

WORK FROM HOME- AN INSIGHT INTO THE RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Work from home has become a common term since the outbreak of Novel Coronavirus in March, 2020. To mitigate the spread of the virus, subsequent lockdowns were announced by the government from time to time. As a result, different organizations were closed and the new normal was accepted where people had to work from home. In the study, perception of respondents- male and female was analyzed in work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. The respondents were all employed either in government sector, government aided/ sponsored sector, private sector, professionals or were self-employed. The primary data were collected by framing a structured questionnaire and data collected from 128 respondents using Google form. Different parameters like distractions during work, working time affecting family responsibilities, flexibility and feasibility, timely and adequate communication and some others were studied. The data were processed and analysed using the statistical package, SPSS. Descriptive statistics, inferential statistics and Mann Whitney-U Test were used to obtain the results. It has been observed that there was a significant difference in the perception of respondents regarding distractions during work, working time & working time affecting family responsibilities but there was no significant difference in case of other test results of our study in work from home during Covid-19 pandemic.

Key-words: Work from Home, Covid-19 Pandemic

1. Introduction

The novel coronavirus and subsequent lockdowns have forced the closure of many organizations to mitigate the spread of the virus. Given the effectiveness of lockdowns in curbing the spread of SARS-CoV-2 virus (Kupferschmidt and Cohen, 2020) many countries and states have issued stay-at-home orders to halt the transmission of the virus (Kraemer et al., 2020; Maier and Brockmann, 2020). The government issued strict orders and regulations from time to time and forced people to stay indoors. Except for the necessary services most of the organizations and offices remained closed. So, work from home was the only available option. Dozens of other companies have declared that employees can work from home indefinitely (Kelly, 2020). Since it brings work into home often it was found that there were some distractions during work and work-life conflict become a common issue. Sometimes there was a balancing problem between work-life and personal life. Working from home allows work to seep into home life, it blurs the boundary between work and family, thus increasing work-family interference (Noonam and Glass, 2012). Gender issue was another

problem that was identified during the pandemic period. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, housework and other family responsibilities should be shouldered equally by both men and women. But during the new normal, in most cases, it was found that when both men and women are working most of the household responsibility fell on women. This is consistent with gender role theory (Benn, 1993; Gutek et al., 1991) which posits that society defines the family role as central to women's but not men's social identity. Both research and popular press articles have revealed that in time of crisis, women take on the majority of family work even when both couples are working full time (Billhult and Segesten, 2003; Stranss, 2020). Working women are often found juggling between office work and home responsibilities during the lockdown and pandemic period. To overcome this problem, governments in many countries have initiated work-life balance programs thereby narrowing gender gaps in various jobs.

2. Literature Review

Flexible working can entail employee's control over when and where they work (Kelly et al., 2011; Glass and Ectes, 1997). Most specifically, flexitime is having control over the timing of one's work. Working time autonomy, which is used by the authors is when workers have larger freedom to control their work schedule and their working hours. The relation between flexible working and work-family conflict is a controversial issue according to many authors. There are many theoretical arguments to relate flexible working to less work-family conflict, and therewith higher well-being since conflict and well-being are clearly related (Back-Wiklund et al., 2011). However, there is not a consistent empirical relation between flexible working and work-family conflict, and even less when gender is taken into account. Many studies show that working from home actually leads to more work-family conflict (Golden et al., 2006; Duxbury et al., 1994; Allen et al., 2013). Control over when to work in addition to working from home is also only partly related to less work-family conflict (Michel et al., 2011). Cech and Blair-Loy examined the gendered nature of flexible working, most are based on qualitative case studies predominately based on professional workers (2014). Country contexts matters in determining who gets access to flexible working arrangements (Chung 2017, 2018a). Gajendran and Harrison are of opinion that although telecommuting practices typically provide more flexibility, they can give rise to more housework, particularly during Covid-19 pandemic (2007). Lott, has argued that family and domestic responsibilities may be understood more as a constraint under which women need to navigate and negotiate their work spheres (2018).

There are two approaches which appeared in the literature to conceptualize the relationship between telework and other forms of home-based work on the one hand and gender roles and the work-family interface on the other. Huws et al (1996) argue that according to the first approach, 'New Opportunities for Flexibility Model' views telework as the solution to problems of balancing work and family, particularly for women. Dooley (1996), for example, argues that one of telework's advantages is that it gives access to work for people for whom childcare responsibilities would restrict participation in conventional on-site work. Silver (1993) argues that this model envisages the breakdown of traditional roles in that male domestic participation will increase as a result of the lack of spatial separation of work and family. This is a view that emphasises entrepreneurship and individual freedom (Haddon and

Silverstone, 1993). According to the second approach, the 'Exploitation Model' views telework as a way of perpetuating the exploitation of women in terms of both paid work, and the domestic burden of responsibility (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993). From this perspective home based work is constructed as a form of employment that leads to women being exploited, isolated socially, subject to demands from both family and employer, and subject to control by their husbands (Silver, 1993). Proponents of this approach concentrate on the benefits of gender inequality to employers and see female home based workers as an informal sector of the capitalist economy that uses exploitative practices.

3. Objectives and hypotheses of the study

Setting the perception of the male and female respondents in work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, the following objectives were considered:

1. To study whether disruptions are faced during work from home situation in the pandemic period.
2. To study whether working time is affected during work from home.
3. To study whether working time will affect family responsibilities in work from home situation.
4. To study work from home during the pandemic period with reference to flow of timely and adequate communication.
5. To study work from home during Covid-19 pandemic with respect to flexibility and feasibility.
6. To study whether there is any impact on costs involved in work from home situation.

The research hypotheses are:

H₀₁= There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding disruptions faced during work in work from home during Covid-19 pandemic.

H₀₂= There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding working time in work from home during Covid-19 pandemic.

H₀₃= There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding working time that affects family responsibilities in work from home situation.

H₀₄= There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding flow of timely and adequate communication in work from home situation.

H₀₅= There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding flexibility and feasibility in work from home during the pandemic period.

H₀₆= There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding impact of costs involved in work from home during the pandemic period.

4. Research Methodology

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Secondary data were obtained from different books, journals and websites. Primary data were collected by framing a structured questionnaire using Google form and data obtained from 128 respondents covering different areas of West Bengal as per feasibility. The respondents chosen were all from working community either employed in government or govt. sponsored/ aided sector, private sector, professionals or were self-employed. The questionnaire was mostly categorical

in nature and the data have been categorized using the 5-point Likert Scale (Level of disagreement to agreement varies from 1 to 5 denoting Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree respectively). Descriptive Statistics, Mann Whitney-U Test have been conducted using SPSS version 21.

5. Data Presentation & Analysis

Table 1: Gender Distribution

Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	79	61.7	61.7	61.7
Male	49	38.3	38.3	100.0
Total	128	100.0	100.0	

Source: Compiled through SPSS

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents, which reveals that out of 128 respondents, 79 were females (61.7%) and 49 were males (38.3%).

Table 2: Distribution of Work Profile

Work Profile

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Government & Govt. Sponsored/ Aided	54	42.2	42.2	42.2
Private Sector, Professional & Self-employed	74	57.8	57.8	100.0
Total	128	100.0	100.0	

Source: Compiled through SPSS

Table 2 reveals that out of the total number of respondents, 54 (42.2%) were employed in government and govt. sponsored/ aided sector and 74 respondents (57.8%) were employed in private sector, professionals or were self-employed.

Table 3: Distribution of Age

Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Below 26 Years	16	12.5	12.5	12.5

26 Years – 35 Years	26	20.3	20.3	32.8
36 Years – 45 Years	27	21.1	21.1	53.9
46 Years – 55 Years	30	23.4	23.4	77.3
56 Years – 65 Years	29	22.7	22.7	100.0
Total	128	100.0	100.0	

Source: Compiled through SPSS

Table 3 reveals the age distribution of the respondents where it is observed that out of total 128 respondents, 16 respondents (12.5%) were below 26 years of age, 26 respondents (20.3%) were between 26 years to 35 years of age, 27 respondents (21.1%) were between 36 years to 45 years of age, maximum number of respondents who belonged to 46 years to 55 years were 30 (23.4%) and 29 respondents (22.7%) belonged to 56 years to 65 years of age. Let us now consider the null hypothesis :

H_{01} = There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding disruptions faced during work in work from home during Covid-19 pandemic against the alternative hypothesis:

H_{11} = There is a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding disruptions faced during work in work from home during Covid-19 pandemic.

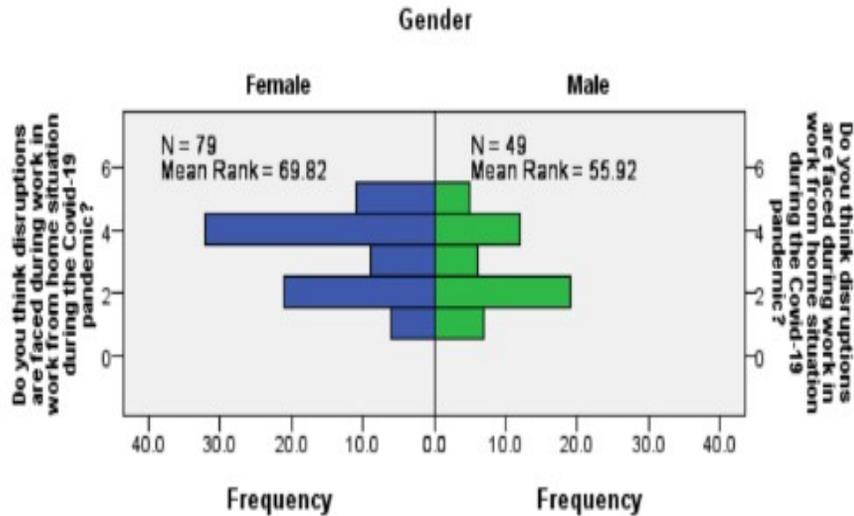
**Table 4: Mann Whitney-U Test
Test Statistics^a**

	Do you think disruptions are faced during work in work from home situation during the Covid-19 pandemic?
Mann-Whitney U	1515.000
Wilcoxon W	2740.000
Z	-2.144
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.032

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Based on the result from Table 4, it can be stated that the null hypothesis is being rejected at 5% level of significance with P-value of 0.032 ($P < 0.05$). Hence, there is a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding disruptions faced during work during the Covid-19 pandemic in work from home situation.

Chart 1: Distribution of responses across



Source: Compiled through SPSS

It is clear from chart 1, that the distribution of responses varies significantly across the males and females. The chart shows that maximum responses of females are 4, denoting females agree with the disruptions during work but maximum responses of males are 2 denoting they disagree with the disruptions during work. Also, mean rank of female respondents is 69.82 whereas, in case of male respondents the mean rank is 55.92.

Let us now test the second null hypothesis:

H_{02} = There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding working time in work from home during Covid-19 pandemic against the alternative hypothesis:

H_{12} = There is a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding working time in work from home during Covid-19 pandemic.

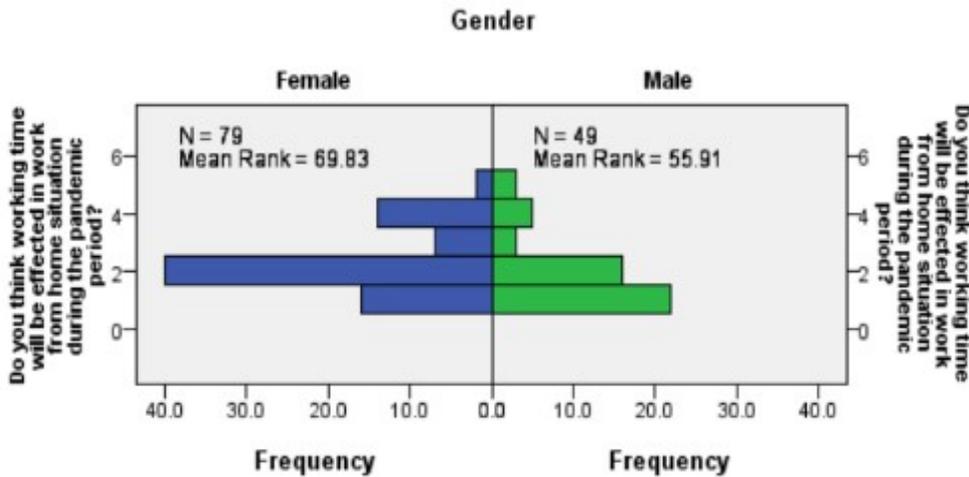
Table 5: Mann Whitney-U Test

Test Statistics^a	
	Do you think working time will be affected in work from home situation during the pandemic period?
Mann-Whitney U	1514.500
Wilcoxon W	2739.500
Z	-2.192
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.028

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Based on the result from Table 5, it can be concluded that the null hypotheses is being rejected at 5% level of significance with P-value of 0.028 ($P < 0.05$). Hence, there is a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding working time in work from home.

Chart 2: Distribution of responses across



Source: Compiled through SPSS

Chart 2 reveals, that the distribution of responses varies significantly across the males and females. The maximum responses of the females are 2 denoting females disagree with working time. Whereas, maximum responses of the males are 1 denoting they strongly disagree that, working time will be effected in work from home. Also, mean rank of female respondents is 69.83 whereas mean rank of male respondents is 55.91

Consider now the third null hypothesis:.

H_{03} = There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding working time that affects family responsibilities in work from home situation.

Against the alternative hypothesis:

H_{13} = There is a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding working time that affects family responsibilities in work from home situation.

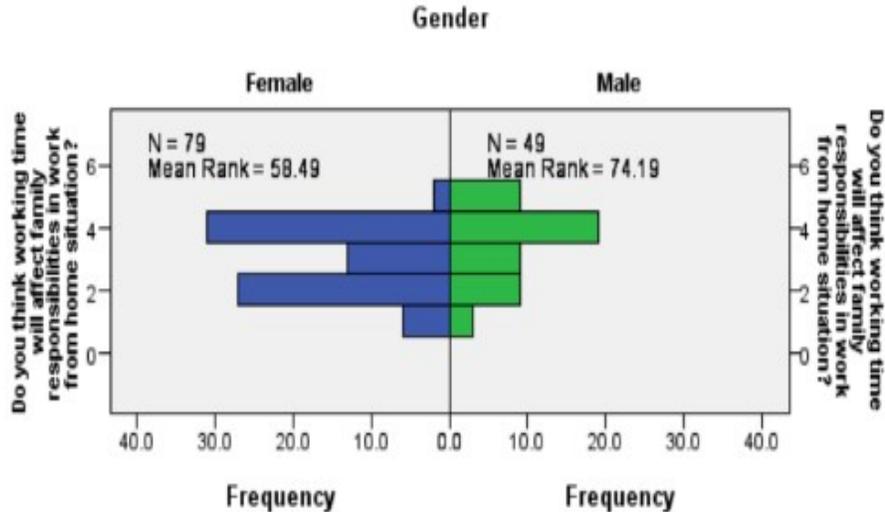
**Table 6: Mann Whitney-U Test
Test Statistics^a**

	Do you think working time will affect family responsibilities in work from home situation?
Mann-Whitney U	1460.500
Wilcoxon W	4620.500
Z	-2.438
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.015

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

It is clearly revealed from Table 6, that the null hypotheses is being rejected at 5% level of significance with P-value of 0.015 ($P < 0.05$). Hence, there is a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding working time affecting family responsibilities in work from home during the pandemic period.

Chart 3: Responses distributed across



Source: Compiled through SPSS

From chart 3, there is again a clear indication that the distribution of responses varies significantly across the males and females. The maximum responses of both females and males are 4 denoting they agree that working time will affect family responsibilities. Also, the mean rank of female respondents is 58.49 whereas for male respondents, the mean rank is 74.19.

Let us now consider the fourth null hypothesis:

H_{04} = There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding flow of timely and adequate communication in work from home situation

Against the alternative hypothesis:

H_{14} = There is a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding flow of timely and adequate communication in work from home situation.

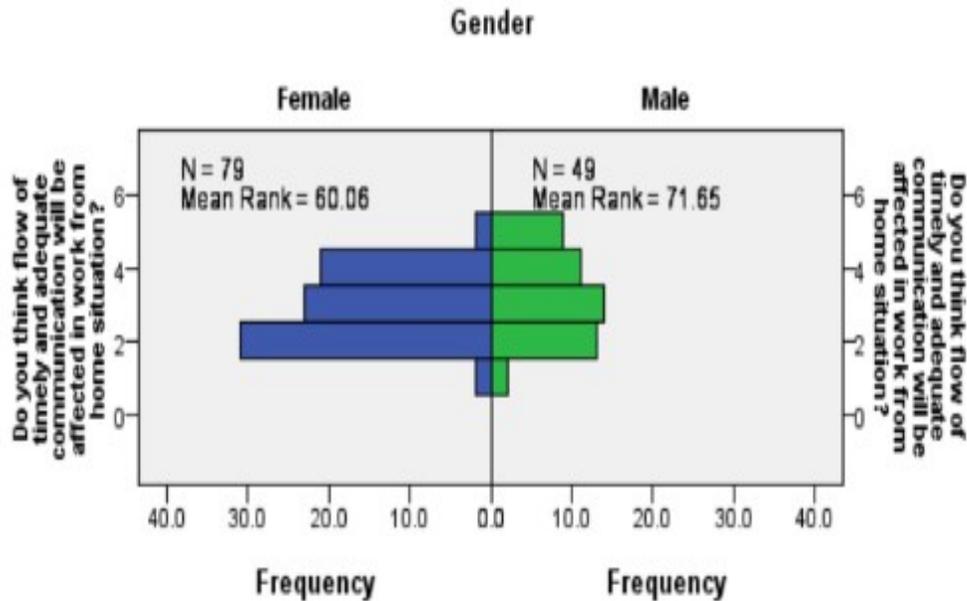
**Table 7: Mann Whitney-U Test
Test Statistics^a**

	Do you think flow of timely and adequate communication will be affected in work from home situation?
Mann-Whitney U	1585.000
Wilcoxon W	4745.000
Z	-1.792
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.073

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

It can be concluded from Table 7, that the null hypotheses is not being rejected at 5% level of significance with P-value of 0.073 ($P > 0.05$). Hence, there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding flow of timely and adequate communication in work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chart 4: Responses distributed across



Source: Compiled through SPSS

Chart 4 shows, that there is no significant difference in the perception of respondents as maximum responses of female respondents are 2 denoting that they disagree whereas, maximum responses of males are 3 stating they tend to be neutral regarding flow of timely and adequate communication in work from home. The mean rank of female respondents is 60.06 whereas, for males the mean rank is 71.65.

Consider now the fifth null hypothesis:

H_{05} = There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding flexibility and feasibility in work from home during the pandemic period against the alternative hypothesis:

H_{15} = There is a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding flexibility and feasibility in work from home during the pandemic period.

**Table 8: Mann Whitney-U Test
Test Statistics^a**

	Will flexibility and feasibility be affected in work from home situation during the pandemic period?
Mann-Whitney U	1794.000
Wilcoxon W	4954.000
Z	-.735
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.462

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

From Table 8, it can be concluded that the null hypotheses is not being rejected at 5% level of significance with P-value of 0.462 ($P > 0.05$). Hence, there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding flexibility and feasibility affecting work from home situation during the pandemic period.

Chart 5: Responses distributed across

Source: Compiled through SPSS

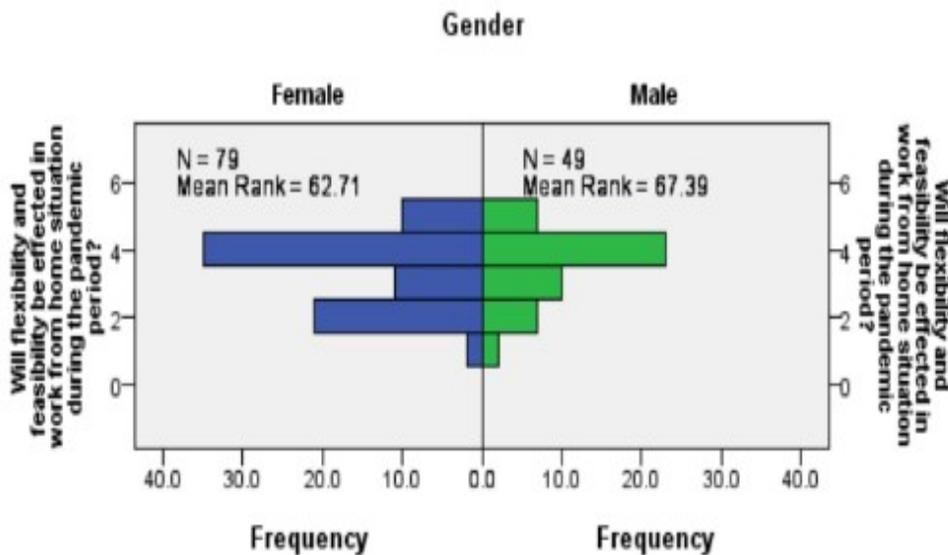


Chart 5 indicates that there is no significant difference in the perception of respondents as maximum responses of both females and males are 4 denoting, they both agree with flexibility and feasibility in work from home during the pandemic period. The mean rank of female respondents is 62.71 whereas the mean rank of male respondents is 67.39.

Now let us consider the sixth null hypothesis:

H_{06} = There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding impact of costs involved in work from home during the pandemic period against the alternative hypothesis:

H₁₆= There is a significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding impact of costs involved in work from home during the pandemic period.

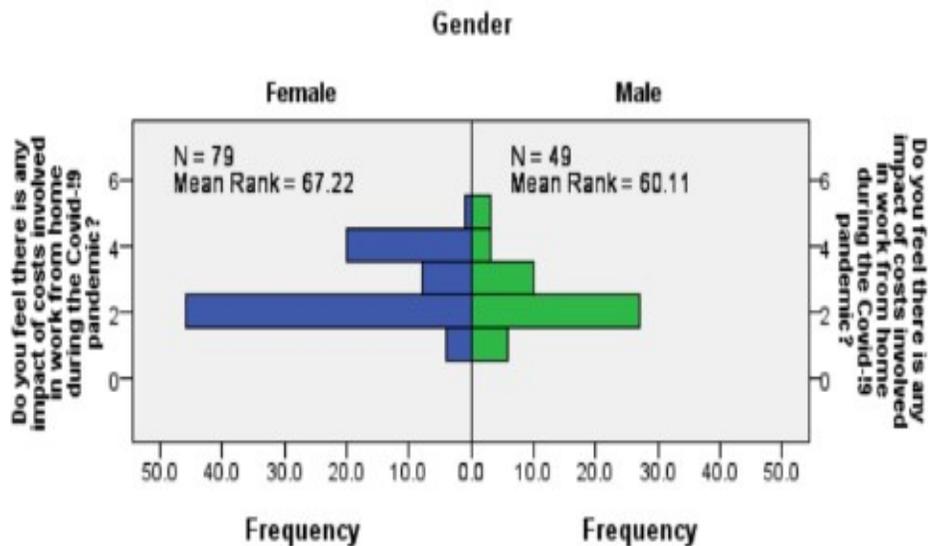
**Table 9: Mann Whitney-U Test
Test Statistics^a**

	Do you feel there is any impact of costs involved in work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic?
Mann-Whitney U	1720.500
Wilcoxon W	2945.500
Z	-1.174
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.240

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

It can be concluded from Table 9, that the null hypotheses is not being rejected at 5% level of significance with P-value 0.240 (P>0.05). Hence, there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding impact of costs involved in work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chart 6: Responses distributed across



Source: Compiled through SPSS

From chart 6, it is clear that there is no significant difference in the perception of respondents as maximum number of responses of both females and males are 2 indicating they both disagree with the impact of costs involved in work from home during Covid-19 pandemic. The mean rank of female respondents is 67.22 whereas, for male respondents the mean rank is 60.11.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

In the study, it has been observed that there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding flow of timely and adequate communication, flexibility and feasibility in work and impact of costs involved in work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Responses have been obtained from 128 respondents- 79 females and 49 males, both females and males are either employed in government or government sponsored/ aided sector, private sector, self-employed or are professionals. But a significant difference was observed in the perception of the respondents regarding disruptions faced during work, working time and working time that affects family responsibilities in work from home situation. Although, during lockdowns and the pandemic period, both males and females should shoulder equal responsibilities especially when both are working, but in reality it has been found that the basic household responsibility falls on women (when there are children or aged members in the family who should be taken care of) which often creates distractions or disturbances in work from home situation. In our study, the female respondents agree that there are disruptions during work in work from home. Also, in the analysis it has been found that during work from home, often it is difficult to balance work-life (office work) and personal life. The challenge that arises is to maintain the balance between working time and family responsibilities in work from home. Work and personal life are supposed to be the utmost essentials in the life of a human (Toyin et al., 2016). Balancing professional and personal life is one of the greatest thought-provoking questions confronting families in the current era (Walker et al., 2008). In my analysis, maximum responses of respondents state that both females and males agree that working time affects family responsibilities. No significant difference was observed in the perception of respondents regarding flexibility and feasibility as maximum respondents- both females and males firmly agree that increased flexibility will facilitate the management of both work and family. Regarding impact of costs involved, the expenses on commuting to office, travelling time and other office expenses will nullify the cost of infrastructure on devices, internet connections, power supply when work from home. So, respondents disagree with the impact of costs involved and no significant difference was observed in their perception.

7. Limitations of the study

The study is based on primary data which were collected from different areas of West Bengal but the sample could have been drawn from more wider areas covering different cities and states. Descriptive statistics and Non-parametric tests like Mann Whitney-U tests have been performed to analyze the data. More related variables could have been taken into consideration and also several higher order statistical tests like regression analysis, factor analysis could have been performed.

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