

CONTRASTING LEISURE PATTERNS OF WORKING WOMEN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN IN JAIPUR CITY

Oorja Sharma

Lecturer, DRV DAV Centenary Public School, Phillaur, Punjab

Abstract

This study explores the leisure patterns of working women during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Jaipur, India, focusing on three primary objectives: evaluating if women had the opportunity to engage in leisure, reviewing the role of families in either granting or denying this time, and determining new patterns of leisure that came up during the lockdown. The study employed a qualitative research method and the narrative approach to assess the research participants' experiences. The participants included ten working women from different fields. The study shows that the pandemic had a negative impact on women's leisure time, which was reduced mainly because of the household and caregiving demands that crossed the work-leisure divide. Also, the study revealed that there was a change in leisure activities with women embracing home and digital leisure activities which were considered less enjoyable than the pre-pandemic leisure activities. Family dynamics were important; some women reported that traditional gender roles were reinforced, which deprived them of leisure even more, while others were encouraged to relax to some extent. The study also pointed out that the changes have social, emotional and psychological effects on the women, and most of the women interviewed expressed feelings of loneliness, irritation and anxiety. These results are consistent with other studies of gender inequalities in leisure and mobility, as well as calls for additional support measures that would protect women during emergencies. Therefore, the study recommends that there is need for more focus on gender equality in terms of sharing of household chores and leisure time especially in such crises as COVID-19.

Keywords: *Leisure Patterns, Working Women, Covid-19 Pandemic, Narrative Analysis, Lockdown*

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the working women in a significant way especially in the area of leisure and work life balance. Carlson et al.) The lockdown period saw many women being tasked with more responsibilities in the home front especially in childcare and cleaning, this affected their leisure in a big way. Among the several factors that affected the leisure patterns of working women during the pandemic, the most significant one was the augmented responsibility of domestic work. Since women were taking up more of the household chores, this was due to their spouses or partners having less time to do so, women's leisure participation was severely limited. This is in line with the time availability hypothesis postulated by Carlson et al., which holds that domestic work is usually done by the partner who has more time to spare. In addition, the pandemic also affected the employment status of many women whereby women-biased occupations were more affected by the lockdowns and closure. This loss of income for women may have additionally reduced their status in the household even further, resulting in increased domestic duties. (Carlson et al.)

The pandemic has also affected the working women in terms of their work-life balance. A third of women said their job interfered with the amount of time they wanted to spend with their families, which is up from pre-pandemic levels. This was compounded by the closure of childcare facilities and the relatives who used to look after the children, thus exacerbating the working women's plight in balancing between their work and family responsibilities.

However, it is crucial to highlight the fact that the impact of the pandemic on the work-life balance was not the same for all the employees. The options of flexibility at work including working from home which helped to reduce the negative effects on the work-life balance of those in the knowledge intensive sectors. (Alfano et al.) However, the increased pressure on working women during the pandemic underlines the necessity of further development of the policies and supportive measures for this category of the population. A survey revealed that both women and men said that they are not able to spend as much time with their families as they would like; there was a 10-percentage-

point increase from the survey conducted in 2015 on the perception that work interferes with the amount of time one would like to spend with one's family (Alfano et al.). This means that the pandemic affected the work-life balance of working people in terms of leisure and family time.

2 Background Information

The COVID-19 pandemic led to significant changes in the global society, changing the ways people function at work, interact with others, and spend their leisure time. The sudden and widespread enforcement of lockdowns made people change the way they live, work and even sleep. The pandemic brought new challenges that affected the lives of the working women especially those who were now forced to work and care for their families besides managing their households.

Drawing on interviews with working women from Jaipur, India, this paper examines how the changes to leisure time and activities during the COVID-19 lockdown affected these women. Recreation, which is an important part of an individual's life and to manage the work-life balance, has a different meaning in the context of the lockdown. Covid-19 affected these women's mobility, increased their domestic burden, and forced them to work from home, which all led to a reconceptualization of leisure.

The importance of this study is found in the understanding of gendered leisure experience amid a global crisis. With reference to the personal experience of working women, the narrative reveals how social norms, family relationships, and the demands of retaining professional identities in a disrupted setting affected the availability and nature of leisure. The main idea of the story is the determination of women in the context of adversity, and how they managed to find some joy, art, and companionship during the pandemic while adjusting to the new reality.

In this regard, the narrative also aims to help to elucidate the potential consequences of the pandemic for gender and employment relations and stresses the importance of the further enhancement of the conditions for working women. These stories not only give an account of the lives of these women during a specific period in history but also highlight the role of leisure in the lives of women and the significance of leisure during difficult periods.

3 Review of literature

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to alterations in how people participated in leisure activities and various research works have been conducted to establish the effects of these changes across different settings. The lack of attention to the leisure patterns of working women in Jaipur during the pandemic is consistent with the general body of literature on how the pandemic impacted leisure, and the strengths and weaknesses that resulted from it.

Campisi et al. (2020) also investigated the effect of the pandemic on the transportation behaviour of leisure activities and concluded that people who did not use public transportation before the pandemic were significantly more likely to reduce their cycling frequency during the lockdown. Even though this study did not assess certain leisure activities, the findings indicate a more general decline in physical activity during the pandemic, which may be linked to the limited movement that the working women in Jaipur reported. The decrease in physical leisure activities including cycling is in concordance with the findings of this study where women indicated a shift in engaging in home-based leisure activities as they were limited in access to leisure sources and outdoor spaces.

In a recent study, Han and Sa (2022) focused on leisure attitudes in the context of the pandemic, and identified the need to provide more leisure activities due to limitations brought by social distancing measures and their impact on the quality of people's lives. To cope with the restrictions, they suggested that people engage in a greater variety of leisure activities and include web activity in them. This recommendation is supported by the conclusion of this study whereby the creation of new leisure trends especially digital and online activities became a major adjustment among working women in Jaipur. Han and Sa's shift of leisure towards digital platforms was a reflection of society's shift towards virtual activities during the pandemic as it was somewhat comforting but considered less satisfying than the traditional leisure activities.

In the study by Meier et al. (2021) where the authors investigated the role of computer-mediated communication for leisure during the pandemic, it was seen that restrictions promoted low-profile social interaction including talking and being together online. They also found out that some groups of people are more likely to participate in such online leisure activities, for instance, male, young people, and those who are more extraverted or open to new things. Similarly, to Meier et al. , who noted the transition to the digital and low-profile social activities, the working women in Jaipur also migrated to the digital realm for entertainment during the lockdown. However, the women in this study, unlike the young and extraverted people described by Meier et al. , reported that such shifts made these digital interactions less satisfying, which shows that the effects of such trends on various groups are not always positive.

The study by Morse et al. (2021) revealed that the creative activities like arts and music were more common during the pandemic as compared to the outdoor and sports activities. But, they did not get the results that show that engaging in new leisure activities enhance the well-being of the respondents. This is in concordance with the women in Jaipur who despite taking up new home based and creative activities cited feelings of loneliness, frustration and anxiety. The fact that well-being did not increase much, while participation in creative activities increased, indicates that such adaptations are not very effective in terms of alleviating the general stress of the pandemic.

Segev-Jacobovski et al. showed that women spent more time on household chores, while having less sleep and rest during the lockdown, in contrast to men who reported more sleep and rest. This finding is important since it shows that working women, especially those in their reproductive age, experienced higher pressures at home, which changed leisure trends and decreased personal free time (Segev-Jacobovski, 2023). The same study by Lawrence et al. also found out that women were forced to work more during the pandemic while also having to do more house chores and this limited their leisure time which in turn caused more stress and anxiety (Lawrence, 2023). Moreover, the study by Hurly about the African immigrant women in Canada shows that while the pandemic was a problem, creative and family-based leisure activities were crucial for the coping mechanism, which is different from the case of the leisurely solitary experiences (Hurly, 2023). This paper thus adds to the existing knowledge on how the pandemic impacted leisure diversely with special focus on working women and their ability to cope with new limitations.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the leisure activities of working women to a large extent with differences across gender, socio-economic status, and regions. A study by Gimenez-Nadal et al. (2022) focused on gender differences in well-being and leisure during the lockdowns and found that women had different well-being outcomes when performing shared as opposed to individual leisure activities. According to Gimenez-Nadal and others, this study identified that women preferred joint leisure activities but were more impacted by the confinement as compared to men in terms of their general health during leisure activities.

Likewise, Reisch et al. (2021) explained how the behavioral gender differences were sustained during the COVID-19 crisis. According to them, more women than men reported that they limited their movement and spent more time on calls during the lockdown. This behavioral change also amplifies the gendered effects of the pandemic on leisure activities as women's movement was more restricted, thus, they had limited access to outdoor and social leisure (Reisch et al.).

Deshpande (2021) gave information about the pandemic situation of India where women are more burdened with the unpaid care work. This increase in domestic responsibilities cut down the leisure time that working women had, thus revealing the intersectionality of the working women during the lockdown (Deshpande).

Furthermore, Huls et al. (2021) examined the consequences of working from home during the pandemic with regard to time use for paid work, unpaid work, and leisure. According to the study, women invested more time on unpaid work than men, thus cutting down their leisure time even more during the pandemic, straining their work-life balance even more (Huls et al.).

Last, Giurge et al. (2020) performed a cross-country analysis of time and well-being disparities during the COVID-19 crisis. Their research found out that women especially mothers spent more time on the necessary activities such as child care and house chores hence taking less time in active

leisure. This meant that leisure time was reduced and associated with lower measures of subjective well-being and this showed the severity of the pandemic in affecting women across regions (Giurge et al.).

Another detailed research was conducted by Tarigan and Kitamura (2009) to assess the effects of frequency of leisure trips made within a week by people of Germany where data was collected by a travel diary which spanned for six weeks. They found that there is a significant difference in leisure travel behaviour between males and females. More so, they concluded that females were more inclined to increase the number of leisure travel than the males. These leisure trips involved social purposes, recreational, educational as well as cultural and other related purposes. The study also showed that there is a difference in the leisure travel behavior based on gender, where women are more likely to participate in those leisure activities than men.

In the same manner, De Pascale et al. (2022) undertook a study that was centered on the analysis of the gender split in engagement in tourism activities especially among disabled persons. Their research was intended to find out whether females with disability are more disadvantaged in participating in tourism related activities because of transport than males with disability. The study supported their hypothesis and showed that they have significant proof that transportation barriers like accessibility and connectivity are worst for females with disability than males. This research also postulated that inadequate transport is a bigger problem for females as it limits their opportunities in tourism and other endeavours. The study highlights the need to consider transport issues in order to enhance access and engagement of females with disability.

In another study, Adeel et al. (2016) explored gender disparity in out-of-home activity engagement in urban Pakistan. They found out that women were more confined to home than men in the sense that women were less likely to go out of the home than men.

4 Theoretical Framework

According to Bammel & Bammel, the Personal Community Theory of leisure implies that an individual's leisure activity is to a large extent determined by the personal community which comprises of family, neighbors, friends, and other related acquaintances. These groups are very important in initiating and reminding an individual to engage in certain forms of leisure activities. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, leisure activities of the working women were influenced by their contact with these peer groups in the immediate physical environment. Some of the social activities included going out with friends, going out for parties, and engaging in other social activities such as attending fairs and other related events. The nature of association of these peer groups was that they were physically close acquaintances of the subjects and the leisure environment was therefore familiar and stable, and the type and frequency of leisure activities were influenced by the interests and norms of the peer groups.

Although, the COVID-19 pandemic that started in early 2020 disrupted these established personal communities. The measures such as social distancing, lock downs and the general shift to working from home significantly changed the composition and impact of these peer groups. The social isolation from friends, coworkers and other social circles meant that the conventional avenues of entertainment and social contacts were out of reach. Instead, the roles of the immediate family members and such close contacts of the patient became more significant.

Therefore, the personal community of working women was transformed in a dramatic way. The family members, who were not active in the past in influencing the leisure activities, became the main social contacts. What this shift did was not only change the kinds of leisure activities that these women could pursue but also brought new dynamics and demands that shaped how these women could do leisure.

The 'Personal Community Theory' is applied in this study, which looks at the leisure behaviour of working women in Jaipur during the COVID-19 lockdown This paper shows how the changes in the personal communities of the women affected their leisure patterns.

4.1 Change of Peer Groups

The working women in this study including Priya, Meera and Sakshi used to participate in leisure activities that were shaped by their peer groups outside the family including colleagues, friends and members of the community before the pandemic. Such activities were going out, parties and other social events, as well as physical activities such as practicing yoga or walking in the evening, which were enabled by the contact with these external peer groups. Such groups' impact promoted engagement in leisure activities, which offered a counterpoint to work-related duties.

However, as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and the practice of social distancing as well as the enforcement of lockdown measures, these external peer groups were affected. The women were suddenly isolated from their social networks and their social networks were reduced to the family members with whom they resided. This change in the peer group forced them to change their leisure patterns as was proposed by the 'Personal Community Theory.'

4.2 More Family Engagement and Its Effects

As the family emerged as the main peer group, the character of leisure activities of these women changed. From this study, one got to learn how family relations started to influence the amount and kind of leisure time. For instance, Aarti and Kavita identified that their leisure was shifted to family related chores including caregiving and managing household chores. More family members got involved hence reducing the leisure time and increasing leisure time that was more common and less individual and self-fulfilling.

This shift has support from the 'Personal Community Theory' since it demonstrates how change in personal community – from a diverse group of peers to a more close-knit family – led to changes in leisure behavior. The women in this study used to have the freedom to select leisure activities independently but now had to consider the needs of the family members thus experiencing a reduction in leisure time and an increase in family demands.

4.3 Disruption and Adaptation

The breakdown of the previous personal communities and the shift in the leisure activities also posed new challenges to these women before the pandemic. The paper explains that being confined at home and having to take care of the children and other family members reduced the time for conventional leisure. For example, Anjali, who was a doctor on the front lines, said that due to the emotional and physical demands of work and the absence of external leisure activities, she lost all her leisure time.

However, the women were also able to demonstrate agency by finding new ways of leisure even if it had to be done virtually. This adaptation can be viewed as a result of the shift in the personal communities. The new leisure activities, though not similar to their pre-pandemic patterns, helped these women to achieve some level of rest and social contact, although less enjoyable and often to a lesser extent.

4.4 Theoretical Implications and Further Implications

The adaptation of the 'Personal Community Theory' to this study shows how much shifts in personal communities can affect leisure behaviour. The restriction of the pandemic affected the leisure activities of these women and their forced changes in peer groups also proved the significance of the supportive and diverse social groups in the balanced and happy life.

The general significance of this theoretical application is that leisure is not only an individual decision but is socially constructed. These structures were brought to the limelight by the pandemic especially the structures of women who are mostly at home taking care of the households. Thus, the results indicate that for working women's well-being, especially in a crisis, it is required to invest efforts in preserving and developing the diversification of the personal community and the availability of meaningful leisure activities.

Therefore, the ‘Personal Community Theory’ of leisure is useful in explaining the changes in the leisure patterns of working women during the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition in personal communities from a diverse external peer group to a more enclosed family oriented unit impacted on the leisure activities these women could partake in. This paper also demonstrates how this theory can be applied while at the same time highlighting the importance of social systems that enable and promote a variety of meaningful leisure activities, no matter the circumstances – including a pandemic.

5 Methodology

The present research uses a quantitative research approach to understand the leisure activities of working women in the COVID-19 lockdown in Jaipur. The investigation is based on a narrative method, and a deconstructive approach is used to examine the participants’ biographies. The use of qualitative research means that the study is able to capture the dynamics of the changes in leisure activities and the effects of such changes in the lives of working women.

The sampling technique adopted in this study is purposive sampling which falls under the non-probability sampling technique. The participants were chosen purposively depending on some characteristics that were of importance to the study. The criteria for selection included: The criteria for selection included:

- The role of a working woman during the COVID-19 lock-down.
- Living in the Jaipur city.
- They should be members of different professional fields in order to have a variety of experiences.

A sample of 10 working women from different areas of Jaipur was taken for the study and all of them were selected from different professions and industries. The purposive sampling method was adopted to make sure that the narratives cover as many experiences as possible concerning leisure activities during the lockdown.

5.1 Data Collection

Participants were recruited and interviewed using semi-structured interviews with ten participants. All the interviews were conducted online, because of the COVID-19 lockdown and lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The semi-structured approach enabled the researcher to follow a general line of questioning while at the same time giving the participants the freedom to express themselves as they narrated their experiences.

6 Narratives and Reflections

Narrative 1: Priya. 34 years, employed as an IT professional. “As an IT professional and working woman, I always managed to balance my demanding career with a variety of leisure activities—working out at the gym, meeting friends for coffee, and spending time with family. These routines provided the mental and physical refreshment I needed to stay focused and energized. However, when the pandemic struck, everything changed. With work shifting to home and strict lockdown measures in place, my usual outlets for relaxation were suddenly unavailable. My workspace and personal space blurred, and I found myself constantly immersed in work with no clear boundary between professional and personal life.

Additionally, the division of labor at home became more problematic. With everyone at home, the responsibilities—cooking, cleaning, and managing household tasks—fell disproportionately on me. Despite my full-time job, I was expected to take on the majority of domestic work, leading to frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed. The lack of support from family members added to my stress, and I struggled to balance everything.

Eventually, I decided to try something new: online yoga and mindfulness classes. Though initially unsure, I quickly realized these activities gave me both physical and mental relief. The yoga sessions

helped release physical tension, and mindfulness practices allowed me to manage anxiety. These online classes became my new way of unwinding. Not only did they help me regain balance, but I also began to connect with others in these virtual spaces, which eased my feelings of isolation. What started as a coping mechanism ultimately became an essential part of my routine, helping me restore peace and clarity to my life amidst the chaos.”

Researcher's Comment: Priya’s experience highlights how gender roles and the unequal division of labor impacted her access to leisure during the pandemic. Research in leisure studies shows that women often have less leisure time than men due to the disproportionate responsibility they bear for household tasks, even when working full-time. Priya’s story is a clear example of this: while managing a demanding IT career, she found herself taking on most of the domestic duties during lockdown, which limited her opportunities for personal relaxation or recreation.

Leisure is not just about free time, but about how social structures—such as gendered expectations—shape one’s ability to engage in fulfilling activities. Priya’s usual forms of leisure, like going to the gym or socializing, were no longer possible, and this loss contributed to her stress and feelings of isolation.

However, Priya adapted by turning to online yoga and mindfulness classes. This new form of digital leisure became a vital coping mechanism, helping her manage the stress of balancing work and domestic duties. It also provided a sense of connection with others, reducing feelings of isolation. Priya’s shift to digital leisure reflects how virtual communities can support well-being and offer a sense of balance, helping individuals reclaim a sense of control and restore mental clarity during challenging times.

Narrative 2 : Meera, 28 years old, School Teacher “As a school teacher and a mother, I had always cherished the rare moments of downtime—whether it was reading a book, catching up with friends, or simply relaxing at home. But when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, everything changed. With schools closing and lessons moving online, my workload suddenly tripled. I had to prepare digital lessons, monitor students remotely, and stay connected with parents. At the same time, I became the primary caregiver for my children, who were also learning from home. The balance I once had between teaching and self-care vanished.

With my professional and caregiving duties blending together in a single space, I found it nearly impossible to carve out time for myself. The constant demands of managing my children's online schooling, cooking, cleaning, and maintaining household routines left me exhausted. Any hope of leisure seemed out of reach.

Eventually, I realized that I needed to make time for myself, or I wouldn’t survive the stress. I began waking up earlier to enjoy a few quiet moments before the day started—whether it was drinking coffee in peace or doing a short meditation. This small change gave me a sense of control and helped me reconnect with myself, allowing me to better manage both my teaching and caregiving responsibilities”.

Researcher's Comment : Priya’s experience underscores the impact of gendered divisions of labor on women’s access to leisure, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research on gender roles reveals that women, even when working full-time, often carry a disproportionate burden of caregiving and domestic tasks. Priya’s experience highlights this imbalance, as her role as a teacher and primary caregiver during the pandemic left her with little time for personal leisure or relaxation.

The blurring of boundaries between work and home life during the pandemic further intensified this issue. Priya’s struggle to balance her teaching responsibilities with the increased demands of homeschooling her children reflects the role strain women often experience when their caregiving

duties collide with their professional lives. This leaves them with limited opportunities for leisure, a concept that is socially constructed and influenced by one's ability to access time and space for self-care.

Priya's efforts to carve out early morning moments for herself, even if brief, reflect how women adapt by creating small spaces for leisure to reclaim some sense of control and well-being. This shift highlights the growing importance of self-care as a form of resilience and underscores the way that women, even in times of overwhelming responsibility, find ways to restore balance and manage stress amidst their caregiving roles.

Narrative 3: Sakshi 31 years, Marketing Executive "As living Independently I used to enjoy shopping, eating out and weekend travel whenever I wanted. When the lockdown started, all those things came to a halt. I had to work longer hours as my company tried to recognize the new norms. I became paranoid because of overburden and less leisure time and I could let off steam. I tried to find my leisure in cooking but my busy schedule didn't work out. I became increasingly nervous as I spent my leisure time exploring the Internet for kitchen and daily needs,as well as during lockdown exploring the scrolling social media".

Researcher's Comment: The lack of leisure and Sakshi's increased anxiety are indicative of the stress and role strain that many individuals experienced, particularly those balancing demanding jobs with the pressures of home life. Sociologically, leisure is crucial for mental health, offering individuals the opportunity to disconnect from work and recharge. Sakshi's attempt to find leisure in cooking, followed by frustration, reflects the challenge many faced when trying to adapt traditional leisure activities into the home space during lockdown. The shift toward internet browsing and social media can be understood as a way of seeking virtual escapism, though it often exacerbates feelings of social comparison and anxiety, particularly when it comes to the curated realities of social media.

Sakshi's experience reflects how the pandemic amplified issues of time poverty and the difficulty of achieving a work-life balance, especially for women and professionals used to active, socially engaging leisure. The overall shift toward virtual forms of leisure such as social media engagement suggests that while leisure time was redefined, it was often not as fulfilling or restorative as the more traditional forms of recreation Sakshi once enjoyed.

Narrative 4 : Aarti aged 40 years, Government Employee "Before the pandemic, I always found it hard to balance my work as a government employee with my family responsibilities. Weekends were my only chance for some leisure, but even then, I was often caught up in chores or helping my kids with schoolwork. When the COVID-19 lockdown happened, everything changed. At first, it seemed like a huge challenge—working from home, managing the kids, and maintaining the household all at once. But after the initial adjustment, I realized I could make the most of this time.

I set a clear routine that allowed me to balance work and family time. I dedicated my office hours to work and, once I was done, I focused entirely on my family. Surprisingly, the lockdown gave me more leisure time with my husband and kids than I'd had in years. We started cooking meals together, playing board games, and even organizing small home projects like gardening. It was a refreshing change and a new way to enjoy leisure as a family.

I also rediscovered personal leisure by reading books and doing puzzles in my downtime. The lockdown became a period of both personal growth and family connection. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, I felt grateful for the extra time and the new, meaningful ways we found to spend our leisure time together".

Researcher's Comment : Aarti's experience highlights how leisure can be reshaped by changing social circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it is influenced by gender roles and family dynamics. Research in leisure studies suggests that leisure is not just about free time, but also about the ways in which people navigate and create meaningful experiences in the face of external pressures like work and caregiving responsibilities. For women, particularly those balancing demanding jobs with domestic duties, leisure time can be limited or even constrained by gendered expectations of caregiving and household labor. Aarti's ability to find balance between her work and family obligations during the lockdown is significant, as it reflects a redefinition of leisure.

The shift Aarti made—turning family activities like cooking, gardening, and playing board games into meaningful forms of leisure—aligns with sociological theories of resilience and adaptation. Instead of viewing the lockdown as a time of isolation or stress, Aarti transformed it into an opportunity for both personal and collective leisure. This highlights how social context—such as the family unit and changes in work-life dynamics—can influence how leisure is experienced and valued. Aarti's experience also shows the importance of shared leisure in strengthening social bonds, as sociological research has demonstrated that leisure activities can foster emotional well-being and enhance family cohesion.

Ultimately, Aarti's ability to create new leisure routines amidst the pandemic challenges speaks to the broader sociological idea that leisure is not just an individual pursuit, but also a social practice that is deeply embedded in family, community, and work structures.

Narrative 5 : Nisha 33 years, Freelance Writer “As a freelance writer, I've always cherished the freedom of doing what I love in my spare time—whether that meant attending cultural events, visiting art galleries, or meeting fellow writers. These experiences always offered me fresh perspectives and inspired my writing. Exploring different art forms and connecting with people was my idea of leisure. However, the lockdown changed everything. I was confined to my small apartment, unable to attend cultural events or meet anyone due to government restrictions. The stress and anxiety from the pandemic, coupled with the fear of getting sick, left my mind in a constant state of numbness whenever I tried to write. Living alone, there was no one to break this cycle of worry. Eventually, a friend suggested I try picking up a hobby to help distract myself from the pandemic stress. I decided to join online meditation classes, which not only helped me regain mental clarity but also provided a way to connect with others digitally. Through this new form of leisure, I not only made new friends but also found a way to restore my mental health, allowing me to get back to writing once again”.

Researcher's Comment : The writer's experience shows how isolation and the loss of social connections during the pandemic affected their mental and emotional well-being. Before the lockdown, attending cultural events and meeting other writers provided important social support, which inspired creativity and offered a sense of belonging. However, the pandemic cut off these interactions, leading to feelings of alienation and stress.

In response, the writer turned to online meditation classes, which helped them manage anxiety and regain focus. This shift to digital platforms allowed them to connect with others, creating new social bonds and finding a sense of community. By adapting to this new form of connection, the writer was able to restore their mental clarity and get back to writing. The experience highlights how social connections, whether in-person or online, are vital for mental health and creative productivity, especially during times of crisis. It is evident that the concept of meaningful leisure time is missing, which is especially important for a person like Nisha who works in the creative industry.

Narrative 6: Dr. Simran, an ICU physician, never anticipated how the pandemic would shatter her sense of balance. With the hospital overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients, her shifts became grueling, stretching from 12 to 16 hours a day. There was no room for rest, and even on her rare days off, she struggled to find the energy to engage in any form of leisure. The constant pressure, emotional toll,

and the haunting images of patients fighting for their lives left her mentally drained. Instead of finding time to unwind or pursue hobbies, Simran spent most of her days recovering from exhaustion, battling insomnia, and dealing with feelings of guilt for not being able to do more. Her physical health suffered, her social life evaporated, and her sense of fulfillment vanished, leaving her trapped in a cycle of burnout that seemed impossible to break.

Researcher's Comment : Dr. Simran's narrative illustrates the profound impact of burnout and moral distress on healthcare workers, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. From a sociological perspective, her experience reflects the emotional labor and gendered expectations placed on healthcare professionals, especially women, who often carry the additional burden of emotional care. The long hours and constant pressure she faces highlight a systemic issue in healthcare: institutional neglect of worker well-being. In many hospitals, the focus on patient care often supersedes the need for healthcare workers to engage in rest or self-care, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion.

Simran's struggle with insomnia, guilt, and the erosion of her social life speaks to the broader issue of work-life imbalance in the healthcare sector, where personal needs are often sacrificed for professional demands. This isolation and emotional depletion are indicative of a toxic work culture, driven by neoliberal healthcare values that prioritize efficiency over mental health.

Dr. Simran's case highlights the need for structural changes in healthcare systems—ones that not only address patient care but also actively support the mental health and well-being of healthcare workers, ensuring they can recover and sustain their own resilience in the face of ongoing crises.

Narrative 8: When the pandemic forced my boutique to close, I was devastated. Like many entrepreneurs, I felt uncertain about the future with the sudden shift in the market and restrictions on in-person shopping. However, instead of letting the crisis take control, I decided to view the lockdown as an opportunity to grow.

With extra time on my hands and a strong desire to keep my business afloat, I threw myself into learning digital marketing and e-commerce. I spent my newfound leisure time building a website, creating social media content, and connecting with potential customers online. I used platforms like Instagram and Facebook to share videos of myself making jewelry, offer behind-the-scenes glimpses of my design process, and showcase customer testimonials. This not only helped me build an online community but also allowed me to humanize my brand, forming a stronger emotional bond with my customers.

As my online presence grew, I experimented with new designs and offered limited-edition collections exclusively on my website. I even started hosting virtual jewelry-making workshops, which turned out to be a hit and provided a new income stream.

Through dedication and innovation, I not only survived the pandemic but expanded my business online. What started as a period of uncertainty transformed into a time of creative empowerment. I proved to myself that when used intentionally, leisure time can be a powerful tool for entrepreneurial growth."

Researcher's Comment : This entrepreneur's narrative exemplifies the resilience and adaptability that many small business owners, especially women, demonstrated during the pandemic. Faced with the closure of her physical store, she leveraged leisure time to learn digital marketing and e-commerce, transforming the crisis into growth opportunity. Her ability to pivot to online platforms like Instagram and Facebook reflects broader trends of digital transformation in small businesses, highlighting the importance of social media in building brand loyalty and emotional connections with customers.

From a sociological perspective, this story underscores the role of digital literacy as a tool for entrepreneurial survival and empowerment, particularly for women who face systemic barriers in traditional business spaces. The use of online tools allowed her to expand her reach and even create new income streams through virtual workshops. Overall, this narrative illustrates how creativity, agency, and technological engagement can transform challenges into opportunities for growth and innovation.

Narrative 9: As a lawyer, my days were usually packed with court hearings, client meetings, and tight deadlines, leaving little room for personal time. When the pandemic hit and lockdowns were implemented, the pace of life slowed down, and for the first time in years, I found myself with extra hours at home. Initially, it felt unsettling, as I was used to a constant rush, but over time, I realized I had an opportunity to reshape my approach to leisure.

Instead of focusing on the stress of remote work and uncertainty, I decided to embrace the quieter moments and focus on personal growth. I started taking up activities I'd always wanted to explore—reading non-legal books, learning to cook, and even doing virtual yoga classes to de-stress. At the same time, the lockdown allowed me to spend more quality time with my family, which had always been limited by my hectic schedule. We began cooking together, playing games, and just talking, which strengthened our bonds. I also found comfort in connecting with colleagues and friends virtually, forming deeper relationships than I had time for before.

This period of reflection helped me establish a new, more balanced pattern of leisure—one where I could recharge, be creative, and invest in both my personal well-being and my family relationships, without the constant pressure of the workday."

Researcher's Comment : A sociological researcher would likely comment on this statement by highlighting the significant impact of the pandemic on work-life dynamics. The lawyer's shift from a fast-paced, work-dominated life to a more reflective and balanced approach demonstrates how leisure can serve as a tool for personal and social re-engagement. The pandemic provided a unique opportunity for individuals to redefine their relationship with time, where the usual boundary between professional obligations and personal life was blurred, but also allowed for new patterns of leisure that prioritized self-care and family connections.

This narrative reflects a broader societal trend where remote work and lockdowns forced individuals to adapt to new ways of living and working. The focus on family dynamics—spending more quality time together—speaks to the importance of social capital in fostering resilience during times of stress. Additionally, the shift toward virtual connections with colleagues and friends highlights how digital platforms became crucial in maintaining social ties during periods of physical isolation.

Narrative 10: "Before the pandemic, I was always running from one task to the next—teaching, grading, taking care of my kids, managing the house. I rarely had time for myself, and when the lockdown started, it only got worse. Suddenly, I was juggling virtual classrooms, homeschooling my children, and trying to keep everything afloat at home. At first, I couldn't find any space for leisure. I felt overwhelmed and drained, constantly moving between work and family without a break.

But over time, I realized I had to change something. I started focusing on the little things that could bring me joy without feeling guilty. My family and I began having movie nights together, cooking meals as a team, and playing games. These moments gave me a chance to unwind and reconnect with my kids, which had been hard to do before. I also reached out to my neighbors, and we started meeting for walks or gardening together. It felt good to talk to others who understood what I was going through.

The pandemic was tough, but it made me rethink what leisure really means. It's not just about escaping from work—it's about finding time to bond, to relax, and to care for yourself and your loved ones. I learned to make leisure a part of my day, even if it was just a few moments with my family or a chat with a neighbor."

Researcher's Comment : This statement offers a profound insight into the shifting dynamics of work-life balance for working women during the COVID-19 pandemic. From a sociological perspective, Maya's experience reflects the intensified pressures many women face as they juggle paid labor with unpaid caregiving and domestic work. The pandemic amplified these responsibilities, particularly for those like Maya, who had to manage remote teaching while also homeschooling children and maintaining the household. This dual burden contributed to stress and time scarcity, making it difficult for her to find space for leisure or self-care.

However, Maya's narrative also highlights the adaptive strategies women employed in response to these challenges. Her shift from feeling overwhelmed to actively seeking out moments of leisure—such as family movie nights, cooking together, and engaging with neighbors—illustrates a shift in how leisure was understood and practiced during the lockdown. What was once viewed as individual downtime became, in her case, a socially enriching experience that strengthened family bonds and fostered community connections.

Maya's choice to connect with neighbors also reflects the importance of social support networks in times of crisis, showing how communal leisure can enhance resilience. In essence, Maya's experience underscores how the pandemic reshaped leisure practices, emphasizing the value of connection, creativity, and well-being during a time of social isolation.

7 Research Findings

The qualitative study on the leisure activities of working women during Covid-19 pandemic lock down in Jaipur revealed the following findings. These conclusions contribute to understanding the nature of the impact of the lockdown on the leisure of working women, the significance of family factors, and the development of new trends in leisure during the unprecedented time.

7.1 Leisure time cut

The self-employment survey also reveals that working women cut down their leisure time significantly during the lockdown period. It was found that participants' leisure activities, which used to include social activities, personal interests, and recreation, were impacted as a result of the pandemic, particularly due to the increase in household and caregiving responsibilities as well as the shift to remote work. The integration of the two spheres of work and home that they are in means that there is hardly any distinction between the working hours and the free time. This cut in leisure time was more so in women who were either housewives or had young children to attend to at home.

7.2 Leisure Activity Transition

The study established that there was a change in the type of leisure activities that working women undertook during the lockdown. Since they could not go out often, access outside leisure facilities like gyms, parks, or social events, women resorted to doing home-related chores. These were cooking, watching television and using social media and other online platforms for entertainment. Yet, these activities were reported to be less enjoyable compared to how they were before the pandemic, leisure activities. Some of the participants reported that since they were confined to the house, they did not have an opportunity to engage in the new leisure activities physically and socially, and this made them feel bored and develop feelings of monotony.

7.3 Effects of Family Environment

The social relations in the family influenced the leisure time of working women during the lockdown. According to the study, most families continued to adhere to the Patriarchal model of

family roles where women were left with most of the house work and child care responsibilities. This led to the fact that they had very little time left to enjoy for themselves. But the study also found that in some cases, the family members especially the husband helped in sharing some of the household chores thus enabling the women to have some leisure time. These changes in the family structure show that a fair division of household chores is essential in giving working women adequate leisure time.

7.4 Emotional and Psychological Effect

The survey revealed that there were several emotional and psychological effects arising from the loss of leisure time and change of leisure pursuits. Some of the participants' experiences include loneliness, anger, and anxiety because of the limited social contact and the demanding tasks. Lack of ability to do preferred leisure activities and the stress from work and family responsibilities caused the level of well-being to drop. Some of the participants complained of having to work and do house chores without any time to rest, take a break or pamper themselves, which made them more stressed and tired.

7.5 The New Leisure Trends

However, the research also revealed the following new trends of leisure during the lock down period; Technology was a main means of entertainment, with most women shifting to online content, virtual interactions and online activities such as online workouts, virtual book clubs and streaming services. Although these activities were not necessarily considered as sufficient replacements for the pre-pandemic leisure, they helped to alleviate the boredom and gave a feeling of being connected with the world. The study also revealed that some women were able to learn new trades or pastimes during the lockdown, like baking, gardening or knitting which gave them a sense of achievement.

7.6 Leisure time exclusion

The study also shows that with the lockdown, working women were left with less leisure time than before. The demands of work, child care, and house chores made it difficult for the women to engage in leisure activities that could help them relax. Family and work needs overpowered leisure time and became the main focus of most people's lives. This marginalization of leisure not only impacted the quality of life of the women but also revealed the social norms of women being subordinate to the needs of others.

7.7 Required Support Systems

The study therefore calls for appropriate structures that could enable working women to balance between work, family, and leisure especially in the face of a crisis. This includes the division of household chores in families, flexible working hours, and easy access to mental health services. The implications of the study are that working women are vulnerable to chronic adverse health effects if they do not receive such support.

7.8 Variability in Experiences

Finally, it was discovered that the working women faced a lot of differences in their experiences based on their occupation, family type, and socio-economic class. For instance, women in healthcare and the essential services had it worse with little to no leisure time while others who were working from home or had flexible working schedules were able to manage. This variability therefore underscores the need to assess the situation based on individual circumstances while dealing with the issues working women encountered during the lock down.

8 Discussion

In this study, the purpose was to identify the leisure patterns of the working women during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Jaipur; the study aimed to establish the availability of leisure time, the role of the family in providing leisure time and the new trends in leisure during this period. The study, which adopted a narrative approach and qualitative analysis of the experiences of ten

working women, established that the pandemic impacted on the leisure activities of the women, with reduced leisure time and changed types of activities. The study also established that family environment played a big part in determining how much leisure time the women could get and the emotional and psychological effects of these changes on the women.

The study found that working women had their leisure time significantly reduced during the lockdown mainly because of the extra work load in handling household chores and caring for family. This finding supports the study of Tarigan and Kitamura (2009) where the authors found that gender is an important determinant of leisure travel behaviour where women take more leisure travel when they can. However, during the pandemic, the stay at home and the combined work and family care roles reduced women's leisure time and reproduced the conventional gender role where women are expected to meet the needs of their families without regard to their own needs.

Further, the study found that there was a change in leisure activities in women where they had to shift from the social and outdoor leisure activities to indoor leisure activities such as cooking, watching television, and digital content. This shift is similar to the conclusion made by Adeel et al. (2016) whereby women in urban Pakistan are more likely to use personal vehicles and are less likely to go out as a result of socio cultural restraints. In the same way, in the course of the lockdown, the limited physical freedom and additional household chores changed the meaning of leisure for many women as they were turning to digital platforms and home-based activities as their main source of leisure, though less satisfying.

These changes had severe effects on the emotional and psychological welfare of the women as most of them complained of frustration and anxiety resulting from lack of interaction with other people and pressure from the overwhelming work. This is in agreement with De Pascale, et al. , 2022 who noted that transportation challenges had a higher impact on female disabled persons as they isolated them from other activities hence higher chances of being marginalized. In both cases, the women could not afford transport or time for leisure hence their quality of life was affected; this shows that there is need to provide for women to improve their quality life.

Furthermore, the study found out that new leisure activities were created during the lock down period especially for women where they resorted to the use of online platforms for entertainment and social relations. These new forms of leisure were somewhat beneficial but were regarded as inferior to the real thing as traditional leisure activities allowed for physical and social contact. This shift in leisure trends is in line with the societal change that has been forced by the pandemic restrictions but it also highlights the inadequacy of the digital leisure in meeting the emotional and psychological needs of working women.

Finally, the study proved that the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown influenced the leisure pattern of working women in Jaipur negatively in terms of time, activity, and emotional and psychological consequences. These findings are in consonance with other similar studies that have noted the gendered nature of leisure, the socio-cultural restrictions on women's movement and the challenges that women face in accessing leisure and other public activities. The findings of this study therefore stress the need to redress these gender inequalities and promote work environments that enable women to balance paid work, care giving and leisure, especially in the face of adversity. This paper has highlighted how women face unique challenges, especially during extraordinary situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, by acknowledging these issues and working towards their mitigation, policy-makers and the society can strive for improving the quality of life for women as well as other vulnerable groups.

9 Conclusion

This paper has discussed the leisure patterns of working women during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Jaipur which has shown the changes and issues in their lives. The results reveal a drastic decline in leisure time because of the increased workload in house chores, caregiving, and the requirements of home-based work. The outbreak not only affected conventional pastime activities but also increased stress and anxiety levels of these women, thus, their health deteriorated.

The stories that emerged in this research highlight how family factors either facilitate or constrain opportunities for leisure time. Whereas in households where traditional gender roles were maintained, women were left with almost no time for leisure, thus eradicating their leisure time even more. On the other hand, where tasks were divided more fairly women could still retain some amount of idle time albeit in a different way.

The study also pointed out that there is the rise of new leisure activities especially through the use of technology which was somewhat comforting during the lock down. However, such activities were considered as less effective as a way to replace the social and physical contact that traditional leisure activities provided. The effects of the lockdown on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of women and the neglect of leisure time, highlights the need for better support structures for working women, within households and in society.

Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has revealed the weaknesses in working women's work-life balance, especially in terms of leisure. The results of the study are focused on the need to have a gender equal family structure, a possibility to work remotely and have access to mental health care for women to be able to cope with the crises. As for the future, it is important to understand these challenges in order to build a better environment for working women to understand that leisure is a significant factor for their health and well-being.

References

- Segev-Jacobovski, O. (2023). Changes in Daily Occupations Patterns, Optimism, and Positive Affect During COVID-19 Lockdown. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*. doi: 10.1177/00084174231166260
- Lawrence, A. J., Fatima, U., Ali, F., Abraham, A., Arif, S., & Khan, T. (2023). COVID-19 and Its Impact on Diverse Aspects of Women's Lives. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. doi: 10.1177/09715215231158010
- Hurly, J. (2023). Flirting with Death: Finitude, Tradition, and Leisure during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Leisure Sciences*. doi: 10.1080/01490400.2023.2265950
- Gimenez-Nadal, José Ignacio, José Alberto Molina, and Jorge Velilla. "Should We Cheer Together? Gender Differences in Instantaneous Well-being: An Application to COVID-19 Lockdowns." *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2022, pp. 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-022-00574-7>.
- Reisch, Tobias, et al. "Behavioral Gender Differences Are Reinforced During the COVID-19 Crisis." *Scientific Reports*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1038/S41598-021-97394-1>.
- Deshpande, Ashwini. "The Covid-19 Pandemic and Gendered Division of Paid Work, Domestic Chores, and Leisure: Evidence from India's First Wave." *Economia Politica*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2021, pp. 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S40888-021-00235-7>.
- Huls, Samare P. I., et al. "Productivity of Working at Home and Time Allocation Between Paid Work, Unpaid Work and Leisure Activities During a Pandemic." *PharmacoEconomics*, vol. 39, no. 9, 2021, pp. 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S40273-021-01078-7>.
- Giurge, Laura M., Ayse Yemiscigil, Joseph Sherlock, and Ashley V. Whillans. "Uncovering Inequalities in Time-Use and Well-Being During COVID-19: A Multi-Country Investigation." *PsyArXiv*, 10 Sept. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/3w67v>.
- Alfano, Vincenzo, et al. "I want to break free: the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance satisfaction." *Taylor & Francis*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1 Feb. 2023, p. 70-88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2023.2167608>.
- Carlson, L., Daniel, et al. "Changes in US Parents' Domestic Labor During the Early Days of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Wiley*, vol. 92, no. 3, 26 Sep. 2021, p. 1217-1244. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12459>.