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Impact of Work from Home on Work Stress with Mediating Effect of Work Productivity Among Women Educators During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract
The study examined the impact of Work From Home (WFH) on Work Stress (WS) among women educators in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explored the mediating role of Work Productivity (WP). Using correlation, regression, and Hayes' PROCESS mediation analysis, the results demonstrated strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships among all three variables. Working from home significantly increased both work stress (R^2 = .888) and work productivity (R^2 = .835). Work productivity itself was found to be strongly associated with increased work stress. The mediation analysis confirmed that work productivity partially mediates the relationship between work from home and work Stress, indicating that part of the stress caused by work from home operates through heightened productivity demands. The study concludes that although work from home enhances productivity, it also significantly elevates stress levels among women educators. The findings emphasise the need for organisational support systems to balance productivity expectations with employee well-being.

Keywords: Work From home, Work Stress, Women Teachers, Academic Productivity, COVID-19, Remote Teaching, Job Satisfaction, Higher Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an abrupt and far-reaching transformation to education systems around the world. Within a matter of days, schools and colleges were forced to abandon long-standing face-to-face teaching routines and adopt Work from Home (WFH) practices to keep classes functioning **(Kraft et al., 2020).** For many educators, this shift meant learning new digital tools, redesigning lesson plans, and managing remote classrooms without prior preparation **(Kaur, 2020).** For women educators in particular, the transition was far more than a technological adjustment—it became a major restructuring of daily life. Across many societies, women continue to shoulder a greater share of caregiving and household responsibilities **(Carlson et al., 2020; Ranji et al., 2021).** When professional work moved into the home, the boundaries separating these roles collapsed, often leaving women with competing and overlapping demands throughout the day **(Peck, 2021; Leo et al., 2022).**

The impact of this shift was especially visible in regions where gender inequalities are still deeply embedded. In states such as Himachal Pradesh, the sudden dependence on digital teaching tools coincided

with limited infrastructure, uneven internet access, and traditional expectations around women's domestic roles **(Pandey & Singh, 2025; NILERD, n.d.).** As a result, many female educators found themselves preparing online classes, supervising their own children's learning, and managing household routines simultaneously **(Dogra & Kaushal, 2022; Mukhopadhyay, 2023).** While WFH did offer some positive aspects—such as reduced travel time and greater scheduling flexibility—these advantages were often outweighed by the intensified workload and emotional strain brought on by the pandemic **(Kundra et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2021).**

Another major change during this period was the way work productivity was understood and measured. Educators were expected to maintain instructional quality, stay constantly accessible to students, and keep pace with administrative tasks—all within their homes **(Afrianty et al., 2021).** For some, having more control over their work hours made it easier to complete tasks. But for many women educators, productivity was compromised by disruptions at home, lack of private workspace, and extended working hours that stretched late into the night **(Kundra et al., 2023; Nwangwa & Nwangwa, 2021).** The pressure to prove one's effectiveness in a remote environment also created new anxieties, as learning digital platforms, preparing online materials, and managing technical issues added more layers to an already demanding workload **(Chitra, 2020).**

These increased demands and shifting expectations contributed to rising levels of work stress among educators. Teaching has long been recognized as a stressful profession **(Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Tsai & Chen, 1996),** and the pandemic magnified many of these challenges. The need to adapt rapidly to online platforms, the absence of face-to-face interactions with students, and the difficulty of maintaining work–life boundaries took a considerable emotional toll **(Klapproth et al., 2020; Holme et al., 2018).** Studies from different countries consistently show that women educators reported higher levels of stress during the pandemic compared with their male **colleagues (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2023; Leo et al., 2022).** The "triple burden"—professional work, household duties, and caregiving—became a defining aspect of women's experiences during this time **(Dogra & Kaushal, 2022).** Many described feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, or guilty for not being able to give equal attention to their students and their families **(Clark et al., 2021; Irawanto et al., 2021).**

These concerns highlight why it is essential to examine the relationship between WFH, work productivity, and work stress—especially among women educators. The experiences of female teachers during the pandemic reveal much about the interaction between gender roles, digital work environments, and institutional expectations **(Kelchtermans, 2017; Klassen, 2010).** Understanding how WFH affected stress and productivity can help educational institutions develop more supportive policies, particularly in contexts where women already face structural disadvantages **(Sundar & Selvam, 2023).** Exploring these dynamics in regions like Himachal Pradesh is especially important, given the geographical and social factors that shape working women's daily lives **(Pandey & Singh, 2025).**

The present study, therefore, seeks to investigate how WFH influenced work stress among women educators during the COVID-19 pandemic and to examine whether work productivity played a mediating role in this relationship **(Kundra et al., 2023).** By focusing on women educators' lived experiences, this research aims to shed light on the pressures and constraints they navigated and to contribute to a broader conversation about supporting women in academic professions **(Mukhopadhyay, 2023).** As schools and colleges continue to integrate digital tools into post-pandemic teaching, insights from this study can help institutions design work environments that balance efficiency with well-being and acknowledge the reality of women's dual roles at home and at work **(Sundar & Selvam, 2023).**

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Work From Home

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an abrupt shift in how institutions operated, compelling educators across the world to transition almost overnight to Work From Home (WFH) arrangements. In many countries, including India and Indonesia, WFH was introduced as a safety-driven measure to ensure continuity of teaching and learning while reducing physical contact. Although teleworking had existed before, the pandemic transformed it from an optional practice into a mandatory work arrangement for most academic staff. **(Afrianty et al., 2021).** For women educators, the adoption of WFH meant navigating dual pressures from professional and domestic spheres. Studies show that women in teaching roles experienced both advantages—such as flexibility and reduced commuting—and challenges, including increased household duties, caregiving responsibilities, and technological adaptation. Many female educators were expected to manage online classes, family needs, and home routines simultaneously, often without adequate institutional support. **(Sundar & Selvam, 2023).** Furthermore, educators encountered practical issues such as digital infrastructure limitations, a lack of adequate workspace, and constantly changing expectations from institutions. Despite these challenges, WFH revealed opportunities for rethinking flexible teaching models, especially in regions like Himachal Pradesh, where geographical barriers often affect access to resources. **(Yusoff et al., 2022).**

2.2 Work Productivity

Work productivity during WFH became a major concern for higher education systems as teachers were expected to uphold instructional quality while working in unfamiliar home environments. Evidence from studies among university staff suggests that productivity under WFH conditions depends heavily on technological readiness, digital orientation, and institutional support. Educators with stronger digital skills and access to robust online platforms were better able to adapt to remote teaching requirements. **(Afrianty et al., 2021).** For women educators, productivity during WFH was influenced by the intersection of professional expectations and domestic responsibilities. Research in similar contexts showed that lecturers faced increased pressure to meet online teaching demands, supervise students, and manage research activities while simultaneously navigating heightened caregiving duties. As household and childcare responsibilities increased during the pandemic, many female educators reported declines in their ability to maintain the same level of productivity they achieved in traditional work settings. **(Nwangwa, 2021).** Despite these challenges, some women educators recognised positive aspects of WFH that supported productivity, such as reduced commuting time and greater autonomy in planning work schedules. Yet, the balance between home and work often remained fragile, indicating that productivity under WFH for women educators is shaped by both personal and structural factors. **(Sundar & Selvam, 2023).** Many reported difficulty separating work duties from household needs, especially when digital access and workspace were limited. In areas such as Himachal Pradesh, where digital infrastructure is uneven, educators often faced connectivity issues, limited devices, and frequent disruptions that made WFH even more challenging **(Yusoff et al., 2022).**

2.3 Work Stress

The sudden shift to remote teaching during the pandemic also intensified work-related stress among educators. Stress levels increased as teachers confronted new digital tools, sustained screen time, unfamiliar pedagogical practices, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Prior studies confirm that remote work can lead to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and psychological strain, especially when individuals struggle to mentally detach from work. The shift to digital teaching increased stress due

to screen fatigue, rapid technological adaptation, and blurred work–life boundaries **(Xiao et al., 2021).** Women educators experienced amplified stress due to the simultaneous demands of professional responsibilities and domestic care duties. Research shows that balancing home, caregiving, and online teaching created significant strain, particularly for female teachers managing children and elderly family members during lockdowns. The "triple burden"—managing the household, caregiving, and professional roles—became a defining stressor for many women in the education sector during COVID-19. **(Dogra & Kaushal, 2022).** Research conducted across countries—including India, Germany, Poland, and Ireland—shows similar trends, with women teachers reporting more stress and work–life imbalance than men **(Alves et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2021; Klapproth et al., 2020).** Qualitative accounts also reveal how work stress spilled into personal life, especially for those who were supporting children with online learning while fulfilling their teaching roles **(Leo et al., 2022).** High stress levels not only affected well-being but also increased the risk of burnout and long-term dissatisfaction with the teaching profession. Additionally, work–life imbalance and the lack of supervisory and peer support contributed to heightened work stress. Studies indicate that stress increases when educators face unclear job expectations, continuously shifting online teaching requirements, and insufficient technological support. Prolonged exposure to such pressures may undermine well-being and reduce overall work productivity, highlighting the complex interplay between WFH, productivity, and stress. **(Irawanto et al., 2021)**

Research Gap

Although existing studies have examined work from home, work stress, and work productivity among educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, significant gaps remain. Most research has addressed these variables independently, with limited empirical focus on the mediating role of work productivity in the relationship between work from home and work stress, particularly among women educators. Moreover, region-specific evidence from Himachal Pradesh is scarce, despite its unique challenges such as uneven digital infrastructure, geographical constraints, and limited institutional support. The gendered impact of work from home, where women educators faced intensified domestic and caregiving responsibilities alongside professional demands, has not been adequately analysed within a mediation framework. Therefore, there is a clear need for a focused study examining the impact of work from home on work stress, with work productivity as a mediating variable, among women educators in higher education institutions in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic.

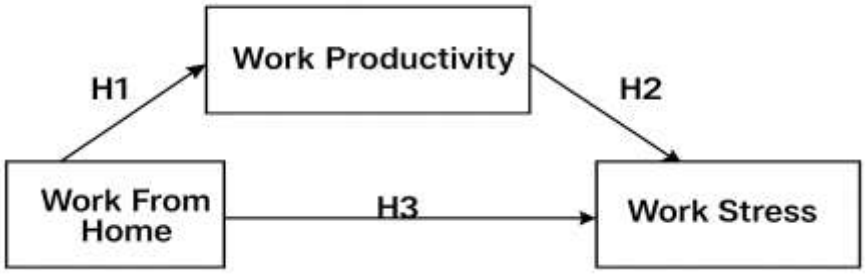

Figure 2.4: The Conceptual Model in this research

- **Independent Variable (IV):** Work From Home (WFH)
- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Work Stress (WS)
- **Mediating Variable (MV):** Work Productivity (WP)

2.5 Objectives

- To examine the relationship between Work From Home (WFH) and Work Stress among women educators during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To assess the effect of Work Productivity on Work Stress among women educators. To investigate the influence of Work From Home (WFH) on the Work Productivity of women educators.
- To determine whether Work Productivity mediates the relationship between Work From Home (WFH) and Work Stress.

2.6 Hypothesis

H1: WFH is positively associated with Work Stress. (WFH → WS)
H2: Work Productivity is positively associated with Work Stress. (WP → WS)
H3: WFH is positively associated with Work Productivity. (WFH → WP)
H4: Work Productivity partially mediates the relationship between WFH and Work Stress. (WFH → WP → WS)

3. METHODOLOGY

The empirical analysis is based on a quantitative approach to understanding the link between the variables measured (work from home, work productivity and work stress) through the research instruments. It uses both primary data (through an online and offline questionnaire to collect demographic information and data about variables) and secondary data (academic articles, publications, and other resources). The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to capture women teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The population comprised 5,373 women educators employed in higher education institutions across Himachal Pradesh. Using a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and a population proportion of .50, the required sample size was calculated as 359. Respondents were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across institution types, disciplines, and districts. The responses of the participants were collected based on the 5-point Likert scale. The structured questionnaire consisted of four sections: - Demographic Profile (15 items), Work from Home (12 items), Work Productivity (8items) and Work Stress (10 items).

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the degree of internal consistency (Hair et al., 1998). In this study, all α coefficients were found to be in the allowable levels, from 0.749 to 0.870, indicating the items' right internal consistency. The results revealed that the Working from home scale with twelve items (a = .951), the work stress scale with ten items (a =.941), and the work productivity scale with eight items (a=.883) were found reliable. Reliability results (α coefficients) are summarised in Table 4.1

Table 4.1: Internal Consistency Values (Cronbach's Alpha)

Factors	No. of Items	Alpha (α)
Work From Home	12	.951
Work Stress	10	.941
Work Productivity	8	.883

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the associations among Work From Home (WFH), Work Productivity (WP), and Work Stress (WS). All correlations were strong, positive, and statistically significant.

Table 4.2 : Correlation Matrix

Variables	WFH	WP	WS
WFH	1	.91**	.94**
WP	.91**	1	.91**
WS	.94**	.91**	1

4.3 Hypothesis testing

H1: WFH is positively associated with Work Stress. (WFH → WS)

Table 4.3.1: Regression Summary for WFH Predicting Work Stress (H1)

Predictor	B	SE	B	t	P
WFH	0.80	0.02	.94	53.21	< .001

Interpretation: A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether **Work From Home (WFH)** predicts **Work Stress (WS)**. The overall model was statistically significant, **F(1, 358) = 2831.40, p < .001**, indicating that WFH is a significant predictor of work stress.

The model explained **88.8% of the variance** in WS (**R^2 = .888**), suggesting a very strong predictive relationship. The unstandardized regression coefficient for WFH was **B = 0.796**, indicating that **for every one-unit increase in WFH, Work Stress increases by approximately 0.80 units**. The standardised beta coefficient was **β = .942**, showing a very strong positive relationship between the variables. The predictor was statistically significant (**t = 53.21, p < .001**), demonstrating that increases in WFH are strongly associated with increases in WS. Because the significance value is well below .05, we ***reject the null hypothesis (H_0)*** *and conclude that* ***WFH significantly affects Work Stress***

H2: Work Productivity is positively associated with Work Stress (WP → WS)

Table 4.3.2: Regression Summary for WP Predicting Work Stress (H2)

Predictor	B	SE	B	t	P
WP	0.63	0.01	.91	42.63	< .001

Interpretation: The linear regression results show that Work From Home (WFH) has a significant positive effect on Work Productivity (WP),

F(1,358) = 1817.594, p < .001, with an **R^2 of .835**, indicating that **83.5% of the variation in Work Productivity is explained by Work From Home**. The unstandardized coefficient (B ≈ **0.627**) suggests that **for every one-unit increase in WFH, Work Productivity increases by approximately 0.63 units**. The 95% confidence interval for B, **[0.598, 0.656]**, does not include zero, further confirming statistical significance. The effect is strong and statistically significant, indicating that increased levels of WFH strongly predict higher WP. Since **p < .05**, we *reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1).*

H3: WFH is positively associated with Work Productivity (WFH → WP)

Table 4.3.3: Regression Summary for WFH Predicting Work Productivity (H3)

Predictor	B	SE	B	T	p
WFH	0.63	0.01	.91	42.63	< .001

Interpretation: A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether Work From Home (WFH) predicts Work Productivity (WP). The overall regression model was statistically significant, **F(1, 358) = 1817.594, p < .001**, indicating that WFH is a significant predictor of WP. The model explained **83.5% of the variance in Work Productivity (R^2 = .835)**, which suggests a very strong level of predictive power. The regression coefficient for WFH was positive and statistically significant, **B = .63, SE = .01**, **t(358) = 42.63, p < .001**, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from **0.598 to 0.656**. This indicates that **for every one-unit increase in WFH, Work Productivity increases by approximately 0.63 units**. Because the confidence interval does not include zero, the effect is confirmed as statistically meaningful. These results indicate that **Work from Home significantly increases Work Productivity**. Employees who report higher levels of WFH tend to demonstrate substantially higher productivity levels. Since **p < .05**, *the null hypothesis is rejected, supporting the conclusion that **WFH is a strong and significant predictor of WP***.

H4: Work Productivity partially mediates the relationship between WFH and Work Stress (WFH → WP → WS)

Table 4.3.4: Mediation Analysis (H4): WFH → WP → WS

Effect	B	SE	T	P	95% CI
Path a (WFH → WP)	0.63	0.01	42.63	< .001	[.60, .66]
Path b (WP → WS)	0.34	0.05	6.64	< .001	[.24, .44]
Direct Effect (c')	0.58	0.03	16.78	< .001	[.52, .65]
Total Effect (c)	0.80	0.02	53.21	< .001	[.77, .83]
Indirect Effect	0.21	0.03	-	-	[.15, .28]

Interpretation: To examine whether Work Productivity (WP) mediates the relationship between Work From Home (WFH) and Work Stress (WS), a mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS approach.

Path a: Effect of WFH on Work Productivity (WP)

The first regression model showed that WFH significantly predicted WP. The model explained a substantial proportion of variance (**R^2 = .8354**). The results revealed that **WFH positively influenced work productivity** (β = 0.6272, SE = 0.0147, t = 42.63, p < .001), indicating that higher levels of WFH were associated with increased productivity.

Path b and c′: Effect of WP and WFH on Work Stress (WS)

In the second model, both WFH and WP were entered as predictors of work stress. The model explained **90% of the variance** in WS (**R^2 = .9001**) and was statistically significant (p < .001). The findings revealed that:

- WFH had a **significant direct effect** on WS (β = 0.5841, SE = 0.0348, t = 16.78, p < .001).
- WP also had a **significant positive effect** on WS (β = 0.3371, SE = 0.0507, t = 6.64, p < .001).

These results show that both WFH and WP independently contribute to increasing work stress.

Total Effect (c): Effect of WFH on Work Stress (WS) Before Mediation

Before including the mediator, WFH had a strong and significant effect on WS (β = 0.7955, SE = 0.0150, t = 53.21, p < .001), demonstrating that greater involvement in WFH leads to higher perceived stress.

Indirect Effect: Mediation via Work Productivity (WP)

The indirect effect of WFH on WS through WP was **significant** (Effect = 0.2114, BootSE = 0.0336, 95% CI [0.1453, 0.2777]). Since the confidence interval does not include zero, this confirms that **work productivity partially mediates** the relationship between WFH and work stress. Overall, the mediation analysis revealed that:

- WFH increases work stress **directly** (c′ = 0.5841), and
- WFH also increases work stress **indirectly** through its positive effect on work productivity (indirect effect = 0.2114).

Because both the direct and indirect effects are significant, this demonstrates a **partial mediation**, indicating that WP explains part—but not all—of the relationship between WFH and work stress. ***Work Productivity partially mediated the effect of WFH on Work Stress. H4 was supported.***

5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

The study aims to understand the impact of the Work From Home (WFH) paradigm on the job-related perceptions of women educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study establishes statistically significant positive correlations between WFH and Work Stress. This means that WFH increases the level of work-related stress. This finding corroborates literature that asserts increased work-related stress due to excessive workload (as is the case with WFH), the absence of work-home boundaries, the role of home and work conflict, digital fatigue, and so on. Equally, positive correlation between WFH and Work Productivity means that women educators were flexible and resilient and were willing to do their best to work toward achieving the goals of their institution. The shift to online teaching required the development of digital competencies, mastery of alternative instructional strategies, and learning of new and time-consuming preparation work. Above all, work productivity is the product of professional accountability and institutional goals. The study further revealed that stress and productivity are directly related. This means that there was a psychological price that women educators had to pay as a result of their increased productivity. Productivity gained during the pandemic achieved as a result of remote work is a major emotional burden. The mediation analysis provides further clarity by confirming that **Work Productivity partially mediates the relationship between WFH and Work Stress**. This suggests that WFH causes stress both directly and indirectly—directly through environmental and situational challenges, and indirectly through the pressure to maintain high productivity when working from home. The partial mediation underscores that productivity demands intensified the stress experienced by women educators but did not fully explain it. Overall, the discussion reveals that while WFH enhanced productivity, it also significantly increased stress levels. This underscores the importance of organizational policies that balance performance expectations with psychological well-being, especially for women educators who often balance professional and household responsibilities simultaneously.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the impact of Work From Home (WFH) on Work Stress (WS) among women educators in Himachal Pradesh during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a specific focus on the mediating role of Work Productivity (WP). The findings provide strong and consistent evidence that WFH significantly influences both work stress and productivity levels, and that productivity plays an important mediating role in this relationship. First, the results revealed a strong and positive relationship between WFH and Work Stress, indicating that increased engagement in WFH significantly elevated stress levels among women educators. The regression model showed that WFH alone explained a substantial proportion of variance in work stress, confirming that the shift to remote work contributed to heightened psychological pressures and workload demands. Second, the study found a strong positive association between WFH and Work Productivity, showing that working from home also led to increases in productivity. Despite the challenges posed by remote teaching, women educators appeared to adapt by maintaining or enhancing their performance levels, possibly due to flexible scheduling, increased autonomy, or the need to adjust to new work expectations. Third, the findings confirmed that Work Productivity is significantly associated with Work Stress, demonstrating that higher productivity levels were accompanied by increased stress. This suggests that while educators were able to perform well under WFH conditions, maintaining high productivity may have contributed to additional strain. Finally, the mediation analysis showed that Work Productivity partially mediates the relationship between WFH and Work Stress. This means that while WFH directly increases stress, a part of this effect is explained by the increased productivity demands placed on educators during remote work. In other words, WFH not only heightens stress on its own but also contributes to higher productivity expectations, which in turn intensify stress levels. Overall, the study concludes that WFH significantly increases both productivity and stress among women educators, and that productivity serves as a partial mechanism through which WFH contributes to stress. These findings highlight the dual nature of remote work—offering potential productivity benefits while simultaneously elevating stress levels. The results underscore the need for educational institutions to develop support systems, balanced workloads, and mental health resources to ensure that productivity gains do not come at the cost of employee well-being.

7. LIMITATION

1. Geographical Limitation: The study was limited to women educators in Himachal Pradesh, which may restrict generalizability to other regions.
2. Cross-Sectional Design: Data were collected at a single point in time, preventing causal inferences.
3. Self-Reported Measures: Responses may be subject to bias such as social desirability or subjective interpretation.
4. Pandemic Context: Findings may reflect unique pandemic-related pressures, which may differ under normal circumstances.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, it is recommended that educational institutions provide stronger support systems to reduce stress among women educators working from home. This includes offering digital training, managing workloads more effectively, and establishing clear boundaries to promote work–life balance. Institutions should also introduce mental health and wellness programs to help educators cope with

increased stress and productivity demands. Improving technical infrastructure and considering flexible or hybrid work arrangements may further enhance productivity while minimising stress.

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