

Rethinking Work: Measuring work in the age of remote working, digitalisation of work and the ‘always-on’ work culture”

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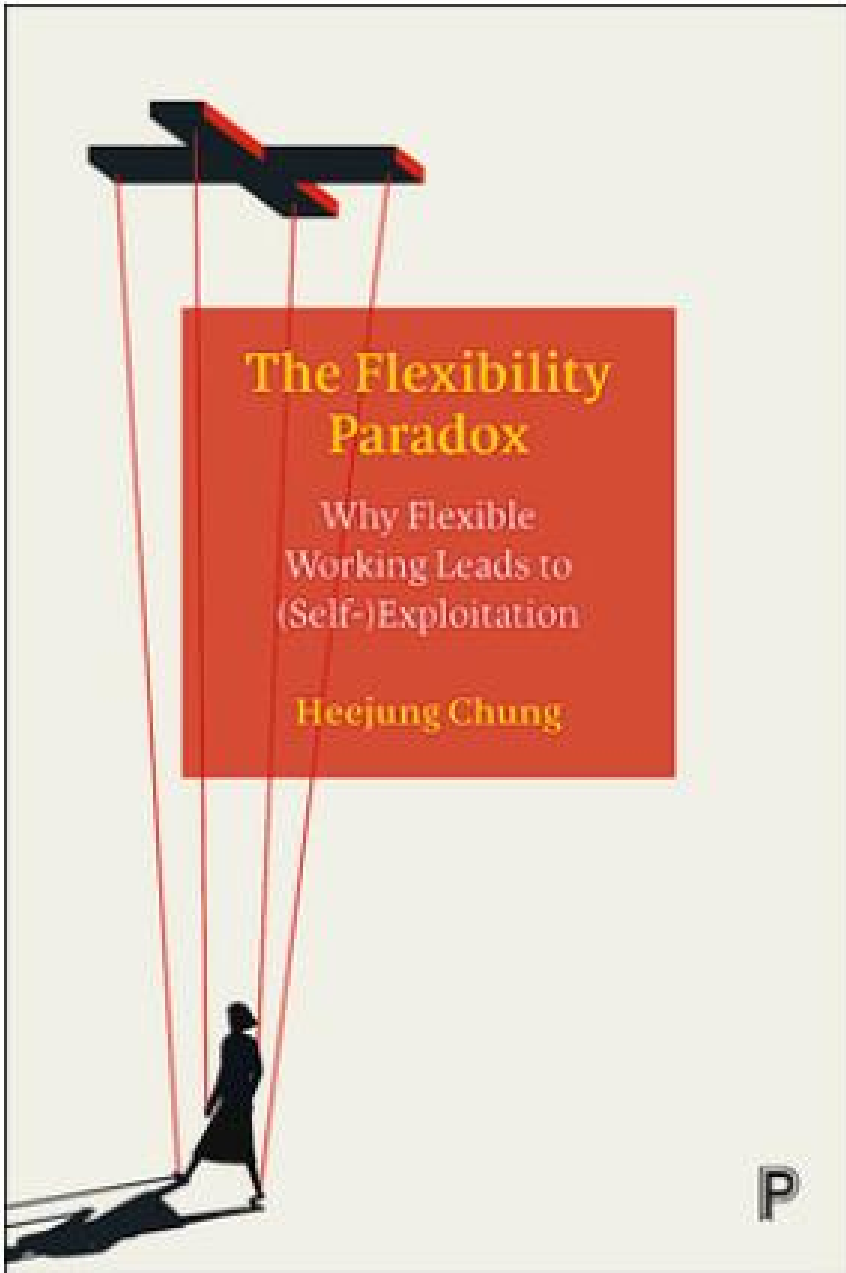
Flexible working, digitalization of
work... providing the utopian working
arrangement?



Or is it bringing forth a new world of work, where work encroaches upon one's life, going beyond your waking hours....

.... And how do we measure work in such environments in a meaningful manner?





Flexibility Paradox

When boundaries between work and private time becomes more blurred/flexible – e.g. through flexitime, working time autonomy, teleworking/homeworking – workers end up working harder and longer – amplified by the move towards digitalisation of work

*Rather than flexible working enabling workers to work anywhere and anytime they want, **workers end up working everywhere and all the time***

And with gender variations in where this happens, what it means for well being

Puzzle – what is work and how do we measure it??

Today's talk

Definitions

The rise of remote working– some patterns and issues with measurement

Benefits of flexible/remote working

The problems of flexible working – flexibility and gender paradox

Digital presenteeism and blurred boundaries of work

How to measure work in a digitalised world

Discussion Q&A





Flexible working

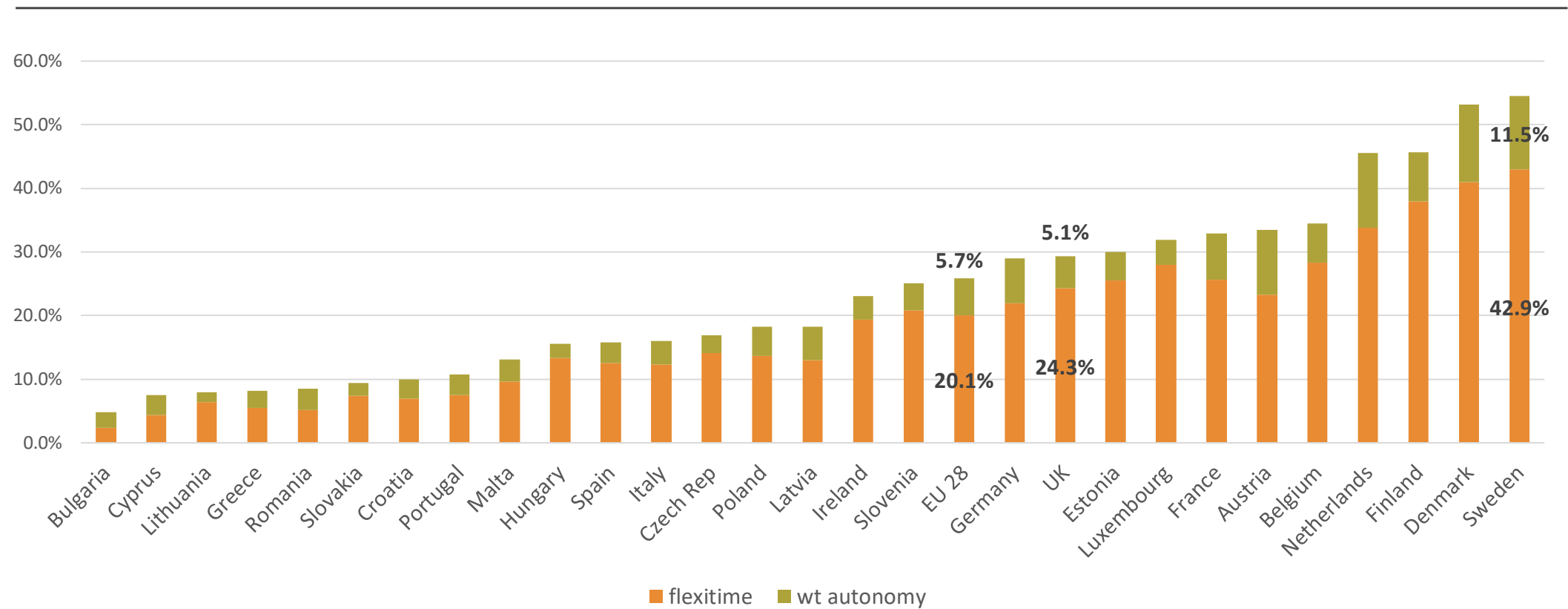
Boundaries of time

- Flexitime – flexible starting and ending times of work
- Working time autonomy – more flexibility in the number of hours worked per day, week + starting ending time

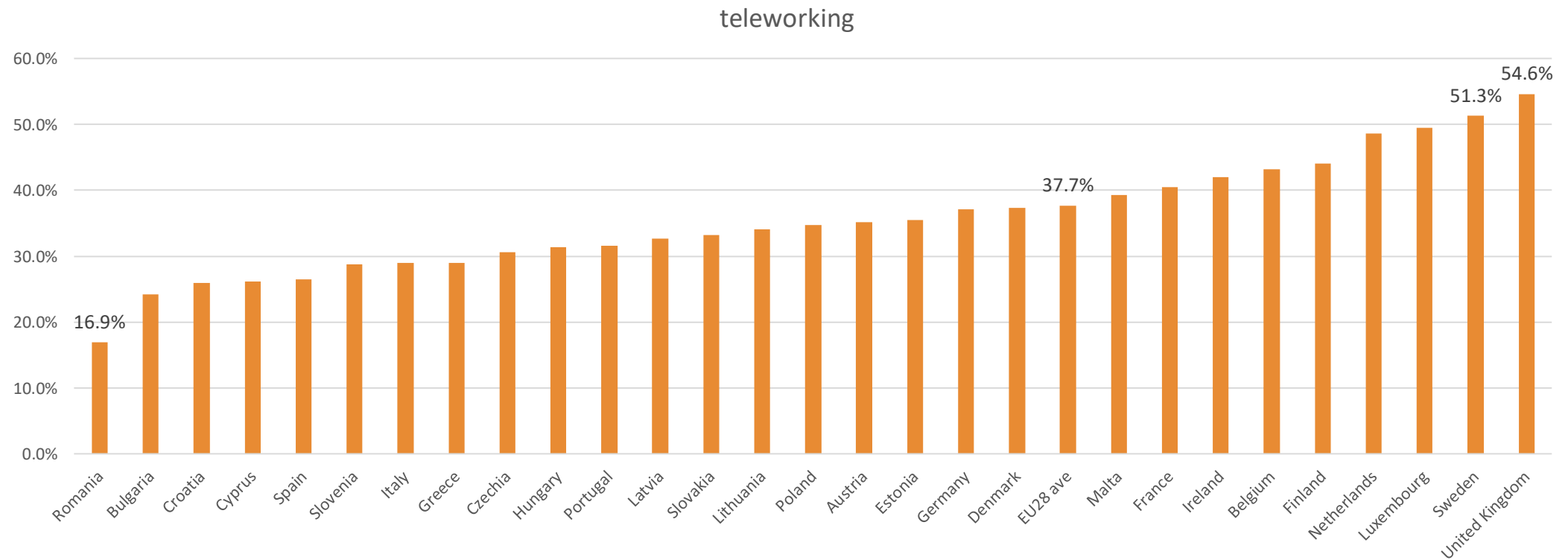
Boundaries of space

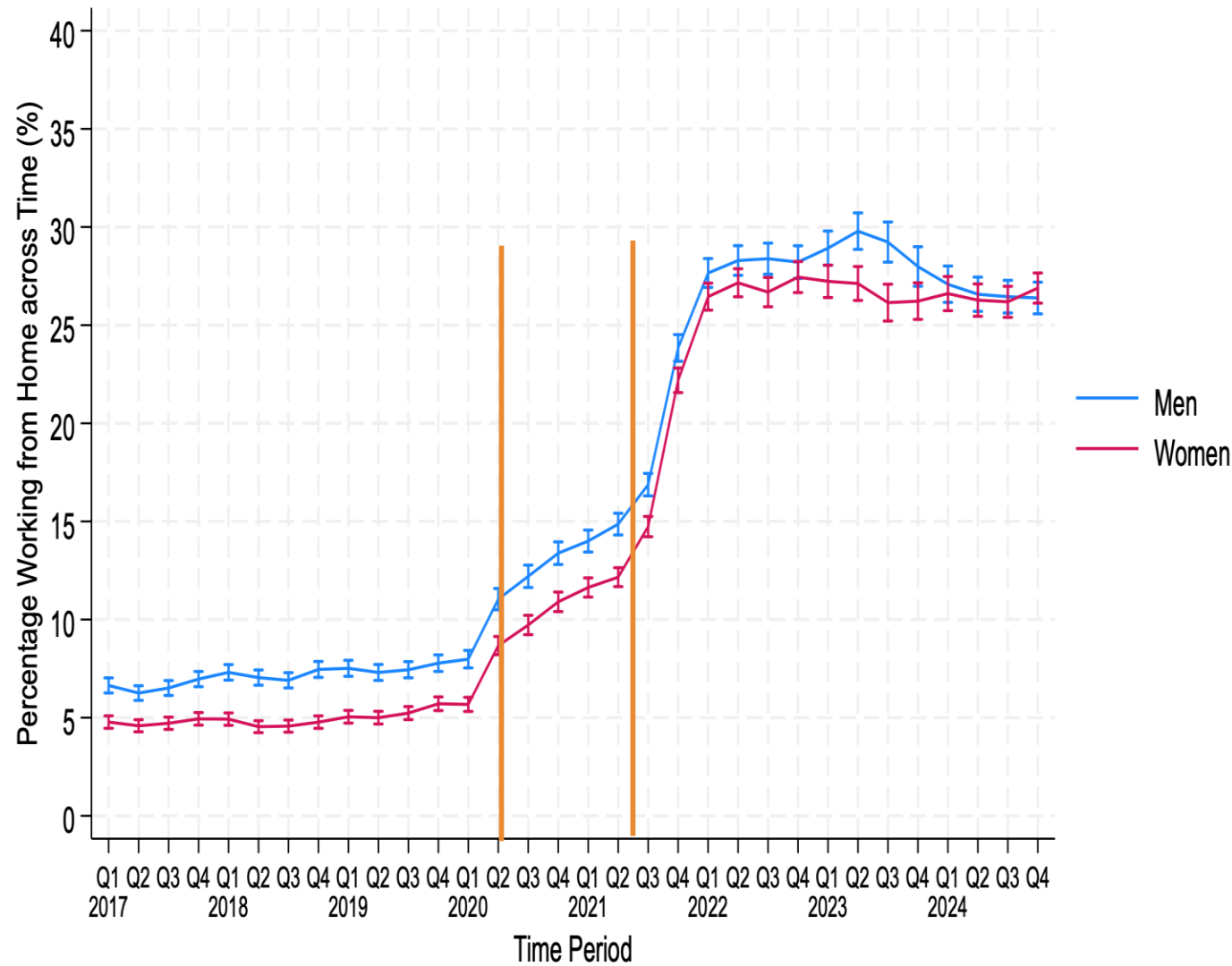
- Teleworking – ability working outside your normal working space/office DURING normal working hours – working from home – hybrid working etc.

The proportion of workers across 28 European countries with access to flexible schedules in 2015 (source: EWCS, author's calculations)



Workers who telework always, partially (hybrid), and occasionally in 2021 (EWCTS) – job needs to be teleworkable, uses ICT, from home (Eurofound definition – see [report 2022](#))





LFS — home is main place of work

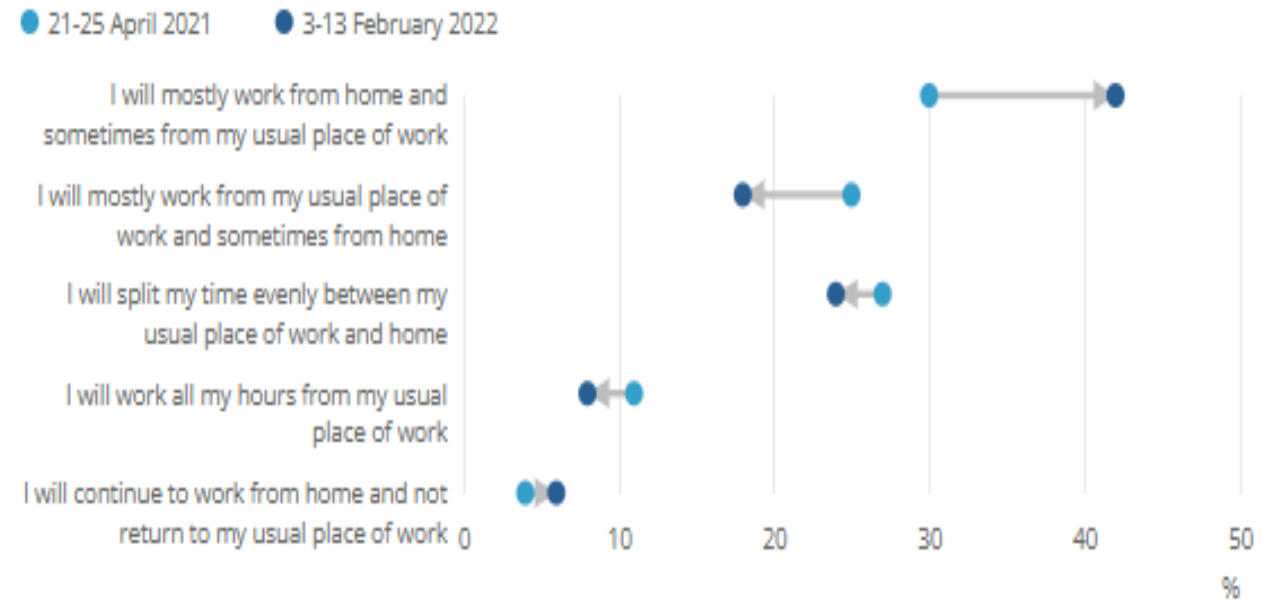
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2017-2024 (latest data available)

Note: Homeworking includes workers who indicated that they mainly work in own home, in the same grounds or buildings as home, and in different places using home as a base

Home working is here to stay

The proportion of homeworkers planning to work mostly from home rose 12 percentage points between April 2021 and February 2022

Future plans of workers who worked from home because of the coronavirus pandemic, Great Britain, 21 to 25 April 2021 and 3 to 13 February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

[Embed code](#)

However, there are some patterns of inequalities



ORIGINAL ARTICLE | [Open Access](#) |

Did COVID-19 Level the Playing Field or Entrench It? Comparing Patterns of Homeworking by Ethnicity, Gender and Migration Status, Before, During and After COVID-19 in the UK

[Correction\(s\) for this article](#)

Heejung Chung Shiyu Yuan

First published: 28 January 2025 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/irj.12462>

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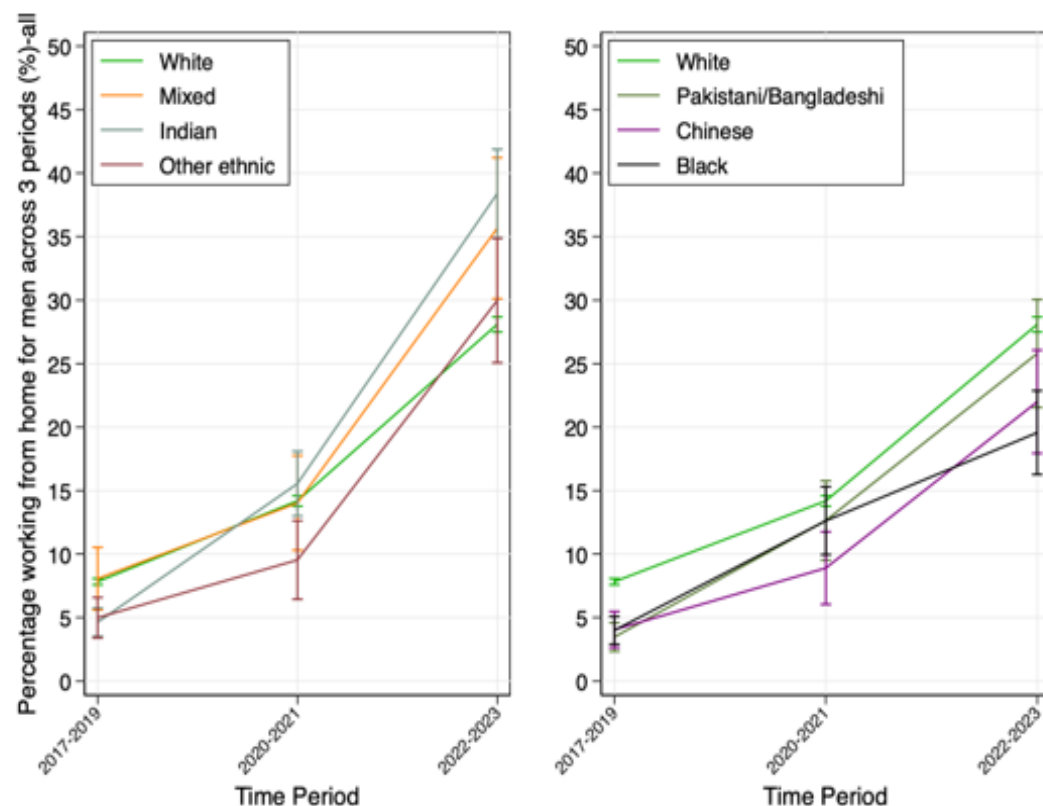
ABSTRACT

This study examines how the pandemic changed the ethnicity gaps in working-from-home practices in the UK. We do this by examining seven waves of the UK Labour Force



Flexible
working
arrangements
and gender
equality in
Europe

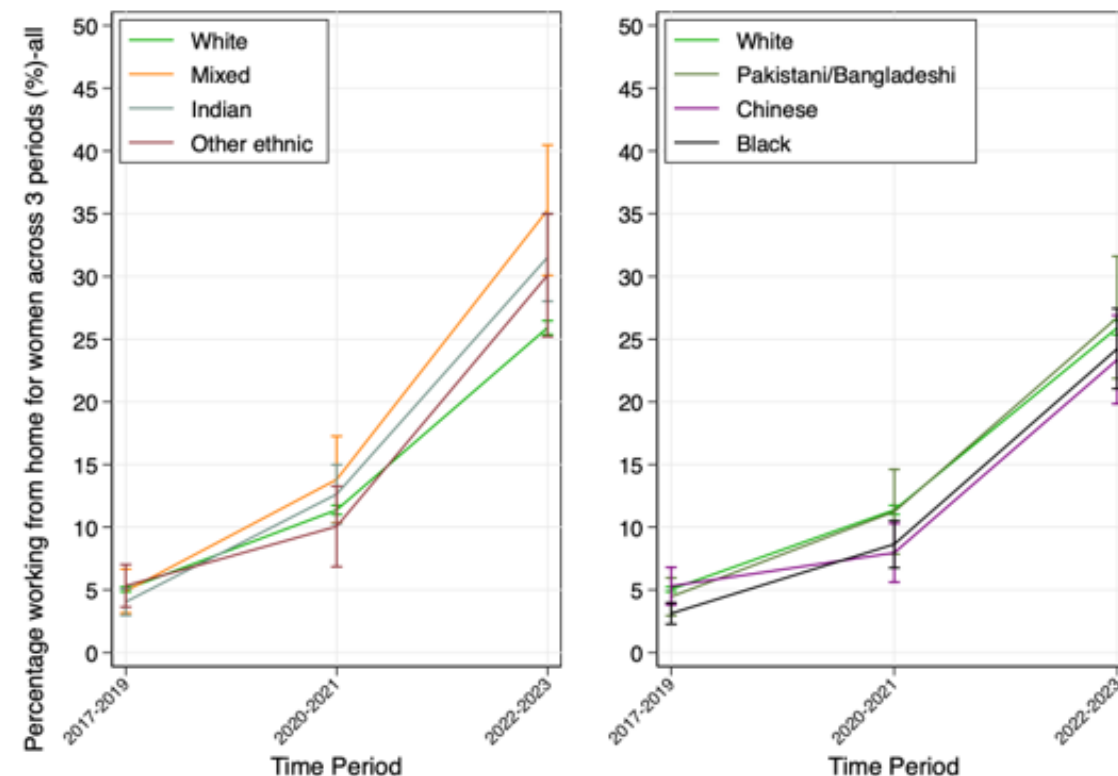
Figure 2. The work-from-home trends across different ethnic groups for male workers before, during and after the pandemic



Source: Labour Force Survey Second Quarter datasets, covering the months of April to June from 2017 to 2023.

Note: The data are calculated as simple proportions of the pooled datasets across each period, without controlling for other factors such as demographics or socioeconomic status.

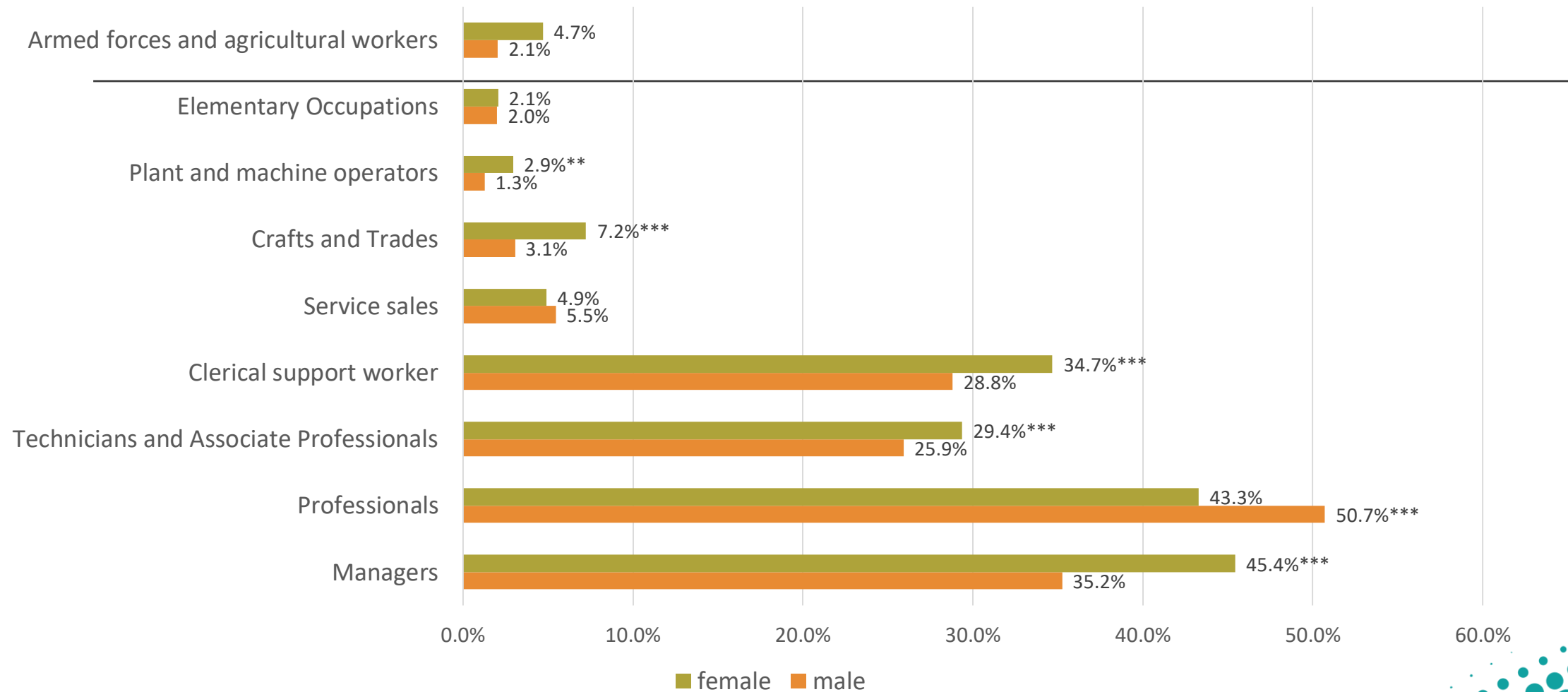
Figure 3. The work-from-home trends across different ethnic groups for female before, during and after the pandemic



Source: Labour Force Survey Second Quarter datasets, covering the months of April to June from 2017 to 2023.

Note: The data are calculated as simple proportions of the pooled datasets across each period, without controlling for other factors such as demographics or socioeconomic status.

Proportion of employees teleworking frequently (full or partial) across the EU 27 countries in 2021, by gender and occupational status (source: EWCTS 2021) – weighted average



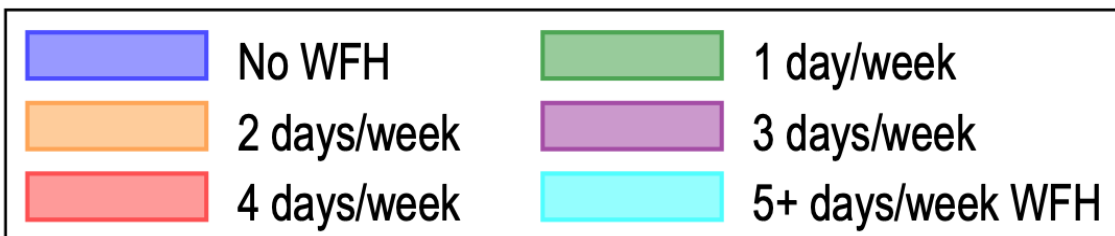
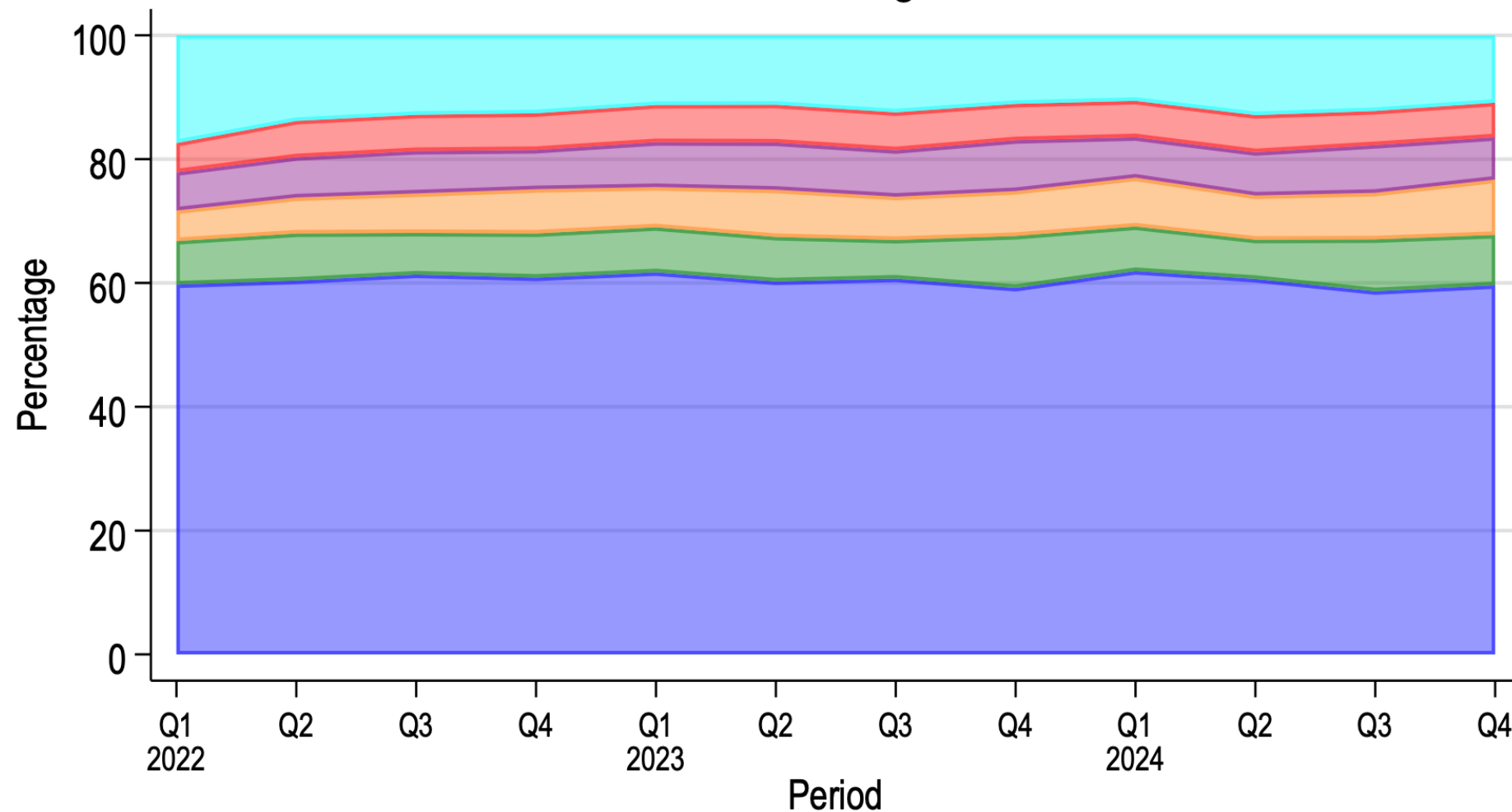
Measuring homeworking

- Majority of workers are now dividing into no days – 1-2 days versus 3-4 days a week.

- LFS main place of work may not capture some of the 1-2 days that we see – which as shown is growing in numbers
- have you worked at home in the past week – can also not fully capture this pattern as it may be capturing those who work from home in addition to the office (e.g. overwork)

Hybrid
Work is
the New
Normal

Homeworking trend



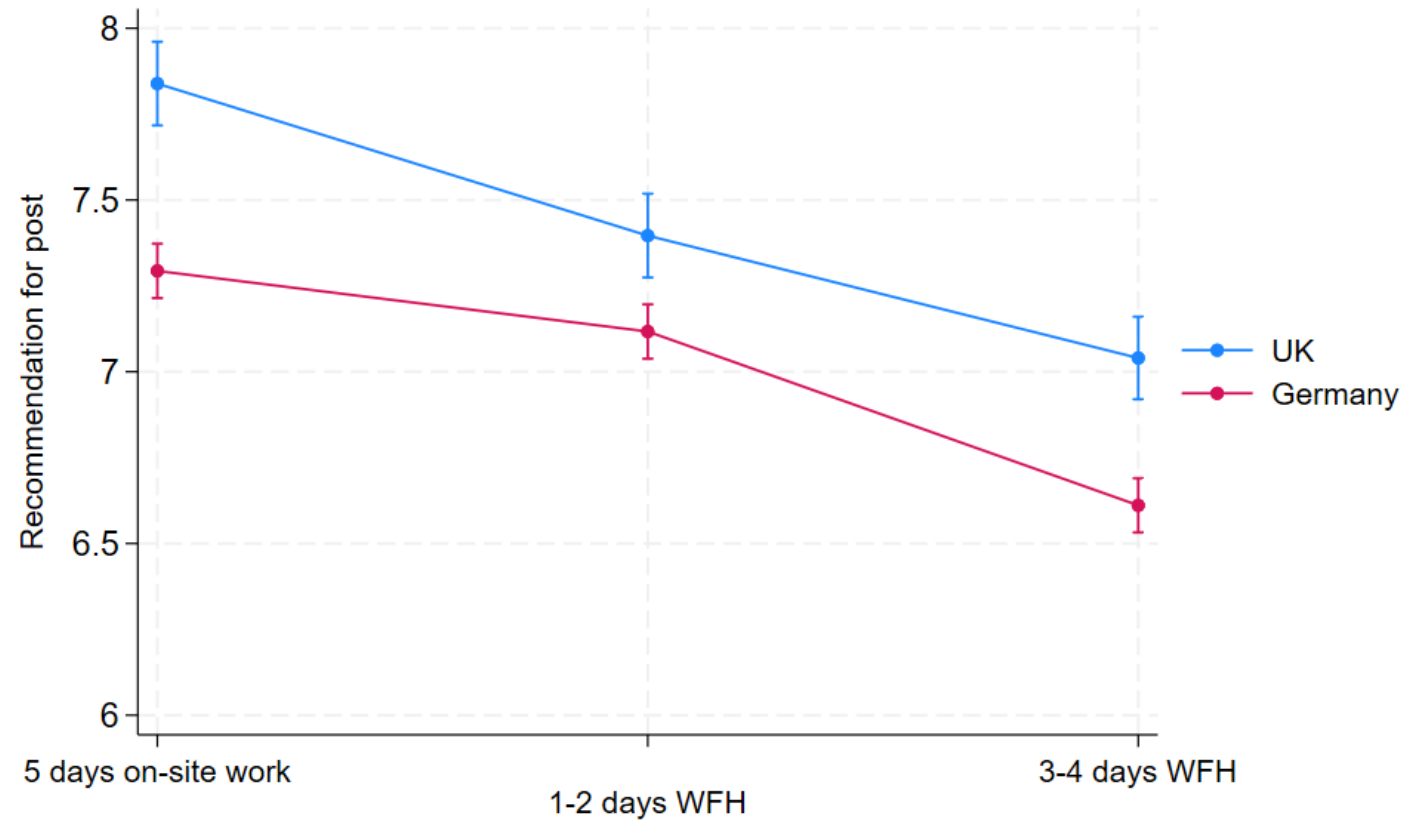
Measuring homeworking

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Some way of distinguishing homeworking that is 1-2 days a week as this is becoming one of the largest group

→ also important when we think about the stigmatised views against remote workers

Flexibility bias – UKHLS 2023



Alternatives???

SWAA data

– 1,2, days etc. – only for full time workers, and doesn't account for those who with different work schedules – e.g. condensed hours etc.

EU-LFS

Sometimes, usually, never

EWCS

Fully, partially, occasionally, never // home – everyday, several times a week, several times a month...

UKHLS – available vs use → studies also show that availability itself is useful to help support workers' perceived work-family integration

 Open access |  | Research article | First published online October 28, 2022

Reflecting the changing world of work? A critique of existing survey measures and a proposal for capturing new ways of working

[Yvonne Lott](#) , [Clare Kelliher](#), and [Heejung Chung](#) [View all authors and affiliations](#)

[Volume 28, Issue 4](#) | <https://doi.org/10.1177/10242589221130597>


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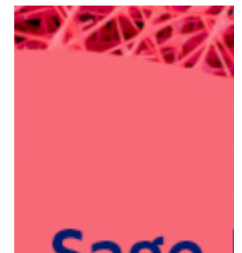
 Metrics and citations

Abstract

Résumé

Zusammenfassung

In recent decades we have seen significant and varied changes in the world of work. Most prominent among these is the diminishing prevalence of the standard employment relationship. These changes challenge traditional notions of what constitute 'employment', 'employers', 'employees', the 'workplace' and



Other issues to consider

How many days does your employer ask you to come in vs how many do you come in?

Degree of control – who gets to decide? How flexible is this?

Anchor days – the extent to which workers have collective days in the office

Other issues – e.g. space at home/working conditions and environments now not only in the office

Back to the flexibility
paradox...

Flexible working enable marginalized workers better engagement in the labour market

- Flexible working allows mothers to stay employed, not reduce working hours (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018; Fuller & Hirsch, 2018; van der Lippe et al. 2018)
- Disabled workers (Work foundation; Hoque & Bacon 2022), BAME workers ([TUC project report](#)), Workers with care responsibilities (informal care)
- The ability to stay in employment + better employment trajectories with regards to pay and career progression
- Better **work-life balance satisfaction** (Role Expansion) → can improve well-being



Positives for well-being

- Flexible working – **reducing commuting time, allowing workers to work when are better able to work + enhance ability to combine work with family demands** (Allen et al. 2016) → less stress... better well being
- Flexible workers are and generally happier with their working conditions, more autonomy and control (Laß and Wooden 2023, Baum and Rau 2024).
- Flexible working leads to fewer problems with regards to sickness, absenteeism and retention – **increasing loyalty, motivation, commitment for the job** (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kelliher & de Menezes, 2019) → less stress.. Better well being



Flexible working ... and gender

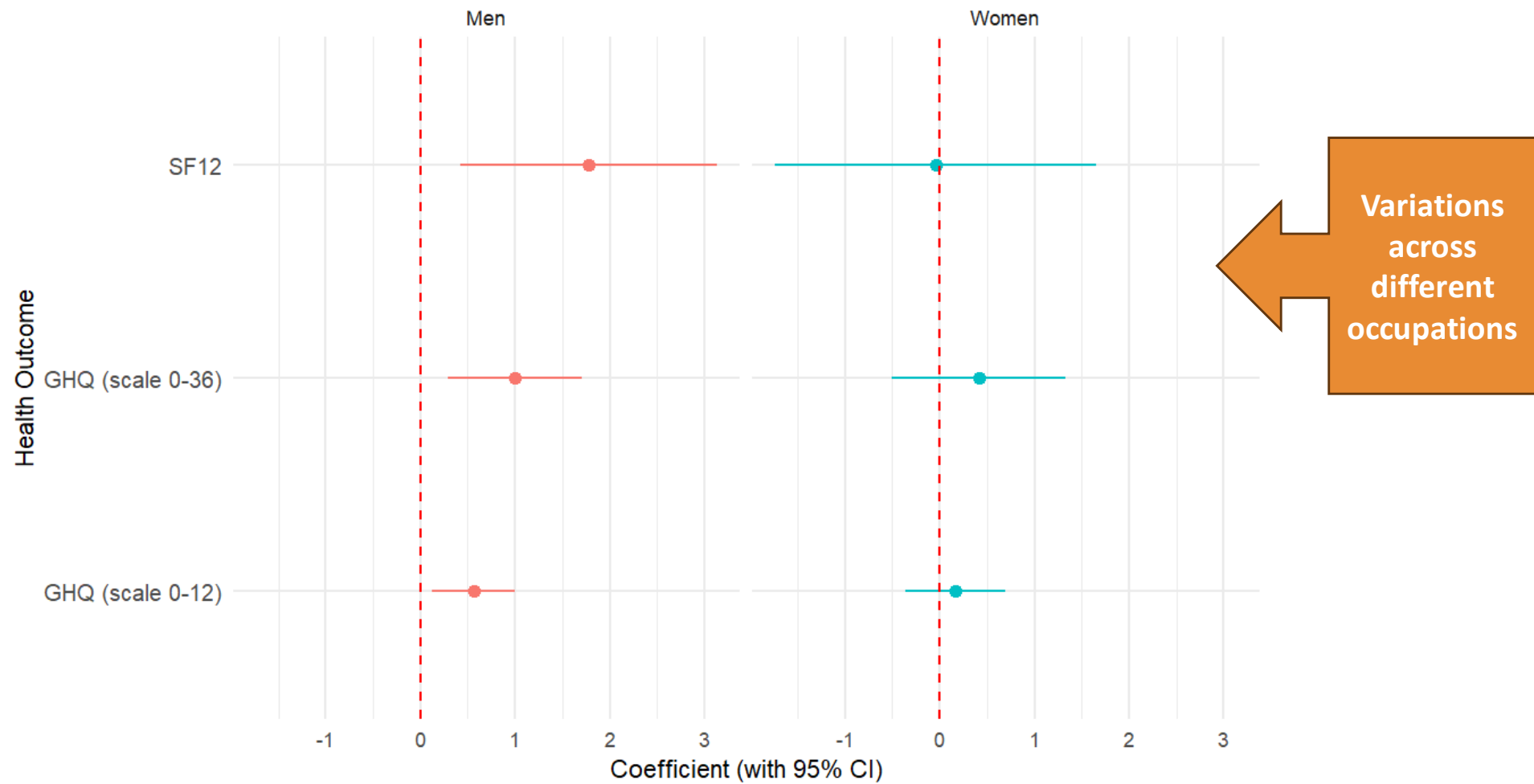
- Lots of studies on the positives of flexible working (Li and Wang 2022; Denzer and Grunau 2023)..
- Flexible working does not necessarily lead to lower stress for mothers (Chandola et al. 2018; Ruppaner et al 2018) can reduce well-being outcomes
- Lu et al (2023) find that women and lower occupational groups do not benefit from mental well-being outcomes as much as men and higher occupational groups
- Beaufils & Chung (forthcoming) remote working helps well-being for men but not for women – Using UKHLS-LFS data



Remote working new approach

- Key problem of reverse causality – do people work remotely because they have mental health or other health issues ... OR... people who are healthier/better able to work, have better access to remote working
- We need to try to disentangle this selection effect → match data using LFS on occupational level (4 digit) use of homeworking to UKHLS individuals' outcomes on health
 - **SF12** (mental component of the short-form 12 items) **GHQ** (General health questionnaire)
- UKHLS - nationally representative panel survey that began in 2009 with a stratified and clustered sample of around 60,000 individuals from 40,000 UK households
- Sample of 18-65 – exploring variations across gender, parental status, informal care giving status ... pre post pandemic
- Exploring occupational level WFH changes → individual's well-being outcomes
- Individual fixed effects model – controls for time invariant characteristics. / time fixed effects control for time specific issues

Effect of Working from Home on Mental Health (Before March 2020)





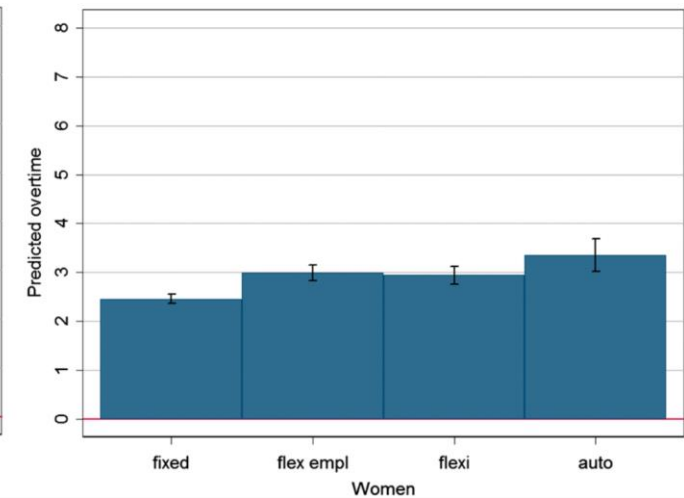
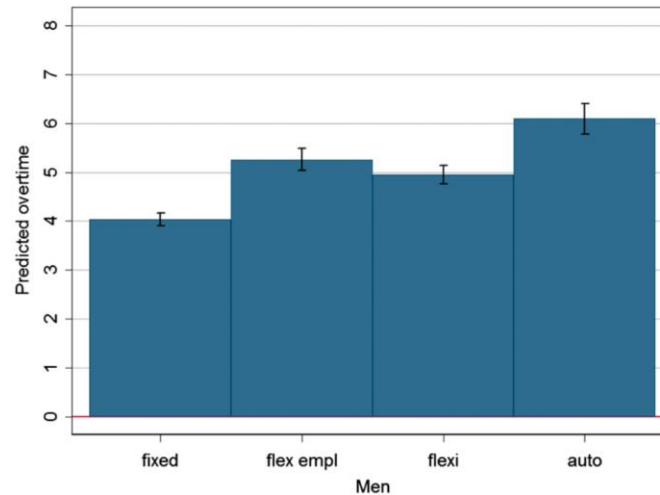
Flexible
working makes
workers work
harder and
longer

Flexible workers work longer hours

GSEOP hybrid models – examining between and within changes

On average 0.7 hours more overtime with flexitime, and 1.5 more hours with working time autonomy ([Lott & Chung 2016](#)). Similar results for teleworking (Glass & Noonan, 2016 and others)

They are more likely to think about work when not at work, have work encroach over private sphere (Chung, 2022; Schieman and colleagues; Lott 2020) and have higher work-family conflict



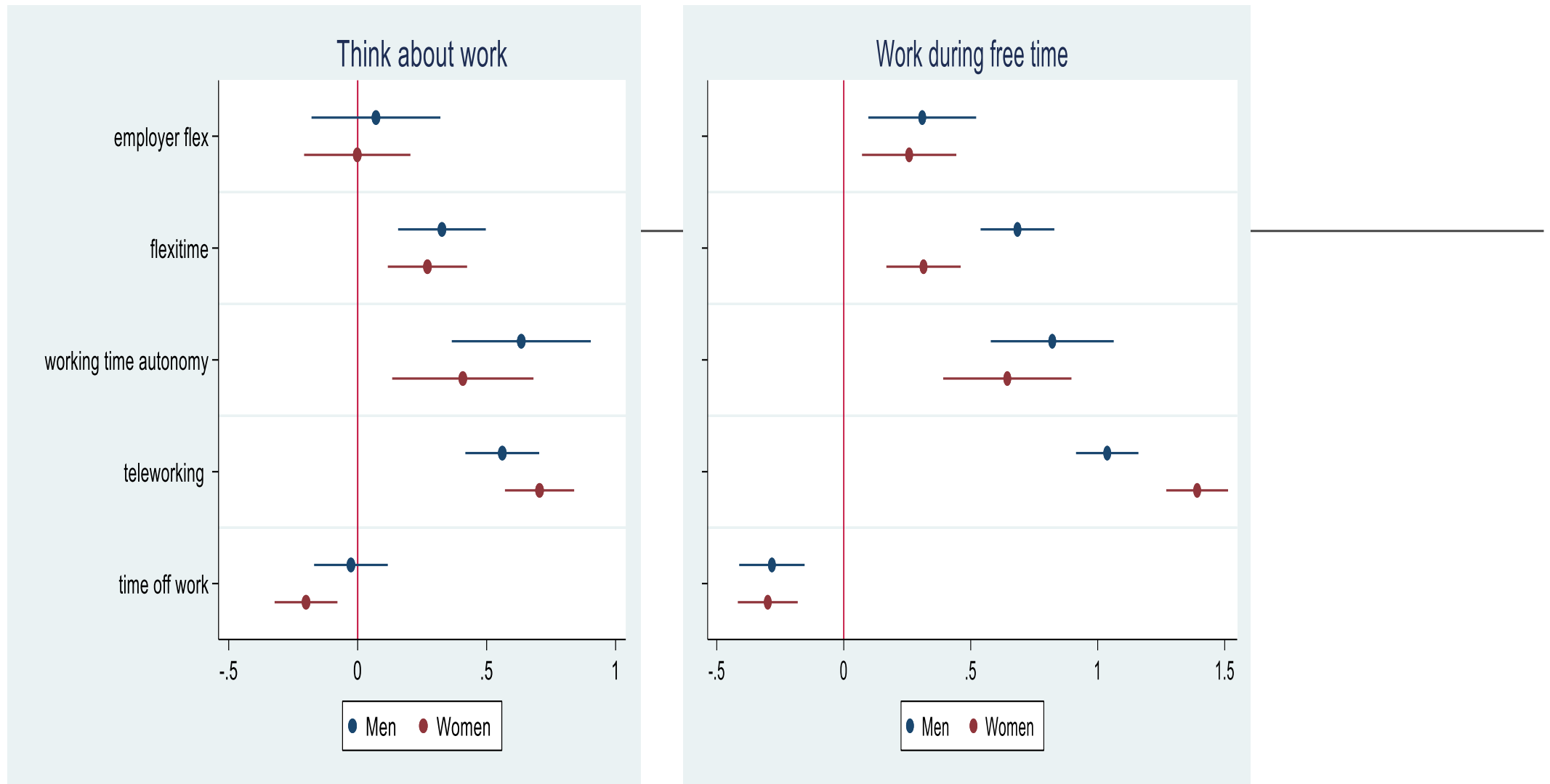


Figure 6-3. Association between flexible working and spill-over

Source: European Working Conditions Survey 2015, authors' calculations.

Self-exploitation (Chung, 2022)

- Workers feel like they can/or need to work harder and longer when the boundaries between work-private life are blurred
- Why? 1) **Internalised capitalism, ideal worker image** (busyness at work as badge of honour)/hustle culture & **passion exploitation** (esp the NHS) → flexible boundaries “enable” workers to meet their excessive workload demands
- 2) This is exacerbated by **flexibility stigma** – bias against flexible workers and **Insecurity** – rise in competition, insecurity at work pushes individuals to work harder/longer.





Exploitation at home

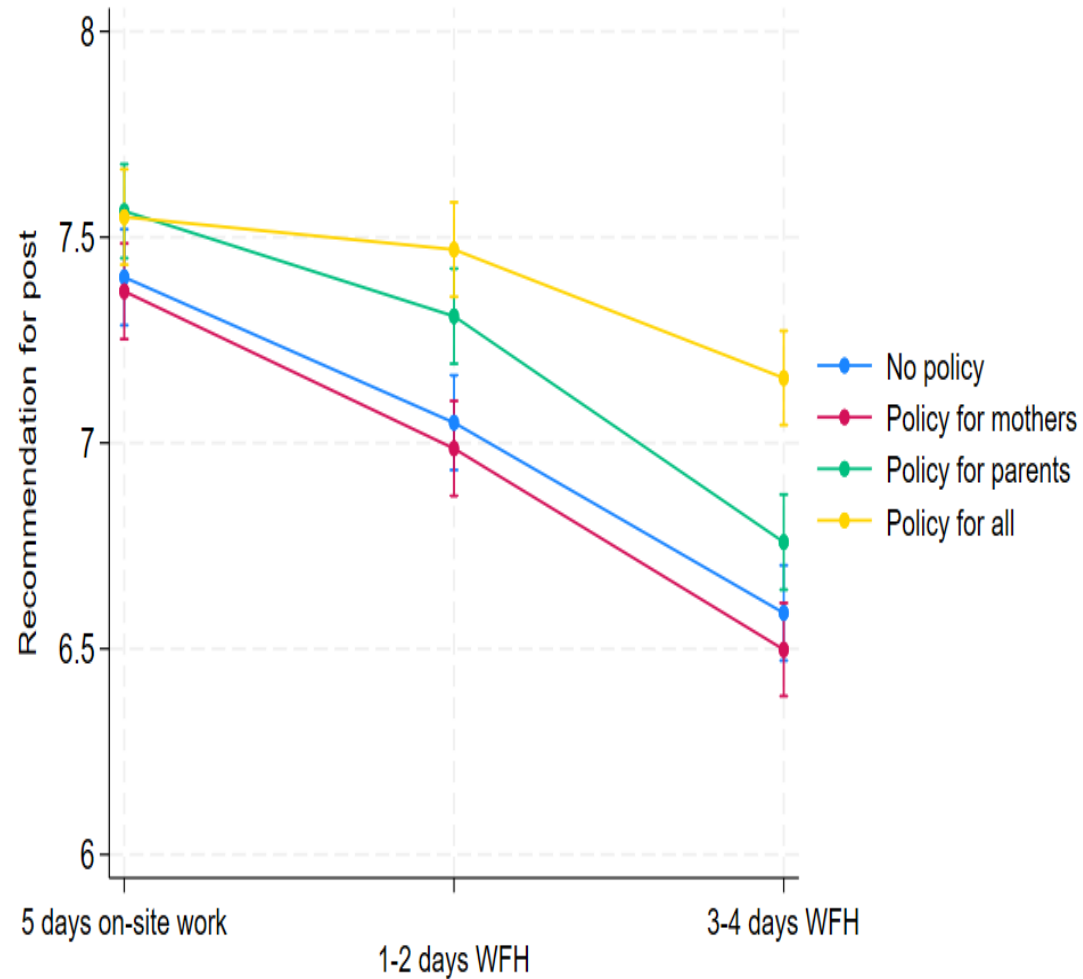
- Flexible working/esp homeworking **increases the (pressure to do more) homework/childcare for women** (Sullivan and Lewis (2001); Kim (2020) US ECLS-B ; Lott (2019) DE SEOP; Andrews et al. (2020) Time Use data during covid; Chung & Booker 2022 UKHLS ; Hilbrecht et al. 2013; Kurowska, 2020;)
- **Mostly through sacrificing their personal/leisure time** (Hilbrecht et al. 2013) – recent studies using dyadic models (Wang & Cheng 2024)
- Women also **work in communal spaces (dining room) whilst multitasking childcare/housework and work**, whereas fathers work in enclosed workspaces with clearer boundaries (Parry, 2024; Andrews et al 2021)
- For women, homeworking is a way to exploit/extract as much labour out of them → does not result in positive outcomes for wellbeing (Chandola et al. 2018)

Flexibility stigma and gender

- the belief that flexible workers are not as committed, motivated, productive and make more work for others
- Rather than based on true evidence it is based on the ideal worker norm & the idea that having a good work life balance cannot be good for productivity
- **Femininity stigma** – men are likely to experience double stigma of flexibility + femininity stigma → deviating away from the ideal worker image AND the image of male breadwinner
- **Double whammy stigma** – those who are likely to experience biases against their work productivity (mothers, ethnic minority workers, working class/lower-skilled, disabled, LGBT+) are more likely to experience flexibility stigma



Gender status/flexible working attribution



Remote working penalises workers – the more often people work, the more likely they will be penalised

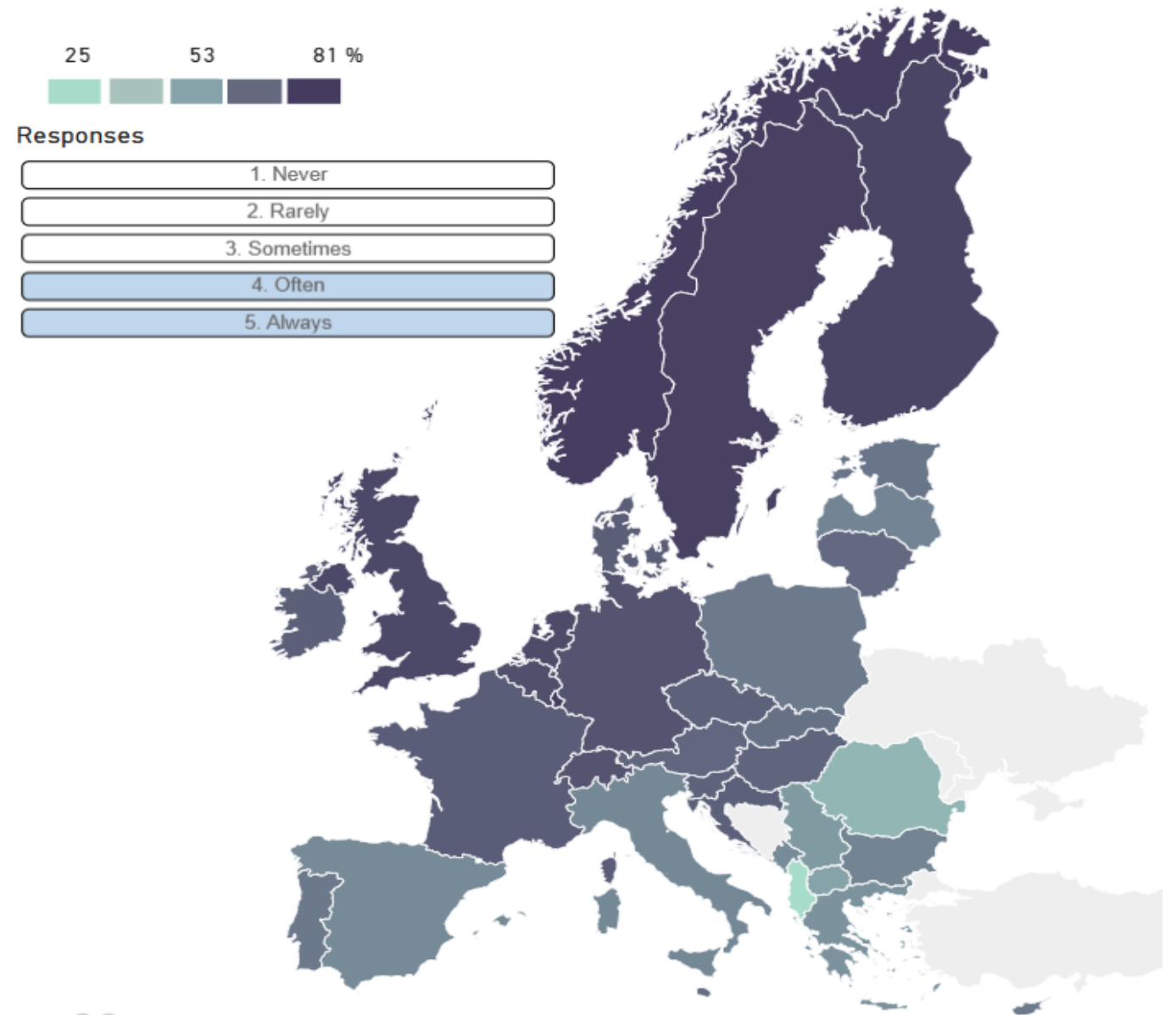
This is harsher on fathers as it goes against their image of the breadwinner

But when policies are attributed largely “for mothers” this is when all remote workers receive more bias – including mothers

Digitalisation of work

The use of digital technology at work -60% of workers across Europe always use computer, laptop, smartphones or tablet for work (Eurofound, 2022).

Skills, discretion and other cognitive factors – Working with computers, laptops, smartphones, etc.
Does your work involve working with computers, laptops, smartphones, etc.? - Category selected: All.. (% response)



Flexibility stigma & digital presenteeism

- o Digital presenteeism is the behaviour of employees who feel compelled to maintain a constant, instant, or visible online presence in digital workspaces (emails, Slack, WhatsApp, Microsoft teams, Google Chat/Meet, Zoom, and other forms of digital communication tools and apps), even when it is unnecessary, both during and outside of normal working hours
- o Due to the relatively weaker position of marginalized workers → these workers showing higher levels of paradox/digital presenteeism (Chung, 2024/ TUC report) especially for mothers/bme workers

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list

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):40 AM

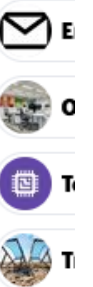
The majority of employees check work emails while on holiday

But new YouGov research reveals fewer than one in six think their managers care

It's the last few weeks of the summer holidays. You're catching your final chance of some peace in the sunshine, and the out-of-office email – containing a more politely worded version of "Sorry, I'm away having a better time than you" – is on. But have you really switched off?

Six out of ten check their work emails when on holiday, despite the fact that eight in ten would rather completely switch off

EXPLOR
ARTICLE



SWAA data

Survey of Working arrangement and attitudes

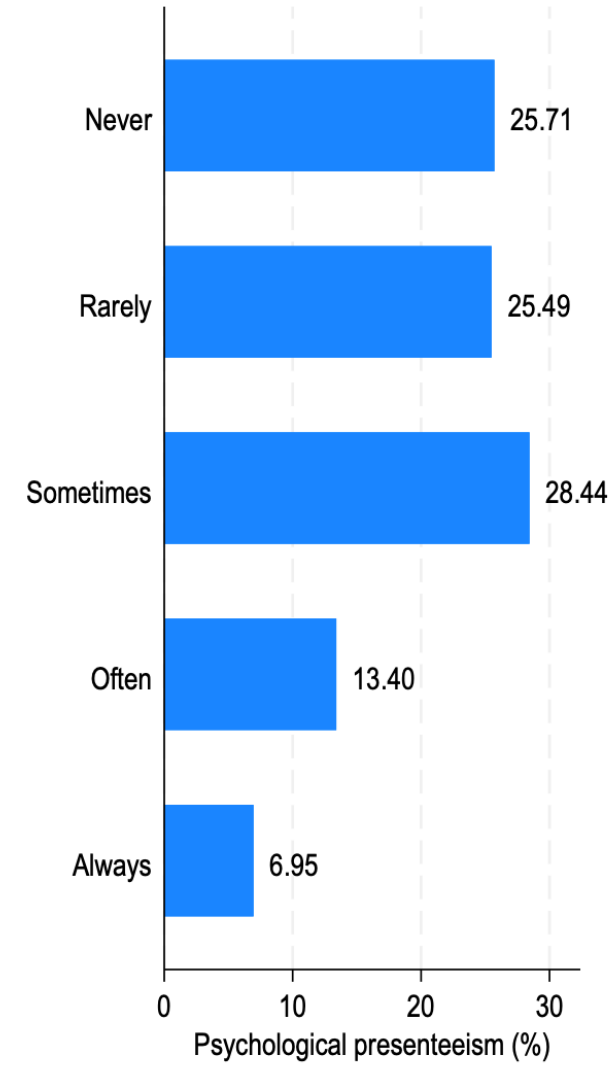
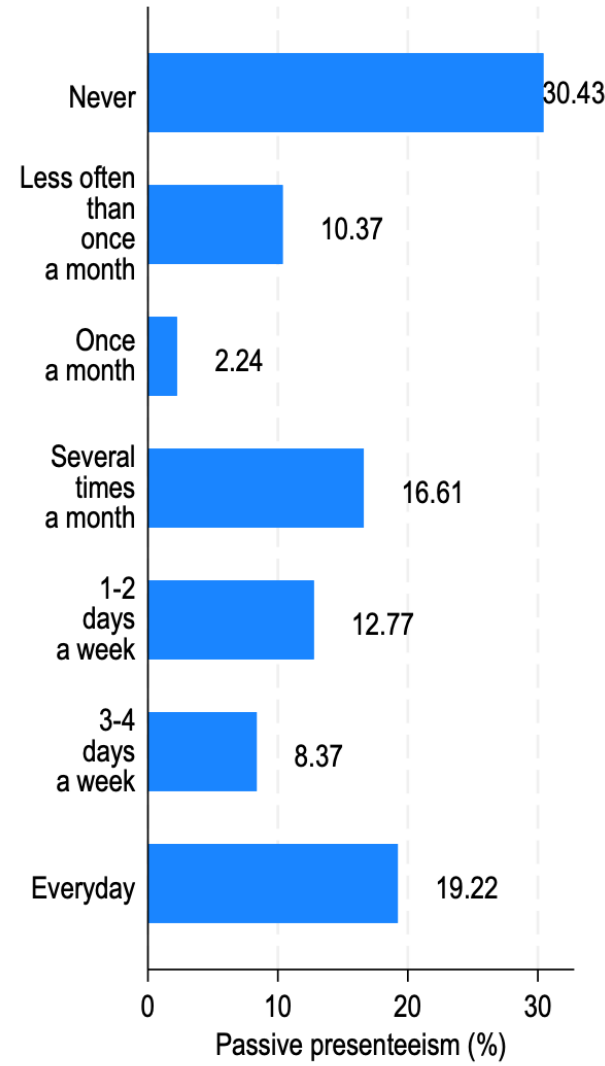
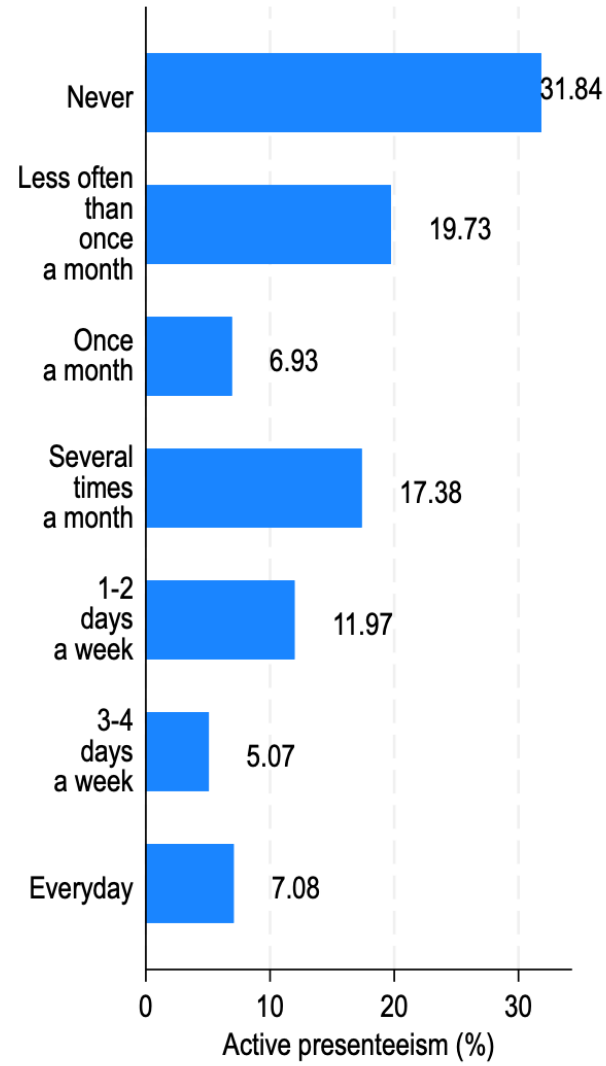
2500 workers

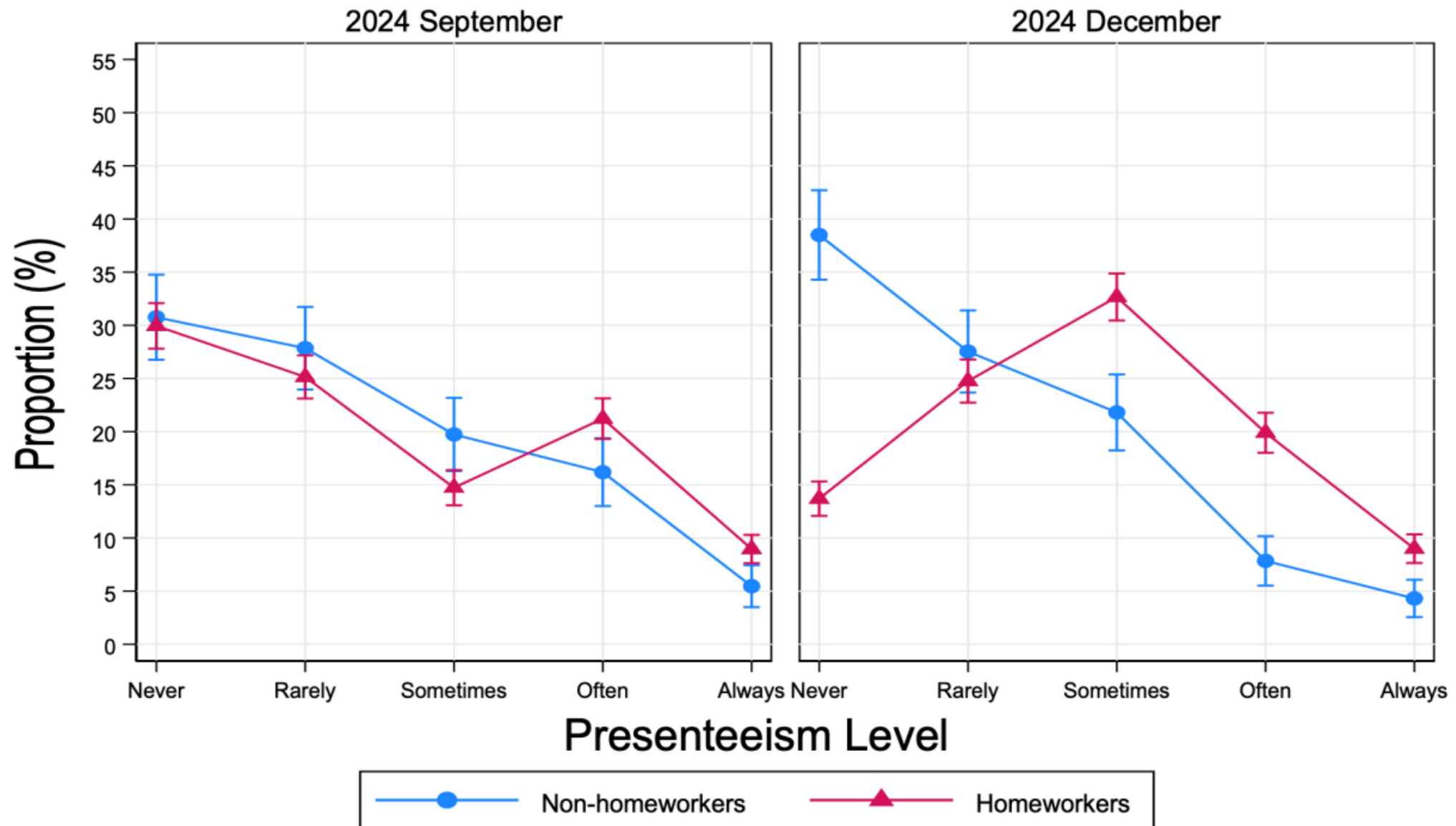
Weighted to be representative of UK labour force – using LFS weights

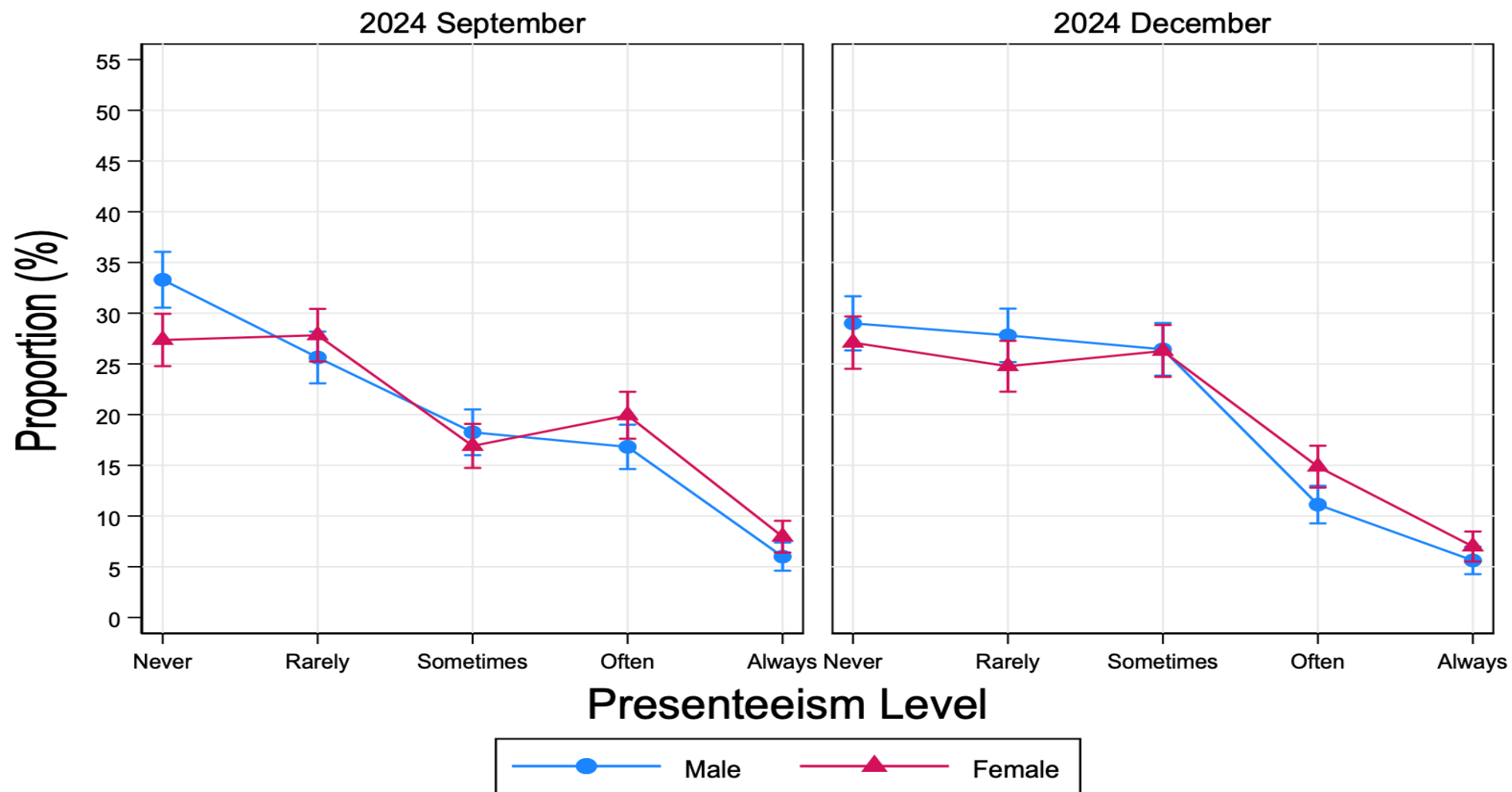
September and December 2024 – questions around digital presenteeism, why they do it and what the outcomes are – impact of work cultures

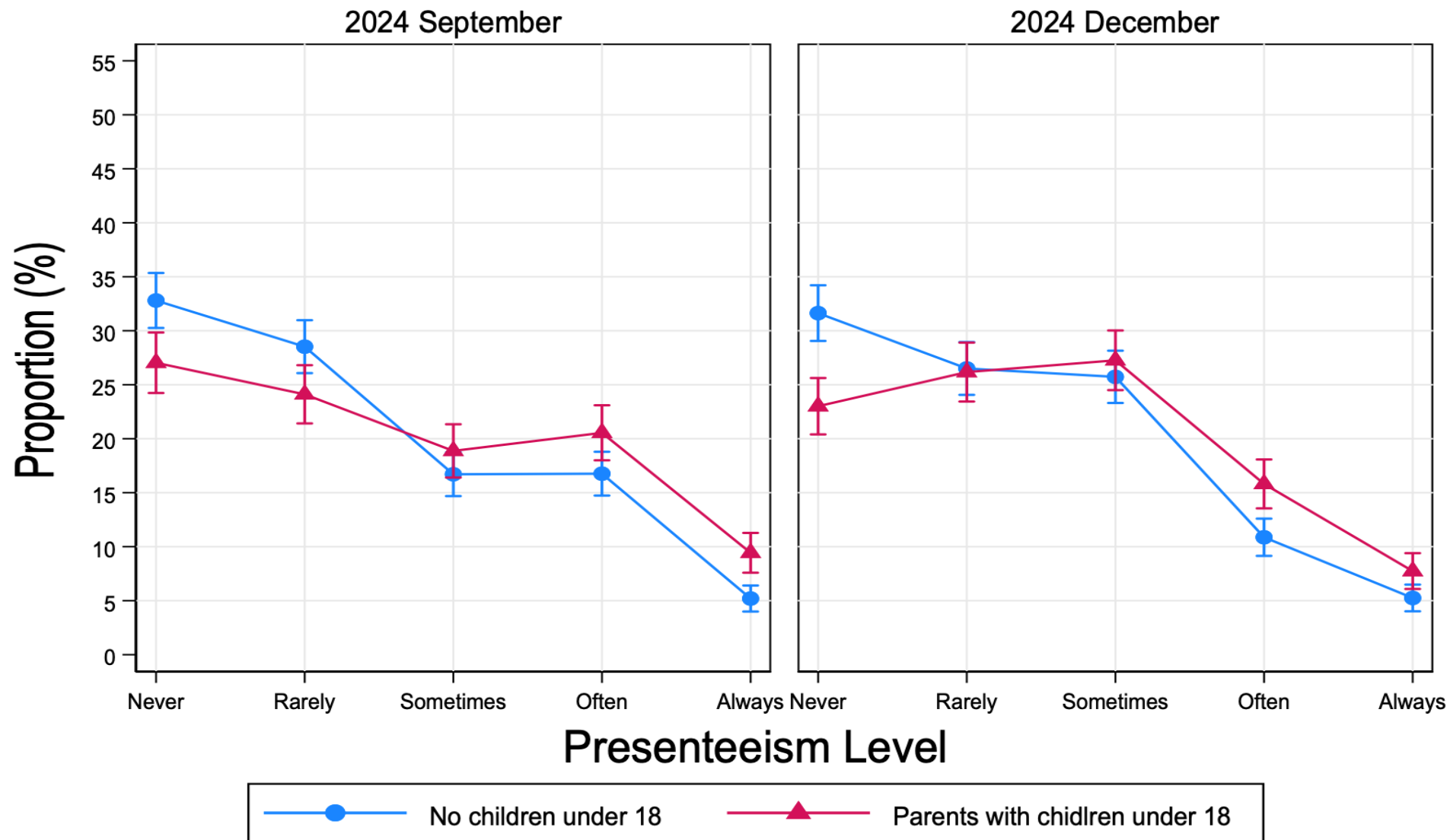
Ideal worker culture – you need to work long hours to succeed

Flexibility stigma – workers who work from home are considered less committed or productive









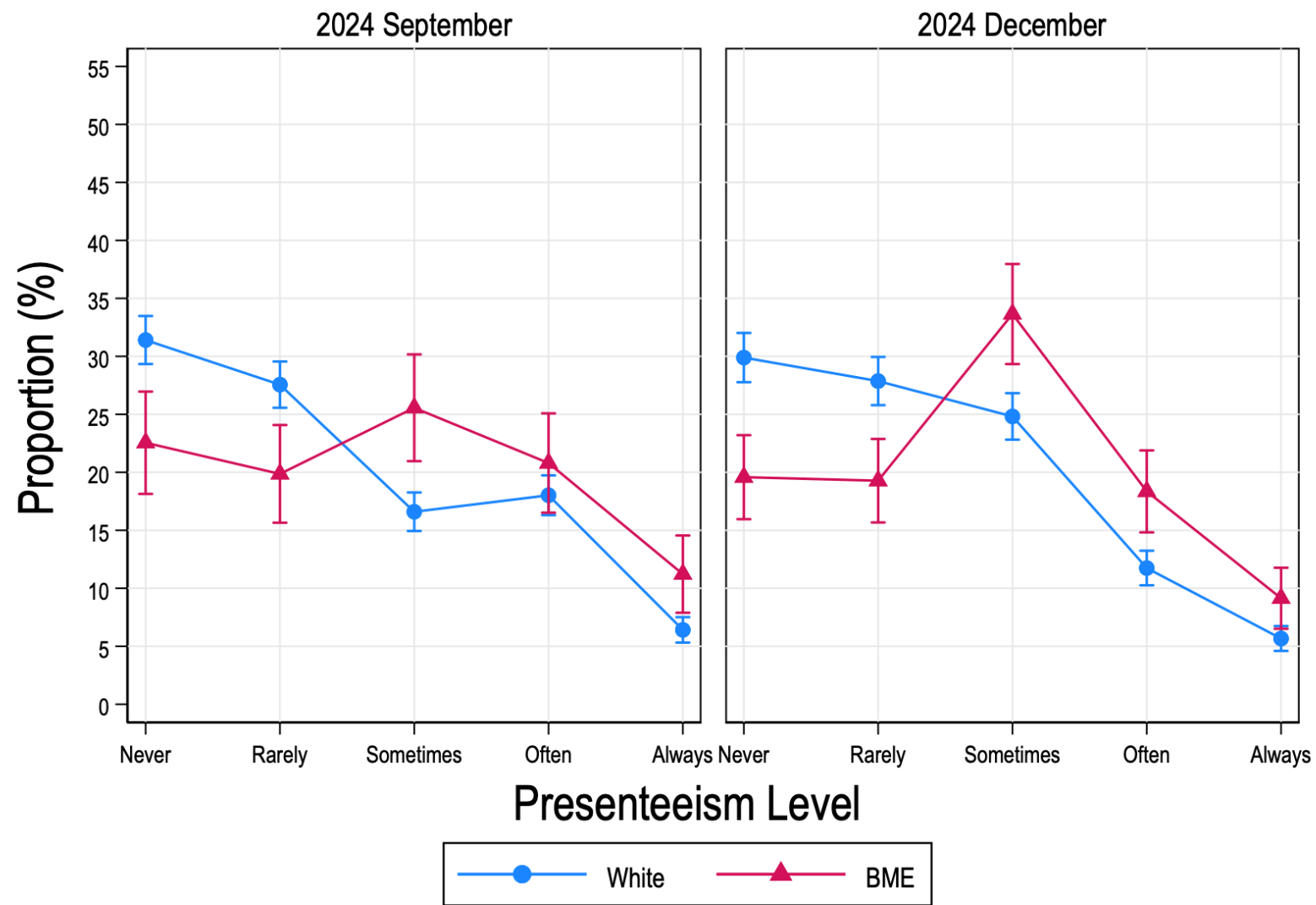


Figure 3. Predicted probability of **internally driven digital presenteeism** by race and workplace ideal worker norm (two waves)

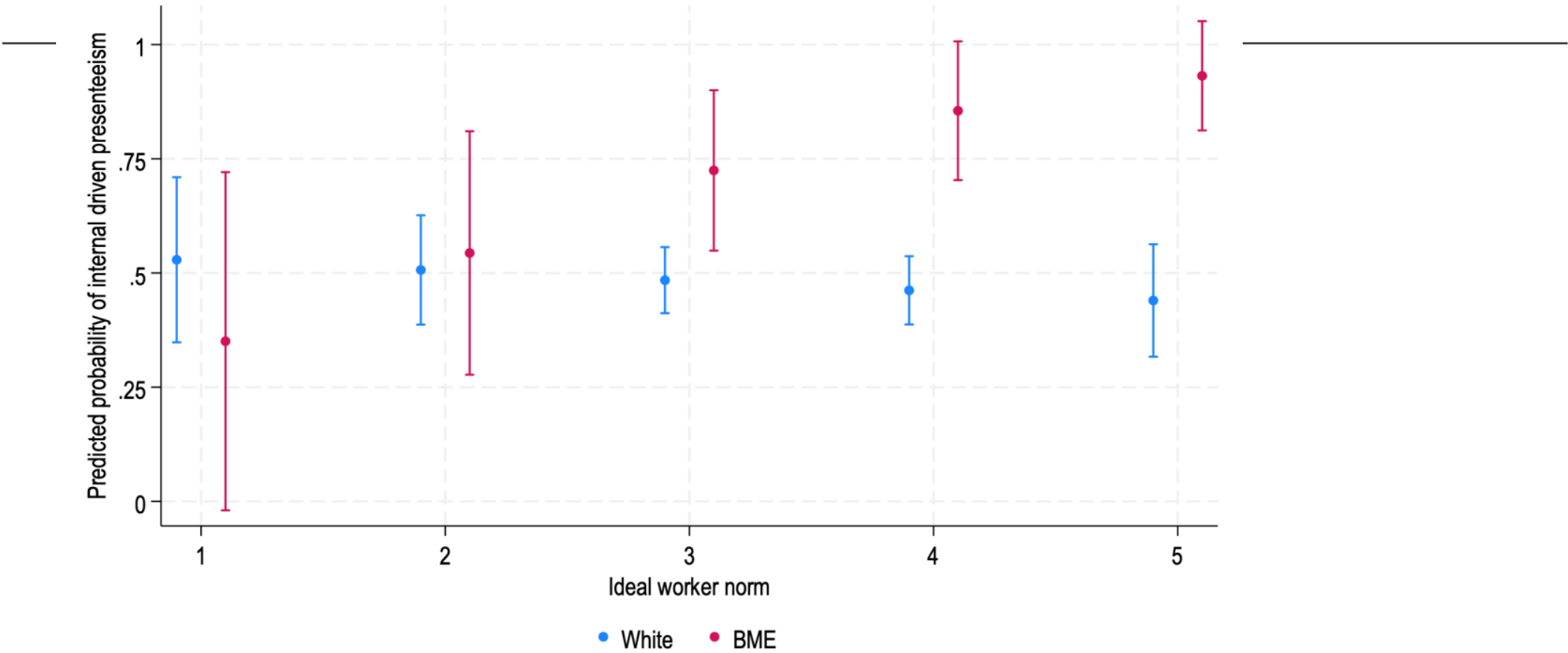
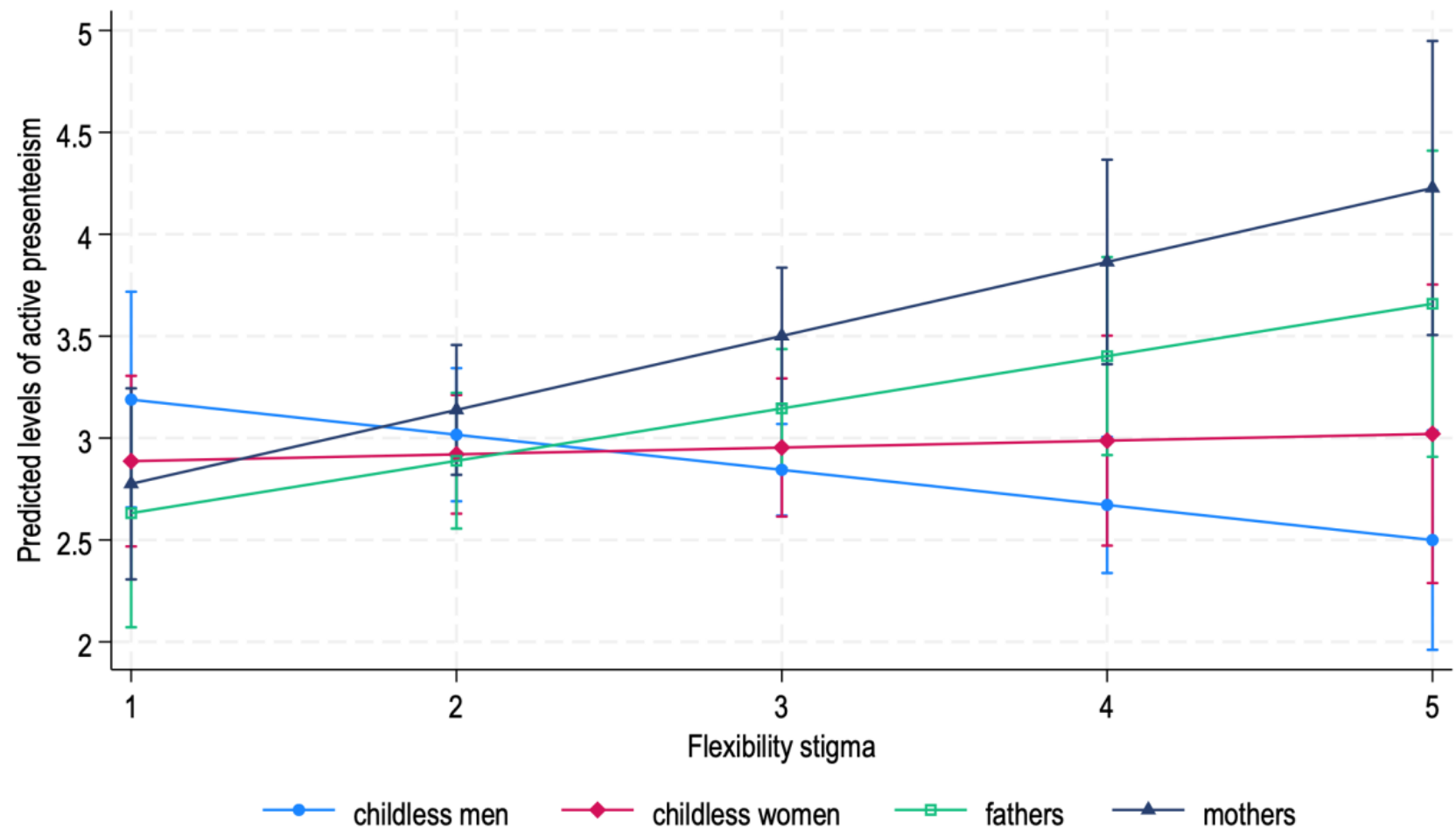


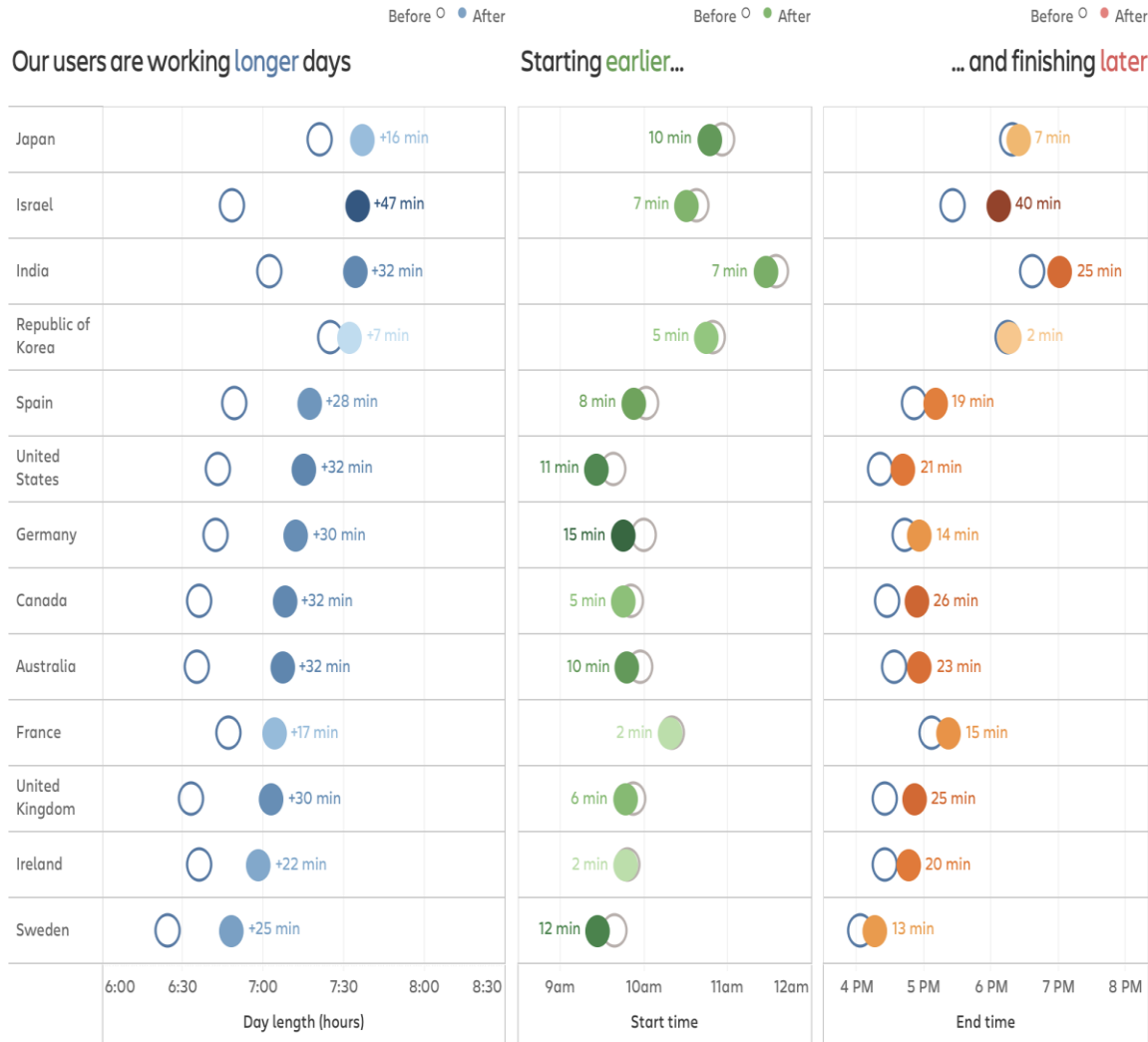
Figure 5. Predicted levels of **active digital presenteeism** by gender-parental status and workplace flexibility stigma



Why do we
need to
rethink work?



Why current measures do not work



Source: Atlassian product usage data.

The *before* period corresponds to January-February 2020, the *after* period corresponds to April-May 2020.

Only weekday data (in the local timezone) was considered.

Measures of working hours - built around office work/fixed schedules

Remote working – time boundaries are blurred – question of **what is working time? And When is working time?**

Stigmatised views around home working& long hours culture exacerbates workers tendencies to blur boundaries to make work encroach private time

Without strict boundaries always on work culture is bound to develop – not only by managers (adding more work/discounting certain hours), but also as a downward spiral of increased competition/culture among workers – ***expectation changes***

Problem with working hours calculations when teleworking

A UK workers's "work" day (source: voucher cloud)

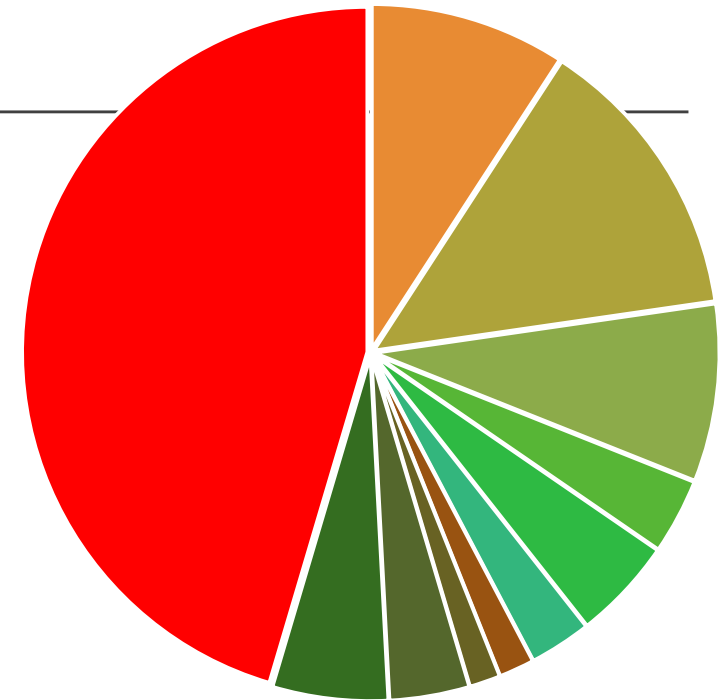


We are living in a dadaism period of work

What is working hours ? Where it is conducted? its outcomes? Or who does those hours?

Previously all hours in the office was considered working hours – yet only 3 hours were used for work

It may not necessarily be about what you are doing but what is impacted?



- social media
- reading news
- talking to colleagues
- making drinks
- smoking
- text messaging
- eating snacks
- making food
- making calls to partner
- searching for new jobs
- work

Then what do we need to measure?

- Move away from working hours?
- How about Digital presenteeism patterns or multi-tasking (timeuse)?
- Break away from work? Measures of rest time?
- Ability to set up strong boundaries without fear of repercussion??



Or focus on the outcomes? Social cost of work

The true cost of running on empty: work-related stress costing UK economy £28bn a year

29 March 2023

Posted in **Surveys and reports**

Newsroom →

[Media enquiries](#)

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[Consultation responses](#)

- Latest economic modelling from AXA UK and Centre of Economic and Business Research shows work-related stress and burnout is currently costing the UK economy £28bn a year and resulting in 23.3m sick days a year
- Data from AXA's Mind Health Study reveals almost half (47%) of the country are currently struggling or languishing, defined as an absence of positive

The cost of workplace stress for employees

- Almost half (48%) of the British population feel stressed at least once a week. [12]
- 50% of workers have blurred work-life boundaries, taking their work home with them. [16]
- 55% of workers who experience job related stress also experience anxiety as a result. [8]
- 51% of workers feel that stress disrupts concentration. [8]
- 43% also experience a loss of sleep, while a third turn to comfort eating to deal with work stress. [8]

Cost of work?

Stress levels

Lack of sleep or work-life balance?

Asking workers directly?

EWCS 2024

“The next questions are about your workplace. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?... your organisation gives priority to the health and well-being of its employees”

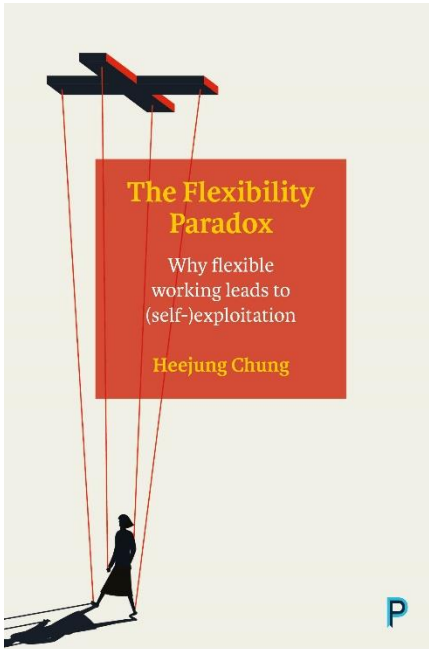
“Does your work affect your health?” – yes positively, yes negatively

Summing up/take home message

Flexible working can be a great enabler especially for those in marginalised positions – great for work-life balance, worker's wellbeing AND productivity

YET it can result in negative outcomes when not implemented appropriately & Reflective policies and approaches can help flexible working help both workers and companies

We need to reconsider what we measure as “work” given the new environment of work we live in - perhaps we need to measure better the outcomes of work and the social costs?- would love a discussion on this!



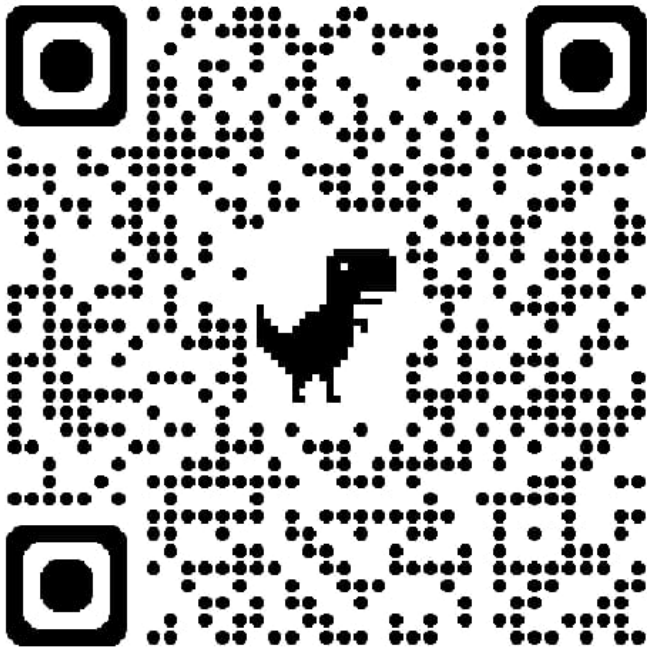
The Flexibility Paradox: Why Flexible Working Leads to (Self-)Exploitation

By Heejung Chung

"Flexible work is a priority for many workers and yet remains a puzzle to many employers. This book provides much-needed clarity about the critical role schedule control will play in creating equitable work systems and cultures." **Brigid Schulte**, New America

<https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/the-flexibility-paradox>

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/giwl>



Thank you

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