

Women's Perception of Flexibility: Autonomy, Balance, Productivity

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ABSTRACT- The study explores how women perceive Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) in the period following the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing mainly on productivity, work-life balance and autonomy. The pandemic changed the way we work, pushing many organizations to move away from traditional office setups and embrace more modern methods like remote work, hybrid models and flexible schedules. This shift from traditional setups to flexible schedules has made FWAs an essential part of many businesses that operate today. This research is descriptive and quantitative, involving working women of various ages from different industries including Education, Healthcare, IT and Finance. A total of 119 women were chosen through specific method of selection to get a wide range of opinions from different jobs.

The data was presented as percentages and visually displayed through bar graphs and pie charts to enhance clarity and understanding. The findings indicate that women generally feel flexible work arrangements boost their productivity, give them greater control over their tasks, and help them achieve a better balance between their work and personal lives. These ideas are true for women of all ages, whether they are married or not and whether they have children or not. The findings suggest that organizations should adopt flexible work policies and create supportive management practices.

Creating flexible and gender-sensitive workplaces not only benefits women employees but also propels overall organizational growth. Companies that support women's needs through FWAs foster an environment where employees can perform well while maintaining harmony in their personal and professional lives. This research highlights the value of making workplaces more inclusive and adaptable, ensuring both employees and organizations thrive together in this new world of work.

KEYWORDS: Flexible Work Arrangement, Work-Life Balance, Productivity, Autonomy

I. INTRODUCTION

The flexible work arrangement has gained importance in Indian subcontinent post covid-19 times. Flexible work was already in practice before, but its adoption became much more widespread following the pandemic. For women, who often have to balance work and caregiving, these

arrangements can be very helpful.

The impact of flexible work arrangement on employee outcomes is well established through various studies. Flexibility when combined with varying level of autonomy, effectively reduces strain-based work-life conflict and time-based conflict [1]. FWA improves job satisfaction primarily by enhancing work-life balance, but benefits vary based on quality of the home workspace and individual stress levels and recommends home office-based stipends. [10]. FWA reduced attrition and increased productivity but FWA alone is not sufficient it must provide psychological satisfaction and safety to employees of not getting career penalties.[2] Employee performance can be significantly enhanced through flexible work arrangements, particularly when they support a healthy balance between professional and personal life. However, the challenges remain in the form of living space and care giving responsibility, suggesting flexibility personalization. [8]. Remote work which is a form of FWA enhances productivity by eliminating commute fatigue, but at the same time it may lead to feeling of isolation and reduced mentorship. Recommends hybrid mode of work to maintain team cohesion. (Jamal 2023). The role of managerial support is crucial, supervisor backing enhances job performance in flexible settings through a sense of reciprocity. It suggests organization must invest in manager training to realize the full benefits of FWA. (Sekhar and Patwardhan 2023).

Even though flexible work has positive outcomes, there is a psychological barrier call FWA anxiety, where workers fear getting career penalties. This fear stops them from fully benefiting from FWA. However, when implemented properly, FWA can greatly improve work-life integration, helping workers manage their responsibilities more effectively, reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction. Flexible work arrangement refers to an organizations ability to offer employee greater control over when, where and how they choose to perform their job responsibilities. It is a very broad concept that encompass various work arrangement with the varying needs of the employees while maintaining productivity. Flexi-time, compressed work week, alternative schedule, remote working and hybrid working are all various types of Flexible work arrangements.

Autonomy refers to an individual's ability to exercise control over their work schedule, location and methods. For women greater autonomy helps them structure their professional and personal commitments which in turn

enhances the overall job satisfaction. Autonomy is categorized into task autonomy, schedule autonomy, location autonomy and decision-making autonomy.

Work-life balance refers to a method of striking a balance between an individual employee professional and personal life. This balance help one navigate family responsibility, work responsibility and maintaining one's physical and mental health in best possible way. In a country like India where onus of caregiving responsibility solely lies on women it becomes extremely important for working women to maintain the work-life balance.

Characteristics of work-life balance:

- Clear boundaries
- Time management
- Stress management
- Flexibility

Productivity in context of work is a measure of output produced by an employee within a certain period of time. A variety of factors influence women's productivity, including the culture of the organization, workplace policies, individual health, societal pressures and their own skills and competencies.

The present study investigates the perception of women employees towards work flexibility in post pandemic transformation of workplace landscape from traditional work arrangements to modern work arrangement. The key focus is on three dimensions of autonomy, productivity and work-life balance. The findings are expected to contribute to building of an inclusive, gender sensitive work models which accommodates flexibility with equity and career growth without the fear of career penalties.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To study women employees' perspective on work flexibility.
- To study the impact of work flexibility on women's autonomy in decision making and key responsibilities.
- To investigate the effect of work flexibility on productivity amongst the female employee.
- To study the influence of work flexibility on work-life balance of female employees.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Baum and Rau [1] investigated the interaction between working from home and job autonomy in reducing work-life conflict. They distinguished between time-based and strain-based conflicts, finding that remote work effectively reduces time-based conflict, particularly for employees with low job autonomy, while strain-based conflict reduction requires high autonomy.
- Bhatt [2] examined workplace flexibility in India's IT sector, reporting that Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) reduced attrition and improved productivity. However, the study stressed the need for psychological safety to ensure employees do not fear career penalties for using FWAs.
- Yoghiana and Riana [10] explored the mediating effect of work-life balance on the relationship between workplace flexibility and job satisfaction. They found that flexibility improved job satisfaction, with job stress

outcomes influenced by the quality of the home workspace. The authors recommended home office stipends to enhance effectiveness.

- Weideman and Hofmeyr [9] conducted an exploratory study revealing that FWAs enhance employee engagement through emotional commitment and discretionary effort, especially among employees with long commutes or family responsibilities. They noted that informal flexibility arrangements can sometimes outperform formal policies.
- Munjal [7] provided a systematic review identifying five key factors for successful work-life integration: organizational culture, personality traits, technological infrastructure, perceived flexibility, and employee self-efficacy. The review advocated a contingency approach, granting employees autonomy while offering training and technological support.
- Sharma and Gaur [8] highlighted the role of work-life balance as a mediator between flexibility and employee performance. They observed that individuals with caregiving responsibilities or small living spaces experienced early productivity declines and recommended "flexibility personalization" with core collaboration hours.
- Kotey and Sharma [5] studied SMEs and found that firm size, industry norms, and technology infrastructure strongly influenced FWA adoption. Smaller companies often implemented FWAs informally, adapting to staff needs. The study emphasized FWAs as talent attraction strategies.

Hypothesis- H01: There is no significant impact of work flexibility on women's autonomy in decision-making and key responsibilities.

H02: Work flexibility does not have a significant impact on productivity among female employees.

H03: Work flexibility may not have a meaningful effect on the work-life balance of female employees.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Problem Identification-

A Study on perception of women employees on work flexibility: Balancing Autonomy, Work-life Balance and Productivity.

B. Research Design: Descriptive Research Design-

This study uses a descriptive research design, which means it aims to paint a clear picture of how women feel about flexible work arrangements in today's workplaces. Instead of changing any conditions or testing new strategies, the research simply observes and records the real experiences and opinions shared by women employees. The goal is to accurately describe what is happening right now in terms of autonomy, work-life balance and productivity as women navigate flexible schedules

C. Sampling Method: Purposive Sampling

This approach is a bit like hand-picking participants, focusing on women whose jobs and industries make them especially relevant to the research. The idea is to reach out to women who are living and working through the new realities of flexible work, ensuring their experiences are useful for understanding the broader picture.

D. Sample Size:

A total of 119 participants took part in the study. This group size is large enough to notice important patterns but small enough to allow for careful analysis. The diversity among these women - in age, profession, and background adds richness and depth to the findings.

E. Sample area:

The research focuses on women working in IT firms, hospitals and schools in Pune, a city known for its vibrant professional community. Including participants from different sectors ensures that the findings reflect a mix of experiences and challenges. By looking at women from education, healthcare, and technology, each with their unique work cultures.

F. Data sources:

Primary sources- A structured questionnaire is designed to gather quantitative data on perceptions of work flexibility, autonomy, work-life balance and productivity. The

questionnaire includes Likert-scale questions and open-ended question.

Secondary sources- The bibliography includes academic journals, articles on gender studies and reports on post-pandemic work trends from newspapers. The full-text database provides access to comprehensive research papers and case studies available on platforms such as ResearchGate and Shodh Ganga. Additionally, government and industry reports from organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO), McKinsey and Deloitte offer valuable insights on work flexibility and gender equity.

V. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The relationship between work flexibility and autonomy is analyzed and determined using graphical representation.

H01= There is no significant impact of work flexibility on women's autonomy in decision-making and key responsibilities.

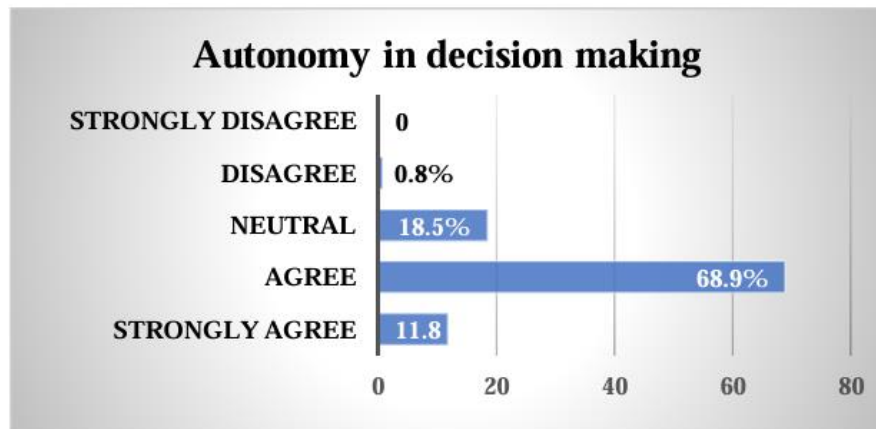


Figure 1: Respondents' agreement levels on autonomy in decision-making under flexible work arrangements.

Interpretation: Maximum of the respondents Agree that is 68.9% for Autonomy in Decision making and 11.8% strongly agree. This together is 80.9%. More than 80% of women have autonomy in decision making suggesting a positive perception.

Therefore, null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is

relationship between flexibility and autonomy.

The relation between work flexibility and productivity is analyzed.

H02= Work flexibility does not have a significant impact on productivity among female employees.

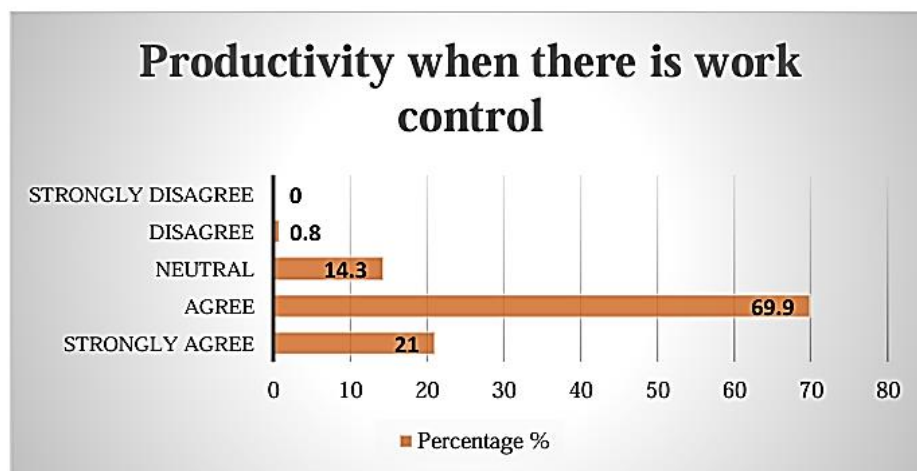


Figure 2: Respondents' agreement levels on productivity with control over work schedules.

Interpretation: Majority Respondents Agree which is 63.9% and Strongly Agree which is 21% for productivity with

control over work schedule. This suggest that women perceive that flexible work arrangement led to productivity. More than 80% of women feel productive due to work flexibility which rejects the null hypothesis. It suggests that there is relation between work flexibility and productivity.

In this the relationship between work flexibility and work-life balance.

H03= Work flexibility may not have a meaningful effect on the work-life balance of female employees.

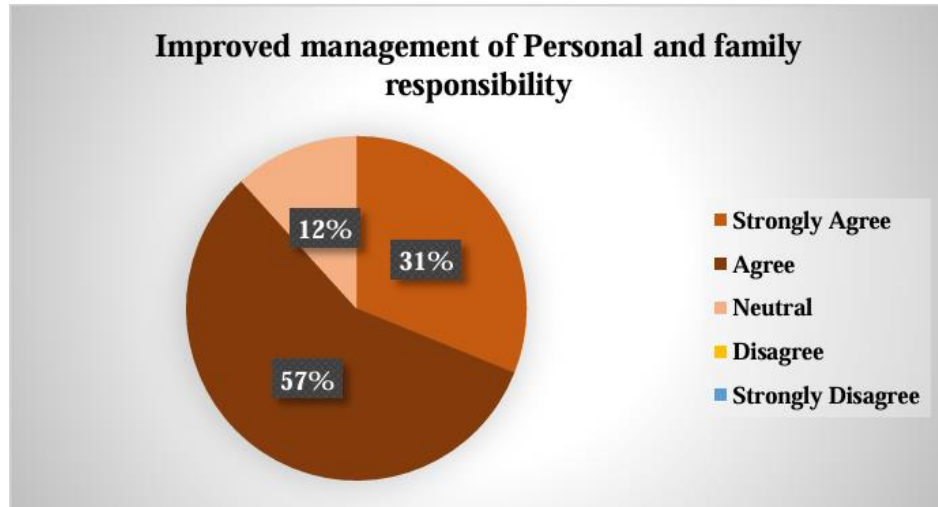


Figure 3: Respondents' agreement levels on work-life balance provided by flexible work arrangements.

Interpretation: Majority Response are showing Agree i.e. 57.1% and Strongly Agree which is 31.1%. Flexibility is critical for balancing work and family, particularly for women with caregiving duties. More than 80% of the women feel that flexible work will provide work life balance.

This rejects the null hypothesis, thus there is a relation between work flexibility and work life balance.

VI. FINDINGS

- A significant portion of respondents amounting to 40.3% work in hybrid models, blending remote and in-office work.
- Despite the rise of remote work, 56.3% women still work fully on-site, indicating industry- specific limitations.
- Certain industries like Education, Healthcare lag in adopting flexible work models. For instance, while 30% of the respondents were from IT which is flexibility friendly, 30% were from education which is creating disparities in employee experiences.
- While some organizations provide suitable flexible work options, others fall short, only 3.4% of respondents work fully remotely and 40.3% in hybrid mode leaving employees dissatisfied.
- Having control over work schedules and decisions is linked to higher productivity among women employees. 69.9% agreed and 21% strongly agreed that they are more productive with control over their time.
- While flexibility is valued, 78.1% women still appreciate structured work schedules for maintaining discipline.
- 85.7% women respondents believe their contributions are recognized equally, whether they work remotely or in-office.
- Women amounting to 79% feel that their work location does not hinder their chances of receiving leadership

opportunities.

- 80.7% women feel they have sufficient autonomy in their roles, allowing them to make key decisions without excessive oversight.
- Flexible work arrangements do not appear to limit access to important projects or career growth opportunities. That is 81.5% women feel they are given high-impact work opportunities.
- 87.4% women report feeling more motivated and engaged when given flexible work options.
- Most women employees express a strong preference for flexible work arrangements in the future. The demand for flexible work is not temporary many women view it as essential for future work environments. This is expressed by 89.1%.
- 90.9% respondents report feeling more focused and productive when given control over their work schedules.
- Work flexibility is widely perceived as beneficial for overall mental and physical well- being by 89.9% women respondents.
- 88.2% women find that flexible work arrangements help them manage family and personal responsibilities more effectively.
- A 70.6% of respondents express satisfaction with their current work-life balance, though some remain neutral.
- A notable portion of women neither agree nor disagree about their satisfaction with work- life balance, suggesting room for improvement.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

- Define core in-office days for collaboration (e.g., Tues-Thurs) while allowing remote work for focused tasks. For frontline roles like healthcare and retail, offer compressed work weeks.
Expected Outcome: Balance flexibility with operational needs, reducing disparities across sectors.

- Train managers to delegate authority and to measure outcomes not the hours worked. Introduce "flexibility scorecards" to track autonomy levels by team.
Expected Outcome: Empower women to structure work effectively, enhancing productivity and job satisfaction.
- Offer "family responsibility hours" for e.g., 4 hrs/month for childcare/eldercare without productivity penalties. Partner with daycare services for emergency backup care subsidies.
Expected Outcome: Reduce burnout among working mothers and retain experienced talent.
- Mandate blind resume screening for promotions. Reserve 30% of high-impact projects for remote/hybrid employees.
Expected Outcome: Ensure equitable career growth for all work arrangements.
- Quarterly pulse surveys to assess flexibility effectiveness. Personalize plans for example, flex time vs. structured schedules based on employee feedback.
Expected Outcome: Proactively address work-life balance gaps before they lead to attrition.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In summary, this study shows that flexible work arrangements have a positive impact on women's autonomy, productivity and work-life balance. Women across different industries in Pune feel that flexibility helps them manage both their work and personal lives better, without holding back their career growth. While some sectors are slower to adopt these changes, the overall message is clear. Flexible work plays a vital role in creating supportive and inclusive workplaces. By embracing flexibility and understanding women's unique needs, organizations can build happier, more motivated teams and grow stronger together.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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