

Original Article

Exploring Employee Indifference Towards Workplace: An Investigation on the impact of Extended Remote Working as a Contributing Factor in IT Sector

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Abstract - One of the most difficult tasks faced by firms during the COVID-19 period is managing work processes while permitting workers to work remotely, which is employee indifference, which has rarely piqued the attention of researchers. This research explores the influence of extended remote working on employee indifference to the workplace among IT sector employees. A quantitative research approach has been used to accomplish the objectives. The data was obtained through well-structured questionnaires distributed to IT employees in Kerala, India. Regression analysis and moderator analysis were used to test the research hypotheses. Sustained remote work is positively associated with increased indifference to the workplace, and gender moderates this relationship. This study provides valuable insights into the impact of remote working arrangements on employee indifference from the workplace over time. These findings have important implications for organisations aiming to comprehend the effects of prolonged remote working models on staff engagement.

Keywords - COVID-19, Employee indifference, IT industry, Remote work, Factor in IT sector.

1. Introduction

The pandemic caused by Coronavirus has not only sped up but also transformed how people work all across the world. It has forced the world to redefine its workplace. The lockdowns, quarantines, and isolations inspired a rethink and redefinition of the workplace, working mode, and even the attitude towards the work. It gave scope for employers, employees, and researchers to critically analyze the extent of investments made in the workplace components and the scope of reimagining it. The world has proved that no pandemic could halt any business/profession. Instead, it gave opportunities to explore new and creative business ways to optimise time and returns. Remote working has unwittingly inspired firms to experiment with it, leading to a global trend. [1] Even when conflicting and contradicting views exist on this change, it has to be accepted that all sectors overcame this challenging situation and gave new horizons of approach towards work, work management, and its evaluation. [2] It forced employees of any age, experience or knowledge to adapt to and accept the new working mode if survival mattered. Though employees were excited at the beginning of this new work pattern, generally, the enthusiasm dropped drastically as remote working shifted from a temporary to a continuing solution. When it became a continuing solution for

many organizations, it created a slew of challenges for both businesses and employees. Employees report feeling worried, burned out and cynic even when productivity has increased. [3] Also, work from home elements which could not completely replace the actual workplace environment and the experiences from various conflicting factors contributed to employee indifference. It leads to emotional weariness, burnout, and cynicism towards one's work and workplace, reducing productivity [4]. Employee Indifference (EI) is a state in which an employee is apathetic towards organizational goals and their accomplishment. [5] Previous research on Employee Indifference (EI) has focused primarily on indifference management and related issues. However, there is a clear research gap in the study of EI within the context of Extended Remote Working (ERW), particularly in the Indian IT Sector. Remote working is an existing concept. Although numerous studies have examined the psychological factors that influence remote work and their impact on job effectiveness, employee well-being, job satisfaction, and work-life balance [6], [7], these studies are frequently restricted to short-term remote work and generalised across various sectors. There is a scarcity of research that explicitly addresses ERW or investigates its impact on EI, particularly among IT professionals. This paper aims to bridge this gap by



investigating Employee Indifference to the Workplace (EIW) within the IT sector's specific context of Extended Remote Working (ERW). Remote work became widely accepted and extensively practiced during the pandemic across sectors. However, the novelty of this research lies in its exploration of how ERW influences indifference among IT employees – a sector where extended remote work is prevalent. The researchers identified the scope for in-depth research on ERW and EI, specific to areas highly affected and influenced by these concepts and scenarios. This research is distinctive in that it concentrates on the relationship between EI and ERW and contributes to the limited corpus of research in this field, particularly in the Indian context. Hence, the research questions identified from the research gap will be reached.

RQ1: Does ERW have a significant influence on EIW?

[8] reveals that job dissatisfaction and cynicism due to prolonged remote working is higher for women compared to men, and working mothers are more affected compared to fathers. This led to a call for gender to be considered a moderator for the relationship between ERW and EIW. Hence reaching the research question mentioned below.

RQ2: Is the influence of ERW on EIW different for men and women employees?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Extended Remote Working (ERW)

The concept of remote working was primarily introduced by Nilles J M [9] during the early 1970s. Even though it was practiced by only a few segments of organisations [10], like IT before the COVID-19 pandemic, it became the most acceptable and cost-effective solution to manage and continue work when the pandemic arose. Later, it became a “new normal” and an important work pattern factor for many organisations across various sectors. Remote working is often called teleworking, flexible, telecommuting, or online work [11]. It is defined as a flexible work arrangement in which employees do their duties at locations that are physically separated from their company offices or production facilities, and communication and collaboration are facilitated through technology [12]. Telecommuting is becoming increasingly popular for employees to reduce their carbon footprint and save money while maintaining employment. It becomes an alternative work arrangement as they use electronic tools to connect with colleagues inside and outside the organisation [13]. It gave opportunities for new business ideas to be explored and developed. “Remote work” [14] is a broader concept that includes working from any part other than the workplace (i.e. not mandatory to be from home). Some professionals prefer remote work for tasks involving little interaction with colleagues and are more productive. In remote work, employees can work from comfortable workplaces such as home or any other place with the help of technology and perform work responsibilities without fail

[13]. Kevin M. Kniffin et al. from Harvard Business School in June 2020 said that Work From Home (WFH), virtual teams, virtual leadership, and its management are emerging changes in work practices during and after the pandemic [1]. A contemporary investigation by [15] covered that during the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., 37 percent of the work could be done from home. Services in finance, business administration, and sciences fall under this category. Medicine, farming, and customer service require face-to-face interaction with clients and patients, which is impossible in the privacy of one's own home. Many organizations are transitioning to long-term remote working plans, and many people seem to believe that remote work is the new frontier [16].

Remote work has been extended to the time and space of employees' lives. It has become difficult for employees to differentiate between work time and personal time, and remote work also mixes the job with one's personal space. Even though work from home commenced as a transitional measure to the unanticipated pandemic caused by COVID-19, as the outbreak progressed, companies began to look into how they might use it as a cost-effective, win-win solution for both employees and employers. It also resulted in more efficient workspace use inside and outside the organization. Employees and organisations have benefited and suffered due to remote work's flexibility regarding work time, environment, and approach [17], [18]. Recent articles in leading business dailies say that most (more than 71 percent) of IT employees preferred to work remotely and were not ready to return to their offices.

They were even ready to turn down promotions for the option of remote work [19],[20], and 10% of employees claimed that working from home had affected their mental health. Hence, many organisations choose a hybrid work pattern or develop a phase-by-phase plan to transition employees online to offline. The survey also says that women employees are more adversely affected by working from home than male employees in terms of their mental health [20]. Various factors influence an employee's experience with remote work. These include both personal and work-related factors. Work-related factors include organisational policies, support and trust [21], supervision, autonomy at work, the extent of workload/targets [22], and communication. [23],[24] Organisational policies and support refer to the extent of an organisation's efforts to frame policies on the nature of work, policies for new hires, taking employee preferences and operational costs into consideration in order to meet the needs of dispersed employees who experienced an abrupt reactive shift in 2020 [21].

As digital communication proficiency is closely linked to effective performance and happiness, an employee must feel comfortable using ICT-mediated interactions, and their availability and quality also matter [23]. Individual factors

include self-discipline, work-home interference, solitude [25], and procrastination [23]. Work-home interference means family interruptions at work can adversely affect the quality of work. Loss of opportunity for social gatherings, which comes with remote work's reduced face-to-face connections with colleagues' increases solitude. Procrastination is the unjustified postponement of work until a deadline. In remote work, this propensity is more prevalent [23],[26]

2.2 Employee Indifference to Workplace (EIW)

Assessing and monitoring the behaviour of employees in an organisation is a vital factor for organisational effectiveness, as the employer's behaviours and actions directly impact their performance. Employers, therefore, need to pay attention to both the employee's performance evaluation and their attitude and behaviour at work. Employee Indifference, a state where an employee becomes apathetic or disengaged from organisational goals, is one such behaviour that demands the immediate attention of the organisation to avoid slow working and the loss of employee engagement and commitment [27].

Employee indifference is when an individual is apathetic or disinterested in their role, tasks, and overall organisational goals. Disengagement, withdrawal, lack of enthusiasm, and a drop in work performance are some of the behaviours included. Such individuals may continue to do fundamental work responsibilities while demonstrating a distinct lack of proactive behaviour or dedication to the organization's overall success. Absenteeism, a general lack of initiative, and poor responsiveness to management indicate employee indifference [28]. It is critical to distinguish Emotional Intelligence (EI) from burnout because the former can result in emotional exhaustion and cynicism. At the same time, the latter frequently indicates a total disconnection from organisational goals and passive non-compliance. Organisational indifference is when a person working for an organisation does not care whether or not its goals are met or whether or not it succeeds or fails. People who repeatedly do non-challenging and tedious tasks will likely get burned out and become indifferent. [5]. According to [29], people who engage in some form of 'people work' tend to experience burnout, a syndrome characterised by emotional tiredness, depersonalisation, and a diminished sense of accomplishment.

Burnout is characterised by emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Emotional exhaustion, one of the core elements of burnout, leads to cynicism towards one's work and coworkers and reduced efficiency levels [30]. Conversely, indifference is a more widespread form of withdrawal in which workers become passive and stop caring about their jobs. Burnout and eventually indifference towards one's work can result from a lack of interest. When an individual joins an organisation with great enthusiasm, it is normal for that enthusiasm to wane over time, and the employee may develop an attitude of disinterest in their work. This stage is extremely frustrating since the

person has lost all hope of accomplishing his objectives. As a result, the person actively tries to escape from this frustration and adopts an attitude of indifference [5]. The negligent attitude of the organisation towards its employees, insufficient performance management system, lack of developmental perspective and rumors in the organisation are found to be the major causes of organisational indifference [31].

Hence, the role of governance has a major impact on creating an indifferent attitude among employees. Ahmadi & Fattahi further says that laziness, disrespect, fatigue, rumors and negative attitude towards work are the significant symptoms of indifference. The research further mentions that workplace, cultural mechanisms, management issues, training issues, incentive and welfare, laws and regulations are the causes of indifference. Lack of transparency in organisational processes and the results of their implementation also contributes to the indifferent attitude of employees. According to a study by H. Fard [32], employee indifference can be observed from five different dimensions. Indifference towards the Manager – includes maintaining a cold and very formal relationship with the manager, avoiding responding to the manager's instructions properly, ignoring the manager, and talking badly about him/her in his/her absence.

Indifference towards the Workplace – includes being irresponsible during work hours by doing personal and other things in working hours, personal use of corporate resources, irresponsible towards organisational resources, increased absenteeism, unnecessary delaying of work, nonunderstanding of department mission, vision, and goals, ready to leave an organisation and organisational dislike. Indifference towards Clients – includes limiting the services to the clients to a specific time, not responding to clients' calls and queries, and unreasonable delaying clients' work.

Indifference towards colleagues includes avoiding teamwork, keeping cold, having formal interactions with colleagues, discussing others in their absence, and ignoring colleagues when not in teamwork. Indifference towards the Job includes reduced work quality, irresponsible working, working for the sake of working, and no commitment to the job. Human resources is the prime factor in the development of an organisation. The success of an organization depends mainly on its employees [33].

Since the pandemic has physically distanced employees from their organisations to a greater extent, employers must guarantee that the remote work arrangement does not deter employees from being as motivated and committed as before. Indifference is inevitable in all organisations; no employee is immune to it. However, if they are not appropriately addressed, they can adversely influence the behavior and motivation of employees. Hence, employee indifference has become one of the most pressing HR challenges in the modern time.

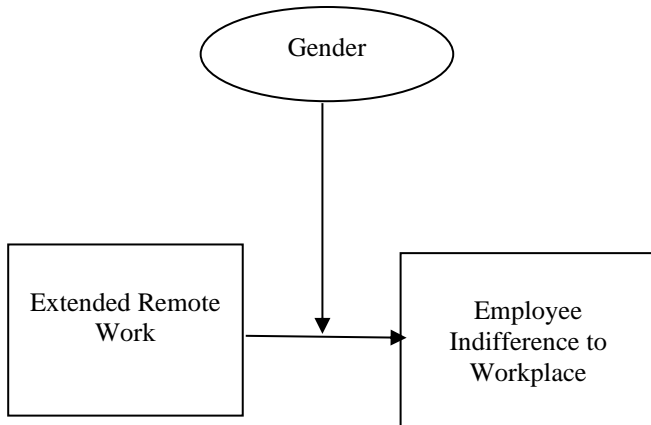


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory in order to provide a structured approach to comprehending Employee Indifference (EI) within the context of Extended Remote Working (ERW). According to COR theory, people try to keep, protect, and build resources, and they feel stressed when they think they might lose a resource or when they actually run out of resources [34]. In ERW, employees may encounter resource depletion, including declining social contacts, structure, and work-life boundaries, resulting in emotional tiredness and indifference. This theoretical framework explains the emergence of indifference as employees recognise a declining return on their invested resources in a remote work environment.

From the literature, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H1: The extent of extended remote working (ERW) has a statistically significant impact on employee indifference towards the workplace (EIW).

H2: The gender of the employee (Gender) moderates the relationship between employee indifference towards the workplace (EIW) and extended remote working (ERW).

Hypothesis 1 addresses the research question RQ1, which is identified based on the research gap. Hypothesis 2 is formulated based on the research question RQ2. H2 tries to find out whether the influence of ERW on EIW differs for male and female respondents, like in the previous literature, which says the gender gap tends to widen more with respect to burnout and cynicism during the pandemic [35, 36].

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Participants and Procedures

IT Employees working in IT companies in Kerala, India, were selected for this cross-sectional research. Remote work is not a novel concept for those in the IT sector. Many of them have probably already experienced this mode of work.

Therefore, IT employees are expected to manage remote work more efficiently than employees in other sectors. The study's objective is to assess the extent to which workers in this industry would feel disinterested in the workplace, particularly when working remotely in an entirely foreign social and psychological environment. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select the 369 employees from the IT sector for data collection. The sample includes representations of IT professionals from north, central and south Kerala. The sample selection was accomplished by emphasizing the most important IT parks in the state. The sample selection was done by concentrating on the major IT parks in the state, which include Technopark Thiruvananthapuram, Infopark Kochi, Infopark Cherthala, Infopark Thrissur, and CyberPark Kozhikode. The sample size was determined based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling formula, which ensured sufficient power for the analysis while maintaining the generalizability of the findings. The study carried out combines descriptive and analytical approaches. This research attempts to study the variables of employee indifference to the workplace and extended remote working. It also analyses the nature and extent of the association between these variables and the influence of gender on the association between them.

3.2. Questionnaire Design and Validation

The research instrument used for collecting data is an electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire contains three parts: The respondents' basic demographic information was collected in the first section. The second section contained statements on extended remote working; the third section was on employee indifference towards the workplace. The questionnaire items were adapted from validated scales in previous literature, with adjustments made for relevance to the IT sector and Indian Context.

EIW was measured using the instrument developed by [32]. It consists of 8 statements to measure EIW from the perspective of reducing individual responsibility, increasing organizational costs, and attempting to leave the workplace. ERW was measured using an adapted scale focusing on employee experiences with long term remote working. All the variables were measured using a Likert scale with five points. Employees were asked to rate how much they agreed with the assertions regarding extended remote working and how indifferent they were towards their workplace. The labels on the scale ranged from strongly agree to disagree with the statement strongly. A score of 5 indicates 'Strongly Agree' while a 1 indicates 'Strongly Disagree' [37].

3.3. Reliability and Validity

The reliability of a method reflects how consistently it produces the same results. The reliability coefficient shows how well it can be relied upon to provide meaningful inferences about the respondent's differences. [38] Cronbach's alpha value (α) was used to check the instrument's

internal consistency. It was found to be 0.771 for ERW and 0.799 for EIW, suggesting that the survey instrument has a good reliability and consistency track record [39]. Additionally, construct validity was assured through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which evaluated the variables' structure and their loadings on their respective factors. Face validity refers to how the items in the measurement instruments accurately assess the intended constructs [40]. In this study, experienced experts were asked to review the questionnaires and provide feedback on enhancing the instrument's face validity. After receiving feedback, it was revised and sent to the intended audience.

3.4. Sampling Method and Data Collection

A multistage sampling methodology was used, which included stratified and simple random sample methods. The population was initially stratified according to the geographical locations of IT parks in Kerala (north, central, and south), ensuring that the sample encompassed broad representations of IT professionals from different regions. Employees were randomly picked from each stratum to participate in the survey. This methodology guaranteed representativeness and reduced sampling bias.

The questionnaire was administered online, facilitating efficient and effective data collection during the pandemic. Electronic questionnaires facilitated an expanded geographic scope, guaranteeing the collection of replies from IT specialists in various places. Furthermore, the online questionnaire administration enhanced prompt data collecting and minimised logistical challenges. The survey was administered anonymously to promote honest feedback.

4. Data Analysis and Results

Appropriate statistical methods were applied to the data to draw inferences and conclusions. The demographic profile of the sample was described using descriptive statistical measures. The descriptive measures for the study variables (indifference to the workplace and extended remote working) were also calculated. SPSS Version 24.0 and AMOS 23 were used for data analysis. The study encompassed both descriptive statistics and advanced methodologies, including regression analysis, moderator analysis, and the evaluation of assumptions through normality tests, confidence intervals, and p-values to provide a solid statistical framework.

The association between the dependent and independent variables was determined and analysed using correlation and regression analysis. The measurement model for the ERW and EIW variables was checked using AMOS and found significant (see Tables 4 and 5). The moderating effect of the variable gender on the association between employee indifference to the workplace and extended remote working was checked using moderator analysis. Since the data met the criteria for normality and homogeneity, parametric tests were used to determine the validity of the hypotheses.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive measures for the study variables were computed. In addition to reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha, confidence intervals for each reliability estimate were computed, ensuring the estimates were precise. Demographic information is presented in Table 1, and descriptive analysis of the study variables is presented in Table 2.

From the mean percentage score analysis, the level of indifference to the workplace among IT Industry employees was average [41] at 48.39 percent (refer to Table 2). This value reflects the average level of indifference based on responses to items measuring EIW. Separately, 79.4 percent of employees prefer to work from home than work from a central office, which was obtained from a specific survey question that directly asked about their preference.

The main reasons for the preference for remote working were saving time on commutes to work, better handling of home emergencies, and more comfort and freedom to be oneself (refer to Table 3). In order to get a feel for the organisational culture, better interaction with peer groups and the opportunity to use facilities/resources and services available at the workplace were the factors that enticed employees to work in offices.

The percentages associated with each reason underscore the significance of factors contributing to the preference for remote work over office environments. This suggests a strong inclination towards remote work among IT professionals, highlighting the importance of flexible work arrangements, comfort, and personal autonomy in today's workplace dynamics.

4.2. Correlation and Regression

A Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to check the dependency of ERW on EIW. The assumptions required to carry out correlation are tested. Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to test normality, and both variables' indifference to the workplace (Shapiro-Wilk P-value 0.109) and extended remote working experience (Shapiro-Wilk P-value 0.073) are found to be normally distributed. Durbin-Watson statistic value 1.717 indicates residuals are independent. The result showed a significant positive correlation between ERW and EIW, with a correlation coefficient value $R(N=369) = 0.623$, ($p=0.004$) (refer Table 6). This indicates a moderate positive relationship between the two variables.

Regression analysis was done to assess the predictive power of ERW on EIW. The adjusted R-square value of 0.357 shows a 36% variability in EIW, as explained by ERW. In regression analysis, ERW significantly predicted EIW, with an unstandardized coefficient $\beta = 0.623$ and $t = 3.399$, $p=0.004$. The confidence interval for β ranged from 0.258 to 0.988, further supporting the robustness of the finding (refer to Table 7).

Table 1. Demographic description of the sample

| N | Gender (in %) | | Marital Status (in %) | | Working Spouse (in %) | | Age (in Years) | | | |
|-----|------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------|--------------------------|----|-------------------|---------|------------|----------|
| | Male | Female | Married | Single | Yes | No | Min_Age | Max_Age | Mean value | Std. Dev |
| 369 | 44 | 56 | 62 | 38 | 81 | 19 | 24.00 | 46.00 | 34.1250 | 4.23 |

Source: Primary data

Table 2. Mean, Standard deviation and z value for Employee Indifference to Workplace

| Variable | Mean | SD | MPS | CV | z | p value | Result | Level | |
|---|-------|------|-------|-------|---|---------|-----------|---------|--|
| EIW | 61.15 | 9.37 | 48.39 | 15.32 | 20.315 | <0.001 | Reject H0 | Average | |
| H0: The level of EIW is above 50% (MPS = 50%) | | | | | H1: The level of EIW is below 50% (MPS < 50%) | | | | |

Source: Primary data

Table 3: Factors of preference for remote working and work from office

| Work from Home | | Work from Office | |
|---|-------|--|-------|
| Factors | MPS | Factors | MPS |
| Save time on travel | 77.45 | To be a part of organizational culture | 83.8 |
| Can better manage contingencies at home | 74.5 | Interaction with peer group | 82.5 |
| More comfortable and free to be myself | 74.5 | To use facilities/resources and services available at the workplace | 80.06 |
| I can be in a casual dress code | 75 | Compromise in quality of work/be more productive | 75.5 |
| Get extra time for other activities | 71 | Better peace of mind to work | 74.5 |
| Less Supervision/reporting | 63.24 | It is challenging to manage both responsibilities together (Work & and home) | 65.26 |
| *MPS – Mean Percentage Score | | | |

Source: Primary data

Table 4. Factor Loadings - Extended Remote Working

| Items | Factor | Factor Loading | P Value | Variance Explained (%) |
|-------|--------|----------------|---------|------------------------|
| ERW1 | ERW | .746 | <0.001 | 0.557 |
| ERW2 | ERW | .810 | <0.001 | 0.656 |
| ERW3 | ERW | .839 | <0.001 | 0.704 |
| ERW4 | ERW | .764 | <0.001 | 0.584 |
| ERW5 | ERW | .853 | <0.001 | 0.728 |
| ERW6 | ERW | .788 | <0.001 | 0.621 |
| ERW7 | ERW | .728 | <0.001 | 0.530 |
| ERW8 | ERW | .701 | <0.001 | 0.491 |
| ERW9 | ERW | .682 | <0.001 | 0.465 |
| ERW10 | ERW | .901 | <0.001 | 0.812 |
| ERW11 | ERW | .858 | <0.001 | 0.736 |

Source: Primary data

Table 5. Factor Loadings - Employee Indifference to Workplace

| Items | Factor | Factor Loading | P Value | Variance Explained (%) |
|-------|--------|----------------|---------|------------------------|
| IDW1 | IDW | .650 | <0.001 | 0.423 |
| IDW2 | IDW | .676 | <0.001 | 0.457 |
| IDW3 | IDW | .630 | <0.001 | 0.397 |
| IDW4 | IDW | .699 | <0.001 | 0.489 |
| IDW5 | IDW | .738 | <0.001 | 0.545 |
| IDW6 | IDW | .986 | <0.001 | 0.972 |
| IDW7 | IDW | .697 | <0.001 | 0.486 |
| IDW8 | IDW | .973 | <0.001 | 0.947 |

Source: Primary data

Table 6. Model Summary of Extended Remote Working and Indifference to Workplace

| Model | R | R2 Value | Adjusted R2 Value | Sig. F Change | Durbin-Watson |
|--|------|----------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 | .623 | 0.388 | 0.357 | .004 | 1.717 |
| Predictors: (Constant), Extended Remote Working Dependent Variable: Indifference to Workplace | | | | | |

Source: Primary data

Table 7: Regression Co-efficient for ERW and EIW

| Model | Unstandardised Coefficients | | Standardised Coefficients | t | Sig. | 95% CI Lower | 95% CI Upper |
|---|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|--------------|--------------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | | |
| (Constant) | 33.359 | 1.871 | | 17.833 | .000 | | |
| ERW | 0.623 | 0.186 | 0.598 | 3.399 | .004 | 0.258 | 0.988 |
| Dependent Variable: Indifference to Workplace | | | | | | | |

Source: Primary data

Table 8. Moderator analysis for gender

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| | Constant | -3.375 | 1.057 | | |
| ERW | -.066 | .032 | -.052 | -2.105 | .037 |
| Gender | 16.284 | .473 | 1.873 | 34.398 | .000 |
| Interaction | .580 | .015 | 2.081 | 38.112 | .000 |
| Dependent Variable: EIW | | | | | |

Source: Primary data

4.3. Moderator Analysis for Gender

A moderator analysis is performed to test the role of gender as a moderator for the association between ERW and EIW. The results revealed that gender moderates the relationship between extended remote working and employee indifference to the workplace ($\beta = 2.081, p = 0.000, t = 38.112$) (refer to Table 8). A plot of the interaction effect shows how the relation between ERW and EIW differs for males and females. The result suggests that correlation is stronger for males than females (refer to Figure 2).

COVID era. This study significantly enhances the understanding of how extended remote working (ERW) fosters employee indifference towards the workplace (EIW). Compared to previous research, the current study illustrates how ERW distinctly affects employee behaviour and attitudes, especially in the IT sector, where remote work has become standard. This study expands on prior frameworks by undertaking more extensive statistical analyses and including gender as a moderating factor, resulting in a more complete, data-driven picture of ERW impact. This study's findings go beyond previous research by offering a more thorough understanding of employee preferences and the changing nature of the workplace culture. According to the study, 79.4 percent of IT sector employees prefer to work from home, and 48.4 percent are indifferent to their workplaces.

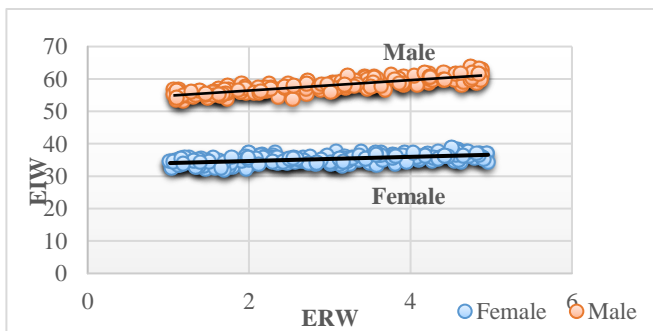


Fig. 2 Interaction Effect of Gender on ERW and EIW Relationship

5. Discussion and Implications

Human resources are currently the most unstable resources to manage. Employee indifference is a significant concept that must be investigated at the corporate level, mainly when designing new workplace factors for the post-

This supports the growing reluctance to return to traditional workspaces, pointing to a new trend in the work culture and a preference for hybrid working modes. This result is commensurate with the findings of the previous studies by [42],[20], but the current research highlights the psychological and emotional factors driving workplace indifference. This enhancement improves precision in recognising how indifference evolves in ERW and allows for more personalised actions for organisations. The study investigates the growing indifference towards physical workspaces among IT workers as remote work becomes more prevalent. The results indicate that as the duration of remote work increases, indifference

towards traditional workplaces significantly rises. In contrast to the current state-of-the-art research, which has primarily focused on the short-term effects of remote work, this study examines the long-term effects of ERW and its implications for employee attitudes. Also, it implies that prolonged remote working has started negatively affecting IT sector employees' mental health and work attitude. This is similar to the previous research findings of [43], [17], [19]. This more profound exploration of employee cynicism and disengagement makes this study more impactful than prior studies focusing solely on productivity metrics. As hybrid and distributed work models become more prevalent during digital transformation, the increased workplace indifference has important implications for organisational leaders. They need to create specific policies that address the feeling of estrangement, promote engagement, and maintain corporate culture, especially in virtual and decentralised workforces in the long run.

This research builds on previous studies [20] by statistically examining the specific influence of gender on indifference during ERW, offering more precise, actionable insights for policy-makers and HR professionals. The findings indicate that male employees are particularly susceptible to experiencing workplace indifference during ERW, suggesting that organisations could benefit from developing gender-sensitive policies to address disengagement. A study like this could explain the advantages and drawbacks of remote employment and how it affects workers' pessimistic attitudes. However, remote work is challenging for employees because of loneliness, work-home interference, absence of work-social interaction, lack of proper feedback from employers, and lack of focus on the job.

At the same time, it also has benefits like time-saving in commuting, flexibility in working hours, work-life balance, saving resources like office space cost, and other opportunity costs to both employee and employer. This trend showcases the requirement of new skills for working and the areas of focus and preparations employers need to take to keep the new generation of employees motivated, engaged, and productive. The research findings help employers effectively design the remote work environment factors to maximise employee commitment and minimise cynicism in the future. This study positions itself within the broader domain of remote work research by offering clearer statistical evidence and methodological rigour. This research enhances existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis that links psychological outcomes with practical implications in the IT industry, building on previous studies of remote work.

6. Conclusion

This research provides significant insights into the relationship between extended remote working (ERW), employee indifference towards the workplace (EIW), and the moderating effect of gender among IT professionals in Kerala, India. The findings support Hypothesis 1, demonstrating a

statistically significant impact of ERW on EIW, indicating that employees are more likely to exhibit indifference towards their workplace as the duration of remote work increases. Moreover, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed, highlighting the role of gender in moderating this association, aligning with previous literature indicating widening gender gaps, particularly concerning burnout and cynicism during the pandemic. Methodologically, the study's rigorous approach, including multistage sampling, reliability and validity checks of the research instrument, and robust data analysis using SPSS and AMOS, ensures the credibility of the findings. The research also sheds light on the preferences of IT professionals for remote work, citing reasons such as time savings, better home emergency management, and increased comfort and autonomy. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of remote work dynamics and have practical implications for organizations aiming to enhance employee satisfaction and productivity in flexible work arrangements amidst evolving workplace practices and challenges.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This research focuses solely on employee indifference to the workplace, whereas the other dimensions of employee indifference, like indifference to the job, managers, clients, and colleagues, are not considered. To fully appreciate the concept of employee indifference, it will be helpful if the other dimensions of the concepts are comprehended. This study presents significant preliminary findings regarding the growing degree of workplace indifference caused by extended remote arrangements. Despite this, a number of glaring limitations remain. Primarily, the investigation was limited to individuals employed in IT positions. Technology personnel who are inherently more productive with remote technologies may tend to disregard physical workspaces more significantly. Further research is required in various industries, such as manufacturing, healthcare, and financial services, to determine whether similar indifference effects persist with the extension of virtual working. Additionally, the results regarded extended periods of remote work as the only explanatory factor influencing decreases in workplace affinity. Nevertheless, further moderating factors probably exist that could either hasten or aggravate the development of these indifferent attitudes in practise. Unexplored among these factors are the character of the work, the number of years of employment, and pre-existing social connections with colleagues. By conducting further research, it would be possible to identify crucial modifiers that have a lasting positive or negative impact on the relationship between the duration of remote work and workplace relationships. The initial excitement of this benefit of remote work gradually fades, and the employees may eventually feel burned-out because, unlike previous remote working periods, there were restrictions during the current pandemic, such as prohibitions on public gatherings, travel, and other everyday entertainment outside the home. It would be instructive to understand how these changes affect other fields of business as well.

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