İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Dergisi / Journal of Social Policy Conferences
JSPC 2023, 84, 1–14
DOI: 10.26650/jspc.2023.84.1207474

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Working from Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons on Well-Being, Work-Life Balance, and Health

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ABSTRACT

Increased levels of work from home, the most significant pandemic legacy, is here to stay, necessitating its examination from different perspectives. This paper focuses on the well-being, work-life balance and health challenges this paradigm shift brings. In our survey of 241 Slovenian companies, we found that the experience of forced work from home was better than expected, though it still poses risk to well-being, work-life balance and health, and that consensual work from home positively influences worker satisfaction, leading to increased productivity. However, the forced work from home resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is not comparable to consensual remote work because it provides a more controlled environment; it is, therefore, critical that workers and their representatives are involved in organizing work from home with management to develop strategies to better develop motivation and optimize productivity. Further research should focus on longitudinal studies to specifically examine the impact on workers in this context, which will also provide a more robust basis for formulating recommendations and policy.

Keywords: COVID-19, work from home, work-life-balance, health and safety at work

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly changed the way we live and work for a number of reasons, including accelerated digitalization and flexibilization, greater job insecurity, increased worker responsibility, depleted resources, and the blurring of boundaries between work and life (Rudolph et al., 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021). Work from home (hereinafter: WFH)[1] is not new, but the recent pandemic accelerated its adoption: the number of those working from home has increased by 20 percent since 2008 (TUC, 2016) and 13.9 percent of those employed now spend at least half of their working hours at home (ONS, 2014; Eurofound, 2021b). In the United States, the percentage of those engaged in WFH, either fully or partially, increased from 19.6 percent in 2003 to 24.1 percent in 2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Similarly, in Sweden, partial WFH increased from 5.9 percent in 1999 to 19.7 percent in 2012 (Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016). A recent Eurofound survey found that about 20 percent of Europe's workers mainly worked remotely on a daily basis in 2010, increasing to slightly less than 30 percent in 2015 (Eurofound & ILO, 2017).

At the organizational level, WFH was the most commonly used measure to limit the spread of Covid-19. Most companies introduced WFH almost overnight in March 2020 creating a natural experiment of unprecedented proportions (Deole et al., 2021), characterized by increased isolation, social distancing, and home-schooling (Kniffin et al., 2021; Campbell & Gavett, 2021; Yu & Wu, 2021). Although the pandemic appears to have slowed down, WFH is expected to persist (Criscuolo et al., 2021; Dahik et al., 2020; Neeley, 2021; Barrero et al., 2021; OECD, 2021; Schwellnus et al., 2022; Parry et al., 2022). Projections suggest the number of remote workers will almost double in the next five years (Ozimek, 2021) and a higher proportion of firms will offer WFH if compared to numbers before the pandemic (OECD, 2021), although not to the same extent in all countries and sectors. WFH will be less prevalent in countries and sectors where small companies account for a larger share of employment activity (Eurofound, 2020b). Working remotely has also become a competitive advantage in the labor market. Pre-pandemic surveys on WFH reported that employees value working from home at the equivalent of about a 4 to 8 percent wage increase (Mas & Pallais,

[1] The term 'work from home' is used because it was the predominant form of work during the Covid-19 pandemic. All of the above applies mutatis mutandis to remote work in the broader sense, i.e., working outside of the employer's premises.

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Submitted: 08.12.2022 • **Revision Requested:** 10.03.2023 • **Last Revision Received:** 10.05.2023 • **Accepted:** 06.06.2023 • **Published Online:** 11.07.2023

2017 and 2020; Maestas et al., 2018; Barrero et al., 2021). A recent study on US data found that WFH reduced average attrition rates by 33 percent and improved self-reported work satisfaction scores (Bloom et al., 2023). There is also anecdotal evidence that advertisements for jobs that do not mention WFH do not attract as many applicants (Epstein, 2022), the reasons for this being the better-than-expected experience at organizational and individual levels, implementation investment, ICT innovation facilitating improved communication and collaboration, and a reduction in the stigma that WFH is less effective (Barrero et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2021; Ipsen et al., 2020). It appears that a ”new (ab)normal” workplace is emerging, characterized by WFH and hybrid workplaces which better focus on a worker's well-being to ensure higher flexibility, better engagement, and productivity while minimizing the negative effects of social isolation, stress, and digital skill paucity (Raghavan et al., 2021; Galanti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). A recent study, based on randomized control trials of hybrid work on 1612 graduate engineers, marketing and finance employees of a large US technology firm, reported that WFH reduced hours worked by around two hours on home days, but increased it on in-office workdays and the weekend (Bloom et al., 2023). However, there is a striking difference in efficiency evaluation and opinion on hybrid WFH between managers and non-managerial employees (with graduate education). Non-managerial employees were more likely to report the positive impact of remote work on productivity and displayed lower quit rates if compared with the control group. In contrast, managers were less likely to work from home on eligible days, predicted a negative impact of WFH on performance, and had higher quit rates under hybrid work (Bloom et al., 2023).

This research explores the dynamics of WFH before, during, and after the Covid-19 pandemic in Slovenia. In particular, the following research questions will be addressed: 1) What was the magnitude of the shift from pre-pandemic to pandemic WFH for different profiles of employees? 2) How has WFH affected the self-assessed performance, health, well-being[2], and work-life balance[3] (WLB) of employees during the pandemic? 3) What are the underlying factors that can help us understand why individuals in different industries and different occupations were better off compared to others? To answer these questions, a descriptive analysis was performed, and pooled ordered probit approach was used to figure out the effects of attitudinal and socioeconomic variables.

Primary data were collected with an online survey of Slovenian middle and senior management between September and November 2021. The survey was completed by 241 respondents; 35 percent were employed by large companies, 33 percent by medium-sized companies, and 20 percent by small companies - 12 percent of the companies had fewer than ten employees. 22.6 percent of respondents were from manufacturing, ten percent from hospitality, and 16.2 percent from the service sector. Almost one-third of the respondents were employed by global corporations headquartered abroad. The questionnaire was comprised of 46 questions; the first section was concerned with general company data, including size, business sector, and ownership; the second with work organization before, during, and after the pandemic; the third with the role and evaluation of remote work by employees and respondents and plans regarding the extent of WFH in the future; the fourth and most extensive section dealt with health issues.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows ¬– in the following section, there is a literature review; the third section describes the survey and methodology. In section four, descriptive statistics and findings are presented based on the empirical model, while the final section consists of a discussion, the study's limitations, and concluding remarks.

Literature Review

WFH encompasses a different approach to work organization. It is generally claimed that WFH can positively affect workers' social well-being, and their physical and mental health, but not directly. To achieve positive effects, WFH must be optimally organized (Warzel Petersen, 2021). WFH during the pandemic could be treated as an experiment that now offers interesting research avenues to study the potential impact of working remotely on employees' satisfaction and perceived worker performance.

There is an intensive academic debate about the benefits of WFH on workers' flexibility and work-life balance (WLB), as some argue that WFH can lead to more flexible schedules and improved WLB. However, numerous studies have presented evidence to the contrary. Workers engaged in WFH increasingly work more intensively and have irregular work schedules and shorter work breaks (Eurofound & ILO, 2017; Messenger, 2019; EU-OSHA, 2021a; Eurofound, 2021a; ILO, 2021; Parry et al., 2022). Moreover, remote workers experienced high levels of time pressure, increased workload, constant control and monitoring, and an inability to take breaks (Piasna, 2022). This phenomenon is not limited to the pandemic era, as studies conducted before the pandemic have shown similar trends, along with a tendency toward work addiction (Hill et al., 1998). Additionally, those who work remotely experience different levels of stress with less workplace-related stress but more telework-related stress (de Macedo et al., 2020; Heiden et al., 2021; Song Gao, 2020), negatively impacting innovation and worker satisfaction (OECD, 2020).

If not organized optimally, WFH with increased workload and changed work times may engender physical and mental health

[2] The concept of well-being used is subjective, based on happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect (Diener, 2009).
[3] In this paper, WLB is defined as the ability of workers to perform employment duties and personal tasks while taking sufficient rest, including holidays.

risks (ILO & WHO, 2021). According to the OECD study conducted in 2020, workers state that the main disadvantages posed by WFH are a lack of social interaction, blurred boundaries between work and leisure, and working in uncomfortable environments. There is ample evidence that poor physical environments, inadequate equipment, and predominantly sedentary work led to musculoskeletal problems, obesity, heart disease, diabetes, eyestrain, and repetitive strain injuries (EU-OSHA, 2021b; ILO & WHO, 2021). Eurofound (2020a) and Parry et al. (2021) also point to an increase in the number of headaches, musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, sleep problems, and anxiety as health problems. Accidents are expected to occur more often because of prolonged working times, primarily due to increased cognitive load and decreased situational awareness, including environment awareness loss, physical disorientation, and motion sickness (EU-OSHA, 2018). Additionally, labor inspectorates in most countries are not adequately equipped to safeguard workers from unjust working conditions, such as prolonged working hours, and have inadequate knowledge regarding safety regulations (ILO, 2021).

Concerning mental health, psychological factors were found to be the most prevalent (EU-OSHA, 2021a), particularly physical isolation, depression, and difficulty in coping with WLB (ILO, 2021). According to a longitudinal study by Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė et al. (2022), overwork during WFH led to exhaustion up to four months after its cessation due to impaired work disengagement ability. In other words, exhaustion was not solely due to long working hours but also due to the inability to mentally detach from work. While the perception of having to be constantly available existed before the pandemic due to digitalization, the pandemic with its blurring boundaries between work and private life has intensified the difficulty of disconnecting from work (Risi & Pronzato, 2021). The consequences of online addiction are indicated in terms of isolation, loneliness, less social interaction and support, and an increase in mental health problems, especially anxiety, and depression (ILO, 2020). The aforementioned factors can lead to cyber sickness, which is characterized by a combination of unpleasant physiological symptoms, such as nausea and dizziness, and the feeling of having less control and autonomy over one's work (Wood, 2021). Feelings of isolation, disconnection from colleagues and the workplace, the lack of opportunity to be creative and contribute new ideas, and informal interaction were also perceived as problematic in terms of WFH (Parry et al., 2021). Before the pandemic, there was concern related to WFH-engendered isolation (Kurland & Bailey, 1999), lower pay and fewer benefits (Rovi, 1997), a fear of being overlooked for a promotion, and an inaccurate performance evaluation (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999; Kelliher & Anderson, 2009).

On the other hand, the literature provides many arguments that speak in favor of WFH. One of the apparent advantages of remote work is the reduction in resources and time spent commuting. However, this is not necessarily an outcome that increases individual satisfaction, as it may lead to an increase in the time spent on work-related activities rather than personal ones. This trend is more pronounced in larger companies (Teodorovicz et al., 2021).

Quantifying the subjective experience of working from home is a challenging task due to the need to gather a diverse set of variables related to factors such as satisfaction, flexibility, and work-life balance. Prior research has concentrated on examining the psychological consequences of working remotely by using digital technology on perceived effectiveness, performance, well-being, and work-life balance (Grant et al., 2013). However, recent studies have suggested that also socio-demographic (number of children at home, commuting time, apartment size) and job-related characteristics (such as control over tasks, freedom, and motivation) should be considered when evaluating subjective experience with WFH (Aczel et al., 2021). Davidescu et al. (2020) have recommended focusing primarily on assessing an employee's satisfaction with their position and work flexibility. This approach entails evaluating the interplay between an employee's subjective response (i.e., satisfaction) to objective factors such as flexibility and their working conditions.

We propose that three paradigms best explain the motives for greater WFH adoption in the future. Firstly, the economic logic behind the WFH adoption is based on the idea that new business models in the "knowledge economy" place more emphasis on intangible human and digital resources. The proportion of specialized and well-educated professionals, whose share of the total labor force has increased by ten percentage points in the previous two decades, is projected to exceed 50 percent by 2024 (Wilson et al., 2016), and this creates less spatially constrained value (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Profound occupational and industrial change in developed economies will drive WFH growth in the coming decades.

The second paradigm builds on flexible work requirements. Employers treat some of their workers differently to increase numerical and functional flexibility in terms of how long, where, and when work is executed (Atkinson & Meager, 1986). Non-standard work arrangement is typically associated with the self-employed and part-time workers (ONS, 2014), WFH introduces some of this flexibility to standard employment.

Organizational adaptation, the third paradigm, explains the WFH growth in terms of demographic trends including labor force feminization (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons, 1995). Employers should adapt and change in response to societal norms and expectations. The changing demographics force companies to offer employment arrangements that better fit the personal circumstances of their workers. Between 1981 and 2014, 1.3 million women joined the workforce, while the number of men remained the same (Wilson et al., 2016).

Given the likelihood of WFH becoming a persistent feature of work, it is essential to conduct further research to evaluate

advantages and potential drawbacks. Several studies suggest that the future is a hybrid working place that resembles the employees' preferences (Gratton, 2021; Parry et al., 2021). A deeper understanding of how organizations and workers create new routines and adapt to the WFH's realities is needed to evaluate productivity and performance (Teodorovicz et al., 2021). In the USA, by early 2023, about 30 percent of full-paid days were worked from home, with hybrid arrangements that involved typically two to three days of WFH which is the most common approach (Barrero et al., 2021). Besides the often-mentioned benefits of hybrid WFH (less commuting, more productivity in individual-focused activities, better time flexibility, lower office costs), there are certain disadvantages (transition costs between on-site and remote work, detrimental effect on employee performance and innovation). Besides debating on the efficacy of hybrid WFH, research strongly focused on well-being. Adopting and supporting the lifelong perspective of employment should be prioritized (EU-OSHA, 2021a), addressing emerging (psychosocial) risks.

This paper explores the dynamics of WFH before, during, and after the Covid-19 pandemic in Slovenia, a small European country, characterized by relatively rigid labor institutions, sound social dialogue, and a long tradition of collective bargaining. In particular, the following research questions will be addressed: 1) What was the magnitude of the shift from pre-pandemic to pandemic WFH for different profiles of employees? 2) How has WFH affected the self-assessed performance, health, well-being, and work-life balance (WLB) of employees during the pandemic? 3) What are the underlying factors that can help us understand why individuals in different industries and different occupations were better off compared with others? To answer these questions, a survey among Slovenian companies was conducted, followed by a descriptive analysis and the pooled ordered probit approach to figure out the effects of attitudinal and socioeconomic variables on WFH satisfaction and performance assessment.

Data, Methodology, and Research Design

Research Context: Diversity and Covid-19 Measures in Slovenia

WFH was not mandatory during the pandemic, it was a corporate decision. WFH is regulated and better facilitated by the Employment Relationship Act and social partners in some sectors amended existing collective agreements to secure worker positions. In the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, WFH was rated positively, with managers being slightly less satisfied than workers (Redek et al., 2020). Therefore, we designed a study to examine WFH prevalence during the second wave of the pandemic, between autumn 2020 and winter 2021, and evaluate whether organizations still faced similar challenges to the ones they were facing in spring 2020, focusing particularly on well-being, WLB, and health. Approval from the Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Human Subjects at the University of Ljubljana was not required because, according to existing regulations, the research did not go beyond the participants' daily activities and required minimal participant involvement in the research. The research was conducted at the corporate level and no identified personal data was collected. Participants were informed that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The researchers were available for further information throughout the research.

Research Design

Primary data were collected with an online survey of Slovenian middle and senior management between September and November 2021 Due to the peculiarities of working from home and the novelty of the pandemic situations we did not use the existing scales. The questionnaire was comprised of 46 questions; the first section was concerned with general company data, including size, business sector, and ownership; the second with work organization before, during, and after the pandemic; the third with the role and evaluation of remote work by employees and respondents, and plans regarding the extent of WFH in the future; the fourth and most extensive section dealt with health issues.

The survey was completed by 241 respondents; 35 percent were employed by large companies, 33 percent by medium-sized companies, and 20 percent by small companies - 12 percent of the companies had fewer than ten employees. 23.1 percent of respondents were from manufacturing, ten percent from ICT, and 4.1 percent from the retail sector. Almost one-third of the respondents were employed by global corporations headquartered abroad (Table 1).

To best understand the heterogeneity in the overall experience with WFH under specific circumstances (see Figure 1), an ordered probit model was used. The dependent variable was obtained from the responses to the following questions: "What was the overall experience of working from home during the pandemic?" 1- Much worse than expected; 2- Worse than expected; 3- In line with expectations; 4- Better than expected; 5- Much better than expected. The respondents were asked to evaluate the experience with WFH from a company perspective, for their co-workers and themselves. The distribution of answers to these particular questions is presented in Figure 1. To investigate further, we were also interested in how WFH affected self-assessed performance and health. Therefore, additional probit models were performed by using (1) health issues and (2) assessed performance as dependent

Table 1.*Selected Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents*

Position in the company		Size of the company	
Top management	18.1	Micro	12.3
Middle management	45.7	Small	19.9
Non-managerial position	36.2	Medium	32.6
Share of respondents employed by global corporations	32.9	Large	35.2
Industry structure			
Manufacturing	23.1		
Retail	4.1		
ICT	9.9		
Finance and insurance	6.2		
Other services	54.7		

Note: N=241.

variables. Assessed performance as a dependent variable was based on the responses to the following question: "What are the potential drawbacks of working from home?" Lower productivity: 1- Not valid at all; 2- Not valid; 3- Neither valid nor not valid; 4- Valid; 5 – Totally valid. Regarding health issues, the dependent variable was based on the following question: "What are the main challenges related to WFH?" Health issues: 1- Not a challenge at all; 2- Not a challenge; 3 – In line with expectations; 4 – Quite a challenge; 5- A big challenge.

The explanatory variables (vector z in formula (1)) were selected based on the literature review: organizational culture[4], pre-Covid WFH experience, WLB, and company-level characteristics (size, industry, and ownership).

An ordered probit model consists of a latent variable y*, sometimes referred to as a latent propensity, such as:

$$Y* = z\gamma + \mu \tag{1}$$

where z is a vector of explanatory variables, γ is a vector of estimable parameters, and μ is a normally distributed standard error term. The latent propensity score function y* is related to the reported J-point response item y; in this case, the WFH experience on a 5-point scale, in the following manner:

$$\gamma = \left\{ \begin{array}{ll} 1 & if \gamma* \leq \varphi_1 \\ jif \tau_{j-1} < \gamma* \leq \tau_{j \forall j \in (2,\ldots,J-1)} & \\ J & if \tau_{j-1} \leq \gamma* \end{array} \right\} \tag{2}$$

where τ _j (j=1,2,$\cdots$,J-1) are estimable thresholds sharing the propensity function. To ensure model identification, either τ _j or a constant in y$*$ can be estimated, and the other parameter set to zero (Washington et al., 2020). Descriptive statistics of variables used in the model are presented in Table 2.

Results and Findings

As two-thirds of respondents did not work remotely before the pandemic, we were particularly interested in employees' and company WFH experience in the years 2020 and 2021 (Figure 1). More than half of respondents indicated that the experience with WFH was better or significantly better than expected for their companies and for their co-workers, but less so for themselves. As almost two-thirds of respondents were employed in managerial positions and almost 15 percent of them did not work remotely, this finding is not so surprising.

WFH extent was analyzed separately in terms of professions and company size (Table 3). Management, professional and administrative staff worked remotely for up to 25 percent of their working hours.

Nearly 30 percent of service-sector workers in direct contact with customers worked on-site. Production workers were likely to

[4] Being acutely aware of Common Method Bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012), the questionnaire was structured in a way to ensure questions with ordinal scales (similar to the one regarding organizational culture) were not answered stylistically, using a variety of point scale anchors and reverse coding, spatially separating constructs, guaranteeing complete anonymity and motivating respondents to provide high-quality answers by explaining the purpose of the survey.

Table 2.*Descriptive Statistics of Variables Used in the Probit Model*

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.
Dependent variables		
The overall experience with work from home during the pandemic – company perspective	3.770	0.932
The overall experience with work from home during the pandemic – co-worker perspective	3.747	0.849
The overall experience with work from home during the pandemic – self-satisfaction	3.589	1.104
Health as the main challenge related to WFH (1- not a challenge at all; 5- a big challenge)	3.149	1.102
Productivity improvements as the main advantage of WFH (1- not an advantage at all; 5- a big advantage)	3.343	0.938
Explanatory variables		
Maintaining organizational culture as the main challenge related to WFH (1- not a challenge at all; 5- a big challenge)	3.823	1.034
WFH before Covid-19 (1 – yes; 0 – no)	0.246	0.432
More than 50 percent of WFH (1 – yes; 0 – no)	0.476	0.501
Work-life balance as the WFH benefit (1- not a benefit at all; 5 – is a big benefit)	3.695	1.070
The change of desire to WFH after the pandemic experience (1 – much less desirable; 5 – much more desirable)	3.520	1.198

Note: N=200-208.

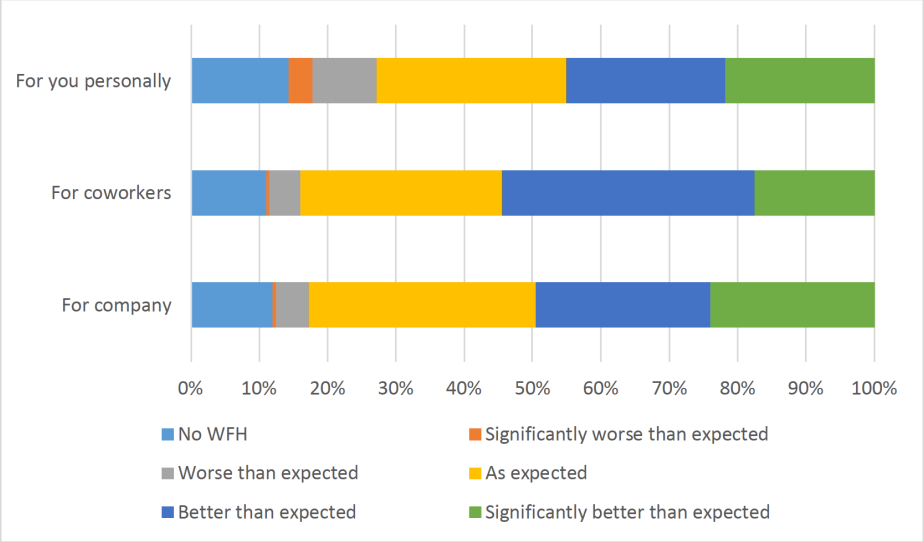
Table 3.*WFH Extent for Different Professions in Terms of Company Size in the Third Quarter in 2021*

	0%	Up to 25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
ALL FIRMS / ORGANIZATIONS					
Managers, directors, and senior staff	21%	31%	8%	18%	21%
Professional and administrative staff	10%	30%	18%	19%	23%
Service staff with direct customer contact	29%	27%	14%	12%	18%
Production workers	86%	6%	1%	1%	6%
LARGE FIRMS / ORGANIZATIONS					
Managers, directors, and senior staff	15%	41%	11%	17%	17%
Professional and administrative staff	6%	27%	27%	25%	16%
Service staff with direct customer contact	36%	26%	16%	14%	8%
Production workers	94%	6%	0%	0%	0%
MEDIUM-SIZED FIRMS / ORGANIZATIONS					
Managers, directors, and senior staff	15%	33%	6%	29%	17%
Professional and administrative staff	7%	36%	14%	25%	18%
Service staff with direct customer contact	26%	24%	20%	12%	18%
Production workers	83%	10%	4%	3%	0%
SMALL FIRMS / ORGANIZATIONS					
Managers, directors, and senior staff	34%	20%	8%	10%	28%
Professional and administrative staff	20%	27%	12%	6%	35%
Service staff with direct customer contact	24%	31%	4%	11%	29%
Production workers	78%	22%	0%	0%	0%

Note: N=162-169

have fewer opportunities for WFH, with only 14 percent of the sample enabling WFH. Small businesses generally practiced WFH to a greater extent than large or medium-sized companies.

When the WFH extent is compared during peak and off-peak periods in 2020 and 2021 before the pandemic with the situation for different professions (Table 4), it is clear that two-thirds of respondents had not experienced WFH before the pandemic and



Note: N=200-208

Figure 1. Experience with WFH – share of respondents who selected one of the answers.

the remainder had only experienced it to a limited extent. During the first wave of the pandemic, nearly half of the respondents switched to WFH, but only one-third of those with direct customer contact did so. Production workers were also less likely to work from home. During the peak of the first wave, they were more likely to be temporarily laid off and receive financial support from the government. Over time, companies tried to find the optimal balance of on-site work and WFH.

Table 4.*WFH Extent for Different Professions in Different Time Periods Between 2020 and 2021**

	0%	Up to 25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
Before the Covid-19 pandemic (until 15 March 2020)					
Managers, directors and senior staff	66%	22%	4%	3%	5%
Professional and administrative staff	65%	21%	5%	3%	6%
Service staff with direct customer contact	80%	11%	3%	1%	4%
Production workers	99%	1%	0%	0%	0%
During the first wave of the pandemic (15 March 2020 - 31 May 2020)					
Managers, directors and senior staff	16%	16%	10%	16%	42%
Professional and administrative staff	11%	9%	15%	15%	49%
Service staff with direct customer contact	25%	19%	12%	14%	31%
Production workers	87%	8%	3%	0%	3%
Between the first and the second wave of the pandemic (1 June 2020 - 17 October 2020)					
Managers, directors and senior staff	28%	24%	16%	13%	18%
Professional and administrative staff	20%	27%	18%	15%	19%
Service staff with direct customer contact	37%	25%	14%	11%	12%
Production workers	92%	7%	1%	0%	0%
During the second wave of the pandemic (18 October 2020 - 15 June 2021)					
Managers, directors and senior staff	24%	24%	13%	15%	24%
Professional and administrative staff	14%	24%	15%	19%	29%
Service staff with direct customer contacts	32%	23%	15%	12%	18%
Production workers	88%	8%	3%	1%	0%

Note: N=162-169

Given the limited empirical studies of health issues resulting from WFH in the literature, particularly for the period during the pandemic, health problems were central in the questionnaire. The survey respondents were asked to evaluate the health problems for themselves and other employees (co-workers). Mental health problems topped the list for co workers (other employees), followed by weight maintenance (Table 5). Survey respondents cited weight maintenance and eye strain as the biggest problems they were facing themselves, at rates of ten percentage points higher than their co-workers in both cases; mental health problems were also high on their list at 18 percent, but this number was just under half the amount accounted for by their co-workers. Based

on the summary statistics, it can be assumed that employees had greater psychological problems than respondents in managerial positions.

Table 5.*Employee WFH Health Problems*

	Self-evaluation of own problems	Perceived problems faced by other employees
Psychological problems	18%	30%
Digestive problems	3%	1%
Poisoning	0%	0%
Cardiovascular problems	3%	0%
Musculoskeletal problems	17%	11%
Injury	2%	1%
Eye strain	23%	11%
Alcoholism and other addictions	1%	2%
Weight maintenance	32%	22%
No problems	41%	11%

Note: N=115-140

Regression Results

Table 6 shows the results of the ordered probit model for identifying important determinants of the WFH experience for the company, co-workers, and respondents personally while controlling for firm-level characteristics According to the Pseudo R2 value, the model explains approximately 10 percent of the variance in the latent slope function of the equation for the WFH experience. The estimated coefficients suggest that companies that predominantly organize their work processes remotely had a better experience with WFH during the pandemic and this positive but statistically insignificant effect, is also confirmed for employees. Organizational culture's impact on the WFH experience is minor and statistically insignificant, but employees with higher WLB had a better experience with WFH during the pandemic. Interestingly, global corporations and their employees had generally better experiences with WFH than domestic corporations. The same is true for service-sector employees when compared with those in manufacturing. The size of the company itself had no statistically significant effect on the WFH experience.

Table 7 reports the ordered probit model outcome results controlled for firm-level information, WFH prevalence, prior WFH experience, organizational culture, and employee desire to work from home also in the future. The model explains about 10 percent of the variance in the latent slope function of the equation for health challenges and productivity gains. The estimated coefficients (Columns 1 and 2 in Table 7) suggest that health issues are more likely to appear when working for companies that predominantly organize their work processes remotely. There is no statistically significant positive relationship between WFH desire and health problems, but WFH-related health problems more likely appeared as an issue when working for companies that face greater organizational culture challenges in the context of WFH. In terms of firm-level factors, it is interesting to note that medium-sized companies generally reported fewer issues related to WFH-related health problems. The same is true for employees in the service sector when compared to those in the manufacturing sector. Based on the ordered probit model estimates (Columns 3 and 4 in Table 7), productivity improvement during WFH was perceived as an important advantage for companies with fewer challenges in organizational culture and better perceived WLB. Workers' desire to work from home also in the future is positively correlated with productivity improvement being an important advantage of WFH.

Discussion and Conclusion

Given that WFH is here to stay, the lesson to be learned from the pandemic and this study is that WFH should be organized comprehensively. The WFH incidence is a business decision that should not only focus on improving productivity but also on employee well-being, WLB, with special emphasis on health and safety issues when legal regulation fails to do so. Slovenia, where the survey was conducted, exemplifies this paradigm, as the majority of its managers, professionals, and administrators were engaged in WFH in 2020 and 2021 for up to 25 percent of their working time. Even though more than half of the respondents indicated their experience of WFH was better or significantly better than expected for themselves and others, there is still room for improvement. Those working for multinational corporations had a better experience with WFH than those that were not, indicating, perhaps, the better HR practices adopted by these corporations to minimize the negative aspects of remote work. WLB significantly affects the employee WFH experience. This study empirically proves that remote work productivity improvements became an important advantage for those organizations where workers expressed high levels of desire to work remotely when

Table 6.*Ordered Probit Model for WFH-Satisfaction*

	Dependent variable: Company Experience with WFH		**Dependent variable: Employee Experience with WFH**		**Dependent variable: Self-satisfaction with WFH**	
Variables	Coefficients		Coefficients		Coefficients	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Organizational culture challenges resulting from WFH	0.005 (0.161)	-0.048 (0.183)	0.018 (0.159)	0.009 (0.181)	0.103 (0.157)	0.212 (0.181)
WFH before Covid-19	0.192 (0.240)	0.210 (0.255)	0.036 (0.238)	0.021 (0.253)	-0.321 (0.237)	-0.345 (0.254)
More than 50 percent of WFH	0.490** (0.220)	0.535** (0.238)	0.186 (0.218)	0.064 (0.237)	0.337 (0.218)	0.262 (0.238)
Work-life balance		0.193 (0.155)		0.416*** (0.159)		0.314** (0.157)
Domestic ownership	-0.924*** (0.251)	-0.874*** (0.261)	-0.555** (0.244)	-0.415* (254)	-0.714*** (0.246)	-0.781*** (0.260)
Micro company	0.305 (0.329)	-0.456 (0.458)	-0.766 (0.399)	-0.582 (0.467)	-0.284 (0.384)	-0.197 (0.454)
Small company	-0.627 (0.393)	0.256 (0.340)	-0.28762 (0.323)	-0.257 (0.335)	-0.156 (0.304)	-0.122 (0.316)
Medium-sized company	0.043 (0.273)	0.073 (0.282)	0.038 (0.271)	0.060 (0.281)	0.063 (0.269)	0.106 (0.280)
Manufacturing	-0.823*** (0.281)	-0.907*** (0.292)	-0.769*** (0.275)	-0.886*** (0.287)	-0.474* (0.270)	-0.575** (0.281)
Thresholds						
/cut1	-3.124 (0.519)	-2.936 (0.559)	-2.358 (0.411)	-2.150 (0.467)	-2.729 (0.455)	-2.682 (0.542)
/cut2	-2.359 (0.417)	-2.364 (0.477)	-0.844 (0.363)	-0.534 (0.414)	-1.724 (0.383)	-1.588 (0.428)
/cut3	-0.642 (0.364)	-0.501 (0.417)	0.564 (0.358)	0.970 (0.417)	-0.564 (0.362)	-0.379 (0.409)
/cut4	0.310 (0.361)	0.467 (0.416)			0.308 (0.358)	0.597 (0.409)
N	115	103	112	100	110	98
Pseudo R2	0.1027	0.1169	0.0613	0.0909	0.0572	0.0855

Note: ***, ** and * denote statistically significant coefficient estimates at 1%, 5%, and 10% respectively. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

Source: Own calculations.

compared to those who did not. Health problem incidence as a consequence of increased WFH volume needs to be addressed, including organizational culture, as it may worsen employee health outcomes.

When compared to other European countries, Slovenia's legal framework is relatively good, adequately providing a basis for organizing WFH, but this does not guarantee that employees engaged in WFH will feel comfortable, or that they will be taken care of in terms of health and WLB. Appropriate regulation is the starting point, followed by consistent implementation and development of appropriate policies and best practices. Unions should also keep advocating for strong policies and measures to best address worker autonomy, working environment and time, career opportunities, and support (Piasna, 2022).

WFH should be regulated, especially in terms of the legal protection of decent work, and government should work with social partners to optimally do so (ILO, 2021). Future development should combine hard and soft law to address emerging risks related to occupational health and safety (ILO, 2020). Collective agreements often contain untapped opportunities, particularly at the sectoral level, which could provide a baseline standard for developing appropriate policy and practice at the company level. Unions strongly support such an approach, as confirmed by their activities (Industriall, 2021), and collective bargaining can significantly regulate occupational health and safety, as proven by the Covid-19 pandemic (Meardi & Tassinari, 2022).

Data obtained from the recent pandemic-enforced WFH experiment must be evaluated and used to better develop policy and best practices for the long run. Social partner dialogue should address how to optimally determine which workers are appropriate for WFH, how to prevent overwork, and how to mitigate psychosocial and other health risks.

Table 7.*Ordered Probit Model of WFH Outcome (Health Problems and Productivity Improvement)*

	Dependent variable: Health problems		**Dependent variable: Productivity improvement**	
Variables	Coefficients		Coefficients	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
WFH before Covid-19	0.389	0.375	0.214	0.186
	(0.244)	(0.257)	(0.271)	(0.285)
More than 50 percent of WFH	0.455**	0.520**	0.325	0.207
	(0.225)	(0.242)	(0.257)	(0.269)
Organizational culture challenges resulting from WFH	0.320**	0.165	-0.323*	-0.364*
	(0.162)	(0.162)	(0.191)	(0.212)
Work-life balance		-0.056		0.503***
		(0.162)		(0.190)
Desire to WFH	-0.194	-0.231	0.448**	0.359*
	(0.145)	(0.163)	(0.174)	(0.185)
Domestic ownership	0.180	0.322	0.034	0.119
	(0.250)	(0.261)	(0.275)	(0.288)
Micro company	0.004	-0.175	-0.547	-0.679
	(0.399)	(0.465)	(0.569)	(0.627)
Small company	-0.332	-0.536	0.050	0.035
	(0.327)	(0.342)	(0.380)	(0.393)
Medium-sized company	-0.405	-0.512*	0.173	0.219
	(0.279)	(0.290)	(0.300)	(0.311)
Manufacturing	-0.507*	-0.557*	0.733**	0.772**
	(0.290)	(0.304)	(0.310)	(0.326)
Thresholds				
/cut1	-0.855	-1.231	1.943	2.115
	(0.693)	(0.755)	(0.814)	(0.883)
/cut2	0.721	0.413	3.305	3.500
	(0.693)	(0.752)	(0.846)	(0.922)
/cut3	1.360	1.091		
	(0.703)	(0.761)		
/cut4	1.821	1.420		
	(0.721)	(0.773)		
/cut5	2.541	2.154		
	(0.815)	(0.857)		
N	112	100	98	91
Pseudo R2	0.0806	0.0889	0.0954	0.1270

Note: ***, ** and * denote statistically significant coefficient estimates at 1%, 5%, and 10% respectively. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

Source: Own calculations.

Organizations must develop policy that promotes healthy work, not overwork, to ensure sustainable WFH in the long run. In addition to providing ergonomic equipment, policy, and practice should focus on drawing clear boundaries between work and leisure (Van Wijhe et al., 2010). Workers should be encouraged to use their free time for themselves whilst being flexible regarding their work. Employees are most concerned with management training, ICT provision, and scheduling (OECD, 2020); management also shares similar concerns, so there is consensus in this aspect.

Regarding the further development of WFH, at least in the medium term, the cost of doing so must be taken into account. For example, a study by the Irish government indicates that employees can save up to €1,400 when working from home (Gataveckaite, 2022) and some companies have started contributing to employee commuting costs to better enable WFH benefits (Epstein, 2022).

WFH has great potential and there need to be more studies on this topic because pre-pandemic WFH studies do not provide appropriate insight and data. The same is generally true for all social and employment responses pursuant to the Covid-19 pandemic (Natali, 2022), meaning there is significantly more data on WFH, including the digital possibility, than before the pandemic.

WFH may exacerbate the problem of digital knowledge accessibility if timely action is not taken. Studies show that digital knowledge and skills need to be enhanced: a third of the workers in the EU have very low or no digital skills (EU-OSHA, 2021a), with variance across countries and sectors. There is a high risk of greater inequality in terms of gender, pay, and education, so

future research on WFH should focus on identifying such gaps and addressing them. In this context, longitudinal data would be beneficial, especially to more accurately determine the dimensions and consequences of WFH-related health risks. As researchers and practitioners have noted, employees engaged in WFH fear diminishing career opportunities and knowledge access, so research should address this. Personal characteristics may affect the frequency of telework, for example, WFH increased more among younger workers than older workers and women than men during the pandemic (OECD, 2021). Collective bargaining seems appropriate for mitigating this (Keune, 2021).

Another trend worth addressing is the world of digital nomads – employees engaged in leisure, a combination of business and leisure, wherever they may be. There should be initiatives to encourage people to relocate for employment, be it to another country, municipality, city, town, or village. One of this trend's challenges is the provision of viable equipment to work from anywhere, and since this problem already exists for WFH, it presents an even greater challenge for the world of digital nomads. It seems that location-independent work is most suitable for those with well-paid jobs and fewer commitments, such as childless tech workers (Economist, 2022); for others, the continuing debate is related to employment executed at home or on-site. It is also questionable whether this positively affects WLB because it can exacerbate imbalance in favor of work. This is currently of great interest and should be considered in future research.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The study was co-financed by the European Union from the European Social Fund and by the Republic of Slovenia.

Author Contributions: Conception/Design of study: V.F., P.D.M.; Data Acquisition: V.F., P.D.M.; Data Analysis/Interpretation: V.F., P.D.M.; Drafting Manuscript: V.F., P.D.M.; Critical Revision of Manuscript: V.F., P.D.M; Final Approval and Accountability: V.F., P.D.M.

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How Cite This Article

Franca, V., & Muren, P. D. (2023). Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons on well-being, work-life balance, and health. *Journal of Social Policy Conferences*, 84, 1-14. https://doi. org/10.26650/jspc.2023.84.1207474