

Conditions Affecting the Perspective Towards the “Work-From-Home” Setup Women’s Voices in the Philippine Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) Industry

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Abstract: Despite the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) in the Philippine industry is striving to achieve greater gains because they are able to employ 70% of their staff to work from home. However, within this economy that has been helping the country, inequalities are still present, especially in the work from setup in the new normal. It unfortunately highlights the notion that women’s contribution to domestic work is greater compared to men. From advancing this position, this study aims to describe the narratives of women BPO agents as they express the surrounding conditions that led to their gendered perceptions of the “work from home” (WFH) setup. The authors use qualitative descriptive design and purposive sampling of fourteen (14) women BPO agents working in Cebu as respondents. The paper uses thematic analysis and concludes that the following are the surrounding conditions affecting the views of women on the WFH setup: (a) The opportunity to do both productive and reproductive work; (b) the significance of the age of the children; (c) the impact of support systems; and the (d) consequences of gender stereotypes.

Keywords: Women, Gender, Perspectives, Work from home setup, BPO Industry

Introduction

Prior to the pandemic, the Philippines was one of the countries whose economies were developing. The “sick man of Asia” title was finally wearing off ([Mendoza, 2021](#)). However, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, that was when its economy began to deteriorate. In fact, the month of April 2020 recorded the highest unemployment rate in the country at 17.6% ([“Philippines: Workers”, 2019](#)). In the year leading up to January 2021, the pandemic wiped out 1.7 million paying jobs ([Bird et al., 2021](#)). But despite the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) in the Philippine industry continues to grow because, during tight quarantine periods, BPOs were able to carry on with their operations by employing 70% of their staff to work from home.

In the case of the workforce, there has been a 1.8% increase of Filipino workers in BPO companies from 2019 to 2020. And from these numbers, call centre operations have historically been dominated by women and are one of the only areas where Filipino LGBTQ+ employees may find safe employment. Women account for 71% of workers in the global call centre industry ([Hultgren, 2018](#)), which maintains what has been referred to as the “worldwide feminisation of the labour force and employment” (Pineda-Ofreneo, [2005](#), as cited in Domingo-Cabarrubias, [2012](#)).

However, within this economy that has been helping the country, inequalities are still present, especially in the work from home setup in the new normal. At home, different roles are assigned to each family member, particularly the mother and the father, and along with these are tasks that they are responsible for. At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, people were restricted from going outside their houses and women had to be burdened with multiple, time-consuming responsibilities and obligations, especially when institutions like schools, child-care services, and so on have also closed down. For the longest period, women have had to bear a disproportionate share of the load of parenting and household work, which has consequently made gender inequalities surface at home and has widened the gender gap between men and women ([Feng & Savani, 2020](#)). Moreover, according to the Asian Development Bank ([2013](#)), there is a significant gender gap in domestic work, with women bearing a greater share of the burden of caregiving and home duties than men. In the Philippines, women take care of the children 84% of the time that is spent at home.

As for the case of the BPO industry, despite the fact that both men and women experience the same stressful demands and environment at work, both may not suffer the same consequences. The nature of work of the BPO industry, which includes demanding jobs and uncertain working schedules, certainly affects women’s traditional duties as caregivers at home and division of labour in terms of gender in the household ([Domingo-Cabarrubias,](#)

[2012](#)), as well as social responsibilities and expectations. Furthermore, because being in customer service requires interaction, it can be at times draining. In fact, despite whatever private matters they may hold, employees are expected to maintain a pleasant and enthusiastic demeanour when dealing with clients ([Pico, 2006](#)). As a result, these employees eventually become disconnected, sceptical, and their sense of accomplishment declines. These characteristics have an impact on the personal and family life of employed women. With women being expected to be loving and compassionate, burnout and stress from the workplace can alter that disposition. On the other hand, the work-from-home setup of BPO agents necessitates a stationary setup, which requires some mobility around the house. In this work setup, women have to juggle work and homemaking tasks, while casually and briefly leaving their work stations to respond to the demands of their homes.

Studies like Domingo-Cabarrubias ([2012](#)) and Pico ([2006](#)) showed the nature of the BPO industry and discussed its effects on working married women and their domestic responsibilities, demonstrating that gender issues are also present in the BPO industry. Mudaliar ([2018](#)) further supported this idea by mentioning that married women suffer additional restrictions on work because of their home responsibilities, which married men can typically escape from and which allow men to leave at reasonable hours. Because they must meet the needs of their husbands or children during the day, which wears them out, women who work night shifts frequently complain of sleep issues. These studies, however, only touched on the surface of these issues and did not go into detail about the effects or gendered impact of call centre work on women and the consequences of such work on gender relations and gender division of labour, specifically in the domestic sphere; hence, a need for more in-depth research that incorporates the experiences of women in the work from home setup in relation to their call centre jobs. Knowledge of the perceptions of BPO agents, particularly women, on work-from-home (WFH) is significant in the development of WFH practices regarding gender roles and for inclusivity in the policy-making process. In order to mitigate the gender disparity issues faced in this setup, there is a need to find out the lived experiences of the target population. Thus, the researchers aimed to answer the question:

What were the expressed surrounding conditions that led to the perceptions of the women BPO agents on the “work-from-home” setup?

Methodology

Research design

In seeking to describe the BPO agents' experiences with the work from home setup, this research utilised a qualitative descriptive design. In the social sciences, the qualitative research method was designed to allow researchers to explore social and cultural phenomena

by observing people's feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and beliefs ([Myers, 1997](#)). The research deals with human interaction and perspectives; hence, the use of qualitative methods is appropriate. Additionally, the purpose of qualitative descriptive studies is a full description, in daily language, of specific occurrences experienced by individuals or groups of individuals.

Research environment

This study was conducted in the Philippines wherein the BPO industry is one of the biggest contributors to its economy. It was conducted in the Visayas Region, specifically in Cebu. The BPO industry in Cebu is one of the key employment generators with the highest job openings in the region, with a 19% increase in hiring in 2019 (["Cebu BPO", 2019](#)). Cebu City has a well-established IT-BPO foothold, with 24 PEZA-accredited IT Centres and four IT Parks ([KMC Savills, 2019](#)).



Figure 1. Map of the Philippines highlighting the Visayas Region

Research participants

The participants for this study were women BPO agents in the Philippines. In this study, the researchers used the purposive sampling method to select the participants. Purposive sampling is when the researchers choose people purposefully because they know the target participants have the attributes needed for the study ([DeCarlo, 2018](#)). The participants of this study were women BPO agents taking a lead in both work and household duties who were any of the following – mothers that may or may not be married in status; married but childless as they may also have duties to their husbands; solo parents responsible for their children; single women taking care of the whole immediate family; and

- has experienced working in an office setup before the pandemic for at least six months; and
- has experienced working from home setup during the pandemic for at least six months.

At this level, they were expected to have gained enough experiences to allow them to reflect easily on those experiences, particularly gender roles that are present in the household which may affect BPO agents' preference for their work setup.

In qualitative descriptive research, it is important to consider the sample size in order to acquire enough collected data to reach the objective of the study (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). Instead of relying on data saturation in measuring the sample size appropriate for the research, it is preferable to focus on the concept of "information power" to determine the number of participants. Ritchie *et al.* (2014) recommend focusing on the amount of information in the data collected that are relevant to the study, rather than to the number of participants. The average range of sample size by different qualitative descriptive research is between 11-20 participants (Kim *et al.*, 2016). The first few participants recommended their co-workers to be invited as participants in the study, which helped the researchers reach the target number. Some of the individuals approached by the researchers declined to participate in the study due to schedule conflicts and unavailability. The final number of respondents is fourteen (14), which has given the research sufficient information and data to be analyzed.

Research instrument

This study used a semi-structured interview to gather data on the experiences of women BPO agents in the work from home setup. Interviews are also recognised as the most effective method for acquiring and exploring experiential narrative material that may be used to generate a better and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon. Moreover, semi-structured interview is a data collection method in which questions prepared by the researcher are open-ended and the interview flow is based on how the participant responds (DeCarlo, 2018). The questions consistently asked to the participants particularly seek their views and narrations on their experiences as BPO agents. The following are the research questions:

- Can you describe in detail your work/experience as a BPO agent in the WFH setup?
- How is working from home beneficial for you as a woman?
- What are the disadvantages of WFH for you?
- Do others have expectations from you as a woman or you yourself put on the pressure of being the breadwinner while fulfilling your role as a mother, wife, and/or daughter?
- What is your preferred setup? Work from home or work on site? Why?

Data gathering procedure

Mode of administration. Informed consent forms were provided for the respondents to read and attach their e-signatures. Upon gathering the desired number of respondents, the researchers and participants had an in-depth individual interview through Google Meet. In

this interview, the respondents were asked open-ended questions and further questions depending on the given answers.

Transcription. The interviews were recorded for the process of transcribing. However, visual information and utterances are not necessary for data interpretation. The interviews were encoded and analysed in the language spoken by the respondents so as to not lose their meaning. Parts of the interview to be quoted are translated to English, as it is the language of the study.

Data analysis

Since this study's goal is to comprehend and describe the phenomenon and lived experiences of BPO agents, the researchers used the thematic analysis method. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a tool for analysing qualitative data that involves looking through a collection of data to determine, examine, and document recurring patterns. This process as outlined by Braun and Clarke consists of six steps: first, is to familiarise oneself with the data gathered; second, generate initial codes; third, search for a common theme with those codes; fourth, review the formulated themes; fifth, define and name the themes; sixth, interpret the data and produce the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

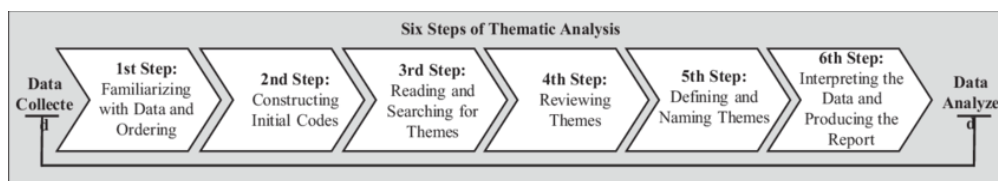


Figure 2. Thematic analysis processes (adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006)

In the data analysis, researchers immersed themselves in the narratives given by the respondents in order to reach a comprehension of the data gathered.

1st step: The researchers did the transcription, converting audio to text. Consequently, the researchers read and re-read the data, while noting any initial analytic observations and impressions.

2nd step: The researchers began to systematically organise the data, followed by constructing initial codes. The coding process breaks down a large amount of data from the online interview into relevant data extracts. This was done by breaking down the data into discrete excerpts.

3rd step: The examined codes made into categories were then fitted together to make into a theme.

4th step: The researchers questioned whether the candidate themes suited the coded data and overall dataset. When the data did not sufficiently support the themes, the researchers modified and refined the names of the candidate themes.

5th step: The researchers conducted and wrote an in-depth analysis of each theme to determine its importance. This included defining each theme and discerning its connection to the full dataset.

6th step: The researchers compiled the analytic narrative and concise data extracts to provide the reader with a cohesive and engaging story about the data and to contextualise it in connection to existing studies.

The data analysis was done through the mentioned method. Also, experts validated the interview guide being utilised by the researchers. The data analysis was reviewed by the same set of experts for validity purposes.

Results and Discussions

The overview results are presented in this part of the chapter. To analyse the data acquired from the respondents, the researchers used the thematic analysis method. The researchers organised the emergent themes following the study's statement of the problem: Conditions Affecting the Views of Women on the WFH setup.

The codes, categories, and themes are listed in Table 1. The codes are derived from the respondents' significant statements that they answered during the online interview, while the categories were the common codes. Subsequently, the themes are then generated from the categories of the same essence.

Conditions affecting the views of women on the WFH setup

While the shift to work from home setup results in the diverse views of the women BPO agents, there are underlying conditions that affect such perceptions.

The emergent themes for this are as follows: (a) The opportunity to do both productive and reproductive work; (b) the significance of the age of the children; (c) the impact of support systems; and (d) the consequences of gender stereotypes.

Code	Category	Theme
It is the nature of women to not depend on their partners. Also, the present situation calls for both partners to work for one is not enough.	Women work because they believe that the income of their partner alone is not enough to sustain the family.	The opportunity to do both productive work and reproductive work
It is the nature of women to have the initiative to do household responsibilities- /unpaid work.	Women work because they believe that it is in their nature to provide for their child. So,	

Code	Category	Theme
It is the nature of a woman to take care of her child. It is the norm for mums to do everything for their child.	they chose to work and at the same time take care of their family.	
For the respondent, it is her utmost priority to provide for her child. Also, the insufficient income of her partner pushed her to work.		
For the respondent, practicality wise, the income of one of the partners is not enough. She also wants to be able to provide for her needs aside for her child.		
Preschooler (3-5 years old) tends to call the attention of their mothers even during work in the WFH setup.	The younger the child, the more time it needs tending. The older the child, the more it is able to understand their mother's situation.	The significance of the age of their children
Grade schooler (5-12 years old) understands the situation of mothers in the work from home setup and can be trusted by their mothers; and takes the role of looking out for their siblings.		
Lesser responsibilities at home and as a parent because the child is old enough to be assigned tasks and take care of himself.		
The respondent has her partner to do most of the household responsibilities.	Living with other family members, such as the partner or in-laws, reduces the mother's household responsibilities.	Impact of support systems
The respondent receives support from her partner in terms of taking care of their children.		
The respondent is living with in-laws, and her mother-in-law is doing most of the food preparation.		

Code	Category	Theme
Despite having nannies, mothers are still worried about their children's welfare. They think that they are the best person to take care of their own children.	Having also a nanny does not take away the mother's intuition or innate sense of their child's needs.	
Respondent has more tasks than her husband as it is typical in the family that the woman does more housework than the man.	Women accept and acknowledge the idea that they should have more household chores because it is the norm.	Consequences of gender stereotypes
Respondent is subjected to more duties as she is the mother.		
Respondent states that men are not domesticated.		

1. The Opportunity to Do Both Productive and Reproductive Work

The work from home setup allows women the opportunity to do both productive and reproductive work, which greatly affects their perception, especially with the rise in living conditions following the rise in inflation. This is the case of the Respondent KF when she revealed:

“Nature na siguro na gyud nato mga babae na dili wala lang ta gasalig sa atong partner gali. Pwede man gyud no ang partner ra ang motrabaho... But sa panahon man gud karon lisod kaayo if kuan usa ra ang mag work.” (*It is natural for women to not depend on their partner. It could be that only the partner works but in present times, it is difficult if only one is working.*)

During the interview, Respondent KF started the discussion by highlighting that there are no expectations on her coming from her family or partner; no one forced her to work, but it is her choice to provide for her family, especially since she believes that the income of her partner alone is not enough to sustain the family. She even admitted that she enjoys having this dual responsibility because it allows her to provide for her family. She further discussed that it is not only natural for a woman not to depend on her partner financially but also with regard to unpaid responsibility, as she added that:

“ ... dili raman sad siguro about sa trabaho kanang about anang kanang mangita gyud ug trabaho bisan sa balay kuan na gyud siguro na sa babae nga kanang kusa na gani tang molihok dili na angay istoryaan” (*It may not only be about work but also about finding work to do even at home – we act on our own without being told to do so.*)

This is the same case of the Respondent EC when she answered:

“Syempre ang kanang imohang role pagka mama, natural raman na siya. Normal rana nimo ba nga buhaton nimo tanan paras imo anak. Wala man sad ko ingon nga nagpabaya.” (*Of course, your role as a mother is natural. It is normal for you to do everything for your child. I am also not neglectful.*)

Being a single mum, Respondent EC believes that it is her sole responsibility to provide for her child on top of her responsibility to also provide for her family. Consequently, she believes that it is expected of her to do everything for her child, including nursing and earning money for her child’s needs. But despite this, she similarly revealed that she feels happy and satisfied instead of feeling burdened doing both unpaid work and paid work, when she said that:

“wala raman ko naka feel ug burden. Kay syempre, main reason ngano nanarbaho ka is because of family. Happy ra pod ko nga makaprovide ko nila.” (*I didn’t feel a burden at all. Because of course, the main reason why you work is because of family. I’m just happy that I can provide for them.*)

Such is opposite to the study conducted by Farre *et al.* (2020) in Spain. The study found that childcare and housework was increased for both genders, but women, particularly mothers, experienced the increased burden. Similarly, Ramani *et al.* (2022) stressed that married working women have an additional burden because, while working remotely, they must simultaneously do family duties and be productive at work. With the difference between the study of Farre *et al.* (2020) and Ramani *et al.* (2022) and the researchers’ findings in this study, it is important to take note that the former did not specifically study the BPO industry. What makes the BPO industry unique is that the work from home setup that it offers takes out a feeling of anxiety. Despite still having to face both productive and reproductive work at the same time, such a setup allows a worker to be in an environment wherein they are comfortable and at ease – i.e., being with their families or the reasons why they are working hard. In turn, this boosts their productivity.

Furthermore, even before the pandemic, unpaid work was perceived as a responsibility for women. Gender gaps in unpaid work are seen all around the world. As such, women spend, on average, two to ten times as much time as males doing unpaid chores (Ferrant *et al.*, 2014). This, however, did not change much with the pandemic and with the work from home setup. A paper by Andrew *et al.* (2020), as cited in Seedat & Rondon (2021), shows that gender inequalities in the pandemic have extended to childcare, with mothers providing a greater proportion and significantly more time to childcare and housework than their male partners. Thus, with unpaid responsibility, on top of the paid responsibility that women carry, the work from home setup eases their burden, as it allows them to work on both responsibilities at the same place (home), or, at times, even simultaneously.

Hence, the emergent theme, the opportunity to do both productive and reproductive work, implies that the work from home setup, particularly that of the BPO industry, allows a woman to generate income aside from her partner to provide for their child's needs, and, at the same time, be a mum and take care of the family.

2. The Significance of the Age of the Children

Generally, children are assumed to play a significant role in mother's experience in the work from home setup, but in this study, the age of children, in particular, emerged as a theme. Respondent DM illustrates the importance of age, particularly the age of the children in the situation of work from home mothers. She claimed:

“There are numerous times when my youngest ... she's still like 5 years old pajud sya ba, baby pajud sya, ing-ing kayo. So, while naa jud koy call, mag hilak hilak. Nya dili ka makatagad dayon kay you're in a call man. Nya madunggan pa jud usahay.” (There are numerous times when my youngest ... she's still like 5 years old, she's still a baby, very whiny. So, while I have a call, she cries. You can't pay attention right away because you're on a call. The cries can sometimes be heard during the call.)

Participant DM describes that preschoolers (3-5 years old) tend to call upon the attention of their mothers even during work in a work from home setup. Children at this age are oblivious in terms of work arrangements and they assume their mothers can cater to them all the time, since they see them at home, and not in the office. With her other child, who is 9 years old, Participant DM experienced a different situation:

“Kay ang akoang eldest, makasabot raman sya nga dili jud ko samukon.” (Because my eldest, he understands that I should not be disturbed.)

In this case, Participant DM illustrates that grade schoolers (5-12 years old) understand the situation of mothers in the work from home setup. This supports the idea that grade schoolers can be trusted by their mothers and take the role of looking out for their siblings when mothers are at work. In addition, Participant BG claims that her child is not an inconvenience because she is almost 18 years old. She revealed:

“She's very old na. She's almost 18. So, she's not an inconvenience when I'm working from home. Actually, she sometimes helps me when I have to do bathroom breaks. She helps me checking my monitor if I have ... someone is calling for me.”

Also, Respondent HJ, a mother of a 13-year-old, explained that her son is able to do chores such as cooking rice and simple dishes, and sweeping the floor. She further claimed that her son is already big enough not to need much care. She answered:

“Dili naman sya atimnanonon kay matured na sya mag hunahuna. Kanang wala ra, pasagdan raman na nako siya, dili nako mag sigeg kuan niya mandar man kay kaybaw naman sya unsay iyang buhatonon gani.” (He does not need much care and attention

because he is mature. That's all, I'll just let him be, I don't always order him to do things because he already knows what he is assigned to do.)

With this, it is understood that the age of the child matters in seeing if a child is an inconvenience (i.e., an interruption in the work from home setup) or a help to a working mother in the work from home setup. Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, parents who work remotely and have children under the age of 18 have reported experiencing difficulties finishing work without interruptions (Schaeffer, 2022). Igielnik (2021) reported similar findings in which it is said that responsibilities required for taking care of a child during working time vary depending on the age of the child taken care of at home. It found that working-from-home parents who have children whose age is around preschool or younger are more likely to report that they have childcare obligations while doing work, compared to those parents with school-aged children. Furthermore, the same study (Igielnik, 2021) found that mothers are about twice as likely as fathers to report they have a lot of these responsibilities. This shows that mothers take up more responsibility regarding childcare than fathers. In another study, it is revealed that in the work from home setup, those who have and infants at home were noted to be less productive, possibly as a result of the constant attention that infants need (cited in Awada *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, having a teenager at home had no influence on the work of parents, as they are capable of helping with household chores and are more independent, and did not add to any potential work-life conflicts when working from home (cited in Awada *et al.*, 2021).

3. Impact of Support Systems

Working from home led women to have more close contact with the people they are living with at home. Different household setups were exhibited by the respective participants, wherein some of them are living with partners, have children and living with their partner/husband, with in-laws, or with hired nannies. This has a significant effect on the perspective of women in performing their roles and duties at home, for the reason that additional assistance and support, or even pressure, would be experienced.

Women who are living with partners feel the lessening of burden and responsibilities due to the initiative of their partners to do the chores. This is evident for Respondent ID who is living with a partner but does not have a child. She expressed how her partner takes care of cooking, and other chores as she pointed out that she does not have problems with her household responsibilities at home. She explained:

“My partner does like almost everything sa household I don't even need to. Akong buhaton kay maligo mokaon. I don't have any problems with household responsibilities and such. Because I don't even do it anymore for myself.” (My partner does like almost everything in the household; I don't even need to. What I do is take a

shower and eat. I don't have any problems with household responsibilities and such. Because I don't even do it anymore for myself.)

Participants who do not have children are more likely to have received support from their partners in terms of the household responsibilities. There are inclinations for them to continue taking care of their own needs or distributing the work evenly. The underlying implication is that women are expected to perform household duties at various periods in their narratives. Women are supposed to handle the housework, but males help out instead for a variety of reasons, including the fact that their work is different in extent. Women view this behaviour of men as a fortunate event that does not frequently happen.

For women who have children, receiving support from their partner also reduces their burdens. For the case of Respondent GC, whenever her children need something while she's at work, her husband is there to assist the children. She narrated:

"It doesn't mean na ako ra jd sa balay, naa man ilang papa pud for example managayo silag unsa or na unsa ba dira akong anak – gigutom, kailangan mag luto. So okay rako kay naa man ilahang papa." (It doesn't mean that I'm the only one at home, their father is also there; for example they ask for something or if there's something that happened to my child - he's hungry, cooking is needed. So, it's okay because their father is there.)

The assistance or support women receive from men is considered as an unexpected, fortunate situation, instead of looking at it as the natural arrangement it should be. As shown from the experience of Respondent GC, men take over taking care of the children when she goes to work.

Participant DM is living with her husband and in-laws. This setup caused pressure towards the participant. Mothers worry about what their in-laws would say if they do not perform their expected roles, since they are present in the house. She said:

"We are living dependently with our parents, particularly with my in-laws ... kay di baya tanan pareha ug kaagi so there's the pressure... but ikaw man gud ang nakipuyo, so dijud na nato makalikayan nga ah unsa gahay ikaingon sa parents sakong partner." (We are living dependently with our parents, particularly with my in-laws ... because not everyone is going through the same thing so there's the pressure... but since you are the one who is living with others, we couldn't avoid thinking about what my partner's parents would say.)

However, the participant later on clarified that this pressure is not imposed directly by her in-laws but because of the uneasiness that she feels and self-consciousness towards her in-laws. She expressed that her in-laws take care of a lot of household chores at home and that they understand her situation.

The same is the case for Participant BG, who is also living dependently with in-laws, allowing the mother to have a breather and lesser responsibilities from their work and household duties. The in-law took the role of preparing meals. This instance is manifested from her statement:

“That’s the advantage of living with parents, kay along mother-in-law, iya tanan sa kitchen.” (*That’s the advantage of living with parents, because my mother-in-law does all the kitchen work.*)

Although the pressure does not come directly from the in-laws they are living with, women feel this judgment due to the accustomed role of being the household’s responsibility as the mother and wife. When these activities are not fully achieved, these women are considered liable.

Respondent AA’s case is different from the previous cases. She is living with her husband, who is also working, and they have a 2-year-old baby. They have hired a nanny to assist them with their child’s needs. However, despite having a nanny the mother still prefers to give more attention to her child.

“Akoa mas ma monitor nako ang bata gud. Let’s say kung naay nannies, matan aw gyud nako kung okay ba ang bata, if nakakaon ug sakto, gitarong bag pagbantay. Mao ni ang pinakaimportante nako mao nindot sad gyud ang work from home.” (*I can monitor the child better. Let’s say if there are nannies, I can really see if the child is okay, if he has eaten properly, if he is taken care of properly. This is the most important thing to me, it’s really nice to work from home.*)

The participants are living under different types of households that serve as their support system. They also had differing experiences such as living with a responsible partner, or felt pressure around their in-laws, but also had fewer household chores due to the help of their in-laws or partner; or, even for mothers who have decided to hire nannies, they have shown worries about their roles as mothers.

Despite being at home and being able to do their responsibilities as a woman or as a mother, the members of their household serve as their support system. They provide support by doing some of the chores in the household and taking care of the children. Similarly, Ramani *et al.* (2022) stressed that, for working women, physical and emotional support from family members, particularly from their spouses, are important in the remote setup. The study concluded that receiving emotional support from family members as well as physical support, such as sharing in household chores and childcare, motivates them to continue working remotely. Furthermore, it is found that working mothers believed that having supportive family members and employers would help them manage the problems of the work from home setup; otherwise, it would be a double task, especially for those with children under the age of

five (cited in Ramani *et al.*, [2022](#)). However, from the findings of the study, the presence of their support systems does not eliminate their own pressure and expectation to do their duties as a mother, such as taking care of their children. This corresponds to the study of Schulze ([2004](#)) that discussed Filipino culture of being family-oriented and that it is in the nature of mothers or women members of the family to take the responsibility of caring for their children. Women, especially wives and mothers, are the ones expected to do this duty, and the support or help that is offered by their family members, in-laws, or nannies are just supplementary in case that they have to work; but it did give significant help to women and made the work from home less of a burden.

4. Consequences of Gender Stereotypes

When the participants were asked about who was more burdened with unpaid work, most of the participants narrated their viewpoints as being affected by the gender stereotypes that they are experiencing as mothers and wives and how these affect their responsibilities in their households.

Respondent BG expressed that, in terms of household duties, men expect and are expected to be less involved. She claimed:

“Ang mga lalaki man gud, they’re not really domesticated.” (*Men are really, they’re not really domesticated.*)

This implies that the patriarchal system still prevails in our society, with the conception that women are bound to be homemakers. This is in relation to our findings on the support system, that women are expected to do various unpaid work more than men. Similarly, Respondent CF agreed in terms of how women are expected to do more of the household responsibilities, and that mothers would just accept their traditional roles at home. Women accept and acknowledge the idea that they should have more household chores because it is what is typical in the family. She claimed:

“Mas daghan kog tasks compared to my husband, but typical in a family, na ang laki na dili man gyud sila mag hinlo-hinlo or arrange-arrange. Usually, babae man gud lage magwork sa balay pod.” (*I have more tasks compared to my husband, but [it is] typical in a family that the man won’t clean or arrange. Usually, women do household work.*)

Most of the participants were being constricted by gender stereotypes. Burdened with paid work responsibilities, they needed to carry the load of unpaid work as well. While men are generally accepted to be less domesticated, the participants’ family members and companies expect them to be confined within societal perceptions of being a woman, a mother, and a wife. According to a study by Fisher & Ryan ([2021](#)), gender disparities were more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with the shift to remote work, and gender role

expectations have not changed, with women still expected to do the majority of domestic and caring responsibilities while also being productive at work. Traditional feminine gender roles dictate that women are social, exhibiting qualities like warmth and compassion, occupying lower status roles in society and acting as caregivers in the household; while men should exhibit strength and dominance, act as the provider outside of the home and assume higher status in society (cited in Fisher & Ryan, [2021](#)).

Unfortunately, most of them became conformist of these notions and will continue to live day by day dictated by these expectations. The conformity is due to the fear of what society will say about how they choose to work instead of fulfilling their responsibilities as women. Men do not receive the same kind of pressure.

Summary of findings

The study of Farre *et al.* ([2020](#)) revealed to us that women, particularly mothers, experienced an increase in the amount of both childcare and housework during the pandemic, which led them to feel more burdened. This is in contrast to the data gathered in this study, wherein women expressed that they felt less burdened due to a few conditions that affected their experience in the work from home setup.

Firstly, the opportunity to do both productive work and reproductive work, wherein they can financially provide for their family and take care of their household responsibilities at the same time, makes them happy rather than feeling burdened. Secondly, even though women are expected to do childcare, those who have children who can already comprehend the situation do not feel inconvenienced, since their children can already understand that they are working despite being at home and already know how to do some of the chores. Those who have young children who are unable to comprehend at their young age, on the other hand, may find their work setup disrupted.

Furthermore, the presence of support systems such as partners, in-laws, and nannies ease the challenges of the work from home setup. Finally, there is women's conformity to gender stereotypes, in which they believe that caring for their children and doing household chores are responsibilities that they should fulfill and are not a burden. If they do not work from home, they would still have these household and childcare responsibilities but would be burdened by other factors.

Conclusions

The narratives of women BPO agents in the study express the surrounding conditions that led to their gendered perceptions of the "work-from-home" setup. Furthermore, it is important to note that women prefer the work from home setup because, though women are aware of the

disproportionate share of household responsibilities, they tend to ignore this because they see it as the norm. Most importantly, despite the dual responsibility on top of the challenges women face when working from home, they still perceive the work from home as the best setup, because they feel satisfied and accomplished being able to do both productive and reproductive work.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for policy and research.

Firstly, the Local Government Unit of Cebu City should pass a resolution for the institutionalization into law of the adoption of adding an option to choose what work setup employees prefer, whether from home, on-site, or hybrid. This is done so that the company will be obligated to give alternatives for their employees.

Secondly, by investigating the experiences of the work-from-home setup, Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) Industries should provide permanent remote job opportunities, incentivise remote workers, and address their needs to boost work performance and maintain business productivity.

Lastly, with the study on the perspectives of women BPO agents on the work-from-home setup being limited in scope, future researchers can pursue the same topic in the manner of:

- a. Exploring industries similar to telecommunications that adopt the work-from-home setup to learn the perspectives of women in that industry;
- b. Investigating women's perspectives in the BPO industry in cities other than Cebu in the Philippines; and
- c. Analysing the case of WFH BPO agents who are single mothers, being part of the disadvantaged sector, to propose solutions that are specially tailored to their needs.

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