

Exploring the relationship between working from home, mental and physical health and wellbeing: a systematic review

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Plain language summary

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Introduction

Working from home is becoming more common and has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the impact of working at home on the health of home workers and the general population remains unclear.

Methods

We looked for research which had been undertaken to help to understand the impact of home working on people's health. One researcher summarised the findings of each paper in tables, and these were checked by a second researcher. These were then drawn together into a final diagram to summarise the findings of all the relevant studies.

Results

We found 96 papers and reports: 30 published before the COVID-19 pandemic and 66 published during the pandemic. This shows that the number of studies in this area has increased significantly as a result of home working due to COVID-19 lockdowns.

The largest volume of studies we found were conducted during the pandemic and looked at measures of wellbeing and mental health. Lack of choice over whether to work from home was also considered in respect to wellbeing. Further measures linked to the home-work environment included feeling in control of time, lack of commuting to work, more time with the family, lower work/family conflict, and spaces shared with others. Openness to new ways of living was also included.

Fifteen studies suggested overall that working at home may have more negative consequences during the COVID-19 pandemic for women and, in particular, mothers. There was very little evidence to tell us how a person's age, ethnicity, education or income might affect their health when working from home.

Conclusions

Many factors determine whether someone works at home, and the effects on their health and wellbeing. These are related to what is happening in the world, the employer and type of job, and the circumstances of the employee.

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