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Research Paper

Quality of Work Life among IT Professionals in the Post-Pandemic Era: A Comparative Analysis of Remote and Office-Based Work Environments

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally reconfigured workplace norms, accelerating the adoption of remote and hybrid work arrangements across the global Information Technology (IT) sector. While these transitions were initially driven by necessity, they have persisted as deliberate organizational strategies, raising critical questions about their implications for employee Quality of Work Life (QWL). This study examines and compares QWL among IT professionals engaged in Work from Home (WFH) and Work from Office (WFO) arrangements, with additional attention to gender-based variation. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, drawing a purposive sample of 200 IT professionals (100 WFH, 100 WFO; 100 men, 100 women) from technology parks in Kochi, Kerala. QWL was assessed using the validated Quality of Work Life Inventory (Vijayalakshmi, 2005), a 50-item instrument spanning eight dimensions including compensation equity, occupational safety, career growth, institutional governance, and human capability development. Results reveal that WFO employees report marginally higher QWL scores than WFH counterparts, attributable primarily to differences in social integration and organizational support dimensions. Gender differences were not statistically significant within either work modality. Findings carry practical implications for HR strategy, hybrid work policy design, and employee mental well-being programmes in the post-pandemic IT landscape.

Keywords: *Quality of Work Life (QWL), Remote Work, Work from Home, Information Technology Professionals, Work-Life Balance, Hybrid Work, Gender Differences*

The emergence of COVID-19 as a global health crisis in early 2020 precipitated one of the most rapid and large-scale transformations in work organization in modern history. For the Information Technology (IT) sector, the shift to Work from Home (WFH) represented not merely a logistical pivot but a fundamental reimagining of the professional environment. With business continuity mandating remote operations, millions of IT professionals worldwide found themselves navigating the intersection of occupational demands and domestic life with little preparation or infrastructural support.

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Quality of Work Life (QWL) — a multidimensional construct encompassing an employee's subjective evaluation of their occupational experience across physical, psychological, and social domains — has long served as a key indicator of organizational health and employee well-being (Walton, 1973; Sirgy et al., 2001). The pandemic-induced disruption introduced unprecedented stressors and simultaneously opened new opportunities for flexibility that had previously been inaccessible to many workers. Against this backdrop, understanding how QWL manifests across different work modalities becomes both theoretically significant and practically urgent.

India's IT sector, concentrated in hubs such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, and Kochi, represents one of the largest technology workforces in the world. IT professionals in these settings are characterized by high cognitive demands, project-based deadlines, and increasingly global client obligations. Prior to the pandemic, flexible work arrangements existed as an exception rather than a norm; post-pandemic, they have become structurally embedded in organizational policy. Understanding how this restructuring affects QWL is critical for employers, policymakers, and occupational health practitioners alike.

Gender constitutes an additional layer of complexity in work-life quality research. Women in IT, while increasingly represented in technical and managerial roles, continue to shoulder disproportionate caregiving responsibilities within domestic settings (Nair & Vohra, 2021; Li et al., 2021). The conflation of work and home spaces under WFH conditions may therefore intensify existing gender-based disparities in professional experience and subjective well-being, or, alternatively, the flexibility offered may serve as a protective resource. Empirical evidence on this question remains limited and context-dependent.

This study addresses the following research objectives within the specific context of IT professionals based in the Infopark technology cluster in Kochi, Kerala: (a) to compare QWL between WFH and WFO employees, and (b) to examine gender differences in QWL within each work modality. By generating locally grounded empirical evidence, the study contributes to a growing global literature on remote work, occupational well-being, and organizational strategy in the post-pandemic era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Quality of Work Life: Conceptual Foundations

The concept of QWL was formally theorized by Walton (1973), who identified eight interrelated domains as constitutive of a high-quality occupational life: adequate and fair compensation, safe and healthy work conditions, opportunity for continued growth and security, constitutionalism in the work organization, social relevance of work, the balance between work and total life space, and the social integration and development of human capabilities. This framework, subsequently operationalized by Vijayalakshmi (2005) in the Indian context, remains widely employed in QWL research and forms the theoretical basis of the present study.

More recent scholarship has extended QWL research to encompass organizational climate, leadership behaviour, and employee autonomy as significant predictors (Demir & Akgün, 2020). In the Indian IT sector specifically, Jha and Gupta (2020) demonstrated robust associations between QWL, job satisfaction, and turnover intention, highlighting the strategic importance of QWL management for talent retention.

Remote Work and Well-Being

Prior to the pandemic, empirical evidence on the consequences of telework was mixed. Studies such as Allen et al. (2015) and Gajendran and Harrison (2007) noted modest positive effects on perceived autonomy and job satisfaction; however, these benefits were frequently offset by feelings of isolation, professional invisibility, and erosion of work-home boundaries. WFH as a pandemic-era necessity introduced a qualitatively different configuration— one imposed rather than chosen — with distinct psychological implications.

Babbar, Saini, and Jhajj (2021) found that Indian IT employees working remotely during the pandemic reported elevated workload, increased screen time, and reduced access to managerial support, collectively undermining QWL. Mehta and Sharma (2021) similarly identified burnout and boundary ambiguity as prominent outcomes of prolonged WFH, particularly among employees in smaller residential spaces. Kedia and Purohit (2021) noted that IT professionals with dedicated home office spaces reported significantly better QWL outcomes, suggesting that physical environment mediates the WFH-QWL relationship.

Gender, Work Arrangement, and QWL

The gendered nature of the work-life boundary has been extensively documented. Women in dual-income households are frequently expected to absorb primary caregiving roles even when maintaining equivalent professional workloads, a dynamic that WFH conditions can amplify (Gurung & Yadav, 2021). Haider, Ali, and Ahmad (2021) found in a Pakistani IT context that women working from home reported significantly more role conflict and lower QWL than their male counterparts, attributing this to asymmetric household labour distribution.

Conversely, Ng and Burke (2010) identified flexibility as a moderating variable: women with higher perceived schedule flexibility reported QWL scores equivalent to men, suggesting that WFH arrangements that afford genuine control over working hours may attenuate gender disparities. In the Indian context, where urban IT parks such as Infopark increasingly employ educated professional women, the question of whether WFH serves as a facilitating or constraining force for female QWL warrants empirical scrutiny.

Objectives and Hypotheses

Objectives

- To compare the overall Quality of Work Life between IT professionals engaged in Work from Home and Work from Office arrangements.
- To examine gender differences in QWL scores among WFH and WFO professionals.
- To identify which QWL sub-dimensions show the most pronounced differences across work modalities and gender groups.

Hypotheses

- **H_1:** There is a statistically significant difference in QWL scores between IT professionals working from home and those working from office.
- **H_2:** There is no statistically significant difference in QWL scores between male and female IT professionals within the same work modality.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed. Cross-sectional designs allow for simultaneous collection of data from distinct groups at a single time point, facilitating group comparisons while minimising longitudinal attrition. Data were collected during the post-pandemic transitional phase (2022–2023), when both WFH and WFO arrangements coexisted within the same organizational ecosystems.

Participants and Sampling

The target population comprised full-time IT professionals employed at companies operating within Infopark, Kochi — one of Kerala's primary IT and ITES clusters. Purposive sampling was used to ensure equal representation across work modality (WFH/WFO) and gender (male/female). A total of 200 participants were recruited, structured as follows: 50 women working from home, 50 men working from home, 50 women working from office, and 50 men working from office. Inclusion criteria required participants to have been engaged in their current work arrangement for a minimum of six months, to hold active employment in a technical or semi-technical IT role, and to provide informed consent.

Instruments

Personal Datasheet: A researcher-constructed demographic instrument gathered information on work arrangement (WFH/WFO), gender, age, years of experience, marital status, and living arrangement. These variables were used for group classification and descriptive characterization of the sample.

Quality of Work Life Inventory (Vijayalakshmi, 2005): This standardized instrument comprises 50 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 5). It assesses eight QWL dimensions: (i) Adequate and Fair Compensation, (ii) Safe and Healthy Work Environment, (iii) Opportunity for Growth and Security, (iv) Constitutionalism, (v) Social Integration, (vi) Social Relevance of Work, (vii) Total Life Space, and (viii) Development of Human Capabilities. Total scores range from 50 to 250; higher scores indicate better perceived QWL. The inventory has demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$) and construct validity in previous Indian IT sector studies.

Data Collection Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board prior to data collection. Participants were approached through company HR liaisons and professional networks within Infopark. Questionnaires were administered both in hard copy (WFO group) and via a structured Google Form (WFH group). Participants were assured of anonymity and the right to withdraw. Completed questionnaires were reviewed for missing data; cases with more than 10% missing responses were excluded from analysis.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed for all groups. Independent samples t-tests were used to evaluate group differences in total QWL scores: WFH versus WFO (H_1) and male versus female within each modality (H_2). Effect sizes were estimated using Cohen's d. The significance threshold was set at $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics: QWL Across Work Modalities and Gender

Table 1 presents the mean QWL scores and standard deviations for all four sub-groups. WFO employees consistently reported higher mean QWL than WFH employees. Among WFH employees, women (M = 158.00, SD = 14.14) scored slightly higher than men (M = 153.00, SD = 28.60). Among WFO employees, women (M = 170.00, SD = 22.30) and men (M = 168.00, SD = 20.32) returned nearly identical scores, indicating high within-group consistency under office conditions.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Mean QWL Scores by Work Modality and Gender

Work Modality	Gender	N	Mean QWL Score	SD
Work from Home	Women	50	158.00	14.14
Work from Home	Men	50	153.00	28.60
Work from Office	Women	50	170.00	22.30
Work from Office	Men	50	168.00	20.32

Note. QWL scores are derived from the Quality of Work Life Inventory (Vijayalakshmi, 2005). Maximum possible score = 250.

Hypothesis Testing

H_1 — WFH vs. WFO Comparison: An independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in total QWL scores between WFH (M = 155.50, SD = 22.28) and WFO employees (M = 169.00, SD = 21.19), $t(198) = 4.38$, $p < .001$, Cohen's d = 0.62. This moderate-to-large effect size indicates that the work environment modality exerts a meaningful influence on perceived work-life quality, with office-based employees reporting substantially higher QWL. H_1 is therefore supported.

H_2 — Gender Comparison within Modalities: Among WFH employees, no significant gender difference was observed, $t(98) = 1.06$, $p = .29$, $d = 0.21$. Among WFO employees, the gender difference was also non-significant, $t(98) = 0.42$, $p = .68$, $d = 0.09$. H_2 is supported in both modality contexts.

Table 2. Independent Samples t-Test Results: Group Comparisons

Comparison	Group 1 Mean (SD)	Group 2 Mean (SD)	t	df	p	Cohen's d
WFH vs. WFO	155.50 (22.28)	169.00 (21.19)	4.38	198	< .001	0.62
Gender: WFH	Women: 158.00 (14.14)	Men: 153.00 (28.60)	1.06	98	.29	0.21
Gender: WFO	Women: 170.00 (22.30)	Men: 168.00 (20.32)	0.42	98	.68	0.09

Note. Two-tailed significance. Effect sizes (Cohen's d): small = 0.20, medium = 0.50, large = 0.80.

QWL Sub-Dimension Patterns

Inspection of item-level and dimension-level responses revealed that the largest inter-group differences emerged on the Social Integration and Total Life Space sub-scales. WFH employees reported lower satisfaction with collegiality, informal professional interactions, and the perceived separation between work and personal life. WFO employees scored higher on Constitutionalism and Safe/Healthy Work Environment, likely reflecting the presence of formal organizational structures and ergonomic support unavailable in most home settings.

No meaningful sub-scale differences were observed between male and female participants within either modality, consistent with the aggregate findings.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined QWL among IT professionals in Kochi, India, comparing those engaged in Work from Home and Work from Office arrangements and exploring gender as a moderating variable. The finding of significantly higher QWL among WFO employees (H_1 supported, $d = 0.62$) aligns with recent literature documenting the social and structural advantages of the physical workplace. Consistent with Babbar et al. (2021) and Mehta and Sharma (2021), WFH employees in this sample reported reduced access to social support networks and less satisfactory work-home boundaries, dimensions that directly underpin QWL in Walton's (1973) model.

The comparatively high standard deviation in the male WFH group ($SD = 28.60$) warrants particular attention. This marked within-group variability suggests that WFH does not produce uniform outcomes for male IT professionals; rather, individual factors — including living arrangements, family composition, and home office infrastructure — substantially moderate the WFH experience. Future research employing person-centred approaches such as latent profile analysis may better capture this heterogeneity than the group-mean paradigm used here.

The absence of significant gender differences in QWL (H_2 supported) is noteworthy in light of prior literature predicting disadvantage for women under WFH conditions. One interpretation consistent with Ng and Burke (2010) is that flexibility of schedule, rather than work location per se, is the operative variable: if WFH employees of both genders perceive equivalent control over their work hours, gender-specific care burdens may be effectively managed without an aggregate QWL deficit. Alternatively, the social desirability inherent in self-report instruments may suppress gender-differentiated reporting of personal constraints. Qualitative methods would be valuable for probing these mechanisms.

The practical implications of these findings are significant for organizations navigating hybrid work policy decisions. The QWL premium associated with office-based work does not imply that mandatory office return maximizes employee well-being; rather, it signals that organizations should invest in replicating the social integration and structural support functions of the workplace within remote environments. Dedicated virtual team-building, ergonomic allowances for home offices, and clear boundary policies for after-hours contact represent concrete strategies grounded in the current findings.

Limitations of the study include its cross-sectional design, which precludes causal inference; its restriction to a single IT cluster in Kerala, limiting generalizability across India's diverse regional IT ecosystems; and its reliance on a single validated instrument, which, while appropriate for the Indian context, does not capture contemporary digital well-being dimensions such as techno-stress or platform fatigue. Future studies should employ longitudinal designs, diversify sampling across IT hubs, and integrate digital well-being measures to build a more comprehensive picture of QWL in the evolving post-pandemic workplace.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that work arrangement modality significantly influences Quality of Work Life among IT professionals, with office-based employees reporting higher QWL than remote workers, primarily due to advantages in social integration, structural support, and work-home boundary clarity. Gender, however, does not emerge as a significant differentiating factor within either modality in this sample, suggesting that organizational and environmental variables may outweigh gender-specific dynamics in shaping QWL outcomes in this professional group.

As organizations increasingly institutionalize hybrid and remote work arrangements beyond pandemic necessity, these findings underscore the importance of deliberate policy design that preserves the social and structural affordances of the physical workplace. Targeted investment in remote work infrastructure, virtual community-building, and employee well-being programmes is essential to sustaining QWL across the spectrum of work modalities that now define the IT profession.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to this research, authorship, or publication.

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