EGE AKADEMİK BAKIŞ / *EGE ACADEMIC REVIEW*

Cilt 22 • Sayı 3 • Nisan 2022
SS. 253/270
Doi: 10.21121/eab.987090
Başvuru Tarihi: 25.08.2021 • Kabul Tarihi: 4.04.2022

Benefits of Flexible Working System During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Field Study in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the opinions and attitudes of healthcare professionals (physicians, nurses and other healthcare workers), academicians and civil servants who benefit from flexible working practices during the Covid-19 pandemic period. This is a descriptive study. A questionnaire form was used in the study as a data collection tool which includes statements about the benefits of flexible working practice during the pandemic such as; family work balance, family work conflict, motivation, performance, productivity, quality of life and health. Study results show that; healthcare professionals experienced an increase in their motivation and job satisfaction, their productivity was positively affected, their individual and corporate performances have increased, while academicians experienced a decrease in their motivation and job satisfaction, their productivity was not positively affected, and their concentration has decreased during flexible working period in the pandemic.

Keywords: Flexible Working; Remote Working; Covid-19 Pandemic; Healthcare Professionals, Academicians

JEL Classification Codes: M12, D23, L84

INTRODUCTION

Technological changes have always occurred in human history. Technological change accelerates in a dizzying way, when a slowly accumulating power reaches the explosion point with the effect of a trigger and creates extraordinary effects in a short time. In times of rapid changes in our technology history, most of the triggers have been non-peaceful phenomena such as wars and revolutions. Especially in recent years, the technology that has developed exponentially was waiting for a new trigger. This time, there is a Covid-19 pandemic that acts as a technological trigger in the face of humanity, but also has very high political, economic and social effects. The technological infrastructure and communication systems that have been created in the last two decades in the world are the battlefield in our war against the pandemic, and the innovative technology itself is the main weapon of human beings.

Covid-19 was detected for the first time in Wuhan city, China at the end of 2019 and caused the pandemic, is a very important and urgent public health problem (WHO, 2020). It spread all over the world in such a short time that societies found the solution to quarantine and work at home. At this point, it has been clearly seen that advanced communication technologies are the most important and reliable instrument to stop the spread of the pandemic, prevent infection, quarantine and disease monitoring. Aside from the solution of health concerns, flexible and remote working systems have become widely used in almost all sectors as the only compulsory solution for organizations (Baadel et.al., 2020; Gursoy and Chi, 2020; Khan et.al., 2020; Kumar et.al., 2020; Kyhlstedt et.al., 2020; Prasad et.al., 2020).

The pandemic has forced organizations to rethink the way they do business and develop different working approaches. Remote business technologies, which are already ready to be used, have supported flexible working systems, and the transition to this new way of working has been successfully implemented by many sectors and businesses in a short time thanks to technology. Flexible working systems aim to empower employees and increase their motivation and performance by giving them more flexibility (Griffin and Moorhead, 2013; Anderson et al., 2015). Today, flexible working practices are carried out in the form of remote work, part-time work, job sharing, shift and weekend work, flexible rotational work, home-

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based work and telework practices (Gramm and Schnell, 2001; Houseman, 2001; Meyer et al., 2001; Rothwell et al., 2012).

The Covid-19 pandemic has given us an opportunity and research motivation to examine the widest transition to flexible and remote working system of the health sector and universities in Turkey. This unforeseen and fast transition of the working system has led us to conduct this research to gain answers of these questions; "What are the feelings and thoughts of healthcare professionals, academics and civil servants about the flexible and remote working system? How did it affect them socially, psychologically and economically? What is the impact of flexible and remote working practices on their family and business lives? Is this system sustainable?". Besides, the lack of previous research on this issue prompted us to manage this study to be able to provide beneficial clues to healthcare managers, universities and planners in new potential pandemic periods that may be experienced in the future. At this point, the purpose of this study is to examine the opinions and attitudes of healthcare professionals (physicians, nurses and other healthcare workers), academicians and civil servants who benefit from flexible working practices during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

Individual and Organizational Benefits of Flexible Working System

The flexible working system allows people to work in different hours according to their needs and offers the opportunity to work remotely, unlike the traditional working order, the way and type of work is managed in such a way that they can adapt to the emergency conditions related to the work (Fursman and Zodgekar, 2009). In the flexible working system, it is recommended to establish a working relationship in which the wishes of both the employer and the employees are harmonized, there is no loser, double-sided gain is achieved, shortly in which the "win-win" strategy is dominant (Brummelhuis et al., 2010).

Flexible working practices allow employees to control their daily working hours and places (Fonner and Stache, 2012; Griffin and Moorhead, 2013) and increase the sense of organizational commitment (Cheese, 2008; Kelliher and Anderson, 2008). Studies show that the flexible working system has a positive effect on high job performance, productivity, morale and quality of work. It enables the employees to increase their life satisfaction by establishing a better work-life balance. Thus, there may be many positive consequences for organizations such as less absenteeism, less being late for work and less complaints, more quality problem solving, openness to technological change, increased cost effectiveness, and keeping personnel and organizational knowledge at a high level (Pruchno, 2000; MIT, 2004; Kossek et al., 2005; Kelliher and Anderson, 2008; Rees and French, 2010; Neo, 2013). In addition, flexible working systems have been proven to allow an increase in the mental health and well-being of both employees and their families (Baker et al., 2011; Goodwin and Styron, 2012) and are beneficial for the development of family relationships and gender equality (Bauregard and Henry, 2009; Andringa et al., 2015; Cannito, 2020).

Researches show that flexible working arrangements, in various forms, are increasingly being accepted and included in organizational policy and business patterns (Petts and Knoester, 2018; Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2019). The rapid and simultaneous transition of tens of millions of people to remote work has led to surprising discoveries in every industry. The data show that employees who work at home during the pandemic period spend their working time more efficiently (Sulaymonov, 2020). Instead of waiting for days or even weeks, meetings that require a joint decision between consumers, suppliers and employees have been made much more practical and effective thanks to online live connections and meetings that take only a few hours to plan and organize (Aydoğan and Sener, 2020).

Surely, it is not easy to embed a flexible working culture within an organization. Flexible working policies need to be reviewed in the context of all employees to ensure that people are effectively managed and goals are achieved. At this point, the role of managers is critical, it will be useful to examine the strategies, barriers and difficulties required for intervention (Golden, 2006; Kelliher and Anderson, 2008). Managers must effectively perform tasks such as identifying unmotivated employees for flexible working, focusing on the suitability of the employee to work flexibly and determining clear duties and expectations, creating a result- oriented performance atmosphere, measuring the advantages gained by flexible working practice, providing feedback to employees after analysing their performance, applying daily management skills that can combine the company's mission with the expectations of the employees (AIM, 2012; Gomez-Mejia et al., 2012).

Flexible Working Practices during the Pandemic in Turkey

Coronavirus spreading rapidly in all countries of the world, has been identified for the first time on March 11, 2020 in Turkey and the number of cases increased rapidly in all cities (MOH, 2020). The rapid increase of cases necessitated the rapid transition to a flexible working system in both the private sector and the public sector.

The circular numbered 22/03/2020-4 was issued by the Presidency of Turkey in order to regulate the working hours of public institutions and organizations during the pandemic. Following this decision, within the scope of the circular numbered 3522 of 23/03/2020 published by the Ministry of Health on the flexible working practice, it was stated that flexible working methods such as remote working and rotational work could be applied even to healthcare workers in order to minimize the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak in the country. In addition to this circular issued by the Ministry of Health, within the scope of the announcement dated 15/05/2020, flexible working practice continued. In the following process, with a letter sent to the Provincial Health Directorates in 81 provinces within the scope of "Normalization and Measures to be Taken in the Scope of Covid-19" on June 02, 2020, it was reported that all personnel working in the central and provincial organizations of the Ministry of Health should start their work full-time. However, with the circular numbered 2020/11 by the Presidency on August 26, 2020, it was reported that employees working in public institutions and organizations could benefit from flexible working methods including remote working and rotational work again (ONT, 2020).

The private sector and public institutions in Turkey have been able to provide a very rapid transition to the flexible working system. However, it can be said that health sector managers were confused about this issue at first. Because, patients who thought that Covid-19 was spreading very quickly in hospitals, did not want to come to the hospital unless there was an emergency, and they wanted to receive medical service remotely. It was decided that healthcare workers, other than the healthcare professionals working in the service and intensive care units serving Covid-19 patients, switch to the flexible working system. The routine appointment system was cancelled in hospitals in units other than Covid-19, and a very limited number of appointments were made. The Ministry of Health and private hospitals have rapidly invested in telemedicine systems where doctors and patients can communicate remotely, and they have begun to provide medical services to non-emergency patients from their homes. Medical data of the patients were monitored remotely, and every possible procedure was performed remotely using communication technologies. If the patient had to come to the hospital, a special appointment was being given. While some of the healthcare professionals were in a very busy working system, some of them worked in a flexible and remote working system and replaced each other periodically. For the first time in the history of Turkey, healthcare professionals switched to a flexible and remote working system due to the pandemic.

Similarly, academicians have switched to the distance education system in all faculties. Lessons were given remotely synchronously or asynchronously. Academicians were free to give their lectures from their homes or their rooms at the university. However, due to the rapid spread of the disease and the high level of uncertainty, the vast majority of academicians worked from their homes and managed their lessons from their homes. Civil servants also switched to a flexible and remote working system. In offices where things could not be handled by working remotely, every day an employee served on duty. All other civil servants worked from home using remote working systems.

Although it was difficult to manage the flexible working system in the health sector at the beginning, Turkey managed the process without major blockages due to the facts such as strong technological infrastructure and hardware (İleri, 2016), more than 62 million people had access to high-speed internet (TSO, 2020), 90.9% of the population was under the age of 65 (TSO, 2020) and could use technology at a basic level and necessary precautions and measures could be taken quickly.

METHOD

Study Design, Study Population and Sampling

This is a descriptive study. The sample of the study consists of physicians, nurses, other healthcare professionals, academicians and civil servants who benefit from flexible working practices in institutions and organizations serving in Konya, Turkey during the Covid-19 pandemic period. Non-proportional quota sampling was used to determine the study participants. Units were selected by convenience sampling method from non-random methods (Esin, 2015). A total of 414 employees benefiting from the flexible working practice were reached. In order to increase the reliability of the study, they have been asked "Did you benefit from the flexible working practice?" and 334 employees who answered "yes" to this question were included in the study.

Konya was selected to be a study location for the study due to being one of the largest and crowded provinces (2.2 million) of Turkey with the highest number of cases during the pandemic period. The city switched to flexible working system at the beginning of the pandemic, it has both qualitatively and quantitatively qualified health infrastructure and health workers, it hosts a large number of public and private universities, its quality electronic communication infrastructure supported working from home / remotely, it geographically takes place in the midst of Turkey, which may help to reach a good sample group with demographic diversity.

Data Collection Tools

A questionnaire was used for data collection in the study. The questionnaire was prepared by the researchers through a literature review (Hildebrandt, 2006; Pichler, 2009; Doğrul and Tekeli, 2010; Giannikis and Mihail, 2011; Doğan et. al., 2015). The final questionnaire was prepared after obtaining expert opinions. In the questionnaire, there are 7 questions related to socio demographic information of the employees, 5 questions containing information about flexible working practice and 28 questions expressing the returns of flexible working practice. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was found 0.96. In the study, 5-point Likert (1= Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree) was used. Statements about the returns of flexible working practice include family work balance, family work conflict, motivation, performance, productivity, quality of life, health, etc. The data were collected via online survey between October and December 2020.

Data Analysis

The SPSS 21.0 program was used in the analysis of the data. Percentage, mean, standard deviation and chi-square tests were performed. Eyes were combined for cells in which the expected value of expressions in chi-square analysis was <5 and the total number of cells exceeded 20%. The rows/columns were combined for cells with the expected value of expressions <5 and the total cell number exceeding 20%. In the study, 1.00-1.79 is evaluated as strongly disagree, 1.80-2.59 disagree, 2.60-3.39 undecided, 3.40-4.19 agree, and 4.20-5.00 is evaluated as strongly agree.

Ethic

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Pharmaceuticals and Non- Medical Device Researches. Written permission was obtained from the Scientific Research Studies Commission on Covid-19 of the Ministry of Health and another written permission was obtained from Konya Governorship. Informed written consent was also obtained from the participants.

RESULTS

Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. More than half (65%) of the participants of the study (15.27% physician, 15.87% nurse, 34.13% other healthcare worker) are healthcare workers, 18.26% are academicians and 16.47% are civil servants. 65.56% of the participants are women, 73.06% are married, and 52.09% are in the 34-45 age group. 43.71% of the employees are postgraduates and 56% of them have more than 10 years of experience.

Table 1 is here

Study findings show that the flexible working program which does not have a specific start and end time and the working hours are determined by the head of the institution and the employees together was benefited by the participants mostly (55%). This is followed by programs that provide some flexibility in the workplace (18%), followed by flexible programs of which start and end times are determined by only the employee (15%), and programs of which the employees work remotely for a certain period of time with (12%). Benefiting different types of flexible working, only 36% of the participants think flexible working practice was fair.

Examining the results of satisfaction and applicability; the average and standard deviation of those who stated that they were satisfied with the flexible working practice was 3.74 ± 1.29 while 34.4% of the participants "strongly agree" and 33.5% "agree". The average and standard deviation of the statement "In this period, I have seen the applicability of flexible working policies and laws in business life" was 3.82±1.05 while 50.3% of the participants "agree" and 25.1% "strongly agree". The average and standard deviation of those who think that flexible working practice should be applied in jobs and tasks requiring less responsibility was 3.23±1.31 while 36.5% of the participants were "agree" and 19.2% "undecided".

In the Covid-19 period, the expressions of flexible working practice were grouped as family work balance, family work conflict, work-related benefits, and benefits related to the individual's own life, and the findings are presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

When the positive statements about the benefits of flexible working are examined in Tables 2, 3 and 4, the

Table 1. Descriptive Variables of Participants

Gender	n	%
Female	219	65.56
Male	115	34.44
Marital Status		
Single	90	26.94
Married	244	73.06
Age		
Between 22-33	109	32.63
Between 34-45	174	52.09
Between 46-56	51	15.28
Educational Status		
High School	15	4.50
Diploma	39	11.68
Bachelor Degree	134	40.11
Postgraduate	146	43.71
Profession		
Physician	51	15.27
Nurse	53	15.87
Other Healthcare Profess.	114	34.13
Academician	61	18.26
Civil Servant	55	16.47
Experiency		
0-5 years	65	19.47
6-10 years	82	24.55
11-15 years	64	19.16
16-20 years	57	17.07
21 +	66	19.75
n: 334		

first three statements with the highest average are listed as follows: (1) 78.7% of the participants (3.87±1.06) stated that they agreed that "their coordination regarding their job or work place was good during flexible working period" (Table 3). (2) 78.1% of the participants (3.87±1.13) agreed that "they did not have any problems in communication about their job or work place during flexible working periods" (Table 3). (3) 77.8% of the participants (3.93±1.21) agreed that "they were able to spare more time for their family thanks to the flexible working practice" (Table 2).

When the negative statements about the results of flexible working are examined the first three statements with the highest average are as follows: (1) 39.5% (2.89 ± 1.29) of the participants agreed that "their technology addiction has increased during flexible working period" as shown in Table 4. (2) 30.6% of the participants (2.65 ± 1.24) agreed that "their multiple roles at home (status at work, mother, spouse, etc.) during the flexible working period overstrained them" as given in Table 2. (3) 26.1% (2.40 ± 1.27) of the employees disagreed that "their concentration decreased due to flexible working practice" as seen in Table 4.

According to Table 2, there was no significant relationship (p= 0.15; p> 0.05) between the professions of the participants and the statement "I have fulfilled my responsibilities in the family more easily due to flexible working practice". This statement is mostly supported by physicians (86.3%) and academics (78.7%). Similarly, it is seen that there is a significant relationship (p = 0.02; p< 0.05) between the participants' professions and the statement "I was able to spare more time for my family due to flexible working practice". This statement is mostly supported by civil servants (87.3%) and physicians (86.3%).

As seen in Table 2, there was no significant relationship between the professions of the participants and the statement "my multiple roles at home (status at work, mother, spouse, etc.) overstrained me during the flexible working practice" and the statement "I had more conflicts with my family members during the flexible working practice" (respectively p= 0.61, p= 0.08; p> 0.05). Mostly, academicians (36.1%) and physicians (33.3%) stated that they had difficulty in multiple roles. Other healthcare professionals (20.2%) and academicians (18%) stated that they had conflicts with family members. A significant correlation (p= 0.00; p< 0.05) was found between the participants' professions and the statement "the time I spent on family responsibilities generally negatively affected my job responsibilities". Again, mostly academicians (27.9%) and other healthcare professionals (10.5%) agreed with this statement.

According to Table 3, a significant relationship was found between the professions of the participants and the statements "my job motivation has increased", "my job satisfaction has increased", "my productivity in my work life is positively affected", "corporate performance has increased" and "coordination with my job or work place was good" during flexible working period (p= 0.02, p= 0.00, p= 0.01, p= 0.00, p= 0.04; p< 0.05, respectively).

Academicians (34.4%, 32.8%, 41%, respectively) and civil servants (47.3%, 43.6%, 50.9%, respectively) were the least participating in terms of increase in motivation, job satisfaction and productivity. While 45.8% of the total participants think that institutional performance increased, the least participating group was academicians (23%). All professional groups stated that they had good workplace coordination over 67%.

According to study results; there was no significant relationship between professions of the participants and the statements "my individual performance increased", "my career is positively affected", "I had the opportunity to make plans for my career", "I had no problem communicating about my job or workplace", "my continuity to work has been positively affected" during flexible working period (p= 0.14, p= 0.51, p= 0.17, p= 0.26, p= 0.05; p> 0.05, respectively). The groups that least expressed an increase in individual performance were academicians (50.8%) and civil servants (50.9%). Besides, less than 41% of the participants think that their careers were positively affected.

51% of physicians, 34% of nurses and 52.5% of academicians think that they had the opportunity to make a career plan. Participants stated that they did not have a problem in communication about their job or workplace (72%). While 65.9% of the total participants supported the statement regarding continuity to work, the least participating group was academicians (54.1%) and civil servants (58.2%).

As seen in Table 4, there was no significant relationship between professions of the participants and the statements "my quality of life has improved", "I can spare more time for myself", "I rested", "I managed time better", "I started to pay more attention to my health (sports, nutrition, etc.)" and "my life (clothing, use of transportation resources, etc.) has become easier" during flexible working period (p= 0.46, p= 0.77, p= 0.71, p= 0.12,

Table 2. Responses to the Statements Related to Family Work Balance and Family Work Conflict due to Flexible Working during the Covid 19 Pandemic Period, Distribution of Average Scores and Comparison of Expressions According to Profession Group

		Physician		Nurse		Other Healthcare Professions		Academic		Civil Servant		Overall		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
I fulfilled my family responsibilities more easily. (3.81±1.27)***	A	7	13.7	16	30.2	34	29.8	13	21.3	17	30.9	87	26	X^2=6.72* p= 0.15**
	B	44	86.3	37	69.8	80	70.2	48	78.7	38	69.1	247	74	
I was able to spend more time with my family. (3.93±1.21)***	A	7	13.7	15	28.3	35	30.7	10	16.4	7	12.7	74	22.2	X^2=12.0* p= 0.02**
	B	44	86.3	38	71.7	79	69.3	51	83.6	48	87.3	260	77.8	
My multiple roles at home (status at work, parent, spouse, etc.) overstrained me. (2.65±1.24)***	A	34	66.7	41	77.4	79	69.3	39	63.9	39	70.9	232	69.5	X^2=2.68* p= 0.61**
	B	17	33.3	12	22.6	35	30.7	22	36.1	16	29.1	102	30.5	
I had more conflicts with my family members. (2.14±1.07)***	A	48	94.1	48	90.6	91	79.8	50	82	49	89.1	286	85.6	X^2=8.36*p= 0.08**
	B	3	5.9	5	9.4	23	20.2	11	18	6	10.9	48	14.4	
The time I spent on family responsibilities often negatively affected my job responsibilities. (2.06±1.03)***	A	47	92.2	48	90.6	102	89.5	44	72.1	50	90.9	291	87.1	X^2=15.2* p= 0.00**
	B	4	7.8	5	9.4	12	10.5	17	27.9	5	9.1	43	12.9	

* Pearson Chi-Square (X^2) ** p <0.05, *** Mean and standard deviation of each statement A = Strongly disagree / Disagree / Undecided, B = Agree / Strongly agree

p= 0.07, p= 0.94; p> 0.05, respectively). In total, 62.3% of employees stated that their quality of life increased, while academics (57.4%) and civil servants (54.5%) participated below this rate. Besides, 72.8% of the participants stated that they spent more time for themselves and rested and 66.5% of the employees could manage their time better. Academicians (52.5%) were below this rate. Regarding the statement of paying attention to health in the flexible working period, academicians (45.9%) and civil servants (54.5%) participated less than the other groups. 72.2% of the total participants stated that their lives became easier during the flexible working period.

There was a statistically significant relationship between professions of the participants and the statements "my physical health was positively affected", "my psychological health was positively affected", "my expenses (financially) decreased", "my technology addiction has increased",

Table 3. Responses for Work Related Benefits Including Distribution of Average Scores and Comparison of Expressions According to Profession Group

		Physician		Nurse		Other Health-care Professions		Academic		Civil Servant		Overall		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
My job motivation has increased. (3.34±1.33)***	A	21	41.2	23	43.4	46	40.4	40	65.6	29	52.7	159	47.6	X^2=12.10* p= 0.02**
	B	30	58.8	30	56.6	68	59.6	21	34.4	26	47.3	175	52.4	
My job satisfaction has increased. (3.40±1.33)***	A	19	37.3	23	43.4	39	34.2	41	67.2	31	56.4	153	45.8	X^2=21.53* p= 0.00**
	B	32	62.7	30	56.6	75	65.8	20	32.8	24	43.6	181	54.2	
It positively affected my productivity in my work life. (3.46±1.33)***	A	18	35.3	17	32.1	40	35.1	36	59	27	49.1	138	41.3	X^2=13.71* p= 0.01**
	B	33	64.7	36	67.9	74	64.9	25	41	28	50.9	196	58.7	
My individual performance has increased. (3.50±1.28)***	A	16	31.4	20	37.7	40	35.1	30	49.2	27	49.1	133	39.8	X^2=6.88* p= 0.14**
	B	35	68.6	33	62.3	74	64.9	31	50.8	28	50.9	201	60.2	
I think corporate performance has increased. (3.17±1.31)***	A	29	56.9	23	43.4	51	44.7	47	77	31	56.4	181	54.2	X^2=19.68* p= 0.00**
	B	22	43.1	30	56.6	63	55.3	14	23	24	43.6	153	45.8	
It positively affected my career. (2.97±1.24)***	A	34	66.7	38	71.7	67	58.8	41	67.2	37	67.3	217	65	X^2=3.31* p= 0.51**
	B	17	33.3	15	28.3	47	41.2	20	32.8	18	32.7	117	35	
I had the opportunity to make plans for my career. (3.20±1.24)***	A	25	49	35	66	61	53.5	29	47.5	24	43.6	174	52.1	X^2=6.50* p= 0.17**
	B	26	51	18	34	53	46.5	32	52.5	31	56.4	160	47.9	
I had no problem communicating about my job or workplace. (3.87±1.13)***	A	9	17.6	12	22.6	31	27.2	8	13.1	13	23.6	73	21.9	X^2=5.28* p= 0.26**
	B	42	82.4	41	77.4	83	72.8	53	86.9	42	76.4	261	78.1	
Coordination with my job or work place was good. (3.87±1.06)***	A	6	11.8	12	22.6	27	23.7	8	13.1	18	32.7	71	21.3	X^2=9.95* p= 0.04**
	B	45	88.2	41	77.4	87	76.3	53	86.9	37	67.3	263	78.7	
My continuity to work has been positively affected. (3.62±1.19)***	A	14	27.5	12	22.6	37	32.5	28	45.9	23	41.8	114	34.1	X^2=9.47* p= 0.05**
	B	37	72.5	41	77.4	77	67.5	33	54.1	32	58.2	220	65.9	

* Pearson Chi-Square (X^2), **p<0.05, *** Mean and Standard Deviation, B=Strongly Agree/Agree

A= Strongly disagree / Disagree / Undecided

Table 4. Responses Related to Individual's Own Life Benefits Including Distribution of Average Scores and Comparison of Expressions According to Profession Group

		Physician		Nurse		Other Healthcare Professions		Academic		Civil Servant		Overall		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
My quality of life has improved. (3.60±1.22)***	A	16	31.4	17	32.1	42	36.8	26	42.6	25	45.5	126	37.7	X^2=3.66*
	B	35	68.6	36	67.9	72	63.2	35	57.4	30	54.5	208	62.3	p= 0.46**
I was able to spare more time for myself. (3.78±1.19)***	A	11	21.6	16	30.2	29	25.4	19	31.1	16	29.1	91	27.2	X^2=1.81*
	B	40	78.4	37	69.8	85	74.6	42	68.9	39	70.9	243	72.8	p= 0.77**
I had the opportunity to rest. (3.78±1.24)***	A	12	23.5	14	26.4	29	25.4	21	34.4	15	27.3	91	27.2	X^2=2.15*
	B	39	76.5	39	73.6	85	74.6	40	65.6	40	72.7	243	72.8	p= 0.71**
I managed time better. (3.66±1.14)***	A	16	31.4	15	28.3	33	28.9	29	47.5	19	34.5	112	33.5	X^2=7.23*
	B	35	68.6	38	71.7	81	71.1	32	52.5	36	65.5	222	66.5	p= 0.12**
It positively affected my physical health. (3.62±1.29)***	A	22	43.1	15	28.3	29	25.4	30	49.2	18	32.7	114	34.1	X^2=12.6*
	B	29	56.9	38	71.7	85	74.6	31	50.8	37	67.3	220	65.9	p= 0.01**
It positively affected my psychological health. (3.59±1.32)***	A	14	27.5	16	30.2	36	31.6	37	60.7	23	41.8	126	37.7	X^2=19.4*
	B	37	72.5	37	69.8	78	68.4	24	39.3	32	58.2	208	62.3	p=0.00**
I started to pay more attention to my health (sports, nutrition, etc.) (3.50±1.24)***	A	20	39.2	19	35.8	37	32.5	33	54.1	25	45.5	134	40.1	X^2=8.82
	B	31	60.8	34	64.2	77	67.5	28	45.9	30	54.5	200	59.9	p= 0.07
My life (clothing, transportation, resource use, etc.) has become easier.	A	16	31.4	14	26.4	33	28.9	15	24.6	15	27.3	93	27.8	X^2=0.77*
	B	35	68.6	39	73.6	81	71.1	46	75.4	40	72.7	241	72.2	p= 0.94**
(3.78±1.17)***														
My expenses (financially) decreased. (3.47±1.29)***	A	25	49	24	45.3	43	37.7	13	21.3	22	40	127	38	X^2=11.1*
	B	26	51	29	54.7	71	62.3	48	78.7	33	60	207	62	p= 0.03**
My technology addiction has increased. (2.89±1.29)***	A	29	56.9	42	79.2	74	64.9	30	49.2	27	49.1	202	60.5	X^2=15.2*
	B	22	43.1	11	20.8	40	35.1	31	50.8	28	50.9	132	39.5	p= 0.00**
It negatively affected my financial gain. (2.44±1.26)***	A	29	56.9	40	75.5	91	79.8	57	93.4	38	69.1	255	76.3	X^2=22.9*
	B	22	43.1	13	24.5	23	20.2	4	6.6	17	30.9	79	23.7	p= 0.00**
Inertia occurred. (2.38±1.27)***	A	37	72.5	45	84.9	95	83.3	38	62.3	36	65.5	251	75.1	X^2=15.1*
	B	14	27.5	8	15.1	19	16.7	23	37.7	19	34.5	83	24.9	p= 0.00**
My concentration has decreased. (2.40±1.27)***	A	43	84.3	45	84.9	92	80.7	34	55.7	33	60	247	74	X^2=24.9*
	B	8	15.7	8	15.1	22	19.3	27	44.3	22	40	87	26	p= 0.00**

* Pearson Chi-Square (X^2), ** p <0.05, *** Mean and standard deviation of each statement A = Strongly disagree / Disagree / Undecided, B = Agree / Strongly agree

"my concentration has decreased", "my financial gain was negatively affected" and "inertia occurred" during flexible working period (p= 0.01, p= 0.00, p= 0.03, p= 0.00, p= 0.00, p= 0.00, p= 0.00; p< 0.05, respectively). While 65.9% of the employees think that their physical health was positively affected, only academicians (50.8%) and physicians (56.9%) were below this rate. In parallel with this result, 39.3% of the academicians think that their psychological health was positively affected which is lower than the other groups. 62% of the participants stated that their financial expenses decreased. Academicians (50.8%), civil servants (50.9%) and physicians (43.1%) participated in the statement about technology addiction. Finally, flexible working negatively affected financial gains of physicians (43.1%) at most and academicians (6.6%) at least. 26% of the participants stated that their concentration decreased, this rate was the highest for academicians (44.3%) and civil servants (40%). Likewise, it was determined that inertia occurred mostly in academicians (37.7%) and civil servants (34.5%) compared to other groups.

DISCUSSION

In the study, it was aimed to examine the opinions of healthcare professionals (physicians, nurses and other healthcare workers), academics and civil servants who benefited from flexible working practices during the Covid-19 pandemic period. It is seen that most of the participants (55%) have benefited from the flexible and remote working program, where their working periods do not have a specific start and end time, and the working hours are determined by the head of the institution and the employee together. 64% of the participants think that flexible working practice is not fair. Surely, all employees do not benefit from flexible working at the same level. While pregnant, breastfeeding, chronically ill, 65+ years old individuals and managers definitely benefited from flexible working practice, the workload of other employees increased in Turkey. However, employees are generally satisfied with the flexible working practice (3.74±1.29) and think that flexible working practice is applicable (75.4%) in working life (3.82±1.05). However, the participants were "undecided" (3.23±1.31) in terms of applying flexible working practice to jobs with little responsibility.

In terms of family work balance, most of the employees stated that they fulfill their responsibilities within the family more easily (3.81±1.27) and they can allocate more time to their family (3.93±1.21) thanks to the flexible working practice. It is observed that the rate of physicians, who benefit from flexible working practice, is higher than the other groups in terms of fulfilling their responsibilities within the family and sparing more time to their families (86.3%). It is also detected that physicians, who had an intense work tempo in the pre-pandemic period, were able to establish their family work balance better during flexible working practice and the balance was positively affected. Similarly, other studies stated that employees can spare more time for their family, environment and themselves thanks to working from home (Tuna and Türkmendağ, 2020).

From the perspective of family-work conflict, the participants were "undecided" whether multiple roles at home (status at work, mother, spouse, etc.) were challenging or not (2.65±1.24). They do not advocate the opinion that they experience more conflicts with family members during the flexible working period (2.14±1.07) and that the time they spend on family responsibilities negatively affects their job responsibilities (2.06±1.03). During the flexible working period, situations such as "having multiple roles at home (36.1%)", "having conflicts with family members (18%)" and "time spent on family responsibilities negatively impacting job responsibilities (27.9%)" were mostly seen in academics. According to Eaton and Bailyn (2000), when organizational flexible working policies are inconsistently implemented and discouraged from participating in these programs, employees perceive more interventions in balancing their work and personal/family responsibilities. Therefore, employees who do not feel free to use the flexible working programs provided by the organization with the fear of damaging career prospects may not benefit from the intended benefits of these initiatives, such as work/life balance. On the other hand, there are studies showing that working from home, which is one of the flexible working types, is associated with higher levels of work pressure and work-life conflict. There is also evidence that working from home may be associated with increased work pressure and work-life conflict in some cases. Further research on working from home reveals that this is associated with working longer hours, as well as causing work to interfere in family time more and regarded as more workload (Russell et al, 2009). Work-family conflict is a source of stress that many individuals experience. Work-family conflict has been defined as a type of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from work and family areas are mutually incompatible (Carlson et al., 2000). Surely, work-family conflict can negatively affect both productivity and family life. Besides, it is shown that work-family conflicts have a potentially detrimental effect on productivity, personal activity, marital relationships, child-parent relationships, and even child development (Gornick and Meyers, 2003).

Expressions of the participants' about work-related benefits reveal that the participants are generally "undecided" (52.4%) whether their job motivation has increased or not (3.34 ± 1.33). Besides, physicians (58%), nurses (56.8%) and other healthcare professionals (59.6%) stated that their job motivation increased. For academicians, this rate was only 34.4%. This finding may support their statements that they experienced family-work conflict while working from home and shows that academics are more motivated when teaching face-to-face with students. Although the main purposes of implementing flexible working programs are to adapt organizations to changing environment, competition and technological and communicational developments, and to increase the morale and motivation of employees by increasing the time they can spare for their family and private lives (Doğan et al., 2015: 376), this study results show that it is not possible to say that all employees have a positive attitude and view about flexible working practices. Tuna and Türkmendağ (2020) stated that the absence of an efficient working environment at home, increased workload, and deterioration of the working environment are negative effects of remote working on motivation. In addition, they stated that remote working increases the need for qualified information technology infrastructure, obligates all stakeholders to be prepared to work remotely, the working time stretches and gets longer, some difficulties arise to hold meetings in homes with children, the workload increases, and workplace discipline deteriorates.

In terms of job satisfaction, the participants agree (54.2%) that they got more job satisfaction (3.40 ± 1.33) in the flexible working period. It was determined that the group with the highest satisfaction was other healthcare workers (65.8%) and the group with the least satisfaction was academicians (32.8%). The results reveal that academicians' continuing all of their courses as distance education dramatically reduces their job satisfaction. For an academician, it is important to know that they are understood and to teach in a discussion environment. However, in the distance education system, the participation of students in the course is naturally less, the interaction is limited, it is often not possible to teach in a discussion environment and to determine whether the students understand the course or not, which probably decreases academicians' job satisfaction. On the other hand, Baydar (2012) reports that the "taste for freedom" is an important reason for employees to prefer working from home. This concept is associated with reluctance to take orders, doing your own job freely and flexibility in the use of time.

In terms of performance, productivity, and efficiency, participants believed that flexible working practices increased productivity (3.46 ± 1.33) and individual performance (3.50 ± 1.28) in working life (58.7%, 60.2%, respectively), but they are "undecided" whether it increased corporate performance (3.17±1.31). While 66% of healthcare workers agreed that the flexible working system increased productivity, only 41% of the academicians participated. Similarly, 62% of healthcare professionals think that flexible working increases individual performance, while this rate is 51% for academics. Besides, 43.1% of physicians, 23% of academics and 43.6% of civil servants agree that flexible working increases corporate performance. Özçelik (2021) stated that employees who worked at home during and after Covid-19 pandemic were more successful in terms of job performance and quality of their work. Forbes et.al. (2020) expressed that, since lockdown during the pandemic, the majority (54.7%) of managers report that over 80% of their employees have been working from home, besides, organisations are providing more support for employees working from home to ensure productivity levels are maintained.

Participants are "undecided" whether flexible working practices positively affected their careers (2.97±1.24) and there were opportunities to make career plans (3.20±1.24). In total, 52.1% of the employees did not have the opportunity to make plans about their careers. Results show that the uncertainty environment created by the pandemic is an important factor in the instability of career development.

In terms of communication and coordination, employees stated that they did not experience any problems in communication related to their job or workplace during the flexible working period (3.87±1.13) and their job or workplace coordination was good (3.87±1.06) in this period. 78% of the employees believe that communication and coordination related to the job was good. The group with the highest rate having this opinion was academicians (86.9%), which may be due to the fact that universities have relatively high quality and well planned systems, academicians already use digital environments effectively, and the hierarchical structure in the academy world is flexible. However, according to studies, one of the possible disadvantages of flexible working practices is that communication problems in the workplace increase and may lead to coordination problems (Giannikis and Mihail, 2011). It is known that such business practices may cause some problems for organizations due to problems such as reducing face-

to-face communication and needing more coordination (Rao, 2004). It is understandable that many flexible workers fear being less in the office or not being able to establish face-to-face relationships with their boss. In addition, 65.9% of the participants believe that flexible working practice positively affects the continuity to work (3.62±1.19). In this manner, Baydar (2012) emphasised the importance of communication technologies (including fast and convenient internet connection) to be able to continue work from home.

According to participants' expressions of "benefits related to their own life", employees agree that "their quality of life has increased" (3.60±1.22), "could spare more time for themselves" (3.78±1.19), and "have rested" (3.78±1.24) thanks to the flexible working practice. On average, 72.8% of the participants stated that they gave more time to themselves and rested during the flexible working period, but the rate of those who stated that their quality of life increased is 62.3%. The relatively low increase in the quality of life can be considered as a reflection of the negative psychological and sociological effects of the pandemic period. In this respect, Tuna and Türkmendağ (2020) stated that working from home with flexible working hours provide advantages for employees including a comfortable working environment, freedom of dress, and a life and lifestyle away from intense stress.

Participants agreed (66.5%) that they managed time better (3.66±1.14) thanks to flexible working practice but the rate was low for academicians (52.5%). It is an expected result because almost half of the academicians think that their motivation and job satisfaction have decreased in the flexible/remote working system and it is a fact that effectiveness in time management is directly related to motivation and job satisfaction (Mackenzie and Nickerson, 2009). On the other hand, Baydar (2012) used in-depth interview techniques in his research on flexible workers and mentioned two groups which evaluated time flexibility positively and negatively. He expressed this situation as "the blurring of the distinction between work and leisure tim

According to the findings, employees think that flexible working practice positively affects their "physical health" (3.62±1.29) and "psychological health" (3.59±1.32). The ratio of those who think that they have started to pay more attention to their health (sports, nutrition, etc.) (3.50±1.24) thanks to flexible working practice is over 60%. The group with the lowest rate in this field is again academics (45.9%). It is seen that healthcare professionals (physicians, nurses, other healthcare workers) could pay more importance to their health during this period and flexible working practices have positively contributed to their physical / psychological health. In addition, 72.2% of the participants think that their life was easier (3.78±1.17) in terms of factors such as clothing and transportation, and 62% of them stated that their financial expenditures have decreased (3.47±1.19).

Participants were "undecided" at the point that their technology addiction increased (2.89±1.29) with flexible working practice. Only 39.5% of the participants stated that technology addiction has increased. The group with the highest rate was academicians (50.8%). It is known that academicians already use digital platforms in most of their routine work before the pandemic. However, the significant increase in the number of distant lives during the pandemic period can be seen as a factor in increasing technology addiction. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute statistics; during the Covid-19 period in Turkey, 90.7% of households had internet access from home, 79% of individuals' used the internet everyday, and 36.5% ordered or purchased products, increasing over the years (TÜİK, 2020).

Participants do not agree that their financial earnings were negatively affected (2.44±1.26) during the flexible working practice period. Only 23.7% of the participants stated that their financial earnings decreased. The rate was the highest among physicians (43.1%). The most important reason for this is thought to be the performance-based payment system in Turkey. In this system, in addition to a fixed salary, doctors receive a certain amount of the predetermined fee for each health service they provide as an additional payment. However, during the pandemic period, it is an expected result that there will be a decrease in the income of doctors due to reasons such as the partial postponement of the health services other than Covid-19, the decrease in the number of patients who are given appointments, and the additional payment rules not determined in the remote patient care regulations.

Finally, 75.1% of the participants disagree (2.38±1.27) that inertia occurred with flexible working practice. However, 37.7% of the academics stated they had inertia. Similarly, 74% of the participants stated that they do not agree that their concentration decreased (2.40±1.27) during the flexible working period, while this rate is over 80% for healthcare professionals, it is 55.7% for academicians. Akyildiz and Durna (2021) found that a majority of the academics (71%) did not conduct academic research after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and academic research was largely negatively affected (67.2%).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Although flexible and remote working practices have been in place for many years, they have never been implemented as widely as they were in the Covid-19 pandemic period. The transition of almost all sectors to flexible working practice has led to important discussions about whether societies are ready for this change in psychological, sociological and administrative aspects. Unprecedented in its history, the flexible and remote working of a part of the healthcare sector and academics has created the opportunity to examine the impact of this situation on employees and institutions for the first time.

When the results of the study are summarized in terms of academicians, during the flexible/remote working practice; they allocated more time to their families and themselves and rested, fulfilled their responsibilities more easily, their quality of life has increased, their income has not decreased, but their expenses have decreased, and they have not had any communication problems with their jobs or institutions. On the other hand, they think that they experienced a decrease in their motivation and job satisfaction, their productivity was not positively affected, they could not manage their time well, their personal and corporate performances did not increase, their careers were not positively affected, their technological dependence has increased and their concentration has decreased.

When the study findings are summarized in terms of healthcare professionals, during the flexible / remote working practice, they allocated more time to their families and themselves and rested, fulfilled their responsibilities more easily, their quality of life has increased, their physical and psychological health was positively affected, there has been a decrease in their income, but also a decrease in expenses, they did not have any communication problems with their business or institution and their technological addiction did not increase. In addition, they think that they experienced an increase in their motivation and job satisfaction, their productivity was positively affected, they could manage their time better, their individual and corporate performances have increased, but their careers were not positively affected.

Flexible and remote working systems can be expected to have different effects on different occupational groups. However, as shown in the results of the study, it creates significant differences in terms of healthcare professionals and academicians. The basis of this difference may be due to the fact that healthcare professionals worked very hard before the pandemic, were under constant pressure, and often did not allocate sufficient time to their families and themselves. Flexible and remote working has provided healthcare professionals with the opportunity to get rid of this pressure and spend time at home with their families, even for a while. Although the workload of healthcare professionals varies with factors such as the structure of the health system among countries, the status of the health system in terms of quality and quantity, and economic conditions, it has been emphasized in many studies that healthcare workers generally complain about workload and stress, even in developed countries. In this respect, although the study findings reflect the results in a country, it can be concluded that the attitude of healthcare workers towards flexible / remote working practice can be generalized and supposed to be positive.

It can be concluded that academicians, who had to teach all their courses remotely for months and could not find the opportunity to communicate face-to-face with their colleagues and students, are generally not satisfied with this situation. It is seen that factors such as motivation, concentration, job satisfaction, productivity and effective time management, which are the most fundamental factors in an academician's success, are all negatively affected.

The results of the study show that the advantages and disadvantages of the flexible and remote working system differ according to the sectors and professions. As a conclusion, it would not be correct to generalize that working flexibly and remotely will be beneficial for all organizations and employees. So, it will be beneficial for managers to adopt flexible working practices, taking into account the corporate structure, organizational culture and employees' wishes and expectations, except for mandatory periods such as pandemics. In addition, organizations should develop the necessary policies to define which profession groups better work remotely and which tasks require employee availability. In conclusion, healthcare professionals benefit from flexible / remote working systems much more than academicians in many perspectives. So, it can be also concluded that; if organizations can use flexible working methods in a planned and effective manner, they may allow their employees to better balance work-family, reduce conflicts and stress, and increase motivation and organizational commitment.

All over the world, the flexible and remote working scheme has been implemented in periods that can be expressed in months for now. However, it is likely

that more and more organizations and employees will want to benefit from flexible working systems after the pandemic, and this option will continue to gain popularity. Nevertheless, the transition to fully flexible and remote working systems in organizations may create new and complex problems that were previously unknown, unexpected. The prolongation of this period may create a sense of isolation in employees and cause a lack of motivation. At this point, it will be among the important duties of managers to apply special approaches to human management, to find flexible solutions that can prevent difficulties that may disturb both employers and employees, and to develop effective and innovative policies to keep employees' motivation and performance high.

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