

## Working from Home during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Satisfaction, Challenges, and Productivity of Employees

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### Abstract

**Purpose-** This study has investigated how professionals are collaborating online working from home (WFH) during COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. Various aspects of this shift in working culture have been examined like employee satisfaction levels, challenges related to telecommuting and perceived productivity of working remotely during the COVID-19 outbreak situation.

**Design/methodology/approach-** This study has employed an exploratory research design. The study has obtained secondary data from various articles published in journals and conference proceedings, books, news media, website etc. and primary data via an online survey using a set of a semi-structured questionnaire. Convenience sampling technique has been used to choose a sample of professionals working from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic (n=100). Both sample selection and survey administration have been done through social media messaging services owing to strict lockdown measures.

**Findings-** All in all, the results have shown that most of the participants are fairly satisfied with working from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Work flexibility is the main factor contributing to this satisfaction. Moreover, the majority of the respondents have cited internet connectivity and maintaining the regular schedule as the biggest challenges of telecommuting. Finally, most of the participants have felt that they have been getting more work done at home as compared to on-site locations.

**Originality/value-** This is one of the few studies to focus on working from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings have vital implications for working professionals, organisations and HR policymakers.

**Key Words:** COVID-19 pandemic, Job satisfaction, Remote work, Telecommuting, Telework, Working from home.

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## **1. Introduction**

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19 pandemic has taken the world by storm. As of December 8, 2020, more than 67 million confirmed cases had been registered worldwide, with more than 1.5 million deaths (BBC News, 2020). To stop the spread of this contagious disease, governments around the globe have ordered quarantines.

During a critical time like this, companies have resorted to working from home (WFH) to keep operations rolling and keep employees safe. Work from home or telecommuting is an alternative work arrangement where office personnel accomplishes tasks elsewhere that are typically done in a central workplace. Employees use technology to collaborate with different stakeholders of the company (Gajendran et al., 2015) remotely.

Nielson (2020) has reported that working remotely was merely an extra office perk before the pandemic. However, after the COVID-19 outbreak, 66% of the employees surveyed have been forced into full-time remote work. Telecommuting has become a necessity to keep companies rolling. Owing to rapid advancements in technology, it is now possible to serve business interests with the internet's power. However, Neeley (2020) has stressed that adopting telecommuting at a large scale for any organization will be a tough transition during a crisis.

Therefore, the present study has been undertaken to examine the impacts of working from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding employee satisfaction, challenges, and perceived productivity.

## **2. Conceptual Background**

Working from home (WFH) is also known as telecommuting, teleworking, and remote working. It has been identified as a flexible work arrangement that enables employees to work from their residence or a remote location. 34% of business leaders have predicted that more than half of their full-time workers will be telecommuting by 2020 (Masuda et al., 2017).

This prediction seems to have come true due to the COVID-19 spreading like wildfire and forcing countries to lockdown. Working from home (WFH) has turned into a necessity to keep companies rolling. Also, telecommuting engagement is much higher than in pre-pandemic times (Nielson, 2020).

Roughly 23% of working professionals in the US have achieved partial or entire fulfillment of their work from home. This estimation has been even higher for employees who have possessed a bachelor's degree or above, with 38% of these people doing some form of work remotely on any given day. However, many companies allow employees to telecommute without analyzing the benefits, challenges, and implications involved in this type of arrangement (Greer and Payne, 2014).

## **3. Literature Review**

### **3.1. Telecommuting across the Globe**

The concept of working remotely from home is something that has been embraced by different cultures. Developed countries such as the US have around 3.7 million employees who telecommute half of the time or more, which equates to 2.5 % of their workforce. It is mostly prevalent among managers and administrative workers operating in the professional services and finance industry. As for developing economies like Argentina, 2.7% of the workforce consists of

teleworkers, which are about 4,13,126 employees. It is predominant among large multinational companies who operate in the service sector (Lister and Harnish, 2019). The variety and scale of telecommuting vary across countries. However, mass-scale telecommunication is still an emerging concept and has recently been adopted due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, as mentioned earlier.

### **3.2. Internet Applications Driving Remote Work**

The internet is the driving force behind the concept of working from home. Numerous online applications allow teleworkers to collaborate remotely. Picu and Dinu (2016) have researched telecommuting patterns in the European Union and the United States. They have identified from secondary sources that many online platforms facilitate tele working. Skype, Google Talk, and Gizmo have been popularly used for communication. Online presentations have been done on WebEx, Go To Meeting, and LiveMeeting. For project management, Basecamp, Active Collab, and Quick Base have been used. Finally, Google and Yahoo Calendars have been used as time management applications to assign remote teams activities. It remains to be seen whether the target group of this study conforms to these platforms or not. Newer online applications are expected to be utilized.

### **3.3. Job Satisfaction of Telecommuters**

Moving on, the study has examined the signaling theory, which is closely associated with job satisfaction among telecommuting employees. The signaling approach is often used to clarify how telecommuting availability is related to employee attitudes within companies or organizations (Masuda et al., 2012). Regarding the signaling theory developed by Micahel Spence, teleworking availability is an observable action of the company or organization, which indicates that they care for their employees' well-being. The body of employees interprets Telework as a resource that benefits their work and develops a tendency to reciprocate it with positive attitudes such as job satisfaction. Allen et al. (2013) have explained that employees appreciate having adaptability accessible as a resource and react with more favorable job attitudes toward the organizations. They have proved that perks like telecommuting promoted job satisfaction and turnover intentions. In this study, aspects of telecommuting that promote job satisfaction have been uncovered.

### **3.4. Challenges of Working from Home**

The boundary theory can help understand the challenges associated with working from home (WFH) absent in traditional work environments. According to the boundary theory, individuals make and keep up boundaries to simplify and order the environment. As people crossover from one sphere of life to another (e.g., from work to home), they cross multiple physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries (Clark, 2000). However, telecommuting changes the traditional boundaries between work and non-work. With the absence of such limitations, the chances for work and non-work roles to conflict are relatively high, which results in undesirable consequences (Raghuram and Wiesenfeld, 2004). The altered physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries essential to remote working pose challenges to traditional jobs. While telecommuting, the physical boundaries between home and work are often non-existent as homes are the most common off-site work location. The eradication of the physical boundary between

home and work might make remote workers engage more hours per week, especially during the time that is saved by not traveling to work (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). These extra work hours might be stressful and challenging for telecommuters, along with isolation from colleagues. It remains to be seen if similar challenges are discovered in this study.

### **3.5. Telecommuting and Productivity**

As for productivity during telecommuting, self-efficacy is the most commonly associated concept. It is a person's beliefs about his chances for effectively fulfilling specific responsibilities. Any individual who possesses a high level of self-efficacy will have superior productivity and performance. Apart from the teleworking system, it has also been pointed out that a high degree of self-efficacy among workers has a positive impact on their work productivity and performance (Bandura, 2006). It is suggested that self-efficacy is an enormously crucial factor when it comes to achieving success at work. Self-efficacy is a vital mechanism where an objective or purpose will impact an individual's performance and productivity. Therefore, a goal established by the organization will not be practical if the workforce does not accept it and have a firm commitment to accomplishing that goal (Valentin, 2013). Correspondingly, Mayfield, and Mayfield (2012) have also highlighted that self-efficacy has a significant and constructive impact on job performance. As a result, the present study has aimed to establish whether the employees of professionals perceive themselves as productive. Moreover, it has also attempted to determine that professionals are getting more work done remotely than on-site locations.

### **3.6. Research Gaps and Questions**

Finally, the research gaps linked to teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic need discussion. The research questions for this study have been formulated regarding suggestions made by past researchers who have investigated telecommuting in detail.

For instance, Masuda et al. (2017) have advised that it is essential to examine how working from home (WFH) is perceived across different cultures. The general perception can be positive, but factors that contribute to it may vary. However, temporal flexibility must also be considered when uncovering the positive outcomes of teleworking (Allen et al., 2015). Moving on, a study in Ghana has stressed that it is essential to look at the hindrances that surround teleworking in addition to its benefits (Ansong and Boateng, 2017). Furthermore, Narayanan et al. (2017) have recommended that more investigation is needed to assess telecommuting's blessings and challenges in developing countries. Finally, it is recommended to determine productivity after telecommuting has begun among professionals (Neufeld and Fang, 2004). Also, Singh et al. (2017) have also narrated that the option of working from home (WFH) affects productivity, and it needs further exploration.

The gaps, as mentioned above, have given rise to the following research questions in regards to working from home (WFH) in the situation of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic:

*RQ1: How much is the level of satisfaction among teleworkers?*

*RQ2: Which challenges are involved with telecommuting?*

*RQ3: What is the perceived productivity of working from home?*

#### **4. Research Objectives**

This study's broad objective is to investigate the working patterns of telecommuting professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. To optimize the overall aim of the study, the specific goals have been derived from the research questions as follows:

- i. To determine the satisfaction level among teleworkers.
- ii. To explore the challenges related to telecommuting.
- iii. To investigate the perceived productivity of working from home (WFH).

#### **5. Methodology**

An exploratory research design has been employed for this study, along with a cross-sectional time horizon. This means that the investigation has taken a snapshot of a specific group of people at a certain point in time (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). Both primary and secondary data and information have been gathered for the study. Secondary data and information have been collected from reviewing previous research literature published in peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings, books, news media, websites, etc. Primary data and information regarding occupation, hours telecommuted, types of work done, etc., have been obtained as per this study's objectives. Moreover, the sample has consisted of 100 professionals as respondents (n=100) working from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic in Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh.

Owing to strict COVID-19 lockdown measures and busy teleworking schedules of professionals and due to the unavailability of the sampling frame or any accurate directory or database for determining the target professionals' population size, the probability sampling technique has been difficult to employ. Instead, a non-probability convenience sampling technique has been used to determine the sample size for primary data collection in this study. Convenience sampling, otherwise known as availability sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling technique through which data collection is done from conveniently available and well-suited members for the study. Convenience sampling is a practical, simple and proven technique in research that involves exploration (Malhotra, 2019; Saunders and Lewis, 2012; Zikmund et al., 2009; Zikmund, 2000; Kothari, 1985).

Table 1 depicts the occupations of teleworkers that have been partaken in this study. Among them, researchers (33%), banking personnel (12%), and HR personnel (10%) have made up most of the sample. Banking personnel consisted of the employees involved in banking support functions like customer care, procurement, etc. Moreover, the 'others' category (14%) has included development sector officials, auditors, communications personnel, and more.

Out of 302 Facebook connections (comprising of colleagues and peers) of the first author, 139 of them have been found (via individual chat on Facebook Messenger) who have fulfilled the criteria of being professionals working from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eventually, 100 respondents have participated successfully in the survey, which means that this study's response rate has been 72%.

A set of semi-structured (both closed-ended and open-ended) questionnaire in Google Forms has been deployed online for collecting primary data and insights for this study. Previous studies have employed this method of online survey. Spanish research looking into telecommuting's effects on engagement via goal pursuit has used online questionnaires to gather data in three

phases (Masuda et al., 2017). Likewise, another Sri Lankan study on autonomy and creativity of teleworkers has collected responses from a web survey (Naotunna and Zhou, 2018).

**Table 1: Various Occupations of the Sample**

Profession	Percentage (%)
Researcher	33.0
Banking personnel	12.0
HR personnel	10.0
University faculty	10.0
Advertisement agency personnel	06.0
Marketing/sales professional	06.0
Data collector	04.0
Engineer	03.0
Business owner	02.0
Others*	14.0

\*1 Others' category consisted of development sector official, auditor, communications personnel and more

Source: Online Survey

## 6. Data Analysis and Findings

This study's primary data and information have been collected from 100 professionals working remotely in various sectors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Online survey created on Google Forms has been deployed to the participants accordingly, and their responses have been depicted below.

It is also worth noting that there are various questions with the provisions for multiple answers. For example, a respondent has chosen both 'team meetings over the internet' and 'attending online sessions' when has been asked about telecommuting activities.

Microsoft Excel has been used for data analysis, which has involved calculating various aspects such as percentages, mean and standard deviation. It has also been used to calculate the total number of hours when professionals have worked from home.

The following sub-sections have highlighted the information provided by the target group of respondents.

### 6.1. Telecommuting Patterns

As illustrated in *Table 2*, the respondents have worked from home for an average of 7.55 hours per day with a standard deviation of 1.45 hours per day.

It can be assumed that there are five working days a week. It amounts to nearly 38 hours of remote work per week. Subsequently, if there are four weeks in a month, this amounts to 151 hours of remote work per month.



**Table 2: Working Hours of Telecommuters**

Duration of work (per day)	Percentage (%)	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$
< 6 hours	12.0		
6 hours	20.0		
7 hours	07.0	7.55	1.45
8 hours	23.0		
> 8 hours	38.0		

$\bar{x}$  and  $\sigma$  have been calculated for all 100 respondents

Source: Online Survey

Table 3 illustrates various types of activities that have been undertaken by teleworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most highlighted tasks are having team meetings over the internet (82%) through Skype, Zoom, etc., and attending training or executive sessions online (57%). These are followed by Microsoft Excel tasks (55%), such as database management and other calculations.

**Table 3: Activities Involved in Telecommuting**

Telecommuting tasks	No. of Responses*	Percentage (%)
Team meetings over the internet	82	82.0
Attending sessions online	57	57.0
Microsoft Excel tasks	55	55.0
Teaching or training over the internet	40	40.0
Making presentations	38	38.0

(\*Multiple responses were present)

Source: Online Survey

The findings contrast several other secondary sources. Owl Labs (2019) has reported that in the United States, 20% of remote workers feel that they are overworked. It indicates that they are engaged remotely for more than 40 hours per week. 14% of remote workers have also attended more than ten online meetings per week. Besides, Buffer (2019) has stated that telecommuters worldwide work for more than four days per week. Moreover, Skype and WebEx are popular collaboration tools in research conducted in the US and EU (Picu and Dinu, 2016). During this COVID-19 pandemic, it is evident that the target group of this study is following teleworking trends that match with other countries.

## 6.2. Job Satisfaction Levels of Telecommuters

40% of the participants have expressed that they are 'fairly satisfied' regarding their current work from home arrangement. In comparison, 24% are 'delighted.' This indicates that the general level of satisfaction of working from home (WFH) is relatively high among the target group.

Table 4 illustrates the factors which positively contribute to said satisfaction levels. Flexible work schedules have been deemed the most significant factor (81%), followed by a better work-life balance (45%).

**Table 4: Factors Contributing to the Satisfaction Level of Telecommuters**

Factors promoting satisfaction levels	No. of Responses*	Percentage (%)
Flexibility in work schedules	81	81.0
Better work-life balance	45	45.0
Not having to commute	41	41.0
Less on-site interruptions	19	19.0
Autonomy	19	19.0

(\*Multiple responses were present)

Source: Online Survey

The collected primary data are also congruent with multiple secondary sources. Werber (2020) has surveyed US adults working from home (WFH) during the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). 25% of the respondents have narrated that not having to commute is the most significant benefit and flexible working schedules. Subsequently, Owl Labs (2019) has reported that better work-life balance (91%) and avoiding commute (78%) are some of the significant reasons behind teleworking.

The insights obtained from this study support the signaling theory developed by Michael Spence. Working from home (WFH) is seen as an additional job perk by employees, which shows that the organization cares for their well-being. This case signals that the organization wants its staff to work safely from home during this ongoing crisis. This proactive initiative by the organization increases job performance and satisfaction. This concept of the signaling theory has been useful in previous literature as well. For instance, Masuda et al. (2017) have used this theory as a foundation to investigate how employees working from home (WFH) have been able to achieve their organizational goals through the supervisor's support and guidance.

### 6.3. Challenges Faced by Telecommuters

With any work environment, challenges are involved. 52% and 46% of the respondents have reported that telecommuting's most significant challenges are internet connectivity issues and maintaining a regular schedule, respectively. Usually, professionals have a 9 to 5 work schedule, but that is disrupted while working from home. Moreover, general anxiety about the impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on their lives is also highlighted by 40% of them, as depicted in Table 5.

**Table 5: Challenges Faced by Telecommuters**

Challenges	No. of Responses*	Percentage (%)
Internet connectivity issues	52	52.0
Maintaining a regular schedule	46	46.0
General anxiety about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on life	40	40.0
Distractions at home	38	38.0
Social isolation from colleagues	35	35.0

(\*Multiple responses were present)

Source: Online Survey



Congruency in data has been found with previous researches. According to Werber (2020), 25% of the participants believe that social isolation is the most significant difficulty of working from home. 13% of the participants have also talked about interruptions caused by children at home. Moreover, Owl Labs (2019) has uncovered that 59% of the participants have faced disruption due to IT issues during online meetings with co-workers. These issues include varying levels of internet speed, audio, and video quality during official online conferences.

The boundary theory has helped to assess the challenges experienced by telecommuters. Human beings pertain to certain boundaries in their lives to maintain order. However, in this case, telecommuters face the merging of work and non-work boundaries, which leads to multiples hindrances in both spheres of life. Other studies have also demonstrated this phenomenon. One investigation has shown that the obscuring of work-family boundaries causes remote workers to relate their homes with their work roles as work obligations repeatedly interrupt family time (Eddleston and Mulki, 2015). Family obligations can also bleed into working hours as well. Mustafa and Gold (2013) have found that female teleworkers are to structure their working boundaries around their children's needs.

#### 6.4. Perceived Level of Productivity

The majority of the participants have felt that they are 'fairly productive' (45%) and followed by 22% who thought they are 'very productive' in terms of work efficiency. This indicates that the perceived level of productivity is relatively high among the target group.

According to Table 6, 67% of the participants consisting of researchers and HR personnel, have felt that they are getting more work done remotely. In comparison, 33% of the respondents comprising banking and legal personnel have vouched to get more job done at the office. Thus, the study can conclude that teleworking productivity levels are high among the majority of the sample.

**Table 6: Getting More Work Done at Home vs. the Office**

	Percentage (%)	Professions
Getting more work done at home	67.0	Researchers, University faculty, HR personnel, Communications personnel, etc.
Getting more work done at the office	33.0	Banking personnel, Development sector officials, Advertisement agency personnel, etc.

Source: Online Survey

The findings are similar to several other sources. Owl Labs (2019) has reported that 79% of the surveyed US teleworkers have reported that telecommuting yielded has increased productivity. Furthermore, Gajendran et al. (2015) have identified that teleworkers frequently go above and beyond— for instance, by responding to emails outside of working hours— to illustrate their organizational commitment. Although pursuing increased productivity is highly discouraged and should be done so within working hours.

The concept of self-efficacy allows examining the productivity of telecommuters. It states that people with high motivation and task ownership experience more excellent job performance and productivity. The overall self-efficacy of the target group in this study is high. Even though there is a general anxiety about working during a pandemic (Table 5), they are determined to overcome the odds. Moreover, other researchers have used this concept, as well. Soenanto et al. (2016) have

determined that self-efficacy has no relationship to labor productivity among a teleworkers sample in Indonesia. Moreover, Naotunna and Zhou (2018) have found that creative self-efficacy has facilitated the effect of autonomy on telecommuters' job creativity in Sri Lanka.

## **7. Research Implications**

Organizations need to understand that working from home (WFH) is indeed productive, and employees get more work done since the hassle of commuting is eliminated. Therefore, to maximize these benefits, organizations need to train their staff in utilizing technology remotely formally.

HR policymakers also need to note and draw up formal guidelines for working from home (WFH) so that employees are safeguarded from being overworked. Quite many professionals (38%) have been found in this study that they have teleworked for more than 8 hours. Hence, official telecommuting hours and other guidelines should be assigned, which will resemble normal working conditions.

Employees themselves should be content that their organizations have given them the opportunity to work from home during such a crisis. It signals that their respective employers are concerned with their well-being, and they are willing to provide perks for employees who work well. Telecommuting will indeed foster long-term growth among them.

This study's results are also a wake-up call for internet service providers (ISPs) since more than half of the respondents have reported internet connectivity issues (52%). So ISPs should improve their services by providing uninterrupted & high-speed internet connectivity and ensuring a stable foundation for remote workers everywhere.

## **8. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This research has faced various limitations along the way. These are as follows:

First and foremost, the sample consisted of a limited number of teleworking professionals working in the Dhaka city of Bangladesh. It might not represent the situation of the entire country. Besides, employing a probability sampling technique has been difficult due to strict COVID-19 lockdown measures and professionals' busy teleworking schedules.

Secondly, the level of productivity among teleworkers is perceived here, and further calculations are required to uncover the actual story. Finally, the organizational impact has not been considered since it has not been feasible to do so during this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Hence, more investigation is advised to reveal telecommuters' effects on the organization while considering the larger sample size. Importance must also be given to discover the actual level of productivity prevalent among such employees who are working remotely. It is recommended for future researchers to closely monitor telecommuting employees in a controlled environment and measure their actual output.

## **9. Conclusion**

In a technologically gifted era such as this, working from home (WFH) is now a reality. Telecommuting can associate employees and making sure business operations continue amid a crisis like the COVID-19 epidemic. With the blessings of such technology, businesses are now more than equipped to handle any adversity.

Overall, this study has made an effort to bring forward teleworkers' current scenario during the COVID-19 outbreak. The primary findings have shown that most of them are reasonably satisfied with their present working from home (WFH) arrangement. Additionally, challenges such as general anxiety about the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation from fellow employees have also been highlighted. Moreover, most believe that their perceived level of productivity is higher working from home (WFH) rather than the office. It happens to be one of the few studies to be conducted on the concept of working from home (WFH) during an epidemic such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings have important implications for working professionals, organizations, and HR policymakers.

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