

## **WELL-BEING OF WOMEN WORKING IN ONLINE BUSINESS: RESULTS OF AN EXPERT SURVEY**

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### **Abstract**

This article focuses on the well-being of women engaged in online businesses. The main objective of the study is to investigate whether there is positive impact of flexible working conditions on the Internet on various aspects of women's well-being. The research methodology is based on the theory of the work – life balance. The main research method is distance expert survey. The author's questionnaire consisting of 22 questions was used as a research tool. The questionnaire aims to identify the main indicators of well-being of women working in Russian online business. The authors identified as indicators of well-being: income level, professional development, quality of personal and work life, the availability of free time. The selection of experts was based on an analysis of specialized groups on the Internet. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained, high indicators of well-being were identified regarding income level and quality of personal life. Low rates are revealed regarding the availability of free time. The obtained results confirmed the presence both of negative and positive factors of online work, as well as prospects of further research in the field of well-being of women working in online business.

**Key words:** online business, work-life balance, women, digitalization, well-being

**JEL Code:** J01, J16, J28

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### **Introduction**

An internet employment is actively developing due to the wide spread of the information technologies in society. Internet reduce the significance of economies of scale and the minimum economic size of operation, hence enabling profitability with a small turnover (Reuschke and Mason, 2020). The internet business is a labor activity based on the use of the Internet resource to perform work, conduct labor communication and other activities in order to obtain any payment. If we look at the history of remote employment and freelancing in 1970, we can see that this activity mainly covered the IT sphere and a large proportion of employees working re-

motely were men (Malyshev, 2018). Over time, more and more professions have become implemented in one way or another in the Internet space, so at the moment, Internet employment is available equally for men and women.

Many researchers have linked the Internet with the innovative forms of employment. Today employment through the Internet includes more and more segments of the population. Kraus S., Palmer C., Kailer N., Kallinger F.L., Spitzer J. write that "digital entrepreneurship is of high topicality as technological developments and advances in infrastructure create various opportunities for entrepreneurs; society's great attention to new digital business models is opposed to very little research regarding opportunities, challenges and success factors of digital entrepreneurship" (Kraus et al., p.353, 2019). The scientists note that there are different reasons for operating a business from home such as cost-minimization, the nature of the business which does not require commercial premises, and convenience (minimizing travel time) (Vorley and Rodgers. 2012).

Some authors point out that home-based work are convenient for women with children because it provides a better work-life balance and quality of life (Reuschke, 2019, Ekinsmyth, 2011, Wyncarczyk and Graham, 2013). The success of combining several social roles (mother, wife, employee, etc.) depends on the possibility to achieve a work-life balance. The authors founded a number of studies on the relationship between working and personal time. According to the results of a study by the Organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD) in 2014, conducted among 35 countries, it was founded that Russia was one of the countries with the highest number of working hours per year (1982 hours, median - 1700 hours). At the same time, the level of life satisfaction was only 73%. This indicator is indirectly associated with a high employees' work load, which also affects their imbalance of working and personal time.

The study made by PGi (a leading provider of software services) in 2014 showed that 80% of remote workers reported higher moral satisfaction, 82% said that it helped to reduce their stress level, and 69% reported the decline of absenteeism (Loubier, 2017).

The theory of the distance labor market is at the stage of the formation: the very first empirical data are published; the interesting models and concepts on the problems of online employment are emerging. But it is obviously that the practical lack of a legal framework remains a significant problem. Today there are no regulations of the Internet work as a special form of employment in Russian legislation. Therefore, the rights of participants in such relationships are regulated by the general labor legislation and as a rule such employees are not sufficiently protected. More over a special attention should be paid to the women's employment

using Internet resources. Some studies devote to female employment and the correlation with the parenting (Tonkikh and Pesha. 2019) but there is no one about female employment in Internet in Russian.

## **1 The research methods and the results**

The authors' made an attempt to create a socio-economic "portrait" of women who have children and work in the Internet business and to find out the women's attitude to the conditions of employment in the Internet. The main goal of the study was to test the hypothesis about the positive impact of flexible working conditions on the characteristics and results of combining paid and unpaid parental work.

The research methodology is based on the postulates of the work-life balance theory. The main research method is an expert survey of a focus group included the women-mothers working in the Internet business. The authors used the questionnaire consisting of 22 questions made in the Google form. The survey was conducted using on-line technologies. The questionnaire was sent to the experts via email, what's app. Some experts were get the questionnaire to their personal accounts in the social networks. The experts' selection was based on several channels. The first one is the content analysis of specialized groups on the Internet, the second one is the participants of the professional communities and conferences, the third one is the personal contacts and the "snowball" method. 32 women took part in the survey. The obtained results confirmed the further development and research in the field of the women's Internet employment.

Well-being it is determined as an integral part of living a fulfilling and flourishing life and is intimately related to people's ability to work, maintain positive relationships, and experience positive emotions (Wiklund et al., 2019). For the qualitative study of women's well-being, the questions were grouped into the several blocks that directly or indirectly characterize the satisfaction with the women's work-life balance working in the Internet business. Work-life balance concept recently gained attention due to its relevance and importance to all employees, despite of their relationship status, family size, and number of children (Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard, 2018). We are supposed that the satisfaction with each of them means that the women's work-life balance has been achieved.

### **1.1 The women's satisfaction with a job success and an income level**

The different age groups of women participate in the Internet business (Table 1) but the most

popular this business among the women of the most effective age (from the point of view of the theory of human capital) from 30 to 49 years old.

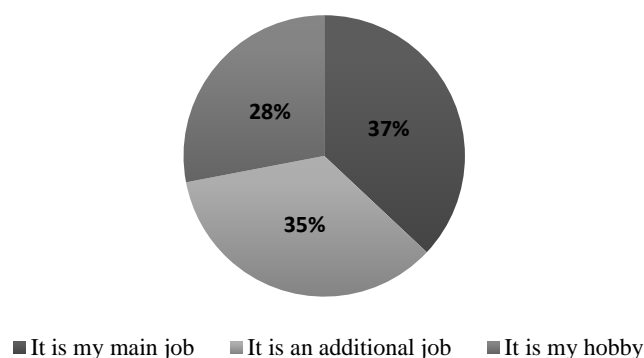
**Tab. 1: The age of women participated in the Internet business**

Age	%
16-29	18
30-49	76
50 and above	6

Source: authors field study results

Every third woman notes that the Internet job is considered as the main job (37 %) or as an additional income (35 %). 28 % of respondents implement their hobbies through the Internet (Figure1).

**Fig. 1: How the Internet job is considered by women**



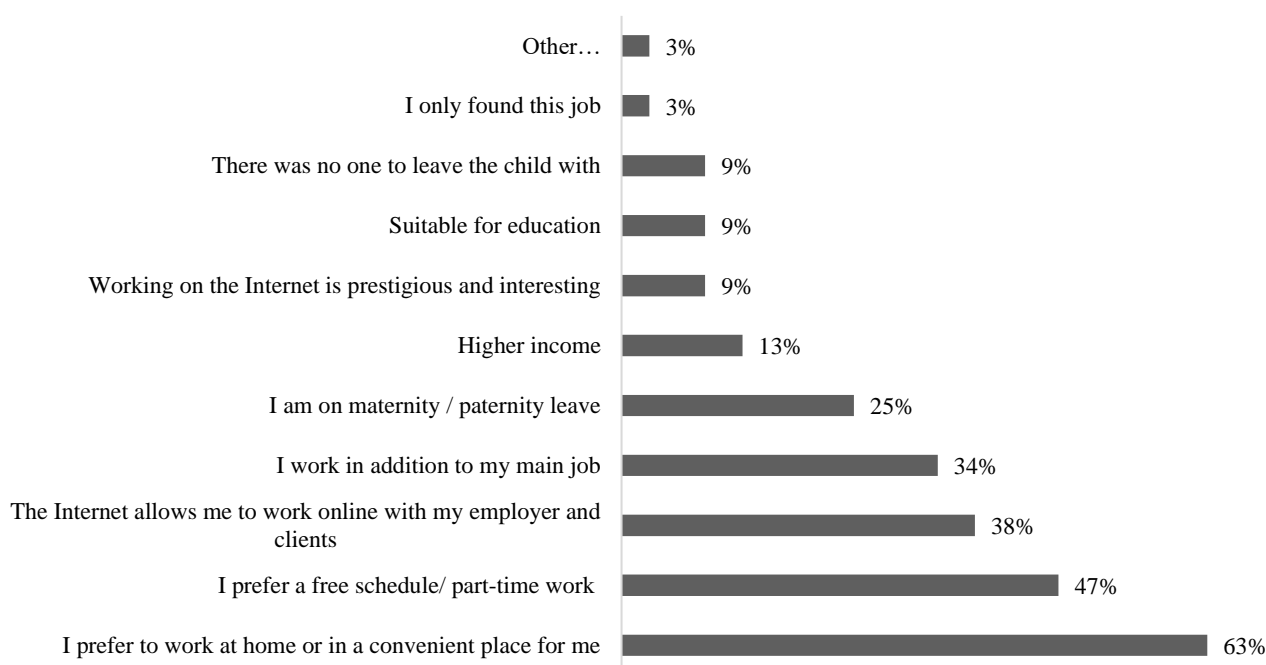
Source: authors field study results

More than a half notice that the Internet job allow them to plan their own work schedule. 45% of respondents have been working in the Internet for more than 3 years, 70% independently regulate their labor activity, being either self-employed (50%) or business owners (20%). Speaking about the financial component, about 60% of women report that their income level was increased when they begin to work in the Internet. From one point of view it can be due to the fact that the woman has additional activity to the main job, which undoubtedly increases the total income. On the other hand, this may be due to the fact that woman changes the standard type of employment (office work) in favor of the activity that is interested to her.

Factors that influence business people to use the Internet need to be identified in order

to help them to choose the best medium to their business activities (Muhaini, Ahmad, 2018). Analyzing the reasons for the women's transition to the Internet business (Figure 2), we can see that the most popular factor is the opportunity to work from home or to work in the comfortable conditions (63% respondents). The free work schedule is noted by 47% of women and 38% say that thanks to the Internet, it is possible to work remotely and communicate with a large number of clients. Thus, the majority of women see the large number of the opportunities in the Internet employment, preferring the distance work to the office one. In addition, the distance job is a good solution to those who take care about children (about 25% of women have moved to the Internet business for this reason).

**Fig. 2: The reasons for choosing an online job**

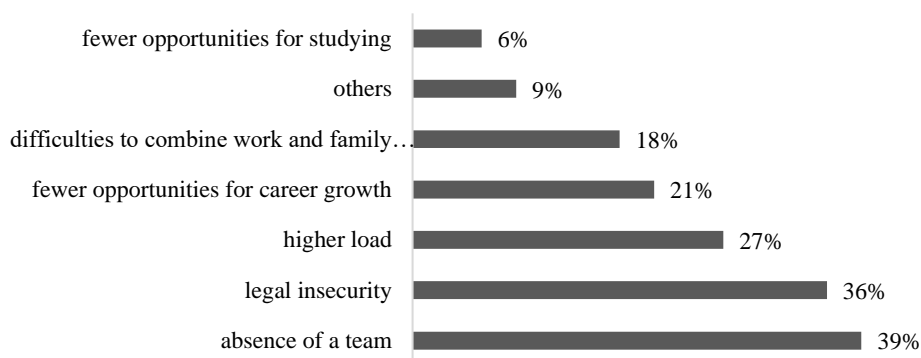


Source: authors field study results

The pyramid of advantages of working on the Internet demonstrates the high social effectiveness of the conditions of the Internet work in terms of the possibility of combining it with the performance of women's parental functions. Flexible employment conditions give the opportunity to the women to devote more time to their children and their development. This conclusion is supported by the results of the answer to the question about the disadvantages of working in the Internet business. Problems with combining the Internet work and the family responsibilities are at the end of the disadvantages' rating, ranked from the maximum value to

the minimum (Figure 3).

**Fig. 3. Rating of disadvantages of working in the Internet business in comparison with traditional employment**



Source: authors field study results

In the field "Other" the respondents wrote the different versions, which can be united into three groups. The first one: the respondents do not see any disadvantages in their employment at all. The second group: the responses noted the lack of life communication. The third one: the respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with the variable level of income.

So the analysis of the first block's answers allows us to conclude that in the conditions of the Internet employment, women are satisfied with the ratio between their job and income. The schedule flexibility is a key advantage over the traditional employment, the independent time planning also provides more opportunities for professional development.

### **1.2 The women's satisfaction with a relationship with the spouse/partner after the transition to the Internet business**

The majority of the surveyed women (66%) are married, less than 7% of women live with a partner without registration, and 28% of the respondents are unmarried. The questionnaire also asked respondents to answer the question: "How did the work in the Internet business affect your relationship with your husband/partner?".

More than 40% of women did not notice any positive or negative changes in their personal relationships, about 17% of the respondents noted improvements. About 7% of women mentioned the deterioration of relationships. Based on the results of the survey, it can be concluded that the distance work of the women-mothers does not improve relations with their husband/partner, but also does not create the conflicts.

### **1.3 The women's work-life balance**

Work-life balance involving two key dimensions: engagement in work life and non-work life and minimal conflict between social roles in work and non-work life (Joseph and Lee, 2017). A woman's personal life consists of free time to meet her own needs (for example she would like to go to a beauty salon, a theater and a concert or to watch TV). According to the survey's results 18% of the women note that they have more free time thanks to the distance work. This is due to the economy of travel time (65% of women choose it); the ability to plan their own time, taking into account personal needs (78%). However, 52% of surveyed women do not have enough time for themselves, recreation and socializing. Less than 40% of women agree that they can find time to do all these activities due to the Internet job. Half of the women say that they have the opportunity to study. So it can be concluded that the Internet business negatively affects the personal life of a woman-mother. There is a violation of her personal interests.

### **1.4 The parenting of the women worked in the Internet**

More than 93% of the surveyed women have children (74% have one child and 26% have two or more children). 55% of the respondents say that the Internet job will have a positive impact on increasing the number of children in families, while every third woman do not see any connection between these things.

One of the leading advantages of the Internet business is the ability to spend more time with children and family (56% of women chose it). More than a half of the women successfully combines a work with the household chores (59%), and they are also more likely to go to a theater, a concerts and other cultural events with their children (47%). The majority of women say that they have the opportunity to devote more time to their children's development and education (59%).

We can stress that there is a positive trend of prevailing advantages of the distance work compared to the office one. There is a positive impact of the Internet business on the parental functions' combination in 60% of cases. So the authors can talk about the satisfaction of this parameter in the balance of personal and working time.

The final questions of the survey were aimed to determine the general condition of the women-mothers. About 90% of respondents feel happy and 77% of women like working in the Internet business. Presumably, the underestimation of the last indicator may be related to the lack of free time to meet the personal needs of women.

## Conclusion

There are several conclusions can be made based on the online survey on the women-mothers who work in the Internet business.

1. The ideal balance of personal and working time is not achieved in the Internet business. There is a lack of time resources to meet the personal women' needs and a lack of free time for themselves.

2. The Internet employment allows women to spend more time with their families. They have an opportunity to teaching their children. There was no negative impact on the relationship with the spouse/partner, in some cases there was an improvement.

3. The internet employment increases the women-mothers' income. This is due to the fact that the Internet business is often a second job or a complete immersion in a favorite business avoiding the traditional forms of employment.

It is worth to mention that the authors found a positive correlation between working in the Internet business and satisfaction with the balance of personal and working time. The overall level of satisfaction with Internet employment was 77%. In addition, an online job is a good solution for those who would like to work in the case of maternity leave.

In conclusion we would like to stress that there is positive impact of flexible working conditions on the Internet on some aspects of women's well-being such as income level, comfortable conditions, work schedule. But the Internet business negatively affects the personal life of a woman-mother because she doesn't have enough time for herself.

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