



In Summary: Working at home and employee well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic

First findings from the UCD
Working in Ireland Survey, 2021

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Between March 2020 and May 2021
23.4% worked exclusively at home.
9.5% worked 9 – 13 months at home,
11% worked 4 – 8 months,
6% worked a small period (1 – 3 months)
4% worked for less than a month at home.



Working at home is associated with an increase in employees' productivity.



The increases in employees' productivity are due to their being able to concentrate better by working from home and having more time to work given that they did not need to commute to the workplace. It is also the case that these factors were fused with increased effort levels.



This intensification of employees' effort levels is associated with an increase in employees' stress levels, an inability to disconnect from work, and a diminishment in their health and well-being.



This intensification of effort levels was particularly pronounced among female employees.



The effects on women's health are particularly stark: **43%** reported an impairment in their mental health and well-being, in comparison to almost a third of men, which is also not an inconsiderable proportion. Women were also more likely to report that their physical health had deteriorated as had their relationship with those whom they lived.



The effects of homeworking varied across parents with children of different ages. The mental health and well-being of parents of children attending late stage primary school were most impaired compared to parents of children in other age cohorts.



We found that the negative effects of homeworking were not lessened or moderated by particular attributes of people's work. However, where a trade union was recognised by management for the purpose of representing employees in the organisation, working at home was less likely to be associated with work intensification.



The majority of employees are in favour of a hybrid form of working where they work some days at home and other days in the workplace.



Those workers who indicated an equivocal preference for returning to the workplace on a fulltime basis included those who felt obliged to remain always connected to their work, those who had experienced impaired mental health and wellbeing, and those whose relations with the people they lived with had deteriorated while they were engaged in homeworking.



A little over a third (**35%**) expressed a preference for returning to work in the workplace all or most of the time.



The workers with the lowest self-reported levels of productivity reported the strongest desire to return to the office when restrictions are lifted, while those with the highest productivity levels were among the most eager to continue to work at home.



People living in cities and commuting belts indicated a stronger preference for a hybrid approach to work than those living in rural areas.



This sorting effect means that increased levels of homeworking in the future may enhance rather than reduce productivity levels. To garner this effect, however, will require a policy that allows employees to volunteer to work at home rather than everyone being compelled to do so.



The longer employees remained working at home during the pandemic, the more likely they are to prefer a hybrid approach to work in the future.



Finally, we argue that 'remote working' represents one of the most significant – if not the most significant – challenge currently confronting employers. It is potentially momentous in its consequences for the organisation and management of work. A number of important practice and policy implications are drawn in our main document.



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