents shared that the participation of their spouse in childcare and chores had hardly increased. 65% and 75% of respondents reported that their time on chores and child care respectively had remarkably increased. 95% and 90% respondents said that the time spent by their spouse on childcare and chores had not increased respectively. 5% women who reported increase in time of their spouse on childcare shared that the time was mostly allocated to playing with the child as compared to other duties.

Figure 2: Pandemic, Personal & Family Life
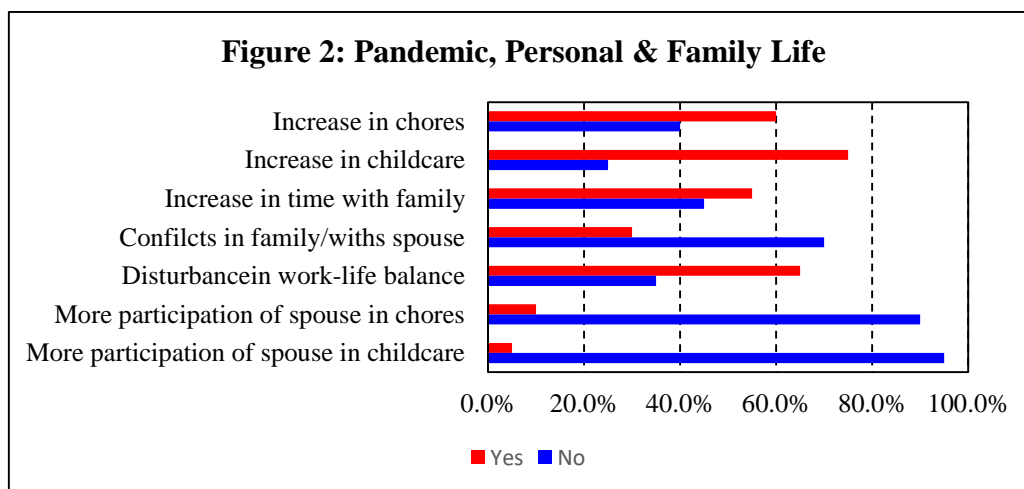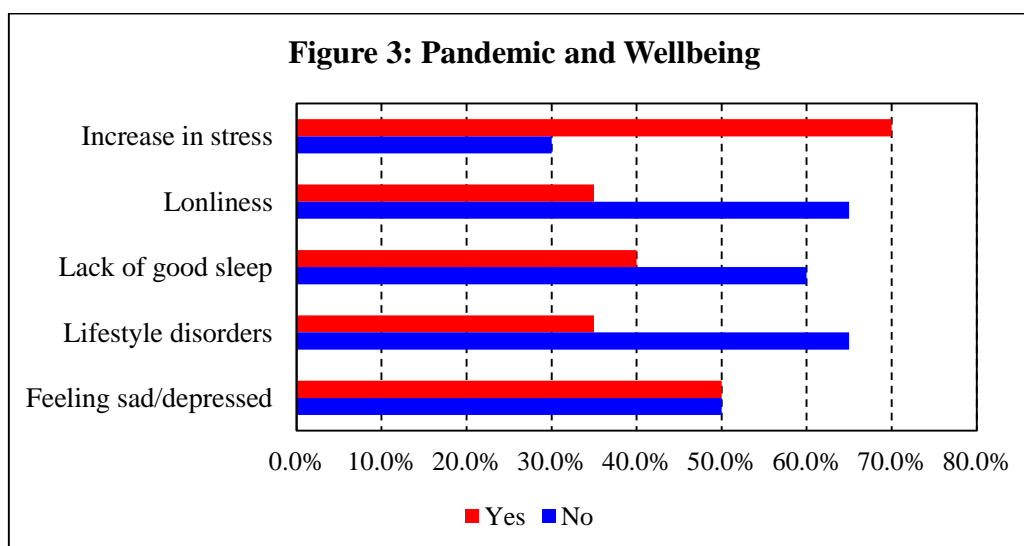
Source: Field data

Working at home can have positive or negative effect depending upon various factors such as demands of the domestic environment, social support at home, level of organizational support and social connections external to work.

Women respondents who had this buffer reported an increase in quality time spend with the family (55%). On the other hand, women employees who were devoid of these resources experienced pronounced negative effects due to overlapping work, family and personal lives. While spill over between personal, professional and family lives was always present to some degree, wfh situation during pandemic removed the possibility of separating these spheres to even a certain degree that was possible by taking work outside homes. Frustration and stress spilling over from work due to non-cooperative manager or financial insecurity led to conflicts in family. 30% respondents reported recurring conflicts with spouse and family which were probably linked to reasons beyond personal lives. In cases where relationships were already vulnerable, divorce and separation along with increased cases of domestic violence became prominent. The phenomenon of increased domestic violence has also echoed across the globe. In fact, it is well documented in research that violence exacerbates during the times of crisis (UN women).

Women have repeatedly faced role conflicts in the roles of an employee, mother, wife etc. and balancing them has been an age old challenge for women. This delicate balance was sustained by the grand bargain that was arrived at between dual earner couples, i.e. we both work while someone else takes care of our child and chores. Due to closure of institutional care facilities, this grand bargain has been struck off and women have been forced to substitute for these functions. In the absence of any alternative support mechanism, women have been leaving the workforce in large numbers and this has jeopardized their financial and economic security. This trend is likely to do an irreversible damage to the representation of women in tech where the picture is already bleak. The pandemic have exposed the fragility of women's role in paid economy (Power, 2020).While women are being forced to leave work, their economic independence will be forgone. This phenomenon will have repercussions on their health and wellbeing which is likely to have long term impact. It is well documented that economic independence plays a significant role in empowerment of women giving them agency. Studies conducted during the 2008 financial crisis and SARS epidemic showed that women who had to quit job for domestic responsibilities experienced identity crisis, exhibited a loss of meaning and purpose for life and faced psychological disorders which were mainly attributed to their sudden loss of agency and loss of economic independence(Rao,2020).

Pandemic, Health and Wellbeing :

COVID 19 is first and foremost a health issue. The containment of the disease mandated quarantine and home isolation measures which had tremendous costs on the health and well-being of people. Though global data indicate higher covid 19 fatality rates among men than women, various other impacts on health were more pronounced in female population. More women than men suffered from physical, mental and emotional health issues induced by pandemic. This difference can be located in the changed dynamics of life effectuated by pandemic that had caused gender role burden to multiply manifold for women. It has been substantiated by previous research that when dual working couples are confined in the domestic space of household, the gender norms signifying role of male as breadwinner and female as caretaker become more pronounced and enforced .In this study, women professionals reported varied impacts of pandemic on their health and well-being. A large number (70%) of the respondents reported feeling stressed on various accounts, 50% respondents reported feeing sad and depressed most of the times, 35% felt lonely and isolated unlike before pandemic, 40% respondents expressed inability to fall asleep with certain symptoms of insomnia and another 30% women professionals had started experiencing some lifestyle disorders.

Figure 3: Pandemic and Wellbeing

Source: Field data

The maintenance of life is critically dependent on keeping our internal milieu constant in the face of a changing environment. Cannon (1929) called this 'homeostasis'. The term 'Stress' represents the effects of anything that seriously threatens homeostasis. The actual or perceived threat to an organism is referred to as the 'stressor'. Studies have indicated that pandemic birthed stressors that substantially elevated the mental health challenges of women. This explanation can be established in the conservation of resource theory which states that people's identity consists of personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy) and social resources (e.g., close relationships) and individuals maintain psychological health by maintaining these resources(Halbesleben, 2006). Broadly speaking, resources are 'things that people value, with an emphasis on objects, states, conditions, and other things'. When expectations or role demands placed on the person is unmatched with the available resources, it results in stress. Stress can result from either threat to resources, actual resource loss, or insufficient resource gains after investing or losing resources (Halbesleben, 2006). These factors form core antecedents of stress, burnout, and exhaustion. Research has shown that gender is a significant dimension in how wfh interacts with employees' demands and resources in affecting emotional exhaustion over the course of the pandemic. It is noticeable that while stress increased, the resources to handle the same depleted. COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on economic and social aspects of life implied losing several resources from multiple categories: job insecurity, layoffs and salary cuts induced financial challenges for employees and potentially threatened their financial resources. Enforced home office threatened social support from supervisors and colleagues while social distancing regulations led to losing social support from friends and family. Furthermore, the closing of childcare facilities threatened the energy resources of women caring for children. Among the 74 resources associated with the COR model, several are of a social nature, including "support from co-workers," "understanding from employer/boss," "help with tasks at home" and "intimacy with spouse or partner" (Hobfall,1989). In the background of pandemic, all these resources were depleted and some were completely unavailable owing to which women employees faced a huge resource crunch.

The fields of stress and physiological health is a well explored territory. Women respondents reported facing hormonal issues, disruptions in the menstrual cycle, backache, diabetes, thyroid cervical pain along with sleep disorders. The pandemic induced sleep disorders became so common that a new term was coined to conceptualise the same, i.e. Coronasomnia. Coronasomnia is characterized by an increase in sleep problems during the pandemic, as well as symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress. While insomnia is often linked to anxiety and depression, coronasomnia differs from traditional insomnia because it's related to the COVID-19 pandemic(Bhat & Chokroverty,2022). It is important to keep in perspective that working in the IT sector has been associated with high work stress even before pandemic. IT industry has a fluid and dynamic nature owing to rapid evolution of technology. The credibility of the IT companies lies in their ability to constantly improvise and innovate with the fast paced technological growth. Owing to these attributes, the work culture in IT is marked with strict deadlines, fierce competition, long working hours and work pressure. Locating this work culture in the context of pandemic indicates the explanatory variables that led to women employees facing stress at work. During the pandemic, the demands at work remained intact at a time when the responsibilities in the domestic context multiplied for working women. This posed immense challenges for women in terms of resources (availability of outsourced help, peer support, family support) they had to fulfil or meet those demands. The pressure of demands at a time when resources had contracted threatened the wellbeing of women in many respects including physiological, psychological and emotional. Pandemic marked a long bout of uncertainty over the nature, symptoms, treatment, causes, and spread of the infection, among many others. In times of uncertainty, people often seek out information to help alleviate fear, possibly leaving them vulnerable to false information. Studies have illustrated how the viral spread of information aggravated the panic and fear about one's own health and health of family along with a nagging fear of contraction. This impact was pronounced on women who were pregnant and in need of reproductive care. To reduce covid risk, many preferred visits to be shifted to virtual mode while being unsure of its effectiveness. For personal visits, many hospitals prohibited escorts to accompany them to the doctor. In the absence of specific guidelines on perinatal care, breastfeeding and virus transmission, women were constantly worrying which heightened maternal stress. There was a scarcity of doctors as staff and resources were diverted to covid care centres. Women respondents with children experienced parenting stress as they had to juggle with child care, chores and working from home. The time and attention demanded by the children increased in the absence of schools, outsourced help or support from family members. This subjected women to time poverty when they were already accommodating the increased work burden in their schedule. The compulsion of social distancing and time poverty of women significantly hampered their social lives. Though virtual mediums were extensively utilised to maintain connectivity and communication, it was no substitute for human face to face interaction.

4. CONCLUSION: Pandemic altered the patterns and conduct of our daily lives which had disproportionate effects running parallel to the axis of power relation and amplifying existing inequalities. Gender is an axis of power and marked

one of the significant fault lines along which risks and consequences of pandemic induced remote working were distributed. This research has shown the consequences on various aspects of lives of women tech workers as the demarcation between work and non-work collapsed and women had to shoulder simultaneous performance of their office work and household responsibilities. This is not to state that flexi work should be completely shunned, rather, what is this study seeks to suggest is that it should be reshaped to support labour force participation of women and work-life balance. There are some significant steps that employers can take to optimise work from home experience for women. Corporates need to train and sensitise the managers on supervising work from home as they need to be supportive to women who are juggling paid work and disproportionate burden of unpaid work. Encouraging the male employees to share the unpaid work at home and be supportive to women working within families can inspire a change in attitude and help to reverse the gender division of labour within homes. As pandemic induced remote work was the first large experiment on work from home at this scale, research is needed to guide formulation of new human resource policies that would be appropriate to this new work setting. The current human resource policies have been based on extensive research on the significance of work environment, leadership, collegial support and job design on employee. This body of research was undertaken in office environment and needs to be conducted in the wfh context to understand how these factors impact employees and thus reshape work policies. In the wake of pandemic, employees experienced role ambiguity due to lack of clear polices from the organization. Organizations need to clearly define the performance measures, ensure clarity around role expectations, maintain regular communication, and allocate appropriate workload and access to HR support. To facilitate boundary management, clarity is required in relation to the expectations of working hours to prevent employees feeling as though they have to be available online throughout the day. Strategies also need to ensure that those who chose to work from home do not experience negative outcome on their career in terms of not being offered career advancement or training or onsite opportunities. The stigma attached to flexible working should be systematically removed by laying down clear measures on work performance evaluation of employees.

The other aspect that demands a change is the organization of social reproduction. Reorganizing care work is significant to recognize the value of care work as it is indispensable for society. This has also acquired a new significance in the context of interest that corporates have shown to restructure work and move it to homes. Family studies (Gerhardt, 2010) have illustrated that changing economic structure is not suitable to the changes in family institution. As families drifted from joint to nuclear to single families and economic model changed from breadwinner to dual earner, the support system and kinship relations within families which served as safety net became unavailable. The changing structure of family institution requires that domesticity, kinship and care ought to be reorganized so that women are liberated from the manacles of gender division of labour (Addati et al., 2018).

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