

Life in a pandemic: a report card

Familial ties improved for urban Indians but many youngsters also faced anxiety and loneliness, finds the latest YouGov-Mint-CPR Millennial Survey

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NEW DELHI

The covid-19 pandemic has disrupted nearly every aspect of human existence. Lifestyle changes during the lockdown made some happier, others not so much. The latest **YouGov-Mint-CPR Millennial Survey** found that family relationships improved largely, yet many are no longer excited about working from home. Stress levels and anxiety shot up for youngsters and a majority longed to meet friends or go on holidays.

The survey, held in October and November, asked a range of questions about life during the lockdown to nearly 10,000 respondents across 203 cities and towns of the country. Income, age and gender had a significant role in how Indians reacted to some of the shocks of the pandemic, the survey found.

First, the positives. A majority of respondents (62%) felt that their relations with family members had improved since the lockdown. Engagement with nature increased for most and so did concern for personal health. Post-millennial respondents were more likely to report an improvement on these two counts, the survey data showed (see chart 1).

Nostalgia for the pre-covid life was clear among urban Indians. Nearly everyone said they had missed some aspect of social life during the lockdown. Meeting with friends and family topped this list, but more than 40% respondents also reported missing going to work or college. The older generation, or pre-millennials, were more likely than post-millennials to miss social gatherings with friends and family. This generation was also more likely to miss travel and going on vacations.

The survey was conducted jointly by the Indian arm of the global market research firm YouGov, Mint, and the Delhi-based think tank Centre for Policy Research (CPR). Roughly half of the respondents were millennials (aged 24-39). The rest were post-millennials (aged 18-23) and pre-millennials (above 39). This was the fifth of a series of bi-annual surveys aimed at examining the aspirations, anxieties and attitudes of India's digital natives (see chart 2).

While social life stopped during the lockdown, work did not. The remote-work reality has led to far-reaching changes in organizational strategies, some of which may outlive the current crisis.

Out of the 5,842 respondents who were employed, more than half were still working from home at the time of the survey. This was true for most sectors, but particularly so for workers in the information technology, media, and education spaces. Sectors such as retail, healthcare, automobile, and utilities were exceptions to this trend.

Women were more likely than men to be still continuing with remote work arrangements. While 23% of the male respondents had returned to full-time physical office, this share was 15% for women (see chart 3).

However, the experience of working from home was not particularly positive for everyone.



A residential building in Malad in Mumbai on 31 March 2020. The survey found there was nostalgia for the pre-covid life among urban Indians, with nearly everyone saying they had missed some aspect of social life during the lockdown.

Fewer than half (45%) want the practice to continue. The household environment indeed made work safer for most people, but also led to greater office workload (81%), with 60% reporting difficulty in striking a balance with household chores.

No sector-wise trends were evident to suggest that dissatisfaction was exclusive to any specific kinds of jobs. There were no income-related patterns either. Nearly all classes felt similarly burdened (see chart 4). However, there was one noticeable trend.

Those still working from home felt better about remote work than those who were back to the office full time. This indicates that the choice may have been voluntary after the lockdowns were lifted and those who disliked the experience have returned to normal workday routines.

Post-millennials had a worse experience on nearly all fronts of remote work than pre-millennials. Men were

Respondents who earn less reported greater worry about money or employment. Loneliness, though, was more a function of age. Post-millennials were nearly 10 percentage points more likely to feel lonely as compared to pre-millennials (see chart 5).

The anxiety has shown in how people feel about their mental health. More than a quarter (28%) of the respondents felt it had worsened in the pandemic period.

There was some age-wise difference here, as the figure varied from 25% for pre-millennials to 29% for post-millennials. Among those who felt more lonely or more worried, this figure was as high as 40%.

Across age and gender groups, post-millennial women were most likely to report a deterioration in mental health (see chart 6).

However, only 30% of the respondents who found themselves in poorer mental health sought some form of trained professional help such as counselling.

This figure was remarkably stable across regions, genders, and age groups. The often-ignored but widespread mental health fallout of the pandemic has highlighted the abysmal lack of awareness and access to

trained professionals.

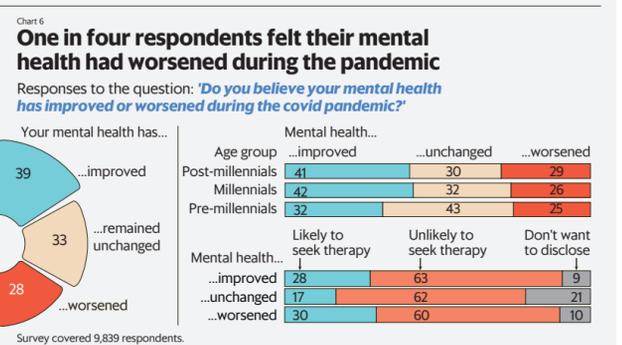
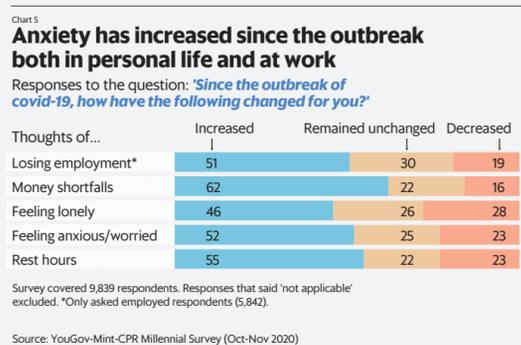
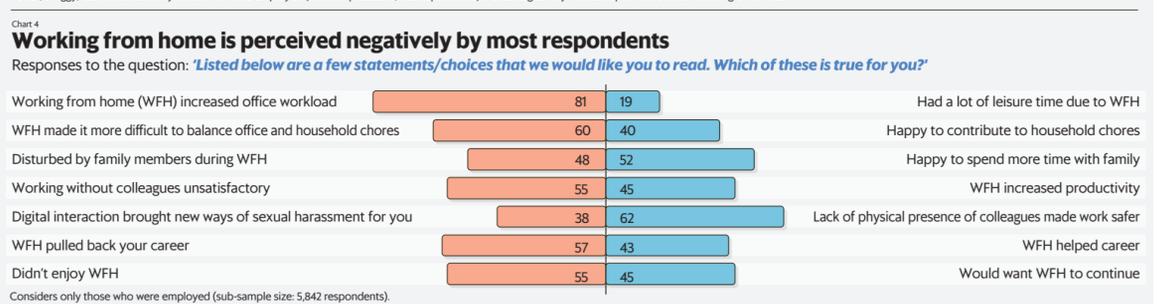
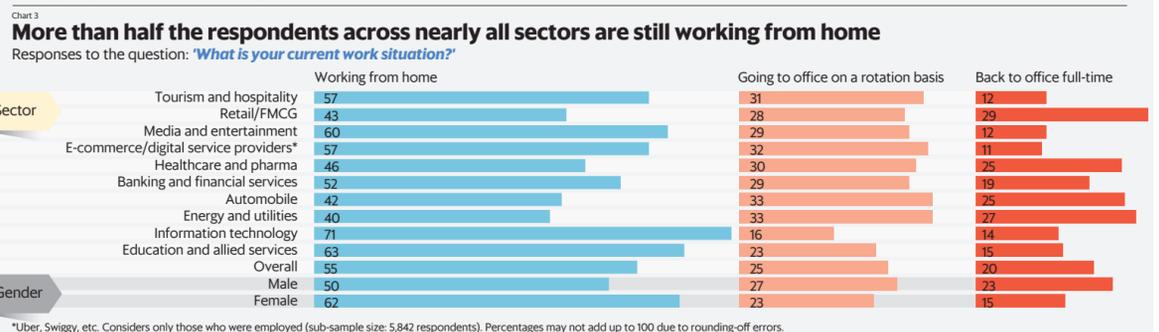
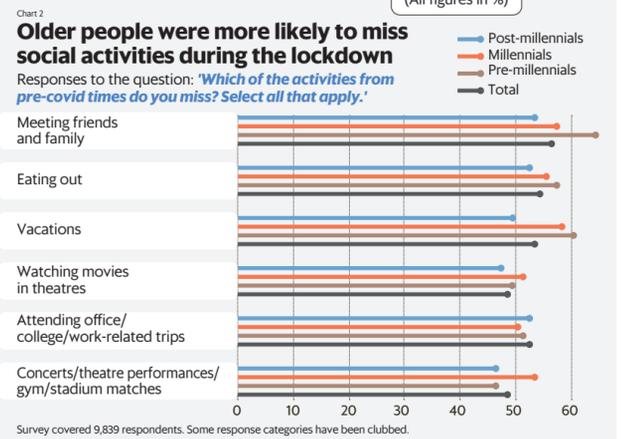
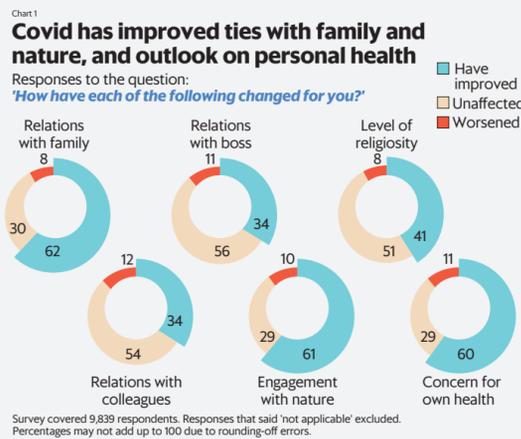
Socio-cultural changes of the covid-era can have far-reaching consequences. Architectural designs of office and home spaces, and technological shifts in how we communicate, are already underway to ensure efficiency and health safety. As the new year begins, it's clear that many of the effects could continue spilling over to the family space, office relations, and social life.

This is the third of a five-part data journalism series on how the pandemic has impacted India's digital natives. The first part looked at the unequal impact of job and income losses in urban India, and the second part looked at how Indians are tackling financial insecurity.

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