



# Persistence of patriarchy and its impact on women professionals working from home

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## Abstract

*The Pandemic and the pandemic induced lockdown have changed every aspect of our life, including the way of working. Work from home means one can work sitting from anywhere other than an office space. The mode of remote working gained momentum during the pandemic times. Considering the IT sector, work from home was implemented way back due its nature of work, but many other sectors administered work from home during the pandemic. The prime challenge posed by work from home is that the domestic and professional domains got mixed up; it imposed the burden especially on women thrice the times as compared to the pre-pandemic times. There is a preconceived notion that working from home would be much flexible, but it is not completely true. Especially married women professionals considers difficult to manage their paid work together with the unpaid domestic works, because of the dominant patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes. In this paper, an attempt is made to unveil how far patriarchal norms are relaxed or pronounced while women undertake work from home.*

**Keywords:** Work from home, Patriarchy, COVID-19, Women professionals.

## Introduction

Sylvia Walby<sup>1</sup> defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominates, oppress, and exploit women”. In the patriarchal system, men hold the supreme power and he controls the women and children in the family. The property and titles are inherited through male’s lineage. Patriarchy can be termed as an ideology in which men dominate women and find women inferior and the decision-making power is vested in the hands of men<sup>2</sup>.

Patriarchal norms can be seen in every realm of society, from family to workplace. One dominant form of the patriarchal norm which is still followed by the custom of a woman moving to her husband’s house after marriage. Similarly, children are given the name of their father’s family. Patriarchy and gender stereotypes can be termed as two sides of the same coin. Gender stereotyping is a set of norms ascribed to women and men, like how they should behave, what roles they should perform. Gender stereotyping has more negative effects on women than men. For instance, a woman must be submissive and nurturing and these stereotypes foist on women to follow such ascribed qualities<sup>3</sup>.

Men consider themselves as the master of the house and view that decision-making is a monopoly of men, and women should obey men for the smooth running of the family. In patriarchy, masculinity is praised for power and femininity for weakness. Man finds it a discredit to his masculinity to abdicate his gender roles pre-assigned by society.

So, in the patriarchal society, the role of women is simply looking after the husband, household duties, and child-bearing. Women lack property rights, freedom to choose a career, generally men are valued more than women.

Work from home means one can work sitting from anywhere other than an office space. It is a major technological advancement. But the experience of work from home may not be the same for everyone. During any crisis, women are one among the vulnerable groups, and during the COVID-19 pandemic times too, women were negatively affected in terms of their health, career, financial stability and their empowerment.

## How patriarchal norms pose challenges to women working from home

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the views on Work from home (WFH). Women were likely to want WFH than men, and they had a harder time doing so. The working hours got increased, anytime meetings and conferences were started to happen and it contributed to negative impact.

The work-life balance became almost non-existent due to working from home. There is an oddity in the society that if a woman is successful in her career, it means that she has compromised her family duties. For women, WFH can be considered as a boon and curse at the same time; because it exacerbated the deeply ingrained gender inequality in our society<sup>4</sup>.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of WFH, the life of working women changed tremendously and caused turmoil.

The status of women professionals with high educational qualifications seems to be in the upper-sections of society and they are considered empowered and independent, but taking into account of their in-world (family space), they are still facing discrimination and their contribution is considered negligible<sup>5</sup>. Thus, it is evident that the status of women has changed in modern times, but still patriarchal norms are being dominant and so women are yet labelled for doing household chores and men as breadwinners and women are accounted for doing more than 75 per cent of household duties, according to Moreira da Silva<sup>6</sup>.

The stereotypes got strong during the pandemic. The household duties are not shared equally between the partners. Sociologists described women's household work as 'second shift', where after completing the paid work, she enters into another shift of work called domestic duties which is unpaid<sup>7</sup>. Before the allocation of work from home, women were more comfortable with their works. As working women used to complete their household duties before leaving for office and do the same returning from office. But due to working from home, they find it difficult to manage their time contributing reasonably to professional duties and household chores. They are even working on weekends; and earlier there were fixed timings for meetings and calls, but due to work from home, the meetings and calls can happen any time throughout the day and even on Sundays which once happened to be holidays.

Therefore, switching between professional and personal space finds difficult to manage. From answering to a calling bell to caring elderly in the home, the duties are supposed to be performed by women. Preparing food, washing dishes, taking care of the child, sitting with the children for their online classes, along with the paid job is a herculean task. Women are not able to find time for them self. The situation is not different even in the case of women working in executive positions of a company, because the cultural and structural systems both are shaped against women. The women undergo difficulties in playing her different roles like wife, mother, daughter-in-law<sup>8</sup> and are more likely to feel burned out than men, and that has negatively affected their experience working from home.

According to McKinsey's assessment on COVID 19's impact on women's employment, 2021, 79 percent of males reported having a favourable work-from-home experience during the epidemic, compared to just 37 percent of women<sup>9</sup>. In the society, household responsibilities and housework are the onus of the women in the family. So, before the arrival of COVID-19 and lockdown, women were at least having some support in terms of domestic servants, but the change emerged with the complete shutdown and it affected quantum of work of women, though it did not affect men's working arrangements in

the same way<sup>10</sup>. For many women, spending time at office and talking to their colleagues was a stress reliever. Due to WFH, the employees lost their social circle and thus alleviating stress and loneliness.

Women with children are found to experience more stress than ones without children. A crying toddler makes an appearance on the zoom call of a mother, not on the father. While both women and men are working from home still women are involved in looking after a child than men<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, men show a positive attitude towards work from home while the working women especially the women with children find it difficult to manage their paid work and care giving to children, so 2 in out of 3 women choose motherhood over the profession. Hence, women quit their jobs. There shows a sharp decrease in the women workforce during the pandemic<sup>11</sup>.

Domestic abuse became more severe throughout the pandemic. One in three women endure physical or sexual abuse from an intimate partner, according to UN Women. Due to the lockdown, people are being compelled to spend more time at home, which has led to an upsurge in domestic violence incidents. The often-silent epidemic of intimate partner violence has been made worse by additional stress brought on by income loss, the inability to pay for housing and food, and other factors like alcohol abuse, problems with in-laws and married women, interpersonal conflicts, etc. during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>12</sup>.

Since sexual harassment exists even online, WFH isn't even thought to be safer for women. Video conversations and virtual meetings, which give the appearance of seclusion and make it simple to detach from or tune out a person, make it easier to berate someone in front of others in the workplace. These private discussions can turn toxic on a personal level. There are multiple ways that workplace cyber bullying can occur. It may be a supervisor overly pressuring a worker to submit to pressure in front of other workers.

When someone declines to be on camera, it may be forced upon them, or when they agree, it may be criticism of their looks and the condition of their residence. Women have seen offensive voicemails, photographs, texts, and even intentionally offensive video call behaviour. The employees' physical and mental health were negatively impacted by the cyber bullying. Even suicidal behaviour and low self-esteem may be experienced by some<sup>13</sup>.

### **How WFH can be made flexible for women**

During the tough time like COVID-19 pandemic, gendered social roles have emerged as a function that suit power positions in the patriarchal set-up. Hence, women were not able to cope up with their career and domestic duties. But considering the situation of a crisis, WFH was a better option that safeguarded people from getting the infection, and also, they can perform

both personal and professional works while sitting in their comfort zone.

Thus, work from home can be used effectively as a catalyst to The gender roles and expectations around must be changed. From the end of organizational set-up-paid parental leaves, equal compensation and promotion for performing same job for both men and women, focus on their productivity and not the extra hours<sup>4</sup>. Hence, work from home can be made effective and outgoing for the women professionals.

## Conclusion

The crisis created due to the COVID-19 pandemic has provided new opportunities to revisit and rethink the underlying inequalities. Inequalities in society can take many different forms, including those related to class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Overall, the epidemic phase has shown profoundly ingrained and gendered societal norms that govern how families are structured. The gender convolutions in families are already present still in the modern era too and those have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 period, resulting in new complexities. The mother's working hours are significantly more impacted by family duties and child care than those of their fathers<sup>14</sup>.

In order to achieve normalcy, it is necessary to maintain a good home environment. Therefore, the family must function as a unit and lessen the stereotypes of sexually delimited work. Working women must balance their personal lives, careers, and physical health, which requires ongoing encouragement and support from their families. Men must be encouraged to assist their partners with household tasks in addition to encouraging women to work and be independent. In every circumstance, whether it be managing home errands or working on a project at work, men and women share equal responsibility. Once everyone accepts this, the world will be a much better and safer place for women and we can build an egalitarian society.

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