



Research Article

Workplace Well-Being in India pre-and post-Covid-19: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

The importance of workplace well-being has become increasingly prevalent in the field of psychology and research, with its importance growing even more following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which triggered worldwide lockdown and influenced the operation and functioning of organisations across numerous sectors. This paper is a qualitative study, which compares workplace wellbeing in India before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The study primarily investigated workplace well-being amongst schoolteachers, healthcare workers and corporate employees in urban India. The sample comprised 18 individuals and data was collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Thematic analysis was employed in order to identify the themes within and across sectors. Findings on the various benefits and challenges faced by each sector indicated that the overall workplace wellbeing has declined for healthcare workers and schoolteachers but improved for corporate employees post the Covid-19 pandemic, as compared to the pre-Covid times.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace well-being, constituting an individual's positive state encompasses positive emotions, potential development, life control, purpose and positive relationships (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Ruggeri *et al.*, 2020)^[12,16]. It significantly influences an organisation's long-term effectiveness, encompassing physical environment quality, job satisfaction; work culture and organisation structure (International Labour Organisation). With an escalating focus on well-being in

organisational psychology, workplace stress has gained prominence, linked to employee well-being and perception of the workplace (WHO, 2020)^[22]. Workplace well-being has emerged as a crucial area of interest in the field of psychology and research conducted on the significance of well-being in an organisational setting is becoming increasingly valuable in today's times. (Jaiswal and Arun, 2020)^[7]. Despite the fact that workplace well-being and attitudes towards employees suffering from stress or mental illness have recently been the

focus of research in the field of positive psychology, it remains a neglected aspect across many countries, particularly in India. (Maulik, 2017)^[13]. The global pandemic created the necessity for widespread remote work, which has exacerbated well-being concerns, affecting individuals physically, mentally, economically and socially (Al-Jubari *et al.*, 2022).

This qualitative study compares workplace well-being in India before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on healthcare professionals, schoolteachers and corporate employees- three understudied settings in the Indian context. The study aims to better understand the challenges and benefits of pandemic-induced workplace changes, with a focus on employee well-being. Given the pandemic's disruptive impact on workplace dynamics, this study analyses the resulting difficulties and advantages to improve our understanding of how these changes affect employee well-being.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Schools

It is a widely acknowledged fact that teaching is a demanding, challenging profession leading to stress and burnout (Benevene *et al.*, 2020)^[2], thus giving rise to the importance of the well-being of school teachers. According to Shukla and Trivedi (2008), teachers' stress and burnout in the modern educational environment negatively affect their productivity and psychological well-being. The Indian educational system is facing significant challenges, including lack of enthusiasm in education, misuse of child protection laws and bullying of teachers. (Sehgal *et al.*, 2017)^[17] Teachers confront escalating challenges—job abandonment, excessive workloads, security anxieties, imbalanced ratios and inadequate work-life balance—often ignored by policymakers; COVID-19 worsened these issues, persisting from pre-pandemic times (Kamboj and Garg, 2021)^[9]. A study in Kolkata found that teachers' opinions of a positive school environment were found to be positively connected with better job satisfaction. (Basak and Ghosh, 2011)^[11].

A study by K.S. (2021) found that teachers faced technical difficulties during lockdown, including a lack of digital infrastructure and limited awareness of online teaching platform apps. Srinivasaiah *et al.* (2021)^[18] compared the Quality of Work Life (QWL) of teachers before and after the pandemic, finding that monthly income and gender were key factors affecting QWL. Senior teachers reported satisfaction with QWL, while less experienced teachers expressed greater dissatisfaction. The pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges, affecting teachers' ability to provide high-quality instruction, maintain focus, and strike a work-life balance. After the lockdown, teachers' roles have evolved to include supporting students and parents, and managing both offline and online communication. (Ramachandran, V, 2022)^[14].

Corporate

According to Jaiswal and Arun's study (2022)^[6] on work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, stress, role improvisation, solitude, and self-initiated innovation were

major causes. Employees in the manufacturing sector faced stress in the future, while those in the service sector faced stress in the present. Nonetheless, self-initiated innovation was noted in the manufacturing and technology sectors, indicating that a hybrid work-from-home model would be the best option in the future. The impact of COVID-19 on the workplace is highlighted in the Kaushik and Guleria (2020)^[11] study, emphasising the need for employees to work from home (WFH). WFH provides work-life balance and continuity, yet social isolation and emotional detachment have resulted from it. Even if it increases productivity and the economy, it should be used carefully to guarantee staff motivation, training, and the best possible business outcomes.

Jha *et al.* (2011)^[8] used the WHO QOL BREF questionnaire to study the Quality of Life (QOL) in the Indian software sector. They discovered that although professionals were more accustomed to the demands of their industry, working from home had a detrimental impact on their physical quality of life. Negative indicators included various addictions, long work hours, and illness; positive predictors were age, fitness, overseas placements, and moving firms. According to Goel and Verma's research (2021)^[3], older employees have the highest ratings for active and passive coping techniques like spiritual practice, while younger employees view technology as a tool to meet expectations, indicating potential organisational impediments and unsupportive work settings.

Hospitals

A comprehensive literature review by Iyengar *et al.* (2020)^[5] identified key risk factors for elevated mortality rates among healthcare professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notable factors included age, gender, medical speciality, lack of pandemic training and insufficient personal protective equipment (PPE). The study emphasized the strain on doctors, particularly the elderly and those with comorbidities, facing increased mortality risks. Male doctors and general practitioners had higher death rates, while Bihar experienced a disproportionately high doctor death rate. Hayes *et al.*'s 2019^[4] research explores workplace well-being amongst doctors and addresses issues like stress, burnout and work-life balance. It emphasises the need for quality indicators and research on therapies for addressing burnout and stress in healthcare settings. Romate & Rajkumar's qualitative study in 2022^[15] delved into the experiences of frontline healthcare workers in Indian government hospitals, revealing fears, increased workloads and negative physical health impacts due to PPE. A cross-sectional study by Vanhaecht *et al.*, (2020)^[20] on healthcare workers revealed pronounced negative mental health symptoms during COVID-19 including stress, hypervigilance, fatigue and difficulty sleeping. Positive professional symptoms were less common, with 18% and 27% expressing a need for psychological help and increased leadership support. This elucidates the urgent need for targeted strategies to support healthcare workers' mental well-being.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research employed a qualitative study design with a sample of 18 participants chosen through convenience sampling for semi-structured interviews, utilizing Thematic Analysis for data analysis. The participants, aged 22 to 54, were drawn from schools, hospitals and corporate sectors, each sector contributing 6 individuals with a minimum of two years of work experience, having worked both before and after the pandemic. The study focused on Tier-1 urban cities in India, with an average participant age of 35. Those diagnosed with mental health issues were excluded and all participants

belonged to the upper and middle economic strata. A semi-structured interview was conducted in English, Hindi and Marathi and each one lasted for about 30-60 minutes. The study aimed to understand participants' views and perspectives on work-related experiences, with questions encouraging elaboration. Participants were assured of their right not to answer uncomfortable questions and encouraged to provide additional insights, viewpoints or anecdotes, contributing to a comprehensive exploration of their experiences across the school, hospital and corporate sectors.

Table 1: List of Participants Interviewed

Profession	Name*	Gender	Age	Work Experience
School Teacher	S1	F	30	6
School Teacher	S2	F	53	20
School Teacher	S3	F	31	2.5
School Teacher	S4	F	36	12
School Teacher	S5	F	29	3.5
School Teacher	S6	F	28	5
Corporate Employee	C1	M	22	4
Corporate Employee	C2	M	27	5
Corporate Employee	C3	F	41	17
Corporate Employee	C4	F	26	3.5
Corporate Employee	C5	F	29	6
Corporate Employee	C6	F	50	27
Healthcare Worker	H1	F	54	16
Healthcare Worker	H2	M	35	13
Healthcare Worker	H3	F	50	15
Healthcare Worker	H4	M	26	4
Healthcare Worker	H5	M	54	25
Healthcare Worker	H6	F	25	2
*Participants are assigned codes instead of using their names to ensure privacy and confidentiality.				

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Thematic Analysis of interview transcripts revealed common and differing themes among schoolteachers, healthcare

workers, and corporate employees, providing insightful findings.

Pre-Covid:

Table 2: Pre-Covid Codes for the Three Groups

Healthcare Workers	School Teachers	Corporate Employees
Smooth management	Positive work life	Positive work environment
Feasible workload	Smooth administration	Difficulty in commuting to the workplace
Consistent salary	Positive attitude of students	
Intrinsic motivation		
Stable well-being		
Basic safety measures		

Post-Covid:

Table 3: Post-Covid Codes for the three Groups

Healthcare Workers	School Teachers	Corporate Employees
Disorganized management	Increased workload	Work-mode preference
Aggravated workload	Pressure from the administration	Company sponsored benefits
Salary Reduction	Poor Student Behaviour	Satisfaction with personal life
Extrinsic Motivation	Intrusive Parent Behaviour	Positive colleague relationships
Unsatisfactory Wellbeing	Change in Teaching Methods	Negative work environment
Additional safety precautions	Difficulties with Hybrid Mode	
	Increased Health Issues	
	Unsatisfactory Income	

Findings from the Participants of the School Sector

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers expressed satisfaction with their work-life balance, citing manageable workloads, limited administrative pressure and well-organized school schedules. The administration was efficient, paperwork was minimal and communication occurred through official notices. Students exhibited positive attitudes, attending classes, participating actively and seeking clarification in doubt sessions.

However, post-pandemic observed increased teacher workload due to the shift to online learning, leading to extended working hours, extra classes, and persistent hybrid teaching. Teachers faced heightened pressure from administration, inadequate resources, and no health insurance. Student behaviour changed, with increased cyberbullying, demands for syllabus cuts, and decreased seriousness in studies. Parents became more dependent, often blaming teachers and disrupting work-life balance with constant communication. The introduction of online teaching methods brought challenges, as teachers struggled to balance e-resources and traditional teaching approaches. The poorly executed hybrid mode resulted in

teachers traveling unnecessarily, affecting their safety. The reopening of schools further strained teachers' physical and mental health, leading to dissatisfaction with salaries, especially with increased workloads and unequal distribution in some cases.

Findings from the Participants of the Corporate Sector

Pre-COVID, participants enjoyed work-life balance through fewer responsibilities, positive co-worker relationships and benefits like health check-ups, fostering a positive work environment, job satisfaction and mental well-being. Pre-pandemic, participants faced challenging commutes to workplaces located far from their homes, leading to exhaustion, limited time with loved ones and reduced leisure. Commuting difficulties were universal across various work experience levels.

Post-pandemic, respondents expressed a preference for a hybrid or remote work model. They appreciated face-to-face interactions in offices under a hybrid model and valued the flexibility it offered. Work experience influenced perceptions, with higher experience correlating positively with the hybrid

model. Post-COVID, participants, including those with varying work experience, reported receiving promotions and salary raises. These improvements enhanced financial stability and provided access to mental health resources, promoting overall well-being. Post-pandemic, interviewees found higher life satisfaction through increased self-care time, timely meals and daily exercise, boosting productivity with enhanced capability and a willingness to invest extra work time. Candidates valued supportive relationships at work, fostering a positive environment and contributing to satisfying peer interactions, promoting overall positive mental well-being. Post-pandemic, candidates experienced extended working hours due to the elimination of travel time in remote work. Increased pressure to work on weekends, heightened daily workload and micromanagement led to unhealthy stress levels.

Findings from the Participants of the Hospital Sector

Before the onset of the pandemic, the hospitals exhibited smooth operations with effective management, administrative support and regular inspections, accompanied by comprehensive insurance policies ensuring employee well-being. Participants experienced feasible workloads, consistent salaries and intrinsic motivation, fostering a positive work environment. Stable mental and physical well-being was evident, indicating a harmonious work-life balance. Basic safety measures were acknowledged but not prioritized. Post-Covid, there was disorganized management, and healthcare workers faced increased pressure affecting their workload and mental health. Salary reductions occurred due to healthcare cost reductions, affecting financial stability. Despite challenges, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation persisted among healthcare workers, supported by family and colleagues. However, well-being satisfaction diminished due to the pandemic's toll on mental and emotional health, with increased safety measures becoming a priority for personal and patient well-being. The pandemic's profound impact reshaped workplace dynamics, emphasizing the importance of health and safety measures in both professional and personal spheres.

5. DISCUSSION

This research explores workplace well-being in India, examining commonalities and differences between pre-COVID and post-COVID times. Qualitative interviews were conducted across hospitals, schools and corporate sectors to gather insights.

Before the pandemic, teachers reported a positive work life, smooth administration and positive student attitudes. Post-COVID, dissatisfaction arose due to increased workload, administrative pressure, challenging student behaviour, intrusive parents, hybrid mode difficulties, health issues and inadequate income. UN recommendations for psychological support align with findings, emphasizing the importance of addressing burnout (United Nations, 2020)^[9]. Time management skills improved but co-worker relations varied, with some reporting increased cooperation and others reduced interactions. Common challenges across both periods included

adjusting to work culture, sexism and behavioural issues. Summer and winter breaks were a universally appreciated perk. Teachers struggled with household management during the hybrid mode, taking on dual roles as caregivers and educators. Juggling home-schooling and remote teaching increased workload and stress levels. Unpredictability and financial hardships worsened family situations, affecting stability.

In the corporate sector, participants experienced a positive work environment but faced challenges with commuting before the pandemic. Post-COVID, positive changes included company-sponsored benefits, improved personal life satisfaction, positive colleague relationships and enhanced time management skills with remote work. Work-mode preference became a post-Covid perk, although a hostile work environment negatively affected well-being.

Pre-Covid, healthcare workers enjoyed smooth management, feasible workload, consistent salary, intrinsic motivation, and well-being and safety measures. Post-COVID, increased workload, salary reduction, fear of virus transmission and feelings of helplessness affected well-being. Financial struggles led to reduced consulting fees, and family support became crucial. Safety measures gained priority, emphasizing the use of masks, PPE kits, social distancing and sanitisation.

Overall, all three sectors exhibited positive work life, manageable workload, satisfaction, good relationships and work-life balance before the pandemic. Post-Covid, increased workload affected daily schedules and work-life balance across all sectors. Healthcare workers and teachers expressed dissatisfaction with income, citing inadequate compensation for increased efforts. In the corporate sector, satisfaction with pay and work increased due to the shift to remote work.

6. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The lack of sufficient studies on the well-being of healthcare workers, school teachers and corporate employees during the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated this research. Employing a qualitative approach helped shed light on the challenges faced by teachers, an issue that is otherwise frequently unsupported by data in news reports.

The study underscores the imperative to address workplace well-being, particularly in the post-pandemic landscape that has significantly reshaped work culture across sectors. Notably, schoolteachers emerged as facing the maximum challenges, with a lack of emphasis on their well-being in education policies. The findings advocate for heightened awareness about teachers' challenges, urging intervention strategies to enhance their well-being and, consequently, productivity in schools. In the corporate sector, a negative work environment post-pandemic resulted from micromanagement and increased workload. Nevertheless, positive aspects like personal life satisfaction, company-sponsored benefits and a hybrid work mode were reported. HR managers should consider these findings in designing programs to improve work settings. Additionally, start-ups and smaller businesses could leverage the positive characteristics identified, especially since the

sample focused exclusively on MNCs. Healthcare workers dealing with patient anxiety can utilize this research as a basis for planning sessions to educate and manage panicked patients. However, the study's generalizability is constrained by a small, unrepresentative sample size and the influence of social desirability bias. Participants, particularly when discussing sensitive topics like interactions with superiors, exhibited hesitation and potential discomfort, affecting the candidness of their responses.

Future research studies should consider integrating quantitative measures along with qualitative interviews, providing a more comprehensive understanding. Diverse socioeconomic backgrounds should be included in subsequent studies to improve the applicability of findings. The thematic analysis revealed common and distinctive well-being factors, indicating potential avenues for deeper exploration. Future research should use mixed methods or quantitative approaches to obtain more objective results, thereby improving accuracy in understanding workplace well-being dynamics.

7. CONCLUSION

The study compares workplace well-being among school teachers, healthcare workers, and corporate employees in India before and after COVID-19. Pre-COVID, positive factors included a positive work environment for teachers and safety measures for healthcare workers. Post-COVID, negative impacts on satisfaction, workload, and income were noted. Corporate employees faced commuting challenges pre-COVID but reported post-COVID benefits and positive relationships, despite issues like micromanagement and increased workload. In essence, the analysis highlights an increase in corporate well-being relative to healthcare and education settings after the pandemic. In conclusion, the study highlights the universal impact of increased workload post-COVID across sectors, with differing effects on well-being and satisfaction. The findings emphasise the need for targeted support to address the specific challenges faced by each sector in the post-pandemic landscape.

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6. The pandemic has affected us all in one way or another. What has been a major change (in terms of work) that you have observed before and after the lockdown ?
7. How has the pandemic affected your approach towards your work? What are some of the major changes you've observed at your workplace before and after the lockdown ?
8. Do you observe a change amongst your co-workers/employee/juniors after the pandemic ?
9. How do you think the pandemic has impacted the overall workplace communication?

For the School sector

1. What were the major changes you observed in school before and after the pandemic?
2. What were some of the major difficulties you faced when managing the students?
3. Aside from classroom teaching, what were your additional responsibilities in the school before and after Covid?
4. How well were you able to manage your work and personal life before Covid and what is the situation now?
5. Do you think that teaching became more complicated with online classes?
6. Were you able to easily switch to online teaching? Did you face any technical difficulties? If yes, how did you resolve it?
7. What were the differences between assessments pre-Covid and post-Covid? Did you face any issues post-Covid?
8. Did you receive your salary on time? Were there any specific issues you faced related to your income?
9. What kind of support was provided by your school during the pandemic?
10. What was the health insurance coverage like from your school?
11. What were some of the incentives provided by the management? Were there any changes because of Covid?
12. Research has shown a significant decrease in children's attention span after the pandemic. Have you experienced any challenges due to that?
13. What is your opinion regarding the use of digital resources in the classroom?
14. With the rise in use of digital sources for education, do you perceive them as competition/job threat with respect to the teaching profession?
15. How was the hybrid model implemented in your school?

For the Corporate sector

1. How would you describe your level of job satisfaction before the pandemic? Did the pandemic affect it? If so, how?
2. Did you feel like you had a good work-life balance before the pandemic?
3. How often did you feel supported by your colleagues and managers before the pandemic?

APPENDIX

List of Questions for the Semi-Structured Interview:

Common Questions for all three sectors

1. Tell us about your job. How many years of work experience do you have?
2. Describe your work life before the pandemic? Were you satisfied with your Job back then?
3. What were some of the major problems/challenges you were facing with work before the pandemic?
4. Did you manage to have leisure time for yourself/family?
5. How was your relationship with your colleagues back then? With your boss?

4. Did you have any workplace wellness programs or resources available to you before the pandemic? If so, which ones did you find most helpful?
5. Have you experienced any new sources of stress or burnout since the pandemic?
6. Have you felt supported by your colleagues and managers during the pandemic? Could anything have been done better?
7. Have any new workplace wellness programs or resources been introduced since the pandemic began? If so, which ones have you found most helpful?
8. How has the pandemic affected your mental health?
9. Have you experienced any changes in productivity or motivation since the pandemic began?
10. Did you face any pre-Covid issues with your job? If yes, what were they?
11. Did you get a chance to work from home during the pandemic?
12. How was working in quarantine for you? What were some job-related challenges you came across?
13. Did working from home affect your personal life?
14. Did you notice any pre-Covid and post-Covid working differences?
15. Did you notice any financial issues before and after COVID? Especially due to inflation.
16. Is your organisation following a hybrid model? If so, are you satisfied with it? Have you faced any issues?
17. How would you feel about an eventual return to the workplace?
18. Did you notice any differences in workplace interactions before and after the pandemic? How would you describe your team dynamics?
19. Were there any layoffs at your company because of Covid? If yes, then how did it affect you?

For the Hospital Sector

1. What was your Pay Scale before and after Covid? Was it sustainable in both the instances?
2. Did you receive any bonus or benefits before and after Covid?
3. Are there any facilities provided by the hospital to you? Like free medical check-ups, vaccines?
4. At any point of time, was there a considerable delay in the payment of salary?
5. If ever you were in need of urgent financial help or medical help, was the hospital considerate? Did they provide good help? Was there any leave given?
6. If a machinery requires a few changes, replacement or an advanced version is needed, how long does the hospital take to provide for it?
7. Did you have regular inspections at your hospital- before and after Covid?
8. Does the hospital arrange for any training or awareness programs?

9. What kind of difficulties have you faced in this hospital in terms of your work? Were they resolved?
10. Any issues with the management or medical staff or non-medical staff?
11. Does the hospital provide counselling or any psychological help?
12. Is there a department or team which deals with women's safety?

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