

“Preference of work from home and caregiving responsibilities of working women”

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Abstract: Background of the study: The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced the transition from traditional office work to remote work models (Zhang, W., et al, 2022). In India, working women are twice as likely as men to assume caregiver roles, highlighting a significant imbalance that persists even with men becoming more involved (Puria, A et al, 2021). A recent study in Austria reveals that many women are willing to sacrifice approximately 4 to 8 percent of their annual salaries in exchange for the flexibility to work remotely on select days or during specific hours (Vij, A., et al, 2023). This desire for remote work highlights the importance of work-life balance and the burden of the caregiving responsibilities.

Aim: This study aims to analyze the relationship between caregiving responsibilities and the preference for remote work among working women in India. Additionally, it seeks to provide effective support to address the challenges they face in managing their caregiving obligations.

Methods: A qualitative research method is adopted along with a descriptive research design. Samples are identified through convenient sampling method. A sample size of 30 working women from IT sectors in Chennai are studied thoroughly through semi structured one on one interviews. The interviews will be recorded for further references. Suitable data analysis tool will be incorporated for the effective communication of the results.

Result: This research will emphasize the importance of support for working women, who often bear a heavy load of caregiving responsibilities. It will also introduce a new perspective on these caregiving roles. The study will provide practical suggestions aimed at improving the well-being of the working women's community.

Keywords: Caregiving, Preference, work from Home, Women, remote model

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented wave of transformation in the global workforce, especially in the ramp-up of remote and work-from-home arrangements in different industries. This movement away from traditional office-based work into flexible work options changed the working and personal lives of workers around the world, particularly women who frequently balances multiple roles and duties, including paid work and unpaid caregiving. The pandemic has also underscored the notion of embracing flexibility in employment arrangements and brought the issue of work-life balance, gender roles and caregiving responsibilities within the family to the forefront. (Zhang et al., 2022).

In the Indian context, working women still experience a major challenge in terms of balancing their work and domestic responsibilities. Although there have been subtle shifts in societal values and greater role for women in the workforce, women are still expected to carry most of the burden for providing care, especially for children and the elderly and household management. Studies have shown that the traditional gender norms regarding the primary care role in the family persist, with almost double the share of women compared to men taking on this role in dual income families in India (Puria et al., 2021). The unequal division of care work, therefore, places extra emotional, physical and psychological demands on working women.

Women's experience of work has taken a new turn with the rise of remote opportunities that have been created during and after the pandemic. Work from home offers flexibility in carrying out household duties and keeping the workplace productive. For many women, working remotely is an effective measure to manage work and care duties. Research done globally has shown that women are prepared to give up some of their earnings for flexible remote work options that would help them better integrate work into their lives (Vij et al., 2023). These results indicate that flexibility has become an important determinant of women's employment preferences and satisfaction with their jobs.

While there are some benefits to working from home, it also introduces a level of work-life balance that can be difficult to manage. Working women have to balance multiple roles in the workplace with the responsibility of caring for those in the household and consequently, the workloads are more intense. When there is no distinction between work and family life, stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion and less wellbeing can be a risk. In addition, performance and performance expectation norms in an out-of-the-office environment can add stress for women who are already juggling caregiving responsibilities. Indian's information technology (IT) industry, especially in urban areas like Chennai, is undergoing a dramatic shift to hybrid and remote work. Women in the IT field may experience specific issues such as time management, care responsibilities, workplace performance and emotional health. Flexible work arrangements can also contribute to the care work load, but can also strengthen traditional domestic roles and women's domestic work in the house. Thus, it is crucial to know the realities of remote working women to gain insights into opportunities and challenges of work-at-home preferences.

The qualitative research methods are appropriate to analyze the personal experiences, perceptions and realities of the working women on caregiving and preference for remote work. In-depth, semi-structured interviews provide in-depth understanding of the negotiations process experienced by women between their professional roles and caregiving roles. A qualitative approach enables the participants to voice their experiences, emotional issues, coping responses and expectations in their own words, which contributes to an understanding of the issue. This study is executed to look at the association among care-giving obligations and work from home choice among working women in India. The study is specifically to explore how caregiving affects IT women workers in Chennai in their choice of the remote working model. The study also aims to explore the difficulties experienced by working women in finding a balance between their work and care giving responsibilities and offer practical recommendations that could help enhance their well-being and work-life balance.

This study is important because it helps to advance the ongoing discussion about the challenges of gender, flexibility in work, caregiving and organizational support systems in a post-pandemic society. The results can inform policy decisions, employer and organizational policies and practices for a more inclusive workplace for women. Additionally, the research could be used to further care for general debates on gender parity, mental health and sustainable working practices within modern workplaces. The shift from regular working to remote working has attracted a lot of academic interest, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic changing the world of work. The effects of remote work on employee productivity, work-life balance, childcare and gender roles within the home have been studied. There is some prior research that shows that women in work are perched among the most impacted groups as they must manage family and work responsibilities at the same time.

COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the work from home trends in some industries around the world, according to Zhang W. et al. (2022). Their research highlighted the importance of remote working becoming a way of working for organisations and employees during lockdowns. The researchers found that flexibility, decreased commuting stress and continuity of work are significant benefits of tele-work. The study also identified work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion and lack of separation between work and life as challenges identified. The results that are found are especially relevant for working women who often find themselves in situations where they must care for others while working.

This study by Puria A. et al., 2021, explored the gender gap in caregiving duties of working people in India. The study showed that, despite the greater involvement of women in the labor force, more women still engage in care duties than men. Childcare, Elder care and home management were cited as main responsibilities that are mostly performed by women. The researchers pointed out that traditional cultural norms and the patriarchal social system still affect the unequal distribution of unpaid labour within Indian households. This imbalance can lead to stress and constrain women's professional development and career progression.

In the same vein, Vij A. et al. (2023) discussed the employees willingness to sacrifice salary benefits for flexible remote working opportunities. Their results showed that most women would also like to have a flexible working schedule, even if it meant a lower pay. The study was concluded that flexibility has emerged as one of the important factors affecting satisfaction of working women and their work-life balance. The authors also pointed out that remote work allows women to better balance childcare and family responsibilities, particularly in families where there are children and elderly family members.

Research on work-life balance has also played a major role in the research understanding of working women in remote working contexts. Allen Tammy D. et al. (2021) said that in the presence of appropriate support systems, flexible working practices can have a positive effect on the employee's wellbeing. According to their research, remote work enhances autonomy and flexibility in terms of working hours, which can alleviate job satisfaction among female workers. But the lack of a clear distinction between work and life can also lead to overloading and mental fatigue.

Moreover, Craig Lyn and Churchill Brendan (2021) studied gender impacts of the pandemic on household labor distribution. They found that during remote working periods women's domestic burdens in terms of unpaid work increased significantly. Despite both partners working from home, women tended to have a larger responsibility with caring for the children and household chores. The researchers found that working remotely is insufficient for achieving gender equality unless there is greater gender equality in domestic work within the family.

Chung Heejung et al. (2021) also conducted a study on flexible work arrangements and gender equality. The study emphasized that flexible working conditions can help to maintain the employment of women, particularly after childbirth and during childcare. But the scientists said that companies should try not to perpetuate the stereotype linking women to the care-giving domain. If left unmanaged and without gender-sensitive policies and rules in place, working remotely can have unplanned repercussions on women's *"double burden."*

The Indian IT industry has embraced remote work in the wake of the pandemic. Based on several research studies, IT women are not only dealing with family issues, but are also experiencing problems with workload, long hours in the workplace and digital fatigue. Flexibility in work-from-home options can be accompanied by higher expectations for being available and productive around the clock, researchers said. These pressures could have a negative impact on the mental well-being and emotional health of working women.

Research cited in the past shows that caring duties have a significant impact on women's working lives and their consideration of remote working arrangements. Most current research is concerned with quantitative measures of productivity, stress or organizational results. The lived experiences, emotions, coping strategies and personal perspectives of working women about caregiving and work-from-home preferences within Indian context, however, has been studied little qualitatively. There is a lack of qualitative research on women working in IT in Chennai. Hence, the present study aims to address this research gap using a qualitative approach to explore the working women's preference for remote working arrangements (RWAs) due to the impact of caregiving responsibilities. The study aims to capture more in-depth understanding of the barriers, attitudes and resources involved in working women's roles and responsibilities to care for children through semi-structured interviews.

Background of the Study:

The COVID-19 outbreak worldwide has led to an unprecedented shift in work and organizational operations globally. Prior to the pandemic, most industries were thought to be a place where people typically work from the office. Staff were to be employed in a specified time frame and in a defined workplace. But, due to nationwide lockdowns, social distancing and the health concerns organizations have had to quickly implement digital communication systems and remote working models to keep the business going. This subsequently enabled work from home arrangements to gain a foothold in the workplace and emerge as more than an optional organizational reward (Zhang et al., 2022).

The shift to remote work had a significant impact on the professional and domestic relationships. While remote work involves flexibility and less commuting time, it also means that tasks that are typically part of the workplace environment are in the home. This change posed new challenges for most of the employees, especially for women who are expected to perform multiple duties as both paid and unpaid employees. The house turned into a multifunctional space where the family could work, care for their children, their elderly, do household chores and comfort one another, adding another layer to the challenge of balancing several roles.

Traditional gender norms and cultural expectations shape caregiving practices in many societies, such as India, profoundly. In the family, women are generally considered as the main managers, whether they work or not. Women's work in the paid labor market still does not diminish their duties in the home front particularly in childcare, cooking, cleaning, elder care, emotional care and so on. They are typically uncompensated and unacknowledged and demand a lot of physical, emotional and mental effort. In India, the research shows that instead of men, working women are almost 2X more likely to engage in caregiving activities at home, thereby confirming gender disparity in distribution of domestic labour (Puria et al., 2021).

Caregiving responsibilities directly affect women's working lives and profession. Several working women experience problems in balancing their work and family lives because of the

conflicting demands of work and family. Emotional exhaustion and psychological pressure often occur due to long working hours, stress in work, child-care obligations and family obligations. Women frequently feel guilty, stressed, tired and exhausted when they try to perform well in the workplace and in child-rearing duties. In many instances these pressures affect women's career choices, career continuity and employment choice.

As the work-at-home trend became a reality, it brought benefits and challenges to women at work. The benefits of remote work include flexibility and convenience in managing personal schedules, reducing travel-related stress and keeping women physically present with family members while completing professional tasks, on the one hand. On one hand, remote work is flexible and convenient in personal schedule management, it reduces travel-related stress and it enables women to be physically present with the members of their families while carrying out assigned professional activities. Flexible working options are frequently seen as “*facilitating*” policies that enable women to attend to caregiving while also working. Many women opt for working at home because they can spend more time with their child, grandchild or elderly family members or devote more time to household responsibilities while continuing to work outside the home.

Research in other countries has shown that flexibility in the workplace is highly valued by women and that they also tend to be willing to compromise on a portion of salary for flexible working arrangements and opportunities to work remotely (Vij et al., 2023). This is indicative of the increasing significance of work-life integration in contemporary work systems. Women workers are increasingly being identified as the ones that benefit from flexible working arrangements as contributors to their satisfaction, happiness and retention. But even though it has some benefits, teleworking does not overcome gender disparities at home. In many cases, working at home makes women's unpaid domestic work more burdensome as family members might believe that women are more available to provide care and attend to their household duties when present physically at home. This means women can go to professional meetings, work on office deadlines, be responsible for their children, cook meals and help with their family's elderly during the day. This can lead to role conflict, stress and less personal time.

One of the primary challenges of working remotely is the separation between work-life and home life. In the traditional office environment, workers typically separate work and family. But with the shift to from-home jobs, those parameters are eliminated and can lead to greater demands from employers and family members to be available around the clock. For working women, there are common interruptions to work, extended screen time, digital fatigue and pressure while at work to be productive with care giving responsibilities. They can have a detrimental impact on mental health, emotional balance and overall health. During the pandemic and more recently, the remote work trend has taken hold in the Information Technology (IT) sector, which is one of the primary industries experiencing this shift. Hybrid and remote work settings have emerged as a major trend in IT organizations in major cities like Chennai in India. Women working in IT professions may be required to work long hours, meet high expectations at work and adapt to new technology as well as perform household and caregiving responsibilities. While flexibility is provided by remote work, there may also be greater focus and demands on work, as well as a lack of social interaction and organizational support.

In addition to childcare, there are other aspects of caring. Working women can also support elderly parents, sick relatives and other dependent relatives emotionally, physically and financially. Women are usually expected to take on roles of care taking in the Indian family, especially in joint and extended families, irrespective of their work. These expectations have the potential to have a major impact on women's work preferences, career choices and mental health. Current research on work at home and care responsibilities has tended to concentrate on quantitative indicators like output, job satisfaction, stress and organizational outcome. Although these studies offer valuable statistical information, they do not reflect the lived experiences, emotions, perceptions, coping strategies and personal struggles of working women. Quantitative methods may not fully capture the personal experience of women of the intersection of caregiving responsibilities and remote work preferences in their daily lives.

Hence, the demand for qualitative research that is able to capture the deeper social and emotional aspects of the issue is growing. Qualitative approach helps the researcher to gain insight into women's experiences from their own point of view and helps the women to share their thoughts, feelings and problems in detail. Semi-structured interviews can help the researchers understand how working women manage caregiver duties, job expectations, emotional stress and work-life balance with remote work. In the present study, the researchers have taken working women employed in the IT Sector in Chennai, India as their considered population. This study seeks to explore the effect of the caregiving role on work from home choice for women and understand the difficulties they encounter in the process of balancing their work and caregiving responsibilities. The study aims to give significant insights into the link between gender roles, care responsibilities and flexible working arrangements in the current society by exploring women lived experiences.

This study is socially and academically relevant as it adds to discussion on gender equality, workplace flexibility, women empowerment and support systems in the organizations. The results can inform organisations to foster healthy work-life balance practices and implement inclusive policies to safeguard the health of working women. Also, the study can help policy makers and employers gain a better understanding of the value of flexible work arrangements that consider the needs of women workers with caregiving responsibilities.

Material and Methods:

Research Methodology

The present study uses qualitative research method to examine the link between Caregiving Responsibilities and the preference for Work from Home among Working Women. This study is qualitative in nature because it is aimed to gain an understanding of the human experience, feelings, perceptions, behaviors and social realities in depth and meaningful ways. The qualitative approach helps the researcher to collect rich descriptive data and insights in the lived experiences of working women who do both.

The paper highlights the need to understand the effect of caregiving on women's preference for remote work models in post-pandemic jobs. The qualitative methodology approach offers a means for participants to convey their emotions, difficulties, coping mechanisms and experiences in their own terms, as caregiving experiences can be highly personal, emotional and socially constructed. This method can be used to gain a deeper understanding of women's work-life balance and the difficulties that come with remote working.

Research Design

Descriptive qualitative research design is used in the study. A descriptive design was used to explain the experiences, opinions, attitudes and realities of working women, regarding care giving responsibilities and work from home preferences. It is a design that enables the researcher to explain and analyse phenomena in the social world as they are lived in their life-worlds. The descriptive qualitative design is appropriate for the study since the study is not trying to measure variables statistically but rather is trying to understand the meaning that participants give to their experiences. This design facilitates the study of emotional pressures, work-life balance, flexibility, caregiving burden and organizational support systems for women in the workforce.

Area of the Study

This study is carried out in Chennai, which is one of the biggest metropolises in India and also a hub of Information Technology (IT) Industries. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant increase in remote and hybrid work cultures in Chennai. The city offers a good setting to investigate the experiences of working women working in IT organizations and having care work responsibilities while working from home.

Population of the study

In the present study, the working women who are from the Information Technology (IT) industry who are working remotely or in hybrid mode and are also handling the household responsibilities as a caregiver, constitute the population of the present study. The relevance of this population to the research is significant since one of the fastest changing sectors to work-from-home practices after COVID-19 was the IT sector. This shift has had a profound impact on how professional work and home life are connected, especially for women who are supposed to have care duties, as well as work duties, due to their social and cultural status. The study looks specifically at women as they often have a dual burden of paid work and unpaid domestic work and thus lived experience is a central component in understanding the impacts of caregiving on preferences for remote work.

Women in the population are actively involved in various aspects of caring work in families. Caregiving here is defined in a general sense, referring to the constant physical, emotional, psychological and organizational care given to the family members who are dependent on the caregiver. These duties involve both child-care tasks, like feeding, child education, emotional support and fulfilling the child's needs and also child-care related tasks, like attending to children's education. Eldercare responsibilities are also included in the study, those in which participants offer physical, emotional, health and companionship care to their aging parents or older family members. Another aspect of care is to care for sick members of the family who need medical treatment, emotional support and practical help in the home.

The study highlights household duties as one of the significant aspects of unpaid work of working women apart from the direct care giving ones. Household management involves preparing meals, tidying house, arranging family appointments, keeping routine and coordinating family tasks while at work. In addition, the study recognizes emotional care in family relationships as also an invisible but important work of care. Emotional caregiving is about the role of keeping families emotionally balanced, emotional support during family stress, interpersonal relations and emotional stability in the family. While these emotional duties are significant, their effects are not usually acknowledged by the women at work.

The participants have been recruited based on their firsthand and personal experiences of balancing working and caring for others in remote and hybrid work settings. The study focuses on the people who experience the struggle of balancing expectations at work, demands for productivity in the workplace, expectations in the family, emotional stress and work-life balance on a personal level. The use of women who have direct experience in these subjects aims to create a rich qualitative description of the realities, difficulties, coping mechanisms, perceptions and emotions of care-giving and working from afar.

It is especially significant that the study specifically looks at women working in the IT field, as the industry has high workload, reliance on technology, flexible work hours, virtual communications and extended hours. These professional circumstances frequently involve aspects of the family responsibility and thus can affect women's physical health, emotional state, job satisfaction and their desire for flexible working opportunities. The study's purpose is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, professional choices and attitudes of the women in this population regarding work-at-home approaches in the current society. This research's population framework acknowledges the wider social context of care-giving as less of a personal family issue and more one that is linked to gender norms, work structures, flexibility and social norms. Thus, the study of the population can bring meaningful understanding of women's work, burden of care, working remotely and integrating work and life in the post-pandemic working world.

Sample Techniques and Tool:

The present study employed a convenience sampling technique to select participants. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are chosen based on their accessibility, availability and willingness to participate in the research. This technique was considered appropriate for the study as it enabled the researcher to access working women employed in the Information Technology (IT) sector in Chennai who possessed direct experience of balancing

caregiving responsibilities with work-from-home or hybrid work arrangements. Since the study adopts a qualitative approach, the primary objective was not statistical generalization but to obtain rich, detailed and experience-based insights into participants lived experiences, perceptions and challenges. A total of 30 working women were selected as the sample for the study. The participants represented diverse caregiving situations, marital statuses, family structures and remote working experiences, allowing the researcher to capture multiple perspectives regarding work-life balance, caregiving burden, emotional well-being and preference for flexible work arrangements. The selected sample size was considered sufficient to achieve depth, richness and meaningful understanding of the phenomenon under investigation while facilitating comprehensive qualitative data collection through in-depth interviews.

Inclusion Criteria

The study included women employed in the Information Technology (IT) sector in Chennai who were currently working under work-from-home or hybrid work arrangements and who had active caregiving responsibilities within their families. Caregiving responsibilities included childcare, eldercare, caring for sick family members, household management and emotional support within the family. These participants were selected because they possessed direct experience in balancing professional responsibilities with caregiving duties, which is central to the objectives of the study. The inclusion criteria ensured that participants could provide rich and meaningful insights into the challenges, emotional experiences, work-life balance issues and preferences related to remote work arrangements. Furthermore, participation was entirely voluntary, allowing respondents to openly and honestly share their lived experiences during the semi-structured interviews, thereby enhancing the credibility, relevance and depth of the qualitative data collected.

Sources of Data

The present study primarily relies on primary data collected directly from working women employed in the Information Technology (IT) sector in Chennai. Primary data is essential for this qualitative research because it provides firsthand insights into participants experiences, perceptions, emotions, challenges and realities related to caregiving responsibilities and preferences for work-from-home or hybrid work arrangements. Data were collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews, which enabled participants to freely express their experiences, opinions and feelings while allowing the researcher to explore relevant themes through open-ended and follow-up questions. The interview process adopted a personal interaction and discussion-based approach to create a comfortable and supportive environment, encouraging participants to share their lived experiences regarding childcare, eldercare, household management, emotional caregiving, work-life balance organizational challenges and coping strategies. The study also draws extensively on participants narratives, which provide deeper understanding of how women interpret and manage their dual roles as professionals and caregivers. These firsthand accounts offer rich, detailed and meaningful qualitative data that form the foundation for thematic analysis and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between caregiving responsibilities and remote work preferences among working women.

Secondary data sources like research journals, academic articles, books, reports and previous studies related to remote work and caregiver's responsibilities, women's employment and their work-life balance, are also incorporated in order to reinforce the theoretical aspect of the research. The secondary sources are used to aid the interpretation and contextualisation of the findings from the participants.

Data Analysis Method

The present study employs thematic analysis to interpret and analyze the qualitative data collected from working women in the Information Technology (IT) sector in Chennai. Thematic analysis is a widely recognized qualitative data analysis method that enables the researcher to identify organize and interpret recurring patterns, themes and meanings emerging from participants experiences and narratives. The analysis begins with data familiarization, where interview transcripts are repeatedly reviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants perspectives on caregiving

responsibilities and work-from-home preferences. This is followed by systematic coding, in which significant statements, concepts and experiences are identified and assigned meaningful codes. Related codes are then grouped into broader themes that reflect common experiences and social realities among participants. These themes are carefully reviewed and refined to ensure consistency, relevance and alignment with the research objectives.

The final stage involves interpreting the themes in relation to the study objectives and existing literature to understand how caregiving responsibilities influence women's preference for remote or hybrid work arrangements. Key themes emerging from the analysis may include work-life imbalance, emotional exhaustion, flexibility and autonomy, gender role expectations, caregiving burden, organizational support, mental well-being and preference for hybrid work models. Through this process, thematic analysis provides a rich and comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experiences, emotional challenges, coping strategies and professional realities, thereby generating meaningful insights into the relationship between caregiving responsibilities and remote work preferences among working women.

Reliability and Validity

The trustworthiness and quality of the present qualitative study were ensured through the application of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Credibility was established through in-depth semi-structured interviews with working women in the Information Technology (IT) sector, enabling participants to share their experiences, perceptions and challenges related to caregiving responsibilities and remote work arrangements. Dependability was maintained by following consistent interview procedures and preserving accurate records, including interview transcripts, audio recordings and field notes throughout the research process. Confirmability was ensured by minimizing researcher bias during data interpretation and grounding the findings in participants' narratives and direct statements, thereby reflecting their lived experiences rather than the researcher's assumptions. Transferability was enhanced through detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, caregiving situations and work-from-home experiences, allowing readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar settings. Together, these qualitative validation techniques strengthened the credibility, consistency, authenticity and overall trustworthiness of the study, ensuring that the findings provide a meaningful and reliable understanding of the relationship between caregiving responsibilities and work-from-home preferences among working women.

Ethical Considerations

The present study strictly adhered to ethical principles throughout the research process to ensure the dignity, rights, privacy and well-being of all participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and informed consent was obtained from each participant after clearly explaining the purpose, procedures and academic nature of the research. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any obligation or negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by protecting participants' identities and ensuring that personal information, interview responses and organizational details were not disclosed in any research report or publication. Audio recordings, interview transcripts and research data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. By emphasizing respect, transparency, privacy protection and participant autonomy, the study ensured a safe and trustworthy environment that encouraged open and honest sharing of experiences, thereby enhancing the credibility, authenticity and ethical integrity of the research findings.

Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted among 30 working women employed in the Information Technology (IT) sector revealed several recurring patterns regarding caregiving responsibilities and preferences for work-from-home arrangements. The analysis identified eight major themes that reflect participants' lived experiences, challenges, perceptions and coping strategies. These themes illustrate the complex relationship between professional responsibilities and caregiving duties in contemporary remote and hybrid work environments.

Theme 1: Work-Life Imbalance Despite Flexible Work Arrangements

A majority of participants reported that although work-from-home arrangements provided flexibility, they did not necessarily create a balance between work and personal life. Many women indicated that the boundaries between professional and domestic responsibilities became blurred, resulting in longer working hours and continuous multitasking. Participants frequently described situations in which office meetings, childcare responsibilities, household tasks and family obligations occurred simultaneously. The findings suggest that flexibility often translated into increased expectations from both employers and family members, creating a persistent sense of role conflict rather than balance.

Pattern Identified:

- Difficulty separating work and family roles.
- Extended working hours during remote work.
- Simultaneous management of multiple responsibilities.
- Reduced personal and leisure time.

Theme 2: Caregiving Burden as a Major Determinant of Work-from-Home Preference

The findings indicate that caregiving responsibilities significantly influenced participants' preference for remote and hybrid work arrangements. Women caring for young children, elderly parents, sick family members or dependent relatives viewed work-from-home as a practical solution that enabled them to remain professionally active while fulfilling family obligations. Participants emphasized that flexible work arrangements reduced commuting time and allowed greater physical availability for caregiving tasks. The findings demonstrate that caregiving responsibilities are one of the strongest factors shaping women's work arrangement preferences.

Pattern Identified:

- Preference for remote work due to childcare needs.
- Greater involvement in eldercare responsibilities.
- Reduced travel time supporting caregiving activities.
- Increased family accessibility through flexible schedules.

Theme 3: Emotional Exhaustion and Psychological Stress

Emotional fatigue emerged as one of the most prominent themes across participant narratives. Many respondents reported experiencing stress, burnout, anxiety and emotional exhaustion while attempting to satisfy both workplace and family expectations. Participants described feelings of guilt when unable to devote sufficient attention to either work responsibilities or caregiving duties. The findings reveal that remote work environments often intensified emotional pressures because women were expected to perform multiple roles within the same physical space.

Pattern Identified:

- Mental fatigue resulting from continuous multitasking.
- Feelings of guilt and self-blame.
- Increased emotional pressure from family and workplace expectations.
- Symptoms of stress and burnout.

Theme 4: Persistence of Traditional Gender Role Expectations

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the continued influence of traditional gender norms within households. Participants consistently reported that caregiving and domestic responsibilities were largely perceived as women's duties regardless of their employment status. Even when spouses worked remotely, women often remained primarily responsible for childcare, cooking,

“Preference of work from home and caregiving responsibilities of working women”

household management and emotional caregiving. The findings suggest that remote work has not substantially altered existing gender divisions of labor within many households.

Pattern Identified:

Unequal distribution of household responsibilities.

Cultural expectations regarding women’s caregiving role.

Limited sharing of domestic work by male family members.

Continuation of traditional family norms.

Theme 5: Flexibility and Autonomy as Positive Outcomes of Remote Work

Despite the challenges identified, participants acknowledged several benefits associated with remote and hybrid work arrangements. Women appreciated the flexibility to organize work schedules according to family needs and personal priorities. Many participants reported feeling greater control over their daily routines and valued the opportunity to spend more time with family members. The findings suggest that autonomy and flexibility remain significant advantages of remote work arrangements.

Pattern Identified:

Greater control over work schedules.

Improved family interaction.

Enhanced ability to manage personal commitments.

Increased autonomy in task management.

Theme 6: Importance of Organizational Support

Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of organizational understanding and support in managing caregiving responsibilities. Flexible scheduling, supportive supervisors, realistic workload expectations and employee well-being initiatives were identified as important factors that reduced stress and improved work satisfaction. Women working in organizations that recognized caregiving responsibilities reported more positive experiences with remote work than those employed in less supportive environments.

Pattern Identified:

Positive impact of flexible organizational policies.

Importance of empathetic leadership.

Need for realistic performance expectations.

Value of employee well-being initiatives.

Theme 7: Impact on Mental Well-Being

The findings revealed a strong connection between caregiving responsibilities, remote work experiences and mental well-being. Participants who received family support and organizational flexibility reported better emotional health and job satisfaction. Conversely, participants facing high caregiving demands and limited support frequently reported feelings of isolation, frustration and psychological strain. Mental well-being emerged as a critical factor influencing participants overall perception of remote work arrangements.

Pattern Identified:

Better well-being associated with support systems.

Negative emotional effects of caregiving overload.

Increased risk of isolation and stress.

Relationship between support and job satisfaction.

Theme 8: Preference for Hybrid Work Models

The majority of participants expressed a preference for hybrid work arrangements rather than fully remote or fully office-based work. Participants believed that hybrid models offered the advantages of workplace interaction, professional visibility, flexibility and family accessibility simultaneously. Many women viewed hybrid work as the most sustainable long-term solution for balancing caregiving responsibilities and professional growth.

Pattern Identified:

Strong preference for hybrid work arrangements.

Need for flexibility combined with workplace interaction.

Perception of hybrid work as sustainable and balanced.

Support for long-term flexible work policies.

Thematic Summary Table

No.	Theme	Key Pattern Identified	Interpretation
1.	Work-Life Imbalance	Blurred boundaries between work and family life.	Remote work increased role overlaps and multitasking, making it challenging to maintain clear boundaries between professional and personal life.
2.	Caregiving Burden	Major factor influencing remote work preference.	Women preferred flexible work arrangements because they enabled them to fulfil caregiving responsibilities alongside professional duties.
3.	Emotional Exhaustion	Stress, burnout and psychological pressure.	The simultaneous management of work and caregiving responsibilities contributed to significant psychological and emotional strain.
4.	Gender Role Expectations	Unequal domestic and caregiving responsibilities.	Traditional gender norms continue to assign caregiving and domestic responsibilities mainly to women, reinforcing gender inequalities.
5.	Flexibility and Autonomy	Greater control over schedules and family time.	Flexible work arrangements enhanced participants' ability to manage competing responsibilities and increased their sense of autonomy.
6.	Organizational Support	Importance of supportive workplace policies.	Organizational understanding and family-sensitive policies play a critical role in reducing stress and improving work-life balance.

“Preference of work from home and caregiving responsibilities of working women”

7.	Mental Well-Being	Emotional health linked to support systems.	Emotional support from families and organizations contributed positively to participants' well-being and job satisfaction.
8.	Preference for Hybrid Work	Most preferred and sustainable work arrangement.	Hybrid work was perceived as the most sustainable model because it combines flexibility with professional interaction and career visibility.

The table presents the major themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with 30 working women employed in the Information Technology (IT) sector in Chennai. The findings indicate that caregiving responsibilities play a significant role in shaping women's preferences for work-from-home and hybrid work arrangements. While remote work offers flexibility, autonomy, and reduced commuting time, it also creates challenges such as work-life imbalance, emotional exhaustion, and blurred boundaries between professional and family responsibilities. Participants frequently reported difficulties in managing multiple caregiving roles alongside workplace expectations, resulting in increased stress and psychological pressure.

The table further demonstrates that traditional gender role expectations continue to influence the distribution of caregiving responsibilities within households, with women remaining the primary caregivers despite their professional commitments. Organizational support, including flexible scheduling, supportive leadership, and employee well-being initiatives, emerged as an important factor in improving participants' experiences. Most participants expressed a preference for hybrid work arrangements because they provided a balance between workplace interaction and flexibility. Overall, the findings highlight that achieving meaningful work-life balance requires not only flexible work policies but also greater organizational support, recognition of caregiving responsibilities, and more equitable sharing of domestic and emotional labor within families. This reinforces the study's central argument that caregiving responsibilities significantly influence working women's experiences, well-being, and work arrangement preferences in contemporary post-pandemic work environments.

Overall Discussion

The findings demonstrate that caregiving responsibilities substantially influence working women's preferences for remote and hybrid work arrangements. While flexible work models provide greater accessibility to family responsibilities and improve autonomy, they do not automatically eliminate caregiving burdens or gender inequalities. The experiences of participants reveal that work-from-home arrangements simultaneously create opportunities and challenges, highlighting the continued importance of organizational support, family cooperation and gender-sensitive workplace policies. The study ultimately suggests that hybrid work models may offer the most effective balance between professional commitments and caregiving responsibilities, contributing to improved well-being and sustainable employment outcomes for working women.

The findings of the present study reveal that caregiving responsibilities significantly influence the preference for work-from-home and hybrid work arrangements among working women employed in the Information Technology (IT) sector in Chennai. Most participants perceived remote work as a flexible arrangement that enabled them to manage professional responsibilities alongside childcare, eldercare, household management and emotional caregiving duties. The flexibility associated with remote work, including reduced commuting time and greater physical presence within the family environment, was viewed as beneficial for balancing multiple responsibilities. However, participants also reported that work-from-home arrangements often blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life, resulting in continuous multitasking, increased expectations from both employers and family members, emotional exhaustion, stress, anxiety and feelings of guilt when unable to

adequately meet competing demands. The study further revealed that traditional gender role expectations continue to shape the distribution of caregiving responsibilities, with women remaining the primary caregivers despite their professional commitments and the availability of flexible work arrangements. Many participants indicated that remote work sometimes reinforced these expectations, as family members perceived women as being more available for domestic and caregiving tasks. In addition, organizational support emerged as a crucial factor influencing women's well-being and work experiences, with participants emphasizing the importance of flexible schedules, supportive leadership, mental health resources, realistic productivity expectations and family-sensitive workplace policies. A strong preference for hybrid work models was also identified, as participants viewed such arrangements as offering an effective balance between professional interaction and workplace flexibility. Overall, the findings suggest that while remote and hybrid work arrangements provide valuable opportunities for managing caregiving responsibilities, they do not eliminate the caregiving burden or underlying gender inequalities. Rather, the experiences of working women highlight the need for greater organizational support, equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities within families and more inclusive workplace practices that recognize the emotional, social and professional realities of women in contemporary post-pandemic work environments.

Conclusion

Thus, the present study examined the relationship between caregiving responsibilities and the preference for work-from-home and hybrid work arrangements among working women employed in the Information Technology (IT) sector in Chennai. The findings indicate that remote and hybrid work models have become important mechanisms through which women manage their professional responsibilities alongside childcare, eldercare, household management, emotional caregiving and other family obligations. Participants perceived flexible work arrangements as beneficial because they reduced commuting time, increased family accessibility and provided greater control over daily schedules. However, the study also revealed that the integration of professional and domestic spaces often resulted in blurred boundaries, increased multitasking, emotional exhaustion and continuous role demands. Furthermore, traditional gender expectations continue to place the primary responsibility for caregiving on women despite changes in workplace structures and technological advancements. As a result, many participants experienced work-life imbalance, psychological stress and emotional fatigue while attempting to meet both professional and family expectations. These findings demonstrate that work-from-home arrangements are not merely organizational innovations but complex social experiences shaped by caregiving responsibilities, family dynamics and gendered expectations.

The study further highlights that meaningful work-life balance for working women requires more than workplace flexibility alone. The qualitative exploration of participants lived experiences revealed the importance of organizational support, family-sensitive policies, mental well-being initiatives and equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities within households. Women's caregiving roles extend beyond physical household tasks to include emotional labor, family coordination and psychological support, which often remain unrecognized despite their significant impact on well-being and professional performance. The findings suggest that organizations, policymakers and society must acknowledge caregiving responsibilities as important social and professional concerns rather than viewing them solely as personal matters. By promoting supportive workplace cultures, flexible scheduling practices and greater gender equity in caregiving responsibilities, it is possible to improve the well-being, job satisfaction and professional development of working women. Ultimately, the study contributes valuable insights into contemporary work culture and emphasizes the need for broader social and organizational changes to create a more inclusive, balanced and supportive environment for women in the post-pandemic world of work.

Acknowledgment Statement

The author(s) would like to state that no acknowledgements are applicable for this study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest of associated with this research.

Funding Statement

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and publication of this article

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