Impact of Remote Work During Covid-19 Pandemic on Employees: Assessing Changes in Physical and Mental Well-Beings

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Abstract: COVID-19 has changed the entire work place structure in most of the companies across the world. Employees are working remotely from their homes and the rate of remote work has accelerated by a huge margin during this period. However, it has been observed that, work from office is more effective for physical and mental well-being, than work from home. Employees are physically and mentally affected by this new normal work culture across the world. Aim of this study is to identify different aspects of physical and mental health of employees, who are working remotely during and after the pandemic. As per the literature review section, the main reason behind the decline in physical and mental well-being of a person during remote work are, food intake, zero communication with co-workers, distractions while working and in some cases extended working hours.

This study has reviewed different articles to gather relevant data from secondary sources for the data analysis process. As per the research review and content analysis, it has been found that the relationship between health and work is complex. Moreover, some of the employees have stated that, their experience and work efficiency while doing WFH depends on their atmosphere at home, network connectivity and many other aspects. Several health outcomes such as fatigue, depression, stress are found that are faced by employees while working from home. However, effective supports from organisations are the only way, to mitigate the negative effect of WFH.

Keywords: Remote work, Physical health, Mental health, COVID-19, Depression, Fatigue, atmosphere at home, work-life balance, Organisational Support

1. Introduction:

1.1 Background:

Remote work or work from home (WFH) was heavily promoted in 2020 to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic situation. WFH is also known as mobile work, telework, and remote work and this is expected to decrease the risk of coronavirus infection. In the entire world, WFH has become common and the implementation rate of WFH was increased to 17% in 2020 (Shimura et al., 2021). However, there is a huge controversy regarding the benefits and challenges of remote work because some authors believe that WFH culture negatively influences the physical and mental wellbeing of employees during the COVID-19 situation (Okubo, 2020). Conversely, another group of authors think that remote work has divorced the work culture and it enabled a better balance of work life and home as well as increasing productivity, job satisfaction and morale (Tavares, 2017).
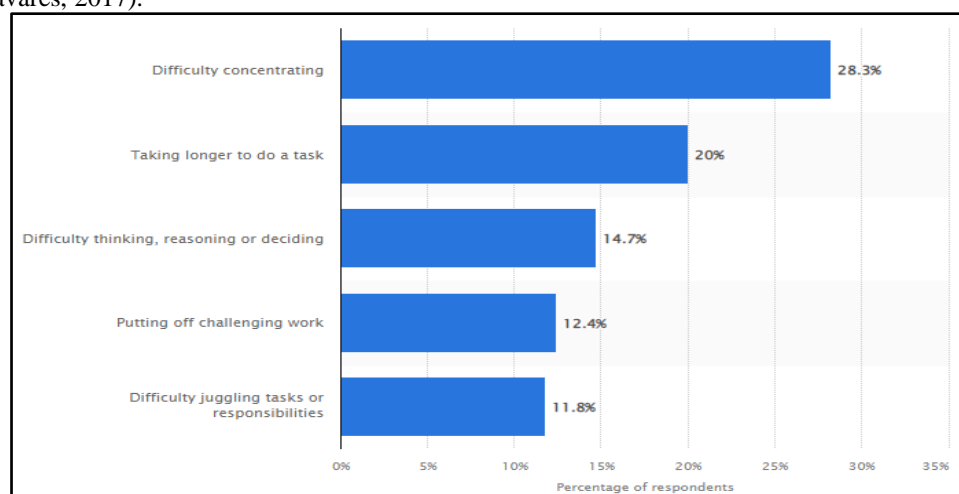

Figure 1.1: Mental health issues employees face due to WFM during COVID-19 outbreak

(Source: Statista, 2020)

Figure 1 shows statistical data that provides data on mental health issues that employees experience due to remote work during COVID-19 pandemic. According to the figure during the COVID situation, when employees need to do remote work, employees mostly face difficulties concentrating on work and followed by employees taking more time to complete tasks (Statista, 2020). According to a Statista report, 14.7% of the employees face difficulties in reasoning, deciding and thinking as well as 11.8% of people experience difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities while working remotely (Statista, 2020).
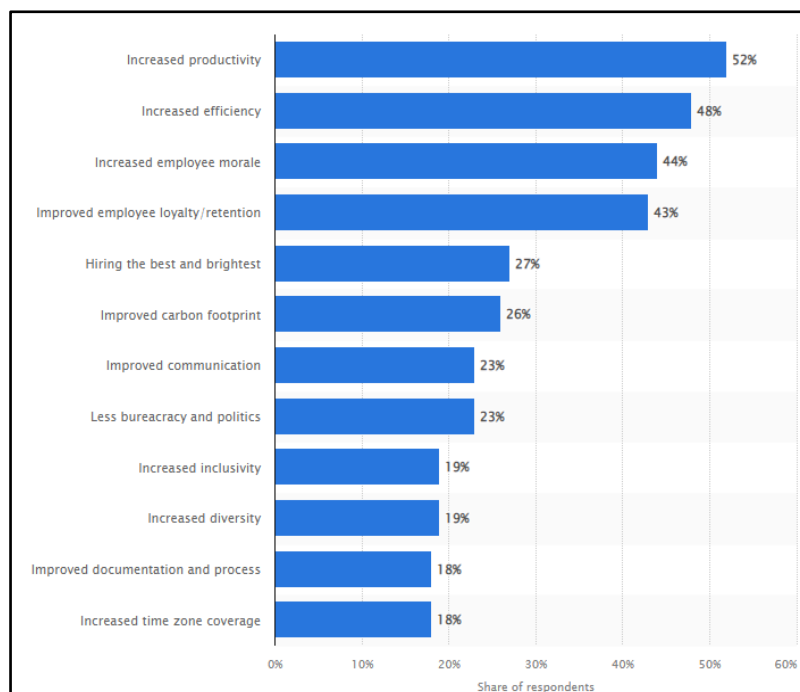

Figure 1.2: Benefits of WFH to employees in 2020

(Source: Statista, 2022)

Additionally, figure 2 shows the benefits of remote working to employees in 2020 and as per this figure it can be stated that remote working has increased productivity, efficiency, employee morale, employee retention, and communication. Additionally, studies have found that WFH has reduced the stress and anxiety among employees. Thus, this systematic review is going to review some research papers to analyse whether remote working has influenced the mental and physical well-being of employees during COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2 Research aim and objectives:
Aim:
The aim of this systematic review is to use existing resources for understanding and evaluating the impact of remote working or work from home culture on employees' mental and physical well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. The objectives of this review have been provided below.
Objectives:
- To analyse the role of COVID-19 pandemic in overall changes of employees' mental and physical wellbeing while doing remote work.
- To identify benefits and challenges of remote work during COVID-19 pandemic.
- To evaluate the different ways of remote work influences employees' wellbeing during the academic year.

1.3 Research questions:
1. What is the major role of COVID-19 pandemic in terms of changing employees' mental and physical mental health in a pandemic situation?
2. What are the benefits and challenges employees face while working remotely?
3. How work from home influences employees' mental and physical wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.4 Problem Statement:
Throughout the world, the working culture has been profoundly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and currently it has become a major issue. However, in order to mitigate this issue and continue the working process, organisations started remote working, which has shown some excellent results. Besides, the several benefits of remote work, studies showed

that it has influenced employees' wellbeing. This is the reason; the systematic review is going to review the impact of remote working during COVID-19 by utilising existing resources.

1.5 Significance of research:

This research paper has both educational and professional significance, for example, in case of educational purposes, if the researchers conduct any study paper on the similar study topic, then this systematic review would help to understand the impact the pandemic and remote work on employees' wellbeing. Additionally, researchers could understand the perspective of other authors on this research issue. Additionally, this study paper would help the industry professionals or the organisational leaders to understand the importance of remote work in any crisis.

2. Review of literature:
2.1 Concept of remote working or work from home:

Remote work or WFH is also known as telework, mobile work, work from anywhere, teleworking, distance working and remote job and this is an arrangement by employers that ensures employees do not require to attend the central workplace including office building, retail store and warehouse. Wang et al. (2020) stated that remote working is a flexible working arrangement where employees work from different locations apart from their central offices and employees do not have any contact with their other co-workers; however, they can communicate with their co-workers by utilising various technologies. COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift away from traditional office work and people are still doing remote work. It is expected that after the pandemic has ended the chances of complete return to the traditional office work is low and organisations are highly probable to switch hybrid work model, where companies would hire employees for both full time office and remote work (Wang et al., 2020).

2.2 Role of COVID-19 pandemic on employees working environment:

COVID-19 pandemic brings new ways of doing any business and because of this; organisations have to change their business operation with the role of offices regarding generating reading, successful and secure careers. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed several weaknesses as well as issues, which have been present within a business for a longer period of time. According to De Lucas Ancillo et al. (2021) with the help of latest technologies companies have effectively implemented remote working or work from home approach and that is why employers implemented several training technologies and tools for remote working, and established a combination of remote and in-house access by using tools like network agnostic tools. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, organisations tried to use various digital technologies so that organisations can continue the office work.

Moreover, Wang et al. (2020) discussed that there is a positive relationship between job performance and remote working intensity was stronger regarding employees low within social support at work.

2.3 Effect of Different Positive and Negative aspects of Employee's on Work from Home (WFH) productivity and engagement:

COVID-19 outbreak has made the process of work from home a new way of working for millions of employees across the world (Galanti *et al.* 2021). Moreover, as per some studies, it has been observed that the overall effect of employee's productivity mainly relies on female employees in any organization, rather than its male employees. Female employees have benefited more than Male employees in countries like India, as it is effective for simplifying their "domestic work" as well as "family demands". Adaptation theory in organizational structure is effective to help female employees to develop efficiency (Farooq & Sultana, 2021).

As stated by Galanti *et al.* (2021), in order to continue their work, millions of employees from different sides of this world had to switch to a new aspect of working remotely in sudden manner and without any preparation. The article has defined the level of production and efficiency of an employee working from home during this COVID-19 situation. As per the results in this article, it has been found that, "family-work conflict", "social isolation", and "distracting environment" are the main three aspects that affect the productivity level of employees along with their efficiency level (Galanti *et al.* 2021). As per this article, it can be stated that, organizations across this world need to consider these three essential factors for developing a guideline in order to manage the positive outcomes of working from home in a better way. It can be observed in this article that all these three factors are negatively related with overall WFH productivity and engagement of an employee (Galanti *et al.* 2021). On the other hand, it has also been stated in this article that, "Self-leadership" and "Autonomy " are the factors, which are positively related with WFH productivity. "Self-leadership" refers to a "self-influence" of an employee that can help them to meet their own goals.

2.4 Relationship of WFH with Physical and Mental Well-being of Employees:

The abrupt shift within the working environment across the world from traditional system to remote working developed many contexts, under which the relationship between WFH with physical as well as mental well-being of an employee can be determined (Xiao *et al*. 2021). As per the findings, it has been observed that, changes in physical activities and food

intake of an employee starting at home for a long period have a major relation with their WFH stress and anxiety. These changes are effective to increase the level of mental stress. Moreover, as per Xiao *et al*. (2021), it has been reported that, for people who live alone, social isolation can be a major factor that affects their mental health, as lack of social interaction and face-to-face conversation with their co-workers are missing, which help them to motivate themselves under huge work pressure. Moreover, distraction at home can affect their mental stability, which can create a great impact on their work efficiency as well.

2.5 Research Gap:

The studies that are reviewed in the literature section are well defined for identifying various factors related to mental health and physical well-being of employees while doing work from home. However, some other additional concepts such as worker's awareness, eagerness of WFH are not mentioned in a detailed manner. As a result, a further review based on some literature is developed in this study to bridge the gap.

3. Research methodology:

3.1 Data Extraction methods:

This study analyses the impact of remote work on during the pandemic of physical and mental health of employees and for achieving this aim, the paper has stated some objectives and research questions, which have been answered by existing resources. To ensure rigorousness of this paper following steps have been considered during review process.

3.1.1 Database:

At first, this paper has determined databases for being used and it has selected Google Scholar, NCBI, Taylor and Francis Online, and ProQuest. The reason for selecting these databases is that the articles provided data on the impact of remote work on employees' health and wellbeing. After selection of databases, the paper searches for the resources by considering standards of the PRISMA Declaration, where it has considered four major steps: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion (Bairagi & Munot, 2019). Additionally, for filtering the selected resources some search terms have been used, which are applied to abstract, title and keyword field. Some of these keywords are "remote work", "COVID-19 pandemic", and "physical and mental wellbeing".

3.1.2 Selection criteria:

Inclusion Criteria:

- Journals that are not older than ten years
- Secondary and primary outcome related primary research articles are used
- Articles written or published in English language are considered
- Chosen journals are related to research topic
- Scholarly journals are chosen
- Full-text journals and articles are considered

Exclusion Criteria:

- Journals based on case study are excluded
- Newspapers and editorial articles are not chosen
- Articles and journals published in vernacular language are restricted
- Articles and journals older than ten years are not considered

3.1.3 Search strategy and selection process:

Additionally, based on the four steps on PRISMA declaration, this paper has selected the existing resources. For example, regarding the identification step, it has identified records through database searching and other sources and from databases it used 20 papers and for other sources, it has collected 10 papers (Mukherjee, 2019). In the screening step, it has eliminated duplicate (n=5) by applying selection criteria. In the eligibility stage, this paper full text articles have been evaluated and some full-text articles (n=6) have been excluded. Finally, in inclusion step, 11 articles were selected that are relevant to the selected study topic (Saha & Paul, 2020).

PRISMA Flow Diagram:
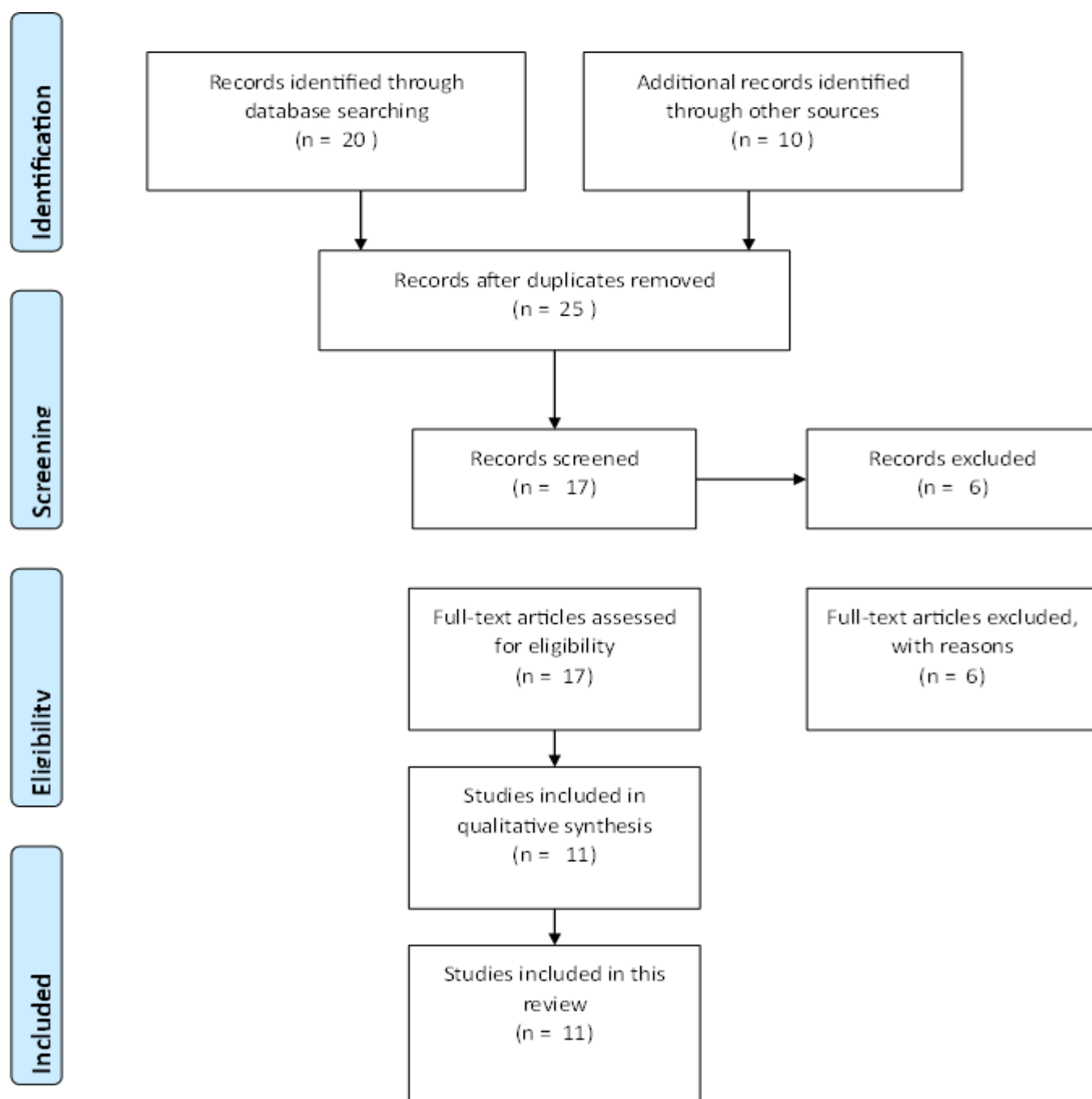
Figure 3.1: PRISMA Flow-diagram

3.1.4 Screening of articles:

Regarding this systematic review, existing resources were taken from different databases and these are based upon proper criteria. In order to choose relevant research articles, the paper has gone to a screening method where it has searched the articles by name and year; the name means keywords and years denotes the selected time. Additionally, it has used abstract screening for selecting articles (Shields, 2019).

3.1.5 Development of data extraction table:

Author	Method	Aim	Outcome	Limitation/ Implication
Wang et al. (2020)	Mixed-method	This paper aimed to explore challenges faced by remote workers during COVID	Findings suggested that social support correlated with low level of remote working risks, workload and loneliness	Since it used both quantitative and qualitative data, it could raise generalisation issue
De Lucas Ancillo *et al.* (2021)	Secondary and Descriptive	The aim was to investigate future evolution and current status of workplace in COVID-19 pandemic	The pandemic has changed the ways organisations as well as employees work and continue to do so	The paper paid attention to specific publications and consulted companies' interest regions
Hamouche, (2020)	Review paper	It aimed to identify key stressors pre, post COVID, and identify moderating factors for mitigating COVID impact on mental health of employees.	Job insecurity, financial loss, risk of contamination, quarantine and social distancing are induce mental health issues among employees	The key limitation is selection of articles, as it can be subjective
Galanti *et al.* (2021)	Primary survey and a statistical analysis was made to test the survey result with "hierarchical linear regression"	To identify effect of "family-work conflict", "social isolation", "distracting environment", "job autonomy", and "self-leadership" on employee's productivity while working from home	As per the study, "family-work conflict", "social isolation", and a "distracting environment" have negative effects on "WFH productivity". On other hand, "job autonomy", and "self-leadership" have positive effect	The cross sectional design of this study is one of the main limitations that does not allow creating a casual relationship between different variables in this study.
Farooq & Sultana, (2021)	Primary survey and statistical analysis with "structural equation modeling" and "multi-group moderation analysis'	To identify the relationship between WFH and employee's productivity	As per findings, a negative relationship exists between WFH and employee's productivity. Moreover, gender plays a main role in moderating this relationship.	Use of limited number of control variables, and missing of industry specific differences

Xiao *et al*. (2021)	Primary survey and "Linear regression", "multinomial logistic regression" and "chi-square tests", used for statistical analysis	To identify the effect of different social, behavioral and physical factors on the well-being of employees who works from their homes	As per the findings, changes in food intake, lack of interaction with co-workers and disturbance in work environment are main factors of poor physical and mental well-beingof employees.	As the data are collected during early days of COVID-19, it cannot determine health status after the reduction in restrictions
Singh *et al.* (2020)	Mixed method	To identify the well-being of IT professionals in Bangalore in WFH structure due to COVID-19	As per the findings from survey, most of the employees have the ability to maintain a boundary between their professional and personal lives	This study will demonstrate knowledge for maintain work-life balance
Selvasundaram, & Dasaradhan, (2020)	Secondary data analysis	Aim of this research is to identify factors that can help employees to improve their willingness to work from home and their opinion regarding this new normal concept	As per the result, respondents will have interest to work from home, if they get enough support from their organization, that improves their mental health	The present study generates different avenues for future work based on employees needs while doing remote work
Oakman *et al*. (2020)	Review article	Main aim was to review the effect of Working at home on mental and physical health of employees	As per the study, different health outcomes has been identified such as "pain", stress, depression, fatigue, strain and many others that are associated with WAH, which can be reduced by organizational support	Some studies in this domain remained untouched die to exclusion criteria and direct comparisons difficult due to heterogeneity of different outcome related measures
Vyas & Butakhieo (2021)	Secondary data analysis based on "exploratory framework" and "SWOT analysis"	To study experienced of employer and employees in Hong Kong related to WFH culture	As per the findings, proper guidelines, policy and training are important to make employees aware of the WGH concept, as it can grow the interest of people in this concept	This research can generate fruitful recommendation to government in long run and short run

Parmar *et al*. (2021)	Mixed method with descriptive study	To identify impact of factors on work life balance of employees before and after COVID-19 period	As per the findings, work life balance of IT employees does not affect much, due to less change in their work structure during WFH. However, not getting enough enthusiasm is an effective factor for their health	This research will be effective for organisations to identify factor to make employees satisfied and make them interested in WFH

Table 1: Data Extraction Table

3.2 Data analysis:

Content data analysis method is flowed in this research paper based on collected secondary data. Through this process of data analysis, the influence of remote work-culture is analysed regarding mental and physical wellbeing of employees. This process also made this analysis better to understand and explore this research topic with context to numerical illustrations (Thomas, 2021).

4. Result and Findings:

The research work has developed a content analysis of 11 articles, considered as samples. This content analysis has been effective to clarify different information related with the research topic based on the effect of WFH on the physical as well as mental well-being of employees. Some essential factors of these samples are reviewed in the following section to get into the insights of the research.

4.1 Publication Year:

The review has focused on articles published from 2019 to 2022, as it can generate effective knowledge on the WFH concept, as a part of new work culture across the world.

4.2 Methodology:

The reviews of methodology used in these 11 articles have generated a thorough overview regarding the research approach considered in each of this article to identify the effects of WFH on employees in different health aspects.
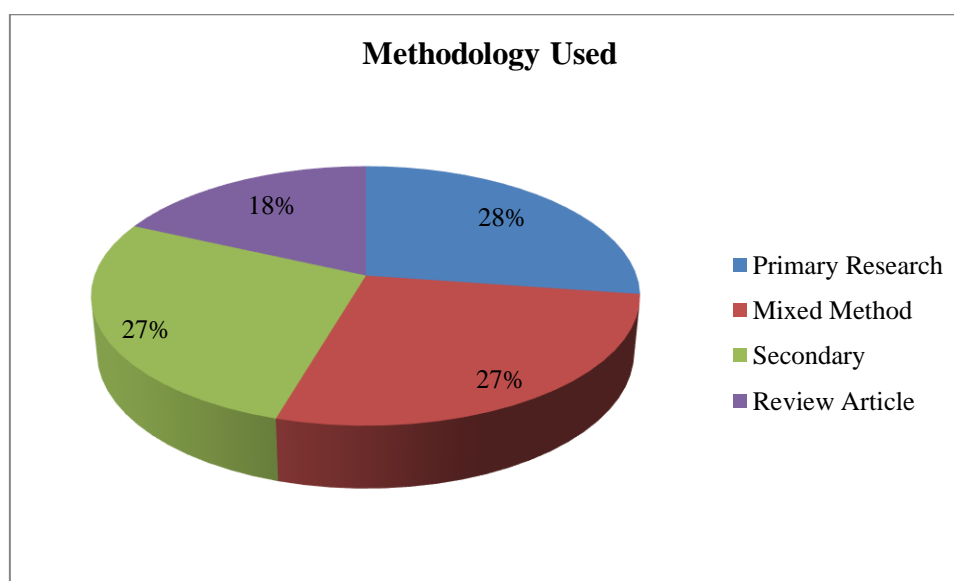
Figure 4.1: Methodology

As per the above figure, use of primary, secondary and mixed methods in terms of descriptive design in these 11 articles are mostly similar. However, out of 11 articles, 18% have used review research methods for conducting the study. As a

result, it can be stated that the tendency of using review articles in this field to identify the impact of WFH in mental and physical well-being of employees is less. Most of the study has chosen the mixed, qualitative or qualitative approach for reviewing the whole scenario across the world.

4.3 Participants:

As the topic of the study focused on employee's well-being due to remorse working, the main focus group was employees from different industries and organizations. Moreover, health issues faced by these employees are mainly influenced by the study's main objective. All the articles discussed in this systematic review process have focused on extracting information regarding employee's feelings and willingness to work from their home.

4.4 Impact on learning:

The study based on 11 different articles from the same domain have been useful to get an idea of overall health outcomes experienced by employees from different industries. This systematic review has a greater impact on organizational work culture and initiative taken by health authorities to focus on mental as well as physical wellbeing of a person, who is new to this WGH concept and coping with this new normal work culture. Organizations from different fields can get an idea, regarding their process of engaging any agile tool to facilitate their employees with best possible opportunities, metal support to overcome this complex as well as fruitful situation.

4

.5 Tools used:

In most of the studies out of these 11, primary data tools and some secondary data sources are used. In terms of primary data collection tools, survey questionnaires have been mostly used in these articles to collect the view from the employees. In terms of secondary studies, Google scholar, Proquest and other databases for resource extraction are used in this study.

4.6 Conceptual Network:

The conceptual structure of this systematic review is effective to analyze the key words that have been used in this paper to conduct the study. The study has focused on gathering different articles to review their findings and identify a conclusion from all, to support the research topic. In this process, some important key words of articles are used to gather relevant data such as "Work life Balance", "Work from home", "Employee's awareness", efficiency of employees, "Metal health", depression, Anxiety, Destruction, self-leadership and many others. The main theme of this study focuses on the relation between changes in daily routines of employees with their WFH stress and productivity. Another theme that is a major identified factor in this review process is Maintenance of work life balance after shifting towards WFH during the COVID-19 situation. An additional theme based on the initiative taken by organizations to support their employees in this work culture is another important aspect of this review paper.

4.7 Identified Limitations:

As per the 11 different review articles, some major limitations that have been identified focus on the generalization of results, limited research area, focus on a specific factor due to exclusion criteria, and time of data collection. In some of the studies, data are collected in the initial stages of COVID-19, which have not focused on the time when restrictions are removed. This can create variation, resulting in different time structures. Moreover, a generalized result can affect any specific phenomenon or event in a particular industry or organization. Moreover, due to research exclusion criteria in one of these 11 reviewed articles, focusing on health outcomes, that can be the main reason behind the untouched fields in this domain, which might be indirectly related to employee's physical and mental well-being.

5. Data Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion

This section has provided some additional review of articles used for this study to meet some literature gaps in the literature review section of this study. As per the 8th article mentioned in the data extraction table, it has focused on identifying factors that can help employees from different organizations to improve their willingness to work from home and their opinion regarding this new normal concept. As per the result of this article, the willingness of an employee in order to complete their respective work while working from home depends on some major personal factors such as occurrence of kids at their home, which sometimes made disturbance to their work. Atmosphere at their home, along with the availability of the internet connection at their home, can create disturbance in their work (Selvasundaram, & Dasaradhan, 2020).

As per these findings, it can be stated that external atmosphere and proper availability of resources required for working from home is a major factor that can affect mental condition of an employee and generate effective work (Selvasundaram, & Dasaradhan, 2020). In case, the internet connection of an employee at his or her home is poor, it makes an employee disturbed at mind, and irritated, which can affect their productivity and willingness to complete their work with best possible effort. However, these findings can be linked with the first article in the literature review section, to highlight that, social as well as organizational support such as support from family and providing internet connection to

employees, respectively (Wang *et al.* 2020). It can reduce this risk and increase the willingness of employees to work at their home.

As per the 9th article selected for this review paper, employees within an organizational structure dances different health factors such as such as "pain", "stress", "depression", "fatigue", "strain" and many others, while coping up with this new normal working cultured due to effect of COVID-19 (Oakman *et al.* 2020). However, the effect of these health outcomes on employees in different organizations are significantly associated with the support and initiative taken by the organization for their employee's safety and health measures (Oakman *et al.* 2020). In case an organization takes initiatives for their employee's health and safety and develops awareness and training for employees to cope up with new aspects of work from their home, the severity of health outcomes becomes very little.

As stated by the 3rd article selected for this systematic review, the literature review portion focuses on the changes in organizational culture and the insecurity level of employees developed due to this pandemic, which leads to several health issues (Hamouche, 2020). As a result, proper job security and training programs provided by employers to their employees are a major factor to lessen their health issues. In terms of the 10th article selected for the review paper, Organizations need to develop proper guidelines, policy and training for employees, as these are important to make employees aware of the WFH concept. The research article identified WFH concept, favorable in a broader context, after developing some proper guidelines and policies before continuing it in the work culture, even after the pandemic situation (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021).

These guidelines can be beneficial for employees to understand the core technical aspects relating to this, the process of concentrating in the work even in the home atmosphere, the process of self-motivation while working at home. These are essential to increase the interest of employees for working at their home. As per the second article in the literature section, organizations across the world are evolving their work culture by shifting from traditional systems to remote working even after the pandemic (De Lucas Ancillo *et al.* 2021). The guidelines that are essential for this organization to motivate and make their employees aware are effective to boost their future work structure.

Apart from this, the 11th and the last article selected for this study have stated that IT employees do not feel it difficult to maintain a work life balance, as in the case of IT employees, the structure of work does not change much after the start of WFH for them. It might indicate the work pressures and stress that might be almost similar for IT employees before and after the COVID-19 period. However, as per this study, they felt less enthusiastic, while working at their home than offices, this might occur due to less interaction with their co-workers, as mentioned in the 6th article in the data extraction table. In this article and other two remaining articles such as the 4rth, 5th and 7th, despite having ability to maintain balance between work and life, employees felt physically and mentally vulnerable, while working at their home due to external effects. As stated by Farooq, R. & Sultana (2021) and Galanti *et al.* (2021), WFH and employee's productivity are negatively related due to "social isolation", "family work conflict" and "destructive environment", which needs to be reduced by social support. However, some employees, who are able to maintain work-life balance might have identified self-leadership effective for self-monitoring process, while working at their home.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations:
6.1 Linking with Objectives:
This section has focused on different evaluations made from the above review paper based on the effect of WFH concept after the pandemic situation on the physical as well as mental wellbeing of employees across the world. As per the objective 1, the review paper identified an effective role of COVID-19 outbreak over the mental and physical health of employees across the work while working at their home. As per the discussion, it has been found that after the COVID-19 outbreak, organizations have suddenly started their work structure to remorse work. This was developed during the lockdown princess in order to maintain the social distancing norms. In this sudden changing atmosphere, some of the employees felt it difficult to deliver as much efficient work as they used to deliver before the pandemic; this was related to different external factors.

In terms of the second objective, employees across the world have faced different challenges as well as positive aspects while working from their homes. Some mental challenges such as depression, anxiety, stress due to less interaction with co-workers, inability to deliver expected work due to home atmosphere and less knowledge regarding technology. Moreover, some of the respondents have stated that, they were able to maintain their work life balance and have a boundary between their family and work during this remediate working princess as well.

They felt that self-leadership, self-monitoring during this princess was beneficial for them to maintain work-life balance and deliver efficient products as well as services for their organization. As per this above review paper, it has been sound that self-leadership sometimes plays a major role to reduce WFH stress from employees and improve their own skills. As per the 3rd objective of this paper, employees from different domains have met with different health issues such as pain, depression, fatigue, strain, anxiety, while working at their home. However, it can be concluded from this review paper, support generated from organizations and surrounding society can be a major factor for those employees, to deal with these health issues and make effective benefits from this new normal work structure.

6.1 Limitation of Study:

The main and the most important limitation of this study is that the study could have used primary research for analyzing quantitative data along with qualitative data from different literatures. Primary research with questionnaires can be developed in order to collect first-hand data from employees from different organizations, who are working from their home and understand their health outcomes along with productivity. However, as the primary data collection process requires effective financial resources as well as huge time to conduct the study, the review paper has been conducted after considering review of some journal articles from different sources in the same domain.

6.2 Future Research:

As the study has defined many aspects of WFH and employee's productivity, the outcomes will be effective in future organizational structure. Some additional industry specific data can be collected from employees as well as the employer's view on this topic will be beneficial for future research. Primary data collected from field work and understanding the situation and health aspects of employees in two different time domains will be effective in future research. The two different time domains include time when the pandemic was started and the time after the relaxation of restriction and low rate of COVID-19 outbreak. Both of these two-time domains are already evaluated from the secondary sources in this review paper. However, the need for primary data is significant to gather better results.

6.3 Recommendations:

As per the above discussion from the review paper, it can be recommended that organizations need to develop health camps with the help of government schemes within their company structure, to support employees who are facing mental and physical challenges during this pandemic whole doing WFH. They can engage their employees in medical counselling to deal with these health issues they faced while working at their home and deliver productivity. Moreover, organizations as well as the government can build awareness camps to make them aware of various aspects regarding the rapidly changing working structure.

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