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Hybrid work models and women's mental health: A post-pandemic evaluation of the banking sector in Bengaluru city

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Abstract

The swift advancement of digital technology within Bengaluru's banking sector, often referred to as the "Silicon Valley of India," has resulted in the adoption of hybrid work models. While these arrangements provide flexibility, they have distinctively influenced the mental health of female employees who must balance a demanding work environment with longstanding socio-cultural expectations. This research article presents an extensive post-pandemic assessment of women's mental health in Bengaluru's banking industry by analysing secondary data. It utilizes Boundary Theory, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions to investigate the gender-specific experiences associated with hybrid work. The study identifies a "triple burden" comprising professional obligations, household responsibilities, and eldercare that is particularly relevant to urban Indian women. Results indicate that although hybrid work alleviates some commuting stress characteristic of Bengaluru, it intensifies issues related to digital fatigue and blurred roles. Furthermore, a notable "visibility gap" has been identified that heightens anxiety concerning career development. The paper concludes with recommendations for gender-sensitive support systems such as "Right to Disconnect" policies and localized co-working spaces aimed at enhancing the psychological well-being of women in finance.

Keywords: Bengaluru banking, hybrid work, women's mental health, role blurring, post-pandemic evaluation

Introduction

Bengaluru is recognized globally as a centre for the Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance (BFSI) sector. In addition to traditional retail banking services, the city also hosts substantial Global Capability Centers (GCCs) for major international corporations including Goldman Sachs, HSBC, and Standard Chartered. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift away from traditional "command-and-control" office environments towards hybrid models that combine remote and on-site work. For women in Bengaluru, this transition occurs at a convergence point between contemporary professional goals and entrenched cultural norms. The banking industry is characterized by stringent deadlines and a zero-tolerance policy for errors, creating significant psychological pressures on employees. When these pressures spill over into domestic life, they result in conflicts that go beyond mere work-life balance struggles often leading to chronic stress levels or burnout. This article explores whether hybrid work arrangements represent a viable long-term solution for women or merely obscure existing structural inequalities affecting their mental health.

Review of Literature

1. **Vikas & Varalakshmi (2022)** ^[9]: Reported that female workers in Bengaluru's service sector experienced a 40% rise in household responsibilities during remote working periods compared to their male counterparts.
2. **Deloitte India (2023)** ^[3]: Indicated that "flexibility" within Indian banks often means being available at all times this disproportionately impacts women's ability to mentally disengage from work.
3. **Rajkumari (2022)** ^[7]: Discussed how hybrid working conditions lead women into a "second shift," where they handle office tasks after completing their domestic duties.

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4. **IWWAGE (2023)** ^[5]: Observed that insufficient informal networking opportunities in hybrid environments have created barriers for women feeling excluded from decision-making processes.
5. **Bloom (2024)** ^[1]: Found evidence suggesting while hybrid arrangements may reduce turnover rates among staff members; they risk forming a two-tier workforce where women working remotely are overlooked for promotions compared to their male colleagues present in-office due to proximity bias.
6. **NASSCOM (2024)** ^[6]: Reported that female bank employees experience 15% greater technostress than males due to constant digital connectivity demands.
7. **Srivastava (2021)** ^[8]: Highlighted challenges faced by mid-career women referred to as part of the “Sandwich Generation,” who care for both children and aging parents a situation exacerbated when both groups are home during working hours.
8. **Williams et al. (2013)** ^[10]: Noted that opting for more remote days can lead to perceptions of reduced commitment toward high-stakes banking roles among female employees termed “flexibility stigma.”
9. **Cisco (2022)** ^[2]: Discovered while commuting-related stress has lessened; there was an observed 25% increase in cognitive load associated with switching between professional responsibilities and maternal roles.
10. **World Health Organization (2022)** ^[11]: Warned about how lacking physical boundaries inherent within hybrid setups contributes significantly towards burnout syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion coupled with decreased professional efficacy.

Research Gap

Despite extensive global literature regarding hybrid work dynamics overall experiences specific to female bankers based out Bangalore remain under-explored; existing studies tend either too broadly cover various sectors across India or homogenously treat IT alongside Banking industries without addressing unique local infrastructural issues such as traffic congestion/urban density or factors specific solely affecting BFSI's high-security digital landscape impacting mental wellness amidst pandemic recovery efforts.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess how psychological effects stemming from adopting hybrid job structures influence female staff members employed within Bengaluru's financial domain.
2. To explore sociocultural elements like domestic expectations/cultural norms impacting mental wellness throughout transitions into flexible working configurations.
3. To identify organizational-related stressors arising post-pandemic uniquely affecting operations within banks serving this region specifically targeting woman-centric concerns therein.
4. To propose solutions involving multiple stakeholders aiming at reinforcing better psychological states amongst females engaged professionally across these sectors.

Methodology

This research employs qualitative descriptive research design built upon secondary data analysis encompassing various reliable sources:

- a. **Data Sources:** Industry reports produced by NASSCOM/Zinnov/Deloitte India along peer-reviewed journals alongside mental health surveys conducted via organizations such as APA & WHO covering years ranging between 2021 and 25.
- b. **Contextual Focus:** Data evaluated revolves primarily around specifics pertaining directly to BFSIs/GCCs located exclusively throughout areas encompassing Bangalore city limits.
- c. **Analytical Tool:** Thematic synthesis was utilized categorizing identified stressors falling under three main domains namely Physical/Psychological/Sociocultural classifications respectively.

Theoretical Frameworks - Sociological Perspective

Boundary Theory & Role Permeability: This theory posits individuals construct 'mental barriers' distinguishing various societal roles; however those boundaries appear diminished presently given circumstances surrounding current banking practices here locally.

1. **Role Blurring:** In workplace settings one identifies simply as 'Banker', yet upon returning home must simultaneously embody identities like 'Mother/Daughter-in-law'; under hybrids these distinctions merge spatially complicating matters further still
2. **Commute Ritual:** From sociological standpoint daily commutes despite frustrations provide vital transitional periods allowing necessary shifts out-from high-pressure contexts relating financial audits/client management which now absent hinder effective disengagement processes required during non-work hours altogether

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Applying Hofstede's model specifically onto Indian context reveals important cultural nuances:

1. **Collectivism:** Expectation prevailing wherein families anticipate prioritization around collective needs often places additional burdens onto women's shoulders especially evident since family members perceive them readily 'available' regardless if technically marked 'Working from Home.'
2. **Power Distance:** Steep hierarchies prevalent within banks foster conditions leading many females experiencing 'Presenteeism Anxiety' compelling immediate responses towards managerial communications lest they risk perceptions displaying laxity amid domestic chores attended concurrently elsewhere outside workplace boundaries altogether

Job Demands - Resources Model

Stress accrues when job demands exceed available resources needed adequately mitigate pressures faced thus increasing likelihood burnout scenarios arising amidst continued demands characteristic modern financial environments today regarding always-on digital cultures established lately seen rising above normal levels previously held prior times overall shifting paradigms occurring continuously

throughout organization-wide transformations undertaken recently observed

Conceptualization of Hybrid Work Models in Banking

In relation specifically targeting practices adopted across Bangalore simply classified into three categories:

- a) **Fixed Hybrid Arrangement:** Typically involves 3 days spent onsite followed up by remaining 2 hours allotted remotely generally common among investment portfolios/banking jobs performed actively elsewhere too
- b) **Flexible Hybrid Arrangement:** Allows discretion based upon project timelines emphasizing completion targets rather than set schedules themselves equally shared among teams involved
- c) **Global Clock Model:** Necessitates aligning working hours according US/UK time zones creating added strain particularly evident facing mothers juggling early morning routines alongside other commitments present daily life situations outside normal business cycles alike

Problems Identified Within Post Pandemic Environment

a. Triple Burden Leading To Mental Fatigue

Urban structures frequently comprised nuclear family units lacking robust support networks/migrant populations residing temporary accommodations post-COVID led increased expectations fall unfairly against primary caregivers managing workload effectively balanced against additional duties tied closely surrounding home/Eldercare dynamics observed increasingly felt pervasive sense chronic fatigue ensued accordingly without adequate relief mechanisms instituted whatsoever previously discussed herein .

b. Digital Surveillance and Zoom Anxiety

Banks enforced stricter monitoring procedures ensuring security protocols adhered strictly hence leading woman experiencing feelings akin panopticism wherein perceived constantly watched elevates cortisol production stifling relaxation opportunities even short breaks taken intermittently throughout day itself resulting dangerously heightened anxieties build steadily over time if unaddressed properly moving forward.

c. Proximity Bias Causing Career Uncertainty

A core source psychological distress emerges linked directly fear missing valuable opportunities arising spontaneous mentorship encounters assigned projects likely missed altogether leaving impression lowered status amongst peers subsequently influencing future prospects negatively causing ongoing worry levels escalate exponentially thereafter thus inhibiting potential growth trajectories experienced regularly therein.

d. Physical Wellbeing Manifesting As Psychological Distress

Poor ergonomic setups commonplace found prevalent within many households ultimately contribute musculoskeletal discomfort when compounded further combined lack natural sunlight exposure leads deficiencies developing linked ultimately down depressive thoughts spiralling hopelessness slowly overtaking daily routines eventually unless proactively managed sooner rather than later preventing deterioration worsening consistently

expected outcomes otherwise anticipated initially intended instead

Potential Support Systems and Solutions

a. Organizational Level

1. Implement Right-To-Disconnect Policy mandating no emails/pings sent post designated hour thereby preventing unnecessary interruptions disrupting downtime needed focus entirely redirected elsewhere appropriately thereafter accordingly.
2. Establish Localized Satellite Offices enabling workers closer communities reducing travel burden whilst promoting healthy separation boundaries maintained intact successfully accomplished through strategic designs pursued collectively shared interests together collaboratively engaging all parties involved likewise importantly .
3. Shift Performance Metrics moving away measuring purely 'Hours Logged' towards focusing on measurable outcomes achieved instead ideally fostering productivity improvements encouraging healthier lifestyles embraced holistically going ahead future endeavours pursued mutually beneficial ventures explored concurrently .

b. Societal and Family Level

Domestic Equality Campaigns advocating equitable distribution household chores crucially emphasized prerequisite success implementing strategies underpinning adaptability necessary navigate changing realities encountered regularly.

c. Psychological Level

Virtual Resilience Training programs introduced through workshops centered around mindfulness/boundary management tailored explicitly targeted addressing unique pressures confronting specifically aimed towards assisting improving coping skills developed proactively beforehand whenever possible ensuring readiness prepared tackling upcoming challenges foreseen down road ahead easily manageable thereafter potentially achieving desired results sought after consistently realized afterward attained ultimately reflecting progress made gradually over time hereafter occurring naturally flowing seamlessly integrated fully into everyday lives lived routinely henceforth onward indefinitely transitioning continuously evolving progressively adapting methods applied aptly suited needs catering best fit grounded realities encountered persistently ongoing .

Conclusion

Bengaluru's banking sector's transition toward incorporating hybrid models represents significant advancements promoting inclusivity however currently remains fraught challenges undermining women's mental health status adversely affected through blurring lines drawn separating personal/professional lives previously upheld firmly before recent developments took place altering fundamentals established originally laid groundwork foundation supporting success envisioned entirely persistent dilemmas arise replacing former traffic-induced stresses enveloping everyday existence now compounded further conflicting roles assumed simultaneously necessitating urgent attention placed rectifying imbalances created harmoniously aligned

priorities reaffirming commitment safeguarding welfare protecting interests paramount sustained progress achieved continuously striving maintain equilibrium foster growth flourishing universally beneficial outcomes realized enjoyed sustainably feasible attainable reaching aspirations boldly pursued onwards together collaboratively progressing forthwith henceforth ensuring stability retained throughout ever-changing landscape permeated complexities presented daily navigating intricacies underlying human experiences lived continually sharing insights gained expanding horizons collectively foster understanding engender compassion guiding pathways illuminated brighter futures envisioned all around us unfolding swiftly embracing possibilities await eagerly discovering what lies ahead next journey unfolds before eyes waiting patiently willing take steps follow suit alike forging connections bridging gaps spanning divides linking hearts minds souls united striving greater good uplifting spirits nurturing hope inspiring generations inspire action paving way forward ushering brighter tomorrows beckoning warmly inviting embrace welcoming arms opened wide .

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