



**Impact of COVID-19 on  
Workplaces in India: A Report**

# Impact of COVID-19 on Workplaces in India

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COVID-19 has had a staggering impact on our world, our healthcare systems and our economies, on the way we live and work, indeed on the very fabric of society. Health is now front and center for governments and companies and people everywhere. COVID-19 has changed the way companies operate and what managers worry about. Employee health and wellbeing are high on all company radar screens. The workplace of the future is not ever going to be the same.

India started its monumental country-wide lockdown on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Workplaces closed overnight and millions of workers started working from home in one of the largest and swiftest mass shifts in working patterns ever. How have the physical & emotional health of workers been affected? What are the lessons for employers and people managers post-COVID-19?

Arogya World implemented two activities to find out more:

- I. We conducted a survey - Impact of Working from Home on Employee Health and Well-Being, and
- II. We held a series of webinars directed at HR and people managers - Emerging Stronger During COVID-19 - highlighting how to take care of the physical and mental health of employees as they work from home and as companies figure out return to work strategies.



## Key Overall Takeaways

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- The strategic value of workplace health has increased greatly. Employee health is now being given a lot of attention by companies and managers. This is an opportunity for advancing NCD prevention and wellness in India's workplaces.
- Work from Home is working fairly well in India. Companies must continue to communicate and engage with employees, give them meaningful work and make them feel valued. This is important for motivating employees, and for both short-term and long-term gains.
- Mental Health is of particular significance in these uncertain times and workplaces must do more to directly confront and tackle that.
- What is becoming clear is that now, more than ever, it is important for individuals to lead a healthy lifestyle, to boost immunity by eating right, lead a balanced life and prevent disease. This is what is at the core of Arogya World's mission - to combat noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) through healthy living.

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## I. Impact of Working from Home on Employee Health and Well-Being – A Survey

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In order to find out the impact of working from home on India's workforce, we ran a survey from April 13<sup>th</sup> to May 18<sup>th</sup> 2020, some three weeks into the lockdown, and asked working people to respond. The survey instrument was adapted from one developed by Institute for Employment Studies, UK. - we are grateful for their leadership on this issue. A number of partners joined us in our efforts and promoted the survey-

INFHRA (The Infrastructure, Facility, Human Resource & Realty Association) – [www.inhfra.org](http://www.inhfra.org)

GACS (Global Association For Corporate Services) – [www.gacs.world](http://www.gacs.world)

CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) and its Karnataka Chapter – [www.cii.in](http://www.cii.in)

CBRE (Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis) – [www.cbre.co.in](http://www.cbre.co.in)

We thank them for their support.



## About the Participants

922 working people completed the survey. They were largely young (73% were under 35 years), male (67%), and managers (71%). Most of the people were new to the situation – 93% had started to work from home only during the COVID crisis. Many had care responsibilities - 40% had children under 18, and 2/3rds of the respondents provided care for elderly people.

## About the Companies

Most (64%) of our respondents worked in large companies (>500 employees). About half the respondents were from Business, Corporate Professionals & Administrative Services.

## What Should we Watch Out for?

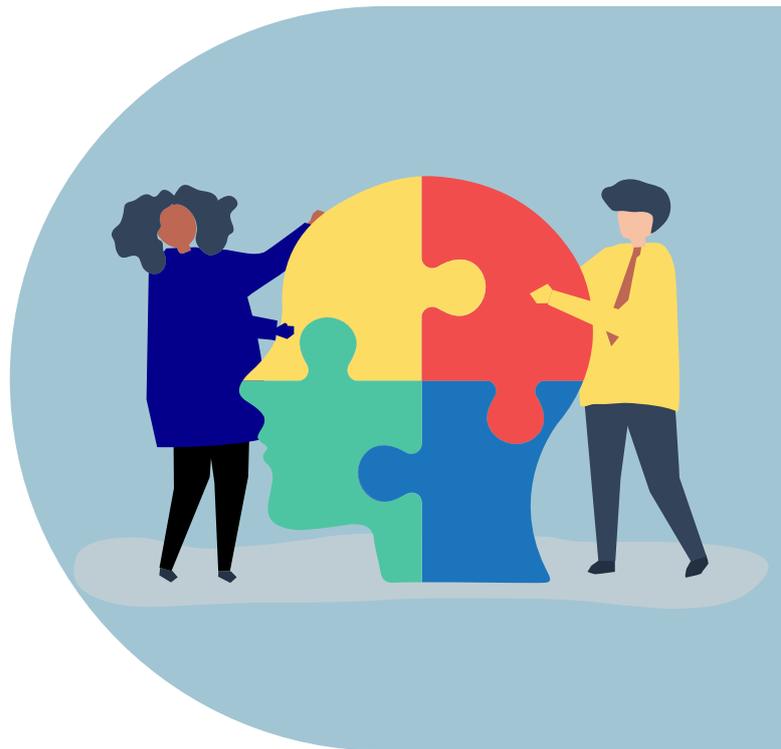
Companies must make special efforts to take care of the mental health of their employees because the future remains uncertain at this time, as companies work on Return to Work strategies and figure out how and to what extent Work From Home is here to stay. Some employees (20%) even in our survey said they were lonely and felt isolated. More than a third showed signs of anxiety and stated they were worried about their future and careers and loved ones. Companies should also not put undue work pressure on their employees as the external uncertainties put enough pressure. And should take clear steps to reach out and include employees in company matters even as they work from home, because half the people feel left out of key decisions.

More data analysis is ongoing. We are also looking forward to working with IES on comparisons between UK and India workforce responses and other insights from international surveys.

## What can we Learn About How Companies Behaved Towards Their Employees During COVID-19?

Workplaces in India have taken seriously their responsibilities to care for their employees. And they get good marks in our score card. From our survey we learned that:

- i. Most companies (77%) gave their employees a computer when they asked them to work from home.
- ii. Most employees (85%) felt their companies gave them interesting and challenging work to do even during COVID-19
- iii. A huge number (87%) of employees acknowledged that their line managers were good at keeping in touch with them
- iv. Employees felt they had enough information (92%) and enough time (75%) to do their job well
- v. And most employees (84%) felt they had the opportunity to develop new and innovative ways of working.



## Have Companies Established a Positive Work Culture?

Our probing questions revealed several insights that showed positive data trends:

- i. A whopping 84% of the employees felt valued by their companies
- ii. 71% said they believed that working from home would not hamper their career prospects
- iii. A majority - 78% - of working people in India said they get a sense of accomplishment from their job.
- iv. And what is very encouraging - 89% of working people said they were motivated to give their employer 100 percent effort. During COVID-19, away from headquarters and even a formal workspace, these are very positive data.

Even though employee engagement is high, still, working from home put a number of restrictions on people. 55% felt they worked long and irregular working hours. 36% felt they had too much work pressure. Even though 75% loved the freedom of working from home, 78% said they liked to keep their work and home life very separate which becomes tough when working from home.

There was some impact on the physical health of employees as a consequence. About a third of the working people felt they had more than usual aches, pains and discomfort in their neck, wrist and/or shoulders, and 31% reported they lost sleep worrying about things.

## How did Individual Employees Cope?

Overall, it was a mixed bag. 82% felt they ate more healthily now that they are eating at home, and about half felt they had less exercise now that they are working from home.

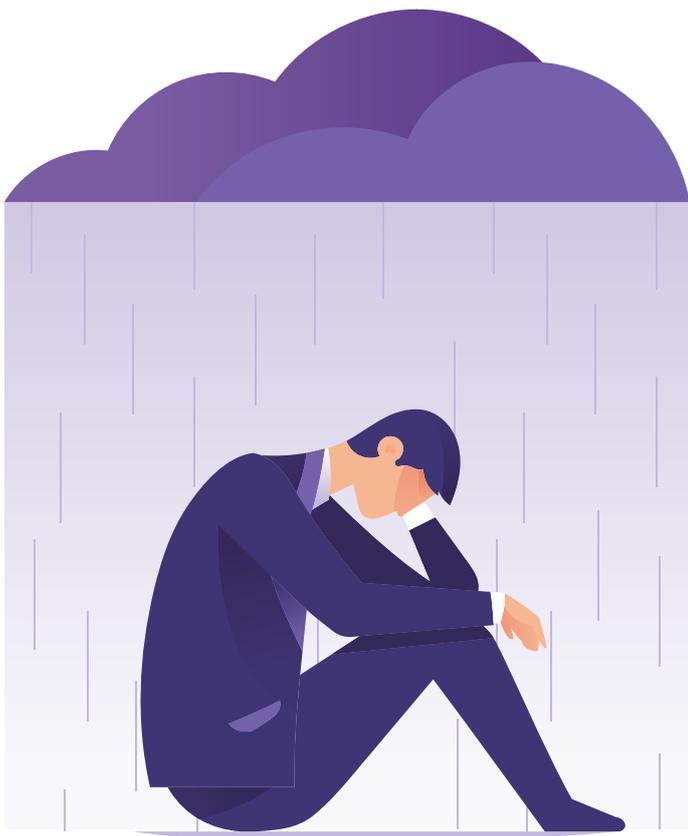
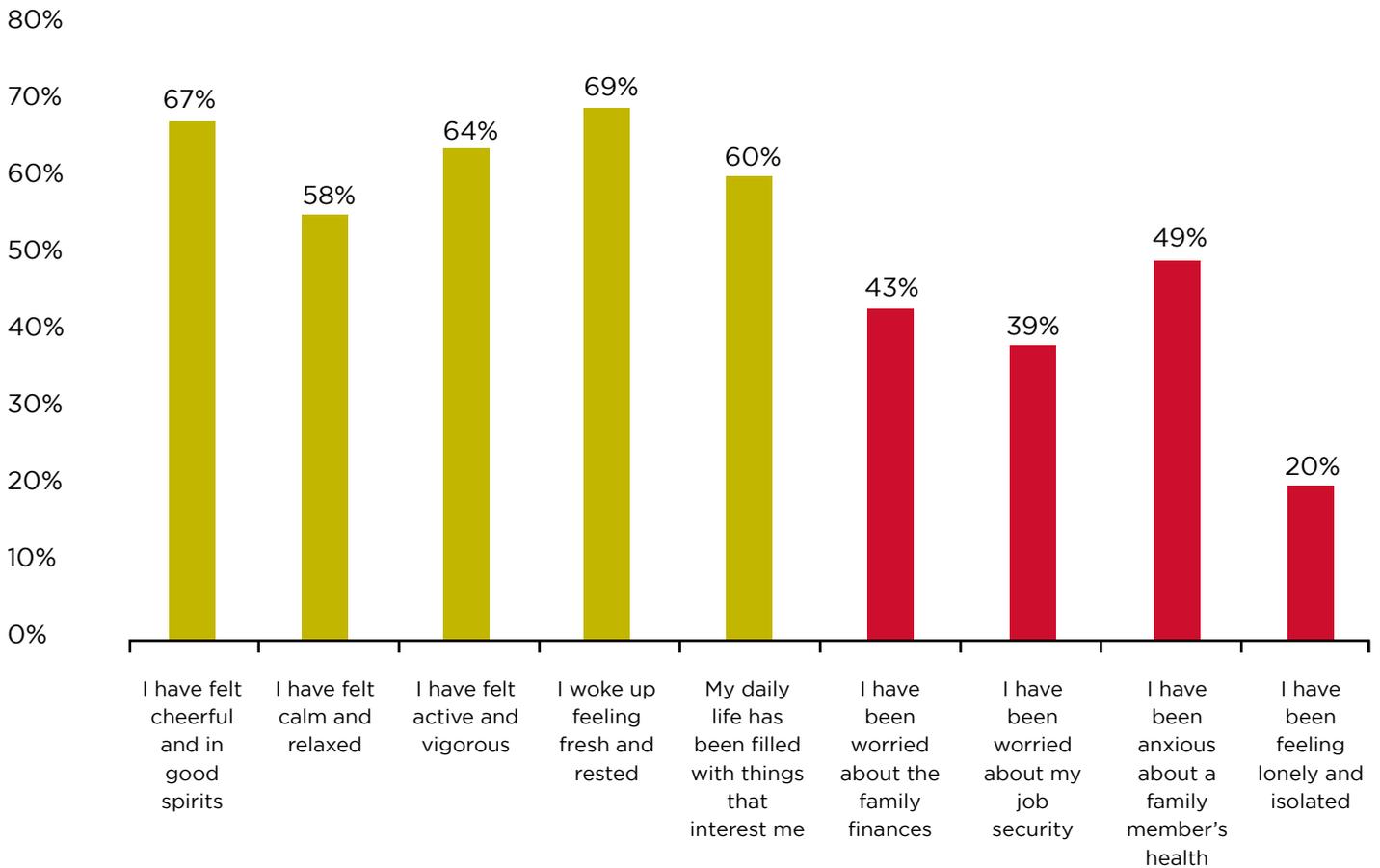
The mental health of survey respondents depicts a workforce with a lot on its mind. Our survey based on the IES survey, used the WHO5 Index, an internationally validated measure of mental wellbeing.

More than half the people scored well on the WHO scale on emotional well-being, and did not appear to be suffering from undue anxiety or depression as they transitioned to working from home. But that also means a good number (30-40 percent) were not in good spirits, did not feel calm and relaxed, did not wake up feeling fresh and rested etc.



## Emotional health of all employees

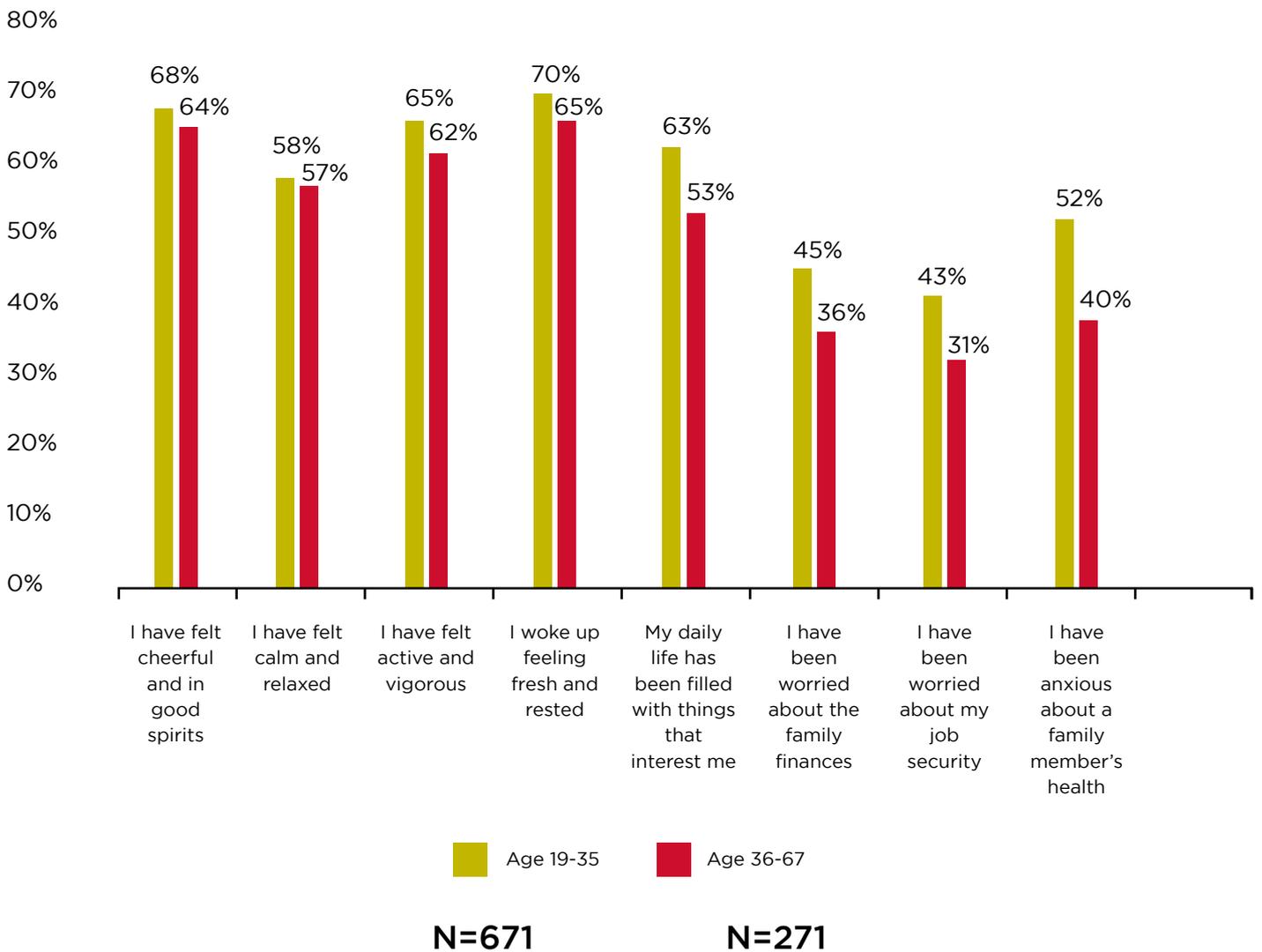
N=922



We asked them more questions - 43% of the people were worried about their family finances, 39% about their job security etc. as shown in the above figure. 49% of the respondents were worried about a family member's health during COVID times. Loneliness and feelings of isolation were expressed by 20% of the people.

Younger working Indians (under age 35) have a more positive outlook on life and can cope better with changes like working from home than older people (age 36-67).

## Employees emotional health by age group



### What is the Good News?

Companies in India are doing well in engaging with their employees even when they had to work from home. Most important is the extraordinarily high number of people who felt valued by their company and were motivated to give their 100%. It is important that companies continue to show their employees that they care for them, for their health and their overall well-being.

Furthermore, our survey showed that working people in India are by and large resilient, adapting quickly and positively to a new and sudden change in the way they worked. This may be largely due to the fact that they loved their jobs and their companies, and their managers reached out, showing them they cared. But it may also be due to the fact that social and family bonds are very strong in India and people live in tight knit close communities which provide a natural and in-built support system for employees working from home.

## II. EMERGING STRONGER DURING COVID – 19: Arogya World’s Webinar Series on Workplace Health

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The COVID-19 pandemic has affected workplace dynamics like never before. Both employers and employees are faced with the new reality and rapidly changing scenarios at the workplace.

Various aspects of workplaces will have to change if employees are to safely return to their desks. This could involve a combination of short-term and longer-term design modifications that put health and wellness at the heart of workplace planning. What are these short-term plans and long-term strategies, how are major corporations managing in the post-COVID-19 era? What about mental health during these tough times? What are the best return to work strategies?

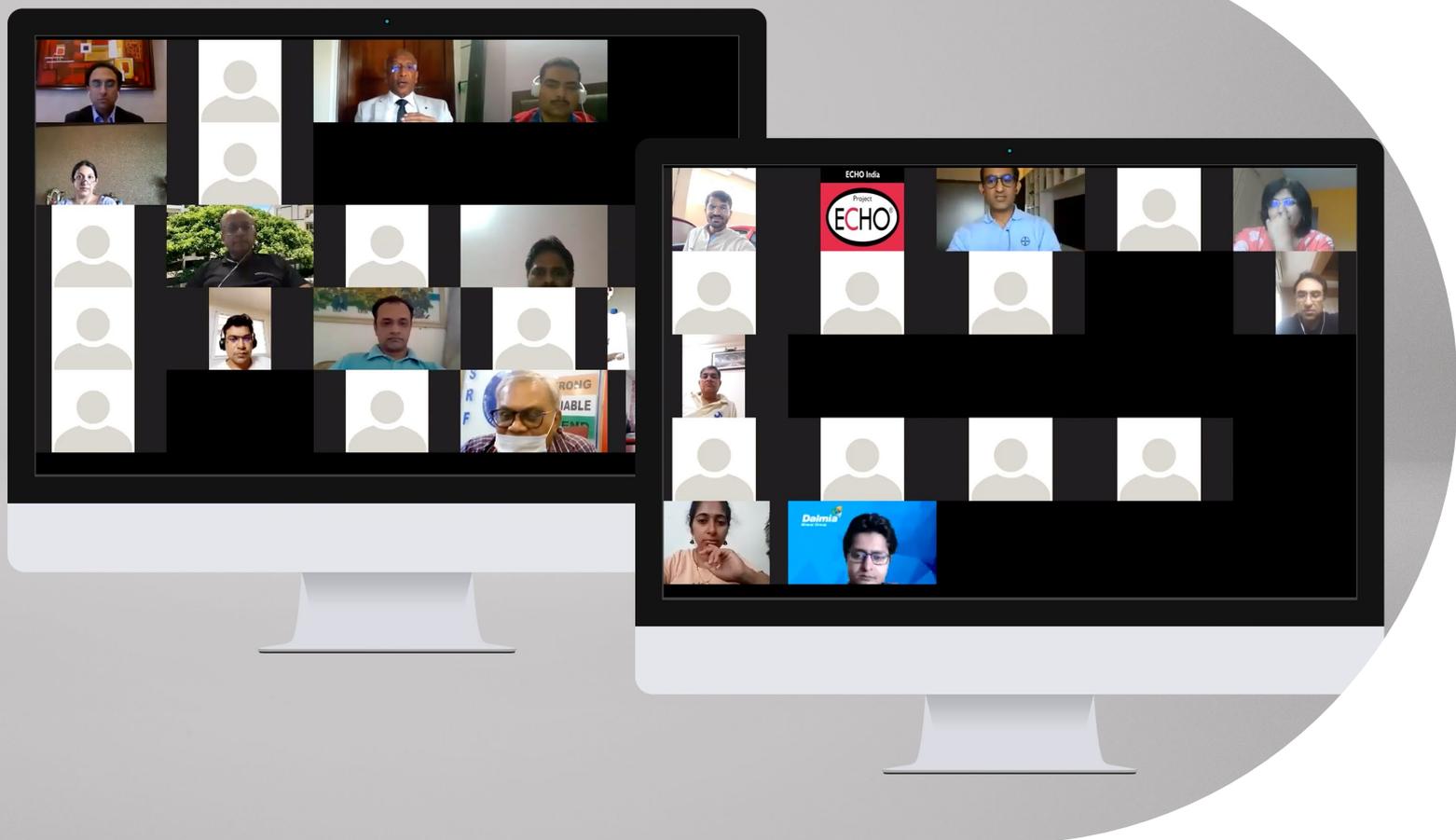
To answer these questions and share best practices, Arogya World conducted a series of Webinars on **‘Emerging Stronger During COVID-19’**, some of them in partnership with a couple of industry organizations – CII (Confederation of Indian Industry), and CBRE (Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis) to help corporates think through key issues during these tough times. The list of webinars is here: <https://arogyaworld.org/covid-19-resources/emerging-stronger-during-covid-webinar-series/>. The focus of the webinars was to start thinking about how to take care of ourselves, our organizations and our teams. We realized that this is not going to be a one-off event, and we will have to help companies really get prepared and future-proof India’s workforce from pandemics.

We have put together key takeaways from our webinars for both employees and employers.

### **Employee Perspective: Own your Wellbeing**

It is not just physical health that is important during COVID times, but also emotional health. This is because employees are working from home, with blurring of boundaries between work and life, because employees are bombarded with fast moving media updates, sometimes contradictory and alarmist, and because of economic uncertainty, social isolation due to lockdown etc.





**WFH is The New Normal:** Ms. Sangeeta Chandran (Global Head - TCS Cares) from Tata Consultancy Services, explained that the new Normal WFH situation has to be managed well by maintaining a daily routine and self-discipline. Most importantly we must all change our attitude and adopt a new definition of VUCA: Vision, Understanding, Compassion, and Agility.

Moreover, a good understanding is needed among team members and family members about the limitations and constraints of working from home. Indeed what is called for is acceptance of the situation and support through availability of work-related resources.

**Empathetic Leadership during Challenging Times:** All panelists in the session moderated by Dr. Ashwin Naik, Author, Ashoka Fellow, and Arogya World India Trust board member, shared how they had to step up, take a step back and demonstrate empathetic leadership at this point. The panelists also focused on the importance of routines and what a key role that plays in our own wellbeing.

**Focus on Mental Health is Key:** Mr Ranade, Managing Director, J&J, drew attention to mental health, and the need for focusing on this important issue. He highlighted the burden of mental health in India with 197M people who are affected, and an increase by 20 percent per the Indian Psychiatry Society. “Humans are by nature social animals; during the lockdown, we have moved from being a high-touch society to low-touch society and hence we are going through a very different set of emotions. This also has changed the way all of us work and live. We need to step back and keep in mind that everyone doesn’t adjust to the situation equally. As leaders we need to be cognizant of this.”

**Sleep Well:** Dr Ramadevi Gourineni MD, Amara Raja Group stressed upon the importance of sleep. With lines between work and personal space blurring, people end up working longer hours. To foster better sleep, she suggested employees engage in relaxing activities, shut down blue screens and have bed time routines.

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**Staying Fit and Healthy: Eat Well, Eat Right:** Life during the lockdown is not easy and can leave one very unprepared and overwhelmed. Even simple everyday meals become complicated. Arogya World believes that during and after COVID-19 we should eat healthy homecooked meals – it will help us boost immunity and maintain a healthy lifestyle and prevent Noncommunicable Diseases. We also learned this from panelist Jayasanckar Rajamanickam (Corporate EHS Head – Britannia Industries LTD) who said that we must keep a good balance between your NEED FOODS (the foods one needs to eat) and your WANT FOODS (the foods you want to eat).

**Boosting immunity by Eating Right:** Citrus fruits help boost your immune system, so include them in your daily intake in the right amounts. Hydrating oneself well, with mindfulness and physical activity will keep you light, fit and productive. Sun bathing for 15 minutes will improve immunity, help absorb vitamin D, and improve our metabolism. Strategic snacking is important to boost metabolism. Out of the three meals one can be of fruits. Avoid processed snacks.

Arogya World's MyThali (<https://arogyaworld.org/mythali/>) a nutritional icon that helps people learn what to eat and in what quantities at each meal, helps one boost immunity through eating balanced meals.

**Home Cooked Food: Panacea for a Healthy Life:** Kavita Devgan, Nutritionist, Weight Management Consultant And Health Writer based In Delhi and Dr. Balaji Santanam, CMO, Godrej promoted “Eating at Home”. Even though there are a lot of options available on the market, the best immunity boosters are easily available in the kitchen.

They encouraged the consumption of foods which contain natural calcium, Iron, Vitamin A & C, Omega 3 and probiotics. Eg. dairy products, pomegranate, chick peas, pulses, turmeric, pepper, cinnamon, carrots, ginger, amla (gooseberry), ghee, nuts, figs, curds, coconut oil (moderate quantity), flax seeds, tea with some spices. These foods not only boost immunity but are also considered as ‘happy foods’.

They also reminded us to focus on nutrients, eat traditional fresh home cooked food, and avoid processed food. Exercising and regular movements, even during work hours are important. One needs to take short energy breaks from time to time.



## The Organizational Perspective

### What can employers do to ensure their employees “Eat Right”?

- Corporate Programs can boost productivity of the workforce by reminding employees about the need for good energy management and that it is possible by maintaining sugar levels without feasting or starving.
- Factory workforce and corporate/home athletes should have a good understanding of their metabolic rate and a consultation with a nutritionist would ensure the right intake.
- Employers can combat rising health care costs and boost employee productivity when nutrition programs are part of their culture of health.
- Along with providing healthy options, companies must communicate about the health benefits of the food we eat.
- Solutions around takeaway & pre-packed meals at workplaces will need to be considered in the post COVID-19 era.

### Managing Business and Engaging and Energizing Employees in the Reboot Era

Is Corporate India really prepared to keep their teams engaged remotely? The Post COVID-19 employee engagement scenario is definitely different; how can we innovatively manage this? Can technology be leveraged better? These were key questions addressed during our webinar series.

**Implement BCPs:** It is key for organizations of all shapes and sizes to truly evaluate and implement their Business Continuity Processes in a manner that caters to the office infrastructure.

**Adaptability is key:** We must be flexible and be ready to improve and change systems to the requirements of the present situation.

**Risk based advisory:** Mahesh Chandak, Head of HSE - South Asia, Bayer recommended a risk-based advisory for all teams to avoid any confusion in the organization. He also felt that collaborating across functions and leveraging technology was needed. “Strive for progress and not perfection,” was his advice.

**Empathy:** Bina Patil, Vice President - Human Resources, Indegene, felt that empathy and engagement should be at the core of all initiatives. “Make employees your brand ambassador of the initiatives,” she said, Empathy is required agreed Mr. Sumeet Sharma (Global Contracts Director, Workplace Services, Capgemini) especially when return to work protocols are developed and there may be inevitable job eliminators or realignments.



## Back to Work: What should organizations be prepared for?

**Preventing NCDs:** As lockdowns in some states ease, employers are working towards safer and healthier workplaces. Dr. Nandakumar Jayaram (CEO - Columbia Asia) opined: "It is vital that during this period other NCDs like diabetes, hypertension are kept in good control." We at Arogya World agree!

**Basic Health and Hygiene:** Social distancing and wearing a mask should be practiced at all points in the worksites including in pantries, toilets, coffee points, water points etc. There is a need for 360 degree social distancing said our speakers. Compliance will be better if this percolates from the leadership downwards, is re-emphasized repeatedly and ensured through COVID-19 champions. Our speakers stressed on the importance of a health policy which is a must for any organization and if existing, it should be revisited to ensure it is appropriate for the present situation.

**Leveraging Technology:** The present crisis is an opportunity for the Health and Wellbeing industry. Workplace transformation is and will be extremely rapid as a mix of WFH, WFO, and WFA (Anywhere); WFC (Client space) are evolving. Intelligent Technologies will digitally evolve the workplace too, Clients and Workforce have to be prepared for this.

**Inclusion:** Employers should Initiate programs and activities not only for employee's wellness but also for their families and extended families. Encourage and motivate across all levels of employees for new learning or training from virtual universities, this can be for professional enhancement or hobbies. The needs of working women should be central to the emerging work culture as observed Ms. Namita Venkatraman (GM, HR - Robert Bosch) who spoke about working women and managing work-life balance in one of the webinars.

**Guidelines and Documentation:** Dr. Guruprasad CMO, Country Head, -Occupational Health and Medical Services, ABB India Ltd. requested companies to be constantly updated with government guidelines. At the workplace it is essential to monitor how the guidelines are interpreted and implemented by the team. Stakeholders also need to be trained in this aspect. One should be positive while updating the management and employees on COVID-19.

### Conclusion:

From the activities we conducted in April-June 2020, the wellbeing survey and the webinar series, we learned a lot about the challenges of working from home and how employees and employers are adapting and learning from the ravages of COVID-19 related lockdowns. While flexible work arrangements are likely to stay in a post-COVID-19 world, companies and business leaders are focused now on thinking through how and when to return to work, on ways to sustain business continuity. How can companies maintain social distancing and bring people back to the office safely? How can companies preserve the long-term benefits of collaboration and camaraderie and discipline that comes with working in an office environment? How to nurture the health and mental health of employees, whatever their location, and improve workforce productivity and India's competitiveness going forward? The insights we gathered will help companies be better prepared for future pandemics and allow us, our companies and our partners shape the workplace of the future.



# About Arogya World

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Arogya World is a global health non-profit organization ([www.arogyaworld.org](http://www.arogyaworld.org)) working to prevent NCDs, non-communicable diseases, through health education and lifestyle change. Our mission is reflected in our very name – Arogya in Sanskrit means to live a life without disease.

India, particularly hard hit by NCDs, diseases like diabetes, heart disease, cancer and chronic lung diseases, is a major area of focus for us. According to the WHO, 80% of heart disease, 80% diabetes and 40% cancers can be prevented by eating right, exercise and avoiding tobacco. Prevention of NCDs is at the core of all our work. Our work is aligned with the Government of India's priorities and we believe we can help India – and the world – meet the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal #3 (health and well-being for all) We do our science-based community centered prevention work in close collaboration with our affiliate, Arogya World India Trust, based in Bangalore, India.

Arogya World follows a doorstep health model, which takes prevention to people where they live, learn and work. Our focus is on scalable, science-based programs to reach and educate a large population. These are deployed in schools, workplaces, and bringing education right to people's phones. Our approach is gaining traction, and working! We have reached 5 million people so far and have helped hundreds of thousands measurably improve their health.

Workplaces have long been validated as platforms for wellness advancement and chronic disease prevention through the work of the WHO, many U.S.-based workplace wellness programs, insurance companies, and the World Economic Forum. Through our pioneering Healthy Workplace initiative in India, Arogya World is guiding companies to come up with a successful employee health and wellness strategy.

We now have 131 companies in India who have earned recognition as Healthy Workplaces, spanning 3 million employees (2019 figures).

Click here for our Healthy Workplace Criteria- <https://arogyaworld.org/healthy-workplaces-criteria/>

To learn more about our Healthy Workplace program and the tools we offer including MyThali and Lifestyle Coach Led Behavior Change Training, that can help employees improve their health, reach [usha@arogyaworld.org](mailto:usha@arogyaworld.org) or [nandan@arogyaworld.org](mailto:nandan@arogyaworld.org).

## Resources

- Lets Talk – 8448449428 – we promoted this mental health helpline number that employees can avail of, in all our webinars.
- Arogya COVID-19 Resources - <https://arogyaworld.org/covid-19-resources/>



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