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### LOCKDOWN AND WOMEN HEALTH- A SURVEY AMONG SOUTH INDIAN EMPLOYED WOMEN

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

CoronaVirus pandemic has put almost everyone out of their normal routines. Most of the countries have announced lockdowns and almost every job has turned online. Children have started with online education. With health as an important criteria, people had to think of their daily routines in a new way. Lockdown in Countries like India is really unimaginable. Being a big Country with a very high population, it is a difficult task for the people to cope up with their daily routines and take care of their health as well. Lockdown ironically has increased both physical strain as well as mental strain for the men and women of the family, especially for the women. The pressure is high clearly as they are taking care of domestic chores, children as well as their jobs. This was a questionnaire-based study using an online survey portal called "survey planet." An e-form was circulated among 102 employed women from South India, who had to manage their profession, household chores, kids, family's health during lockdown. The data were collected during July 2020. The Questionnaire was prepared which included questions to assess their knowledge, awareness and perception towards women's health, both mental and physical health amidst the pandemic. The Questions were framed in such a way to create awareness on the stress and plight of employed women during lockdown. Results were obtained using proper statistical methods, and thus, the opinion on online education was studied. When asked whether they find it difficult to manage their family during the pandemic, uniformly all the participants (100%) have said that they find it very difficult to manage their family during a pandemic. When asked whether the participants feel depressed, a majority of (70%) of them have accepted that the uncertainty has created a feel of depression in them. It is time that the other members of the family also should realize

the troubles faced by the employed women during lockdown and try to spare them some quality time to keep them fit. A feel of loneliness and anxiety can be removed if all the members work and spend time together. Thus, this survey was done to spread awareness on the importance of women's health amidst the lockdown.

## INTRODUCTION

CoronaVirus pandemic has put almost everyone out of their normal routines. Most of the countries have announced lockdowns and almost every job has turned online. Children have started with online education. Each and every sector has undergone lots of changes. Economy has had a bad hit, again affecting all levels of people (Rossi et al., 2020).

With health as an important criteria, people had to think of their daily routines in a new way. Lockdown in Countries like India is really unimaginable. Being a big Country with a very high population, it is a difficult task for the people to cope up with their daily routines and take care of their health as well (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Health does not mean physical health alone, it includes mental health also. Since, COVID 19 is a highly infectious disease and every day increase in the number keeps each and everyone in a stressful condition. (Pappa et al., 2020) At a time, people have to fight the spreading disease, economic challenges, employment challenges and health challenges. (Rasmussen et al., 2009) If the family has senior citizens, again it adds on to mental stress and panic.

Women in a family are usually the most affected. They have to take care of themselves and each and every family member. Since the routines of the entire family have changed all of the sudden, it is highly unmanageable for the women of the family. Due to lockdown, everyone started staying at home, men, children and other members of the family (King et al., 2015). Satisfying the demands of each and everyone of the family the entire day is a task for the woman. If the woman is an employed woman, additionally she needs to address her employer as an online or work from home. (Sriharan et al., n.d.)

Psychological stress is the major thing each and every woman faces during this pandemic. Thinking of the financial hurdles which have been imposed due to the lockdown is the major one. Monthly commitments especially loans and EMI stands big. Another major stress is the children's education. (Carneiro, 2020) Due to lockdown, schools and colleges are closed indefinitely, thus children are mostly away from their normal chores, their daily routines like school, extra curricular activities and sports are totally lost. Again taking care of the children, without sending them to any classes and school is a real big challenge for the woman of the house (Doyal, n.d.).

Apart from all the rest, the prime thing to be taken care of is health. Woman of the family is responsible to take care of the health of the other family members. (Lohm et al., 2014) When the entire family is at home, cooking usually becomes doubled than the normal day (Baker et al., 2020). Due to lockdown, all the provision and groceries needs to be purchased and stored as

a whole. Daily requirements like vegetables and fruits also need extra washing and the whole cooking process needs lots of time. (Matvienko-Sikar et al., 2020) Lockdown and Pandemic situation has made restrictions for household help too. Most of the big apartments don't allow household help and again the woman of the family has to do all the household chores without any help. (Malik and Naeem, 2020)

Panic towards the pandemic is found common among everyone, with an increasing number of cases everyday, taking immune booster foods like ginger, pepper etc has become a priority. (Galanakis, 2020) Again, it falls on the head of the woman, who has to concentrate in boosting the immunity of the entire family. All these add up to increased stress. Overeating on one side, less mobility due to lockdown, panic and stress all results as a peril for the woman's health. (Urquhart and Mihalynuk, 2011) Women always keep their requirements at the end though she is the decision maker for the most the issues in the family. Employed women face added stress due to work from home and also due to the uncertainty of their regular income. (Ammar and Busby, 2020)

Regular income or certainty in financial situations always determines the stress level of the family. As COVID lockdown has initiated uncertainty in many of the sectors, many people have lost jobs and people who have jobs got only less than half of the salary. Again it is a hurdle for the women, where she needs to plan for the entire financial situation of the house which includes, loans, EMI, monthly expenses, house rent, medical expenses, education etc. Lockdown ironically has increased both physical strain as well as mental strain for the men and women of the family, especially for the women. The pressure is high clearly as they are taking care of domestic chores, children as well as their jobs. Due to this, most of the working women face another problem that is increased weight gain. Increased weight gain suddenly may lead to other complications such as diabetes, hypertension etc. It is prime time for the women in the whole world to understand the necessity of keeping fit amidst lockdown. This survey aims at understanding various troubles faced by women in her day to day life during lockdown.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This was a questionnaire-based study using an online survey portal called "survey planet." An e-form was circulated among 102 employed women from South India, who had to manage their profession, household chores, kids, family's health during lockdown. The data were collected during July 2020. The Questionnaire was prepared which included questions to assess their knowledge, awareness and perception towards women's health, both mental and physical health amidst the pandemic. The Questions were framed in such a way to create awareness on the stress and plight of employed women during lockdown. Results were obtained using proper statistical methods, and thus, the opinion on online education was studied.

The study subjects were recruited on a voluntary basis. The inclusion criteria required participants to be active, well spoken and employed mothers of a

secondary school going kid..The exclusion criteria included physical deformities , without a child in school , unemployed and chronic diseases.

### **Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument which was a questionnaire was prepared after extensive review of the existing literature. The questionnaire was reviewed and amendments were made to improve clarity of the questions to eliminate ambiguous responses. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 15 questions. The questionnaire was shared to the participants using an online survey platform.

### **Data Analysis**

Only completed surveys were taken for analysis and the incomplete ones were eliminated. The statistical test used is descriptive statistics. All the responses obtained were tabulated and reliability of the data was checked. The data was statistically analysed.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

Employed mothers of South India were involved in the survey. When asked whether they find it difficult to manage their family during the pandemic, uniformly all the participants(100%) have said that they find it very difficult to manage their family during a pandemic. The question was more general and from the answer it can be easily predicted that employed women are more stressed to manage their family during lockdown. Since the survey was taken among employed women, they were asked whether they work online or go to their respective offices, so 100% of the participants have told that they work online. Online jobs and the advancement in technology is certainly a boon during a pandemic situation. If there is no possibility of online mode many would have lost their jobs. Due to the sudden announcement of lockdown, employers made almost all the jobs work from home. There were no proper rules followed and thus the employees were left to work for more number of hours. Since everyone was at home, the situation was taken for granted and job insecurity also added to it. Thus most employed people all around the world worked for more number of hours during lockdown. In the current survey too, 80% of the participants have told that they work more number of hours during lockdown. In Spite of working for more number of hours, many of them were not paid properly. The situation was taken granted from the employer side. When asked about their salary, around 40% of the participants have told that they weren't paid with full salary and their salary was reduced due to lockdown. There was a lot of uncertainty around employment and salary. When asked about their online job, 50% of the participants find it very difficult(Figure 1) and another 50% of them have told that they can manage. None of them have found it easy, though the option was also provided. The reason can be the increased number of hours of work and also the associated stress. The lockdown has made all the members of the family to stay at home, if not children would have gone to school and both the parents would have gone for work. Such a situation where all the members of the family were together in the house for a longer period of time is generally a different and unusual situation. Though 40% of the participants have told that they find it difficult to manage, a majority of 60% of the participants have accepted that

they enjoy as a family as it is a very rare circumstance where they all stay together for many days. When it comes for the employed women, they need to balance both the household work as well as their work from home. Since house maids were also not allowed during the pandemic and all the members stayed at home and apart from that the increased workload from their employer, everything together added stress for most of the women. About 80% of participants think that both the household and office work has increased many folds (Figure 2) during the lockdown and they all feel stressed out to manage the same. From the time lockdown was announced, women of the family has a paramount job of checking the inventory for the household requirements, which includes provision, fruits, vegetables, eatables, medicines etc and manage to purchase for days together and stock it properly. It is not just the purchase, the most tiresome part of this activity is washing and storing properly the things which were purchased. Due to the increased spread of infection, all the purchase needed to be washed and sanitised properly. Thus, a majority of 70% of the participants have accepted that they found it difficult to manage (Figure 3) sanitise and stock up things for the entire family. There were few participants who had their family members help them in this task and thus got their stress reduced. The next prime task for the women in a family is their children's education. Due to lockdown all the educational institutes were closed indefinitely and children were left with no school. Thus most of the urban women were more stressed towards it, some schools started with online classes, but still to compensate for the loss, most of the women started teaching children and thus added to increased stress. In the current survey too, 80% of the participants (Figure 4) were totally stressed about their child's education and their future. Again, lack of proper schooling and other special classes makes the child more lazy and unmanageable. Almost 40% of the working women find it very difficult to manage their kids during this lockdown. No schools and other coaching classes on one side, increased infection and pandemic situation on the other side thus makes the women of the family to be stressed. Most of the employed women have their own network of friends and colleagues with whom they share their joy and sorrow, and feel as a family. For most of them, it is a letout. Due to lockdown, there is increased work pressure from both household and workplace, they miss out on their own quality time and thus most of the employed women feel missed out and lonely as they are not able to meet their friends and colleagues. In this survey about 50% of the participants felt lonely (Figure 5) and 40% of the participants felt lonely and missed out at times. Above all these is the news about the increasing spread of COVID infection among the locality. The entire lockdown has been announced for the sake of protecting from the infection spread. Women especially the employed women amidst the increased stress from all the corners are always worried and feel agile in protecting the family from getting infected. Thus the news about the prevailing situation will definitely put them into more and more worried situations. Thus 100% of the participants have accepted that they feel anxious about your family's health when you hear about increased spread of COVID 19. Among all these multiple tasking, it is the women's health which has been taken a toss. Mounting pressure from all the sides such as household, work place, children and family health, collectively increases cortisol level and adds on to their weight gain. Weight gain during the middle ages is definitely not

safe for anyone, especially to women. This may land up in other clinical conditions too. About 80% of the participants have declared that they have put on weight during the lockdown, (Figure 6) which is certainly a hazard for their health. When asked about doing regular exercise and yoga among the participants a majority of (80%) them don't find time (Figure 7) to do exercise as there were other chores which take up all the time of their day. When the situation goes beyond control and extends for months together, it not only builds anxiety but also increases mental pressure. When asked whether the participants feel depressed, a majority (Figure 8) of (70%) of them have accepted that the uncertainty has created a feel of depression in them.

Women in a family usually take care of all the needs of each and every member of the family. Due to pandemic the government has announced lockdown and because of that the entire lifestyle has been changed. Especially for employed women the situation is challenging. They need to work online, where the time bound has been removed, thus the number of hours they work from has increased, apart from this even the daily chores seem to be a difficult task. There is no house maid and due to lockdown every single requirement of the family has to be purchased, sanitized and stored in advance. The inventory maintenance, purchase and stocking has turned into a paramount job. (Larionov and Mudło-Głagolska, n.d.) Added to all these the education of the children adds more stress as the schools are closed and started with online classes, children stay at home and need extra care and attention. Apart from all these, increased stress results in increased weight gain and at the end of the day most of the women were left with no time to take care of them personally. (Prime et al., 2020) Doing exercise and yoga for themselves is actually not possible. Most of them miss out their workspace friends and feel lonely. Most of the women were unable to take care of all the family members, since from the day lockdown was announced everyone stayed at home and the demand to serve them also increased simultaneously. The increase in the number of infections everyday also makes the women become more anxious. At the end, the other members of the family must realise the stress and anxiety felt by the employed women. It is high time that they should be given some leisure so that both the mental and physical health can be restrained.

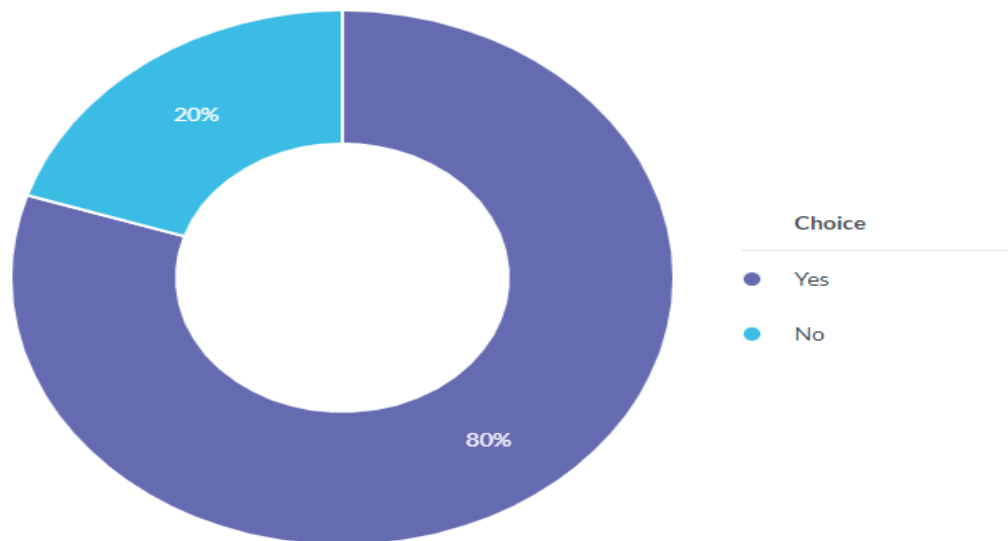


Figure 1: Pie chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on whether they work more number of hours during online work , where 80% (Navy blue) of the participants has accepted that they work more during work from home.

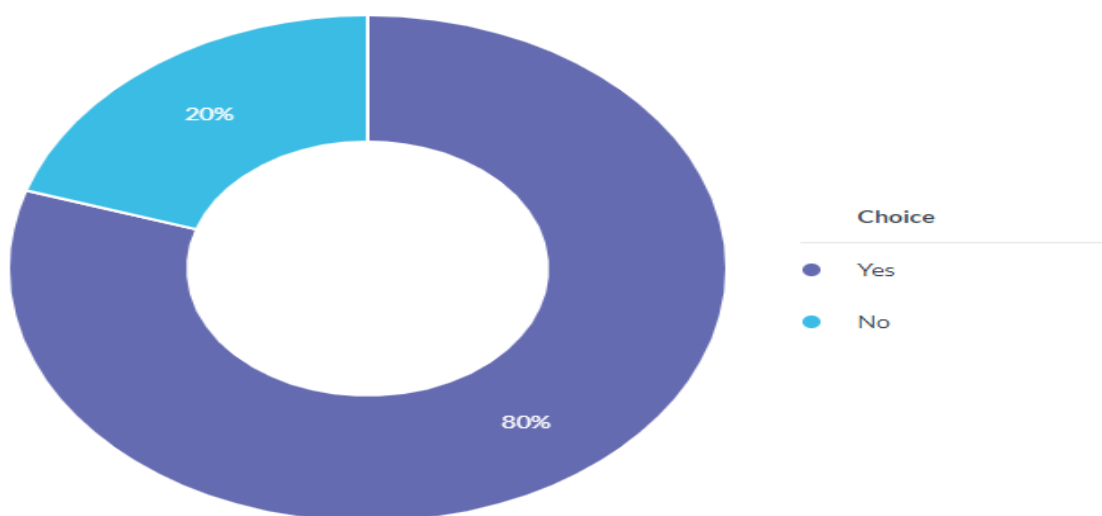


Figure 2: Pie chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on increased household and office work during lockdown, where 80%( Navy blue) of the participants has accepted that their household and office work has increased many folds during lockdown.

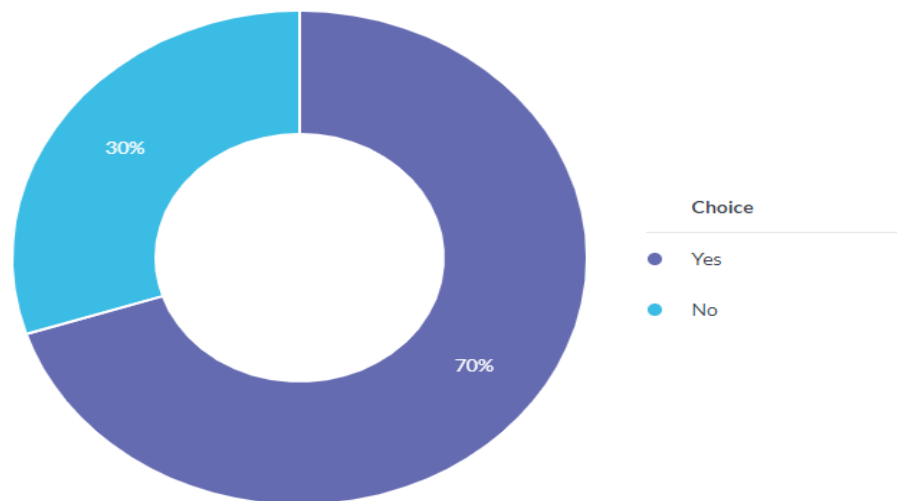


Figure 3: Pie chart represents the distribution of participants on their opinion on whether they feel stressed to buy , sanitize and stock the household requirements such as provision, vegetables, fruits, medicines, eatables etc, where 70%(Navy blue) of the participants find it difficult to buy the requirements as a bulk, sanitize and stock for further use.

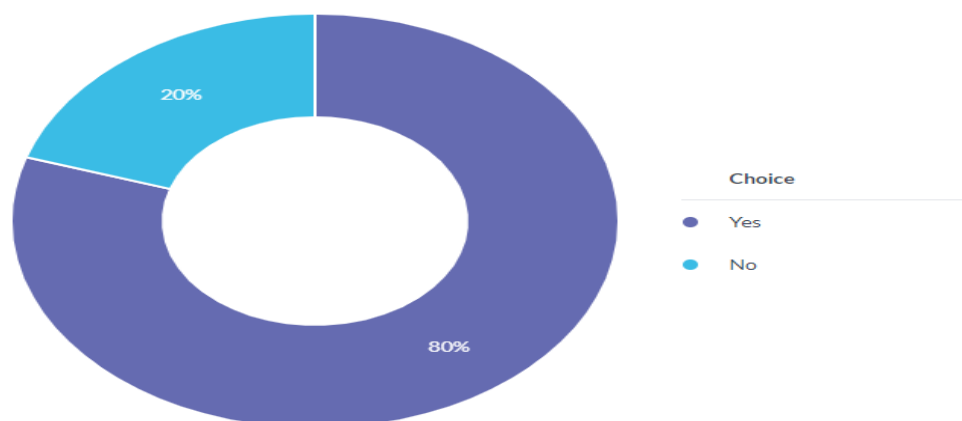


Figure 4: Pie chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on their children's education , where 80%(Navy blue) of the participants feel stressed about their children's education, as the schools were closed indefinitely due to lockdown.



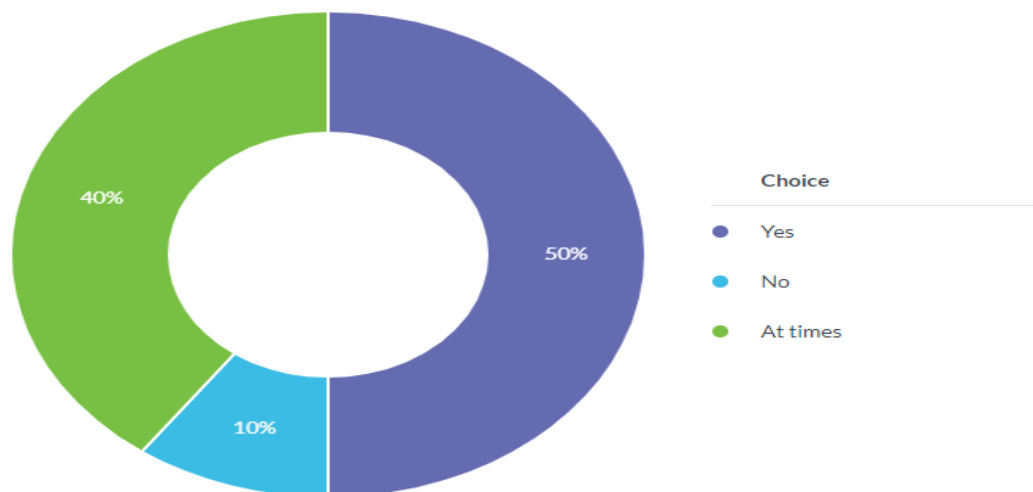


Figure 5: Pie chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on how they felt missing without seeing their loved ones and colleagues due to lockdown, where 50% (Navy blue) of the participants felt lonely and missed out, 40% (green) of them felt lonely at times when they think of their friends.

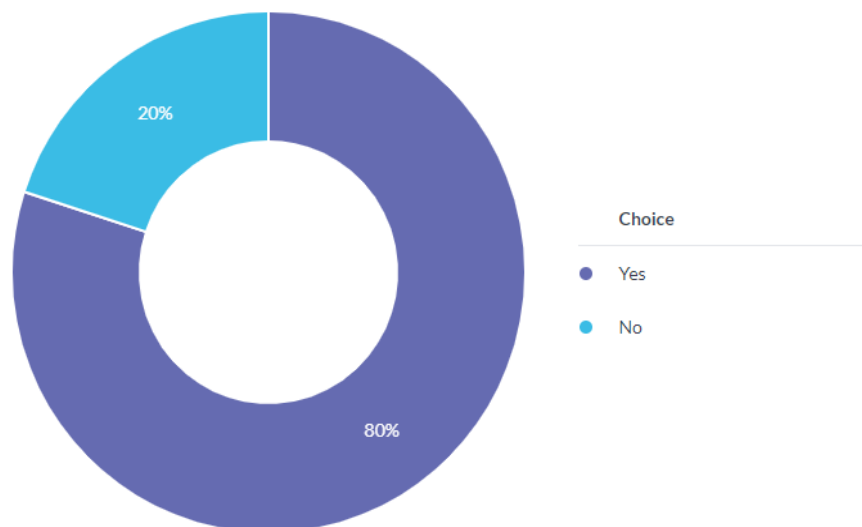


Figure 6: Pie chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on weight gain during lockdown, where 80% (Navy blue) of the participants felt that they had put on weight as they lacked physical activity and also due to mounting stress.

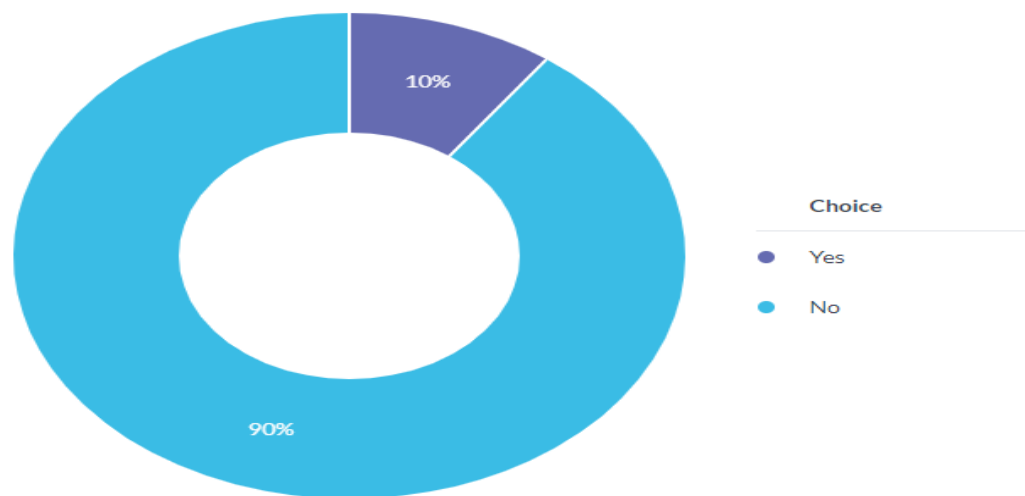


Figure 7: Pie chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on whether they find time to keep them fit and do exercise amidst lockdown where, 90 % ( light blue) of the participants have accepted that they don't find time to exercise and keep themselves fit owing to increased work pressure during lockdown.

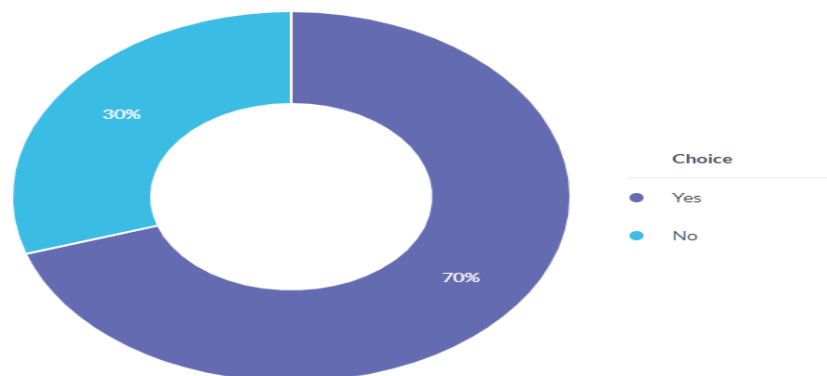


Figure 8: Pie chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on how they feel emotionally during lockdown where, a majority of (70%) ( navy blue) the participants have felt depressed during lockdown owing to the mounting pressure and workload from household, children , family and workplace.

## CONCLUSION

As the lockdown has increased stress and work pressure from all the sides such as household, workplace , financially , towards education for children,

health status etc, this has led to the mounting pressure , stress and anxiety especially among the employed women. It is time that the other members of the family also should realize the troubles faced by the employed women during lockdown and try to spare them some quality time to keep them fit. A feel of loneliness and anxiety can be removed if all the members work and spend time together. Thus, this survey was done to spread awareness on the importance of women's health amidst the lockdown.

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