



COVID-19: Challenges of home-working, a survey to inform working practice

A grassroots survey conducted 28.05.20 to 11.06.20

Presented 17 June 2020

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About this survey

At the start of the year many of us faced changes to the way we work as the COVID-19 virus began to spread worldwide at an unprecedented rate. Employers and employees embraced a new virtual workspace.

Changes were introduced quickly leaving little time for contemplation, planning or preparation. Many organizations were required to move from office-based to a 100% remote workforce in a matter of days.

Everyone faced personal disruption and change.

As strategies are being considered to reverse lockdown conditions, employers and employees are asking themselves whether lessons learned during the pandemic may be translated into new working paradigms.

This survey was conducted to gain insight into individual experience.



Approach

A survey was proposed to identify key work-based observations made during the 2020 pandemic.

Questions targeting key well-being factors were identified based on the Working at Home Wellbeing Survey conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies in March 2020. Opinion was also sought on pet hates and perceptions, recommendations and learnings. Questions were allocated randomly to a perceived 'positive' or 'negative' bias.

A series of 52 questions and four free text entry fields were entered into Google Forms and the survey was run from 26 May to 11 June, 2020.

Responses were combined to create a unique set of responses focusing on:

- WFH environment
- Emotional health
- Self worth
- Satisfaction
- Working patterns and life style

Reporting categories

The WFH environment: the workplace environment; health and safety; briefing; freedom; training and growth opportunities

Emotional well being: enjoyment; cheerfulness; anxiety (including health concerns and job security); vigor; rest/sleep (and isolation)

Self worth: motivation; engagement and contribution; recognition; trust; feeling of value

Work: daily routine; workload; productivity; support; interaction with colleagues; concentration; issue resolution; interesting work

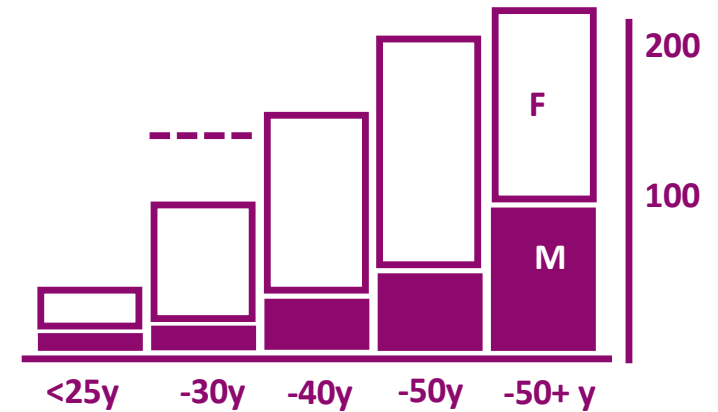
Life style: work-life balance; exercise; alcohol use; social media; relationships

Opinion: pet hates and perceptions; recommendations and learnings (free comment)

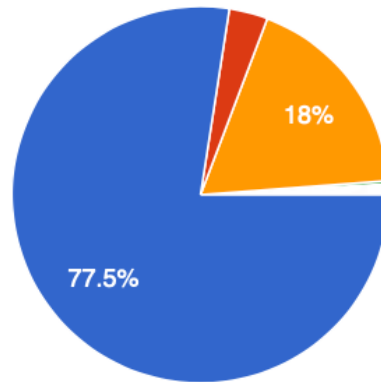
Demographics

Total of 758 respondents most of who were female (71.5%)

Highest proportion of respondents (31%) were in the >50 y bracket

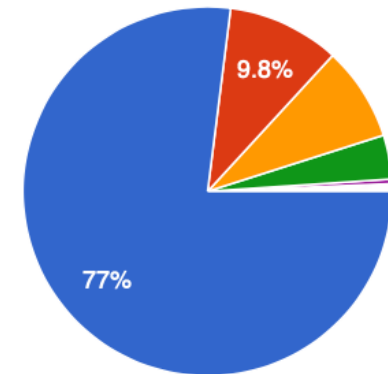


Most (77.5%) were married and living with their partner



Most were living in their own homes

38.4% of respondents were living with a child under 18 y



77.2% of respondents were based in the UK, the next largest response group were from USA (8.1%)

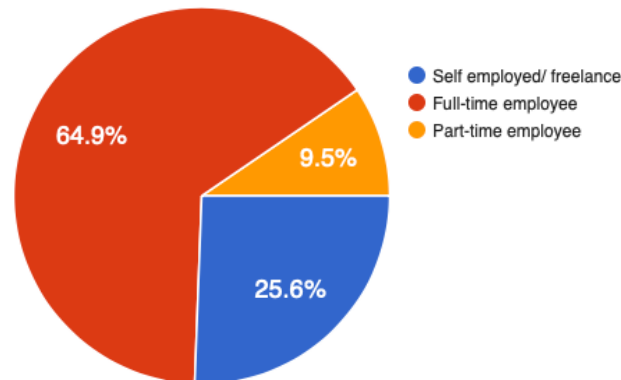
Employee profile

Over half (56.8%) of respondents are employed in medical communications;
14.4% Pharma/Biotech; 11.1% CRO

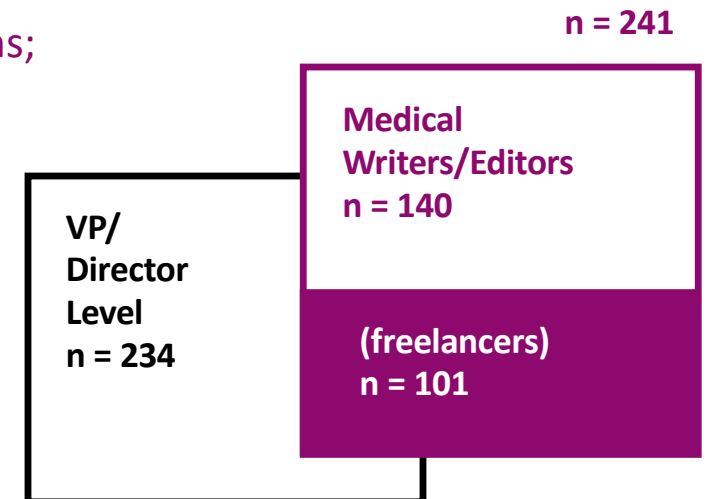
The majority of respondents (32%) identified themselves as
medical writers/editors and 31% (234) as
VP/Director level employees

43.9% of our population
were managing others

Most respondents
were full-time employees



18% of respondents felt they were financially worse off since the start of the pandemic
In contrast, over 50% felt they were better off.

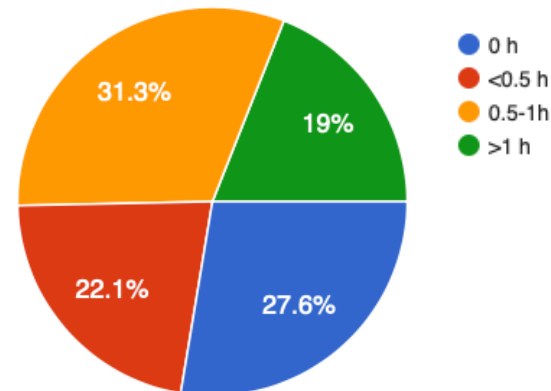


Responder characteristics

The survey sample reflects an employment fluid population with modest turnover rates: <1 y (19.1%) ; 1 – 5 y (42.9%) ; 6 – 10 y (13.3%) ; 10+ y (24.7%)

The majority of the survey population worked a full 'working week' profile: <15 h (2.4%) ; 16 – 29 h (14.5%) ; 30 – 40 h (61.3%) ; 40+ h (21.8%)

The daily commute was relatively evenly spread



Over 58.7% of responders (n=444) had the option to work from home before the pandemic



97.4%

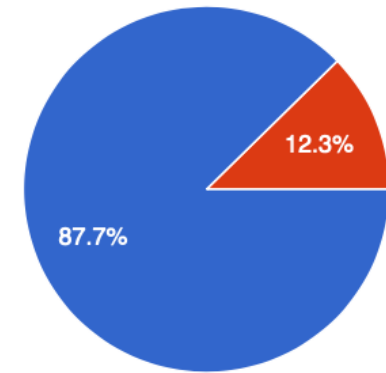
**Of responders were
working from home at
the time of the survey**

The WFH Environment

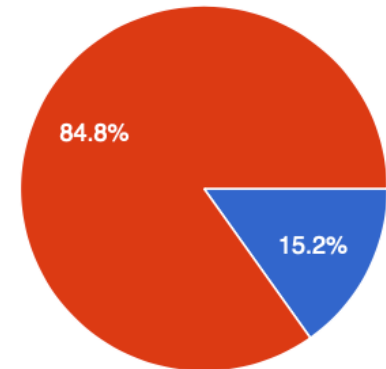
The majority of responders felt that they had the equipment they needed to work from home effectively

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Briefing ^{Q30}	57.2%	35.9%	5.5%	1.1%	0.3%
Freedom ^{Q33}	38.8%	37.2%	15.7%	6.7%	1.6%
Training ^{Q37 #}	13.6%	34.4%	25.7%	22.8%	3.4%
Growth ^{Q38}	17.0%	50.7%	22.3%	7.8%	2.3%

Negative response reversal



A formal health and safety assessment was only performed in a small proportion of cases



Emotional well-being

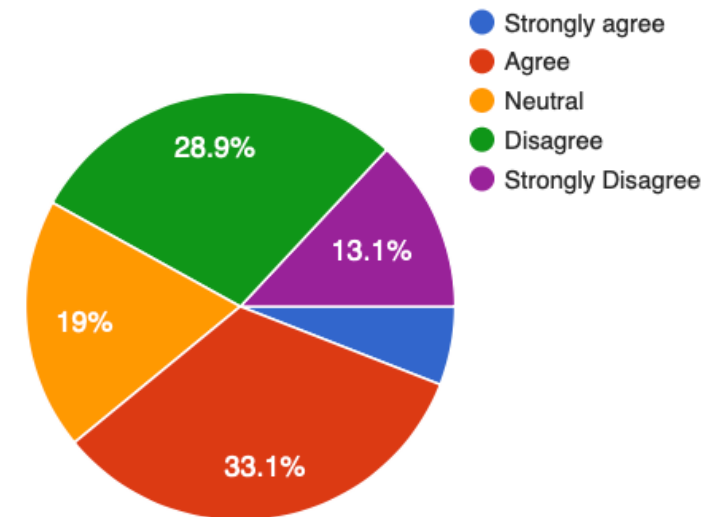
	All the time	More than half the time	Less than half the time	Some of the time	At no time
Enjoyment ^{Q20}	30.9%	43.5%	9.8%	14.5%	1.3%
Cheerfulness ^{Q21}	18.5%	60.4%	10.4%	9.6%	1.1%
Anxiety ^{Q22 #}	37.2%	42.4%	9.3%	10.2%	0.9%
Vigour ^{Q23}	11.4%	43.2%	19.1%	19.6%	6.3%
Job Security ^{Q26 #}	39.1%	37.4%	9.8%	8.2%	4.2%
Rest ^{Q24 #}	13.7%	42.3%	18.2%	19.4%	6.5%

Negative response reversal

Fewer than half the responders had experienced concerns over health during the lockdown period

“More time at home with family - no travel time and I get to have lunch at home. Good for work-life balance and mental wellbeing.”

Female aged 31-40y, UK



28.1%

Strongly agreed (5.6%) or Agreed (22.5%)
with the statement:

“I have felt lonely and
isolated”



71.9%

Strongly Disagreed (20.8%), Disagreed
(35.2%) or felt Neutral (15.9%)

Self worth

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Valued ^{Q39 #}	27.9%	45.3%	14.1%	9.4%	3.3%
Engagement ^{Q35}	25.4%	47.0%	19.2%	7.5%	0.9%
Recognition ^{Q36 #}	17.9%	37.9%	27.0%	13.2%	4.0%
Motivational ^{Q31}	22.3%	36.0%	25.6%	13.5%	2.6%
Trust ^{Q40}	45.4%	45.9%	7.2%	1.2%	0.4%

Negative response reversal

“It's important to continue to ensure people feel valued and motivated. a significant part of my job satisfaction came from organising and attending live meetings so the prospect of not having this for the foreseeable future is more demotivating than having to work from home.”

Female aged 26–30y, UK

“It's not really about whether working from home is good/bad/motivational etc, it is about how you are managing to work in an extremely difficult home situation. For those of us with children at home, the challenges of working in the current situation have more to do with looking after children.”

Female aged 31–40y, UK

Work

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Daily routine ^{Q48}	21.3%	48.3%	14.7%	12.7%	3.0%
Workload ^{Q32}	35.5%	28.4%	20.7%	11.2%	4.2%
Interaction ^{Q34 #}	17.2%	40.5%	25.8%	14.0%	2.4%
Concentration ^{Q43}	15.0%	39.0%	22.4%	19.4%	4.2%

	All the time	More than half the time	Less than half the time	Some of the time	At no time
Interest ^{Q25}	15.7%	43.4%	16.1%	21.0%	3.7%
Productivity ^{Q27 #}	32.5%	37.6%	12.6%	13.4%	4.0%
Contact time ^{Q28 #}	39.8%	34.1%	11.9%	10.7%	3.4%
Support ^{Q29}	34.0%	44.1%	8.6%	10.3%	3.0%

Negative response reversal

“Lack of social contact with colleagues.”

Male, 41-50y, UK

“Just having the flexibility to be at home a few days a week would help to reduce the ongoing to do list as I find it more productive working from home with less distractions in the office environment.”

Female 31-40y, UK

“My employer has been really proactive during COVID-19, all staff are working from home, they arranged webinars to support us with hints/tips on how to get the best out of working from home.”

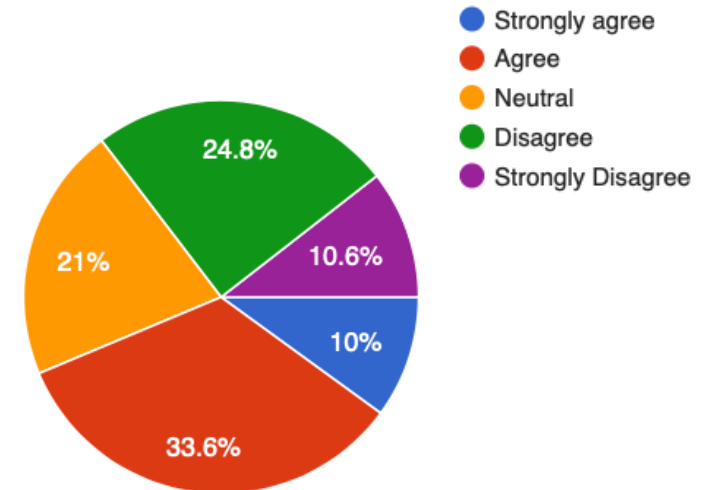
Female 50+y, UK

Life style

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Desk eating ^{Q44 #}	31.0%	33.2%	12.7%	13.6%	9.5%
Lunchtime ^{Q45}	9.5%	25.7%	20.6%	31.3%	12.8%
Alcohol intake ^{Q46 #}	26.1%	26.6%	15.5%	25.1%	6.7%
Exercise ^{Q47 #}	19.9%	24.9%	11.5%	25.7%	17.9%
Social media ^{Q49 #}	11.8%	31.3%	23.2%	27.2%	6.6%
Relationships ^{Q50}	6.9%	19.7%	44.8%	24.0%	4.6%

Negative response reversal

35.4% of responders felt that they had experienced issues keeping their work and domestic lives separate ^{Q51}



The freelancer

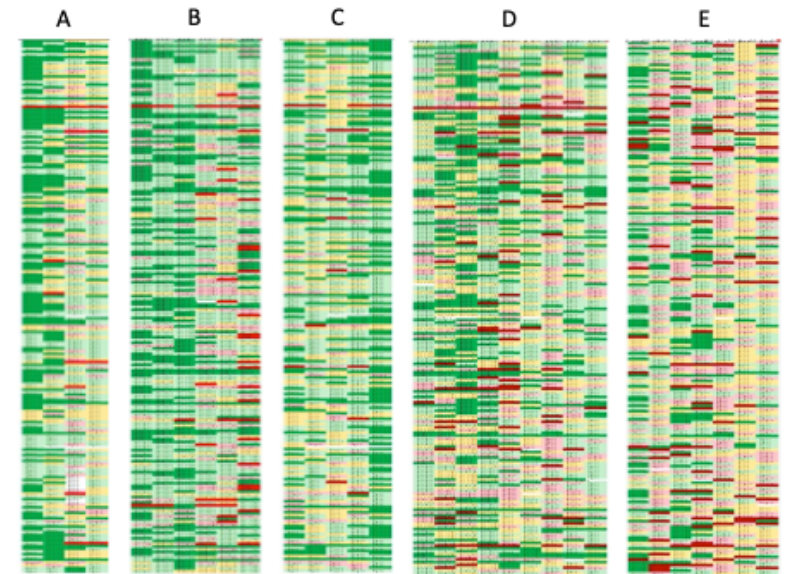
Total of 194 respondents identified themselves as freelancers and had a similar M/F split – female 68.6%, 49% were in the >50 y age group (no responders <25y)

Of the 194, 90.2% (174) could work from home beforehand and eight were not working from home despite the pandemic

Response grading

- 2 – Strongly agree/all of the time
- 1 – Agree/more than half of the time
- 0 – Neutral/less than half of the time
- 1 – Disagree/Some of the time
- 2 – Strongly disagree/At no time

- A – WFH environment
- B – Emotional well-being
- C – Self worth
- D – Work
- E – Life style



The WFH Environment

	Freelancers	Whole population
Briefing ^{Q30}	1.47	1.49
Freedom ^{Q33}	1.09	1.05
Training ^{Q37#}	0.44	0.32
Growth ^{Q38}	0.67	0.72
Average	0.91	0.89

Emotional well-being

	Freelancers	Whole population
Enjoyment ^{Q20}	1.28	0.88
Cheerfulness ^{Q21}	1.16	0.86
Anxiety ^{Q22 #}	1.36	1.04
Vigour ^{Q23}	0.58	0.33
Job Security ^{Q26 #}	0.46	0.37
Rest ^{Q24 #}	0.57	0.96
Average	0.90	0.74

Work

	Freelancers	Whole population
Daily routine ^{Q48}	0.66	0.72
Workload ^{Q32}	0.23	0.80
Interaction ^{Q34 #}	0.71	0.56
Concentration ^{Q43}	0.51	0.41
Interest ^{Q25}	0.71	0.46
Productivity ^{Q27 #}	0.69	0.81
Contact time ^{Q28 #}	1.08	0.96
Support ^{Q29}	0.69	0.96
Average	0.59	0.64

Negative response reversal

Self worth

	Freelancers	Whole population
Valued ^{Q39 #}	0.88	0.84
Engagement ^{Q35}	0.76	0.88
Recognition ^{Q36 #}	0.60	0.52
Motivational ^{Q31}	0.92	0.62
Trust ^{Q40}	1.41	1.35
Average	0.91	0.84

Life style

	Freelancers	Whole population
Desk eating ^{Q44 #}	0.87	0.63
Lunchtime ^{Q45}	0.07	0.12
Alcohol intake ^{Q46 #}	0.43	0.40
Exercise ^{Q47 #}	0.25	0.03
Social media ^{Q49 #}	-0.05	0.14
Relationships ^{Q50}	0.05	0.00
Balance ^{Q51}	0.12	0.08
Average	0.25	0.20

Negative response reversal

26.8%

Strongly agreed (4.6%) or Agreed (22.2%)
with the statement:

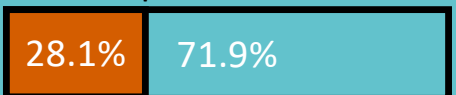
“I have felt lonely and
isolated”



73.2%

Strongly Disagreed (26.8%), Disagreed
(35.1%) or felt Neutral (10.8%)

Total Population



Which aspect of working from home do you find most difficult?

"As someone that is relatively new to the company, it has been hard to built relationships with my team members and I am finding that I am only communicating with a handful of people. It has also been difficult to expand my skill base."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Feeling isolated."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Over working - spending longer hours on work."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Work equipment at home is not enough. I only have a small laptop. It's difficult to use for long hours."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Managing children at the same time."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"The lack of social interaction with other people in the company. The chats you have in the office, at the kitchen, over lunch etc. Trying to organise these chats via video call feels quite formal and intrusive on people's day-to-day."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

Which aspect of working from home do you find most rewarding?

"Flexibility of working hours to fit in around small children."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Being less stressed, no commuting, having lunch breaks and working better hours."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"The ability to concentrate more in a quiet work environment, as opposed to the hustle and bustle of the office."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"No commute."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Better work/life balance."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

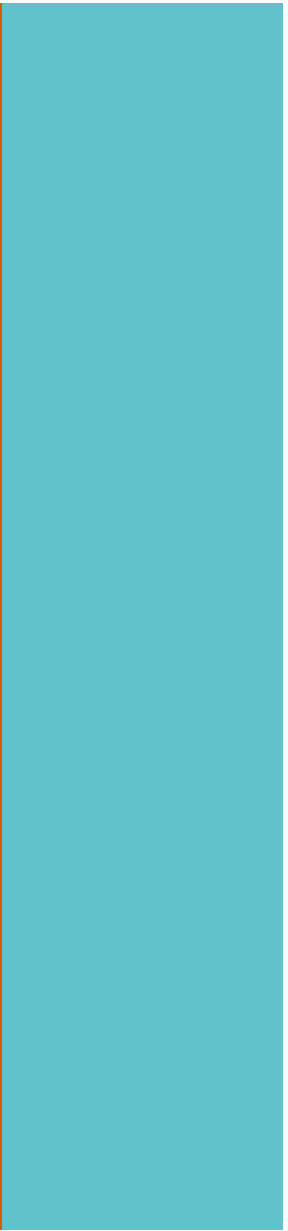
"We have built a different kind of relationship with clients, it's more personal, there is a recognition that we are all individuals with personal lives, and we are working flexibly to meet business needs, whilst juggling many other things."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK



85.6%

**Of responders don't think that
the way we work will return
to the way it was before the
pandemic**



What recommendations could you give in terms of techniques and approaches that can optimise home working?

For example, have you found an efficient and effective way of dividing up your day? Have you found any useful practical solutions such as a bigger screen, computer software or cable internet connection?

"A comfortable work station with big screen, comfortable chair and big desk."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Have a separate fully equipped office. Double screen a must."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Have a clear to do list of what you want to achieve during the day - this is a good way to stay focused."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Create yourself clear boundaries of work and leisure time and be disciplined on that."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Making time for a lunch break walk has made me feel healthier and sleep better."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Our company has regular social video calls which are a good way of keeping in touch with colleagues without being on a work call."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

Have you any advice for employers?

"Invest in technology & training. Empower employees to make independent decisions."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Be flexible and trust your employees."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Ensure employees have the equipment they need to work from home."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"If long term, ensure that staff are kept up to date with changes happening in the company. If working from home becomes the norm, maybe staff could have a hot desk that they can come in to the office for a couple of days to do their work and keep in touch with rest of workforce."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Expenses are less, so pay could be increased?"

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

"Whenever possible, give your employees work flexibility and the autonomy to manage their own work schedule."

Female, aged 40–50y, UK

28.1%

Strongly agreed (5.6%) or Agreed (22.5%)
with the statement:

“I have felt lonely and
isolated”



71.9%

Strongly Disagreed (20.8%), Disagreed
(35.2%) or felt Neutral (15.9%)

The isolated

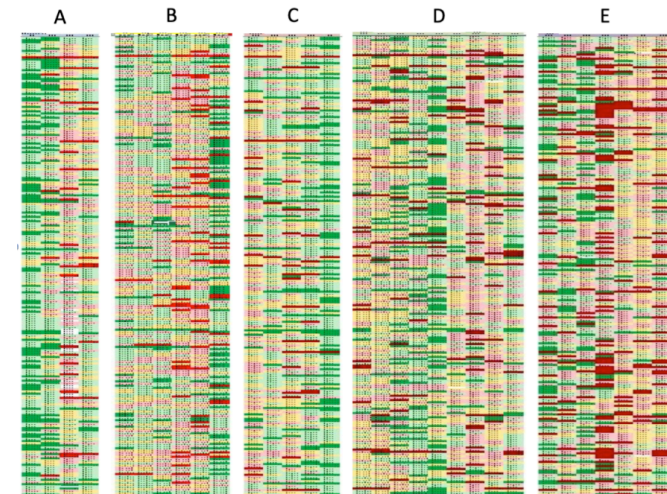
Total of 213 respondents indicated “I have felt lonely and isolated” and had a similar M/F split – female 70.4% female.

Over 54.0% of responders (n=115) **didn't have** the option to work from home before the pandemic

Response grading

- 2 – Strongly agree/all of the time
- 1 – Agree/more than half of the time
- 0 – Neutral/less than half of the time
- 1 – Disagree/Some of the time
- 2 – Strongly disagree/At no time

- A – WFH environment
- B – Emotional well-being
- C – Self worth
- D – Work
- E – Life style



The WFH Environment

	Isolated	Whole population
Briefing Q30	1.23	1.49
Freedom Q33	0.74	1.05
Training Q37#	-0.19	0.32
Growth Q38	0.41	0.72
Average	0.55	0.89

Emotional well-being

	Isolated	Whole population
Enjoyment Q20	0.33	0.88
Cheerfulness Q21	0.28	0.86
Anxiety Q22 #	0.45	1.04
Vigour Q23	-0.28	0.33
Job Security Q26 #	-0.17	0.37
Rest Q24 #	0.69	0.96
Average	0.22	0.74

Work

	Isolated	Whole population
Daily routine Q48	0.21	0.72
Workload Q32	0.72	0.80
Interaction Q34 #	0.10	0.56
Concentration Q43	-0.30	0.41
Interest Q25	-0.14	0.46
Productivity Q27 #	0.16	0.81
Contact time Q28 #	0.37	0.96
Support Q29	0.53	0.96
Average	0.14	0.64

Negative response reversal

Self worth

	Isolated	Whole population
Valued ^{Q39 #}	0.48	0.84
Engagement ^{Q35}	0.44	0.88
Recognition ^{Q36 #}	0.18	0.52
Motivational ^{Q31}	-0.03	0.62
Trust ^{Q40}	1.15	1.35
Average	0.44	0.84

Negative response reversal

Life style

	Isolated	Whole population
Desk eating ^{Q44 #}	0.42	0.63
Lunchtime ^{Q45}	0.13	0.12
Alcohol intake ^{Q46 #}	0.28	0.40
Exercise ^{Q47 #}	-0.52	0.03
Social media ^{Q49 #}	-0.27	0.14
Relationships ^{Q50}	-0.33	0.00
Balance ^{Q51}	-0.33	0.08
Average	-0.09	0.20

Negative response reversal



Executive Summary

758 people responded to a survey into home working during the 2020 pandemic that posed questions relating to the working from home (WFH) environment, emotional well-being, self-worth, work and life style. Over 97% of the responders were working from home at the time of the survey.

Generally, the majority of responders felt that the WFH environment was acceptable and their employers provided the equipment they needed to perform their work. However, more than 85% had not had performed a health and safety assessment on their work space.

Overall responders felt that WFH allowed them to have good emotional well-being. However, a proportion demonstrated signs of not adjusting to new environment and over 28% indicated that they had experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Both work and life style data indicated that as many as 20-25% of people working from home were not adjusting well to working in the home environment. Freelancers with established home working experience were also prone to dissatisfaction.

Not having to commute and flexible working were identified of key advantages of working from home and a comfortable work station with large screens and good internet connection were identified as key to optimizing home working.

Over 85% of responders didn't think that the way they work would return to the way it was before the pandemic.



Thank You

COVID-19: Challenges of home-working: A grassroots survey conducted 28.05.20 to 11.06.20
Presented 17 June 2020

The report and the full data set can be found on
The MedComms Networking surveys page at
<http://www.medcommsnetworking.com/surveys.html>

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