

Research Paper

Gender Differences and Relationship of Burnout and Well-Being Among Employees Working from Home

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic has altered every aspect of our work and life. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become more important, as many employees are enabled by technology and can work from home (WFH) (Wang et al., 2021). Work from home has continued even after the pandemic. The abrupt shifts to WFH and other factors associated with it provide a unique context for exploring the impact of work from home on physical and mental well-being of employees. The present investigation aimed to study the gender differences and relationship of burnout and well-being among employees who were working from home in Information Technology Sectors. The study was conducted among 80 males and 80 females. The results revealed significant gender differences on Total Burnout and its dimensions viz. Exhaustion, Mental Distance, Cognitive Impairment, and Emotional Impairment along with Well-being. Females scored higher on Total Burnout and its dimensions and lower on Well-being as compared to males. Burnout and its dimensions were also found to be negatively related to Well-being.

Keywords: *Burnout, Well-being, Work from Home, Employees*

Companies that specialize in information technology (IT) offer ample of resources which are accessible anywhere, at any time, and can enhance workplace flexibility, productivity, and efficiency. Work from home has become more popular since the pandemic and employers have already paid the fixed cost to set up remote work systems for their employees (Bartik et al., 2020). However, IT firms are quite demanding with respect to work because they encourage a "always-on" mentality (Atanasoff & Venable, 2017) and put pressure on people to be constantly accessible and responsive, such as to work emails, calls, and texts. Such adverse consequences were notably apparent throughout the epidemic of COVID 19 as well (Belzunegui-Eraso & ErroGarces, 2020). The health and stress levels of employees have been found to be significantly influenced by information technology businesses (Berg-Beckhoff et al., 2017; Burman & Goswami, 2018). The popularity of IT firms has caused the lines separating work and personal life to become increasingly hazy for employees, making it difficult for both individuals and organizations to reconcile work with home and maintain a work-family balance (Lonska et al., 2021).

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According to Majumdar et al. (2020), prolonged screen exposure from full-time computer work might cause weariness, headaches, and eye-related problems. Living alone and working full-time from home without daily face-to-face interactions and lack of social support can lead to mental health problems including depression and social isolation. WHO (2019) states that unmanaged chronic work stress can lead to burnout, a syndrome that has emerged to be a serious threat to both the well-being of employees and the efficacy of their organisation. The economic, social, and psychological costs to employees, businesses, and society as a whole are further impacted by this (Shirom, 2011; OSHA, 2014).

Di Renzo et al. (2020) suggested that social and behavioural factors have the most evident impacts on health. Particularly, being home for an extended period of time may cause generalised anxiety and depression, which frequently results in modifications of routines and eating habits. According to Schnitzer et al. (2020), work-from-home stress can combine with certain changes in physical activity and dietary consumption, and all of these factors together have a direct impact on the employees' physical and mental health. Thus, the abrupt shifts of employees working from home provide a unique context for exploring the relationship between burnout and its impact on physical and mental well-being.

Gender Differences

Burnout and well-being might impact males and females differentially. Eddleston and Mulki (2017) reported an increase in job stress for employees who were full-time working at home. This was mediated by work family conflict; an inability to disengage from work, and the integration of work into home life, led to higher work family conflict which was associated with higher job stress. Further, it was found that this relationship was moderated by gender. It was reported that women experienced greater work family conflict due to inability to disengage from work, and men experienced greater work family conflict due to integration of work into the family domain.

Windelar et al. (2017) examined the effect of interpersonal and external interactions on work exhaustion, using work at home as a moderator. The researchers surveyed employer's pre and post implementation of a formal work at home policy and then compared employees who work at home with those who work in office. The results showed that males had higher levels of work exhaustion following the commencement of telework. It was also found that work at home increased the negative effect of interactions external to the business on work exhaustion. Females working at home reported higher levels of work exhaustion compared to those who worked from office.

Turnbull et al. (2020) opined that the variations in health implications may be due to conventional gender roles, in which men are still seen as the ideal citizen workers who put the major focus on their jobs, however women still have multiple roles in both the home and the workplace that are prevalent throughout many countries. Due to the lack of interior space available at home, the work at home situation may make it difficult to distinguish between these responsibilities, leading to conflict. It is plausible that for some females, the work at home situation exacerbates the high levels of exhaustion, stress and reduced happiness that are associated with high levels of work family conflict, including poor mental and physical health in comparison to males who are working at home.

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Burnout

Burnout is what happens when employees are exposed to more stress than they have resources to cope with. According to World Health Organization (2019), it is characterized by “feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job, and reduced professional efficacy. “Signs of burnout include forgetfulness and difficulty concentrating, diminished pride in work, losing sight of goals, and frustration and irritability with coworkers. This can affect life at home as well. Workers suffering from burnout experience difficulty maintaining relationships, being present with loved ones, enjoying hobbies and time with family. This inability to relax outside work can result in health effects such as unexplained muscle tension, pain, fatigue and insomnia, as well as increased risk for serious health concerns, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, depression and suicide (Mayo Clinic, 2020; Menon et al., 2020).

In terms of the outcomes of burnout, negative consequences extend beyond employees’ individual emotions and feelings. Burnout results in decreased individual, team, and organizational performance, including inhibited creativity, innovation, workplace mistakes, accidents, and injuries. Burnout is also associated with counterproductive work behaviors such as higher absenteeism and lower turnover (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022).

Well being

World Health Organization (1948) defines health as a condition beyond a lack of infirmity but of complete mental, physical, and social well-being. The three well-being domains that were reviewed include (1) affective/psychological well-being, (2) physiological well-being, and (3) behavioral well-being. The conceptual definition used to designate a study as an affective/psychological well-being study draws on Peter Warr’s definition of psychological/affective well-being in the workplace. Workplace well-being refers to all aspects of work life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment to what workers think about their jobs, work environment, work climate, and work organization.

Burnout and its impact on well being

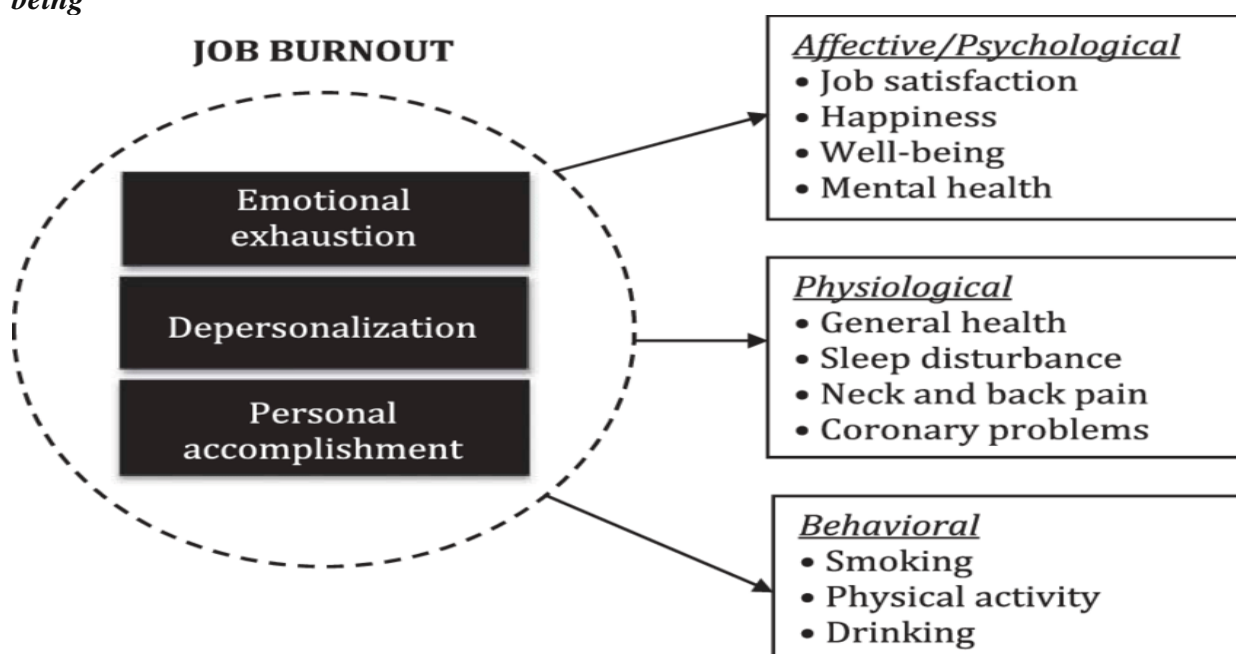
The relationship between burnout and depression is frequently explored in the literature. Burnout has been reported to predict depressive symptoms and life dissatisfaction (Ahola, 2007). Burnout has also been linked to both psychological and physical ill-health symptoms (Bianchi et al., 2015). Similarly, Thuynsma and De Beer (2016) also found depressive symptoms and satisfaction with life (together with job demands) to explain significant amounts of variance in the burnout construct. Burnout has been associated to poor physical health, including sleep disturbances, headaches, respiratory infections, and gastrointestinal infections as well as musculoskeletal problems (Armon et al., 2010).

Kivimaki and Kawachi (2015) conducted a review from twenty seven cohort studies which comprised of more than 600,000 individuals. The findings showed that work stressors such as job strain and long working hours were associated with a moderately elevated risk of incident coronary heart disease and stroke. The same study also showed an association between work stress and type 2 diabetes. Similarly, research in South Africa has shown that burnout is linked to self-reported treatment for diabetes, hypertension, and irritable bowel syndrome (De Beer et al., 2016). Therefore, there is a clear link between burnout and health. Job burnout poses a risk to the affective/psychological, physiological, and behavioral well-being of workers. The mechanisms by which burnout is theorized to affect worker well-

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being are generally described as resulting from a depletion of the burned-out individual's personal resources that lead to a decline in one's affective, psychological, physical, or behavioral state. An expenditure of energetic resources occurs as workers cope with chronic stress and feelings of exhaustion, which then lead to feelings of fatigue and psychological erosion. The depletion of personal resources experienced by a "burned out" worker can also lead to physical ailments by compromising the immune system (Leiter & Maslach, 2001). Additionally, worker reactions to job burnout can be manifested behaviorally and can include things such as increased smoking or drinking as coping mechanisms (Maslach, 1978).

Figure 1 The conceptual model of the impact of job burnout dimensions on worker well-being



Note: Job burnout and its impact on affective, physiological and behavioral well-being of employees. From "Examining the Impact of Job Burnout on the Health and Well-Being of Human Service Workers: A Systematic Review and Synthesis", E.L. Lizano, 2015, *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, 39 (3), 167–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2015.1014122>.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hayes et al. (2020) conducted a study with the purpose to understand the relationships among stress, work-related burnout, and remote working brought on by social distancing efforts and stay at home orders put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from the analyses suggested that perceived stress increased during the COVID-19 restrictions, especially for people that had limited experience of working from home. Females were reported to be more affected by this. 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.

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Song and Gao (2020) using data from the 2010, 2012, and 2013 American Time Use Survey Well-Being Modules, examined how subjective well-being varied among wage/salary workers between working at home and working in the workplace using individual fixed-effects models. Researchers found that compared to working in the workplace, bringing work home on weekdays was associated with less happiness, and telework on weekdays or weekends/holidays was associated with more stress. The effect on subjective well-being that resulted working from home was varied by parental status and gender. Parents, especially fathers, reported a lower level of subjective well-being when working at home on weekdays but a higher level of subjective well-being when working at home on weekends/holidays. Non-parents' subjective well-being did not vary much by where they worked on weekdays, but on weekends/holidays. Childless males felt less painful whereas childless females felt more stressed when teleworking instead of working in the workplace.

Russo et al. (2021) conducted a longitudinal study impact of work from home on an individual level among software engineers who were working from home. Longitudinal study was conducted on one hundred ninety-two employees, approximately fifty psychological, social, situational, and physiological factors were covered that had been previously been associated with well-being or productivity. Examples included anxiety, distractions, coping strategies, psychological and physical needs, office set-up, stress, and work motivation. The design of the study was in such a manner that those variables can be identified which explained unique variance in well-being and productivity. Results showed that the quality of social contacts predicted well-being positively, and stress predicted an individual's well-being negatively. Boredom and distractions predicted productivity negatively. Productivity was less strongly associated with all predictor variables at time two compared to time one, suggesting that software engineers adapted to the lockdown situation over time. Longitudinal analyses did not provide evidence that any predictor variable causal explained variance in well-being and productivity. Overall, it was concluded that working from home was not a significant challenge for software engineers.

In another study, White (2021) found that 69% of respondents reported higher levels of work-related stress while working from home. The higher levels were attributed to increased workloads and changes to working patterns to meet demands. Smite et al. (2022) interviewed eighteen software developers to understand how their code production performance and daily activities have changed during the pandemic home-based working period. The results suggested that developers attuned themselves gradually to the pandemic situation and hence pandemic did not have any major effect on developers' daily activities and code productions. Additionally, Thorstensson (2020) explored factors that impacted IT project managers' productivity and concluded that home-based work had both positive and negative effects on productivity.

These studies, however, are insufficient in this regard and call for additional in-depth research on these variables, particularly in the context of India. The findings in the Indian context are thought to be influenced by the differences in cultural backgrounds and social conventions. Depending on the job profile, the differing responsibilities that men and women play can have a significant impact. Additionally, IT businesses compensate their employees well and have high standards for their workers. Employees are under a lot of job pressure from their employers, which could have an impact on their wellbeing. Additionally, COVID-19 has created a work-from-home possibility, which has benefits and drawbacks of its own. Various factors can have an impact on men and women. Thus, the goal of the

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present investigation is to study the gender differences and relationship of burnout and well-being among IT sector employees who are working from home. The current study will assist in synthesising the results into concrete actions which companies can adopt to promote happier, healthier, and more efficient workplaces. The research will also be useful in a variety of global crises that affect how work is done at the time of crisis and enhance employee wellbeing.

Objectives

- To study gender differences on Burnout and Well-being among IT sector employees working from home.
- To study the relationship between Burnout and Well-being among IT sector employees working from home.

Hypotheses

Based on the review of literature following hypotheses were proposed:

- Females were expected to score higher on Burnout and its dimensions viz. Exhaustion, Mental Distance, Cognitive Impairment, Emotional Impairment in comparison to males of IT sector working from home.
- Males were expected to score higher on Well-being in comparison to females of IT sector working from home.
- Burnout and its dimensions viz. Exhaustion, Mental Distance, Cognitive Impairment, Emotional Impairment were expected to be negatively related with Well-being among IT sector employees working from home.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample comprised of 160 employees in the age range of 25-35 years. There were 80 males and 80 females who were chosen. Subjects were chosen from the various IT companies of India who had been working from home with minimum 2 years. 92% of employees were unmarried and 96% were graduates.

Tests and Tools

Following standardized self report inventories were used to assess Burnout and Well Being

1. **Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT)-23** by Schaufeli et al., 2020 was used to assess burnout. It was a 23 item scale which measured the Burnout on four dimensions viz. Exhaustion (8 items), Mental Distance (5 items,) Emotional Impairment (5 items), and Cognitive Impairment (5 items). A 5-point Likert frequency scale with the following values is used as answering format for the BAT viz. 1 =never, 2 =rare, 3=sometimes, 4 =often and 5 = always. The score ranges from 23 to 115. Higher score indicating greater burnout. The global factor of the BAT-23 has shown evidence of unidimensionality according to its omega reliability value $\omega = 0.95$.
2. **World Health Organization- Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5)** by World Health Organization, 1998) was used to assess well-being. The WHO 5 consists of five statements, which respondents rate according to the scale viz. all of the time=5, Most of the time=4, More than half of the time=3, Less than half of the time= 2, Some of the time=1. At no time =0. The total raw score ranging from 0 to 25. High score indicating greater well-being. The test has shown correlation coefficient of 0.87.

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Procedure

The administration of the tests took a maximum of 20 minutes on an average. Willingness of the participants was taken and they were instructed to answer carefully with a view in mind that there is no right or wrong answer. They were told that the purpose of this study was to assess their personality. Volunteers were told that they will be informed about their results upon the analysis completion.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics and t-ratios for males and females working from home in IT sector were calculated for Burnout and its dimensions and Well-being. Correlational analysis was done to study the relationship of Burnout with Well-being for the total sample working from home in IT sector.

RESULTS

Results are shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 shows Mean, S.D and t-ratios. Table 2 shows the intercorrelation matrix for the entire sample.

Table 1: Means, S.Ds and t-ratios for males and females

S. No.	Variables	Males (n=80) Mean	S.D.	Females (n=80) Mean	S.D.	t-ratios
1.	Exhaustion	18.63	5.88	27.67	6.48	7.99**
2.	Mental Distance	12.75	4.14	16.57	5.54	4.27**
3.	Cognitive Impairment	11.72	3.18	16.20	5.37	5.56**
4.	Emotional Impairment	10.93	2.93	16.28	5.23	6.90**
5.	Total Burnout	54.03	10.96	76.72	20.43	7.57**
6.	Well Being	18.20	5.06	14.67	4.69	3.96**

*t- ratio significant at .05 level = 1.65

**t-ratio significant at .01 level = 2.35

The results revealed significant gender differences on Burnout and Well-being ($p < .01$). The mean value for females came out to be higher for burnout and its dimensions viz. Exhaustion, Mental Distance, Cognitive Impairment, Emotional Impairment and lower mean value was obtained for Well-being as compared to the males. Thus, females were found to be higher on burnout and lower on Well-being and vice versa

Table 2: Intercorrelation matrix for the total sample (n=160)

S.No	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Exhaustion	-	.63**	.65**	.66**	.87**	-.37**
2	Mental Distance	-	-	.73**	.66**	.85**	-.27*
3	Cognitive Impairment	-	-	-	.76**	.88**	-.28**
4	Emotional Impairment	-	-	-	-	.87**	-.28**
5	Total Burnout	-	-	-	-	-	-.35**
6	Well Being	-	-	-	-	-	-

*correlation value significant at .05 level = 0.22

**correlation value significant at .01 level = 0.28

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The intercorrelation matrix table depicted a significant negative correlation between Total Burnout ($p < .01$) and its dimensions viz. Exhaustion ($p < .01$), Mental Distance ($p < .05$), Cognitive Impairment ($p < .01$), Emotional Impairment ($p < .01$) and Well-being.

DISCUSSION

The results revealed significant gender differences on Burnout and Well-being ($p < .01$). The mean value for females came out to be higher for burnout and its dimensions viz. Exhaustion, Mental Distance, Cognitive Impairment, Emotional Impairment and lower mean value was obtained for Well-being as compared to the males. Thus, females were found to be higher on burnout and lower on Well-being and vice versa. Hence, our first two hypotheses which stated that Burnout and its dimensions and Well-being will differ significantly between males and females were accepted. These results are in line with the previous studies conducted by Kumareson et al. (2022) in which the prevalence of burnout syndrome among IT professionals who worked from home was explored and the impact of burnout in different gender and age-groups during the COVID-19 pandemic was determined. A total of eleven hundred and seven participants took part in the study and were invited through E-mails, phone calls, and social media. Nine hundred and thirty-four participants between the age group of 25–35 years were selected based on the selection criteria. The data collected were used for the descriptive analysis, which revealed that the average age of the sample population was 29.26 years, with more female participants (60%) compared to male participants (40%). Around 58.7% of the participants were aged between 25 to 30 years and 41.3% were aged between 31 to 35 years. The mean score for all 934 indicated that almost 95% of the IT professionals were affected by burnout syndrome. The results evidently showed that female IT professionals were more prone to have high burnout syndrome than the male population. It was also found that 95% of the selected participants were having burnout syndrome with the eldest female group (30–35 years) having more risk to experience burnout syndrome than the other groups.

It was also hypothesized that Burnout and its dimensions will be negatively correlated with Well-being among IT professionals working from home. The intercorrelation matrix table also depicted a significant negative correlation between Total Burnout ($p < .01$) and its dimensions viz. Exhaustion ($p < .01$), Mental Distance ($p < .05$), Cognitive Impairment ($p < .01$), Emotional Impairment ($p < .01$) and Well-being. Hence, third hypothesis was also accepted. These findings are also in line with the previous studies which demonstrated that burnout was negatively related to happiness and satisfaction with life (Demerouti et al. 2019). Furthermore, González-Rico et al. (2022) in a study showed that lower level of well-being at work caused negative collateral effects on the individual's life in general outside of work, leading to low satisfaction with life and lower levels of happiness.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

If multinational IT companies want to sustain remote work arrangements, they should formulate strategies that assist employees in avoiding exhaustion while operating from home. Presently, workers are assuming greater workloads than before due to financial uncertainties and perceived or actual pressures stemming from employer expectations. When employees exhibit signs of being overwhelmed or express concerns about meeting their targets, supervisors ought to engage in discussions to facilitate effective workload management. It is crucial to guide employees in seeking support, whether through colleagues, friends, family members, or employee assistance programs. It is essential to explore viable options to alleviate musculoskeletal pain resulting from home office setups and address psychological stress.

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Given the significant changes in work routines, employees may experience disruptions in other aspects of their lives such as sleep, social interactions, and exercise. Employers can mitigate these disruptions by promoting social hours, enhancing communication, implementing exercise challenges and mindfulness practices, and supporting employee mental well-being through initiatives such as employee assistance programs.

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Conflict of Interest

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