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## Employees Working from Home During Covid-19 and Potential Mental Health Challenges

Jena Graham  
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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Jena Graham

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Employees Working from Home During Covid-19 and Potential Mental Health  
Challenges

by

Jena Graham

MA, University of Oklahoma 2019

BA, Ashford University 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

Walden University

November 2024

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a rise in employees working from home (WFH), raising concerns regarding the mental health experiences of remote workers. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the impact of WFH on employee's mental health, focusing on how the WFH model has affected the emotional health of remote workers. The lived experiences of 9 WFH employees 22 years and older who worked from home during the pandemic were explored via Zoom semistructured interviews. The framework of the study was Cognitive Evaluation Theory. Content analysis of the data was conducted to code and identify categories and themes. Emergent themes included: remote workers experienced employment status changes during WFH policies, employment status shifted due to WFH transition, WFH policies affected workers' productivity, WFH transition interfered with personal life balance, remote work distanced colleague relationships and collaboration, employer support mitigated remote workers' stress. The study may lead to positive social change social change by improving the quality of life of remote workers, promoting mental well-being, and enhancing productivity during remote work arrangements. The study aligns with the social determinants of health by addressing key factors such as economic stability, social support networks, and access to healthcare, which are critical for remote workers' well-being.

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## Dedication

First and foremost, I would like to thank God Almighty. His guidance, strength, and wisdom have been with me every step of the way. I am grateful for the countless blessings, the resilience to overcome challenges, and the inspiration that sustained me through difficult moments. Without His unfailing love and grace, this accomplishment would not have been possible. To God be the glory for the wisdom, peace, and perseverance that allowed me to achieve this milestone.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Ronald Graham whose support, wisdom, and encouragement have shaped the person I am today. Though you are no longer with me, your spirit, love, and lessons continue to guide me every day. This accomplishment is a testament to your belief in me, and I hope it brings honor to your memory. I miss you deeply and carry your legacy in everything I do. This one is for you, Dad.

To my partner, for being my anchor and my greatest source of motivation. And to my family, friends, and mentors, who have provided me with guidance, inspiration, and laughter along the way.

Thank you all for standing by my side and for your invaluable contributions to my success.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 outbreak and its rapid spread caused a significant global depression that also affected the world's economic status (Wang et al., 2021). Consequently, most employers were forced to adjust to the pandemic by letting their workers carry out their duties by working from home (WFH) to reduce the Coronavirus transmission and keep workers' safety (Wang et al., 2021). However, greater cognitive stress and emotional exhaustion associated with reduced social support from colleagues and other factors caused the reason for concern associated with the mental health of the many employees of WFH (Brooks et al., 2020). Employees across the United States have dealt with experienced compelled social distancing and unexpected interruptions to families and supportive structures distortions including the loss of family members and friends. These interruptions have also caused long-term financial anxieties, an overall unpredictability of situations apart from direct worries that were brought about by the coronavirus (Galimova & Shakirova, 2020).

WFH caused workers to experience reduced daily physical activities, increased intake of irregular meals, obese conditions, less sleeping time, and general body pains (Di Renzo et al., 2020). Galimova and Shakirova (2020) noted that WFH causes mental effects that range from high anxiety levels anxiety, body pains and fatigue, deep stress and depression, and reduced work satisfaction, which could eventually lead to life-threatening health conditions such as heart attacks and respiratory problems. The effects are likely to cause employees' low performance and poor health According to Di Renzo

et al. (2020), poor mental health resulting from WFH reduces the employees' work output, hence reduced productivity, and also their physical capability, which affects their normal functioning, and workers are more likely to develop depression that is solved by expensive healthcare services for some individuals, especially obese employees who are associated with smoking.

### **Background of the Study**

The current economic and health frustrations have been brought about by the pandemic, a situation that has resulted in changing working environments and doing many jobs over the internet (Chen, 2021). For many employees, mostly professional workers employed in offices, their homes became their workplaces (Kara et al., 2021). WFH employees occupied family space for their work needs, and, in this regard, they experienced distractions from their children as well as doing house chores during working hours (Sunyoung et al., 2021). The sharing of space has created a conflict between work and family. As a result, the workers found it hard to create a balance between family and work, causing reduced job productivity, thus compelling employers to consider how to mitigate this impact (Song & Gao, 2020). WFH has caused diverse effects such as social distancing, disturbances in working environments, and family and work imbalances, a situation that has also negatively impacted employees' mental and physical health. Furthermore, many employees have to pay for the internet costs and electricity themselves (Brooks et al., 2020).

According to Song and Gao (2020), isolation and quarantine were the most effective part of the containment strategy during the pandemic, but the isolation of

employees could lead to low productivity for jobs that need teamwork. Moreover, the relationship between coworkers has also changed due to changes in daily interactions with the introduction of supportive technologies that allow them to work miles apart (Song & Gao, 2020). Allen et al. (2021) reported that some employees have revealed that they are distracted by children and some of their kin along with obscured dividing lines between jobs and home life that have led to overstraining. Similarly, many remote workers were tempted to continue working beyond the usual working hours due to the flexibility that arises when one works from home (Chen, 2021). The adverse effects that have been caused on organizational and physical boundaries between home and workplace have added to the negative impacts on the employees' physical and mental health status because of the long hours spent at work, inadequate capability for workers to draw lines between home and work and minimal support from employers (DeFilippis et al., 2020). The situation of WFH, which was inevitable, is complex and requires a structurally orderly investigation to determine the effect it brings on organizations, employers, and the overall health conditions it causes on employees.

Cottone (2017) indicated that data from phenomenological studies are significantly accurate and reliable; hence, this information brought about the determination of a need for more research that could lead to obtaining objectives for the current study. This current study applied a qualitative phenomenological research approach using interviews carried out on Zoom, a popular communication platform in the COVID-19 era.



The research method in the study was appropriate because it may enhance the reliability of the findings due to their improved accuracy. Using qualitative analysis, researchers can extract appropriate information concerning the participants' feelings, views, and life experiences, enhancing accurate result interpretations (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This study has been validated by the fact that a qualitative approach with a flexible method has been used.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The COVID-19 disease has rapidly altered the way workers carry out their duties and their workplace, wherein a significant percentage of employees in the United States shifted to WFH in May 2020 (Chen, 2021). In this regard, substantial concerns have arisen about the well-being and mental health of employees who WFH (Brooks et al., 2020). Many employers have allowed their employees to carry out their duties remotely to mitigate the rate of COVID-19. Xiao et al. (2021) noted that employers should prioritize employees' WFH psychological and mental well-being.

Prasad et al. (2020) argued that the disease has already led to an immense rise in psychiatric health problems which, when not managed, could cause acute health conditions. Therefore, medical personnel have observed a significant interest in the way forward to safeguard the mental conditions and personal health of the employees during the time of the pandemic. Shankar et al. (2021) examined the best way to help employees who WFH. The results and conclusions tell employers the implicit systematic procedures optimal for helping electronic-based workers. Through analyzed empirical and assessed studies, it is obligatory to speak about the major experiences and perceptions of virtual

workers considering their mental health conditions. The WFH program introduced during the COVID-19 outbreak has been associated with anxiety, fear, and panic among workers who were compelled to WFH (Gunaydi, 2021). For instance, American workers have reported high degrees of anxiety and other mental problems since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak (Shuja et al., 2020).

A large number of employees with statistical coverage extensions have reported diverse observations on mental health issues (Guler et al., 2021). The reasons range from distinct factors such as education level and financial status. As a result, rescue procedures such as online surveillance and training may be functional for the remote workers' mental health welfare (Vahia et al., 2020). Additionally, the work procedures for remote workers may be conceptualized comprehensively considering the mental welfare and post-COVID-19 moves to promote the proportionality between work duties and family life (Autin et al., 2020).

From research, I have obtained a few pieces of information concerning the employees' perceptions regarding the concept of WFH and their mental health experiences although the earlier mentioned researchers regarding how COVID-19 affects the psychological health status of workers WFH reveal significant findings. From this observation, more research is needed to scrutinize what workers go through about their psychological health status brought about by WFH to explain the noted challenge of the problems related to anxiety that is caused by the WFH model (Guler et al., 2021).

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this structural and qualitative study, I sought to find out the life that remote e-workers go through about their mental health welfare from the WFH model during the COVID-19 period. I carried out in-depth assessments to gather information on how people interpret COVID-19 stressors about e-workers. Also, I intended to understand how deeply the employees who work from home may have been affected by emotional health conditions starting from work-related stress to persistent depressive disorders in the pandemic period. This study explains the psychological health conditions among the employees in the previous days, from the moment limiting conditions and compelled home-based work experience became increasingly daily practices to fill the existing gap. I realized that the noted results rely on data gathered during the start of the pandemic and, hence, cannot be used to accurately determine the present mental experiences among remote e-workers.

Addressing the declining mental health among employees is vital to health promotion, as it helps some of the most vulnerable employees in remote areas acquire skills during WFH years that result in improved health across the lifespan (Shankar, 2021). Employers can help eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health by encouraging employees to practice self-care and explore mental health resources available in their benefit plans. Steed et al. (2019) noted that employers can take steps that can include general discussions about mental health, as well as small pragmatic gestures such as encouraging employees to take breaks throughout the day, reminding employees to use their paid time off, and utilizing digital channels or virtual events for

employees to interact socially in a fun, non-work-related manner. Additionally, employers can organize training sessions for managers to help identify psychological condition issues among employees, allow for supple planning, review obtainable psychological health resources in workers' health schemes, communicate the attainability of measures that employees can turn to, such as Employee Assistance Programs, and encourage utilization. The probable social suggestions of this study include a significant positive impact toward gaining insights into the employees' experiences and perceptions and providing information to improve mental health for employees WFH. In this chapter, I evaluate the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, shape of the study, the definitions and assumptions involved, the extent and limits, constraints of the study, and its significance.

### **Research Question**

What life experiences do e-workers go through due to the application of the remote working approaches in the Covid-19 disease period?

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks**

This study analysis is argued from the perspective of cognitive evaluation theory (CET). Inherent motivation may contribute to or frustrate individual determination following which social and environmental determinants are in play (Sunyoung, 2021). Under CET, incomparable occurrences, payoffs, communication, and reactions that arouse feelings of competence when doing work promote inherent motivation for doing that task (Guler et al., 2021). The CET mechanism targets helping an individual change unconstructive thoughts and behaviors. According to Lurie et al. (2020), this approach is

a psychotherapy that aids a stressed individual to point out in time and control anxiety-related issues. Its mechanism is goal-focused and mainly includes homework (Chen, 2021). The homework is meant to assist the in-person sessions (Shankar et al., 2021). Working in isolation increases the feeling of loneliness and tiredness because home-based work during COVID-19 is done for long hours. Additionally, there are new workstation setups, work disturbances, and stress that result from this experience (Xiao et al., 2021). The daily jobs that used to involve employees working together and cooperating with supervisors now turned to be self-dependent, to the effect that pressure and boredom cause the workers to fail to meet their targets, thereby leading to overall anxiety (Brooks et al., 2020).

The theory applied to the study because it investigates the role that intrinsic motivation plays in manipulating the participant's experiences and perceptions regarding the given case study. The employer plays a role in providing guidance and motivation and in providing the needed resources to the employees who WFH in the time of the pandemic. In the WFH approach, the employer takes full responsibility for setting targets for the remote employees and intends that they attain their best results (Gunaydi, 2021). When an employer does not implement cooperative approaches to build teamwork and the appropriate social skills among remote employees, it reduces the performance level of the staff (Lurie et al., 2020). According to Vahia et al. (2020), this ends up making employees self-dependent, a factor that creates a gap among colleagues, and so they eventually develop stress. The theory of cognitive evaluation defines the adaptability that

workers and employers in such develop in adverse work situations and their self-motivation to attain the desired goals (Liu et al., 2021).

### **Nature of Study**

I used qualitative phenomenology. This approach was relevant because it helps in understanding the structure and normal life experiences of the participants. For the study, workers from all age groups with diverse occupations were the selected participants. This helps in exploring diverse experiences and perceptions regarding the impact that this model could bring from its implementation during the pandemic. In this procedure, participants were recruited and informed of their part in the research study. I let them know that the research was aimed at investigating their life experiences and what they thought about this subject of interest. I informed the participants about the procedure, including the interview sessions as well as the dangers and gains associated with participation in the study. Also, they were informed that they could leave the study at their convenience and that there would be no consequences for doing that. After data collection, the researcher pays attention to the trends and repeated patterns that occur in their details. I used nonprobability sampling to select the primary participants.

The sample size could be sufficient once the researcher establishes the saturation point, whereby subsequent interviews reveal similar and repeating themes to give detailed information for this study following the similar range of participants used in previous studies (Guler et al., 2021; Gunaydi, 2021; Lurie et al., 2020). To identify eligible participants to be included in the study, individuals with sound minds and of at least 30

years of age were considered, who must have worked from home for not less than 12 months since COVID-19 was declared a global issue.

I used thematic analysis to point out common issues across the participants' responses. This type of analysis was appropriate because it simplifies the understanding of the shared themes from specific questions depending on individual reactions (Shankar et al., 2021). The steps followed in this analysis that are based on themes included getting familiar with the data, coding it, using it to create themes, reassessing the themes, giving the theme appropriate names, and writing the data analysis. These steps were merged to create important ideas and patterns from the participants' responses (see Nowell et al., 2017). The analysis was guided by how the participants perceived and behaved relative to their personal experiences. This approach was used to analyze and clarify the data into appropriate themes and theories.

I determined researcher credibility by ensuring regular contact and check-ins with members and dividing them into respective groups. I also used adaptability and compliable approaches to determine reliability during the study. Researchers need to give solutions to the ideas of possible bias, political interference, racial, and gender challenges to ensure no significant challenge can interfere with the process of doing the research (Prasad et al., 2020).

For concerns regarding research ethics, I ensured that I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board before researching subjects concerning human life. In addition to the approval, I adhered to set regulations by filling out the consent form and ensuring the participants agreed to this requirement before taking part

in the study. I did an overview of the expected interview, ensuring every involved detail was covered. Finally, the collected details, reactions, and responses about the participants were reserved and kept confidential.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Addiction:* The fact or condition of being addicted to a particular substance or activity.

*COVID-19:* A transmittable disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

*Experiences:* An event or occurrence that leaves an impression on a person or people.

*Mental health:* A person's condition concerning their psychological and emotional well-being.

*Mindfulness:* A mental psychological state achieved by quietly observing and appreciating one's emotional being, way of thinking, and physical realizations while focusing one's mind on the current situations, utilized as a curative strategy.

*Perceptions:* The collection, classification, and interpretation of sensory data to represent and comprehend the provided information or environment.

*Telecommuting:* The practice of remote working, utilizing internet, emails, and telephone communications.

*Work from home (WFH):* An employment model where workers do not commute to the main workplace, such as a warehouse, an office building, or a store.



### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are things that are implied, and for purposes of this study, may be true and plausible based on the population and study design used (see Hering, 2020; Liu et al., 2021). First, participants in the study had to respond to the interview questions. Secondly, participants had to share their mental health experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of the WFH model. Lastly, the interviews and questions responses are confidential and were kept private.

### **Limitations, Barriers, Challenges, and Potential Data Sources**

The limitations of this study are brought about by the nature of the questions selected, the process involved in selecting them, and the challenge that comes with interpreting the reactions and responses. Depending on the interview that was used, I made use of theme analyses to arrange the participants' reactions and responses into regular themes to come up with specific patterns that determine how the involved individuals regard the issue of interest. My credibility and professionalism aided in ensuring that the interview was carried out smoothly with the least interference to the end and that data scrutiny was conducted at recommendable levels.

This study is subject to individual validity limitation because the participants may not be reliable in the information they give about their experiences and perceptions. This study was designed to exploit the survey approach where interviews are carried out with the participants and their reactions are arranged according to themes for analysis. According to Kabir (2016), it was essential to note that greatly diverse and unreliable responses were expected in this study. To counter the effect of this limitation, I had to

plan to ask questions diligently to guide the respondents in ensuring they gave consistent and relevant responses. Following how this limitation may affect the outcome, strict interpretation of data was exercised to ensure the pieces of information collected adhered to the responses gathered from each participant regarding their personal experiences for accurate presentation.

The approach used to contact participants was the main barrier to this study. This was a virtual survey because it did not have the aspect of interpersonal challenge. Galanti et al. (2021) observed that when some individuals think they are involved alone in the survey, they tend to give inaccurate information that cannot be reliable for analysis. Therefore, reaching individuals who could give reliable responses is a process that required a determined and appropriate approach. However, Hering (2020) and Liu et al. (2021) argued that apart from these challenges, reliable data from previous studies related to the topic together with self-reported information from participants can be used. This approach ensured that the impact of the limitations would be lessened for better analyses.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Delimitations comprise the boundaries set by a researcher upon which the study is based (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The participants were qualified professional employees working from their homes. The introductory part of this study gave the guideline on what was explored in this dissertation. The subsequent topics shed more knowledge about the topic of literature review, research methods, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for further reading as well as the conclusion of the study. This is one of the least explored topics and it creates a significant chance for future

researchers to get deeper into the issue of lived experiences and the participants' way of conceiving the issue under consideration.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research could add to the conceptualization of the lived experiences of previously office-based employees as they carry out their work from home during the COVID-19 outbreak. The study may give additional insights to employees and other essential stakeholders on ways to determine a favorable environment for work that enhances the psychological and mental welfare of those workers who work from home (Shankar et al., 2021). Individuals who can greatly gain from this research are organization managers, psychiatrists, human resources, and public health experts. It is important to understand the experience that remote workers go through to establish relevant intervention approaches to encounter increasing mental issues that are discussed.

The insight obtained may help companies improve remote workers' mental welfare by developing effective and relevant policies, functional working processes, and appropriate performance management structures (Sunyoung et al., 2021). Some of the groups that may gain from the results of this research are the American Psychological Association, the World Health Association, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, the International Labor Organization, and the National Institute of Mental Health. Human resource professionals may use the findings of this study to enhance the mental welfare of remote employees and develop workers' careers during the COVID-19 pandemic era. This development may be achieved by establishing policies that are human-friendly and that consider social values. On the same point, Brooks et al. (2020)

identified the mental health challenges that could be solved among employees because their awareness promotion provided them with information that enhanced their psychological well-being. The authors also observed that the findings helped professionals promote accessible services and train managers to face mental health problems. Therefore, creating a positive work environment is essential and this study may have a significantly reliable foundation for future research in this specialized area of interest.

### **Summary**

The COVID-19 disease and the resulting economic worsening have had a detrimental blow to the mental health of most individuals and caused new barriers for those who already have psychiatric diseases and substance abuse challenges. Employees in remotely working sectors have turned their homes into their workplaces (Kara et al., 2021). Many employers have allowed their workers to carry out their duties from home to reduce the rate of the spread of the disease. Because many employees have been forced to carry out their duties from their homes during the COVID-19 outbreak, significant concerns have arisen about their psychological health and well-being (Sunyoung et al., 2021). Thus, this qualitative phenomenological approach study investigated the lived experiences of remotely based e-workers taking into account their mental welfare from the WFH mechanism during the COVID-19 outbreak. This implies that more research is recommendable that could explore the psychological health experiences of employees during the pandemic to encounter the documented challenge of issues related to stress that is brought about by the WFH model.

As workers carry out their duties from home during the pandemic, the challenge of doing it in isolation has contributed to feelings of loneliness, fatigue due to prolonged working hours, changed working station setups, and possible disturbances that come from family members. These limitations have resulted in work dissatisfaction; hence, there has been stress and a decline in mental health. Addressing the declining mental health among employees is vital to health promotion, as it helps some of the most vulnerable employees in remote areas acquire skills during WFH years that result in improved health across the lifespan (Galanti et al., 2021). The study is guided by the following research question: What are remote workers' perceptions of the impact of working from home on their emotional health during the Covid-19 period? This research could add to the understanding of the previously office-based workers' lived experiences as they carry out their duties from their homes during the pandemic. The knowledge obtained may help organizations improve remote workers' mental welfare by developing the most relevant policies that can help workers work with efficient procedures and appropriate performance management structures.

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and explores themes that are relevant to the lived experiences and perceptions of employees about the implementation of the WFH model and its impacts on their mental health.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

During the COVID-19 outbreak, a significant effect on the work output was realized because workers could not commute to work (Kniffin et al., 2021). Research has suggested that the COVID-19 disease created disruptions on diverse working environments, with businesses, companies, and other institutions encouraging their personnel to carry out their duties remotely from home to keep their safety (DeFilippis et al., 2020). Particularly, the social segregation and confinement imposed to reduce the spread of Coronavirus compelled governments, public, and private institutions to reorganize their workforces to WFH (Kniffin et al., 2021).

WFH has become the new way of working for many employees across the globe (Sunyoung et al., 2021). Research has shown that many workers and enterprises had to suddenly and unexpectedly transferred to home working environments (Guler et al., 2021). Hering (2020) noted that a wide range of employees were recommended to carry out their full-time duties from home, altering the usual idea of WFH, which used to work for particular sorts of work, on occasion, or given special workers' conditions. This sudden shift to work remotely and other factors connected to the Coronavirus outbreak has provided a special framework for investigating the influence that WFH brings on both psychological and physical conditions (Gunaydi, 2021).

The WFH model continues to present numerous negative experiences. For example, studies have shown that people working remotely have reported experiencing high levels of burnout and detrimental effects on their mental health (Robinson, 2021).

Further impacting burnout, many WFH employees are also dealing with new tensions, additional household chores, and a deteriorating work-life balance as a result of the closing of schools, daycare centers, and public places (Sunyoung et al., 2021).

Conversely, many others living alone and who have moved to WFH while also isolating themselves socially are experiencing poor mental health (Shankar, 2021). These stressors have an impact. According to Tavares (2017), nearly half of adults with WFH endure stress, anxiety, or despair.

To gain more insight on psychosocial effects of the transition to working remotely during the COVID-19 outbreak, this qualitative study aimed to investigate the usual life experiences of former office employees concerning their mental welfare in the WFH model in the time of COVID-19 outbreak. The deployment of the WFH model has resulted in a variety of experiences and perceptions (Lurie et al., 2020; Shankar, 2021). While employees adapt to their working environments differently, when new working alternatives are implemented, not all employees may benefit in the same way (Hering, 2020). This study examined whether strategies like well-organized remote meetings and interviews, appropriate communication, staying in touch with staff members, and developing a positive WFH culture supported a positive work environment from a home experience.

A review of previous research on the study's main ideas is covered here in Chapter 2. I detail information on the COVID-19 pandemic, the WFH model, employee perceptions and experiences, mental health, and telecommuting. A review of qualitative methodology is included in this chapter's conclusion.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Literature searches were carried out via the Walden University Library, the CDCs, Elton B. Stephens Company, the National Center for Biotechnology Information, and SAGE databases from 2016 to 2022. In addition to PubMed and Research COVID-19, other search databases used were Work from Home, PLOS ONE, Psychological Reports, BMC Public Health, Psychological Medicine, Public Health, and Wiley Online Library. I found peer-reviewed literature with a particular emphasis on studies highlighting the growing concern about the mental effects of employees' WFH during the COVID-19 epidemic. The keywords and terms that were searched included the following: *COVID-19, older adults, mental health, perceptions, experiences, addiction, parenting, work-from-home, and telecommuting.*

### **Theoretical Framework**

CET was developed by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. This theory originated through laboratory studies in the early 1970s, which indicated that extrinsic rewards can reduce intrinsic drive in some circumstances (Riley, 2016). CET is a type of psychotherapy that aids a person experiencing stress to identify and handle stress-related issues including anxiety (Lurie et al., 2020). Ackerman (2019) noted that CET encompasses two significant factors: autonomy and competence. Additionally, Deci and Ryan (2020) reported that the environment and social context influence how competent an employee feels in the setting of the workplace.

A core concept of CET is intrinsic motivation. This motivation that is attained by enabling artificial agents is the innate, natural wish to pursue one's desires, magnify one's



capabilities, resulting to seeking out and overcoming physical obstacles (Sansone & Tang, 2021). Cultivation of these behavior-motivating factors can influence behavior even without extrinsic rewards or environmental-related barriers because they erupt from internal tendencies. To add to this fact, enabling artificial agents significantly promotes the learning and adaptability processes, and the development of the adequacies that are essential to human growth (Riley, 2016). Employees who feel competent and independent have an additional intrinsic drive. Therefore, the intrinsic drive generates positive effects on employees' motivation when participating in internal reasons activities as opposed to external (Locke & Schattke, 2018).

The motivation of enabling artificial agents can be either supported or impeded based on the environmental and societal factors observable (Sunyoung, 2021). Deci and Ryan's CET (2020) focused on the social and environmental changeable factors that motivate or negate intrinsic motivation and identified the major mental demands that need to be addressed by the individual to enhance self-motivation: autonomy, skillfulness, and connectedness. Autonomy involves having control over one's behavior; competence involves feeling effective in one's ability to meet tasks; and relatedness involves feeling connected to others.

Under CET, environmental and social factors like social interactions, external incentives, feedback from peers and management, and reactions that promote a sense of competence when performing a task all were found to increase intrinsic desire for that same task (Guler et al., 2021).

With its focus on intrinsic behaviors, the CET emphasizes assisting an individual in altering harmful ideas and habits. Hering (2020) reported that practitioners of CET adopt a goal-oriented methodology and frequently give their clients homework to supplement in-person meetings. In light of the COVID-19 disease, CET has grown more relevant for individuals who find it difficult to make sudden shift to remote work. The transition to WFH can be challenging for many, as it often involves creating new routines, managing distractions, and separating work from personal life. The practitioners of CET can help individuals alter these behaviors by teaching employees' skills such as time management, stress management, and self-discipline (Hering, 2020). CET practitioners can also help clients identify and change negative thought patterns that may be impacting their ability to work effectively from home. In addition, the use of homework assignments can help individuals put into practice the skills they have learned, which can further reinforce positive habits and behaviors. CET is related to the current study because employees need self-motivation and dedication to complete their specified WFH goals even if their mental health is declining (Riley, 2016). Research has shown that the WFH model encompasses numerous uncertainties that are causing increasing mental health issues among employees working remotely (Savi, 2020). When there is greater ambiguity, certain acts are hard to predict before they happen. Contrary to action outcomes that may be arranged into systematic codes and repeated in foreseeable circumstances, the most appropriate sequence of actions especially entail experimental and flexible approaches when the working environment is less known (Kozako et al., 2022). According to CET, employees must be motivated to think critically, alter their

behavior, and examine fresh ideas to contribute to continuing change in the WFH environment.

The CET is aimed to bring more insight about how intrinsic desire affects the participants' experience and interpretation when subjected to a phenomenological investigation and this knowledge applies to employers and managers. Allen et al. (2021) noted that to support employees in remote areas, employers must offer them direction, support, incentives, and access to essential resources. The WFH paradigm may have changed employers into thoughtful professionals who create goals for remote employees and anticipate their best performance (Gunaydi, 2021). Conversely, employers who do not encourage remote workers to develop their social and cooperation skills by using cooperative tactics demotivate their staff (Lurie et al., 2020; Russo et al., 2021). The CET provides a lens to better understand how employees who lack a face-to-face social connection might be self-driven and devoted to achieving their predefined goals through mindfulness and self-management (Liu et al., 2021). Good et al. (2016) reported that self-management entails a recurrent procedure whereby an individual organizes a duty, its execution, assessment, and outcome evaluation. Along with cognitive, metacognitive, and procedural regulation techniques, attentional and emotional control and efficiency can improve performance. One such strategy to improve these skills is mindfulness, which impacts the modal qualities of using a self-management strategy, resulting in a new level of efficiency.

**Mindfulness**

Being mindful generally refers to having awareness and developing interest to current happenings including the way of thinking, physical realizations, and observing the surrounding trends, making no judgements. Good et al. (2016) denoted that mindfulness makes people to pay attention to what is happening in their immediate environment, both internal and external, without giving it any meaning. Because it enables people to disassociate from their thoughts and emotions, mindfulness increases people's capacity for objectivity concerning both internal and exterior experiences (Gu et al., 2015). Employees carry out duties from home may find mindfulness beneficial to them in four main ways: (a) enabling reduced mental involvement in office work, (b) work detachment, (c) enhancing focus on duties and thereby enhancing work performance, and (d) enabling them to have better fatigue recovery management.

**Self-Regulation**

Prior research has indicated that self-regulation and by the use of concept extension, organizational effectiveness, along with self-management adaptive strategies can function as predicting signs of significant remote work coping and behavior modeling (Donati et al., 2021). Moreover, Fosslien and Duffy (2020) noted that organizational effectiveness, self-regulation, and coping mechanisms can all be impacted by the work environment caused by the Coronavirus outbreak, though they can also be used as resources to help people better adapt to it. It is anticipated that employees who find the forced WFH model to be more stressful during this time had negative opinions of their efficacy as a result of this dual course of action (Schnitzer et al., 2020). Additionally,

these perceptions of efficacy are linked to workers' more favorable views of WFH, particularly if they have used this working environment for long enough to get used to it (Prati & Mancini, 2021).

### **Automation**

Programmed commands mechanism is more useful as a replacing approach or support when there is consistency and predictability because there are less self-determination sources for motivation that can help to keep to standard the performance of recurrent jobs. However, in ambiguous conditions, individuals benefited by exhibiting cognitive flexibility and by being creative and proactive, all characteristics that probably could materialize when individuals develop a self-determination interest (Kozako et al., 2022). The environment variable contains elements that influence work contentment such as duration of work and personal life. A significant division of the time and focus between working, family, and personal life is essential to create a conducive workplace that is stress-free and enable individuals to attain their maximum work output (Popa et al., 2022). Finding a decent balance between work and life experiences, however, can be hard for most workers, for example, those who have caregiving duties, especially at the time of the pandemic outbreak during. Therefore, research has demonstrated that establishing a flexible and family-friendly workplace, such as by enabling remote work or having flexible work hours, can help to increase the workforce's well-being (Abdullah et al., 2020). In this regard, mindfulness makes it easier to maintain and improve a welfare status, as well as improves specified attentions and reaction time while enabling an increase in performance.

## **Literature Review on WFH**

The research on WFH has been extensive, particularly in light of the COVID-19 disease. The initial research focused on the negative results brought about by WFH, including feelings of disconnection, difficulties with task completion, and screen fatigue. Further research has also investigated the influence WFH has on psychological condition and its unequal effects on different groups of individuals. The potential for WFH to lead to addiction has also received attention in recent studies. Responding to these negative effects, analytic investigators have also surveyed the role of mindfulness in promoting well-being for WFH employees. This literature review aims to bring together the findings of these studies to provide an awareness of WFH and its effects on employees and organizations.

### **Negative Effects of WFH**

Many studies on WFH have focused on the negative effects of WFH on employees. For example, employees who WFH may find it hard to unplug from work at evening may have difficulty focusing on tasks and report experiencing screen fatigue.

#### ***Disconnecting From Work***

In an aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak, many workers were unanticipatedly obliged to WFH. With this unexpected adjustment came the difficulty of combining home life job demands. Vahia et al. (2020) reported that numerous employees were compelled to set up temporary environments on any available space because they had inadequate designated home offices, including living rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms. According to Oakman et al. (2020), employees working more days have reported

increased emotional weariness and cognitive stress resulting from the decline in the social support they receive from their coworkers.

Many workers do not find it favorable to disconnect from work because there is unclear distinction between their personal and professional lives (Routley, 2020). WFH employees have reported difficulty separating their multiple duties, particularly the location, and planning for work and family duties (Schieman et al., 2021). As a result, some employees have struggled to stop thinking about work after hours. Psychological detachment describes the capability to perceptively pull out of work-related strains when not at work (Firoozabadi et al., 2018). Off-duty, the more an employee can psychologically detach themselves from work, the more they feel relaxed and free, which can better their well-being (Steed et al., 2019). Notably, workers gain much recovery from work when they fully detach themselves from office duties.

However, switching off from work is not easy. For example, work-related meditation is one of the factors that make it difficult for employees to mentally detach themselves from work (Querstret et al., 2017). Meditation concerning WFH-related matters and occasions entails working while switching thoughts to WFH challenges. Good et al. (2016) noted that work-related meditation is the opposite of mental detachment because employees cannot be mentally disconnected from their work keeping their thoughts on work-related issues. Mindfulness was found to reduce levels of rumination because it encourages people to focus on the current instances more objectively (Gu et al., 2015). In this regard, employees of WFH are likely to attain a higher degree of tenacity and determination if they practice mindfulness because

mindfulness practice controls attention, affect, and behavior. As such, WFH employees were more enlightened and comprehend the constraining potential outcomes brought about by negative thinking and emotions as a result of mindfulness, which can play a significant part in minimizing meditation and other nonconstructive emotions and allow the employee to disconnect from work when not working.

### ***Task Performance and Focus***

Some workers have reported having trouble focusing on their current tasks since their home environments might present unrestricted access to social media. Social media distractions cause subpar performance and poor production (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021). The performance has been hampered immensely such that many times attentional focus veers away from the work activity. Therefore, social media distractions have served as attentional demands that are off task. For instance, some employees have tried to access social media while at work and, accidentally encountered a distressing Facebook message from friends, and as a result, their task completion has been hampered due to the increased arousal caused by this unfavorable emotional state.

Workers can encounter challenges focusing duties to execute following possible disturbances brought about by factors such as noises, housework, and social media use. This can lead to low work performance and poor results. Work performance is thus affected to the extent that alertness focus veers away from the work activity (Good et al., 2016). Therefore, home disturbances cause significant off-task alertness demands but employees must maintain attention for peak performance.



Just as mindfulness can help WFH employees disconnect from work, mindfulness also supports attention. Good et al. (2016) claimed that mindfulness promotes improved attentional stability, alertness control, and cost-effective use of analytic resources by improving alertness efficiency. Also, awareness boosts sustained attentiveness, which enables an individual to remain in the present moment for long (Popa et al., 2022). It also enhances improved capabilities of switching attentiveness, a situation that makes it possible to rapidly come to the present after realizing that the mind has gone. Following the sensitive states, they can cause, disturbances at home may significantly diminish performance. Following this effect, awareness may motivate maximum performance by elevating on-duty focus. In this regard, combining mindfulness with work-related tasks can lead to an increase in resilience, happiness, and self-esteem among employees (Kozako et al., 2022).

### ***Screen Fatigue***

Many employees have reported screen fatigue, which is a feeling of exhaustion after participating in several virtual video meetings. The employees have contended that since the majority of meetings have shifted online, they have experienced screen tiredness (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020). Fatigue has a noticeable result on stress levels and psychological health. Studies have shown that long screen time from full-time computer work has resulted in fatigue, exhaustion, headaches, and eye-related ailments (Majumdar et al., 2020). A further factor contributing to their burnout is the pressure to attend social gatherings, which has resulted in stress levels comparable to those of any work-related gathering.

Employees must make proactive behavioral changes to avoid excessive screen time (Kozako et al., 2022). If this cannot be prevented, employees must learn to detect physical signs of fatigue and their feelings of exhaustion to alter their behavior moving forward and allow themselves to recuperate through self-regulation. For example, many employees have experienced screen fatigue as a result of the pandemic's online relocation of most meetings (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020). Thus, it is essential to take steps to regain from the fatigue after observing the early signs for better zoom and screen management of fatigue.

Self-regulation, a key outcome of mindfulness, is the process of controlling or altering behavior to attain self-centered objectives and better outcomes. Effective self-regulation requires some degree of attention; to pursue self-endorsed goals, employees need to be aware of their inner feelings and activities (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020). Employees must be acutely aware of their physiological feelings and indicators that indicate strain for that to occur. General mindfulness helps employees become more aware of their bodies and emotions, which improves their ability to control their emotions (Popa et al., 2022). Therefore, mindfulness may enable employees to control their behavior to better control screen exposure. Strong employee self-regulation enables the worker to approach difficult issues and tasks with a positive mindset.

### **COVID-19 and WFH**

Despite numerous challenges associated with WFH, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted many businesses to impose WFH requirements per public health recommendations to foster social segregation and halt the spread of COVID-19. Dingel

and Neiman (2020) estimated that a substantial percentage of the total jobs in the United States ‘can be performed entirely at home’, including the distinctive knowledge work of the IT industry.

Behrens et al. (2021) indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic may have caused many changes in workplaces, changes that included uncertainty, disturbances to daily routines, financial stress, and social isolation, and had big implications on the workforce. For example, Bernstein et al. (2020) found that immediately following the implementation of the lockdowns, productivity dropped. In another study, Wu and Chen (2020) found that productivity fell by 38%, primarily because of connectivity and technical issues although they also found that workload increased by around 3 hours per week during the lockdowns. PricewaterhouseCoopers (2020) indicated that managers and employees differed in how they viewed productivity; only 28% of the employees reported an increase in their competence with 44% of the managers observing that the worker productivity improved.

Dingel and Neiman (2020) reported that a disproportionately higher number of American adults have admitted to feeling anxious, unhappy, stressed, or having trouble sleeping specifically because of the COVID-19 disease. Due to this increase in stressors, Bernstein et al. (2020) indicated that managers should extensively improve their interactions with workers to make instructions and expectations clear to them to circumvent misapprehension and mitigate stress among employees. Additionally, Giurge and Bohns (2020) pointed out that WFH employees should create borderlines with simple

activities such as proper dressing codes when employees work from home and starting work at usual office time.

### **Mental Health and WFH**

As noted above, research has shown that WFH includes some significant stressors. Combine these stressors with the added stress of a worldwide Coronavirus outbreak, and the psychological conditions of employees should be addressed. Mental health includes people's psychological, emotional, and general well-being. Oakman et al. (2020) noted that mental health is also an emotional and psychological condition in which an individual can practice their analytical abilities, attain usual commitment expectations, and carry out duties that are accepted in society. Furthermore, mental health influences people's thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as how we interact with people, manage stress, and make decisions (Oakman et al., 2020). One method to evaluate someone's mental health is to look at how successful and effective they are as an actor.

A significant percentage of Americans have reported that their mental health has been negatively impacted by stress connected to the COVID-19 outbreak (Vahia et al., 2020). Further, some employees have found the sudden transfer to a home-working environment disconcerting (Firoozabadi et al., 2018). Without the fundamental assistance they need, some employees have felt more alone (Xiao et al., 2021). Because of the abrupt end to the physical connection, employees may have felt isolated when under pressure or worried (Vahia et al., 2020). As a result, it is harder to create a strong support network, which is crucial for good mental health. Finally, the adjustment to working

remotely added to employees' workloads. Rudolph et al. (2021) reported that the lack of a distinction between personal and professional life for those without a home office arrangement tempts workers to put in longer hours.

As alternatives to informal gatherings dwindled during the pandemic, employees were found to be spending more time in virtual meetings (Majumdar et al., 2020). Majumdar et al. (2020) found these virtual meetings can be time-consuming and exhausting for the participants. In large meetings, they found this issue was particularly evident because the speaker is unable to see specific faces. Majumdar et al. further reported that there is an abrupt increase in the psychological and emotional workload of the workforce. As a result, stress and anxiety levels increased, which hampered both the long-term productivity of the workers and the organization. Majumdar et al. concluded that WFH has led to higher levels of anxiety, depression, stress, headache, exhaustion, and low job satisfaction. Additionally, they found workers' productivity and job satisfaction decreased significantly due to the decline in workplace comfort.

The majority of workers have reported that WFH encompasses anxiety and depression. According to research, spending more time at home raises risks of developing depression (Di Renzo et al., 2020). Additionally, depressive stress and worry affect routines and eating patterns. Together, these physical activity and diet modifications have interacted with other stressors associated with the WFH model and have damaged both physical and mental health.

**WFH's Impact on Minorities**

COVID-19 stressors have affected racial and ethnic minority communities who WFH structurally, interpersonally, and personally. Structurally, the pandemic has been a particularly stressful time for these communities since they frequently experience structural racism, as a result of food and housing insecurity, constrained access to healthcare, and racially motivated violence (Abbott, 2021). Research has shown that many racial and ethnic workers who WFH are becoming less efficient at both their profession and providing care since they have limited time to focus on their wellness (Sandoiu, 2020). Discrimination, which has a significant negative influence on the psychological and physical conditions of minority groups, has made WFH more difficult. Their psychological conditions worsened as a result of their remote workplace environment (Abbott, 2021). Abbott (2021) further reported that several mental health issues were linked to working in electronic surveillance environments. Employees reporting issues with their emotional or psychological well-being at work were more likely to claim that they were monitored at work. The lockdown worsened some of the risk factors for discrimination against women and men from minority ethnic groups while having unprecedentedly detrimental economic effects on families. For example, Nielsen et al. (2021) reported emotional abuse was reportedly experienced by several women.

**WFH's Impact on LGBTQIA Individuals**

The LGBTQIA community goes through untold experiences when carrying out their work duties from home. This community is known to have been neglected over time in terms of receiving satisfactory health care services, being inclusive in policy-making

processes, and being researched to understand their psychological health needs.

According to research, LGBTQIA people claimed that the COVID-19 disease affected their psychological health in a more profound and pervasive detrimental way when they worked from home (Gonzales et al., 2020). They claimed that their sleep, food, and temper were negatively influenced at higher rates, which reduced their ability to accomplish responsibilities in the working environment (Gonzales et al., 2020).

According to Raišienė et al. (2020), LGBTQIA communities of all ages disproportionately reported greater psychological health and drug abuse-related disorders, suicidality, and worse well-being outcomes when comparing them with their colleagues who are either cisgender or heterosexual. Additionally, the researchers found that individuals from the LGBTQIA community sought more psychological healthcare services than any other group during the COVID-19 outbreak, including via telemedicine while being compelled to attend lengthy Zoom meetings.

### **WFH's Impact on Indigenous Populations in the United States**

The findings from the research have indicated that when workers from indigenous populations move to work from home, it has a profound effect on their work. Bleakney et al. (2020) reported that reduced computer ownership among this demographic made it more difficult to participate in WFH. Additionally, internet access and speed were and continue to be a problem in many rural indigenous communities. Research has shown that indigenous populations were disproportionately represented in homeless communities during the pandemic as well (Arriagada et al., 2020). In part, this could be because the

indigenous population's remote work rate was 8% lower than that of White workers in the middle of the COVID-19 economic crisis (de Souza Santos et al., 2022).

### **WFH's Impact on Family Balance**

Many employees who WFH find it hard to balance between meeting their families' expectations and employment. A major cause of this imbalance is brought about by the more hours that employees who WFH experience compared to working from office places (Vahia et al., 2020). Song and Gao (2020) reported that WFH allows employees to exercise flexibility in carrying out their duties, a factor that does not show the distinction between working and not. To mitigate the demand for working rooms among employees who carry their work from home, the companies opted to reduce office space and use that expense to meet their workers' needs (Behrens et al., 2021). To achieve a better work-family balance, employees feel that they need to interrupt working places at home with limited access to bar family members from causing destruction (Allen et al., 2021).

### **WFH's Impact on Parents and Families**

Some employees reported that they were compelled to try to be productive while also managing distractions such as watching their children (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021). When daycare and school facilities are closed during the height of the pandemic, working parents are compelled to form home-based schooling to mitigate disruptions caused by their children in their home working environments. Vahia et al. (2020) noted that the employees were forced to engage in additional household responsibilities, such as childcare and cleaning. According to Schieman et al. (2021), family and work were more



at odds as a result of work-life conflict caused by COVID-19 disease. Kara et al. (2021) reported that due to home-related obstruction, many workers reported feeling less motivated, less productive, more stressed, and increased damage to mental health. Additionally, due to other unnecessary disturbances such as playing games, shouting, and interrupting youngsters, WFH frequently made it harder to concentrate on work assignments in that many employees claim that they put in more time instead of working fewer hours to compensate for the lost hours (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021).

Several workers have reported that they have been forced to occupy family members' space. According to research, many remote workers use their homes for professional purposes (Thompson, 2020). Some workers needed to improvise on the spot and according to research, some workers had limited access to a conducive working environment at home, thus leading to the sharing with their children the places of work (Sewell & Taskin, 2015). For example, dining tables were transformed into desks, and couches were used as office chairs. Also, other home structures such as kitchens and bedrooms were turned into workplaces till home offices were made by respective companies. Sewell and Taskin (2015) further reported that not only were home spaces transformed into workspaces, but work was also done in various locations all day long, including from beds and coffee tables.

This quick reconstruction of workspaces in home environments had consequences for the well-being of these workers. Many employees reported that sharing workplaces, poor body mechanics, inadequate physical workstations, and extended periods of inactivity contributed to more discomfort and agony (Baradaran & Kelishadi, 2020).

These reports were not new, however. Studies have illuminated that WFH can result in poor indoor environmental quality (IEQ) conditions that can negatively impact both physical and mental well-being (Rodda et al., 2021). Additionally, workers are unable to manage the IEQ home-working environment as carefully compared to their usual workstations that are equipped with air-conditioning and heating systems.

Robinson (2021) investigated that the capacity to feel competent, capable, and able to handle typical stress levels, as well as the capacity to maintain satisfying relationships and lead an independent life are all significant factors when dealing with mental health issues. Some workers have reported that office-related relationships have lost some of their importance due to the WFH model. Oakman et al. (2020) noted that the qualities of corporate relationships that are embodied in WFH scenarios, such as employer-employee relationships, have been undermined. Although online interactions among workers are promoted by technology, employees have shown less passion for physical collaboration, a factor that is considered essential to establishing tighter social ties. Some employees feel they are not part of the working environment and the business norm (Kawulich). Oakman et al. (2020) found many workers asserted that managers' capacities to manage and oversee subordinates were also impacted negatively. In contrast to conventional office employment, many employees felt that WFH had fewer opportunities for private psychological relationships (Savi, 2020). This means that pandemic-style productivity and performance at work might not last in the long run if employers and managers do not address their declining relationships with employees especially when research has shown that a poor employer-employee relationship has been

linked to unsatisfactory work performance and reduced connections among workers, hence affecting work efficiency (Kawulich et al., 2021).

### **WFH and Addiction**

WFH is associated with numerous stressors, one of which is the effects on psychological conditions brought about by WHF. A study by Galimova and Shakirova (2020) found that there is a potential rise in substance use disorders during the pandemic as a result of the stressors of the WHF. Galimova and Shakirova further noted that the increase in loneliness due to WFH was found to be a significant factor in the increased risk for substance use. The authors further emphasized that the psychological effects of COVID-19, such as isolation, anxiety, and fear, can lead to an increase in drug and alcohol dependence. Studies have also shown that loneliness has a major negative impact on workers who feel cut off from the outside world when WFH (Grensing-Pophal, 2021). Grensing-Pophal (2021) further noted that substance use can be a coping mechanism for the uncertainty of the pandemic, as employees feel cut off from everyday life. As such, individuals and organizations need to mitigate the negative effects of WFH on mental health, such as by implementing strategies to combat loneliness and increase social support.

### **Summary**

The COVID-19 outbreak compelled most workers to WFH full-time, leading to a redefinition of the traditional notion of WFH. While WFH has allowed employees to continue working despite the pandemic, it has also led to emotional and mental health problems such as social isolation, work-family conflict, and emotional exhaustion.

Studies have shown that businesses are considering the possibility of reducing office space as the pandemic has demonstrated that work can be carried out efficiently from home (Guler et al., 2021). However, full-time WFH has its set of drawbacks for employees, such as reduced social interactions with coworkers, increased screen exposure, and potential psychological conditions that include social isolation and depression (Brooks et al., 2020). The fuzzy work-life boundaries and the need to balance work and household responsibilities can lead to emotional exhaustion, work-family conflict, and decreased psychological health and welfare (Kara et al., 2021). The unexpected alterations caused by the outbreak have affected employees' psychological work environment and led to negative outcomes such as social isolation, anxiety, and emotional fatigue (Xiao et al., 2021). The situation is particularly stressful for employees who were not trained or equipped for remote work, and the lack of control over their work environment has led to increased job demands and decreased emotional efficacy (Prati & Mancini, 2021). To mitigate these negative effects, mindfulness has been shown to improve self-regulation, attentional control, and cognitive resources (Good et al., 2016). Developing appropriate concern for these factors promotes sustained attention and allows individuals to adapt to the current situation, potentially reducing stress and anxiety. The present research aimed to explain this deficiency by exploring life situations, perceptions, and negative consequences of full-time WFH brought on by the COVID-19 outbreak. Additionally, the study shed light on the potential benefits of mindfulness in improving the employees' welfare when they carry out their duties from home full-time and provided insights for businesses and organizations to improve the WFH experience

for their employees. Chapter 3 explores methods used to collect and analyze data. Both internal and external validity are also discussed. Other details explored in the chapter include confirmability, dependability, and triangulation, which were consistent with qualitative phenomenology.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of remote e-workers regarding their psychological well-being from the WFH model during the COVID-19 pandemic. I conducted in-depth interviews to gather the views and perceptions of workers regarding pandemic stressors needing to work from home due to the pandemic. The study also aimed to understand the extent to which remote e-workers may have experienced emotional disorders ranging from burnout to prolonged depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research described the mental health statuses of the employees during the most recent days, once the restrictions and WFH have become increasingly routine to fill the existing gap. I noted that the recorded findings relied on data collected within the early days of the pandemic and therefore may not accurately represent the most recent mental experiences among the employees working remotely.

Research methodology enables researchers to evaluate the dependability and justifiability of the selected research. Moreover, the methodology can be referred to as a philosophical framework that enables research to be conducted efficiently (Snyder, 2019). Daniel and Sam (2011) argued that research methodology provides a consistent framework that enables other scholars to replicate the same findings in the future. Additionally, it should be noted that two types of research are categorized into qualitative and quantitative research (Kumar, 2018). Qualitative research provides insights into real-world issues like the coronavirus pandemic. There are six special types of qualitative

research: ethnographic, phenomenological, case study, grounded theory, historical, and action research (Bader, 2020). Qualitative phenomenology fit this study because the method helps researchers explore lived human experiences, and the design makes it easier to interpret every data assembled during a research process. This research was based on a qualitative phenomenological study to gather personal experiences during the pandemic. Phenomenology boosts a researcher's skills to study participants' experiences at an individual level (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of remote e-workers using the WFH model during the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, it is vital to examine workers' psychological well-being to evaluate their challenges when working remotely after the social distance directive was issued (Cornejo et al., 2023). My intention in this study was to examine the lived experiences of these e-workers, particularly their mental health. The study conducted by Chowdhury et al. (2022) indicated that e-workers faced serious mental health issues during the pandemic due to anxiety, stress, and depression.

Therefore, I used detailed interviews to assess the views and perceptions of e-workers based on the stressors experienced during the pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic undermined workers' physical and physiological health, affecting global health (Giorgi et al., 2020). The ability to use phenomenology studies is categorical in signaling the specific remote workers who faced emotional disorders while WFH. Burnout or work overload has been a major issue faced by health workers since the outbreak of COVID-19 (Fajri & Haerudin, 2022). Generally, in this research, I focused on assessing the mental

health status of using technology to work remotely, an idea pioneered to enable slowing down the infection rate. WFH was a major approach to attaining social distance challenges at the workplace (Cetrulo et al., 2020).

Barbieri et al. (2021) indicated that Covid-19 presented a global challenge to the workforce sector on human resources. This study revealed how workers' mental health changed while using the internet during the tough economic times induced by COVID-19. However, it is vital to note that this research may rely on the data and findings in connection with the early outbreak of the pandemic. The assumption, in this case, is that this particular study may not conform to the recent impacts of employees currently working remotely.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The following RQ guided the current study: What are the lived experiences of e-workers due to the implementation of the WFH model during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Honey et al. (2020) stated that lived experience studies can be conducted on individuals who have undergone mental health issues. Therefore, such outcomes provide strategies for learning from past outcomes. Additionally, phenomenology exposes the research to the limelight of gathering lived experiences from the participants undergoing interviews (Frechette et al., 2020). Thus, lived experiences may expose the interaction of the participants with their society or surroundings during the past. Heidegger's (1927) understanding on phenomenology can be understood as a view of human existence from the perspective of the individual within the social context. Two important approaches in research should be examined to comprehend experiences at a personal level. This



includes sociocultural and cognitive approaches (Dieumegard et al., 2021; Parsons, 2010). Specifically, the cognitive subject operates on an individual as the unit used for the analysis.

I analyzed the lived experiences of remote workers based on the psychological consequences of remotely working during the outbreak of COVID-19 in the world. Thus, the dominant subject of the study was the individual experiences of these e-workers, given the point that the outcome of the pandemic was visible in human resources. Assessing human emotions and experiences is achievable using phenomenological studies (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Qualitative methods are the most relevant approach to working on a phenomenon that explores personal or individual experiences in a given context. Therefore, qualitative studies analyze research-based nonnumerical approaches (Snyder, 2019).

I chose qualitative phenomenology because it best suited the attributes of gathering personal experiences from respondents. Lived experiences emanate from direct interaction with society or facing direct impacts of a phenomenon. Frechette et al. (2020) described lived experiences as Heidegger's philosophy. Mental health is a major lived experience challenge that may be mapped after it was reported in Wuhan, China, which disrupted human resources (Singh et al., 2023). Hence, the lived experiences can be best approached using phenomenology. This implies that technology has become a critical tool for communication and WFH among remote workers such as health professionals.

I selected qualitative phenomenology based on the focus of exploring lived experiences of WFH during the pandemic. In lived experiences, researchers may have

direct or primary information from the respondents on the psychological impacts of the pandemic. Hence qualitative phenomenology has become the best scheme for exploring human experiences in social sciences and healthcare perspectives (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

Qualitative phenomenology focuses on exploring and interpreting the lived experiences of people and their environment (Frechette et al., 2020). Understanding individual beliefs and emotions is a subject of phenomenology (Chowdhury et al., 2022). Alase (2017) indicated that phenomenology is a qualitative study that can be used to interpret social phenomena. Phenomenology integrates individual experiences with the social world (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). This allows a researcher to investigate a phenomenon and its impacts on the given subjects.

Cornejo et al. (2023) attributed more research evidence, revealing that qualitative research has gained roots in the current times for scholars. Analysis of lived experiences can be interesting using a dimension that reveals personal opinions and perceptions. Moreover, phenomenology is an iconic approach to studying human behaviors in society (Schweitzer et al., 2018). The capacity to understand the relationship between the natural world and human beings is a critical section in the health sector. Therefore, humans' physical and mental health relies on the status of the natural world (Frechette et al., 2020; Schweitzer et al., 2018).

Schweitzer et al. (2018) argued that there has been an increased disconnection of human beings from the natural world due to the introduction of the digital world. Therefore, this disconnection has created a great challenge for mental health. Notably,

phenomenological studies emphasize the social world to access the desired perception. WFH has been greatly adopted due to the digitalization world. Placement attachment theory reveals that humans ignite emotional bonds using imaged or real places (Schweitzer et al., 2018). WFH models were the ultimate option during the pandemic, which would facilitate interaction among the e-workers. Using phenomenology to critique psychoanalysis can be accessed when the research focuses on lived experiences (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018). Noon (2018) conducted a study that shows the sense attained when using phenomenology to explore human experiences and construct meaning on its application to the social world. The same idea can be used to analyze the lived experiences in this research on the e-workers based on their respective mental health consequences. Another key advantage of using this research method is its flexibility and adaptability. It is imperative to note that the pandemic posits great societal challenges, which can be analyzed at the individual level.

Studies that seek to categorize human experience rely on qualitative phenomenology. Using this research design, a researcher has options for discussion, observations, and interviews (Qutoshi, 2018). I was left with the role of describing the structure of a given phenomenon. Interpreting human experience requires bracketing or making assumptions by the researcher (Alase, 2017; Qutoshi, 2018). Phenomenological studies may provide the platform using four important aspects: bracketing, understanding by instinct, analysis, and descriptive method (Greening, 2019). My research was driven by the experiences that the e-workers accounted for during their Covid time on their psychological welfare. The COVID-19 outbreak affected people from different cultural

backgrounds and social classes differently (Tredinnick & Laybats, 2020). Hence, it was essential to examine how these social and cultural factors might have influenced the psychological well-being of remote e-workers during the WFH model.

The central concept or phenomenon of the study is the lived experiences of remote e-workers regarding their psychological well-being from the WFH. The foundation of this research is based on the exploration of lived experiences involving remote workers. Phenomenology is best applicable when investigating in scenarios that involve personal experiences (Schweitzer et al., 2018). Therefore, qualitative phenomenology fostered my understating of personal experiences among remote e-workers as a result of the WFH model. Psychological or mental health can be established by closely examining participants to understand their personal experiences and the experiences encountered due to the WFH model (Frechette et al., 2020). This was the best method to assess the impact of the pandemic, and personal encounters on mental or cognitive well-being. Through this research, the global impacts of Coronavirus can be mapped and assessed on cognitive statuses. The World Health Organization (WHO) responded to the health sector on important issues such as isolation, travel restrictions, quarantine, and lockdowns (as cited in Angwenyi et al., 2021). Additionally, it is important to note that restrictions imposed on workers disrupted daily activities, job loss, and stress evaluation. Using this model, the level of anxiety and stress on the remote e-workers. Some noticeable trauma includes insomnia, substance abuse, dissociation disorders, anxiety, depression, and psychosocial dysfunction (Angwenyi et al., 2021).

The WFH model has been an increased case that kept many organizations running remotely during the pandemic. Angwenyi et al. (2021) showed that mental issues experienced during COVID-19 had a detrimental outcome on parenting. Qualitative phenomenology boosts the scenario, which requires understanding human interaction with the social world. However, there are major strengths that made the research adopt this design. Phenomenology enables research of the essence of the study when exploring human experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). The COVID-19 outbreak has become a prolific example of how the WFH can be applied in a qualitative approach. Interviews are key areas to pay attention to when using this method to collect data. The qualitative data gathered enabled me to account for the feelings or experiences among the remote e-workers. Qualitative phenomenology is an alternative means that shows how participants were coping with the impacts of Covid 19, adaptation, and the challenges they faced immediately after this pandemic was reported in Wuhan City. Cetrulo et al. (2020) showed how phenomenology enables research to collect cultural and social experiences of WFH.

Tredinnick and Laybats (2020) noted that COVID-19 impacts people despite their cultural backgrounds and social classes. These experiences can be extrapolated using qualitative phenomenological studies. The study used phenomenology to show how various aspects influenced psychological well-being while using the WFH model. A qualitative model, phenomenology gives the capacity to integrate a variety of beliefs and experiences among the participants adversely affected by the outcome of the pandemic. Understanding a qualitative approach to the various complexities such as human

isolation, stress, anxiety, and psychological well-being requires. The phenomenological study enabled this study to locate flexible activities capable of describing and understanding complex phenomena like human social experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022). Moreover, this method contributed to the understanding of how human beings extract personal experiences from their surroundings.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

I played the observer-participant role in the study. The role of an observer-participant in a qualitative phenomenological study is to provide a unique perspective on the phenomenon being studied and to contribute to the development of a rich and detailed understanding of the experiences of remote e-workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the observer-participant role, I balanced both roles of observer and participant, which could provide a unique perspective on the phenomenon. Numerous qualitative methodologies have been devised to gain profound and comprehensive insights into a study through textual interpretation. Amongst them, interviewing and observation are prevalent techniques (Jamshed, 2014). For example, I conducted interviews with remote e-workers while also WFH as a remote e-worker. This role allowed me to remain objective while also experiencing the phenomenon firsthand, enabling me to gain an in-depth understanding of the psychological well-being challenges faced by remote e-workers during the pandemic. However, the observer-participant role can be challenging to manage, and I needed to be transparent about their role and potential biases.

The role of an observer-participant in this type of study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of remote e-workers regarding their psychological

well-being from the WFH model during the pandemic, by becoming immersed in the phenomenon themselves (Tredinnick & Laybats, 2020). By participating in the same experience as the participants being studied, the observer-participant can gain first-hand insight into the nuances of the phenomenon, such as the challenges and benefits of remote work, the impact of the pandemic on their work and personal lives, and the ways in which remote e-workers are coping with the stresses of WFH. The observer-participant can also use their own experiences as a means of validating or challenging the experiences of other e-workers in the study (Cornejo et al., 2023). They can compare their own experiences to those of the participants and identify similarities or differences, which can help to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The observer-participant can also use their own experiences as a way of generating questions for further exploration and as a means of developing a deeper understanding of the psychological well-being of remote e-workers.

In this qualitative phenomenological study, I took an observer-participant role, and it was appropriate for me to have a professional relationship with the participants. Because I was acting as an observer-participant, they were actively participating in the phenomenon being studied and likely developed personal connections with the participants. However, I maintained a professional relationship with the participants to avoid any potential bias or ethical concerns.

To establish a professional relationship with the participants, I communicated my role in the study and ensured that the participants were aware that they were being studied as a group, rather than as individuals (see Ramsook, 2018). I also established

clear boundaries and maintained confidentiality throughout the study. Additionally, as the researcher, I was mindful of the power dynamics that may exist between themselves and the participants and took steps to minimize any potential imbalances. A professional relationship between the researcher and participants was appropriate for this type of study, as long as I took steps to maintain a fair and ethical approach to data collection and analysis (see Filindassi et al., 2022).

### **Methodology**

Phenomenology is closely related to disciplines such as ontology, logic, epistemology, and ethics (Alase, 2017). Qualitative research facilitates the exploration of the world's real issues using non-numerical techniques like observation. This type of study usually describes why something is observed as it is in nature (Busetto et al., 2020). Phenomenology is qualitative research that can be branched into methodology and philosophical perspectives, particularly when focusing on participants' lived experiences in a given group (McCarthy, 2015). Therefore, understanding phenomenology requires scholarly work to emphasize the interpretation of human experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). This indicated that my study focused on interpreting and describing human experiences during the pandemic. The qualitative phenomenology approach may be a suitable research tradition for exploring the nuances and complexities of psychological well-being, such as stress, anxiety, burnout, and isolation.

As a special type of qualitative study, hermeneutic phenomenology allows researchers to focus on human experiences and traditions that shape their culture and daily activities. Thus, hermeneutics collects non-numerical data in the form of stories to



understand a given phenomenon (Oerther, 2020). However, qualitative phenomenology is understood in a wide perspective of description, hermeneutic, and interpretative.

In the research process, I used the research question instead of a hypothesis. A hypothesis is a tentative assumption established in the study process that accounts for a given phenomenon (Lind & Boomgaarden, 2019). Hypotheses are typically used in quantitative research designs where the results have to be tested (Lind & Boomgaarden, 2019).

However, this qualitative phenomenological study relied on lived experiences. Research questions are essential in guiding the study's development and categorizing a compatible research design (Farrugia et al., 2010). Research in social sciences has revealed that research questions enable the study process to attain an accurate sample size and even the position to determine the desired power of the study (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The research question used in this discussion is as follows: What are the lived experiences of e-workers due to the implementation of the WFH model during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Participant Selection**

For one to be selected as a participant, there were various aspects of consideration, such as WFH during the pandemic. The participants were asked to explain their psychological experiences of using the WFH model during this particular time.

There are three major criteria that the study used to select participants accurately. These criteria for inclusion in the study were to be at least 30 years of age, must have worked from home for at least 1 year since the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, and be able to read and understand English. Palinkas et al. (2015) continued to show that qualitative methods, such as purposeful sampling and concentrating on saturation, while

the quantitative aspect leads to generalizing the study findings. Cho et al.'s (2022) concept was used to show participants may have experienced psychological changes during the pandemic. This was a major criterion that was the subject of this study to critique individual experiences.

I selected individuals using diversity based on locations and industries. Diversity creates a range of experiences in research (Charalampous et al., 2018). Qualitative phenomenology creates a framework that facilitates exploring the lived experiences in different workplaces and localities. Notably, the selected participants may have different experience levels based on their capacity to work remotely. The study relied on other common approaches to collect qualitative data such as online surveys and virtual interviews. However, this is necessary with language conformity to avoid common barriers during the communication process. During the selection of participants, ethics were applied to guard the privacy and confidentiality terms of the research.

Eligibility dominated the process of participant selection. Inclusion criteria was applied to the selected target population to answer the proposed research question (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). It may be a great challenge in this research process because participants were supposed to indicate their professional networks. This was intentionally conducted to categorize e-workers during the Covid 19. Additionally, I consulted different organizations to recruit their employees to facilitate the study process. Within the locality, communication was done for the interested groups.

A total of 10-12 participants in a sample was appropriate for this study to answer the research question. Noon (2018) indicated that sample size is the main frame of the

research process to collect information from samples as opposed to examining the entire population. The main target of the study laid out lived experiences during the pandemic, which would help explore psychological well-being. The gathering of qualitative data during the pandemic to assess the research question also indicates challenges faced in research when selecting these participants (Cornejo et al., 2023).

### **Sampling Strategy**

Kumar (2018) stated that sampling enables the selection of the subsets used to represent the population under study. Different categories of sampling are covered in the research methodology. Sampling has been classified as probability or nonprobability sampling techniques (Daniel & Sam, 2011). The research relied on the use of nonprobability sampling. Deliberate or purposive sampling is utilized when participants have given characteristics that are under investigation. I selected participants based on their lived experiences and the information they possessed as remote e-workers during the outbreak of COVID-19, which had net impacts on their psychological well-being. It should be noted that this group typically worked from home in different sections. Therefore, the purposive sampling may be categorical when targeting personal experiences in this scenario. A diverse sampling approach aids in increasing the validity of the study (Kumar, 2018). During the selection of participants, familiarity was excluded by filling out anonymous forms to minimize biases, which may affect the research process (Alase, 2017).

Purposive sampling is a major qualitative research approach when selecting samples that align with phenomenological studies. In this case, the participants must be

knowledgeable about their experiences and willing to participate. Thus, participants were free to communicate their opinions. However, one of the key challenges with this type of sampling is data generalization due to nonprobability (Palinkas et al., 2015). Therefore, participants were selected using a nonprobability method, unlike probabilistic methods like random sampling and cluster sampling, which rely on chances or outcomes. Purposeful sampling does not rely on chances but depends on the selected characteristics in the study process (Palinkas et al., 2015). It should be noted that the particular sampling boosts the gathering of qualitative data from participants.

### **Sample Size**

Justification of sample size can be distinguished from saturation in qualitative research. Saturation emerges when a researcher has gathered enough data, and no new information is emerging in studies (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Notably, the sample size of 10 to 12 participants in research is determined using different elements such as the depth of the analysis and the research question. The same study published by Vasileiou et al. (2018) indicated that saturation emerges regardless of the given sample size in studies. In this context, I started with a smaller sample size up to the point where the collection of information hit a saturation point. This is after the lived experiences of a sample size of 10 to 12 remote e-workers have been perfectly quantified in the research process.

### **Instrumentation**

I used a qualitative interview protocol to collect data from participants through semistructured interviews. The interview protocol was developed to explore the

participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards remote work, their psychological well-being, and the impact of the WFH model during the pandemic.

Instruments used in research take an extensive approach when categorizing qualitative and quantitative studies. This term is used in research to show surveys, checklists, tests, and interviews. Kumar (2018) indicated that the research methodology and methods are different. The researcher determines the instruments that conform to the study methodology during the study process. This study relied on the use of semistructured interviews to obtain qualitative data. Thus, the phenomenological approach promoted gathering qualitative data such as attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs based on the WFH model (Frechette et al., 2020). The semistructured questionnaire was aimed to assess mental welfare during the COVID-19 outbreak among employees working away from their normal places of work.

Interview protocol directs qualitative researchers to stay connected with the research themes. A perfect interview protocol uses a topic of interest, research question, open-ended questions, basics, and prompts (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Questions in the protocol were open-ended to enable participants to account for their lived experiences during the pandemic as connected with the mental health of remote working. Some topics I may trace in the interview protocol include a history of participants WFH, personal life, and psychological well-being or mental health using the WFH model.

A qualitative interview protocol was used to collect data from participants through semistructured interviews. The interview protocol was developed to explore the participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward remote work, their

psychological well-being, and the impact of the WFH model during the pandemic. I generated the interview questions. Below is the interview guide and transcript.

### **Interview**

1. How long have you been in your current positions? Was this your position before and during the outbreak of COVID-19?
2. Describe your work environment before COVID-19 and during COVID-19?
3. Describe the impact the WFH model has had on you.
4. In what ways has WFH changed your relationship with your colleagues?
5. How useful has your employer been in providing the necessary services to aid your WFH?
6. In what ways has WFH changed your perception of the traditional workplace?
7. If you were to choose between WFH and going to the office even without COVID-19, what would you choose?
8. Are there any variables in your experience that you have not already mentioned?

### **Participant Recruitment**

I used various strategies to identify participants who met the criteria using purposive sampling. One approach used professional networks, such as social media platforms or professional associations, to identify potential participants with remote work experience during the pandemic I also reached out to relevant organizations, such as companies or nonprofits, to seek permission to recruit their employees for the study. Another approach is using online communities, such as forums or social media groups, to

recruit participants who meet the criterion (Cho et al., 2022). Additionally, I posted recruitment messages in these communities and ask interested individuals to contact them.

### **Data Collection**

The process of data collection should accompany every concrete research finding. Data collection from participants enables the given research to support the research questions (Kumar, 2018). It is vital to note that this research targeted qualitative data using a phenomenological perspective to collect lived experiences from participants on their psychological aspect during the remote working approach that emerged during the beginning of Covid 19. The qualitative data collection involved professional organizations and social media platforms among the willing respondents. In this context, I played the role of participant-observer to ensure that accurate data is assembled during this process that avoid bias. Through the use of semistructured questionnaires, I interviewed participants within a 60-90-minute timeframe, depending on the flexibility of the respondents on the question to be posted during the interactive session. In this research, I used a field notebook to observe some of the behaviors and actions among the participants regarding the subject matter. The questionnaire posted to the respondents had open-ended questions to allow the collection of qualitative data. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) indicated that using qualitative approaches to collect data enriches the understanding of social and cultural perspectives.

Snyder (2020) showed that data collection procedures increase the validity of the selected research. One of the areas to which the research paid attention was based on the

right of participants to participate in the research process to offer their experiences with the pandemic. As a professional researcher, I respected all the ethical concerns that characterize scientific researchers to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Therefore, the sensitive information from the participants was sensitized for protection. I provided participants with a monetary gift to compensate for their time and loyalty to participate in this research.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I transcribed the interviews and read them several times to identify the significant concepts, themes, and categories that emerged from the data. I developed a list of codes that reflect these concepts, themes, and categories. Next, I coded the data by assigning the relevant codes to each data segment that corresponds to the identified concept, theme, or category. Recorded information for this study was limited to only those who needed it. The signed consent form notified participants that their information was held in confidence. All information was kept in my office in a locked file cabinet. Participants' real names were kept while the data was being collected and separated from any of the data collected. In keeping with Walden University regulations, I kept copies of the participant list separate from transcribed data in my office in a locked file cabinet per Walden's policy for 5 years. The audio recordings were erased from the flash drive after the transcripts were completed and checked for accuracy, pauses, or emphasis.

The data analysis step sets the ground for the researcher to decide based on the available data. Data analysis aims to offer sufficient information that can be used to answer the research questions or hypotheses (Kumar, 2018). In most cases, this presented



the most technical procedure in the entire process of research. I used research questions instead of hypotheses. The main research question in this study targeted the assembly of lived experiences of WFH and its impact on emotional well-being during the outbreak of COVID-19. The interview protocol was best suited for this qualitative procedure targeting beliefs, emotions, and experiences.

Coding was applied in this research because it sets the ground for rigorous, critical, and reflexive thinking to validate collected data. Open coding is inductive or analytical when applied to research (Daniel & Sam, 2011). This may be applicable through identifying major themes throughout the study, which aided in developing various codes. Each code may be unique to the specific theme. Open coding incorporated grounded theory to uncover social processes and relationships. I used a suitable program such as Nvivo to code and analyze the themes.

### **Themes: Professional Relationships**

Maintaining professional relationships in research is intuitive to avoid biases and ethical violations. Ethical violation exists in research when the safety and privacy of participants are violated (Armond et al., 2021). Therefore, confidentiality was a major test in this study because the participants had to be given an overview of the study process to categorize the structure of the study. As a researcher, it is my role to maintain the existing relationship of each party to set a position for data collection. It is important to note that the data quality depends on the relationship between the researcher and participants. Maintaining professional relationships drags researchers near their participants, building confidence among them to gather quality data. One of the ways I

utilized to avoid biases during the research process was to review the guidelines outlined by Walden University. Conforming to the institution enables me to manage the conflict of interest that emerged in research. Another approach I used to manage biases is drafting the data collection procedure early for preparation. Finally, it is imperative to acknowledge the limitations throughout the study. Galdas (2017) showed that biases distort the accuracy of the results collected.

Consideration of bracketing is paramount in this study since it relies on lived experiences of WFH during the outbreak of COVID-19. It is a major way of avoiding biases when using qualitative phenomenology to account for beliefs, experiences, and human relationships. Thus, bracketing ensured that I collected nonjudgmental data for interpretation. In bracketing, a researcher may separate personal experiences from the actual study (Weatherford & Maitra, 2019).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

In qualitative phenomenology, immersion takes from the commencement to the conclusion of the study. I applied the experiences I gained from publications to interact with the topic of study. I studied examples of how various pandemics contributed to the psychological impacts on the human being. Therefore, I explored themes such as suicidal ideation, anxiety, and mental health.

#### **Member Checks**

Member checking is also known as respondent or participant validation (Sahakyan, 2023). It is a critical means of exploring the credibility of the results obtained.

Therefore, the participants are issued with the results to check the accuracy using their reasoning or experiences. In studies, participants can be issued with brief findings or the entire findings of the study (Birt et al., 2016). Member checks can be performed formally or informally in studies. I used this technique to collect my research's positive aspects, problems, and drawbacks.

### **Research Auditor**

The research auditor in this study was my supervisor, who ensured that I collected honest responses. I was directed appropriately on the basics of ethical research outlined by the IRB and Walden University.

### **Transferability**

Research has indicated that transferability primarily sets the ground, enabling scholars to generalize the study's findings. Korstjens and Moser (2018) noted several quality criteria common in all qualitative research, such as confirmability, dependability, transferability, and credibility. Transferable findings allow other readers to make a judgment of the findings when it has a replication impact (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). This study focused on the transferability context because participants were selected widely for equal representation. The diversity enabled me to compare the lived experiences among these participants during the outbreak of the pandemic. It should be noted that the researcher who transfers these findings can make a judgment based on the credibility of this process.

**Triangulation**

Noble and Heale (2019) asserted that triangulation increases validity and credibility in a research process. The two terms are unique as credibility reflected trustworthiness, while validity was the accuracy of the study procedures. Triangulation is meant to reduce the number of biases that occur, which may interfere with the validity of the study's findings. This approach is flexible because it can collect qualitative and quantitative data (Noble & Heale, 2019). A researcher needs to be familiar with different types of triangulations, such as methodological, theoretical, investigator, and data triangulation. In this study, I relied on data triangulation, which set the ground for understating the phenomenological approach to collecting data.

**Validity**

Validity is commonly applied, aiming to show how the participants' results have accurate findings when compared with similar contexts outside the study. Validity may be applied in various sections, such as intervention, associations, prevalence, and even diagnosis in clinical studies (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). There are two broad categories of validities used in a research process. Validity can either be internal or external validity. Internal validity is coined in the study population, while external validity is prominent in generalizing the study findings (Andrade, 2018).

In research, there are different strategies that a researcher can utilize to promote the validity of the study. Patino and Ferreira (2018) outlined that increasing internal validity requires adequate planning and quality control. Implementation strategies that research can adopt include sample size, data analysis, recruitment as well as data

collection strategies (Kumar, 2018). On the other hand, the study's external validity can be maximized using a broader inclusion criterion. During the research, it should be noted that the major threat to this validity is predetermined experiences, affecting the outcome of the study's findings.

### **Dependability**

It is important to note that research is conducted to point out required changes and how they affect the population. Therefore, Korstjens and Moser (2018) laid the foundation for stating this concept in research, allowing participants to evaluate findings, recommendations, and interpretations made in research using audit trails. There is a need for consistency to set trails that can be followed by other researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this case, this point sets the ground, which enables others to understand why a given audience or participants were recruited for the study. The study paid attention to the dependability among the researchers who might wish to use the findings for replication.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability enables other scholars to confirm the findings of a given study. In this case, the work is to confirm whether concrete information sources supported the qualitative findings. One of the approaches used to assert confirmability in this research was the documentation of the procedures for a recheck. The aim, in this case, is to ensure that data can be replicated by other researchers when there is credibility and trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020). Confirmability can also be increased in research through auditors (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I maintained an audit trail for the

transparency of the findings, which created room for generalization. Moreover, this research kept a reflective journal to enrich thoughts in this research as well as avoid biases. Conformability is greatly impacted by the biased assumptions that bar interpretive processes on the findings (Stahl & King, 2020).

### **Ethical Procedures**

Various ethical concerns may be highlighted throughout this study. The privacy of participants is a dominant issue to pay attention to when conducting research involving human subjects (Armond et al., 2021). I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. This increased their safety because the research problem involved professional organizations and diverse localities. Unethical research does not consider the privacy or confidentiality of its participants (Yip et al., 2016). Power relationships may also dominate research to eliminate methodological changes, which usually emerge in qualitative studies (Green & Johns, 2019). I strived to avoid power relationships by reflecting on their positions, biases, power dynamics, participant empowerment, open communication, and informed consent.

Noon (2018) reminded researchers that every study process should maintain privacy, transparency, and confidentiality. It is illegal to conduct research without giving attention to the concept of informed consent. Research ethics emphasizes that participants have full right to obtain information from the researcher on the nature of the data gathered and ethical sensitivity to bolster phenomenological studies (Schweitzer et al., 2018). It is also critical to note that ethical research may not lead to harming participants. Therefore, participants have to be protected based on the Institutional Review Board

given to the researchers, which uses human subjects (Grady, 2015). Generally, participant selection comprises the identification process, secreting, contacting, obtaining consent, collecting data, and appreciating participants.

To reflect the qualities of formal research, approval is necessary. I fulfilled the requirements that Walden University sets in research. Walden University ensures that all researchers conform to the standards required by the IR) established under the Food and Drug Administration Agency (FDA) (Grandy, 2015). Research that involves human subjects is monitored to ensure that only ethical studies are conducted (Yip et al., 2016). Additionally, I submitted my entire data collection structure for review and adjustment. The data collection process began on May 12, 2024, after receiving Walden's IRB endorsement # 05-06-24-1053783.

Armond et al. (2021) showed that ethical concern emerges when using human subjects in research. Normally, ethics are moral principles that are tied to the conduction of various activities. Therefore, violating these moral principles concerns the IRB. This body ensures that the research activities are compatible with human rights (Grady, 2015). Yip et al. (2016) reported that ethical and legal issues are essential when conducting modern research. This has enabled block misconduct among scientists and scholars who risk human life. Thus, research cannot understand ethical concerns without focusing on privacy, safety, confidentiality, and informed consent (Yip et al., 2016).

Additionally, this research conformed to the technological advances due to the increased cybercrime, given that a section of data received from respondents was sent electronically. Electronic data has many challenges, which include hacking and

unauthorized access (Jaquet-Chiffelle & Loi, 2020). These issues were sorted through data encryption, restricted access, and secure storage. This was possible through the use of safe passwords. A secure protocol is a safety measure when storing data in electronic devices.

During the research process, I maintained informed consent through emails. Participants were well-informed about the nature of the study, procedures, and associated risks. The goal of informed consent is to give a chance for participants to decide on a personal level without coercing (Yip et al., 2016). Additionally, safety and privacy were other key sections that influenced this research. The information provided by the participants was confidential. Sharing participant data with the public is an ethical violation (Armond et al. et al., 2021).

For additional safety, I issued participants a written document detailing the content of the study. All able participants were required to sign to accompany verbal informed consent. The ultimate goal of this procedure was to increase confidentiality and safety throughout the study. Confidentiality is achieved when participants have a consensus with the researcher to protect their identity (Yip et al, 2016). Disclosure can only be achieved when informed consent between the respondent and the researcher exists. This is the section I maintained to ensure maximum participant protection from internal and external threats.

### **Summary**

This chapter has outlined critical information that enables readers to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative data. In this section, research tradition has been



discussed clearly, which leads to the collection of information targeting to assess lived experiences. Qualitative phenomenology was the main design used to gather experiences among the remote e-workers during the outbreak of COVID-19 and their general psychological well-being. Phenomenology boosted the understanding of human experiences using non-numerical data. Sampling was another key theme used in this research. Purposive sampling is deliberately selected based on the given characteristics or features analyzed by the researcher, unlike probability sampling and simple random sampling. Chapter 3 explored methods used to collect and analyze data. Both internal and external validity was also be discussed. Other details explored in the chapter include confirmability, dependability, and triangulation, which are consistent with qualitative phenomenology.

Ethics is an outstanding section that ties to all research. This chapter gave various criteria required of ethical researchers in line with the institutional review board. IRB reviews and rejects unethical projects that use human subjects. It can be traced in this study that ethical research conforms to participants' confidentiality, privacy, safety, and informed consent. I reviewed various qualitative aspects, such as transferability, conformability, triangulation, and credibility, which are paramount when replicating research. In Chapter 4, I discuss data collection and analysis methodologies appropriate for the study along with any key themes and showcased the lived experiences of e-workers about the implementation of the WFH model during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

This study explored the effects of COVID-19 on the workplaces, personal experiences, and relations between employers and employees. The interviews gave firsthand views on experiencing remote work, including the positives and negatives, and opinions on traditional offices. The interview questions revealed various themes drawn from the participants' responses and ensured an understanding of the participants' work environment, and their perceptions before and during COVID-19. I examined the impact brought about by COVID-19 on workplaces, experiences, and contracts between employers and employees. The goal was to identify the changes that the pandemic brought about in work, employees' personal lives, and workplaces.

Given its objectives, I focused on conducting semistructured interviews to gain detailed insight into the effects of the transition to telecommuting. The interview participants offered first-hand information regarding their experience with remote working and the opportunities and challenges presented by this working model. Also, participants expressed their views on the conventional office arrangement, especially as it related to working remotely. The research aimed to answer the following question: What are the lived experiences of e-workers due to the implementation of the WFH model during the COVID-19 pandemic? Chapter 4 illustrates the changes the participants and organizations had to take to adapt to the new model of WFH, explores the characteristics of the participants of the study, provides the results obtained from the interviews with

reports of the themes displayed in the interview responses, and provides the credibility of the results collected.

### **Setting**

The participants' experiences and the perceived study results incorporated in the study were occasioned by personal and organizational conditions at the time of the study. The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily, the switch to working remotely. These changes included a shift in communication leading to feelings of isolation, and the new working environment demanding, making work-life balance challenging. Some common concerns were noticed while WFH, like a lack of resources, the internet connection was less for some employees, or a poor home office setup compromised the work environment. Furthermore, participants' perceptions of job insecurity and stress arose from budget constraints and changed organizational structures like layoffs or restructuring. These conditions possibly intensified anxiety and depression and increased the participants' mental health and experiences of WFH. Another factor that impacted the participants' experience is the regional dimension where they had to work without direct contact with co-workers and supervisors. This reduced interaction affected them in a negative way where they felt isolated and possibly demoralized. Also, fluctuations in leadership and management during the COVID-19 period compromised the employees' stability.

### **Demographics**

This study focused on nine participants, four males and five females who worked remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The average age was 33 years old.

Of the nine participants, five used she/her pronouns, and four used he/him. The eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study were that the participants were at least 22 years of age, worked from home for at least 1 year after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, and were of sound mind. This enabled participants to have adequate experiences to share about their psychological concerns while WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 1 shows participants' demographic information.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Race	Education	Years of employment	Years of work from home after COVID
Participant 1	Male	32	Hispanic	College degree	7 years	1 year
Participant 2	Male	31	White	College degree	10 years	2 years
Participant 3	Female	28	White	High school graduate	6 years	1 year
Participant 4	Female	41	Hispanic	High school graduate	2 years	1 year
Participant 5	Female	33	African American	College degree	4 years	1 year
Participant 6	Female	29	Native American	High school graduate	2 years	1 year
Participant 7	Male	33	Hispanic	College degree	4 years	2 years
Participant 8	Male	35	White	Some college	4 years	1 year
Participant 9	Female	36	African American	College degree	5 years	1 year

**Participant 1**

Participant 1 was a 32-year-old Hispanic male with a college degree who was WFH after the COVID-19 outbreak. Participant 1 had been working for 7 years in his current role. The participant elaborated on his work climate prior COVID-19 pandemic situation as dynamic and filled up with communication and collaborative events. However, changes occurred due to the COVID-19 outbreak, which affected people's movement and limited participation in group events and visitors. The participant felt restrained while WFH to even thinking about other kinds of online work. Nevertheless, he acknowledged the help received from his employer, including concerning their mental state. As far as the operational environment is concerned, he embraced the home setting but preferred working at the office due to socio-interactional features. The respondent's impressions and attitudes are somewhat ambivalent, yet on the whole, they appear to be quite positive.

**Participant 2**

Participant 2 was a 31-year-old White male with a college degree and had been employed for 10 years. The participant stated that before COVID-19, his work was mostly centralized in the office environments with emphasis on meetings or face-to-face communication with his counterparts. Participant 2 said the evolution to WFH during the pandemic had its drawbacks, such as enhanced stress, management of working-family life for employees, and isolation. Specifically, the participant observed the following main benefits of the new strategy and some resulting drawbacks: new perspectives, diversity in solving problems, and blurring of lines between business and personal life. It

also created anxiety because many of the complaints were a result of low interaction with others and the absence of real-time feedback from coworkers. The company's initial response to support remote work was not sufficiently good, though it came up with improvements later on. Participant 2 preferred hiring a balanced, halfway setup, stating that if one goes fully remote, they can feel mentally exhausted after each work session, and miss interpersonal communication. This called for improvements in areas, particularly with technique training and regular support concerning technology in working remotely.

### **Participant 3**

Participant 3 was a 28-year-old White female high school graduate. This participant was reflective and had been working for 6 years. The participant mentioned that she came across the study on Twitter and stated her willingness and interest to participate. In detailing the extent of the change from before COVID, the participant indicated that the work environment was as good as a traditional face-to-face live lab facilitating an organized work schedule before COVID. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, work shifted from going to the office to WFH; the participant discovered the immaculate convenience it had to offer. All in all, the participant considered the opportunities of telecommunication as a plus that affected positively communication abilities, productivity, and personal attitude. Participant 3 said that working remotely has somewhat cut down physical encounters and was convenient. The participant stated a clear dislike of traditional offices even after the pandemic, which does not negate the

general trends in the formation of new perceptions of work. Her employer was responsive by availing the needed equipment and inquiring about the employees' well-being.

#### **Participant 4**

Participant 4 was a 41-year-old Hispanic female who was a high school graduate and has been employed for 2 years in her current role. At first, the participant considered remote work as something good because of the comfort and opportunities of its realization. However, as seen in the response to COVID-19 in the United States and other parts of the world, the gains were lost to this pandemic. Participant 4 later understood that working at home was associated with social exclusion and restricted promotion possibilities because they interacted with secondary-level individuals and engaged in secondary-level conversations. The participants felt a lack of the work's variety compared to the typical working environment where people communicated and solved cases together face to face. Nevertheless, Participant 4 maintained her working relationships with co-workers and managers using social media such as Twitter, Teams, and Webex.

#### **Participant 5**

Participant 5 was a 33-year-old African American female with a college degree. A hardworking supervisor who had worked for about 3-4 years said that before the COVID-19 outbreak, team coordination was steady and stable in her working environment. The COVID-19 outbreak affected her work in that social interactions and management of the team became difficult via technological means. Also, the management of clients and financial requirements were adversely affected. Nevertheless, the participant transitioned

well to the concept of WFH, which was reasonably favorable for the management of work-family conflict. At that time, Participant 5 had received considerable support from the employer in terms of monetary help and other facilities. Certainly, if it were not for the pandemic, the participant appreciated the fluidity of WFH and would wish to work from home again. All in all, the participant seemed purposeful in her profession, and how to adapt to change.

### **Participant 6**

Participant 6 was a 29-year-old Native American female and a high school graduate who had been working for 2 years in her current role. The participant identified the survey for this study on Twitter and took the chance to participate. Her experience at work was altered because of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the participant's employment before the COVID-19 outbreak, had face-to-face interactions with co-workers. Remote work has continued to give the participant personal time, improve self-scheduling, and decrease the chances of getting sick. However, Participant 6 said that she does not get to interact with people in the usual manner – face-to-face communication and interaction with co-workers. While recognizing the advantage of being able to work from home, the participant stated that they would prefer having to go to work, be social, and enjoy the presence of other people. She noted that her employer was quite understanding about the need for WFH and supplied them with all the adequate tools for the job.



**Participant 7**

Participant 7 was a 33-year-old Hispanic male with a college degree who had been working in his current role for 4 years before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The participant gave an account of a change from an industrial type of working, highlighting that he has been forced to work from home because of the pandemic. The transition was initially difficult due to distractions from family/children interfering with his work. Participant 7 became comfortable with the current system of working remotely. He observed that since the implementation of virtual work, the opportunity to interact as closely with other co-workers as he was not friends with before causes constraints. However, his employer has been considerate enough to supply all the essentials for home office work. Ideally, Participant 7 would like to remain a fully remote worker because he has grown to appreciate the convenience and discretion that distanced work brings as opposed to bargaining with the hustle and bustle associated with going to an office building every day.

**Participant 8**

Participant 8 was a 35-year-old White male who attended college and had been working for 4 years. He described his work environment, where at the beginning, there were many people, but due to some complications caused by COVID-19, many people lost their jobs. A change that occurred due to the transition to WFH was the schedule, which became less interrupted but busier; however, it provided Participant 8 with more time with family and improved personal bonds. The experience also set up the opportunity for him to discover his abilities and juggle several tasks simultaneously.

Another aspect of social functioning that Participant 8 highlighted was that he experienced a decrease in coworkers' social accessibility, meaning colleagues became less close after the COVID-19 outbreak. He welcomed any help from his employer in the form of required items and rescue. Nonetheless, the participant also stated a clear desire to come back to WFH rather than going back to the office workplaces, stating the advantages of comfort there.

### **Participant 9**

Participant 9 was a 36-year-old African American female with a college degree who had been working for 11 months in her current role. The fact that the pandemic forced Participant 9 to work from home was not easy, because she described herself as an extroverted person. This brought stressful working conditions inclusive of WFH. The participant's line of work saw them going through mental stresses, which culminated in the change of jobs. Participant 9 was in a dual-site environment, and the versatility of the setup was something appreciated as she helped her family. The participant noted that WFH had advantages: flexibility, and freedom to decide when to go to the office.

### **Data Collection**

I intended to recruit 10 to 12 participants to address the research questions adequately. A total of nine participants, four males and five females were interviewed for the study. I streamlined flyers on approved social media platforms and emailed the participants who met the inclusion criteria. Of the emails sent, I included the consent form, confidentiality procedures, time commitment, and data collection procedures.

After all participants responded to the emails with the words “I consent,” dates, times, and interviews were scheduled. This sample size was chosen because I used a qualitative approach through interviews of detailed experiences of the participants. Additionally, the participants came from different geographical areas and fields of work. Questionnaires were used in this study because this method enabled me to gain more information from the respondents about their experiences. Every interview took between 60 - 90 minutes based on the respondents’ availability and willingness to accommodate flexibility. Moreover, I used field notes to document participants’ behaviors and activities regarding the researched subject. The qualitative data collection was conducted through professional bodies and organizations within the sector. Data were gathered through semistructured interviews concerning participants’ proximal and distal experiences WFH during COVID-19. Special attention was paid to diversity when selecting participants. The data were collected through professional associations and spreadsheets from social media. Participants consented to be interviewed on different days. Interviews and field notes were taken in the context of the study. The questionnaires used open-ended questions and notes. The interviews were recorded verbally since this provided clear responses.

### **Data Analysis**

To examine the data collected, I used Greening’s (2019) descriptive phenomenological method to explore the lived experiences of remotely based e-workers considering their mental welfare from the WFH mechanism during the COVID-19

outbreak. Greening's method provides the platform using four important aspects: bracketing, understanding by instinct, analysis, and descriptive method.

### **Codes and the Coding Process**

By using thematic analysis to point out common issues across the participants' responses, I followed this type of analysis, which simplified the understanding of the shared themes from specific questions depending on the individual reactions (see Shankar et al., 2021). First, I read through each transcript numerous times to achieve proper familiarity with the content. After I became comfortable with the notations of the transcripts, I entered the data into the NVIVO 14 data analysis program to verify groupings of codes and to put them into codes. I moved the information that I hand-coded into NVIVO, highlighting the parts of the text and entering the corresponding codes that I assigned during hand-coding. The codes identified were job security, stress and anxiety, work-life balance, technology challenges, flexibility and autonomy, isolation, employer support, family time, productivity, and communication with colleagues. After allocating codes to the data, the codes were regrouped based on their similarity to form themes. I identified six major themes: remote workers experienced employment status changes during WFH policies, employment status shifted due to WFH transition, WFH policies affected workers' productivity, WFH transition interfered with personal life balance, remote work distanced colleague relationships and collaboration, employer support mitigated remote workers' stress.

Table 2 highlights the codes and the codes' descriptions as obtained from NVIVO

14. Initial codes were assigned manually based on key phrases and ideas that surfaced repeatedly across interviews. NVIVO 14 was used to verify the groupings of these codes and to create codes representing broader categories (themes).

**Table 2**

*Codes*

Code	Code description
Job security	Concerns about employment stability during the pandemic, including layoffs and reduced hours.
Stress and anxiety	Increased mental health challenges due to remote work, job insecurity, and isolation.
Work-life balance	Issues in balancing personal and professional life while working from home.
Technology challenges	Problems faced due to insufficient or malfunctioning technology in remote work setups.
Flexibility and autonomy	The benefits of remote work allow participants more control over their schedules and workflow.
Isolation	Feelings of social disconnection due to lack of face-to-face interaction with colleagues.
Employer support	Measures taken by employers to support employees in terms of resources, technology, and well-being.
Family time	Increased time spent with family due to the work-from-home arrangement.
Productivity	Variations in personal productivity, either enhanced or diminished by remote work.
Communication with colleagues	Changes in communication styles and frequency with colleagues during the shift to remote work.

Although all the participants expressed concern about job security, stress, and WFH majorities have had an opposite view. For instance, Participant 6 highlighted a

highly positive attitude toward remote work claiming that it was more suitable for a person and their job:

Generally, it gives me more time, it helps me to handle other activities more effectively. It also decreases the risk of getting sick. I'm having to communicate with other people. It also helps me to organize myself more. It's been a great experience, and it has impacted me greatly.

Such contrary cases proved helpful in a way that no single side was emphasized and left out during the study. The cases were taken into account by reflecting on the sample heterogeneity and understanding that the ability to telework may be rather limited and depends on numerous factors. Such acknowledgment helped prevent overgeneralization of the findings and imparted improved precision to the data collected and analyzed. Therefore, this established a methodical approach to categorizing the data and analyzing both typical and atypical cases by answering the research questions to ensure the investigation of the diversity of the effects of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic was comprehensive. The identified themes showed how participants' experiences were diverse in various aspects.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

It was important to establish credibility in this study because it is qualitative. To increase the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the results, several measures were taken. Credibility was considered as each participant in this study was employed. The participants of the study availed the chance to go through the transcriptions of their interviews and make corrections and confirmations on the content

as recorded. This allowed for verification of the data in determining how it is that their experience and perception were being represented. Another type of method applied was also the method of triangulation, which means the collection of data from various participants with different characteristics and experiences. It also assisted in affording confirmation of the coherence of the themes that were discovered. To establish the credibility of the findings of the study, prolonged engagement with the participants was key to gaining the confidence of the participants and in the process acquiring a contextual understanding of their experiences.

Additionally, transferability was made by offering concrete descriptions of the study context, the subjects, and the local environment. Such a technique is fruitful to make a precise evaluation of the generalizability of the findings to other contexts and populations. The amount and type of information of the participants were given including their age, gender, race, and work experience. This gave a clear understanding of how far generalizable the findings were to other situations or types of populations. Moreover, the study was dependable by creating objective records of data collection, coding, and analysis processes. This documentation assures that the study processes and results are clear to other people and can be assessed and comprehended. I used a methodical and objective approach to data collection and analysis; the process was standardized. Confirmability was used to achieve objectivity and neutrality throughout the study. Reflexive journaling was essential to acknowledge and manage personal biases, ensuring that the findings were grounded in the data rather than personal preconceptions. Implementing these strategies provided a trustworthy account of the participants'

experiences with WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic. This thorough approach enhances the reliability and validity of the study's findings, making them significant in understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workplace dynamics and employee well-being.

### **Results**

In this section, the results of the nine-participant semistructured interviews are described with an emphasis on the different ways that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the participants' working and personal domains. The results are presented about the major research questions, where the participants' quotes are used, and tables and figures are incorporated. The chapter also describes conflicting cases and deviant data to give a holistic picture of the study findings. The themes obtained from the interviews are employment duration and changes, which explains changes in employment duration and work roles or statuses by theme with a concentration on the impact of the coronavirus outbreak, employment status changes, which shows employment status of the participants before and during COVID-19, or the change in working from office space to work from home, impact of work-from-home during COVID-19, analyzes the impact of WFH on efficiency, stress levels, and satisfaction levels at the workplace, personal life impact, which shows how the pandemic affected the lives of participants in terms of conflict between work and life responsibilities, impact on colleague relationships, which focuses on the changes in interpersonal relation with colleagues due to the new model of work where employees are working remotely, and employer support, which shows that employer support was a vital element in the success of participants in adapting to work



from home where some participants indicated moderate to low levels of organization support on the availability of necessary equipment, monetary assistance as well as access to mental health services, and flexibility of work schedule.

### **Theme 1: Remote Workers Experienced Employment Status Changes during WFH Policies**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many changes were implemented for the employees in different organizations, whether by contract or permanent. Participant 1 had been employed for 7 years, Participant 2 for 10 years, Participant 3 for 6 years, Participant 4 for 2 years, Participant 5 for about 3-4 years, Participant 6 for 2 years, Participant 7 for 4 years, Participant 8 for 4 years, and Participant 9 for 11 months. The participants had to adjust to these changes including dismissal, cutting down of employees, change of function or responsibilities, and changes in status from permanent to contract or contractual to permanent. Participant 6 said,

There were some workers that were being signed back home not to come work from the office no longer, but we were just being fewer. So as time goes on during 2019, late 2019, so 2020, late 2020. So, it becomes so severe that it's okay. So, you all need to work from home. So, it's not possible to know some hybrid work. Also, Participant 7 who is a web designer said, "During the COVID-19, I was unable to supervise people in my working place, which was a little bit hard for me to even try to come into contact with them." Awareness of such changes is useful in estimating how such interruptions impact the degree of employment security and stability.

## **Theme 2: Employment Status Shifted Due to WFH Transition**

Before COVID-19, the participants noted that interactions in the office were vibrant and interactive in the pre-COVID-19 period. The interactional capacity was high both socially and professionally. Additionally, regular office presence and communications were to a central office. Participant 1 described work before COVID-19 and said,

I'll say it was always lively. We had this kind of group hanging out and just quite a busy area and we usually had fun together, so many outings together.”

Participant 2 described work before COVID-19 and said, “I did most of my job, you know, before, Covid. I have been at the office where I will speak to my team. Speak to my coworkers, you know, have briefings on other topics, you know, before going out.

Participant 3 said his workplace was operational on weekdays and he worked in rotational shifts. Participant 5 said, “My working environment has been very ill, more let me say, reliable and fast, where I have a lot of people, I supervise whereby there's more workforce.” Participant 6 said that before COVID-19 she could meet in the office with many people and interact with colleagues. Participant 7 said, “It was nice, but most importantly, I was working full hours in the office.” This theme is focused on the pre-COVID-19 work culture; where people had to go to work and how the new norm of remote or blended work culture has come into existence. Knowledge of these experiences placed the focus of the study on how COVID-19 interrupted these rhythms and the subsequent altered organizational culture, teamwork, and communication practices. The

theme relates to the study by demonstrating the importance of business social skills and physical office contact in the development of professional relations and work output before COVID-19.

Table 3 summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of remote work. This table analyzes the changes in the themes of the study. The benefits show advantages associated with the ability to work from home, while before COVID-19, working from an office location was more of a priority, dependent on physical presence and interaction. However, the challenges are in sync with eradicating the lively, communicative office atmosphere the participants described. The lack of interaction with co-workers also relates to the decreased interactivity during the pandemic; stress and anxiety also point to the heavy emotional burden of remote work as opposed to the social activity experienced pre-COVID-19.

**Table 3**

*Benefits and Challenges of Working From Home*

Benefits	Challenges
More flexibility	Hard time distinguishing between work and home life.
There is no commute issue	Inefficient home office setups
Better work-life balance	Less contact with workmates
Cuts in costs	Increased stress and anxiety

### **Theme 3: WFH Policies Affected Workers' Productivity**

The COVID-19 virus outbreak brought many changes including situations where one is switching from being employed to being unemployed, WFH, alteration in the provisions on job security, fluctuation in working hours, or establishment of operative fixed-term or permanent teleworking provisions. Additionally, the effect on output, productivity, free time and convenient time, physical and mental health, and job contentment were experienced on different levels by different organizations. Participant 1 narrated their experience of WFH being like a prison and caged from doing other things. Participant 2 said that the experience of WFH enabled them to utilize technology. For example, he worked from the phones and computers while balancing work and life. Participant 3 had to work in the office but said, “We needed to walk half the time we used to before the pandemic.” Participant 5 found it hard to supervise the team members and said, “During the COVID-19, I was unable to supervise people in my workplace, which was a little bit hard for me to even try to come into contact with them.” Participant 6 was glad that WFH reduced the risk of the employees contracting COVID-19 and that she had enough time for other activities. For Participant 7, WFH affected the quality of their work, “With kids moving around and all of that plane, it affects the work you're supposed to do, and being that, you know I was not used to working from home.” Participant 8 on their side there was a lot of work, he became busier while WFH. Moreover, Participant 9 found it stressful WFH because as an extrovert she had to transition immediately thus she struggled to adapt to the situation. These changes

provided the general direction of the changes in the economic and employment landscapes as a result of the pandemic.

Table 4 depicts the impact of WFH has brought about social gains and losses to personal lives and mental health. The positive effects are consistent with the advantages of WFH, which meet personal needs for quality time with family, flexibility, and relationship enhancement, offering a stark comparison to the pre-COVID-19 norm of physical presence at the workplace. On the other hand, the negative effects evident in the study imply that there was a disruption in the richness of social and professional interactions embraced by the participants before the breakout of the pandemic. The theme of reduced social relations and interaction in the workplace corresponds to the table note on loneliness, while the difficulties with the home-office balance reflect the problems of remote work.

**Table 4**

*Impact on Personal Lives and Mental Health*

Positive impact	Negative impact
More time with family	Increased stress and anxiety levels.
Time management flexibility	Social isolation
Improved personal relationships	Strenuous work-life balance

**Theme 4: WFH Transition Interfered with Personal Life Balance**

Some personal life issues developed during COVID-19. Issues of adjustment to new schedules, managing new routines while WFH, and managing efficiency during the WFH experience came up. People experienced a sense of being locked in and a rise in

stress levels because there was no physical contact as well as a loss of distinction between personal and workspaces. Participant 1 described the experience of WFH as being imprisoned and caged from doing some things. Participant 2 said, “I had lots of increase of stress, you know, cause I don't have to deal with other challenges, you know, with the kids and walking homes as well.” Participant 3 said,

I would say, it has given me about 70% positive impact. It has really impacted my understanding of a lot of things. My relation with individuals, my communication skills as well as my individual interest in getting my job done.

Participant 4 said that despite having to work from home, she felt that she was in isolation and had to figure out everything by themselves when she encountered a challenge at work. Participant 4 said,

If I'm having some difficulty, it can go on my YouTube and I can just browse about it. And you know, follow the procedure of someone else that did that just to do it by myself, and but not everyone might have this. This advanced knowledge of you learning things yourself online.

Participant 5 said the experience of WFH was hard because, in most cases, there was some information she needed to get which was hard to get. Additionally, in the COVID-19 period, she could not get more clients. During that WFH period, she experienced challenges such as finance, and no work from clients. Participant 6 said,

Generally, it gives me more time, it helps me to handle. Seems like other activities are more effective. It also decreases the risk of getting sick. I'm having to communicate with other people. It also helps me to organize myself more.

Participant 7 on the other side had difficulties balancing family with work which affected their productivity. He said, “Working from home limits my focus. And sometimes I would want to do certain things. But with people around. And you know, kids around, and all of that, you know, it distracts and takes.” Participant 8 said this about WFH: “So good on a kind of very epic as well made me close to my family. It's all for me to build relationships, and it's all for me to be able to know my strengths.” Participant 9’s experience at the beginning was stressful but after some days, she had adapted to WFH. She said,

Once I went back after 3 months, I only lasted 30 days. I ultimately decided to leave, that was not necessarily just because of the transition to WFH, but because of the stressors on the job. And then you know, on top of that, having to add the fact that I'm having to bring my work home.

This theme focuses on the mental and social transformations where people experienced a shift to work remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants experienced positive and negative impacts. Further, the theme reveals how it displays the testimonies of various people and how they managed or struggled to deal with the changes affecting their efficiency and psychological well-being during working hours. This corresponds with the larger literature, as it exemplifies how the conditions of telework as experienced through the pandemic upended prior expectations for work and life and required different levels of adjustment and strain in workers.

Table 5 focuses on various changes in interactions with co-workers and employers during the transition to remote work (WFH). The reduction of interactional

capacity and the feeling of being socially isolated resonates with these challenges. On the employer-employee side, the ownership of tools for WFH and mixed levels of supply indicates hybrid organizational commitment, which reflects the participants' experiences of achieving various levels of organizational fit in adapting to new work patterns. Here, the effects can be tied to the concept of social distancing, the breakdown of communication, and the inability to sustain close working relations during the shift to remote work. They highlight a need to establish how the pandemic has altered professional and social relations in the workplace.

**Table 5**

*Changes in Relationships With Colleagues and Employers*

Colleague relationship	Employer-employee relations
Increased isolation feelings	Provision of working tools for WFH.
Decreased face to face social interactions	Mixed levels of support
Reduced opportunities for bonding	Lack of communication with coworkers

**Theme 5: Remote Work Distanced Colleague Relationship and Collaboration**

The interacting dynamics changed slightly during COVID-19 and after people resumed working in the office in that everyone maintained a professional rapport. However, this changed how positive the interactions were and the possibility of casual encounters in the same physical space. Greater respect for the opinions of others and more tolerance in the approach to work, while the disadvantages refer to the difficulty of interacting with colleagues due to the lack of face-to-face communication while working



remotely. Participant 1 said the WFH period made them miss how he used to work in the office. Participant 2 had a different experience whereby he stated he began to view WFH from a different aspect which enlarged their ideas to work at home effectively despite loneliness. Participant 3, however, said that WFH had not changed their relationship with colleagues, but this reduced the in-person meetings. Participant 4 said,

Although I am a lot more kind of a person, that is a lot of friendly associated people, even if I go somewhere, I can somehow navigate my ways through because I don't have a phobia in talking or discussing Carter places. So, my colleague will stay in touch. Even my supervisor is still in touch. Most times I email him if I have some difficulty. We chat.

Participant 5 colleagues' relationship was negatively impacted and said, "I say loss, because I was not closer to my colleagues, I'm unable to even get more information needed." Participant 6 said, "We, we still keep in touch with each other. We talk from the group chat." Participant 7 said,

It's changed. My relationship with a whole lot of people that you know I was not that connected with before the whole, you know, working from home scene: it did not give me the chance to connect to them, because I felt like probably if we had been together for a while, I would have had the opportunities connect, and all of that. But then, for those who I was in connection with. I tried as much as possible to still stay connected.

Participant 8 said he had been in contact with some of their colleagues. For Participant 9, the relationship with colleagues became different and said, "I miss my coworkers because

I enjoy the people I work with now.” The participants encountered different challenges while trying to keep their relationships with colleagues. However, this promoted the development of many ideas to utilize technology such as email, and group chats to stay connected.

### **Theme 6: Employer Support Mitigated Remote Workers’ Stress**

Employers played a critical role in transitioning to work from home. At the onset of COVID-19, the employees had challenges accessing the necessary tools and materials required for WFH, However, during the interviews, the participants noted that some of the employers provided the necessary hardware, software, training, and other means for efficient teleworking. Further, the employees received psychological amenities, virtual contact, and compassion when things were tough. Participant 1 said their employer holds online meetings to check on them and they have mental health checks every weekend. Participant 2 said,

At the beginning, it was kind of priced out, because all while, you know, we are trying to maintain trying to go for the system, and what you had approved After some few symposiums and some few programs about how this could as well, we were given the rights and activate.

Participant 3 said this about their employer: “He has helped set aspects like who was reaching out to ensure how my current work has been and how overwhelming my overall wellbeing has been in certain times. We also got a Wi-fi subscription.” Participant 4 said that there had been a lot of issues coming up and the efficiency of working was not that

great. Participant 5's employer has been providing little support financially to subsidize the employees' expenses. On the other side, Participant 8 said this about their employer:

He's been a great person, and sees very much, tries as much as possible to get in touch with us, to know how generally he can help. Also, if you have questions, especially if we want to get jobs done, if we need to do something, he has given us that avenue to be able to ask questions.

Participant 7 said their employers were supportive:

They tried as much as possible to, you know, provide us with necessary help considering that the Covid period things were, you know, difficult, and all of that. So, they helped us, you know, to set up our workspace as home, and I think since then they have been really helpful and doing quality checks, and all of that, to make sure everything is intact, and we also have the necessary data to work with, and all of that.

Participant 8 said they were given material needed to work from home and relief for WFH. Participant 8 said,

My current employer. They have been phenomenal. We have a docking station where we're able to plug and play from the office to home. I have a laptop that I travel with. They've also been very accommodating about the tools and the equipment, such as a hotspot.

### **Summary**

This chapter delved into the remote working culture due to COVID-19 restrictions and presented some of the difficulties and experiences of different employees. In this

study, the participants had no experience WFH and were consulted with semistructured interviews during the pandemic to evaluate their experience and attitude. The study employed a descriptive phenomenological method and thematic analysis to categorize the data. The themes that emerged in the study were remote workers experienced employment status changes during WFH policies, employment status shifted due to WFH transition, WFH policies affected workers' productivity, WFH transition interfered with personal life balance, remote work distanced colleague relationships and collaboration, employer support mitigated remote workers' stress.

The participants stressed that remote work had an obvious positive appeal and has its sour side. Some participants understood its usefulness to flexibility and safety and said they had fewer sick days and more freedom to appointments. However, others struggled with social distancing, poor WFH conditions, and minimal contact with colleagues. Similar problems were coupled with other organizational issues such as downsizing and restructuring which made the workers more concerned and insecure. The findings offered in the paper painted a more complex picture of how the pandemic reshaped work environments, for the better and worse, to show the multiple effects WFH arrangements had on employees.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The rationale for this study was to explore the changes that working remote employees experienced in psychological health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote work became the new normal and unexpected, bringing many changes, primarily concerning mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic established an environment that forced working people to shift from working in offices and WFH while dealing with other external stressors like social isolation, job insecurity, and work and personal life extension. The research aimed at the absence of available literature on the consequences of WFH, especially on employees' mental health in the long-term perspective. Also, the study contributed to filling the gap in the existing literature on the consequences of WFH, focusing on its impact on the long-term mental health of employees. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to gain an understanding of the participant's rich descriptions. Focusing on remote workers, the consequences for their psychological well-being were due to the lack of social contacts, increased working hours, and insufficient equipment. The research questions focused on what type of workers considered their psychological status for the new WFH model and how they managed the corresponding stress challenges. This method enabled the concern with the description of the individual and their psychological developments during this period. Specifically, the highlights revealed that most of the participants reported that they have severe mental issues, such as anxiety, burnout, or loneliness. Many employees complained about loneliness given that they worked remotely, and some were single and got little or no social contacts as

they used to get when working in offices. This isolation led to the examples of feeling less connected to their teams and organizations which in turn increased the stress levels. Another enduring outcome was the problem of the flexibility of the work-life boundary, with quite a few participants describing the inability to 'log out' of the work setting. The participants pointed to the advantages of a flexible schedule due to the ability to work remotely. For instance, the employees saved time and energy commuting and spent more time with their families. It turned out that the advantages of flexibility significantly masked the drawbacks associated with the impossibility of working intensively at home. Another emerging theme in the discussions was the poor home office setup whereby some participants had to use kitchen counters and couches as office space. This made them physically uncomfortable and less happy with their work. The implemented WFH model had some benefits and challenges such as mental health toll on the employees. In light of the research, it is evident that organizations need to enhance their efforts for employees WFH by providing mental health records and creating more distinct separation between working and non-working hours.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

This study adds credibility to, supplements, or challenges previous literature on remote work and mental health. Several earlier works by Brooks et al. (2020) and Sunyoung et al. (2021) showed that teleworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic suffer from mental health problems including loneliness and burnout. This study supports such findings because most participants reported loneliness and burnout. In one way of expressing psychological disturbed, Participant 3 said they felt caged, confirming that

WFH made it worse. This research extends this literature by considering the long-term consequences of remote work, unlike other prior investigations that focused on the early consequences of this practice. People mentioned that because they could not communicate face-to-face it was gradually getting worse and worse feeling of isolation and being lonely. In addition, Vahia et al. (2020) pointed out that the use of telework caused employees much anxiety and depression because there was no division between work-related duties and personal responsibilities. This study supports this assertion by showing that to prevent reversals and instability, employees with no prior work experience in telecommuting were at risk. Participant 5 said, “During the COVID-19, I was unable to supervise people in my workplace, which was a little bit hard for me to even try to come into contact with them.” These findings are similar to Vahia et al. (2020) who mentioned that besides saving lives, remote working was associated with worsening mental health and wellbeing since workers were isolated from their employees. This argument extends current knowledge by considering how constant immersion in remote work contexts leads to the exacerbation of burnout.

From a theoretical perspective, the study’s results can be explained by the CET devised by Deci and Ryan in 2020. CET posits that intrinsic motivation is driven by four key factors: self-determination, self-competence, self-assertiveness, and self-affiliation. Although various participants preferred autonomy received from telework, the lack of relatedness, which resulted from restrictions on social contacts, hindered competencies. Some participants such as Participant 2 posed that lack of social relations made it hard to manage performance and health resulting in stress. This implies CET’s notion that the

absence of social capital de-motivates workers by excluding them from balanced, useful relationships in their workplaces. Measurement implications for practicing employers are that while the research points to self-telework sufficiency as positive, employers need to set up the telecommunications environment to ensure feelings of competence and relatedness for worth. If these components are missing, employees can be easily lost in the sea of the problems associated with working remotely, as mentioned by Participant 2:

At the beginning, it was kind of priced out, because all while, you know, we are trying to maintain trying to go for the system, and what you had approved. After some few symposiums and some few programs about how this could as well, we were given the rights and activate.

This study helps to expand the existing knowledge of how remote work influences mental health by revealing the demand for the employer-imposed hierarchy. Therefore, it is possible to state that the results of the present study support many of the previous findings pursuing additional investigation of the long-term effects and a broader involvement of CET in the context of teleworking. For these reasons, this study has implications for organizations that are thinking about the continued practice of remote work and stress the need for effective mechanisms to combat burnout and declining mental health.

### **Thematic Findings**

I discuss six themes observed in the participants' experiences of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic. These themes are the manifestation of what has become the new normal WFH and the problems that come with it.



### **Employment Status Fluctuations Impacted Remote Workers' Stability**

During the pandemic, participants revealed changes in their employment duration and working hours. These changes included pay cuts and the transition from permanent to temporary employees, lower hiring rates, and shorter working hours for employees all of which increased feelings of job insecurity and the mental health toll. Participant 4 reported that the employment relationship changed to contractual while the position provided the participant with insecurity of job. Problems that have perhaps stemmed from people having to work from home and mainly the issue of performance put extra pressure on employees. Participant 6 stated

There were some workers that were being signed back home not to come work from the office no longer, but we were just being fewer. So as time goes on during 2019, late 2019, so 2020, late 2020. So, it becomes so severe that it's okay. So, you all need to work from home. So, it's not possible to know some hybrid work.

Participant 7, who is a web designer, said, "During the COVID-19, I was unable to supervise people in my working place, which was a little bit hard for me to even try to come into contact with them." This theme points to the disruption to employment changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results have demonstrated how the interplay of changes in their tasks and job insecurity became a major source of pressure on the employees. While some of the participants have learned to cope with the established changes in working conditions, others extended working instability, leading to long-standing anxiety. This reiterates reviews that revealed employment insecurity as one of the determinants of the mental health of employees during the COVID-19

pandemic. Moreover, this theme explains how extended insecurity overshadowed participants' focus on job tasks. The participants in the study were asked about their feelings towards job permanency and security while in new roles or temporary contracts with their organization; the results indicated that increased pressure to deliver expectations may arise from the lack of a permanent job in place in any organization. This resulted in the general creation of constant stress due to the uncertainty of layoffs or additional shifts in roles for many, which affected their productivity levels.

### **Employment Status Shifted Due to WFH Transition**

Remote work made a massive shift in the social dynamics of the workplace; with the implementation of WFH. According to participants, the sociable and collaborative nature of the physical workplace space was defined by physical isolation and virtual meetings. For instance, Participant 1 described the prepandemic office environment as full of life: "I'll say it was always lively. We had this kind of group hanging out and just quite a busy area and we usually had fun together, so many outings together." Participant 2 described work before COVID-19 and said, "I did most of my job, you know, before, Covid. I have been at the office where I will speak to my team. Speak to my coworkers, you know, have briefings on other topics, you know, before going out." Participant 3 said his workplace was operational on weekdays and he worked in rotational shifts. Participant 5 said, "My working environment has been very ill, more let me say, reliable and fast, where I have a lot of people, I supervise whereby there's more workforce." Participant 6 said that before COVID-19 she could meet in the office with many people and interact with colleagues. Participant 7 said, "It was nice, but most importantly, I was

working full hours in the office.” These switches significantly shifted the interactions of the participants with co-workers and tasks. This theme focuses on the impacts that WFH and work in homes turned workspace have on society. Here physical distance from other colleagues at the workplace was one of the reasons why the lack of interaction with others made a majority of participants feel lonely. The adoption of various information-sharing technologies was inadequate in capturing the casual social interactions that used to take place in the workplace. This step reduced the level of interactant social framework at the workplace, thereby making it less frankly social to work in. This situation also affected team dynamics and, having no possibility to meet the team members face to face, participants would experience more disconnection and alienation. They bear evidence of fading social interaction savings that used to emanate from working closely with fellow employees while fitting into new working environments more altered by remote work. This supports earlier research done on social capital about the well-being of employees, especially in companies where task interdependence prevails.

### **WFH Policies Affected Workers Productivity**

WFH gave participants some freedom which is highly valued in today’s society. Although this was flexible, it also had its drawback in that it was hard to set boundaries between work and other aspects of life. Participant 7 said, “With kids moving around and all of that happening, it affects the work you're supposed to do and being that you know I was not used to working from home.” Participant 8 stated that there was a lot of work, and they became busier while WFH. Moreover, Participant 9 found it stressful WFH because as an extrovert she had to transition immediately thus she struggled to adapt to

the situation. One of the major complaints, that participants raised was that mixing work and personal life increased difficulty in being able to disengage from work situations leading to high levels of stress and burnout. This theme underlines the positive effect of WFH flexibility and at the same time, the negative effect. Though commuting was effectively eradicated and people were able to work hours of their choosing, the good nature of flexibility quickly transformed into an ill of blurred work-life separation.

Nevertheless, the majority of participants, especially those who had caregiving responsibilities, were unable to clearly distinguish between work and personal life. This created role overlaps which intensified burnout and blurry separation of work and personal life since participants were constantly on call for work, even in their off time. This is also evident in the best way and flexibility that comes with WFH because it works best when practiced with a routine together with well-defined measures that helped minimize burnout at work. While some parents managed to establish a demarcation between their work and home sphere by going to an office space or shuttling between home and office, several participants failed to transition easily and experienced noticeable stress deterioration. This supports the need to provide and encourage measures to alleviate work-to-home interference or work-home conflicts by setting clear break periods or strict stopping times for working-from-home employees.

### **WFH Transition Interfered with Personal Life Balance**

It was noticed that participants experienced significant pressure due to the blurring of the division between personal and working life during the pandemic. It was especially challenging for many to handle the two, especially as regards the care of

children and responsibilities of the home to work. Participant 9 for instance said that at the beginning WFH was stressful but after some days, she had adapted to WFH. Later on, she said,

Once I went back after 3 months, I only lasted 30 days. I ultimately decided to leave, that was not necessarily just because of the transition to WFH, but because of the stressors on the job. And then you know, on top of that, having to add the fact that I'm having to bring my work home.

The fact that there are no rigorous partitions between the working and family times contributed to the feeling of work overload. This theme shows how the participants were under high pressure during the pandemic as they tried to balance many responsibilities. What it meant was for many that one had to produce at the same level or even more in terms of career as they had to handle home chores at the same time. Besides the aspect of integrating work and personal life responsibilities, which as seen enhanced stress, participants also complained of poor mental health as they knotted themselves in vicious cycles as they struggled to meet various expectations placed on them. The fact has been depicted in conclusion that there ought to exist a clear line of separations between professional and personal lives. This led to a feeling of failure in the professional as well as personal career since participant could not effectively balance their duties. This struggle speaks volumes about the need for other support structures in a workplace that has embraced WFH, especially for those who provide care for the young or the elderly.

### **Remote Work Distanced Colleague Relationship and Collaboration**

Virtual environments driven by technology lead to the reduction of not only close friendships and communication but working relationships as well. Some participants said that the feeling of being a part of a group, and social interactions that are felt at the workplace were drastically affected within the virtual environment. Participant 5 colleagues' relationship was negatively impacted and said, "I say loss, because I was not closer to my colleagues, I'm unable to even get more information needed." Participant 6 said, "We, we still keep in touch with each other. We talk from the group chat."

Participant 7 said,

It's changed. My relationship with a whole lot of people that you know I was not that connected with before the whole, you know, working from home scene: it did not give me the chance to connect to them, because I felt like probably if we had been together for a while, I would have had the opportunities connect, and all of that. But then, for those who I was in connection with. I tried as much as possible to still stay connected.

Thus, insufficient level of interpersonal contact. Most participants conveyed feelings of distress because of the deterioration of relationships in the workplace. In particular, such coincidental interactions that are unassociated with actual work, which used to help team members maintain their connectedness, waned. Indeed, although individuals were able to conduct official business inside the conferencing platforms with official meetings, they could not replicate the informal interactions of normal corporate life and so could not easily sustain their one-to-one working relationships with each other. This theme talks of

social loss due to remote work in that direct physical interactions that foster interpersonal relationships are reduced. Some interviewees claimed that there was restricted communication exclusion and restricted social recognition; they stated that when people are limited to online interaction, they feel quite isolated. This work implies that communication media that support work transcends the information technology tools that support the exchange of information but do not satisfy face-to-face interaction needs.

### **Employer Support Mitigated Remote Workers' Stress**

Employer support ranged from offering participants mental health support and equipment for the home office to feeling as if they were for the most part ignored. Participant 1 said their employer held online meetings to check on them and they had mental health checks every weekend. Participant 3 said this about their employer: "He has helped set aspects like who was reaching out to ensure how my current work has been and how overwhelming my overall wellbeing has been in certain times. We also got a Wi-fi subscription." Participant 4 said that there had been a lot of issues coming up and the efficiency of working wasn't that great. These approaches sketched out above differ vastly and could be seen as having a profound impact on how the participants managed WFH challenges. It was established that the support provided to the employer was a significant factor that influenced the probability of performing participants' transition to WFH. Some of the participants were able to get sufficient resources including checkups for mental health or equipment for home offices and these respondents noted a better transition and wellbeing.

On the other hand, participants who experienced a lack of support from the employer fell into stress and frustration because they were on their own to combat problems associated with remote work. This theme highlights a fact of illustrates the impact of the organization's support on the physical and psychological conditions of the employees while working remotely. All these findings indicate that employers who embrace their employees, offer the required resources, as well as the necessary encouragement for WFH, can help themselves and their employees avoid adverse impacts from loneliness and work fatigue. On the other hand, lack of support worsens the existing issues experienced while WFH because the employees are left on their own while contributing to the company's productivity. The findings underscore that caring for people requires organizations to equip them with resources to support them with their current work and well-being especially when organizations embrace virtual working environments.

The thematic analysis from this study presents a clear picture of the duties and tasks performed by remote workers during the COVID-19 outbreak. These findings show that despite the protection of freedom and flexibility, the organization and its employees experienced the following limitations while practicing remote work: I detected the influence of the six important themes of the studies: employment duration/changes, employment status changes, the effects of WFH, the changes in personal life, relationships with colleagues, and employment support for those who are WFH at the time of the pandemic. The findings discussed in this paper have implications for



understanding the effects of remote work and highlight how organizations need to help employees function well in a newly established remote working environment.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Some of the limitations concerning the trustworthiness of this study emerged during implementation, which should be noted when interpreting the results. To begin with, the ability to conduct only virtual interviews, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, restricted the researcher's face-to-face communication with the participants. Traditional face-to-face interviewing allows the interviewer to assess rapport and body language which is important when collecting qualitative data (Liu et al., 2021). The respondents might have provided less reliable answers as they recorded their answers or because of the absence of direct contact with the interviewers. It could have led to less descriptive or self-observing accents of their experiences. Second, the results may not be generalized to larger populations of WFH employees as my focus was only on elucidating and describing the lived experiences of the nine study participants. Sample size may be a problem when generalizing the findings. Qualitative studies use fewer sample sizes; however, they search for deeper information. Cresswell (2020) admitted that a qualitative study's sample size is smaller; although the sample size may vary, anywhere between five to 25 until saturation is reached.

### **Recommendations**

With the strengths and limitations of this study, further studies with various sectors and a more diverse population can be done to understand differences in remote work. Perhaps, future studies can investigate other sectors where remote work is not

possible or possible only to a limited extent, like manufacturing or the retail sector, to compare the levels of psychological effects with those of employees in knowledge-intensive industries. Also, meaningful data could be received from the investigation of cross-tabulations by age, gender, presence of children, being a parent or not in the population that uses the remote work option. Additionally, there is a potential for other research to extend the current work by adopting a longitudinal research design to capture the effects of remote working on the psychological well-being of employees in the long run. Although the current study targeted experiences during COVID-19, it would be important to understand how such experiences change over time especially as organizations consider moving to a blended workplace where some practice remote working while others work from the office. More specifically, comparing the state of employees, mental health-wise, in several months and years would tell whether burnout, isolation, and other WFH-related issues are a passing phase, gradually declining, or on the contrary growing worse, and how individuals change as they engage in adapting to new working conditions.

Furthermore, it could be useful for future studies to consider how the organization can help reduce these effects by providing the proper support for WFH. Although this study established the significance of mental health resources and supports, it was not very detailed about the mental health intervention that could be offered at the workplace by employers. Research could compare what kind of support, it might be monetary, hardware, kinetic, or others to equip remote employees to sustain their health. For instance, it may be used to explore whether issuing allowances for the enhancement of an

employee's home office environment can reduce or increase stress and boost productivity or perform a similar analysis based on requiring workers to check in on their mental wellness.

### **Implications**

The implications arising from this study for method, theory, and data contributed to understanding the effects of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of employees. From the methodology point of view, the use of the phenomenological qualitative research approach was applicable to gain insight into the context of remote working from the subject's personal and emotional perspective whereby some of the emotions that people find themselves going through while working remotely may not be captured by quantitative studies. More empirical investigations into the effects of remote work may be useful in future research by using qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide inclusiveness. Consequently, the study supported CET, as though autonomy is helpful in distant work, social isolation negatively impacts an employee's psychological well-being. The study revealed that it is critical to focus on cultivating social integration or the sense of identification with large, autonomous work environments even when working virtually while maintaining the right proportion of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Methodologically, the study contributed to the literature by providing more evidence on psychological outcomes related to remote work to refute the contamination hypothesis that negative effects disappear after the transition to home-based work. This pointed to the necessity for further studies that look into the changes in mental health due to the shift to hybrid work models. The study also

considered the directions for future empirical analysis on how various industries and people with diverse characteristics perceive remote work. This calls for diversity research that accounts for the diverse contexts and population groups.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the WFH model served its purpose during the COVID-19 outbreak and helped organizations and employees maintain flexibility and convenience. The WFH model had its drawbacks and challenges that impacted the employees' mental health. Lack of interactions, fatigue, and troubles with the distinction between working time and free time were reported by the respondents who were working remotely. The analysis showed that investment in these mental health issues is essential through the process of building favorable organizational conditions conducive to improving the psychological state. All employers, policymakers, and employees need to know that the positive effect of remote work is complete when supported by proper mental health assistance and a strict line between personal and professional life. The study can contribute to the establishment of additional research on modern work conditions and the development of effective policies and practices that would foster the creation of healthier working modes for the future work environment.

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