# THE GREAT RESIGNATION OR THE GREAT RESHUFFLE: IS IT A COVID-19 BURNOUT IN INDIA? A DESCRIPTIVE-EXPLORATORY STUDY

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The Great Resignation, popularly known as "Big Quit" begins in early 2021, in the United States. It is an economic trend where willingly a mass number of employees resign from their jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the outlook of young millennials and the Gen Z workforce. The culture of opening new start-ups has overcome the traditional blue-collar employees. An article published in Forbes states that post-pandemic burnout spurs the "Great Resignation" among workers. The article cited Klotz's views that many factors are contributing to mass resignation including long working hours, stress related to COVID-19, and uncertain working conditions which result in Covid burnout. The study's primary purpose is to illustrate the characteristics and noticeable developments in "the great resignation" and "The great Reshuffle" phenomenon. Additionally, to find its relevance in India with COVID-19 Burnout. Is there any connection with coronaphobia or just a churning behavior post-pandemic? To answer the above questions, descriptive and explorative research method was used. The results concluded that working from home and poor quality of life corroborate COVID-19 Burnout, fear of an uncertain future, and anxiety. The study also recommended how to manage anxiety and COVID-19 Burnout.

# Keywords: Burnout, COVID-19 Pandemic, Great Reshuffle, Great Resignation, India

#### 1. BACKGROUND

The Great Resignation, popularly known as "Big Quit" begins in early 2021, in the United States. It is an economic trend where willingly a mass number of employees resign from their jobs. With the general acceptance of the movement of "The Great Resignation" or "The Great Reshuffle", Gallup claimed that "it is less an industry or pay issue than it is a workplace issue" (Gandhi & Robison, 2021). The Gallup report called it "Great Discontent" because 48 % of the U.S.A workers were actively

looking for new jobs for better pay, more resilience, and more engagement activities.

The qualitative mathematical study used a fuzzy analytical hierarchy process and identified toxic workplaces, and the uninterested nature of the job as the most ranked factors that contributed to the Great Resignation (Kundu et al., 2022). Another study reported a high level of emotional exhaustion and burnout among healthcare workers in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic (Menon et al., 2022) The burnout syndrome is not only confined to healthcare workers, it can be also observed in IT professionals. Low salaries, post-COVID-19 pandemic evaluations, work stress, and repetitive work are the biggest concerns about rising resignations in the IT industry (Charwad & Chaitanya Pangarkar, 2022). 95 % of IT professionals in India suffer from COVID-19 burnout who Work from home. The study found that workplace-related stress is more than physical stress(Kumaresan et al., 2022). Recently a qualitative work on work-quit-fire-related posts on Reddit from 2018-21 corroborates that the COVID-19 pandemic deteriorated the mental status of people across the world. The study found that posts related to job anxiety and job switching likely contributed to the high record of Great Resignation in the U.S.A. in 2021 (del Rio-Chanona et al., 2023).

The notion of YOLO (you only live one) is now more crucial than working regularly to fulfill the job. YouGov-Mint-CPR Millennials survey 2020 also found that nearly 45 % noticed an increase in working hours, and 70 % of them worked during weakened. Unlike in Western countries, younger millennials (19.1 %) in the age group of 24 to 30 years in India suffered a job loss since the lockdown than older millennials (15. %) in the age group of 31 to 39 (Kwatra, 2020). One out of three remote working professionals may be likely to resign if they must join the office full-time (Half, 2021).

The purpose of the research is to explore the movement of "the Great Resignation" and "the Great Reshuffle." The study also intends to find the noticeable characteristics of COVID-19 burnout. The paper is divided into three parts 1. The first part covered the emergence of the great resignation in the U.S.A. and the emergence of the great reshuffle in India; the second part presented the studies on burnout and the COVID-19 pandemic and the conclusion; the last part proposed the findings (U.S.A v/s India) on tabular form, followed by conclusions, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and future research.

# 2. Methodology

The present research is the foremost attempt to explore the drift in the quitting-shifting model of jobs post-pandemic. Therefore, the researcher deployed the secondary data published in various blogs, working papers, journals, and HR consultancy firms reports such as Gallup, Deloitte, SHRM, Forbes, Mint, Harvard

Business Review, Business Standards, International Monetary Funds, WHO, and Aon, etc., public, and private statistical data. The research is exploratory in its method and descriptive by providing the statistics drawn from surveys.

# The emergence of The Great Resignation: U.S.A

The term "Great Resignation" was coined by a management professor, Anthony Klotz who projected the mass migration in May 2021. It started in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2021 when 4 million American people quit their jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Later, in October 2021, a strike wave emerged known as "Striketober" where again 100,000 workers participated or prepared for a strike against the lack of employment benefits, low wages, and poor working conditions Furthermore, at the end of November 2021, approximately one in five health-care workers quit their jobs. Most of them are female workers from the retail sector, manufacturing, restaurants, hotels, and childcare. (Pizzinelli & Shibata, 2022) identified the major reasons for such a mismatch between the U.S.A. and UK labor markets. They found that the lack of attention towards older people led to the withdrawal of mass resignation among female workers, which they termed as "She-cession."

# The emergence of The Great Reshuffle: India

Interestingly, we can say that the great resignation in the US started the wave of the great reshuffle in India. According to a study by Amazon (September 2021) nearly 51% of the job seekers in India looking for novel jobs where they have no or little experience. Moreover, 68 % of them wanted to switch their career without a prior job offer in hand. According to a Money Control report published in October 2021, India's top-five IT companies -TCS, Wipro, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, and HCL Tech hired nearly 1.7 lakh workforce between January to September 2021 altogether. The skilled employees, post-pandemic shuffling their re-alignment, re-evaluating and re-recognition of their career preferences and hierarchy to balance work-life.

Another study by Microsoft (2022) highlights that 62 % of the workforce shifted their jobs in search of better financial stability and working conditions. Eight out of ten urban Indians confirmed an increase in anxiety levels. The lack of social activities, loneliness, and disturbed mental health were the leading factors for general anxiety levels among post-millennials (18-23 age). Approximately 45 % of the respondents would like to continue WFH, on the contrary, 55 % did not enjoy WFH due to unbalance between work and life (60 %), virtual harassment (38%), and increased workload (81%). The post-pandemic perks and salary hike survey by Korn Ferry India annual rewards in December 2021 claimed that 60 % of the companies surveyed offered reimbursement of monthly Wi-Fi and utility bills and limits the travel allowance to only 10 % in the salary structure. They have also projected a 9.4 % hike in average salary in 2022 as compared to 8.4 % in 2021

# (Rajkumari, 2022).

LinkedIn, an online service for business and jobs conducted research revealing that 86% of the Indian participants were confident regarding their professional strengths and looking for new avenues. Furthermore, 82% of the surveyed workforce were looking for intention to change jobs and roles for better work-life balance and more career preferences. These job seekers prioritize healthy work-life balance, flexible work arrangements, and mental wellness as the most important criteria before shifting to new roles. This is evidence that Indian job seekers recognize their real roles and realign them with the new normal.

The consumer Pyramids household survey conducted by the Center for Monitoring of the Indian Economy (CMIE-CPHS) published in (Azim Premji University, 2021) State of Working India 2021 highlighted in a recent survey in 2021 that over 15 million jobs were lost in May 2021. Table 4.1 shows the results of the panel database survey conducted by CMIE-CPHS from April 2019 to December 2020.

	Pre lockdown (December 2019)	During Lockdown (April 2020)	Post Lockdown December 2020	Trajectory
	Employed	Unemployed/Out o Labour Force	Unemployed/Out o Labour Force	No recovery
	Employed	Employed	Unemployed/Out o Labour Force	Delayed job loss
	Employed	Unemployed/Out o Labour Force	Employed	Recovery
	Employed	Employed	Employed	No effect
	No Effect	Recovery	Delayed Job Loss	No recovery
All India	57.4	27.9	4.7	9.9
Urban	61.2	24.9	4.5	9.3
Rural	51.7	32.3	5.1	10.9

Table 4.1 CMIE-CPHS Employment Pre-During-Post Lockdown

Source: based on CMIE-CPHS. Data is for the December 2019-April 2020-December 2020 panel. Page. 63 (Azim Premji University, 2021)

More than the half of workforce continued to stay employed during and post-lockdown. In total, 85 % of the workforce followed a recovery path. Additionally, 5 % faced a delayed loss of jobs and 10 % failed to get into the recovery path. Rural India lost only 1.9 million jobs urban workforce lost 5.7 million jobs between 2019-2020 adding more loss of 3.7 million in August 2021.

### Burnout and COVID-19 pandemic

World Health Organization (2019) described burnout as "a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed" (WHO, 2019). WHO included Burnout as an "occupational phenomenon" in their 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)(WHO, 2019). Burnout can be understood by three factors (1) feeling of energy exhaustion; (2) feeling of cynicism from one's job; and (3) reduced

professional efficacy. Many studies related to burnout have been linked to cognitive weariness, emotional exhaustion (Shirom, 2003), coronary heart diseases (Toker et al., 2012), increased turnover and decreased performance, and anxiety (Yu et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has created more job stressors that have impacted the work-life balance of many people. The COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to burnout, cynophobia, fear of job loss, social depression, anxiety, and loneliness due to lockdown and strict quarantine regulations. To cope with the negative repercussions of burnout, resilience may act as a protective sheath and manage the increased hard times. (Marshall et al., 2021) found that resilience acts as a moderator between the COVID-19 pandemic and burnout among disaster response workforces. The higher dimension of emotional exhaustion and cynicism increased turnover intentions. The 'open door policy' empowered employee voice behavior and simplify voice efficacy (Chauhan & Sharma, 2019).

(Sinsky et al., 2017) found that NHS doctors experienced high burnout during the pandemic and quietly withdrew from the job due to factors such as moral distress, inadequate resources, and challenging ethical decisions. Similar results showed that turnover intentions among nurses who carry a low degree of resilience. Positive emotions help deal with life challenges, stressful events, and frustration (Xu et al., 2021).

Perceptions of the work environment positively depend on job burnout (Guan, 2021). Job satisfaction decreases with an increase in emotional exhaustion, which prompts to perform workplace incivility (Jamal & Siddiqui, 2020). According to an Indeed survey "67 % of all 1500 U.S. workers supposed that workplace burnout has worsened during the pandemic" (Threlkeld, 2021). On the question of how feelings of burnout have changed during COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021, the following numbers were accredited. Refer to Table 5.1

 January 2020
 February 2021

 Gen Z
 47 %
 58 %

 Millennials
 53%
 59%

 Gen X
 40 %
 54%

 Baby Boomers
 24 %
 31%

Table 5.1. Burnout 2020-2021

Source: Indeed Survey https://www.indeed.com/insights/preventing-employee-burnout-report

The situation of burnout pre- and post-pandemic can be observed from the above statistics. The baby boomers jumped from 24 % to 31 % i.e., a hike of 7 % in just one year, whereas Gen X overlapped almost 14 % higher, a double burnout rate as compared to baby boomers. Gen Z stood second after Gen X, which was 47 % in January 2020 and reached 58 % in 2021 jumping 11 % from last year. Millennials experienced 6 % more burnout in 2021 than in 2020.

LinkedIn launched the findings of the future of work perception study conducted census stating that "one out of three Indian professionals is burnout due to stress, and over workload, during WFH model(Alawadhi, 2021 cited LinkedIn Survey)More than half (52%) of them firmly believed that the hybrid model can be managed by prioritizing the well-being aspect.

Almost 72 % of them, wanted to connect their workplace back to well-adjusted burnout and have a pleasurable time with their colleagues (Alawadhi, 2021). This burnout episode is not limited to the hybrid model of working professionals, but also impacted women in India, according to a report by Deloitte's Women@work 2022: A Global Outlook, 56 % of 5000 women surveyed acrossed10 countries including India stated that their stress is higher post-pandemic than pre-covid times. Burnout is the most cited factor behind quitting jobs between November 2021 to February 2022 published by Financial Expression (2022). Similar research on Indian housewives by (Pareek et al., 2021) suggested that prolonged exposure to the stress of work and life affected their mental health which leads to reaching a burnout state of mind.

# Findings: The Shift of West Reaching to the East

Table 6.1. describes the characteristics of the social phenomenon "the Great Resignation" that started in the U.S.A. moved towards Asia and Europe and transformed into another social phenomenon referred to as "the great reshuffle." The wave of great resignation mostly affected the mid-level employees in the age group of 30-45 years. The mid-career workers were seeking more security, higher salaries, and priorities on mental health in the atmosphere of corona anxiety, fear of job loss, and stressful working hours. U.S.A. trends showed that an increase in demand among low-wage employees was more affected than higher salary earners. The resignation rate was the highest in employees working with transportation, hospitality, accommodation, healthcare, technology, and education. Moreover, this trend was noticeable very clearly in Information technology, data science healthcare, and knowledge workers in India. There are many underlying factors contributing to this trend, experts believe that secure positions(Cook, 2021), burnout(Cook, 2021; Gupta, 2022; Limeade, 2021), workload (Cook, 2021), low pay, lack of opportunities, disrespect (Parker & Horowitz, 2022), poor response to covid-19 pandemic (Shapero, 2022), Job insecurity, toxic culture (MIT Sloan Management Review, 2022), lack of new challenges (Shapero, 2022), prolonged mental and emotional stress (Menon, 2021) and emotional exhaustion (Menon, 2021) is the topmost one with their respective nation culture.

Table 6.1. The Great Resignation Vs. The Great Reshuffle

The Great Resignation —	The Great Reshuffle	
2021	2022	
USA (Starts from western)	India (Asia and Europe)	
4 million Americans resigned in July 2021, reached up to 4.4 million by the end of September 2021 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021)	51 % looking for jobs with little or no experience 68 % Industry Switching Amazon India (September 2021), Job Keep reshuffling till 2022 (Sharma, 2022 quoted LinkedIn Research Report)	
According to (Chugh, 2021) in the World Economic Forum, "It is phenomenon that describes the record number of people leaving their jobs after the Covid-19 pandemic ends".	Shifting of job from one industry to another or within the industry or sector rather than completely leaving the job.	
Highest Rate: Mid-level employees	Highest Rate: Mid-career employee	
(30-45 years) (Cook, 2021)	30-45 years) (Cook, 2021)	
Industry: Retail, Healthcare, Warehousing, Education, and Hospitality (Chugh, 2021)	<b>Industry:</b> IT Industry, Knowledge industry Healthcare, and Data sciences (Patel, 2022)	
Technology and Healthcare (Cook, 2021)		
Voluntary Turnover:	Voluntary Turnover:	
1 <sup>st</sup> June 2019- 1 <sup>st</sup> June 2020 (11.0% )	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2019- 1 <sup>st</sup> June 2020 (12.5 % )	
1 <sup>st</sup> June 2020- 1 <sup>st</sup> June 2021 (11.3%)	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2020-1 <sup>st</sup> June 2021 (9.7%)	
(Brown and Green, 2021 cited Aon's Turnover Survey )	(Brown and Green, 2021 cited Aon's Turnover Survey )	
Underlying Factors :	Underlying Factors :	
Secure positions (Cook, 2021)	Poor response to Covid-19 pandemic (Shapero, 2022)	
Burnout (Cook, 2021)	, ,	
Workload (Cook, 2021)	Job Insecurity (MIT Sloan Management Review, 2022)	
Low pay (Parker & Horowitz, 2022)	Toxic Culture (MIT Sloan Management Review,	
Lack of opportunities (Parker & Horowitz, 2022)	2022)	
Feeling Disrespect (Parker & Horowitz, 2022)	Burnout (Limeade, 2021; Gupta, 2022 quoted SHRM India Conference poll)	
	Lack of new challenges (Shapero, 2022)	
	Emotional Exhaustion and Prolonged mental and emotional stress (S. Menon, 2021 stated in Forbes India)	

**Source:** Author gathered data from various published sources

In India, this trend gained thrust, driven by different factors based on Indian work culture, employment nature, and individual factors. In both cases, intellectual and emotional health issues gave a strong sign that the shift is comparable in terms of work sentiments. Burnout already exists but the rise of the global health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the unnoticed sentiments of the employees like exhaustion, fear of losing their job, technostress, supervisor pressure, and discriminating salaries. The feeling of belongingness, empowerment, and recognition improve employee performance (Chauhan, 2017).

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

To conclude these two great trends are entirely different from each other, however, the great reshuffle raised and gained momentum after the emergence of the great resignation in the U.S.A. There is clear evidence from the literature presented that the covid burnout is not wholly accountable for change in the working pattern and reshuffling of the job. The millennials are now prioritizing their mental health, work-life balance, happiness, and more challenging jobs than long working hours, higher salaries, and putting their emotional health at risk. This social phenomenon specifies the workforce shift in two diverse cultures, showcasing different drivers behind resignation altogether. For instance, for U.S.A. people, dissatisfaction with working conditions was one of the key contributors and job insecurity was one of the significant factors in India.

# **Theoretical Implications**

Theoretical implications stem from the need to revisit workforce job structure in international economics, labor market, and organizational behavior. Understanding the psychological needs and sociological aspects of employees under the pandemic fear is important. The traditional workforce models may need to adapt and emphasize the updated models that consider employee reskilling and engagement. An article published by (Savage, 2023) on Forbes recommended that employees after this phenomenon are looking for a purpose in their work, a sense of fulfilment, and motivation, which is again raising the face of "Quiet Quitting". The Great Resignation can contribute to sifting the factors by reconsidering the theories on dynamic forces of employment.

## **Practical Implications**

The following practical implications to leaders and decision-makers to track the shifting and changing minds of expert's post-pandemic so that proactive actions can be implemented before the next big wave.

# 1. Work from Home (WFH) to Work from Anywhere (WFA)

The work-from-home (WFH) is now converting partiality into work from anywhere (WFA) by hiring novel talent beyond geographical boundaries, non-metro cities, and smaller towns, and adding more local regional content to their workplace culture.

# 2. Retain of Work to Refusal of Work

Pre-pandemic focuses on retaining the work, which is now moving to refusal of work which simply refers to quitting regular employment.

- Return to Office Policies
- Skill-based Jobs

# 3. The transformation from materialistic to value-based goals

The Millennials experienced the loss of loved ones, the uncertainty of a job, salary deductions, less challenging work, more stress, emotional exhaustion, growing inequality in opportunities, and burnout. They are surviving between life and death poles. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way the young generation thinks about the reason to work. They have moved to gain more valuable jobs than working for higher salaries.

#### 4. Culture

The organization should re-think and re-evaluate its working culture model. The leaders must adopt a culture that is more valued, accepted, and on the norms of employees' benefits. Employees are now comfortable with the culture of informal attires, less formal channels, flexible working hours, traveling flexibility, less autonomy, and more recognition at the workplace. The feedback of culture is important i.e., measurement of culture should be included in the HR database so that contributing factors are known to everyone.

### 5. KPIs and Resignation Rate

The key performance indicators are important HR metrics to monitor and assess the resignation rate on a timely basis. The voluntary turnover rates, resignation rates, recruitment offers, selection tests, type of appraisals, and training hours should be measured along with other wellness metrics such as life satisfaction, mental health, emotional intelligence, resilience, happiness index, and physical soundness.

### 6. Identify Root Causes

COVID-19 Burnout, anxiety, stress, and disengagement are multifactorial. They vary from industry to industry, roles, and workplace environment. Managers need

to identify the root cause of it and find solutions for the same. For this, a clear bottom-up communication channel is essential to be activated so that any employee suffering from psychological or emotional disturbance can exchange dialogue.

#### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The scope of the paper is limited to the methodology. It is only explorative and descriptive. The study is based on secondary sources of data only. Therefore, the empirical study can be conducted after assessing the factors affecting COVID-19 burnout. Furthermore, the research is based on only nations; the U.S.A and India. The social movement of great reshuffling is observed in other countries also for example, in China where the young generation moving towards the "lying flat" concept (popularity known as tang ping) refers to withdrawing from the rat race and taking rest from relentless work whereas in Australia took the advantage of the great reshuffle and recorded 3 lakh employees switched to better jobs in 2021 which is 10 percent higher than pre-covid average. Future research could instigate the cultural variations affecting employment, considering the social norms and values impacting India and the U.S.A. like job equity and discrimination, and trust between employee and employer. Futurist scholars could also study the potential impact of Great Resignation on inclusion and diversity factors. Additionally, the role of AI or metaverse in shaping the future of work.

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