

## **Understanding the Impact of Work from Home Arrangement on Psychological Empowerment**

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**Abstract:** Psychological empowerment can be understood as a sense of self control with respect to one's work and active involvement with one's work related role. It is manifested when employees feel that the work they do is personally meaningful to them, they have required competence to get the work done, they also have a degree of self-determination in taking work related decisions and their work has some impact on others and on the organizational as a whole. Psychological empowerment results in positive organizational and managerial outcomes. Today's era is marked by tremendous changes in ways of work including the work from home arrangements. Because of the COVID-19 Pandemic situation, working from home arrangement is preeminent. The current study focuses on the working from home arrangements, personal life characteristics of individuals which might have an impact on psychological empowerment of employees. Gender differences, marital status, working hours, childcare responsibilities are expected to have impact on psychological empowerment of employees. T Test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypothesis. The results of this study show that gender differences, marital status, childcare responsibility and working hours affect psychological empowerment of employees. The results also focus on need to reduce insecurity in the minds of remote working employees. The implications for the organizations and limitations of the study are also discussed.

**Key Words:** Psychological Empowerment, Working from Home, Gender Differences, Marital Status, Childcare Responsibility, Working Hours

### **Introduction**

#### Understanding the Concept of Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment is a concept originating from industrial-organizational psychology. Empowerment is defined as the opportunity an individual has for autonomy, choice, responsibility, and participation in decision making in organizations. Psychological empowerment refers to an "intrinsic task motivation reflecting a sense of self-control in relation to one's work and an active engagement with one's work role."

Since the 1980s, an increased interest in empowerment had been seen in diverse subject areas within psychology and management, including motivation, task performance, leadership, group processes, decision-making, and organizational design, because empowerment can enhance employee performance, well-being, and positive attitudes of individuals, teams, and organizations.

It is the process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information. Many studies on enterprise organizations have found that psychological empowerment can effectively stimulate individuals' enthusiasm for work and promote the improvement of job performance.

Psychological empowerment is composed of four cognitions according to Spreitzer namely Meaning, Self-determination, Competence and Impact. Meaning refers to a sense of purpose or personal connection to work. Empowered people feel that their work is important to them and they care about what they are doing. Competence reflects individuals' beliefs that they have the necessary skills and abilities to perform their work well. Self-determination refers to a sense of freedom about how individuals do their work. Impact describes a belief that individuals can influence the system in which they are embedded. The four dimensions are independent and distinct yet related and mutually reinforcing, qualities that capture a dynamic state or active orientation towards work.

The prime objective of empowerment is allocation of power between management and employees in such a way that employees' commitment can be enhanced. Managers in contemporary organization advocate performance improvement through employee empowerment and decentralization. Individuals feel empowered when they perceive and possess power to adequately cope with events, situations, or people they confront.

An employee feels empowered due to a meaningful job, gaining confidence to perform the task, degree of autonomy in decision-making, and perceives that the job and individual performance have a positive and vital impact on the organization. Employee empowerment is reflected in job satisfaction, enhanced morale and improved performance which is ultimately in long-run interest of the organizations. The firms' objectives can be achieved easily.

Meaning results in high commitment and concentration of energy. Competence results in effort and persistence in challenging situations, coping and high goal expectations, and high performance. Self-determination results in learning interest in activity and resilience in the face of adversity. Impact is associated with absence of withdrawal from difficult situations and high- performance.

Psychological empowerment is beneficial in reducing the cost as employees save the time and efforts of top management, reducing the need for middle level managers to a considerably lower level. It helps to increase the productivity, quality of product which helps to gain a competitive edge over the organization's competitors. Psychological empowerment may vary with organizational structure, individual and team characteristics, work design, leadership, and organizational support.

Researches show that employees with higher degrees of psychological empowerment will be motivated to work harder and their performance will be correspondingly higher. Psychological empowerment brings congenial atmosphere in the organization to achieve organizational goals, and develops a culture of openness and trust.

In changing scenario like global COVID-19 pandemic, workers need acceptance of changes in operation, methods, techniques, changing workplace dynamics like working from home and changing workplace demographic as well as employee expectations. Employees with higher degree of psychological empowerment tend to adopt such changes within the organization easily compared to other employees, with increasing employee satisfaction and reducing attrition rate.

#### Understanding Today's Working From Home Scenario

The concept of working from home/ remote working emerged in the last decade due to explosion in technology and globalization (Caramela, 2017). In the 1980s, companies began officially experimenting with flexible work. For example, IBM installed "remote terminals" in several employees' homes during that time, and the program flourished to the point that "by 2009, 40% of IBM's 386,000 global employees already worked at home (the company noted that it had reduced its office space by 78 million square feet and saved about \$100 million in the US annually as a result)," cites a report in Quartz. Today the concept has working from home has come to the forefront due to sudden outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.

Although initially it was challenging for organizations to operate as per this new normal, by now, after being locked down organizations and employees are getting used to this new normal and coming up with various ideas and methods to cope up with this challenging situation. Video conferencing tools and collaborative technology has made it easy for coworkers to communicate and stay in touch, no matter their geographical location. As long as one is connected to the internet and has required devices, technology has now made it easier to work from anywhere in the world (Hendricks, 2014).

This lockdown had major impact on employees working environment and work methodology. Different professionals are now working from home ranging from professor, scientist to artists. Due to this 'new normal' working environment is changing drastically. Though many working individuals have accepted this remote working and are working from home now, claims that they are not able to conduct their various roles and responsibilities like before. With the changes happening in all walks of life, schools, colleges and day cares are also closed down. Many working individuals today are responsible for looking after their children. While others have to support elders, dependents and other family members through this trying times of illness and uncertainty.

It simply means that on the one hand through working from home individuals have brought their 'professional roles'

at home, while on the other hand due to pandemic situations their personal life roles have already multiplied. In a nutshell, the COVID-19 crisis is disrupting the way individual works.

This paper focuses on understanding the impact of working from home and personal life characteristics of working individual like gender, marital status, child care responsibilities and working hours on psychological empowerment of employee.

### Literature Review & Hypothesis

Tripathi, N., & Bharadwaja, M. (2019), research shows that PE (psychological empowerment) has a significant negative relationship with perceived stress, which helps to validate the effectiveness of PE (psychological empowerment) in Indian work settings. They established emotional stability and agreeableness as significant moderators which enhance the negative links between PE and perceived stress.

Saltiel, F. (2020), his paper examined the feasibility of working from home in developing countries. The feasibility of working from home is positively correlated with high paying occupations. Educational attainment, formal employment status, an household wealth are positively associated with the possibility of working from home, reflecting the vulnerability of various groups of workers. These relationships remained significant within narrowly defined occupations, yet exhibited heterogeneity across countries. He remarked the importance of rapidly identifying the vulnerability of workers to design adequate policies to combat the negative employment impacts of COVID-19.

Results from the analyses of Hayes, S., Priestley, J. L., Ishmakhmetov, N., & Ray, H. E. (2020), paper suggested that perceived stress did increase during the COVID-19 restrictions, especially for people that had limited experience working from home and were female. Individuals who worked from home before COVID-19 had higher levels of work-related burnout but did not differ based on gender or part-time work status. The results suggested that working from home

may create more stress and result in more burnout, which challenges the current moves by some employers to make working from home a permanent arrangement.

From the above discussion it is hypothesized that

H1 – People working from home will experience the feeling of stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty.

H2 - Women working from home will experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty than men.

H3 – Married employees will experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty than unmarried employees.

H4– Employees with childcare responsibility while working from home will experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty than employees without childcare responsibilities.

H 5 – Employees working more hours than normal due to work from home arrangement will experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty.

H 6 – Employees working from home will experience less psychological empowerment than those not working from home or occasionally working from home.

### Methods

To secure information from respondents, a self- administered survey /questionnaire was used in current study. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, physical distribution was not possible. So, questionnaires were sent to respondents through social media platforms and using websites like survey swap, and survey circle. Electronic distribution techniques were also used (Google form).

Total 160 questionnaires were distributed electronically, out of which 82 filled questionnaires were returned giving a total response rate of 51.25%. A non-probability convenient sampling method was used to reach the respondents in this study.

Sample size was 82 respondents out of which 43.9% are male and 56.1% are female respondents with an average age of 30 years. Approximately 45.7% respondents were graduates, while 49.4% had post graduate degrees. Approximately 62.2% were single and 35.4% were married. 20.7% were from a joint family and 79.3% from the nuclear family. Approximately 26.8% respondents had children and 48.8% had dependent care responsibilities. About 30.3% of respondents earn annual income ranging from Rs. 2, 00,000 to 4, 00,000.

On average respondents worked 5 days a week with average 8 working hours per day and average work experience was 7 years. On an average experience working with the current organization of the respondents was 4 years.

**Measures**

Work from Home - A scale for working from home was taken from Snapsurvey blog by Joshua Nicholas (2020). Sample items include, ‘Have you worked from home before the COVID-19 lockdown?’, ‘ Do you have required equipment to work from home?’ etc.

Psychological Empowerment – A scale was used in this study to measure Psychological Empowerment is developed by Spreitzer (1995). Spreitzer developed the sub scale by adapting items from previous studies. Meaning items were taken directly from Tymon (1988), competence items from Jones’s (1986) self-efficacy scale, impact from Ashforth’s (1989) helplessness scale and self-determination items from Hackman and Oldham’s (1980) autonomy scale.

The Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire contains three items for each of the four sub- dimensions of psychological empowerment for example, Meaning: ‘The work I do is meaningful to me’; Competence: ‘I have mastered the skills necessary for my job’; Self- determination: ‘I have significant autonomy in determining how to do my job’; and Impact: ‘I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department’. Respondents were asked to indicate their responses on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Highest score indicate more employee engaged while lower score indicate lower employee engagement.

Buckle (2003) reported a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.88 for total psychological empowerment and Malan (2002) reported alpha coefficients for all the four sub dimensions of psychological empowerment to vary from 0.68 to 0.83. For the current study the alpha reliability was .89.

Demographic Profile - Demographic data was collected on the parameters like Gender, Age, Educational qualification, Department, Work Experience, Marital status, Number of dependents, Number of children, etc.

**Data Analysis & Results**

- Correlation between working from home and feeling of Stress, Fear, Anxiety, Insecurity & Uncertainty

Table 1- Mean, Std. Deviation and Zero Order Correlations among variables

Variables	M	SD	WFH	Stress	Fear	Uncert.	Anx.	Insec.	
WFH	3.44	.787	1						
Stress	1.94	.802	-.323**	1					
Fear	1.38	.696	-.336**	.428**	1				
Uncertainty	1.68	.788		-.317**	.432**	.672**	1		
Anxiety	1.70	.822		-.267**	.602**	.499**	.609**	1	
Insecurity	1.52	.728		-.240**	.423**	.610**	.478**	.445**	1

\*\*  $p < .01$

Results in Table 1 show significant negative correlation of work from home with stress (-.323\*\*), fear (-.336\*\*), uncertainty (-.317\*\*), anxiety (-.267\*\*) and insecurity (-.240\*\*). Thus hypothesis 1 which states that people working from home will experience the feeling of stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty is supported by the data.

- Gender Differences

Independent samples T test was conducted to understand the differences of perception of male and female employees’ regarding factors like stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty. Significant results are shown in Table 2

Table 2: Results of T test for Gender Differences

Particulars	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	sig.
Fear	Male	1.19	.525	11.695	.001
	Female	1.46	.751		
Insecurity about Job	Male	1.22	.485	26.914	.000
	Female	1.72	.834		

\*\*  $p < .01$

The results of T test shows that there are significant differences in the feeling of fear of male 1.19 (SD= .525) and for female 1.46 (SD= .751) employees due working from home,  $F= 11.695, p =.001$ . Additionally, significant differences were found between male 1.22 (SD= .485) and female 1.22 (SD= .485) employees in their experience of feeling of insecurity about the job,  $F= 26.914, p =.000$  Therefore, hypothesis 2 stating that women working from home will experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty than men is partially supported by the data.

- Marital Status

Table 3: Results of T test of marital status of employees on stress and uncertainty due to working from home

Particulars	Marital status	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	sig.
Stress	Single	1.87	.856	6.059	.016
	Married	2.07	.704		
Uncertainty	Single	1.62	.837	2.783	.099
	Married	1.69	.712		

\*\*  $p < .01$

The results of T test shows that there are significant differences in the feeling of stress of unmarried 1.87(SD= .856) and married 2.07 (SD= .704) employees due working from home,  $F= 6.059, p =.016$ . Additionally, significant differences were found between unmarried 1.62 (SD= .837) and married 1.69 (SD= .712) employees in their experience of feeling of uncertainty,  $F=2.783, p =.099$ .

Hence, hypothesis 3 which claims that married employees will experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty than unmarried employees.

- Childcare Responsibility

Table 4: Results of T test for Childcare responsibility

Particulars	Childcare Responsibility	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	sig.
Stress	No	1.87	.853	7.895	.006
	Yes	2.14	.640		
Fear	No	1.27	.607	6.526	.013
	Yes	1.55	.800		

\*\*  $p < .01$

Results of T test shows that there are significant differences in the perception of stress among employees with childcare

responsibility 2.14(SD= .640) and employees without childcare responsibility 1.87(SD= .853),  $F=7.895$ ,  $p =.006$ . Additionally, there are also significant differences in the experience of fear of employees with childcare responsibility 1.55 (SD= .800) and employees without childcare responsibility 1.27(SD= .607),  $F= 6.526$ ,  $p =.013$ . Hence, the data partially supports hypothesis 4 which states that employees will childcare responsibility while working from home will experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty than employees without childcare responsibilities.

Working Hours

Table 5: Results of one way ANOVA for Working Hours

Particulars	Working Hours	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Stress	Working less than before	1.44	.698	9.158	.000
	Working more than before	2.16	.721		
	Feels to work for 24×7	2.25	.866		
Anxiety	Working less than before	1.33	.620	3.344	.040
	Working more than before	1.79	.833		
	Feels to work for 24×7	1.83	.835		
Insecurity about job	Working less than before	1.26	.594	2.451	.093
	Working more than before	1.58	.763		
	Feels to work for 24×7	1.75	.866		
Uncertainty	Working less than before	1.41	.636	2.452	.093
	Working more than before	1.65	.720		
	Feels to work for 24×7	1.92	.669		

\*\*  $p < .01$

Analysis of variance in Table 5 shows that employees who feels like they are working 24\*7, experience higher level of stress 2.25 (SD = .866\*\*), Anxiety 1.83 (SD =.835), insecurity about the job 1.75 (SD = .866\*) and uncertainty 1.92 (SD = .699) than employees who are working more than before or working less than before.

This partially supports hypothesis 5 stating that Employees working more hours than normal due to work from home arrangement will experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty.

Work from Home & Psychological Empowerment

Table 6: Results of one way ANOVA for Work Form Home & Psychological Empowerment

Particulars	Work from Home	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Psychological	No	4.30	.483	3.289	.042
	Occasionally	3.70	.483		

empowerment	Yes	4.08	.552		
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The results of ANOVA shows that employees who work from home 4.08 (SD = .552) experience lower level of psychological empowerment compared to employees who do not work from home 4.30 (SD = .483). Thus, hypothesis 6 which states that employees working from home will experience less psychological empowerment than those not working from home or occasionally working from home is supported by the data.

### Discussion

This study claims that people working from home experience the feeling of stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty. This was supported by the data. The reason for this can be attributed to the change or shift in working arrangements, no separation between work life and personal life, extended working hours, increase of competition, and lack of one to one interaction.

Further it was found that women working from home experience higher fear, insecurity than men. This may be because in this study, 26.8% of employees have children and 56.1% are women employees in this research. Because of the working from home arrangement, female employees have to carry out both the responsibilities of work as well as of the home simultaneously. Male employees feel less responsible to carry out the household duties. The burden or the pressure of duties and responsibilities on women employees has increased since the country is under lockdown every member of the family is at home including children. The schooling of the child is also from home, parent employees especially female employees have to take care of the child's health as well as education.

It was also found that married employees experience higher stress and uncertainty than unmarried employee. This finding can be justified as married employees have more responsibilities and duties regarding their family they feel more uncertain and stressful about their job. Married employees have more responsibilities so they tend to avoid risks, changes. So, adopting the sudden shift in working arrangements due to pandemic becomes difficult.

The study also claims that employees with childcare responsibility while working from home will experience higher stress and fear than employees without childcare responsibilities. This is due to COVID-19 pandemic, children are also at home. Parent employees have to manage both the roles as parents and also as employees simultaneously. The switching between these two roles becomes difficult to manage because employees are working from home.

It was further found that employees working more hours than normal due to work from home arrangement experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty. This can be justified by some obvious reasons like workload, long working hours, changes within the organization, boring work, managers or higher authority providing no feedback, tight deadlines, etc.

At the end it was found that employees working from home experience less psychological empowerment than those not working from home or occasionally working from home. This is because employees working from home experience stress, fear, anxiety, workload, and insecurity about the job, and as studies show that stress, fear, anxiety, workload, and insecurity about the job is negatively correlated to psychological empowerment.

### Limitations

Like any other research this research also have certain limitations. This study is based on self- reported responses of the individuals. For this study we have used the convenient sampling method to approach participants and hence the issue arises regarding whether the findings of this study will generalize to the entire population. The study is based on the self- reported responses of respondents. In this study all sectors are not considered. Further, considering the sample profile of this study, the representation of male participants in the current study sample is less as compared to female participants.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of work from home arrangements on psychological empowerment of employee. In this study, it was found that demographic factors like gender, marital status, and childcare responsibility have an impact on psychological empowerment of employees. Negative correlation between stress, anxiety, fear, uncertainty, insecurity about the job and psychological empowerment was found.

This study claims that people working from home experience the feeling of stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty, which was supported by data. The study shows that women working from home experience higher fear, insecurity than men. The study also claims that employees with marital status, childcare responsibility while working from home will experience higher stress, uncertainty and fear than other employees. It was further found that employees working more hours than normal due to work from home arrangement experience higher stress, fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty. At the end it was found that employees working from home experience less psychological empowerment than those not working from home or occasionally working from home.

It is recommended to perform psychological empowerment practices in the organization by decentralizing, giving access to information, building an open culture, involving employee in decision making etc. These practices can help the employer to improve employee's psychological empowerment. Employee's productivity gets influenced by the changing or uncertain external factors which can be minimized by empowering employees.

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