



Original Article

Remote Working during COVID-19: Boons or Banes for Instructors Working in Higher Education Institutions in Pakistan

Farhana Tabassum^{1*}, Muhammad Shaghil Baqa², Nazia Akram², Rabia Nawaz¹, Fareeha Bashir¹, Mahwish Alam³, Zartasha Sarwar⁴ and Anam Jamil¹¹ University Institute of Medical Lab Technology, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan² Lahore Business School, Faculty of Management and Sciences, The University of Lahore, Pakistan³ Department of Biochemistry, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan⁴ Department of Physics, The Women University Multan, Multan, Pakistan

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*Corresponding Author:

Farhana Tabassum
University Institute of Medical Lab Technology,
Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, The University of
Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan
farhana.tabassum@mlt.uol.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as the most serious threat to human health, economy, and well-being, affecting substantially every country. The current outbreak has presented society with unexpected obstacles and has jeopardized mankind and global resilience. **Objective:** To determine the influence of COVID-19 on 250 educators teaching at various public and private higher educational institutions in Pakistan. **Methods:** An online cross-sectional survey was conducted using a link to a Google questionnaire form. The survey consisted of 22 questions covering demographic information, physical activity, remote working challenges, time spent on social media, and issues with online education. The data were collected using the snowball sampling method, and it was analyzed using SPSS 2021. **Results:** The findings revealed the detrimental effects of COVID-19 lockdowns, such as excessive use of social media, a sedentary lifestyle, insufficient online classes training, excessive workload, rigorous timetable, the constant worry of shrinking, and wage cutbacks are all factors to consider. To continue the smooth teaching and learning process, the study recommends that educators, government, and policymakers reshape the present policies directly associated with the national teachers' personal, social, economic, physical, and mental well-being.

INTRODUCTION

SARS-CoV-2, a new coronavirus, has wreaked havoc on our daily lives. It has shaken the world economy, affecting practically every industry. There is little question that the local economic and social realms, as well as global spheres, have been tested, with certain sectors badly devastated. COVID-19 has thrown a wrench in the workings of all educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities, as well as other activities such as sections of on-campus training, seminars, lectures, and conferences aimed at improving skills and personal growth were also disrupted. Similarly, all professions encountered obstacles in their various vocations, whether physicians, engineers, educators, actors/actresses, businesspeople, or vendors.

Similarly, the epidemic has wreaked havoc on global schooling. The education sector in Pakistan was no exception, and it had a direct influence on the personal and professional lives of educators, who are regarded as the pillars of the educational system. The Pre-COVID-19 setting demonstrates the instructors' demanding and hectic schedules. The purpose of this research was to look at the issues that instructors in Pakistan's public and private higher education institutions experience as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. The following section contains excerpts diverse researches involving a wide range of professionals and the issues experienced by teachers during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In terms of physical activity, Puccinelli et al. in 2020 investigated the impact of interpersonal distance on physical burnout levels along with interconnection between states of the mood (distress and stress level) or sex with actual physical excursion levels, the change in the mode of physical exercise due to socially isolated duration, the extent of cohesion and the acceptance time to social distancing, family income, and age. The research explored the association of low levels of physical activity, low-income families, monthly income, and younger age with stress and depression syndromes. Moreover, it was also found that a significant number of males remained active and exhibited no mood problems and vice versa [1]. Kaur et al. (2020) researched how different workouts and fitness activities are done at home helped them cope with psychological concerns and physical health issues. Twenty-two individuals who were frequent gym-goers before the COVID-19 epidemic but remained at home during the statewide lockdown were interviewed over the phone in semi-structured interviews. According to the findings, the individuals experienced a poor situational view and a lack of enthusiasm for physical activity throughout the first phase of lockdown. They progressively shifted away from gym-based routines and toward alternative activities, which considerably aided in the restoration of their mental and physical health. They also expressed worries about their mental health and an unhealthy reliance on social media in their spare time [2]. Hussain, Mirza, and Hassan (2020) conducted a study to examine the effect of COVID-19 on the population's health, economics, education, and lifestyle, as well as the general public's understanding of COVID-19 symptoms and preventative techniques. The research looked at how people's physical health has suffered as a consequence of a lack of exercise and the closure of gyms and parks. As a consequence of the pandemic lockdown, the bulk of people's sleeping patterns has been interrupted [3]. During the first two waves of the COVID-19 epidemic, Tomsz (2021) conducted a study on the relationship between distance education and teachers' well-being, as well as their close relationships and other social relationships in Poland. According to the research, the study found that teachers suffered at least modest levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Teachers' well-being was greatly influenced by their social and close/marital relationships, and issues in these relationships may have hampered their ability to cope with stress during the epidemic [4]. Medina-Guillen, Quintanilla, Palma-Vallejo, and Guillen (2021) researched to examine the working load of teachers in Latin America at three diverse academic levels during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. The surveyed teachers noticed an increase in workload as a result of the conditions studied, which correlated with an increase in

student desertion. The rapid move from in-person to cyber school has resulted in a reorganization of working hours and domestic responsibilities; remote working needs a fair distinction of work schemes and duties played by instructors in the different components of virtual education [5]. Lizana et al. (2021) researched to analyze the Quality of Life (QoL) effect on Chilean teachers before and during the Covid-19 epidemic. The researchers investigated using a longitudinal design on a sample of 63 Chilean instructors before the Covid-19 pandemic periods. The data verified the decrease of teachers' QoL during the epidemic. The research found some detrimental implications of the outbreak on teachers' mental and physical well-being. The results might be attributed to job pressure owing to teleworking or emotions of uncertainty, alienation, and worry that the epidemic and its correlated repression would deteriorate [6]. Another research was undertaken by Washburn et al. (2021), studied the experiences of full-time faculty members from the 18 authorized Masters of Social Work (MSW) schools in Texas. The study shines the light that a significant number of participants reported an increase in workload, either in intensity or quantity of obligations connected to teaching and field across all ranks and kinds of social work programs. The key element contributing to workload increase noted in the research was the strong effort necessary by faculty to fast convert face-to-face courses and student field instruction to be provided in an online format because of the health and safety issues associated with COVID19 [7]. Jeliska and Paradowski (2021) also investigated how college and university instructors grapple with instructing virtually in these unprecedented conditions, with an emphasis on how elements related to their everyday lifestyle and sustenance affected their well-being. The findings revealed that respondents frequently mentioned anxiety and fear about the pandemic, general anxiety about the world right now, depression associated with workload, uncertainty, struggle with anxiety increasing due to COVID-19, and the uncertainty and anxiety surrounding the state of the world in general [8]. Maity, Sen, and Sahu (2020) performed studies in West Bengal, India, to evaluate the true impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on private-sector employees. The quick rise of a Covid-19-driven pandemic, according to the study, has wreaked havoc on the global economy, producing health issues and employment losses. Layoffs, retrenchment, wage reduction, and delayed promotions with increments are all clear negative repercussions of the crisis. The monster epidemic has caused turbulence in the nation's work environment, culminating in economic contraction and restricted career alternatives, all while professionals suffer a tangible feeling of fear and uncertainty [9]. Zhao and Zhou (2020)

investigated the linkages between COVID-19-related media platforms use and mental stability outcomes, as well as the probable mechanisms behind such associations. According to the findings, higher levels of social media use were linked with decreased mental soundness. However, increased exposure vulnerability to despondent news through interactive media was connected to high levels of depression in participants with high (but not moderate) levels of catastrophe anxiety. Furthermore, in the study, negative affect was revealed to mitigate the connection between social media use and mental health [10]. Stewart et al. (2021) documented the shift of four precariously employed communication teachers to emergency remote teaching in March 2020 in their study. The lecturers have much expertise. Technological annoyances, mental health issues, accent hurdles, financial strains, care work, and illness were all pushed to the side as they dealt with teaching online amid the epidemic. The constant threat of losing one's employment looms large in the background [11]. Marshall, Shannon, and Love (2020) also conducted a national survey of American teachers from March to April 2020 to learn more about their experiences. Remote instruction, according to teachers, made all aspects of teaching more challenging, and they shared a range of experiences. When they had children at home, teachers, for example, had to balance their jobs with their children's educational and technical needs. Several instructors, particularly those in outlying areas, mentioned unhappiness with their home internet access [12].

The research design of this study is a quantitative descriptive technique. The descriptive research technique is applied to describe the characteristics of the demographic segment of a population under inquiry. In this form of study, the researcher monitors the participants or the sample acquired by the subjects without changing the surroundings. Total 250 educators from 2 public and 2 private higher education institutions in Pakistan took part in the research, which aimed to determine the positive and negative effects of Covid-19 on them throughout the lockdown period from January to September, 2021. The subjects freely signed the consent form and participated in the inquiry. To collect data from the participants, the Snowball sampling method was used. In snowball sampling, the researcher chooses a preliminary group of people who meet the study's criteria. Then, these people look for other people who have similar attributes which could be interested in participating in the study [13].

Data Collection and Analysis: An online Google Questionnaire was produced with 20 questions from different segments. It was distributed to instructors via

numerous e- medias such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Emails. The questionnaire was featured multiple-choice. The questionnaire was organized into five categories. The first section consisted of five questions based on the demographics of the participants (age, gender, education, marital status, and teaching experience) (age, gender, education, marital status, teaching experience). The second section included four questions on physical activity during epidemic. The last section contains five questions concerning working from home during outbreak. The fourth portion has three questions about how much time is spent on social media. The fifth section, which comprises five questions, focuses on the issues that were encountered during pandemic. The respondents took around 8-10 minutes to finish the questionnaire. Data were collected, and descriptive data analyses (such as frequencies) were performed using the online survey site's data analysis tool and the SPSS 25 version, which was then shown via tables.

The Scale: Face validation was tested in a pilot study. Ten faculty members from a private higher education school were given the questionnaire. The questionnaire was tweaked and enhanced in response to feedback from pilot research participants. The Alpha Cronbach test was used to determine the questionnaire/internal instrument consistency, and the result was 0.77. The measured value is sufficient to meet the study's objectives.

RESULTS

Table 1 demonstrates the demographic features of the respondents on age, gender, education, marital status, teaching experience. Out of 250 respondents, the age means and \pm SD were 31.53 and 7.974, respectively. In the study, (40.4%) males and (59.6%) females participated. Most of the respondents were MPhils/MS (71.6%), whereas (15.2%) respondents had a bachelor's degree of education, and only (13.2%) were PhDs. While (60.8%) respondents were married, (39.2%) were unmarried. The majority of the respondents (38.0%) had more than 6 years of teaching experience while (32.0%) had 3 to 6 years, and (30.0%) had 1 to 3 years of teaching experience.

No	Demographic	Categories	N(%)
1.1	Age (years)	Mean 31.43 SD \pm 7.974	
1.2	Gender	Male Female	101 (40.4) 149 (59.6)
1.3	Education	BSc/BA MS/MPhil PhD	38 (15.2) 179 (71.6) 33 (13.2)
1.4	Marital Status	Married Unmarried	152 (60.8) 98 (39.2)

1.5	Your teaching experience(year)?	1 - 3 3 - 6 Over 6	75 (30.0) 80 (32.0) 95(38.0)
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Table 1: Participants' demographic characteristics(N=250)

No	Items	Yes n(%)	No n(%)
2.1	I take exercise regularly before COVID-19 Lockdown.	80(32.0)	170(68.0)
2.2	I used to do physical exercise daily during the COVID-19 lockdown.	103(41.2)	147(58.8)
2.3	I started spending time on yoga/mediation during the lockdown.	62(24.8)	188(75.2)
2.4	After lockdown, I joined the gym.	44(17.6)	206(82.4)

Table 2: Physical Exercise during COVID-19(N=250)

No	Items	Yes n(%)	No n(%)
3.1	I was continuously engaged in official tasks during the lockdown.	180(72.0)	70(28.0)
3.2	It was difficult to maintain a professional environment during lectures.	135(54.0)	115(46.0)
3.3	Working from home was more productive than working in the office.	98(39.2)	152(60.8)
3.4	I was mentally relaxed while executing official tasks from home.	114(45.6)	136(54.4)
3.5	I preferred to do work from home than the office.	128(51.2)	122(48.8)

Table 3: Issues of Remote Working during COVID-19(N=250)

Table 3 exhibits the participant's responses to work from home experience. The results disclose the fact that a large number of the respondents asserted that they were continuously engaged in an official task during lockdown (item 3.1). Conversely, the majority of the participants were shown the agreement that it was difficult to maintain the professional environment during lectures (item 3.2). Similarly, a noticeable number of the participants also exhibited disagreement that work from home was more productive than working in offices, and they were mentally relaxed while executing official tasks from home (item 3.3 & 3.4). Contrary to previous statements, a little more than half of the respondents preferred to work from home than the offices (item 3.5).

No	Items	Yes n(%)	No n(%)
4.1	I spent more time on social media (TV, Netflix, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.).	206(82.4)	44(17.6)
4.2	I exhibited more interest in national and international news.	174(69.6)	76(30.4)
4.3	I deliberately remained updated due to mass media during COVID-19 Lockdown.	186(74.4)	64(25.6)

Table 4: Time Spent on social media during Covid-19(N=250)

Table 4 demonstrates the answers of the respondents on time spent on social media. The findings brought to light the fact that a significant number of the respondents revealed that they started spending more time watching

TV, Netflix, Facebook, and WhatsApp (item 4.1). Similarly, the majority of the respondents also exhibited a deliberate interest in national and international news during lockdown (item 4.2 & 4.3).

No	Items	Yes n(%)	No n(%)
5.1	It was challenging to execute online learning	164(65.6)	86(34.4)
5.2	My workload increased during the Covid-19 lockdown.	219(87.6)	31(12.4)
5.3	It was difficult to maintain a strict schedule of daily routine.	167(66.8)	83(33.2)
5.4	I had an incessant fear of downsizing	204(81.6)	46(18.5)
5.5	I faced the problem of the pay cut	239(95.6)	11(4.4)

Table 5: Problems faced during Covid-19 Lockdown

Table 5 exhibits the responses of the participants on problems faced by educators during Covid-19 lockdown. A noticeable number of the respondents revealed that it was challenging to take online classes (item 5.1). Likewise, the majority of the respondent also showed agreement that their workload increased, and it was quite hard for them to maintain the strict schedule of the daily routine (item 5.1 & 5.3). Similarly, a significant proportion of the participants expressed fear of layoffs and pay cuts in the unprecedented time of epidemic (items 5.4 & 5.5).

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed the positive as well as the negative impact of COVID-19 on the lives of educators. The results indicated that a large proportion of the educators neither took physical exercise nor before and after COVID-19 lockdown, nor did they join Jim. Conversely, another study conducted by Dwyer MJ et al. (2020), in which physical activity is advocated during the pandemic owing to its many advantages on physical and mental health. Personalized training is important according to age, clinical problems, and fitness level; consequently, special guidelines are needed to handle home training [14]. Similarly, Rodriguez-Pervez et al. (2020) researched in Spain and encouraged increased physical burnouts while staying at home during a pandemic. It was also explored that sales of apparatus for performing physical exercises at home, such as stationary bicycles, treadmills, weights, and mats, increased, according to the market research. The majority of participants were grown more physically active and exhibited increased concern about their health [15]. Data from the study revealed that work from home was not an easy task, and educators were continuously engaged in the official tasks at home, which was tiresome and demanding. They faced anxiety, stress, and depression while working from home during containment time. Afrianty, Artataaya, and Burgess (2020) carried out

research and explored that working online was found to be unpalatable for numerous workers in India, as the home atmosphere was considered to be uncomfortable, chaotic, and inappropriate for long periods of productive work [16]. The study indicated that working from home is not productive as compared to working from offices. There could be numerous reasons for that, such as lack of a professional environment, internet connectivity issues, and electricity shortfall. Weitzer et al. (2021) evaluated variations in the quality of life and perceived productivity, focused on the influence of remote working during the first wave of COVID-19 in Austria, and found that working from home was connected with lower rather than greater reported productivity [17]. However, notwithstanding all the above-mentioned concerns, the educators favored working home because Working from Home [WFH] can minimize travel time, boost job satisfaction, and improve work-life balance. According to Medina-Guillen et al. (2021), the shift from brick and mortar teaching and learning process to online education has resulted in a reorganization of office work and personal life, and teleworking from home necessitates a delineation of the work schedules and functions involved in the various aspects of online education by teachers [5]. Besides the teaching and learning process, the educators spent time on social media (TV, Instagram, Netflix, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.). Most of the participants exhibited more interest in national and international news and got their selves updated through mass media during COVID-19 Lockdown. Similarly, a study conducted by MY Ni et al. (2020) and discovered that the majority of participants spent multiple hours per day viewing COVID-19 news via social media [18]. Additionally, social support was associated with a decreased risk of anxiety and depression among community-dwelling individuals. In contrast, Zhao and Zhou (2020) found that having a greater degree of social media usage was linked to having lower mental health [10]. The study also exposed that educators confronted different obstacles when executing the teaching and learning process using online platforms. Similar findings are documented by Tabassum, Rafique, and Sherazi (2020) in their study, and they found that the virtual education system in various public and private universities is associated with potentially obsolete technology due to a lack of financial resources, insufficient training for online courses, inability to take visual cues from students, the terror of technology usage, spiraled expenditures due to the internet, a weak internet connection, and electricity fluctuation [19]. Another study by Şener et al., 2020, in which prominent problem faced by educators is increased workload and maintaining the strict schedules of daily routines. They remained at their toes and

were required to be active online for almost 24 hours that was hectic and cumbersome. Similar findings were also revealed by the researchers [14].

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that during the COVID-19 outbreak, the instructors faced numerous challenges related to their social, economic, emotional, psychological, and physical conditions such as online teaching, hectic and strict daily routine, increased workload, sedentary lifestyle, mental stress and anxiety, fear of pay cuts, lack of physical activity and downsizing. The analysis of the data indicates that many teachers were under financial distress due to arbitrary layoffs and pay cuts. According to the research, government and health groups should start initiatives to encourage people to exercise. Guided seminars for daily physical activity fit for non-active people were broadcast on social media and television networks. To combat COVID-19, social media (TV, Netflix, Facebook, WhatsApp, and so on) should promote healthy eating, healthy living, stress-free life, and a healthy atmosphere. When dealing with online classrooms and digital pedagogy, all sectors of education, whether private or public, must be appropriately equipped. Furthermore, Governments and educational institutions should work together to offer the essential infrastructure and hands-on training to all stakeholders, providing devices and concessional Internet pricing to faculty to stimulate online education during the pandemic. Moreover, the educational institutions must also perform many counseling sessions, which may aid in lowering anxiety and concern. Likewise, the government and its policymakers should encourage the TV channels to air the worry and stress alleviating shows instead of presenting and repeating the same news of covid-19 affected case repeatedly.

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