

Keeping up with the New Normal: The Impact of Working-from-Home on the Psychological Well-Being of Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a major disruption in the lives of many people around the world. In this systematic review of literature, I intend to examine how the recent pandemic impacted the psychological well-being of Filipino workers and their means of coping with the challenges of working from home. A total of nine papers were reviewed that met the set inclusion-exclusion criteria and were analyzed thematically. As shown in the existing studies, the alternative work arrangements brought positive and negative impacts on the workers' psychological well-being with improved employee engagement and experience; various challenges were rendering adverse effects. Employees use physical, social, and cognitive mechanisms to achieve work-life balance to cope with the challenges at work. Although onsite working is slowly being imposed, the possibility and feasibility of working from home remain viable for public and private offices because it was evident that workers could still maintain work productivity and carry out their tasks even remotely.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Working from Home, Psychological Well-being, Philippines, Coping, Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led the global government to implement stringent measures to restrict the movement of people to reduce the spread of the virus. On March 16, 2020, the entire Luzon was already placed by President Duterte on enhanced community quarantine

(Official Gazette, 2020). It was followed then by implementing travel restrictions, curfew, and checkpoints (Yap & Jiao, 2020). Many facilities, such as schools, commercial organizations, and social venues, were closed (Pohkrel & Chhetri, 2019). Only the essential sectors critical to keeping the economy running (e.g., food, medicine, etc.) were allowed to stay open. The new policies forced people to stay in their homes and adapt work-from-home arrangements to continue their operations. Remarkably, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly transformed into an unprecedented global economic and labor market crisis, with a severe impact on the world of work in the Philippines. Approximately 2 million workers have been impacted by the temporary closures of their organizations, while around 1.2 million employees have been affected by the implementation of flexible work arrangements such as telecommuting (Aquino, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2020).

With the enforcement of lockdowns and social distancing, workers embraced remote working when possible and made working from home a must rather than an option. Reducing work and operating hours, moving to partial operations, and allowing employees to work from home emerged as the top strategies employed by firms to cope with the pandemic.

A range of terms is associated with the idea of working from home, including remote

working, teleworking, and telecommuting (Productivity Commission, 2021). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Labour Organization (2020) defined "working from home" to refer uniquely to home-based teleworking as a temporary, alternative working arrangement. Making this work arrangement work entails commitment and shared responsibility by both employers and workers.

Working from home affords many benefits, including flexibility in schedule, more time to take care of the family, fewer expenses, and increased productivity (Grant et al., 2019; Nakrošienė, 2019). Employees save time commuting to and from work, especially during rush hours. Under ideal circumstances, previous studies concluded that WFH is associated with at least similar productivity levels compared to regular office work (Bloom et al., 2015). Support is often made available to help workers who work from home (Awada et al., 2021).

On the other hand, various factors were reported that negatively affect productivity when working from home (Seva et al., 2021). Limited workspace has been cited as a challenge of working from home in Hong Kong, famous for having tiny homes, during the COVID-19 pandemic (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Being forced to share space with family members working or studying can make it difficult for an employee to be productive. In a work-from-home situation, it can be challenging to set up a productive working environment that promotes health, safety, and productivity (Sarmiento, 20201). Studies have documented the difficulty of setting boundaries between household and office tasks at home without a dedicated workspace (Ammons & Markham, 2004).

Given the current condition and as our country transitions to the new normal, it is interesting to explore how remote working affects Filipino workers during this pandemic. Specifically, I intend to

investigate the impact of working from home on the psychological well-being of employees based on the existing literature and their ways of coping with the changes in working arrangements. I intend to synthesize and evaluate findings from previous studies to determine workers' productivity, satisfaction, and wellness and the feasibility of adapting this work scheme even after the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

A systematic review of the literature was used to examine the impact of working from home during the pandemic on the psychological well-being of Filipino workers and how they manage to handle the current situation. A systematic literature review is a methodology for "making sense of large bodies of information" and a way of contributing answers to questions "about what works and what does not," among other types of questions (Petticrew & Roberts, as cited in Verdin, Godwin, Copibianco 2016).

The following terms/phrases were used in the search: work-from-home, COVID-19 pandemic, WFH stress, psychological well-being, work-life balance during the pandemic, coping with remote working, and the like. Open-access journals, peer-reviewed, "grey materials" like government reports and books were considered and included in the review. They must be written in English and published from 2019-2022 in the Philippines. The references of each article were also examined to look for further relevant studies.

A total of 18 papers were initially identified and examined to ascertain their relevance; nine met the inclusion criteria and became part of the literature review. In analyzing the articles, I looked into the common ideas expressed in each academic article to address my objectives.

The table that follows shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting the research articles to be included.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Not English
Country focus	Philippines	Foreign countries
Type of Article	Peer-reviewed conference papers, government reports, law review	Research posters
Methodology	Quantitative & Qualitative	
Study focus	Impact of Work-from-home on workers' psychological well-being during the pandemic	Studies not focused on the psychological well-being of workers remotely working during the pandemic
Year of publication	December 2019 to August 2022	Studies on or before December 2019

The next table shows the different scholarly articles that were included in my systematic review.

Author/s	Title
Khristian S. Liwanag	A Case Study on the Advantages And Challenges Of Work From Home (Wfh) Scheme During Pandemic
Rosemary R. Seva, Lourdes Marie S. Tejero, & Vivien Fe F. Fadrilan-Camacho	Barriers and Facilitators of Productivity while Working from Home During Pandemic
Elizabeth Hill, Marian Baird, & Suneha Seetahul	The Philippines and Covid-19 Impact on the Private Sector
Raymond E. Gaspar & Nina Ashley O. Dela Cruz	Managing Pandemic-induced Mental Health Concerns in the Philippines: A Strong Case for Building Public Trust and Confidence
Jonathan C. de la Cerna	Work Never away from Home: Exploring the Concept of Work among Home-Based Workers
Erick S Parilla, Marc Edward Abadilla, Harrison Villanueva, & Noel P. Tarrazona	The Impact of Working from Home on Selected Employees' Job Performance in the Philippines During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Paulina Bawingan, Keith Sigfred Ancheta, Katrina Mae Laranang, Rica Denise Alcantara, Jelene Quiocson, Aldulrazzaq O. Balain	Reactions, Behavioral Practices and Coping Mechanisms of Filipinos in Luzon, Philippines during the Lockdown Due to Covid-19
Jaimee Felice Caringal-Go, Reniel B. Tiu, & Mendiola Teng-Calleja	Work Attitudes of Filipino Employees During the COVID-19 Crisis
Jaimee Felice Caringal-Go, & Mendiola Teng-Calleja, Donald Jay Bertulfo, & Jason O. Manaois	Work-Life Balance Crafting during COVID-19: Exploring Strategies of Telecommuting Employees in the Philippines

RESULT

The Impact of Working From Home on the Psychological Well-being of Filipino Workers

The psychological well-being of employees during the pandemic is a crucial component of the transition to work-from-home. Tang et al. (2019) described psychological well-being as central to mental health and can be defined as including hedonic and eudaimonic happiness and resilience.

Existing studies pointed out that the alternative work arrangement has a positive and negative impact on the workers' psychological well-being with improved employee engagement and experience, but challenges were rendering adverse effects. This shows that workers are satisfied with the "new" work set-up; however, it was also clearly expressed that feelings of fear, anxiety, stress, and exhaustion due to

various factors were experienced while working from home.

Looking at job performance, Parilla et al. (2022) established that working from home increases employees' enjoyment, job satisfaction, and motivation. Positive feelings were also expressed because they were free from several work-related stressors like public commutes, traffic, pollution, and transportation costs (de la Cerna, 2019; Liwanag, 2021). Also, favorable attitudes towards the job and work tasks were reflected, e.g., increased appreciation of work, motivation to deliver, and disposition toward work given the realization of the importance of having work during trying times (Go et al., 2021).

Better work satisfaction, as Liwanag (2021) advanced, due to flexible scheduling, permitted employees to have some control over their daily life, encompassing both employee and family activities. Noticeably,

the family served as the driving force for telecommuting workers. Thus work flexibility relates to having more time for family, which seems to draw in home-based workers (de la Cerna, 2019).

On the other hand, not everyone could adjust healthily to abrupt changes brought about by the pandemic. It has affected workers' well-being and threatened their mental health (Gaspar & De la Cruz, 2022). This left many individuals feeling isolated-experiencing fears and anxiety primarily over hardships and uncertainty.

Income and domestic pressures were reported to impact employees' physical and mental Health (Hill et al., 2020). Among the private sector, when asked to identify the reasons for the negative impact on mental health, workers reported that it is due to the stress of the pandemic situation, financial concerns, caring for family members, isolation, and challenges in balancing work and family.

In the study of Go et al. (2021), the intention to quit is related to undesirable working conditions set by their employers due to a seeming lack of support, perceived inequalities, and inadequacy of organizational response to the crisis.

Difficulty in focusing on work tasks and collaborating with colleagues and social isolation from co-workers have been emphasized (Parilla et al., 2022). The limited interaction with the manager career is the greatest challenge of working from home among employees. At the same time, the most challenging aspects of work-from-home in an organization are the possible adverse effects on workplace social networks (Liwanag, 2021).

The report of Hill et al. (2020) revealed that the location of work during the pandemic reveals gender differences. More women than men reported working from home. Women reported being more concerned about the current situation, caring concerns, and family tensions, whereas men reported being more concerned about finances and isolation. The changes brought about by COVID-19 on women's work and home

lives have compounded to produce higher levels of exhaustion and stress for women.

Likewise, workers experience more tension, irritability, and problems in relaxing; employees living with school children or extended family have little workplaces because of the need to share space during working hours. Finding a spot at home that is quiet and free of clutter can sometimes be difficult, especially for those with small children (Seva et al., 2021).

Moreover, the country-specific problem with internet connection also appears as a disadvantage to teleworking (de la Cerna, 2019). The fact that the Philippines is at the bottom of the internet speed world ranking (ASEAN Post Team, 2019) made the employees experience connectivity difficulties impinging their work productivity and adding more burdens and concerns (Parilla et al., 2022).

Coping With the Challenges of Working from Home

Coping with the challenges brought by the pandemic and keeping one sanity is a must for one to face the everyday stresses in life, work productively and fruitfully, and be able to contribute to her or his community (WHO, n.d.).

Specifically, findings show that employees use physical, relational, and cognitive crafting to achieve work-life balance (WLB) despite the abrupt changes in work arrangement, familial dynamics, and societal context (Go et al., 2021).

Bawingan et al. (2020) posited that workers look after their physical and mental health by taking enough rest, eating a balanced diet, taking vitamins, and exercising to stay active. For some, this entailed introducing hygiene factors to boost their productivity. Examples include purchasing ergonomic chairs and working in a well-ventilated space, among others

To prevent being burnt out from being immersed in an unending tide of work tasks, workers allowed themselves to take quick breaks or disengage from it. The relative ease of stepping out from work to non-work

that WFH provides is different in the work-from-home setting, enabling workers to shift from one domain to another or make compromises quickly. In this regard, workers actively reorganize their perceptions of what work entails, is required, and demands to preserve their stability and minimize friction between their home and work lives, especially in the context of a pandemic (Go et al., 2022).

Given remote working arrangements, this involves spending time with loved ones within the confines of their homes, as well as virtually connecting with co-workers. Workers adjust their work schedules to accommodate domestic care responsibilities while working. With the help of technology, working from home has magnified digital technology's role in achieving social proximity amid spatial distance, which is essential to achieve better work coordination and maintaining productivity through social connectivity (Bawingan et al., 2020; Go et al., 2021)

Workers adopt strategies to manage the various work tasks, such as creating to-do lists and scheduling task bundling. This goal-centered approach allows workers to practice task prioritization (i.e., doing tasks from most to least significant), job pacing, and iterative work. It is important to note that scheduled task bundling constitutes time management practice that interacts with another physical crafting strategy (i.e., managing work tasks), accentuating that temporal and functional work consideration are seldom understood as isolated work decisions (Go et al., 2022).

DISCUSSION

On March 16, the Philippines government imposed an enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) or 'lockdown' in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that limited all non-essential movement and mandated the closure of non-essential shops and businesses (Haill et al., 2020). To keep the economy running, the work-from-home arrangement was adapted to contain the

spread of the virus and ensure that work operations continued.

Primarily, paradoxical outcomes yielded from working from home according to its impact on the workers. This assertion is consistent with De Klerk et al. (2021) as it has presented to be an effective alternative work arrangement; however, exclusive working from home could hamper employee engagement and employee experience to the point of burnout.

Workers' preferences to work from home are influenced by various factors that significantly affect their well-being. The increase in productivity appears to be because of an increase in work hours re-utilizing the time saved from commuting. In addition, several reported a better working environment due to fewer meetings and more flexible working hours, as reasons for their improved performance (Productivity Commission, 2021; Patanjali & Bhatta, 2022).

Moreover, several worker characteristics, workspace, and work contexts were associated with increased and decreased productivity. Effective communication with co-workers, satisfaction with the thermal environment, workload expectations, having a teenager at home, not having an infant at home, and establishing a dedicated workspace for work activities that have no other uses were all associated with higher productivity (Awada et al., 2021)

Women obviously experienced more hurdles at home working, profoundly affecting their psychological health (Windeler et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2020; Allen & Martin, 2020). Being responsible for household chores and other home activities, working mothers can feel double the pressure at home due to a lack of support (Xiao et al., 2021). Evidence from this study shows that women suffered higher levels of stress, burnout, somatic stress, sleep trouble, and depressive symptoms than their male counterparts during the lockdown, while men reported higher levels of work-life conflict (Platts et al., 2022; Oakman et al., 2020).

The blurred boundary between workspace and home space can make it difficult for employees to set a clear separation between their work and home life (Derks et al., 2021). Whilst most participants noted their ability to better manage their personal and professional lives, they also found that blurred boundaries between work and family life made psychological detachment from working and work-life balance difficult. They experienced disadvantages, such as decreased emotional well-being and social isolation (De Klerk et al., 2021).

Thus, the achievement of work-life balance is a significant reliever influencing employees' psychological well-being and positively affecting one's psychological well-being by promoting happiness and relieving stress. Under a work-life balance functional approach, it is assumed that employees can reserve enough time to handle non-work-related life issues and activities while managing their work tasks (Chu et al., 2022).

Time management, goal-orientedness, and organization give the workers focus, making them productive in their work. This allows them to prioritize things and be focused on their daily routine. Nevertheless, flexibility and learning to re-prioritize must be learned cause sudden disruption/alterations in work are inevitable. (Leon & Diaz, 2020; Covey Regular and open communication with managers and colleagues is vital to helping reduce the negative impacts of feeling isolated. The more one is connected with others, the more fulfilment one feels in working from home (Oakman et al., 2020; Kaushik & Guleria, 20220)

Significantly, workers highlighted the significance of staying physically active and healthy. Getting enough adequate sleep, eating a balanced diet, and exercising are important things to be productive, stay healthy, and feel good (Leon & Diaz, 2020; Haibeh et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

In line with the study's findings, it was established that the COVID-19 pandemic

had a paradoxical impact on the psychological well-being of Filipino workers. Employees pointed out that with the new work arrangement, they still find satisfaction, enjoyment, and fulfilment given the necessary condition at home. However, detrimental factors like balancing work and family, difficulty focusing on work tasks and collaborating with colleagues, poor working environment, and slow internet connectivity lead to isolation, stress, and anxiety.

Notably, women experienced higher stress and exhaustion with working from home compared to men due to familial and domestic responsibilities.

Employees use physical, relational, and cognitive mechanisms to cope with the burdens of remote work to maintain their psychological well-being. Staying active, keeping open communication with colleagues, employers, and family, maintaining work-life balance and organizing work are ways to avoid loneliness and fear and from getting burnout.

Despite the changes in the new work set-up and the delights and difficulties of working from home, it was determined that they were still able to maintain work productivity and carry out their tasks. Although specific work requires onsite reporting, it was laid down based on the existing studies that remote working is a viable option to adapt even after the pandemic, given the necessary considerations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As we still live under the threat of the COVID virus and onsite work is slowly being imposed, the possibility of working from home remains a major considerable option for public and private offices. Likewise, considering the current situation where weekly oil price hike is happening, remote working is an important work arrangement to lessen workers' expenses.

For workers to remain productive and satisfied with working from home, their well-being, i.e. physical, psychological,

social, and spiritual, must be continuously nurtured. Seminars, orientations, or training on work-life balance, mental health, and the like must be provided regularly. It is crucial also that a wellness break must be given to workers to prevent them from getting burned out.

Taking into account the unique situation faced by women, especially those with little children or single parents, knowing their context and giving them certain considerations to manage work tasks and family responsibility.

Telco companies, with government intervention, must address the perennial problem of the country on poor internet connectivity. With home-workers reliance on the internet connection to work properly, this should be taken a priority by people in authorities and internet allowance must be considered as worker's additional incentive for work.

Finally, further studies must be conducted to enhance and inform policymakers, business sectors, and other stakeholders on adapting working-from-home work arrangements.

Declaration by Authors

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