



COVID-19 AND YOU: IMPACT AND RECOVERY STUDY

Home working in Scotland during and after the Pandemic: Prevalence, Experiences and Preferences

Authors: Dr David A. Comerford, Dr Alan Duggan, Dr David Bell, Dr Elaine Douglas



**Economic
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**UNIVERSITY of
STIRLING**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 Pandemic caused a change in the working patterns experienced by many Scottish people. This rapid report describes the change to home working induced by the pandemic and the restrictions it imposed. It reports the preferred working patterns reported by our sample of older people living in Scotland and describes which factors influences those preferences.

The sample of older people (aged ≤ 50) was drawn from two Scottish longitudinal studies - Healthy Ageing in Scotland (HAGIS) and Generation Scotland. A predefined panel of Scottish respondents (aged ≤ 50) was additionally invited to participate. Data were collected between October 2021 – January 2022 using electronic and postal self-complete interviews and telephone-assisted personal interviews (TAPI). From a target sample of 15,674 older people, 3373 (41% men, 59% women) participants completed the survey.

40% of workers in our sample increased the hours spent working from home. A majority of our working respondents (>85%) report that their preferred working arrangements would continue to involve spending at least some of their working hours working from home. As well as the reduced infection risk, workers particularly like working from home because it avoids having to commute and it gives control over their own work schedule.

Nearly half of workers surveyed identified loneliness as something they disliked about working from home.

About 80% of our sample expected that after the pandemic they would spend just as many hours working (paid or voluntary) as they had prior to the pandemic. Of those who foresaw a change in their activity, about 75% expected to reduce their hours worked.

KEY FINDINGS

40 percent of workers in our sample reported that they changed to greater homeworking during the pandemic. The modal respondent shifted from working full time in the workplace to working fulltime at home.

When asked for their preferred working arrangements, the most common answer was to spend 100% of worktime at home (20% of sample). The next most preferred option was to spend 0% of work time working from home (14% of the sample).

The most commonly endorsed answer about what workers like about home working was that it avoids having to commute.

The most commonly endorsed answer about what workers dislike about home working was the loneliness of working from home.

About 80% of our sample expected that after the pandemic they would spend just as many hours working (paid or voluntary) as they had prior to the pandemic. Of those who foresaw a change in their activity, about 75% expected to reduce their hours worked.

INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing strategies were introduced to restrict spread of the infection. One group who were especially affected by these strategies were those in paid employment.

The data collected as part of the COVID-19 wave of the HAGIS survey shed light on the scale of these changes and on how they were experienced by older people living in Scotland.

AIMS

To describe the work patterns and subjective experience of work of older workers (> 49) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To determine desired levels of home working.

METHODS

Sample and recruitment

The eligible participants were older people aged 50 and over living in Scotland. The recruitment was primarily targeted at the participants from two existing Scottish longitudinal studies - Healthy Ageing in Scotland (HAGIS) and Generation Scotland. Additionally, a predefined panel of 600 Scottish participants meeting the eligibility criteria was invited to participate. Data were collected remotely between October 2021 and January 2022. This was the period when most but not all public health restrictions were lifted in Scotland [4]; however, due to the rapid transmission of the new Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in December 2021, the restrictions on large gatherings and physical distancing in hospitality venues were re-introduced [5]. Multiple modes of remote data collection were used – electronic, telephone and postal interviews. Postal participants were additionally offered to take the survey online, referred to as ‘nudge to web’ mode (see Figure 1). More details on the participant recruitment to multiple modes of data collection are available in Appendix A.

There were 3,373 core respondents to the COVID-19 Wave of HAGIS, data for which were collected in late 2021. Of these, 2,679 were asked about their economic circumstances, which is the module from which the data for this report derive. These analyses were carried out on those respondents in our sample who were asked about their economics circumstances and also identified that they were working.



2021-2022

OCTOBER



NOVEMBER



NOVEMBER-DECEMBER



DECEMBER-JANUARY



TARGET SAMPLE
n=15,674

HAGIS n=186
GS n=7,076

HAGIS n=190

HAGIS n=627
GS n=6,995

PANEL n=600

ACHIEVED SAMPLE
n=3,722

HAGIS n=66
GS n=2309

HAGIS n=18

HAGIS n=166*
GS n=563*

PANEL n=600

EFFECTIVE SAMPLE
n=3,393

HAGIS n=55
GS n=2018

HAGIS n=18

HAGIS n=166
GS n=536

PANEL n=600

*Note. *Inclusive of 'nudge to web' participants*

Figure 1. Timeline for survey fieldwork

Results

Change to Home Working During the Pandemic

We asked “did you change to home working during the pandemic”. Of those who are working, 40% report that they did change to home working. A follow up question of those who reported increased home working asked the number of additional hours spent working from home. The graph in Figure 2 on the right indicates that the most common transition for workers was from working fulltime in a workplace to working fulltime from home.

Applying population weights to the data, the proportion indicating that they changed to home working remains at 40%. This suggests that our result is not an artefact of having oversampled any particular demographic group of workers.

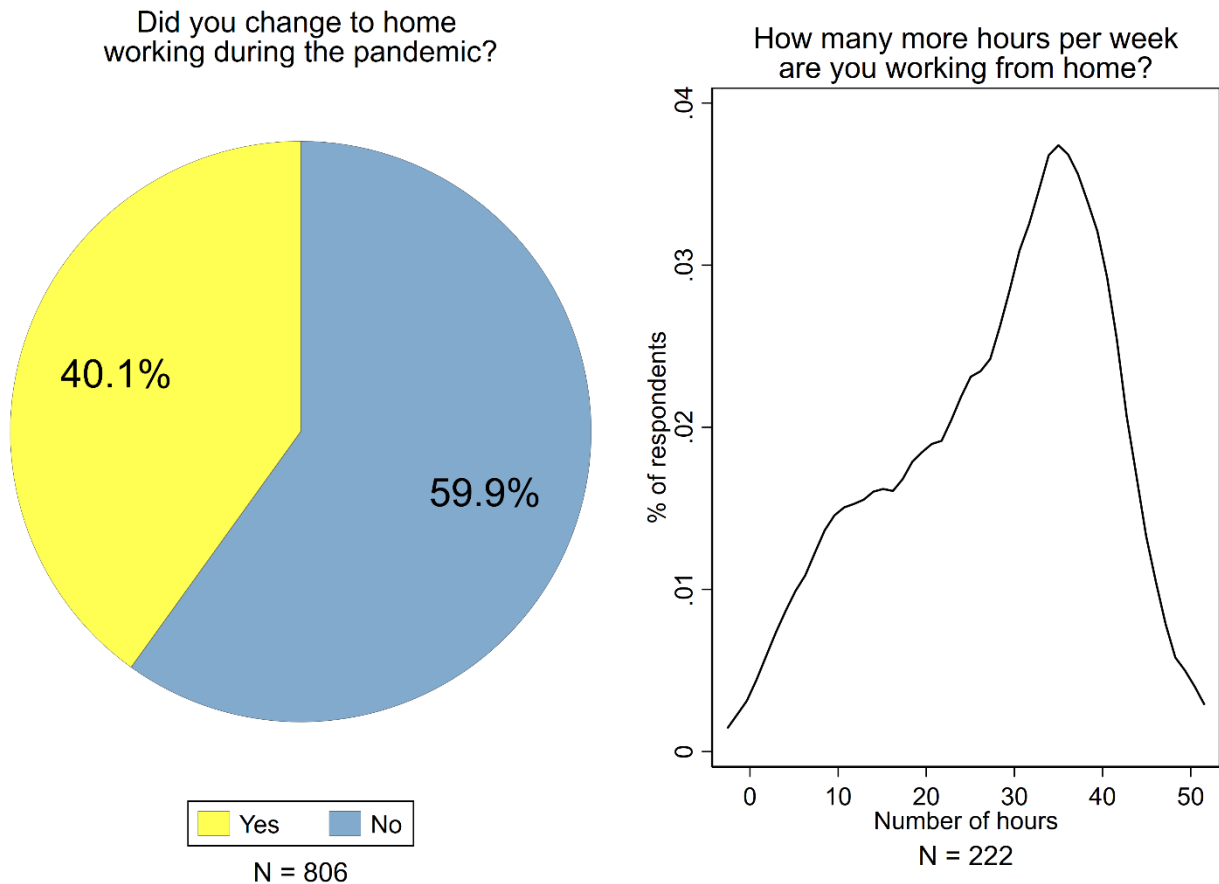


Figure 2. % working respondents reporting a change to home working during the pandemic (left) and, for those reporting more home working, additional number of hours home working (right).

What Workers Like about Working From Home

We asked workers “To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I like working from home because...” (there then followed the reasons summarized in Figure 3). Respondents answered on a five-point scale from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. Respondents also had the option to add their own reason to the list. One of the features most liked by workers was the “reduced risk of infection”.

Two other highly liked features of working from home were that it removes the necessity of having to commute and that it gives more control over the pace of work. These features of working from home are not contingent on the pandemic and so suggest that a preference for home working will persist as we emerge from the pandemic. We return to this point below when we consider the preferred proportion of worktime spent working from home.

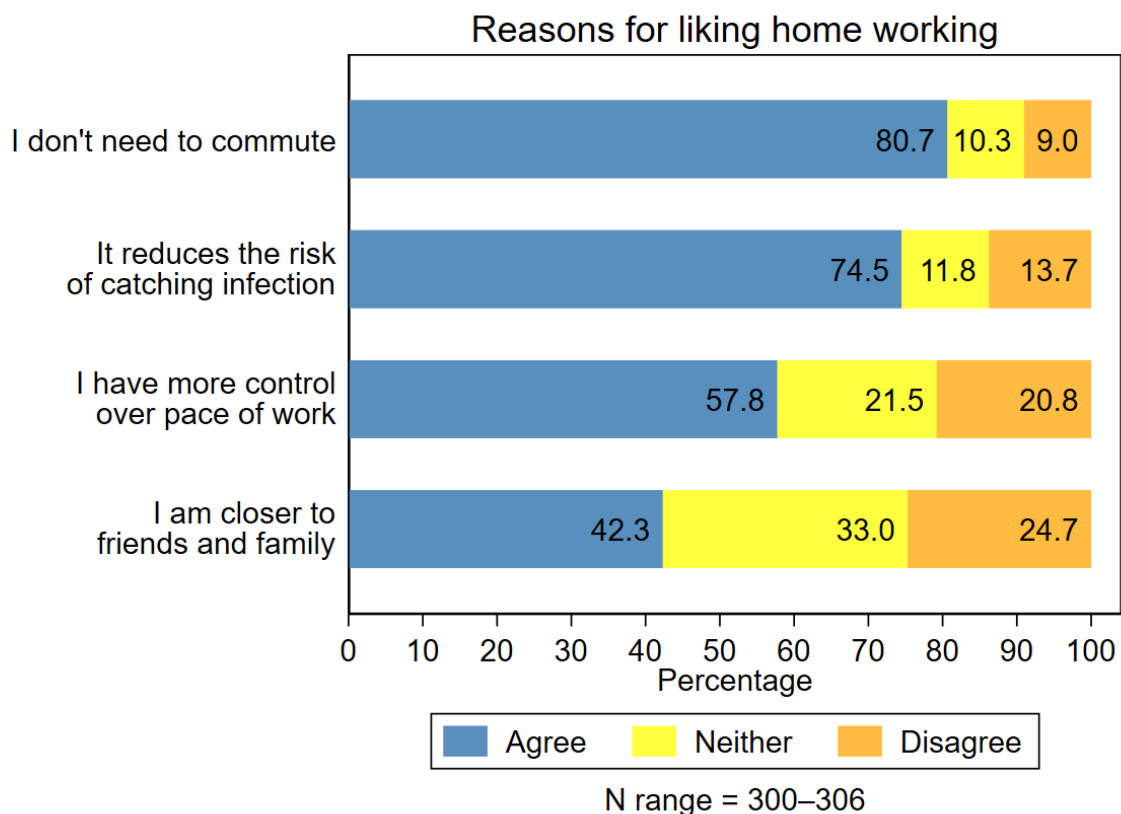


Figure 3. Reasons workers like working from home

What Workers Dislike about Working From Home

We asked workers “To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I dislike working from home because...” (there then followed the reasons summarized in Figure 4). Loneliness emerged as the item that was most agreed with as a source of disliking working from home. Still, fewer than 50% of workers endorsed loneliness as a reason for disliking working from home. This result converges with the reasons for liking data in suggesting that working from home is broadly liked by respondents to our survey.

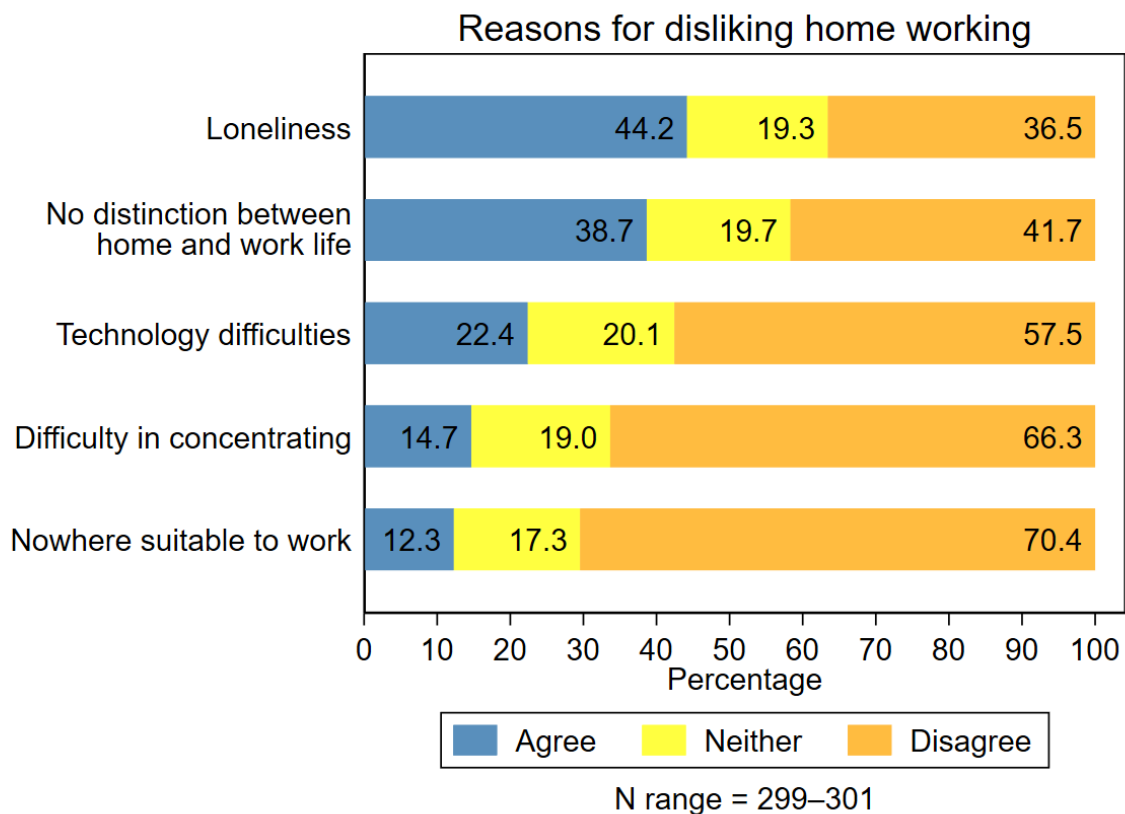


Figure 4. Reasons workers dislike working from home

Preferred Amount of Working from Home

We asked workers “What proportion of your working time would you prefer to spend working from home?” To answer, respondents used a slider that ranged from 0% to 100%.

A caveat to interpreting the response to this question is that rates of non-response were high: where 488 respondents answered with usable data, 164 endorsed the option “prefer not to say”. We do not know why so many respondents answered “prefer not to say”.

Of those who did answer, the most common response was 100%, which was delivered by 20% of workers in our sample. The next most common was 0%, which was delivered by 12% of the workers in our sample. Applying population weights suggests that bias in the composition of our sample might slightly underestimate the appeal of home working. When we apply weights, the proportion preferring to work from home always rises from 20% to 21.5% and the proportion preferring to never work from home falls from 14% to 12%. Given high rates of non-response however, caution should be taken when interpreting these results.

There is no difference in preference for home working across men and women. There is no significant difference across men and women in their likelihood of wanting to spend all their workhours working from home. Men and women are also similarly likely to want to spend all their workhours at the workplace.

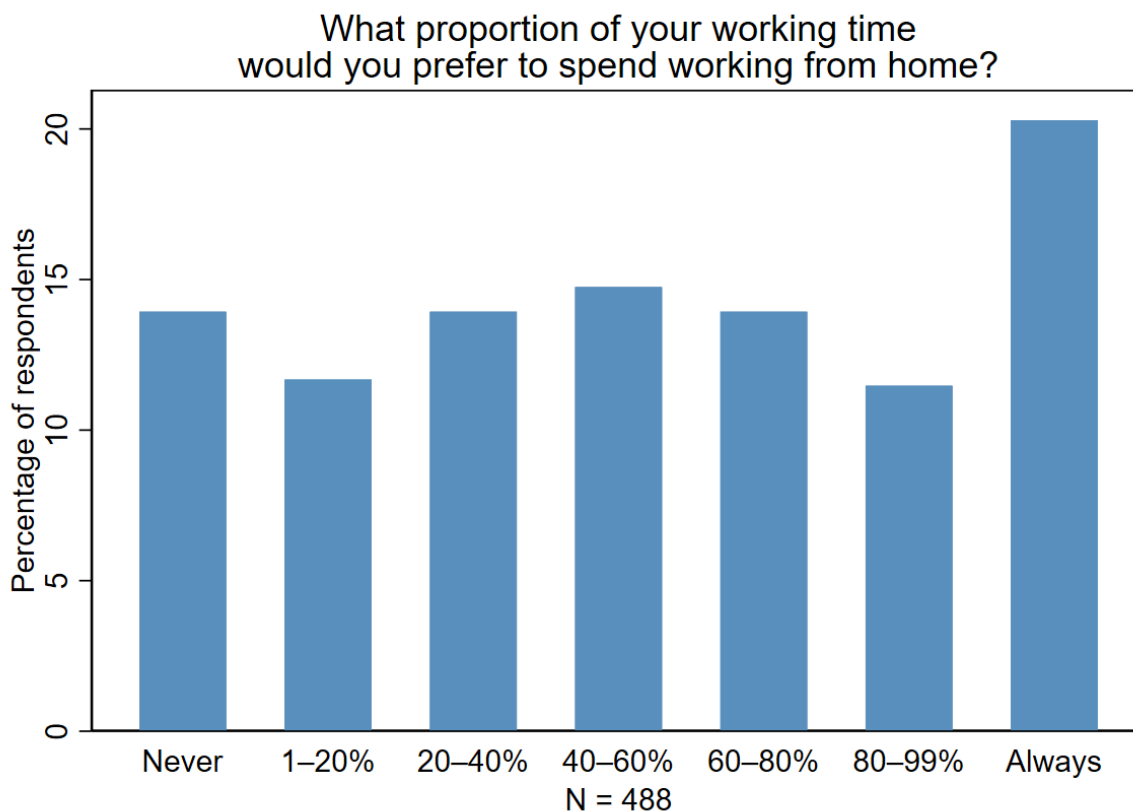


Figure 5. Preferred allocation of working time spent working from home. Note that non-response to this question was high – 164 eligible respondents answered “prefer not to say”.

Intentions to Leave Work

We asked respondents “After the Covid-19 pandemic, do you expect to spend more or less of your time in the following activities.” One of the activities listed was paid work and another was volunteering. While the vast majority of respondents reported that they would spend the same amount of time in both of these activities as they had before (82% for paid work; 79% for volunteering), the remaining respondents showed a tendency towards reducing their working time: 13% reported that they would spend less time in paid work and 16% reported they would spend less time volunteering.

Applying population weights to the data, we find an identical pattern to that reported above.

APPENDIX

Participant Recruitment to Multimodal routes of Data Collection



Online mode: Eligible online participants from two existing Scottish longitudinal studies received an electronic invitation letter with an enclosed link to the study website and a personalised link to the survey. The website described the study, how to take part in the survey and get more information about the study. An email address and a freephone number was provided to connect directly to HAGIS researchers for clarifications. The survey was hosted on the Qualtrics XM Platform. Participants received a reminder to complete the survey following 2 weeks post-invitation. DJS Research (a social marketing research agency) recruited panellists to the study by sending an initial electronic invitation. The panellists who expressed an interest to participate were directed to the survey hosted by DJS Research using Nebu Platform. Panellists are paid for completing the survey, at a rate of £12 per survey.



Telephone mode: Participants for phone interviews were approached by DJS Research. Interviewers explained the study and ways to get more information about the survey. For participants who were interested to take part, interviewers arranged a suitable time for the interview. Survey responses were entered initially into the Telephone Assisted Personal Interview (TAPI) system, followed by the transfer into the Qualtrics XM Platform.



Postal mode: Eligible postal participants received the postal invitation letter, information leaflet and postal survey, with an accompanying reply-paid envelope. All postal participants were offered an option to take part in the survey electronically through the study website. The reminder postcards were sent to participants 3 weeks post-invitation.

Contact us

Healthy Ageing in Scotland (HAGIS)

University of Stirling

FK9 4LA

Stirling, Scotland

Email: HAGIS@stir.ac.uk

Website: www.HAGIS.scot

