

## Filipino Working-Mothers, Working From Home Under the COVID-19 Lockdown in the UAE

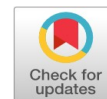
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**Abstract:** The study attempts to have a closer look at, collect, and formulate Filipino working mothers' experiences in the United Arab Emirates forced to work from home under the COVID-19 lockdown. The study has investigated several dimensions such as efficiency, achievements, concerns, work-life balance, employer support, family support and future perspective. Following an exploratory approach and a convenient sampling method, the study contacted the potential populations; 57 responded. Through a digital survey with 22 questions under five factors, primary data was forwarded through Whatsapp and responses collected. While the study shows these Filipino mothers' positive experiences with details on their efficiency and support from both employer and family, under the lockdown; almost half of them will still prefer to have regular office with clear and separate hours for work and family. This is a unique study that concentrates only on the working mothers of any nationality, who had to work from home under the unique lockdown condition; and manage both family and work together at the same time. The study can guide potential future decisions, interventions and arrangements between working mothers and their employers, informed of both the potential benefits as well as long term repercussions.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Working mothers, Working from home, Filipino, UAE

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### INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates is truly a global metropolitan; welcoming, attracting and nurturing the hard-working dreamers worldwide (Chaudhry, 2016) for decades with its safe, secure, private and conducive life culture. As of 2020, the total population of the UAE stands at around 9.89 million with almost 80% of that being expats from all over the world. The top 3 expat nationalities are Indians, Pakistani and Filipinos. The gender ratio stands at 72% Male to 28% Female, making it predominantly a male-dominated society, but with a decent female workforce of 17.7% of the total labour force (The World Bank, 2020).

Filipinos make for around 5.56% of the total population of the UAE. That is a population of around 750,000 highly educated and skilled workers dedicated to their work, and doing very well in the country. Sawy (2019) reports that the majority of Filipino population is college-graduated, highly skilled and earning very well in the UAE. According to Sawy (2019), over 17% of the Filipino population work in sectors of architecture, engineering and construction, 16% in tourism and hospitality, 13% in customer service, 10% in health and medicine where around 8% in marketing and advertising.

UAE announced its first four COVID-19 cases on January 29, 2020 (Duncan, 2020) but it was not until March 2020 that the government called for the schools and university to close first (Gulf News, 2020), launched the disinfection drive, followed by lockdown in several parts of the country (The Straits Times, 2020). On March 25, the Dubai government made it mandatory for 80% of the private sector employees to work from home, except for a list of critical sectors such as pharmaceuticals, banking and supply chain (Duncan, 2020). Employees across most industries were forced to stay home and deliver work from home. According to the Dubai Statistic Center (Dubai Statistics Centre, 2019), 56.1% of the Non-Emirati (expat) female population is economically active, that is, employed.

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### **Research objectives**

The research objectives were as follows:

- To enquire into the experiences of Filipino working-mothers working from home under the temporary lockdown.
- To investigate if these working mothers could deliver work efficiently from home.
- To identify conclusive inferences concerning working from home.

### **Research questions**

The research aims to answer the following research questions:

- How was the overall experience of Filipino working mothers working from home under the COVID-19 lockdown?
- Did they receive adequate support from their family and employer?
- What are their preferences now on working from home versus working in office, after substantial time spent working from home?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Stress related to job can be defined as substantial depression about undesirable experiences at work. It is undesirable and natural ([Ahmed & Ramzan, 2013](#)) with high pressure and demanding jobs that affect employees both physically and mentally. Several studies have concluded that little stress encourages greater efforts and inputs at work from the employee to perform and look better in the office. However, excessive stress has detrimental effects on the employee's performance. Work stress is bad for both the employee and the employer; while it lowers employee's concentration, efforts and inputs, it also affects the company's overall performance and productivity ([Islam & Chughtai, 2019](#)). While [Robbins and Judge \(2007\)](#) state that the work stress originates from three factors, namely environmental, organizations and individuals. Some scholars argue that a leading cause of work stress is the lack of balance and stability between work and family ([Ahmed & Ramzan, 2013](#); [Dolcos & Daley, 2009](#)).

[U.S. Office of Personnel Management \(2013\)](#) defines remote work as an arrangement where the workers can live and work away from the organization's worksite. [Crosbie and Moore \(2004\)](#) has defined the term 'work from home' as the act of carrying unfinished or urgent work tasks after the office hours to home for completion. Working from home has been extensively studied and shown consistently mixed reactions from the employees who have been or tried working from home. It is however, debatable whether working from home is as effective, efficient and healthy as it sounds. While [Chung and Van der Lippe \(2018\)](#) has pointed inevitable conflicts between work and home. Studies have argued that long term working from home has negative consequences to one's career ([Glass & Noonan, 2016](#); [Maruyama & Tietze, 2012](#); [Qalati, Ahmed, Mei, Thu, & Sohu, 2020](#)). Though other studies did not find any correlation between work from home and career prospects ([Riley & McCloskey, 1996](#); [Tolbert & Simons, 1994](#)). Technological advancements have offered substantial support to working from home, which can prove beneficial for employees ([Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, Kalleberg, & Bailey, 2000](#)), offering them adequate opportunities to achieve better balance between work and family. According to a survey by the American Information Technology Association, 36% of the respondents preferred working from home over a salary hike. These respondents are happy to avoid stressful & polluted traffic jams, having more time and energy to focus on work and family ([Lorenz, 2007](#)).

[Allen, Golden, and Shockley \(2015\)](#) while reporting the advantages including an increase in employee's job satisfaction, lower levels of exhaustion and stress, coupled with even higher evaluation on performance, also pointed out lots of stress following difficulties in balancing work and life together when blended. They suggested that staying home naturally engages an employee to attend to the daily household chores that distract them from work and create increased stress, especially if they are already struggling to meet their duties. But they also reported that if remote work continued for more than a year, the conflict and the subsequent stress appear to decrease as the employees and their family adjust to the routine and adapt with clear boundaries. [Bloom, Liang, Roberts, and Ying \(2015\)](#), in his extensive two years long study with 500 employees of China's largest travel agency, Ctrip, found strong evidence in

favour of remote working. He reported a full or more true work-shift at home with no incident of reaching the office late or leaving early, with substantially less distraction and better concentration. Nevertheless, this study too reported that more than half of those who volunteered for remote work changed their mind and returned to the office, reporting too much isolation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several industrial sectors had to completely close temporarily or reduce staffing by at least 50%, during which, employees were required and supported to continue to stay productive, maintain performance and report remotely to office affairs (Putri et al., 2020). Lack of proper space, structure, facilities, focus and boundaries between work and family (Spinelli, Lionetti, Pastore, & Fasolo, 2020) lead to added stress when working from home. The COVID-19 pandemic situation was unprecedented when the employees working from home, had the rest of the family at home and substantial stress amounting to children studying from home.

Ahmed and Ramzan (2013) have shown stress is caused due to overlapping work and family life. This could originate from the inexperience of working from home and the inability and inexperience of the family to understand and support office work being done from home. Some studies have pointed to emotional disturbances, irritability and depression; when working under quarantine (Hegde, 2020). This could lead to alcohol abuse and difficulty in returning to a normal routine. Ryu, Chun, of Epidemiology, et al. (2020) warned people facing serious emotional consequences under the worldwide emergency lockdown and suggested a need to understand the phenomena in depth for strategic interventions to preserve and support their current and future well-being. Spinelli et al. (2020) have pointed to increased difficulties and stress in parents working from home, leading to increased problems with children at home. Jain and Mohanan (2020) have reported Indian women working from home faced great challenges related to work, family and health; yet adapted to them and maintained harmony. Manzo and Minello (2020) reported the unbalanced responsibility model continuing even during the pandemic, with women doing most of the household duties, even while reporting and delivering to their work.

While there are abundant studies investigating and reviewed remote working in general and COVID-19 lockdown related work from home, very few have focused on working women. Researchers here have tried to take a closer look at Filipino working mothers and collect their feedback so that the findings can guide and support future planning and decision at both the employee and employers end.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

A short survey of 22 queries on the experience of working from home for these Filipino mothers was developed, and segmented under the following five factors:

1. Working at home
2. Achievements
3. Concerns
4. Work-life balance
5. Future

The complete survey was as follows:

1. Working at home
  - I have been doing some office work at home even before the COVID-19 lockdown.
  - My family helped me in learning new tools & technology for work.
  - My employer/office helped me in learning new tools & technology for work.
  - My employer/office was supportive in my working from home under COVID-19 lockdown.
2. Achievements
  - I could successfully manage & deliver all my work from home.
  - I could conveniently report & update my work to my employer/office on a daily basis.
  - I was forced to learn new IT skills under the lock down; and I am happy about it.

- I am happy I saved a lot of time wasted in getting ready, travelling & socializing at the office.

### 3. Concerns

- I had to put extra effort in completing my work from home compared to the office.
- I missed my colleagues & working with them in the office.
- I felt I was working more at home than at the office; as it was difficult to track working hours in a day.
- I felt my employer/office did not acknowledge & respect my work done at home.
- I feel physically less active & unhealthy after months of working from home.

### 4. Work-life balance

- I was able to balance my life and work efficiently, when working from home.
- I was able to well attend to my children while working from home.
- I received some help from my husband/children in finishing house chores.
- I felt life out of discipline during the lockdown.

### 5. Future

- I think working from home would be much more efficient & productive; when my children are at school after COVID-19 crisis.
- I wish to continue to work at least a couple of days from home in future; after the COVID-19 crisis; knowing it will not affect my work quality.
- Employers should be open to allow a mix of "work from office & home" routines to employees, depending on their nature of work.
- Working in an office is better as it keeps a good difference & balance between private & professional life.
- My employer/office is OK to allow me work from home, even after the COVID-19 crisis.

A simplified Likert Scale (Disagree/Neither Agree-disagree/Agree) was used to collect each of the statements' responses.

## Participants

The researchers are senior lecturers at the Bath Spa University, RAK; which currently has a majority Filipino population of over 400 students enrolled in various programs from Level 3 to Level 6. Ms Arooj was assigned to identify and contact the UG students with working mothers who had to or were currently working from home under the pandemic lockdown. Following a convenient sampling method, students were contacted and requested to encourage their mothers to register their survey responses.

## Data collection

A Google Form was created for the survey. Participants were forwarded the link to the survey through whatsapp and responses were registered. A total of 57 participants responded to the survey.

Table 1: Demographic details of the collected sample

Total Respondents	Count	Percentage
	57	100%
Age group 30-34	1	1.8%
Age group 35-39	16	28.6%
Age group 40-44	14	25%
Age group 45-49	14	25%
Age group 50-plus	11	19.6%

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research aimed to collect and review a simplistic view of the overall experience of working from home and investigate and gauge any major trends with high percentages. All percentage figures pointing to an important insight are highlighted in bold below and discussed later.

Table 2: Insights from working Filipino mothers, working from home under individual factors & queries

Factors & Elements	Agree %	Neither Agree nor Disagree %	Disagree %
1: Working at home			
1.1. I have been doing some office work at home even before the COVID-19 lockdown.	56	9	35
1.2. My family helped me in learning new tools and technology for work.	63	19	18
1.3. My employer/office helped me in learning new tools and technology for work.	64	21.5	14.5
1.4. My employer/office was supportive in my working from home under COVID-19 lockdown.	73	14	13
2. Achievements			
2.1. I could successfully manage and deliver all my work from home.	79	14	7
2.2. I could conveniently report and update my work to my employer/office on a daily basis.	88	9	3
2.3. I was forced to learn new IT skills under the lock down; and I am happy about it.	61	30	9
2.4. I am happy I saved a lot of time wasted in getting ready, travelling and socializing at the office.	65	25	10
3. Concerns			
3.1. I had to put extra effort in completing my work from home compared to the office.	39	32	29
3.2. I missed my colleagues and working with them in the office.	60	33	7
3.3. I felt I was working more at home than at the office; as it was difficult to track working hours in a day.	53	26	21
3.4. I felt my employer/office did not acknowledge and respect my work done at home.	12	17	71
3.5. I feel physically less active and unhealthy after months of working from home.	44	28	28
4. Work-life balance			
4.1. I was able to balance my life and work efficiently, when working from home.	65	23	12
4.2. I was able to well attend to my children while working from home.	80	12	8
4.3. I received some help from my husband/children in finishing house chores.	84	11	5
4.4. I felt life out of discipline during the lockdown.	17	37	46
5. Future			
5.1. I think working from home would be much more efficient and productive; when my children are at school after COVID-19 crisis.	46	25	29

Table 2: Continued...

5.2. I wish to continue to work at least a couple of days from home in future; after the COVID-19 crisis; knowing it will not affect my work quality.	61	25	14
5.3. Employers should be open to allow a mix of "work from office and home" routines to employees, depending on their nature of work.	84	12	4
5.4. Working in an office is better as it keeps a good difference and balance between private and professional life.	49	37	14
5.5. My employer/office is OK to allow me work from home, even after the COVID-19 crisis.	37	28	35

It should be noted how a good 56% of these working mothers have reported already doing some office work at home at regular times. While it is promising to observe these employees' commitment to work, it is also interesting to note how technology has penetrated work into our personal spaces and made us addicted and comfortable with working from work. It is also promising to note how 63% of respondents reported their family, helping them learn new technology and tools, while 64% reported similar help from their employees. Another positive aspect to note is how 73% of respondents reported understanding and support from their employers.

As for the work done from home, it does not come as a surprise; in the light of the above fact that these employees are used to bringing work home, 79% of respondents reported successfully managing and delivering their work from home. This aligns well with Bloom et al. (2015) study on employees' performance when working from home. Furthermore, 88% of respondents could conveniently report and update their work to their employers/office. This figure is significant as it reflects on the extent of technology and how it has shaped the nature of regular office work, which is majorly digital. A modest percentage of 61% of respondents confessed to having been forced to learn new IT skills while being happy about it. Another rather inconclusive 65% of respondents were happy to save time wasted in commuting to office. At the same time, it appears the almost another half of 60% of respondents actually missed working with their colleagues in the office. The interdependence of these employees could explain this on each other on a regular basis for daily office operations; and hence having mixed feelings about working remotely. Just 44% of respondents reported health issues related to working from home for months.

65% of the respondents reported they were able to balance work and family efficiently. With around 80% able to attend to their children well. A very positive insight was that around 84% of women reported receiving help from husbands or children in completing house chores. This is indicative of collective family support and contribution in times of pandemic. A small 17% of respondents said they felt out of discipline during the lockdown.

46% of respondents felt that working from home would be easier and more efficient with children at school. This is understandable as the children would surely contribute to the major demand and distraction at home. A modest 61% of respondents wish to have an opportunity to work from home for at least a couple of days in a week. Finally a good 84% of respondents think the employers should consider and be open to a "mixed work" culture depending on an employee's profile.

In line with Bloom et al. (2015), a very strong aspect is how almost half of the respondents, 49%, accepted that working from the office is better as it keeps work and family life separate. This is a substantial indicator of, despite several advantages agreed upon earlier, an overall negative experience after a long duration of working from home.

## CONCLUSION

This paper was a modest attempt to capture a snapshot view of the Filipino working mother's experience working at home. The data clearly and conclusively shows that these women successfully managed their family and worked very well under the pandemic lockdown of COVID-19. While most of them were able to conveniently complete and report their work to their employers, they also clearly

received good understanding and support from their employers. In contrast, there were mixed feelings about staying home, avoiding traffic and not seeing their colleagues.; it was also clear that almost half of the respondents did not enjoy working from home and preferred to have regular working hours, separate from personal.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even with a strong Filipino student population of over 400, a modest response of 57 respondents (working mothers of these students) is understandable as well due to their busy schedule. A larger response would have greatly supported more conclusive insights. Also, the survey was conducted in the month of October 2019 with just over five months of working at home. The researcher assumes and recommends that the same survey may have different insights and results now with over a year of mostly working from home.

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