Homeworking trials and triumphs during Covid-19

Mental health and wellbeing

THE INSTITUTE OF LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Covid-19 has presented workers across the world with new and unique challenges, many switching to working from home for the first time.
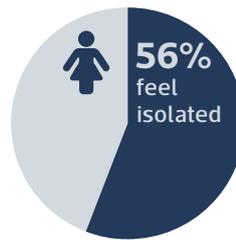
According to YouGov, during May 2020 some 38% of the UK workforce were working at home, a significant increase from 7% pre-Covid-19. Working at home has brought reported benefits to many: greater flexibility, no commute and more family time, although there are also negative consequences for some workers.

In 2019 Business in the Community (BITC) found that 2 out of 5 workers had experienced poor mental health connected to work in the previous 12 month period. Rapid change, uncertainty and instability are often uncomfortable bedfellows leading to changes in mental health and wellbeing. The Institute of Leadership & Management asked over 1200 leaders and managers how working from home was affecting them in May 2020.
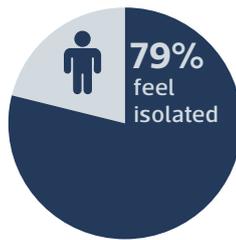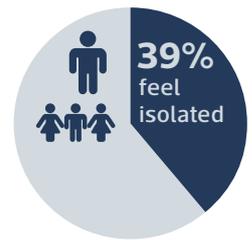
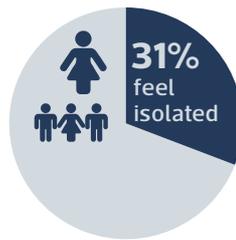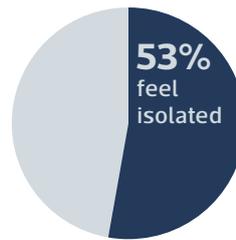Working at home doesn't suit everyone, 2 out of every 5 workers told us that they feel isolated in the "new normal." This rises dramatically in some groups, particularly younger workers and those who live alone. 4 out of every 5 men living alone, over half of 18 to 30 year olds and over half of women living alone report feeling isolated.

Who is feeling isolated?

79% feel isolated
Men living alone

56% feel isolated
Women living alone

39% feel isolated
Men living with children and a partner

31% feel isolated
Women living with children and a partner

53% feel isolated
Aged 18-30

44% feel isolated
Aged 31-40

43% feel isolated
Aged 41-50

32% feel isolated
Aged 51-60

35% feel isolated
Aged 61+

42% feel isolated

2 out of 5 people told us they feel isolated

It's in my head: working at home during Covid-19 and mental health

Almost a third of workers told us that homeworking improved their mental health, while almost half were unaffected. But 20% said that working at home was negatively affecting their mental health.
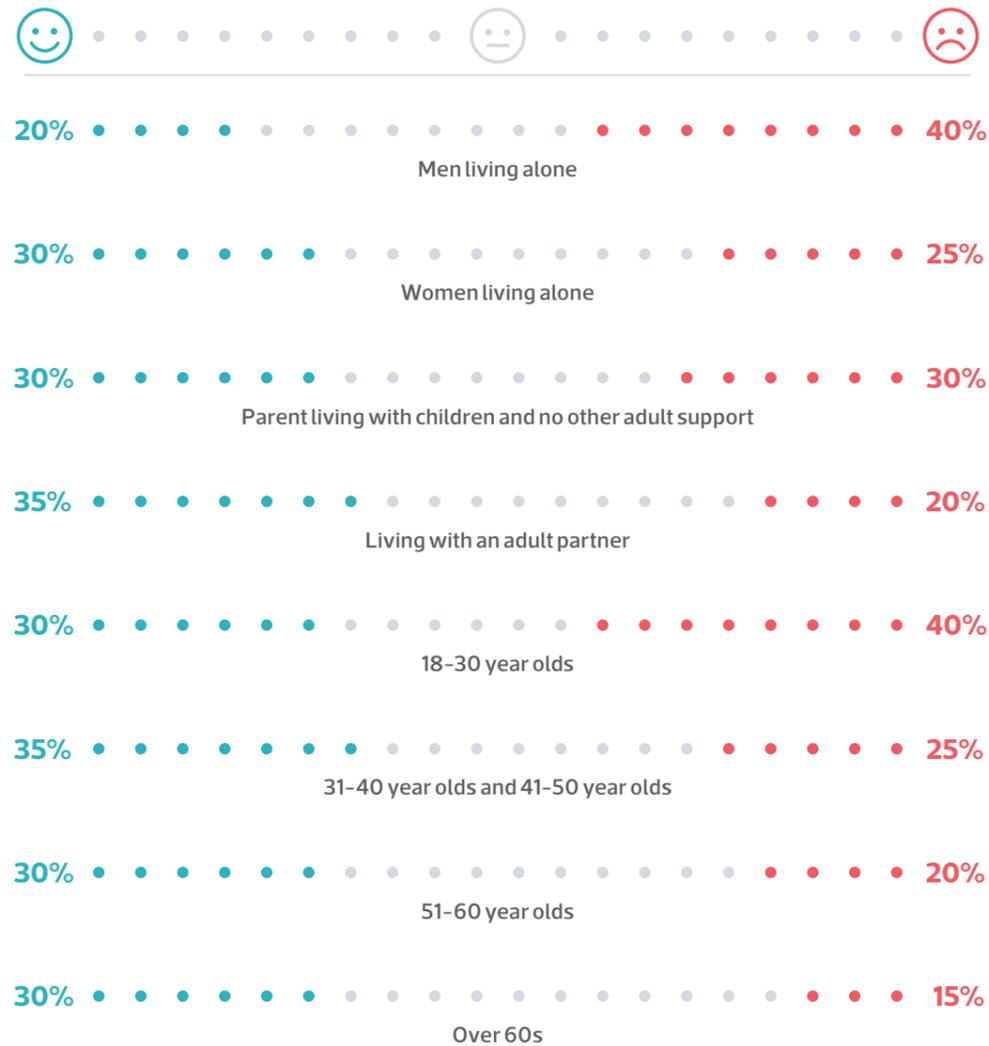
Men who live alone and younger workers aged 18–30 were most affected, with 40% telling us that their mental health had deteriorated during the first 8 weeks of lockdown due to working at home.

Over 60s and adults who live with a partner report the best mental health and appear most resilient.

The overall impact on mental health; 6 in 20, experience improvements, 5 in 20 have had negative impacts, 9 in 20 have experienced no change in mental health

Whose mental health is being affected?

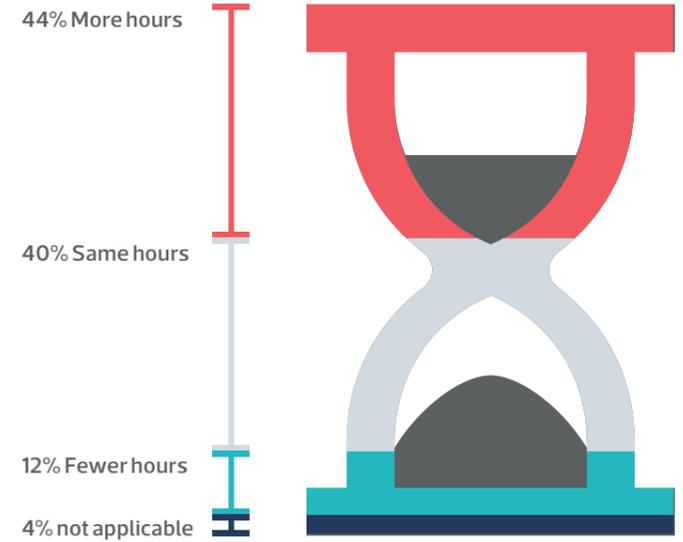|		
20%	Men living alone	40%
30%	Women living alone	25%
30%	Parent living with children and no other adult support	30%
35%	Living with an adult partner	20%
30%	18–30 year olds	40%
35%	31–40 year olds and 41–50 year olds	25%
30%	51–60 year olds	20%
30%	Over 60s	15%

It's all about balance

Bringing work into the home space delivers flexibility, but also risks intruding into homelife as the boundaries between work and home become blurred. Working at home may increase the potential for working longer hours and taking fewer breaks.
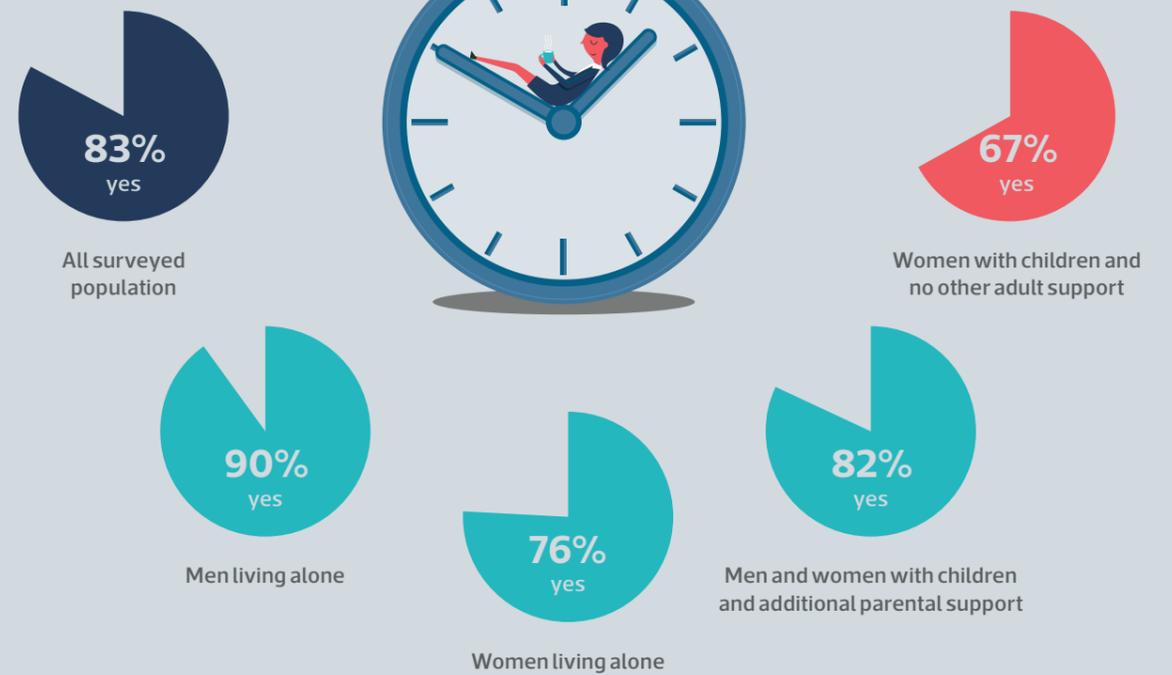
Just under half of all workers, 44%, told us they were working more hours than normal, which raises concerns that they feel under pressure to overwork, or struggle to manage their time.

Do you work the same number of hours as your would normally?

44% More hours

40% Same hours

12% Fewer hours

4% not applicable

Are you able to take suitable breaks for wellbeing during the working day?

83% yes
All surveyed population

67% yes
Women with children and no other adult support

90% yes
Men living alone

76% yes
Women living alone

82% yes
Men and women with children and additional parental support

Connected and motivated

Our previous research highlighted the importance of the social aspect of work (The Institute of Leadership & Management, 2020), and while the vast majority (84%) say they still feel very connected to colleagues there is a significant proportion (71%) who are missing their colleagues.

84%
I feel very connected to my colleagues

71%
I miss my colleagues

83%
I feel motivated

Closing thoughts

Leaders and managers are facing leadership challenges that, for many, are unique and could not possibly have been prepared for. While it is clear that many workers have thrived and experienced improvements in mental health and wellbeing, a large proportion of workers have experienced a deterioration in their mental health and wellbeing. We consistently find that men who live alone and younger workers have been most negatively impacted.

The Institute has campaigned for many years for mental health and wellbeing to be given the priority it deserves in the workplace. This research is a significant contribution to the debate around how to support mental health in our increasingly dispersed teams.

References

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The Institute of Leadership & Management (2020) **New Decade, New Direction** www.institutelm.com/resourceLibrary/new-decade-new-direction.html

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Yougov (2020) **Many more middle-class workers able to work from home than working class workers** www.yougov.co.uk/topics/economy/articles-reports/2020/05/13/most-middle-class-workers-are-working-home-full-ti (Last updated 13 May 2020)