



MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AND WELLBEING IN REMOTE STARTUP TEAMS: EVIDENCE FROM MUMBAI

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Abstract:

This study explores the mental health challenges faced by employees working in remote startup teams. With the growing adoption of remote work models in startup environments, concerns regarding employee wellbeing, work-life balance, and organizational support have become increasingly significant. The primary objectives of the study were to analyze mental health challenges in remote startup teams, examine the impact of remote work on work-life balance, study the relationship between organizational support and employee wellbeing, and suggest strategies to improve mental health in such environments. The research adopted a descriptive methodology, and primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to employees working in remote startup settings. The collected data was analyzed using percentage method and presented in tabular and graphical forms for interpretation. The findings reveal that a considerable proportion of respondents experience stress, burnout, sleep disturbances, and feelings of isolation. A majority reported difficulty disconnecting from work, indicating poor work-life balance, while many also perceived limited organizational support and discomfort in discussing mental health concerns. The study concludes that although remote work offers flexibility and productivity benefits, it also contributes to psychological strain in startup environments. Practical measures such as structured work schedules, right to disconnect policies, improved communication, and greater mental health awareness are recommended to enhance employee wellbeing and ensure sustainable organizational growth.

Keywords: Remote work, Mental health, Work-life balance, Startup teams, Employee wellbeing.

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Introduction:

In recent years, remote work has become an important part of the modern business world. With the growth of digital technology and online communication tools, many organizations now allow employees to work from different locations. Startups, in particular, increasingly adopt remote models to reduce costs, access global talent, and maintain flexibility. While remote work offers benefits such as flexible schedules and reduced travel time, it also creates challenges related to employees' mental health and wellbeing.

Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, influencing how they think, feel, handle stress, and perform their job responsibilities. In remote startup teams, employees often face high work pressure, unclear roles, long hours, and job insecurity. Limited face-to-face interaction may lead to feelings of isolation or disconnection. Additionally, working from home can blur personal and professional boundaries contributing to stress and burnout.

Although remote work has been widely studied, limited research focuses specifically on mental health in remote startup teams. Since startups operate in fast-changing and competitive environments, employee wellbeing becomes particularly important. Therefore, this study examines the mental health challenges faced by employees in remote startup teams and suggests measures to promote a healthier and more supportive work environment.

Statement of the Problem:

The shift toward remote work in startup organizations has created new workplace dynamics that may significantly influence employees' mental health and wellbeing. While startups benefit from flexibility and reduced operational costs, remote employees may experience stress, role ambiguity, social isolation, and difficulty maintaining work-life balance.

Unlike established corporations, startups often operate with limited resources, evolving roles, and high-performance expectations, which may intensify psychological strain. However, most existing studies focus on large organizations and do not address the unique pressures of remote startup teams.

Due to limited research in this area, there is insufficient understanding of how remote startup environments affect employees' mental health and what measures can effectively support their wellbeing. Therefore, this study examines these challenges and explores strategies to improve overall employee wellbeing.

Significance of the Study:

The present study is significant for the following reasons :

1. **Increase in remote work** : Remote work has become common in startups due to digital technology and global connectivity. Understanding its impact on mental health is essential.
2. **Work pressure** : Startups operate under high pressure, tight deadlines, and limited resources, increasing employee stress.
3. **Mental health challenges** : Remote employees may experience loneliness, stress and exhaustion due to prolonged screen time and reduced interaction.
4. **Limited support systems** : Many startups lack formal HR policies or structured mental health support programs, highlighting the need for improvement.
5. **Impact on performance** : Poor mental health affects productivity, creativity, job satisfaction, and employee retention.
6. **Contribution to research** : Limited studies focus on mental health in remote startup teams. This study contributes to this area.

Limitations of the Study:

The study has the following limitations:

1. Based on personal opinions : The research relies on employee responses. Since mental health is subjective, perceptions may vary among individuals.
2. Conducted at one point in time : The study examines mental health during a specific period and does not analyze long term changes in wellbeing.
3. Limited to remote startup teams : The research focuses only on employees in remote startup environments.

Therefore, findings may not apply to traditional office settings or other industries.

4. Sensitivity of the topic : Mental health is a sensitive issue, and some participants may not have shared their true feelings openly.
5. Changing nature of remote work : Remote work practices continue to change, which may influence employee wellbeing differently in the future.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze mental health challenges in remote startup teams
2. To examine the impact of remote work on work-life balance
3. To study the relationship between organizational support and employee wellbeing
4. To suggest strategies to improve mental health in remote startup environments

Hypothesis of the Study:

H0 : Remote work in startup teams has no significant impact on employees' mental health and wellbeing.

H1 : Remote work in startup teams has a significant impact on employees' mental health and wellbeing.

Review of Literature:

1. Healthy and safe telework : technical brief - Geneva, 2021

The WHO and ILO stated that telework improves flexibility and work-life balance. However, it may increase risks of isolation, burnout, anxiety, and depression without proper support. The report emphasized mental health policies and the “right to disconnect.” Strong organizational systems are necessary to ensure safe and healthy teleworking.

2. Alina Costin, Alina Felicia Roman, and Raluca-Stefania Balica (2023) conducted analytical study on Remote work burnout, professional job stress, and employee emotional exhaustion during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This review examined burnout among remote workers during COVID-19. Emotional exhaustion increased due to heavy workload, blurred boundaries, and constant connectivity. Limited managerial support and poor communication worsened stress. Strong leadership and structured support systems were found to reduce burnout and improve wellbeing.

3. Joana Ribeiro, Filipa Pires da Silva, Pedro Rino Vieira (2024) conducted analytical study on Remote workers' wellbeing : are innovative organizations really concerned?

This study analyzed research trends on remote worker wellbeing. It found that digital overload, long screen time, and weak boundaries harm mental health. Isolation and reduced interaction were major concerns. The authors stressed the need for clear communication and mental health initiatives.

4. Jun-jie Dong, Zhi-dan Tan, Yu-liang Zhang, Yu-jie Sun, Yuan-kai Huang (2025) conducted analytical study on Work from home and employee well-being : a double-edged sword.

The study described remote work as both beneficial and challenging. It increased engagement, flexibility, and autonomy. However, unclear boundaries led to family-work conflicts affecting mental health. The authors

recommended organizational guidance to help employees manage responsibilities effectively. (Dong et al., 2025)

5. **Gallup (2025)** conducted survey on The remote work paradox : higher engagement, lower wellbeing. The survey showed that fully remote employees reported high engagement but also higher stress and loneliness. Reduced social interaction negatively affected wellbeing. Hybrid workers showed comparatively better balance. The study emphasized maintaining team connection and organizational support.
6. **Georgia Karakitsiou, Spyridon Plakias, Anna Tsiakiri, Katerina Kedraka (2025)** conducted analytical study on When work moves home : remote work, occupational stress, mental health, burnout and employee wellbeing: trends and strategic roadmap. This study examined stress and burnout in remote settings. Key stressors included work-home interference, increased workload, and lack of boundaries. It proposed a strategic roadmap focusing on supportive policies and communication. Mental health initiatives were recommended for long-term wellbeing.
7. **Mental health support increasing, but workers still struggle (2022)** The report noted that organizations are offering more mental health benefits. However, many employees still face stress and emotional exhaustion. There remains a gap between available resources and actual wellbeing outcomes. Stronger and more practical workplace strategies are needed.
8. **State of remote work Report (2023)** This global report explored remote workers' experiences with productivity and flexibility. While many valued autonomy, challenges included loneliness and difficulty disconnecting. Communication and collaboration issues were also highlighted. The report provided insights into evolving remote work trends.
9. **The global life-work survey 2023: tracking happiness, burnout, and job satisfaction in the workplace (2023)** The survey found higher job satisfaction and improved work-life balance among remote workers. Burnout levels were lower compared to office employees. However, benefits depended on clear boundaries and energy management. Structured breaks and supportive leadership were recommended. (IE Center for Health & Well-Being, 2023)
10. **Surveillance of remote workers: a growing challenge for safety and health (2024)** This report discussed the rise of digital monitoring in remote work. While remote work offers flexibility, constant surveillance increases stress and reduces autonomy. Such practices can negatively affect mental health. Transparent policies and employee involvement were strongly recommended. (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2024)

Research methodology:

Research methodology refers to the systematic procedure adopted to conduct the study. It explains the methods used for data collection, sampling, and analysis to achieve the objectives of the research.

1. **Research design :** The present study adopts a descriptive survey research design. The study aims to describe and analyze the mental health and wellbeing of employees working in remote startup teams. The research does not involve any experimentation but focuses on collecting and interpreting responses from participants.

2. **Nature of data :** The study is based on both primary and secondary data.
 - a. Primary data - primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire prepared using Google Forms.
 - b. Secondary data - secondary data was collected from news articles, blogs, journals, research reports, reviews, and various studies related to remote work and mental health
3. **Methods of data collection :** A structured questionnaire consisting of close-ended and Likert scaled-based questions was circulated online through Google Forms. The questionnaire included basic demographic details and questions related to stress levels, work-life balance, communication, and organizational support.
4. **Sampling technique :** The study used a non-probability sampling method. The questionnaire link was shared online through Google Forms, and responses were collected from people who were willing to fill it. No specific respondents were selected. Participation depended on the interest and availability of the employees working in remote startup teams.
5. **Sample size :** The study was conducted among 50 employees working in remote startup teams.
6. **Tools for data analysis :** The collected data was analyzed using simple statistical tools such as:
 - Percentage analysis
 - Tabular representation
 - Charts and graphs

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected through the questionnaire. The responses were tabulated and analyzed using simple percentage method. The findings are interpreted in relation to the objectives of the study.

1. Demographic & Work Profile of Respondents

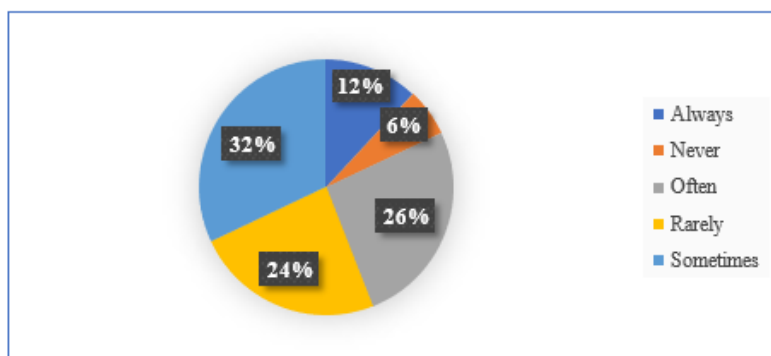
Table 1. Demographic & Work Profile of Respondents

Particulars	Percentage (%)
1. Gender	
Female	68
Male	32
2. Age	
18-25 years	64
26-35 years	34
Above 45 years	2
3. Educational qualification	
Undergraduate	24
Graduate	14
Postgraduate	40
Professional	22

4. Role in the startup	
Employee	40
Founder/Co-founder	6
Intern	34
Manager/Team Level	20
5. Duration of working remotely	
1-3 years	18
Less than 6 months	30
6 months-1 year	34
More than 3 years	18
6. Average working hours per day	
6 - 8	34
8 - 10	30
Less than 6	18
More than 10	18

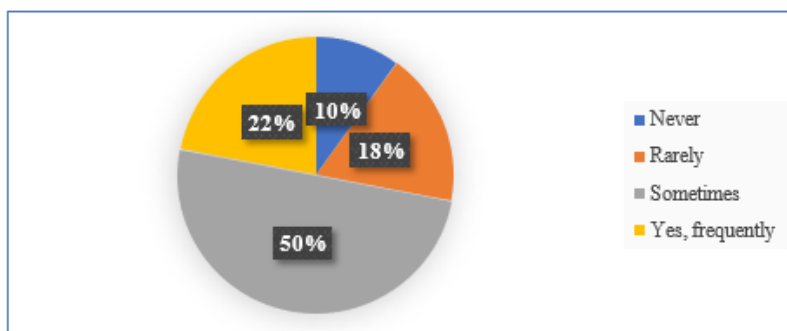
1. The majority of respondents (68%) are female. This indicates that female employees form a significant proportion of the sample in this study.
2. Most respondents (64%) belong to the 18-25 years age group, followed by 34% in the 26-35 years category. Only 2% are above 45 years. This shows that the sample largely consists of young professionals, which aligns with the typical workforce structure of startup environments.
3. A significant proportion of respondents (40%) are postgraduates, followed by 24% undergraduates and 22% with professional qualifications. This reflects that the respondents generally possess a strong educational background.
4. The majority of respondents are employees (40%) and interns (34%), indicating that the sample mainly consists of operational level team members. A smaller proportion includes managers (20%) and founders (6%), ensuring representation across hierarchical levels.
5. A significant portion of respondents (64%) have been working remotely for less than one year. This suggests that many participants are relatively new to remote work settings.
6. While 34% work standard 6-8 hours daily, a combined 48% report working more than 8 hours, indicating extended working hours among a considerable section of respondents.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Analysis:



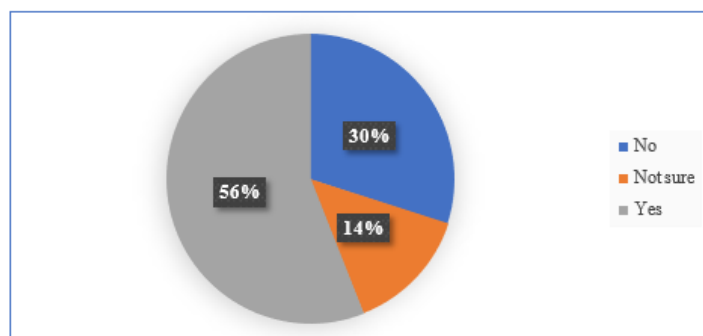
1. Frequency of work-related stress

A majority of respondents experience work-related stress at varying levels. While 32% report feeling stress sometimes and 26% often, 12% experience it always. Only 6% report never experienced stress. This suggests that work-related stress is a common concern in remote startup teams.



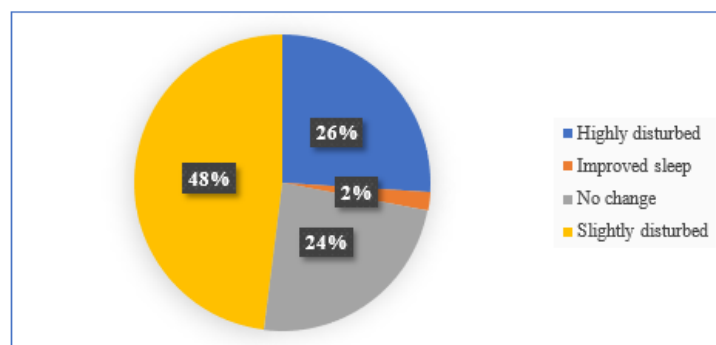
2. Feeling of isolation

Half of the respondents (50%) sometimes feel isolated due to remote work, and 22% frequently experience isolation. This indicates that lack of physical interaction may significantly affect employees' wellbeing.



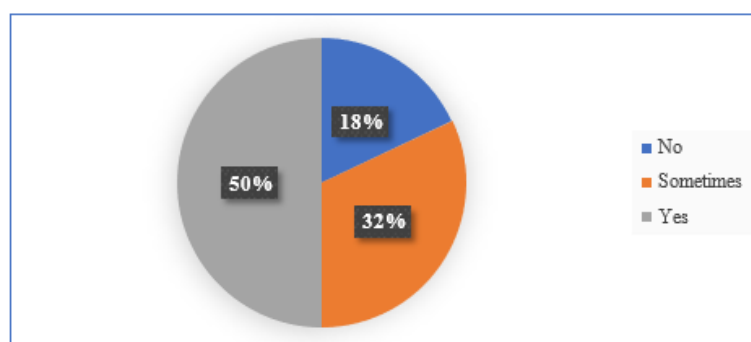
3. Experience of anxiety or burnout

More than half of the respondents (56%) reported experiencing anxiety or burnout due to remote work. This highlights a considerable mental health challenge within remote startup environments.



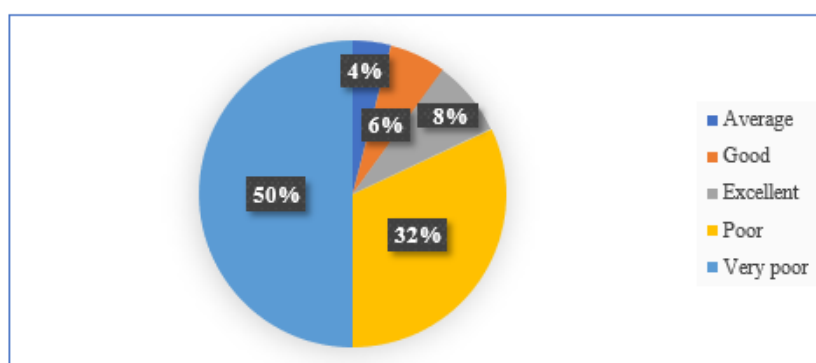
4. Impact on sleep patterns

A combined 74% report disturbed sleep patterns (48% slightly disturbed and 26% highly disturbed). Only 2% experienced improved sleep. This suggests that remote work may negatively influence sleep quality for many employees.



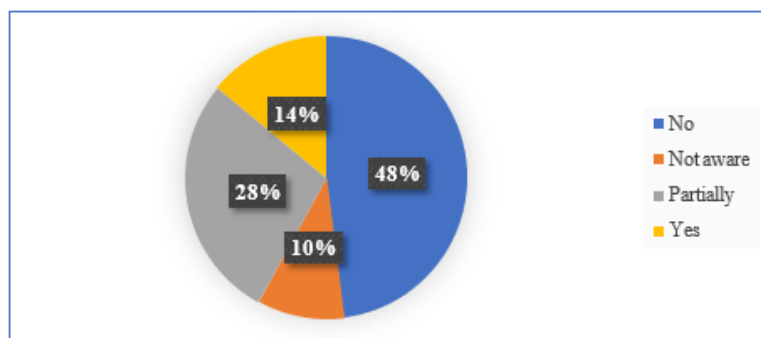
5. Difficulty disconnecting after office hours

Half of the respondents (50%) find it difficult to disconnect from work after office hours, while 32% experience this sometimes. This reflects blurred boundaries between personal and professional life in remote settings.



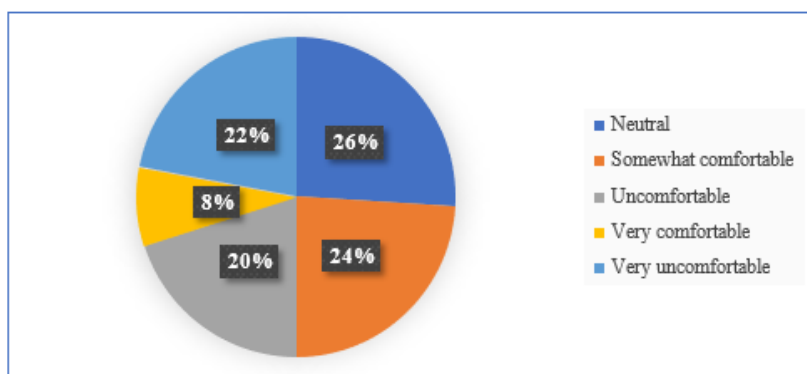
6. Work-life balance rating

A majority rate their work-life balance negatively, with 50% reporting it as very poor and 32% as poor. Only 14% rate it as good or excellent. This indicates dissatisfaction with work-life balance among many respondents.



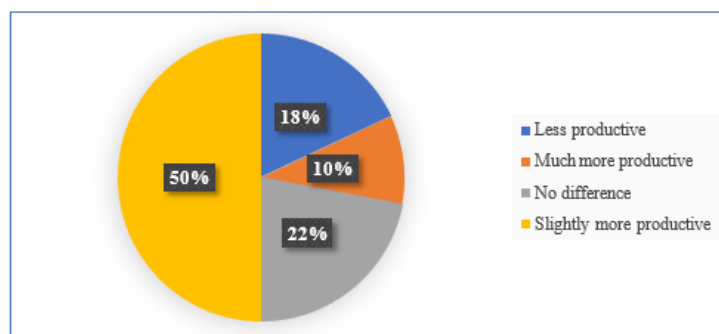
7. Organizational mental health support

Nearly half of the respondents (48%) believe their organization does not provide adequate mental health support. Only 14% feel adequate support is provided. This suggests a potential gap in institutional wellbeing initiatives.



8. Comfort discussing mental health

Responses are mixed, with 26% neutral and 24% somewhat comfortable. However, 42% (20% uncomfortable and 22% very uncomfortable) express discomfort in discussing mental health concerns, indicating possible stigma or lack of psychological safety.



9. Productivity in remote work

Half of the respondents (50%) feel slightly more productive working remotely, and 10% feel much more productive. However, 18% report reduced productivity. This suggests that remote work has varied productivity outcomes across individuals.

Analysis of open-ended responses:

1. *Biggest challenge affecting mental wellbeing in remote startup teams –*

The most common challenges included work-life balance, work pressure, and strict deadlines, indicating difficulty in maintaining boundaries between personal and professional life. Feelings of isolation and loneliness were also frequently mentioned due to limited in-person interaction. Additionally, communication gaps, fear of unemployment, financial concerns, and lack of acceptance of mental health issues were highlighted. Some respondents also pointed out unstructured routines and reduced productivity as contributing factors. Overall, the responses suggest that both organizational and personal factors play a role in influencing mental wellbeing in remote startup environments.

2. *Suggestions for improving mental wellbeing in remote startup teams-*

Respondents emphasized the need for structured work boundaries and supportive organizational practices. Many suggested fixed work timings, weekend holidays, flexibility, and the right to disconnect to promote a healthy work-life balance. Team building activities, fun engagement sessions, and efforts to build stronger human connections were recommended to reduce isolation. Respondents also highlighted the importance of normalizing mental health conversations, providing sensitivity training, and encouraging open communication within teams. Additionally, practices such as meditation, maintaining a positive outlook, and fostering proper communication were suggested to enhance overall wellbeing. Overall, the suggestions indicate that both organizational policies and personal wellbeing initiatives are essential for improving mental health in remote startup environments.

3. *Testing of hypothesis-*

The analysis reveals high levels of stress, burnout, disturbed sleep, poor work-life balance, and limited organizational support among respondents. These findings indicate that remote work significantly affects employees' mental health and wellbeing in startup teams.

Hence, the Null Hypothesis (H₀) is rejected and the Alternative Hypothesis (H₁) is accepted.

4. *Achievement of objectives-*

The study successfully identified key mental health challenges in remote startup teams, examined the impact of remote work on wellbeing, and analyzed the role of organizational support. Suggestions for improving mental wellbeing were also gathered. The suggestions provided by respondents form practical strategies to enhance mental wellbeing in remote startup teams.

Therefore, the objectives of the study have been achieved.

Conclusion:

The present study examined the mental health and wellbeing of employees working in remote startup teams. The findings reveal that while remote work offers flexibility and improved productivity for some individuals, it also creates significant mental health challenges. A large proportion of respondents reported experiencing stress, burnout, sleep disturbances, isolation, and difficulty maintaining work-life balance. Limited organizational

support and discomfort in discussing mental health concerns further highlight the need for structured wellbeing initiatives.

The study confirms that remote work environments in startup settings significantly influence employees' psychological wellbeing. High performance expectations, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and lack of formal support systems contribute to increase mental strain.

However, the suggestions provided by respondents indicate that practical improvements such as fixed work timings, right to disconnect, better communication, team engagement activities, and normalization of mental health conversations can enhance overall wellbeing.

In conclusion, startups must adopt supportive policies and proactive mental health strategies to ensure sustainable employee wellbeing and long-term organizational effectiveness.

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