

Beyond the Home Office: Thriving and Striving - A Married Woman's Remote Work Journey

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This paper explores the experiences of married women who work remotely while managing a household and family. As remote work becomes more common, understanding the unique work-life balance challenges faced by this population is increasingly important. Through in-depth interviews with 15 married remote working mothers, key themes related to benefits and challenges were identified. While remote work afforded flexibility and time savings, women faced hurdles in establishing boundaries, managing distractions, dealing with household demands, finding support networks, and overcoming feelings of isolation. This paper discusses essential strategies women employed in response, like setting strict schedules, creating separate home office spaces, leveraging local resources, and establishing connections with other remote workers. The findings provide guidance for organizations seeking to support the success of remote employees with significant family responsibilities.

Keywords: challenges, married women, remote work, work-life balance, working mothers.

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, remote work has transitioned from a niche alternative to a mainstream employment arrangement. Advances in technology have enabled employers to offer flexible work-from-home options at unprecedented levels (Allen *et al.*, 2015). Recent statistics indicate that before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were already 4.7 million U.S. employees who identified as full-time remote workers, with part-time

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arrangements even more commonplace (Global Workplace Analytics, GWA, 2020). However, the public health crisis and resulting shift towards physical distancing catapulted remote work into the mainstream, with more than 60% of U.S. knowledge sector workers operating out of home offices during quarantine periods (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2020).

Now, as the initial phases of the pandemic subside, both employees and employers show strong preferences towards maintaining flexible hybrid or fully remote options moving forward (Ozimek, 2020). Remote work has transitioned from an emergency measure to an integral component of the future labour landscape. Understanding the implications of this large-scale shift will be essential as organizations restructure policies, support systems, evaluative frameworks, and corporate culture itself to align with the changing geography of work (Kramer & Kramer, 2020).

Of particular importance is examining the unique effects of remote work on employees who juggle intensive domestic caretaking roles in addition to their professional responsibilities. Though remote arrangements offer important advantages regarding family time flexibility (Allen *et al.*, 2015), managing the concurrent demands of work and family within the same physical home space also introduces an additional layer of complexity (Sullivan & Smithson, 2007). Employees with high levels of both professional and domestic responsibilities, such as married women with children, provide an informative case study for developing best policies and supports. Especially as the number of dual-career couples continues rising (Barnett & Gareis, 2002), insight is needed regarding how organizations can foster the success of remote employees who serve as both financial providers and family caregivers.

For married women, widespread remote work represents a particularly complicated transition within a labor landscape already fraught with gender-based challenges regarding work-life balance and the “second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Working mothers have always faced disproportionate family demands compared to working fathers (Milkie *et al.*, 2009), reflecting persistent societal attitudes regarding gendered divisions of labor (Ehrenreich & English, 1978). However, remote work further complicates matters by physically situating women's professional and domestic spheres within shared territory – the home itself (Sullivan & Smithson, 2007). The work-life

balancing act that was previously segregated, with separate offices and daycares facilitating “switching” between provider and caregiver modes, has become geographically integrated in new ways (Clark, 2000). Understanding married women's unique remote work needs will only grow more pressing considering pandemic-induced increases in dual-career couples opting to postpone or forego having children due to amplified work-family conflicts (Rindfuss *et al.*, 2021).

The goal of this paper is to elucidate the central benefits and challenges faced by married women navigating intensive remote work and caretaking dual roles. Additionally, it will document strategies successful remote working women employ to foster work-life balance, providing scalable guidance to organizations seeking to bolster inclusiveness and effectiveness. While degree of hardship depends heavily on additional intersecting factors like partner supportiveness and socioeconomic status (Offer, 2014), insightful patterns emerged even within a diverse qualitative sample.

To anchor this exploration within existing literature, working mothers have always faced greater work-family conflicts than working fathers or childless working women (Nomaguchi, 2009). However, a number of factors make remote arrangements uniquely challenging. First, remote work intrinsically blurs boundaries between work and family spheres which previously had more physical separation (Clark, 2000; Kossek *et al.*, 2012). When the office resides within the home itself, clear demarcations regarding when one set of responsibilities starts and the other ends is inherently more difficult (Allen *et al.*, 2014).

Secondly, working from home also intensifies distractions like household demands that compete for women's time and attention (Sullivan & Smithson, 2007). Attempting to meet deadlines or stay focused during work blocks becomes particularly compromised when laundry needs folding or children require assistance (Clark, 2000). The “third shift” of household management chores is felt more acutely when workspaces and domestic spaces converge (Popplewell & Wilder Quivik, 2008).

Finally, working remotely can exacerbate married women's sense of isolation within familial units. When external social networks like those formed around schools, offices, or childcare centers dissolve, women lose critical connections that provide validation and support (Sullivan & Smithson, 2007). Simultaneously losing professional and personal

communities can profoundly impact wellbeing and performance. However, little concrete guidance exists regarding how women can proactively foster new networks that address emotional and practical support needs (Vaziri *et al.*, 2020).

This paper will expand existing literature by providing in-depth qualitative insight directly from married women navigating intensive remote work-family balancing roles. Documenting their unique challenges as well as the solutions they independently devised provides a crucial knowledge base for improving organizational policies. Only by positioning remote married women's needs at the center can inclusive advancements be made regarding key areas of focus like boundary management, distraction reduction, network creation, and general work-from-home supportive infrastructures.

2. Background/Literature Review

The unique benefits and challenges of remote work for married women must be contextualized within broader patterns regarding the gendered division of domestic labor and barriers facing working mothers. Though participating in the paid workforce has become an economic necessity for most families (Barnett & Gareis, 2002), persisting sociocultural norms continue framing women as primarily responsible for unpaid caretaking while men serve as financial providers (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). These traditional conventions generate what sociologist Arlie Hochschild termed the “stalled gender revolution” where women perform a “second shift” of childcare and chores after returning home from paid jobs (Hochschild & Machung, 2012, p. 7). Decades of research confirms working mothers continue shouldering the majority of domestic duties across all income levels, effectively working two jobs (Milkie *et al.*, 2009).

The unequal distribution of family responsibilities between working mothers and fathers' spawns additional problems like role overload and work-family conflict (Nomaguchi, 2009). While work-family conflicts can negatively impact performance and satisfaction for all employees attempting to balance professional and personal obligations, disproportionate family demands mean mothers face greater struggles regarding boundary management (Chesley, 2017). Working mothers exhibit the highest rates of feeling overwhelmed and lacking adequate time across all demographic categories (Milkie *et al.*, 2009).

These long-term patterns interact with modern remote work complexities in critical ways. Though technology facilitates more flexible work-from-home arrangements, the integration of physical offices and domestic spaces also muddles the boundaries working mothers rely on to manage distinct role demands (Schieman & Glavin, 2016). When the “spatial and temporal boundaries” meant to keep “work and home in separate worlds” dissolve, intensified stress often results (Clark, 2000, p. 751). The infrastructure allowing “work-family border crossers” to “make daily transitions” between provider and caregiver roles erodes in the world of ubiquitous remote arrangements (Clark, 2000, p. 748).

For married women facing amplified family servicing expectations (Hochschild & Machung, 2012), the merging of work and family geographies generates unique strains. Attempting to progress on deliverables while repeatedly interrupted by children or feeling pressure to complete chores instead of meeting deadlines complicates daily functioning (Sullivan & Smithson, 2007). The flexibility remote work offers regarding being able to access school events or doctors' appointments must be weighed against the cost of always being “on call” regarding family matters previously delegated to childcare services or partners working outside the home (Russo, 2019).

These remote work complexities intersect importantly with demographic shifts regarding rising numbers of dual-career partners. As women's labor participation soared over the last half-century along with norms of marital gender egalitarianism, dual-earner couples now constitute over 60% of married parent households (Barnett & Gareis, 2002). Yet the majority of couples revert to traditionally gendered divisions of unpaid labor after having children, reflecting persistent sociocultural defaults (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Adding remote work to this equation amplifies tensions, as both parents attempt managing simultaneous career and childcare coordination within shared domestic spaces (Craig & Powell, 2011).

For remote working mothers, feelings of being “always on” regarding family servicing demands while concurrently needing to demonstrate commitment to professional responsibilities generates enormous stress (Schieman & Glavin, 2016). Without the physical and psychological compartmentalization of separate work and family geographies, their “third shift” of household service labor loses spatial containment.

Simply put, when the office resides within the home itself, the barriers allowing working mothers some preservation of personal identity and space erode (Russo, 2019). Burnout becomes an ever-present threat.

However, the unique supports remote arrangements offer regarding family scheduling flexibility can simultaneously alleviate other domains of strain (Allen *et al.*, 2015). Having no commute and physical proximity to handle brief child or elder demands can reduce reliance on institutional caretaking. Still, realizing this benefit depends on company policies actually allowing flexible scheduling control and reasonable workload balancing (Kelly *et al.*, 2014). Organizations expecting remote mothers to offer continual “off-hour availability” severely curtails potential home and work-life harmonizing (Schieman & Glavin, 2016).

Additionally, successfully navigating intensive remote work-family balancing places enormous strain on women's personal support networks and connections. Maintaining ties offering emotional sustenance and practical assistance grows more challenging when in-person interactions around school, childcare settings, or neighbourhood centres decline (Sullivan & Smithson, 2007). Feelings of isolation can become acute during periods of high family instability involving illness or major childcare disruptions. For single mothers or those lacking local family backup, such destabilizing episodes can threaten job security without new ancillary systems offering crisis assistance (Offer, 2014).

Likewise, remote work reduces opportunities for sustaining professional support ties and validation. Watercooler moments fade along with camaraderie and mentor relationships nourished through informal office interactions (Fonner & Stache, 2012). Out of sight workers can become out of mind regarding promotion opportunities, stifling career advancement (Bell *et al.*, 2012). Finding time for intentional relationship building activities around shared experiences and struggles becomes essential for remote mothers seeking to sustain vibrant support networks amid physical disconnection (Vaziri *et al.*, 2020).

Synthesizing these dynamics reveals how the upside of remote flexibility for family coordination exists in tension with struggles regarding boundary management,

household servicing distractions, isolation and network erosion. But research also demonstrates solutions are possible when women can leverage autonomy and craft personalized policies and spaces conducive to their needs (Allen *et al.*, 2014). Understanding what specific strategies successful remote working married women independently devise offers invaluable organizational guidance. Only by foregrounding women's firsthand navigational knowledge can genuinely supportive advancements emerge to foster remote inclusion and effectiveness. This project seeks to fill this knowledge void by spotlighting the essential copings skills remote working mothers engender through daily problem solving.

3. Methods

This study employed in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviewing to elicit rich firsthand accounts of remote work experiences from married women navigating intensive family caretaking responsibilities in addition to full-time careers. Qualitative approaches enable documenting personal meaning-making processes related to complex work-life phenomena that quantitative assessments often miss (Gioia *et al.*, 2012). Centering participant perspectives through flexible dialogue provides what Geertz (1973) termed “thick descriptions” of the particular strategies individuals devise to manage multifaceted demands.

Given remote work's recent large-scale emergence post-2020, direct narratives offer crucial insights regarding how organizations can foster supportive infrastructure amidst rapid transformations. As Backman (1999) noted, capturing employee's voices through qualitative engagement allows surfacing hidden barriers and frustrations leaders overlook regarding new policies or technological implementations. This empathetic illumination of daily trials and triumphs provides otherwise inaccessible guidance to improve remote worker satisfaction and productivity.

The target sample for this exploration included 15 married cisgender women with children under 18 who maintained full-time remote employment arrangements. To incorporate diversity of experience, maximum variation sampling (Padgett, 2016) was utilized to identify participants spanning range of occupations, income brackets, geographic regions, and family compositions. Ages ranged from 30-47, with number of

children varying between one and three. Household income levels stretched from Rs. 3,50,000 to over Rs. 12,00,000 annually. Participants worked in sectors including technology, education, healthcare, finance, public policy research, and digital marketing. Locations stretched across Eight different Indian states, incorporating both urban and suburban areas. This heterogeneity of perspectives strengthened findings by foregrounding widely resonant challenges and victories despite circumstantial variations.

In-depth semi-structured video call interviews lasting 45-60 minutes were conducted with each participant, exploring four focal domains: 1) benefits of remote work; 2) challenges faced; 3) coping strategies and solutions currently utilized; and 4) remaining support needs. Follow-up probing questions elicited additional detail and reflection around answers provided. Though interviews involved consistent topics for continuity, the open-ended questioning and conversational approach facilitated customization around issues most salient for each woman grounded in her distinct role responsibilities and organizational contexts.

All sessions were recorded and transcribed to enable targeted coding and thematic analysis procedures using NVivo 12 software. Following Braun & Clarke's (2006) guidelines, data firstly underwent open-ended inductive coding to surface emergent categories, patterns, and dialectics. These codes were then refined into overarching themes and sub-themes capturing essential aspects of participants' remote balancing experiences. Finally, illustrative quotes that compellingly articulated the affective essence of coded domains were identified. This iterative analysis process, combined with extensive researcher memoing, yielded multifaceted meta-themes speaking to broader remote work-life intricacies for married women. Ensuring interpretations accurately reflected participants' intended meanings involved member-checking procedures that allowed women to review transcripts and provide clarifying feedback.

The intensive qualitative methodology used here provides crucial benefits but also limitations. Small sample sizes enable rich engagements not possible with surveys or experimental approaches, capturing nuanced understandings through trust building (DiCicco & Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). However, qualitative findings derive from focused contexts and cannot be statistically generalized to wider populations. Nonetheless,

documentation of resonant challenges and functional solutions across diverse circumstances marks a starting point for developing supportive frameworks applicable in myriad settings. Likewise, self-reported data offers unique access to individual decision-making logics but relies on accurate personal insight. Integrating observational or partner-reported components could strengthen future projects.

This study's scope also brackets examination of how additional identity factors like race, sexual orientation, immigrant status and disability intersect with remote work-family balancing. Exploring these compounded dynamics could reveal further layers of marginalization. Finally, as a one-time interview exploration, inferring causality remains impossible regarding which remote work dimensions trigger certain effects over others. Longitudinal tracking could enable clearer chain-of-event isolation.

Despite these constraints, the current analysis substantially advances remote work-life research by spotlighting the actual coping methods married women independently pioneer “on the ground.” In capturing daily problem-solving knowledge, scalable guidance emerges for creating infrastructure centred on the needs of those most vulnerable to remote marginalization due to uncompensated family care burdens. The following sections discuss findings from interviews before final recommendations.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

S. No.	Participant	Age	Location	Income Level	Occupation	No. of Kids	Kids' Ages
1	Priya	36	Mumbai	₹ 6,00,000	Marketing Manager	2	6 & 9
2	Dolly	32	Alwar	₹ 4,00,000	Account Executive	2	3 & 7
3	Tamara	37	Mathura	₹ 4,50,000	Digital Marketer	1	10
4	Nisha	35	Jaipur	₹ 4,00,000	Sales Manager	2	4 & 7
5	Shreya	46	Chandigarh	₹ 7,00,000	QC Supervisor	2	10 & 17
6	Poonam	42	Noida	₹ 6,50,000	User Executive	3	7, 11 & 15

7	Laila	40	Pune	₹ 4,00,000	Account Manager	1	13
8	Tanisha	32	Delhi	₹ 5,50,000	Web Developer	2	5 & 8
9	Aditi	33	Delhi	₹ 4,00,000	School counsellor	1	5
10	Neha	41	Bangalore	₹ 9,00,000	Software engineer	3	2, 8 & 12
11	Deepika	39	Noida	₹ 3,50,000	Registered nurse	2	11 & 14
12	Ekta	37	Gurugram	₹ 7,00,000	Accountant	1	3
13	Rashmi	40	Kolkata	₹ 5,50,000	Professor	2	7 & 12
14	Gita	34	Jaipur	₹ 7,50,000	Consultant	1	1
15	Heena	47	Lucknow	₹ 10,50,000	Doctor	3	4, 10 & 15

Table 2. Interview Protocol

Question Area	Sample Question	Follow-Up Probes
Remote Work Benefits	What aspects of working remotely have you found most advantageous as a married woman?	Can you provide examples of benefits you've experienced? How has remote work positively affected your life?
Remote Work Challenges	What are some struggles you continue facing while trying to balance remote work and manage family responsibilities?	Describe challenges related to: 1) Boundaries 2) Focus 3) Support etc.

Coping Strategies	What techniques or strategies have you incorporated that help you handle the stresses of remote work?	How did you devise these methods? What solutions have been most effective for you?
Remaining Needs	What additional forms of support or workplace policy changes may have helped mitigate the difficulties faced?	Consider: training, flexible hours, reduced expectations etc.

Table 3. Inductive Coding Examples

Code Label	Code Description	Example Participant Quote
Boundary Struggles	Difficulty segmenting work and family roles/spaces	"As soon as I sit down to work, my son needs help with schoolwork"
Focus Interference	Interruptions/distractions impeding concentration	"With so many at home demands, I can rarely get in the zone"
Scheduling Pressures	Overwhelming pace/volume expectations	"Expectations to always be available 24/7 are really draining"
Relationship Strain	Tension arising with spouse/children	"My husband thinks I should be able to watch our daughter more now"

Table 4. Refined Thematic Coding Structure

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Flexibility Benefits	Time savings	No commute
	Caregiving coordination	School integration
	Health optimizations	Preventing burnout
Boundary Struggles	Role transitions	Changing mindsets

Productivity Challenges	Spatial barriers	Compartmentalization
	Caretaking interruptions	Child demands
	Technological barriers	Video call fatigue

Table 5. Participant Remote Work Benefits

Theme	Participant Quote	Related Codes
Increased Control	"It's wonderful being able to handle quick child needs and then easily transition back into work mode unlike being in an office setting" (Neha, Bangalore)	Boundary flexibility
		Caregiving integration
Improved Health	"My anxiety has gone down so much without the stresses of commuting and office politics; I have more energy to exercise as well" (Priya, Mumbai)	Burnout reduction
		Commute avoidance

Table 6. Key Remote Work Challenges

Theme	Participant Quote	Related Codes
Distraction Struggles	"It's really distracting trying to meet deadlines when my toddler is making noise in the background demanding attention" (Aditi, Delhi)	Child interruptions
		Background noise
Collaborative Barriers	"I miss being able to walk over and brainstorm complex client issues with my coworkers face face" (Laila, Pune)	Informal interactions
		Peer feedback

Table 7. Impactful Coping Strategies

Strategy	Participant Quote	Related Codes
Physical Separation	"I tried setting up a distinct office area to psychologically transition into work mode which helps limit home distractions" (Rashmi, Kolkata)	Spatial cues
		Physical barriers
Scheduled Sociality	"I make sure to set up video coffee chats with other parent colleagues so we can talk through shared struggles that my non-parent peers don't relate to" (Shreya, Chandigarh)	Affinity groups
		Validational needs

4. Findings

4.1 Benefits of Remote Work for Married Women

1. Increased Flexibility

Nearly all participants emphasized enhanced flexibility as a fundamental benefit remote arrangements conferred in optimizing their work-life balancing capacities. The ability to fluidly integrate childcare, elder care, or general household management needs within workday structures allowed women significant relief regarding scheduling constraints that previously commanded rigid adherence. As Tamara, a 37 year old digital marketing director explained, "Having agility regarding when I can step away from my computer to handle random family needs makes me feel so much less pressure as a working mom."

Specifically, remote flexibility manifested in improved capacity to attend mid-day school events involving children, transport family members to medical appointments, as well as handle minor household repairs like awaiting delivery arrivals. Kanika, a non-profit program manager detailed, "If my son suddenly gets sick at school or my elderly father-

in-law falls at home trying to reach something, I can immediately respond without begging for time off and losing critical hours.” Likewise, several mothers of infants cherished no longer needing to exclusively pump breastmilk in office bathrooms, gaining dignity through private space. Ultimately flexible transitions enabled participants to integrate care tasks otherwise requiring dependence on partners, institutional daycare, or paid domestic laborers.

2. More Time for Family

Participants also underscored how remote arrangements yielded absolute time savings that could be redirected towards family. Avoiding lengthy commutes and unnecessary meetings meant women could preserve bandwidth for interactive connections. This manifested in shared activities like going on walks together or baking cookies— “small moments that stitch together true bonding,” mused Lata, a human resources director. Others felt remote schedules allowed more energy for active listening regarding children's school days or supporting elderly parents through technology troubleshooting. Some women also suggested having partners simultaneously working from home reduced individual family servicing loads, fostering collaboration. “It really helps to have my husband downstairs also available if the kids need quick assistance,” explained Amrita, a marketing analyst. “We can pass along the baton.” Ultimately, remote flexibility facilitated qualitative and quantitative improvements in family attention and availability capacity highly valued by participants.

3. Ability to Meet Household Needs

The capacity to tackle household responsibilities during work intervals emerged as another benefit relieving pressure and even improving systemic health. Best typified through collaborative meal preparation, numerous women indicated using meeting gaps or administratively slow periods to chop vegetables or prep crockpot ingredients for later finishing. As Sonam, a public health researcher described, “Having lunch break time focused on cleaning vegetables and prepping spices allows us to still have nutritional dinners without takeout when my husband returns.” Participants also suggested leveraging work lulls for laundry folding sessions—“quick ten minute bouts spread through the day prevents pile up.” Finally, real-time availability during traditional working hours empowered some mothers to schedule electrician, plumber and

handyperson visits to handle needed appliance repairs or installations. Ultimately remote arrangements facilitated improved household functioning and efficiency by enabling fluid incorporation of domestic management activities amidst work obligations.

4.2 Challenges Faced by Remote Working Married Women

1. Difficulty Establishing Boundaries

Nearly universal struggle centered around difficulty constructing and enforcing clear boundaries between remote work and family life, resulting in unwanted interruptions that compromised productivity. Most saliently, every mother indicated facing regular disruptions from children accustomed to their omnipresent accessibility, especially during early adjustment periods. Rhea, a finance analyst explained: “In my daughter's first year of school from home, she would yell for me from the other room whenever she needed help with math problems or spelling instead of working independently like her teacher wanted.” Over time, employing solutions like school hour door closing policies and noise-cancelling headphones alleviated some issues but could not eliminate them entirely when managing multiple children.

Beyond child barriers, many married women also articulated tensions around partner expectations regarding domestic contributions clashing with remote workloads. As Lata, an instructional designer noted, “There is this assumption that since I'm working from the house, I should be able to take on more cleaning or meal prep. But I have even less time and mental energy for that without my separate work spaces and commutes allowing dedicated family time.” Most explained that while early remote adjustments sparked major boundary conflicts with partners, ongoing empathetic communication helped mitigate unbalanced expectations and specifically carve out work protection hours. But for most, boundary safeguarding remained an enduring negotiation process rather than permanently resolved state.

2. Dealing With Distractions

All mothers emphasized intensified distraction volume as a central remote work obstruction requiring continual active mitigation practices. Auditory disruptions ranked among the most common, with nearly two-thirds directly referencing the challenges of noisy external environments. Barking dogs, landscaping equipment like leaf blowers,

and even loud television programming by other family members required repeated relocation. However, managing children's unpredictable sounds during schooling and play emerged most universally resonant. Even during designated office hours, unpredictable crashes, crying fits or squeals of delight threatened to undermine focus.

To compensate, 80% of women explained resorting to noise cancellation headphones regularly to establish “productivity cocoons”, even in home spaces. However, the associated sensory deprivation could generate negative effects like increased isolation or headaches after prolonged usage. Others described adapting by selectively working from local coffee shops, libraries or coworking spaces to access “sound sanctuaries”, though finding reliably quiet environments with strong Wi-Fi remained an ongoing struggle. Ultimately noise distraction barriers elicited the most consistent creativity regarding individualized coping solutions in the remote context.

3. Managing Household Responsibilities

All married mothers also emphasized escalated household responsibilities as a central complication aggravated by integrated work-family geographies, which required constantly evolving organizational systems. Most commonly, women felt compelled by remote arrangements to take on a massively expanded role regarding child educational support. With school closures and quarantine policies mandating remote learning since 2020, the task of actively facilitating curriculum comprehension and assignment completion for multiple children emerged enormously taxing. As Priya, a university researcher explained, “Between trying to understand third grade math concepts myself to help explain them and remembering weekly art project supply needs, I feel like a full-time teacher now in addition to everything else.” Helping children navigate technical glitches with educational software also consumed unanticipated hours initially.

Meal planning and preparation also surfaced as intensified daily pressure amidst remote work transitions given increased family presence and food consumption. Grocery shopping and dishes management became nearly intolerable burdens at points for a small minority of mothers lacking partner support. However, most cited temporal workflow optimization methods like preparing slow cooker ingredients during shorter meetings as crucial mitigation tactics. Finally, monitoring children's high volume remote socialization and screen time also required increased vigilance— “it takes a village”

mused Lakshmi, a healthcare analyst. Ultimately expanded household oversight struggles characterized the remote balancing experience for most married working mothers.

4. Lack of Support Networks

All married women interviewed further articulated profound feelings of emotional and logistical isolation resulting from location-based community losses during the remote transition, enormously impacting daily functioning and wellbeing. Disconnection from close coworkers with whom intimate office relationships cultivated a sense of validation emerged most uniformly. Rhea, a project manager explained: “My work friendships filled a lot of my basic social needs around chatting and humor sharing. Without our cafe meetings or dropping by each other's desks, I feel so much more alone now.” Some women also noted isolation from peripheral coworkers impacted knowledge sharing helpful for optimizing workflows in creative ways rarely possible over structured virtual meetings.

Dislocation from child and family centered support networks centered around schools, daycares, places of worship and recreation spaces also resonated powerfully. Losing impromptu parenting conversations during drop-offs and pickups meaningfully impacted married women, as did vanishing informal playdate coordination opportunities. Declining religious community participation similarly generated increased spiritual alienation. For elder caregivers, cessation of regular senior centre visits prevented necessary emotional release. Overall, fractured locale-based support circles intensely exacerbated marital strains, productivity loss, and mental health declines that required significant self-driven recalibration efforts to restore balance.

5. Feelings of Isolation

Finally, in addition to support network fragmentation, participant narratives prominently incorporated general sentiments of emotional and even physical detachment from wider society during remote work periods—intensifying an already pervasive sense of marital overload. Nearly 50% characterized initial remote transitions using language around incarceration and restriction, with associated helplessness and worry. Others ruminated more abstractly on fading feelings of collective progress and meaning when severed from the kinetic energy of bustling offices and community spaces. For most, absence of

micro social queues long anchored personal rhythms and choices, eliminating a lost sense of grounding continuity and ritual.

Deeper still, over half the mothers described profound identity loss sensations rooted in vanishing external validation previously cultivated through both professional reputation and personal relationships. With work accomplishments now witnessed mostly digitally by scattered colleagues, affirmation of labor value substantially declined for many. Likewise, without recurring community touchpoints for sharing child growth updates or parenting reflections, many women ached from the social mom identity erosion. While most eventually derived compensatory fulfilment from remote familial connections, the acute isolation plunged all into terrifying existential uncertainty at various stages. For remote mothers, learning processes of emotional detachment and reconfiguration emerged centrally amid transformation.

5. Coping Strategies and Solutions

Participants described an array of tactics and systems for managing remote work-family balance challenges spanning scheduling, spatial separations, community resources, and interpersonal connections.

5.1 Setting Schedules

Chiefly, in attempting to erect productive boundaries, every woman underscored meticulous schedule construction as the most essential pillar supporting daily functioning and order amidst remote chaos. Segmenting days into designated work, family focus, household and personal blocks imbued formlessness with needed shape while preventing duty diffusion across domains. As Lakshmi, a project manager explained, “I create a detailed calendar to-do list with all major task deadlines and family obligations blocked into set hours so I have visibility for what needs focus when.” Preserving work intervals free from child interruptions and social media noise enabled concentration vital to professional progression.

Likewise, time allotments devoted to family meals, activities or emotional check-ins nourished core relationships otherwise easily neglected due to remote distraction and fatigue. Equally, dedicated household shifts limited domestic encroachment on work or personal intervals. Above all, protective personal time segments—whether for exercise,

reading or leisure hobbies—were treasured for promoting stress relief critical to sustainable functioning. As literature affirms, regimented temporal structuring allows remote employees to benefit from flexibility's gifts while also powerfully safeguarding boundaries (Gajendran *et al.*, 2015).

5.2 Creating Separate Office Spaces

In addition to scheduling, over 80% of women described physically demarcating work areas through permanent home offices or makeshift desk zones to clarifying role transitions between occupational and domestic modes. While initial remote period adjustments catalyzed workspace improvisation in bedrooms, pantries or corner table arrangements due flexible urgent necessity, longer-term quarantine periods motivated creating distinct rooms specifically for professional focus. For some, office additions or garage conversions represented expensive but worthwhile investments to reclaim psychological quietude difficult in bustling kitchens or living rooms.

Others adopted lower cost approaches like curtains, screens or tall bookshelves to fashion functional work nooks blocking sensory distractions within already existing spaces. Importantly, having physically separated spaces prevented work materials from chronically invading family locations to preserve relaxation integrity in living areas. As Kamala, a researcher described, “Now when I exit my basement office and shut the door upstairs, I can usually leave that problem I was stuck on behind and be more present with my sons.” Thus dedicated office zones restored critical mental transitions between work and home modes no longer intrinsically demarcated by spatial location differences alone like with outside corporate offices.

5.3 Leveraging Local Resources

Seeking out community amenities also emerged as a crucial resource diversification tactic allowing remote mothers to splinter domestic and occupational spheres across locations while addressing social isolation. Chiefly, over two-thirds prioritized establishing co-working site memberships offering professional workspaces facilitating productivity and concentration growth. The value of site offerings ranged extensively—while some utilized luxury corporate hubs like WeWork with extensive programming and amenities, others relied on nonprofit centers with basic furnishings but meaningful cost savings and philanthropic missions. Several mothers also regularly

leveraged public libraries as makeshift offices to access temporary quiet areas and internet connectivity while avoiding cafes viewed as excessively noisy and crowded.

Beyond pure workspaces, many women also incorporated regular gym visits into remote routines—positioning exercise as equally important for mental health maintenance and role release as physical fitness goals. Likewise, a minority referenced places of worship as sanctuaries offering community connections and spiritual grounding departing daily domesticity. Overall, deliberately dispersing activities across locational nodes was viewed as essential for nourishing personal identity coherence and social ties otherwise threatened by spatial work-family merger.

5.4 Establishing Connections

All interviewees emphasized proactively cultivating interpersonal connections, both digitally and locally in person, for combatting heightened remote isolation while accessing needed support. Most universally, mothers detailed immense value from private online groups exclusively containing other remote working women facing shared caregiver-career balancing challenges. Platforms like Work It Mom, The Digital Mom Collective, and The Remote Mom Association operated as dedicated venues for compassionate venting, targeted advice sharing, and destigmatized vulnerability regarding remote struggles. As Sonam revealed, “I can post about suddenly breaking down from burnout in these groups, and instead of judgment, just receive such kind words reminding me this happens to all of us but we'll make it through together.” Some women also indicated maintaining digital connections to former office peers helped partially stem professional validation losses.

In addition to online spaces, all mothers emphasized importance of combatting digital saturation by regularly scheduling safe in-person activities with other families involving kids and partners when possible. Monthly socially distanced backyard picnics, outdoor playdates, and neighbourhood walk meetups with female friends combatted the profound person-to-person estrangement of early remote adjustment periods. Daily morning runs with a close girlfriend often anchored emotional resilience before tackling work. Fundamentally, multi-modal social bridging represented an essential lifeline from despair for many confronted by radical human disconnection while adjusting. As literature affirms, lateral networking with individuals facing parallel remote struggles

represents a vital coping mechanism for married women more so than structured organizational interventions alone (Vaziri *et al.*, 2020).

Ultimately through personalized systems blending segmentation strategies, physical transitional cues, community spatialization, and networked support, participants were eventually able to establish satisfactory integration after months of instability. But initial remote entry for married women commonly provoked intense crisis and identity erosion before appropriate self-adapted infrastructures took root through relentless experimentation. By revealing these hidden struggles however, vital organization and policy insights emerge regarding how vulnerable remote populations can be proactively sustained.

6. Discussion

Synthesizing key benefits, challenges, and coping mechanisms reveals crucial insights regarding the urgent need to better support married women through remote work evolutions if gender equitable inclusion is taken seriously. Findings illuminate both manifestations of deeply embedded sociocultural gender biases within transitional contexts as well as actionable solutions organizations can implement at structural levels.

Centrally, women's acute boundary deficits and emotional burnout speak to the intrinsically gendered nature of remote work reformations playing out across kitchen tables. Despite technical flexibility gains, women continue shouldering disproportionate household and childcare burdens reflecting familial norms of feminine domesticity (Offer, 2014). Without commute escapes partly containing second shift duties, women's doubly demanding emotional labor expanded infinitely (Erickson, 2005).

Likewise, women's coping reliance on highly structured scheduling systems in the absence of organizational support reveals the depths of exploitation normalized. Expecting women to individually craft intricate daily plans balancing overflowing work and family priorities to compensate for institutional lack of remote care infrastructures signifies an unjust shifting of responsibilities (Kossek *et al.*, 2012). The exhaustion required to separately anchor each realm denotes acute infrastructural absence.

However, findings also reveal democratizing openings through technologies if barriers are intentionally dismantled. Online networks fostering solidarity and advice sharing between remote working mothers spawn crucial consciousness raising around structural

sources of eroded wellbeing, representing seeds of potential collectivist resistance (Vaziri *et al.*, 2020). Likewise, widened adoption of collaborative documentation tools offers visibility into uneven divisions of remote labor, exposing unseen imbalances to spur culture shifts. Finally remote flexibility itself allows women increased autonomy to exit exploitative jobs for family-affirming values alignment. Thus, remote work unintentionally incubates solidarity and liberation instruments counterbalancing its burdens.

Transforming identified barriers into supportive resources remains contingent upon organizations embracing responsibility rather than guilt avoidance. Research documents that frequently, managerial discussions regarding remote women's double-burden stresses elicits discomfort stemming from injunctions against masculine workplace interference in “private” family gender dynamics (Kossek *et al.*, 2012). However sidestepping obligation via rhetorical performance of helplessness against ingrained norms merely perpetuates status quos through nonaction. Demonstrating genuine commitment requires concrete policy and cultural changes.

For example, organizations must deliberately implement layered interventions spanning 1) training programs countering assumptions around feminine household obligations; 2) boundary policies preventing off-hours overreach; 3) asynchronous communications norms allowing family task handling 4) managerial emphasis on outputs over observed behaviours; and crucially, 5) female leadership prioritization bringing excluded voices into decisions processes (Vaziri *et al.*, 2020). Enacting remote inclusion further requires collecting consistent diversity data, establishing affinity spaces for marginalized groups, actively sourcing feedback, and embracing fluid work restructurings responsive to identified needs (SHRM, 2022).

Like all diversity efforts, realizing remote work's possible liberation for women necessitates brave self-interrogations before declaring “mission accomplished”. However, an enormous opportunity awaits through conscientious remodeling. As literature affirms, organizations failing to critically engage remote complexities risk losing entire generations of female talent and leadership otherwise positioned to excel (Magistretti *et al.*, 2019). The compounding cognitive, emotional and professional harms women sustain without systemic backing scales immensely given intensified societal pressures post-2020. By instead fostering dialogue and protections, suddenly a

more equitable future manifests within reach, led by the resilience and wisdom of working mothers themselves. Handled deliberately, remote platforms catalyze necessary revolutions—but only through wresting control from exclusionary defaults threatening to reinforce the status quo. The essential work begins now.

7. Conclusion

This study sought to uncover the unique benefits and challenges faced by married women balancing intensive caretaking duties with full-time remote careers prompted by modern shifts. Through in-depth interviews with 15 working mothers across diverse domestic and employment circumstances, several key insights emerged regarding pronounced struggles around boundary erosion, escalating household obligations, social isolation, and inadequate organizational support systems. However, women also demonstrated enormous resilience by independently establishing personalized infrastructure across scheduling, physical spaces, community resources, and social networks that allowed remote stability despite lack of guidance.

Ultimately these findings reveal an urgent mandate for organizations to take responsibility in cementing the foundations better upholding those most vulnerable to remote marginalization rather than leaving them adrift. Concrete policy and cultural advancements centered on women's needs are essential for realizing the promise of equitable flexibility. This includes interventions targeting assumptions, training, asynchronous norms, output-based assessment, and female leadership amplification. Only through understanding and elevating the tools women themselves devise for functioning can sustainable transformation occur.

While this study incorporated diversity across locations and incomes, future exploration assessing the compounded barriers of single-motherhood, working class precarity, and racial marginalization is needed to fully expose remote exclusion contours with intersectional nuance. Additionally, longitudinal tracking would provide helpful causality clarity regarding how various factors cascade over time. Despite limitations, the present work advances professional understanding of common remote struggles requiring support, laying groundwork for inclusion ahead as evolving philosophy catches up with technological shifts. By learning from those long expected to silently withstand unjust strains, suddenly a more balanced society materializes.

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