

Do women pay for working from home? Gender gaps in pay and wellbeing during Covid-19 in the British Birth Cohorts

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Abstract: The shift to remote work, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has the potential to reshape gender inequality in work and wellbeing. It may benefit women by enhancing their ability to compete with men (*the work-life balance hypothesis*). It may also disproportionately burden women's mental wellbeing by reinforcing traditional gender roles (*the work-life conflict hypothesis*). Three British Cohort Studies provide data on pay, life satisfaction, anxiety and depression for people who remained employed a year into the pandemic. Gender differences across three work arrangements (fully remote, hybrid and on-site) were analysed accounting for personal, job and pre-pandemic characteristics. Remote work (both fully remote and hybrid) is linked to a greater gender pay gap than work on-site. Hybrid work shows the greatest gap gender in wellbeing to women's disadvantage across the work arrangements analysed. With some evidence in support of both hypotheses, future policies should continue to manage, protect and develop flexible practices.

Key words:

COVID-19, Flexibility Paradox, Gender, Hourly earnings, Wellbeing, Working from home

1. Introduction:

Gender disparities in the labour market persist alongside corresponding divisions of household and caregiving responsibilities. The route to their reconciliation involves employment flexibility. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, flexible working arrangements in the UK largely took the form of reduced or adjusted hours - more commonly undertaken by women, often at wage penalties and stigmatised. The pandemic deepened existing labour market inequalities and accelerated a shift toward remote work. This hitherto less common form of flexibility altered the relationship between paid work and the domestic sphere.

The implications of this shift for gender equality in pay and the quality of life are not clear. Remote work can promote work-life integration, enabling women to compete more effectively with men (*the work-life balance hypothesis*). Alternatively, it may reinforce traditional gender roles, increasing men's engagement in paid work, while consolidating women's role as main carer (*the work-life conflict hypothesis*).

This article examines gender (in)equalities by work location in Britain, using data on adults aged 63 (National Child Development Study), aged 51 (1970 British Cohort Study) and aged 31 (Next Steps) who remained employed a year into the COVID -19 pandemic. It addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Which workers worked from home?

RQ2: How was remote working related to gender gaps in pay?

RQ3: How was remote working related to gender gaps in wellbeing?

Each question is addressed through regression analyses, distinguishing between those who work exclusively at the employer's site, from home and in combination of the two (hybrid). Covariates expected to account for the observed differences are introduced sequentially.

The article makes two contributions to understanding the relationship between remote working and gender equality. The first shows that remote work was linked to greater gender inequalities in pay than work on-site. Secondly, the results challenge the idea that hybrid work arrangements combine the benefits of working from home and on-site. Hybrid work is not only associated with a relatively large gender pay gap, but also the highest gender disparity in wellbeing. Mental health outcomes were unfavourable to women, particularly in hybrid arrangements, though were more equal under fully remote settings. Overall, through the lens of the two hypotheses, there is some evidence of work–life balance, but more in support of the work–life conflict. This suggests remote work arrangements are not inherently detrimental to gender equality, but targeted policy measures could mitigate associated work-life conflicts and support improved work-life balance for both women and men.

The next section, on background and literature, elaborates the research gap, the theoretical framework, the British context and the rationale behind each hypothesis. Section 3 introduces the data and methods. The results, addressing the research questions posed above, are summarised graphically in section 4. Section 5 discusses these results in the context of the two hypotheses and the final section concludes.

2. Background and literature

2.1 The research gap:

46 The division of labour between men's primacy in productive activities and women's in
47 reproductive and caring roles has evolved over time and space, but continues to
48 underpin gender differences in pay and wellbeing (Rosenfield and Mouzon, 2012,
49 Ferrant et al., 2014). Although women's participation in the labour market has
50 increased, they still face disadvantages there - notably the persistent gender pay gap
51 (Bryson et al., 2020). This gap exists throughout the life course (Joshi et al., 2021),
52 but tends to widen after the birth of a first child, often seen as a "motherhood
53 penalty" (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2015, Costa Dias et al., 2020, Kleven et al., 2019).
54 As women's unpaid and caregiving responsibilities accumulate, combining them with
55 paid work tends to rely on flexible working arrangements.

56 The growing prevalence of flexible employment arrangements - typically involving
57 adjustments to working hours, such as part-time contracts or flexitime - has had two
58 effects on women's labour market outcomes. One is that such arrangements have
59 facilitated labour market participation, although often in occupations that are
60 traditionally lower paid (Rosenfeld and Birkelund, 1995). The other is that, the
61 reliance on flexibility has constrained their career progression, particularly when
62 competing with men in high-earning occupations that reward long hours and penalise
63 temporal flexibility (Goldin, 2021, Bertrand, 2018).

64 The rise in flexibility of work location - such as fully remote or hybrid arrangements -
65 has been more recent and was boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mutebi and
66 Hobbs, 2022, Barrero et al., 2023). Its implications for gender equality remain less
67 well understood. While remote work can be more easily integrated into time-intensive
68 roles, thereby extending into high-paying, male-dominated occupations, it can also

reinforce traditional gender norms by increasing the time men spend in paid work and the time women spend on unpaid responsibilities (Chung, 2022).

2.2 Trade-offs between flexibility and pay:

One theory explaining a negative relationship between pay and job flexibility is that of compensating differentials (Rosen, 1986), which has a sociological parallel in preference theory (Hakim, 2000). Flexibility is conceptualised as a non-monetary job amenity, for which employees may be willing to accept lower pay. Empirical evidence confirms that increased flexibility in working hours, such as part-time work, is associated with lower financial returns and pay penalties (Blundell et al., 2019, Price and Wasserman, 2024, Smithson et al., 2004). Moreover, women are disproportionately willing to accept lower pay in exchange for other family-friendly benefits, such as shorter commutes, remote work or reduced employer-imposed scheduling (Goldin and Katz, 2011, Wiswall and Zafar, 2018, Goldin, 2014, Le Barbanchon et al., 2021). However, others argue that pay penalties for flexible work exceed what can be explained by worker preferences alone (Mas and Pallais, 2017), particularly in female-dominated occupations (Glauber, 2012).

The literature offers several explanations for why compensating differentials may not fully account for trade-offs between pay and flexibility. Barriers may be rooted more deeply into systemic structures. First, structural labour market inequalities play a key role. Occupations and industries account for a large portion of the gender pay gap (Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin, & Rauh, 2022; Blau & Kahn, 2017) and systemic devaluation of work traditionally performed by women contributes to their disproportionate concentration in low-paying roles (Levanon et al., 2009). Flexibility in these lower-wage jobs is more likely to be offered alongside contracts that expose

workers to earnings risk. In contrast, flexibility at higher wages and in more skilled occupations is more likely to be offered alongside a fixed salary that shields workers from earnings variation (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). This is partially because women's bargaining power can be weakened, and that of employers strengthened, by women's limited range of travel and their greater domestic responsibilities than men's. This constrains women's ability to negotiate both higher wages and better working conditions (Cullen et al., 2025). Clark (1997) explains how expectations help explain gender differences in job satisfaction. Limited means to organise or pay for childcare also tend to constrain women's labour market options (Blundell et al., 2021).

Second, social and cultural factors, both in workplaces and in households, play a critical role. Berdahl et al. (2018) describe dysfunctional organizational climates, where workplaces remain arenas for 'masculinity contests' among men, reinforcing gendered power structures. At the household level, McMunn et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of emerging shared egalitarian ideology within couples as a necessary condition for achieving gender equality.

Third, discriminatory workplace practices exacerbate pay penalties experienced by women. Grimshaw and Rubery (2015), for instance, point to the twin-track career practice that deters (future) mothers from qualifying for career tracks with high time commitment requirements and segregates them onto "mommy tracks". These tracks accommodate lower time commitments but also offer lower pay (Self, 2005, Wilde et al., 2010).

2.3 The UK context:

In the UK, policies supporting flexible working have gradually expanded, in the years before the pandemic. Remote working arrangements were officially classified as flexible options in the Flexible Working Act of 2002, initially available only to parents, on a case-by-case basis. The scope of eligibility in this legislation was broadened to carers of all adults in 2007 (Dex and Smith, 2002, Lewis et al., 2008). In 2014, it was extended to encompass all employees with at least 26 weeks of continuous employment, but still limited to one application per year (Chung and Van der Horst, 2018). Despite policy expansions, uptake remained low: between January and December 2019, 12% of the UK workforce had worked at least one day from home in the previous week and 5% reported working mainly from home (Mutebi and Hobbs, 2022).

The pandemic intensified existing inequalities in the labour market, disproportionately affecting women (Alon et al., 2022, Croda and Grossbard, 2021, Stovell et al., 2025) and younger people (Michèle et al., 2021). Women were more likely to assume the majority of the extra childcare responsibilities (Chung and Booker, 2023, Andrew et al., 2020, Craig and Churchil, 2021), to stop working (Wielgoszewska et al., 2023) and to suffer greater decline in mental health (Etheridge and Spantig, 2022). The adoption of remote work was also accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated social distancing mandate introduced in March 2020, particularly in industries with better-educated and better-paid workers (Bartik et al., 2020). Working class women experienced the most adverse impact, given their limited access to good quality flexible working arrangements (Warren and Lyonette, 2020). In June 2020, home working peaked, with 38% working from home exclusively and another 11% of the workforce working at least one day from home (Mutebi and Hobbs, 2022).

After the lifting of pandemic restrictions in the summer of 2021, the proportion of people working remotely declined but remained higher than pre-pandemic levels. In September 2022, 22% of the workforce worked at least one day from home in the previous week and 13% worked from home exclusively (Mutebi and Hobbs, 2022). Despite growing tensions around return-to-office mandates (Ding and Ma, 2023), the expansion of flexible working policies continued. The Flexible Working (Amendment) Regulations 2023 - effective from April 2024 – enhanced remote working provisions by allowing requests from the first day of employment and permitting up to two requests per year. Exceptions are permitted where such arrangements are not reasonably feasible, transferring the onus of justification to the employer. The 2024 government plan to "Make Work Pay" proposed further enhancements, including "making flexible working a genuine default" (UK, 2024).

Although flexible working policies have expanded, many employees remain hesitant to request them. This reluctance partially stems from a desire to conform to the "ideal worker" norm (Kelly et al., 2010, Acker, 1990), in which long working hours signal commitment and busy schedules status (Bellezza et al., 2017). Additionally, flexible working is frequently stigmatized (Chung and Seo, 2024), those who use it perceived as less dedicated (Williams et al., 2013, Chung, 2020). For mothers, this stigma is intensified by biases about their capacity to work (Benard et al., 2007). As a result, many employees have historically avoided requesting flexible arrangements (TUC, 2021), and those who did often had them denied (Skinner and Pocock, 2011, Unison, 2024).

2.4 Hypotheses:

164 The state of knowledge suggests two diverging hypotheses with about remote
165 working and gender equality, as follows.

166 **Work-life balance:**

167 Remote work saves commuting time and therefore makes time-intensive, high-
168 earning roles more attainable by women. These are often male dominated, where
169 the gender pay gap is typically the widest. By removing the trade-off between
170 working hours and pay, remote work can support better work–family integration for
171 both men and women, ultimately facilitating work–life balance, whose importance
172 outweighs pay as a job motivator for a large majority of respondents (Randstat,
173 2025).

174 *H1: Working from home is associated with better pay, and mental health and hence,*
175 *better work-life balance and wellbeing.*

176 **Work-life conflict:**

177 Alternatively, remote work can blur the boundaries between professional and
178 personal life as it is often associated with unsocial working hours (Lass and Wooden,
179 2023), intensification of work without breaks, and less benefit from socialisation with
180 people in the workplace. It may also reinforce traditional divisions of domestic labour,
181 as argued by Chung (2022). Men, when given more control over their work, have
182 stronger adherence to the ideal worker norm (Kelly et al., 2010) using time saved
183 from commuting to work longer hours. In contrast, working women with domestic and
184 childcare duties may be less able to do so. This dynamic can place additional

pressure on women, leading to overwork and negatively impacting their pay and wellbeing and greater work–life conflict.

H2: Working from home is associated with worse pay and/or mental health and wellbeing and hence work-life conflict and a poorer quality of life.

These hypotheses are not mutually exclusive, as individual experiences may differ.

1. Data and Methods

3.1 Data:

To investigate the gaps at different stages of the lifecourse, data were taken from three nationally representative, longitudinal British Cohort Studies: 1) the National Child Development Study (NCDS), a cohort born in 1958, part of "Baby Boom Generation", who were aged 63 at the time of the data collection; 2) the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) born in 1970, part of "Generation X", aged 51; and 3) Next Steps, a cohort born in 1989–90, among "Millennials", aged 31.

Members of these longstanding cohorts took part in a COVID-19 survey conducted in three waves. The first online survey (W1) was in May 2020, the second survey (W2) in September–October 2020, the third (W3) was a year into the COVID-19 pandemic in February–March 2021 (Brown et al., 2024)ⁱ. The analyses examine outcomes from W3, but covariates are mainly measured earlier, including prior to COVID-19.

3.2 Missing data strategy:

To deal with item non-response in the whole sample (defined below), multiple Imputation with chained equations was implemented, imputing ten datasets. This approach is outlined in Silverwood et al. (2024) and has been shown to mitigate bias

despite selective attrition (Mostafa et al., 2021). The representativeness of the analytical sample was restored by using weights which account for both survey design and non-response (Brown et al., 2024) and are provided in the data available to download from UK Data Service¹.

3.3 Sample:

Our research questions relate to the sample who remained in paid work a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, which is expected to be selective. The analytical sample (defined below) is compared to other groups of participants of the surveys, in the descriptive statistics of Appendix A.

The first stage selection took only participants who provided valid information about their economic activity status at W3 and before the outbreak in March 2020 (asked at any of the three waves, depending on prior survey participation); resident in England, Scotland or Wales at W3 and for whom the derived weights were available. This sample of N = 15,956, denoted as the whole sample, was divided into four groups: 1) not in paid work at both time points (26% of the whole sample); 2) transition out of paid work (15%); 3) transition into paid work (6%); 4) remained in paid work (54%).

Those who remained working were generally relatively advantaged. Compared to the whole sample, they were more likely to be men, better educated, and less likely to have had fathers in the manual social class. They were also more likely to live with a partner, but less likely to live with their children. Compared to those who transitioned out of work, they were more likely to be key workers (defined below), to work in higher classified occupations, to be better paid, and less likely to work part-time.

¹ for more details about the content of the survey, including the questionnaire see <https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/data-access-training/covid-19-survey>

Continuing workers had better mental health as compared to those who did not work, but not as good as those who transitioned into paid work. They were also less likely to be in the oldest cohort, many of whom had retired prior to COVID-19.

Those who remained working were further divided into two groups: 1) the analytical sample, employees only, providing valid responses for all four outcomes of interest and reporting their work location as either own home (wfh), employer's premises (on-site), or some days at home and some at employer's premises (hybrid); 2) everyone else who remained working but did not meet these criteria, notably the self-employed (7% of all who remained working), and those with other work locations (mainly workers in agriculture, construction, or transport) (8%).

The analytical sample consisted of 74% of those who remained working. Compared to other continuous workers, those in the analytical sample were more likely to be women from the younger cohort, to be working on-site, and to have worse mental health outcomes. However, they were also better educated and less likely to have had a manual social class background.

3.4 Outcomes:

To answer RQ1 (Which workers worked from home?), two versions of a binary dependent variable were used: 1) a broad definition where hybrid workers were included as working from home (any wfh), and 2) a narrow definition that covered only those exclusively working from home. This allowed testing sensitivity of the results to the inclusion of hybrid arrangements.

To answer RQ2 (How was working from home related to the gender gaps in pay?), log hourly pay was used as continuous dependent variable, as common in the literature on gender pay gap (see for example Grimshaw and Rubery, 2015).

To answer RQ3 (How was working from home related to the gender gaps in wellbeing?), three outcomes were examined: one positive, as used by Blanchflower and Bryson (2024b) and two negative, as used by Moreno-Agostino et al. (2023).

These are:

1. Life satisfaction (from 0 very dissatisfied to 10 very satisfied). Life satisfaction is the most commonly used metric in the subjective well-being literature.
2. Anxiety, measured by summing scores from two items from the general anxiety disorder (GAD-2) inventory “feeling nervous, anxious or on edge” and “not being able to stop or control worrying” over the previous week. The responses to each item range from 0 (‘Not at all’) to 3 (‘Nearly every day’): the derived variable thus ranges from 0, not experiencing either of the symptoms, to 6, experiencing both symptoms nearly every day. This two-item scale performed well as screening tool for anxiety disorders (Kroenke et al., 2007).
3. Depression, measured by summing two items from the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2) - “experiencing little interest or pleasure in doing things” and “feeling down, depressed, or hopeless” that were measured on the same scale as anxiety, with the derived variable similarly ranging from 0 to 6. This measure has been validated (Kroenke et al., 2003) and, like the two-item anxiety measure performs similarly to the longer versions of these scales (Lantos et al., 2023).

3.5 Estimation:

The main regression analyses pooled all three cohorts (see Appendix C-H). To better understand the evolution of gender inequalities by age, additional analyses were conducted separately by cohort (see Appendix I-N). Sub-sample analyses were also

carried out for men and women living with and without children² to explore gender differences related to parenthood (see Appendix O-T).

The probabilities of working from home, were modelled with logistic regression.

Linear regressions were used to model log hourly pay and the three wellbeing measures, commonly modelled using linear estimation (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters, 2004). The wellbeing scales were standardised using the distribution in the analytical sample, reweighted to be more representative of the population.

In **Model 1 (M1)**, a female dummy was included to estimate raw gender differentials of the probability of home working. The analyses of pay and wellbeing included a composite exposure variable, interacting gender with the location of work. In the main analyses men working on-site were the reference category, but supplementary analyses changed the reference category to men with the other two work arrangements (see Appendix C-H). This allowed direct assessment of gender gaps and their statistical significance in all work locations.

Sets of covariates were then sequentially added to the regression models and the coefficients of the exposure variable were compared across the levels of the adjustment, full results in Appendix C-T. The levels of adjustments and the rationale behind the introduction of each set of covariates were:

M2: Basic - key covariates known or thought to correlate with pay and the possibility of working at home: age/cohort (Age 63, Age 51, Age 31); country of residence at W3 (England, Scotland, Wales); resident in London at W1 (yes, no); education

² Considered themselves a parent to, including adult children, stepchildren, adopted children, foster children or any other children. It does not include biological children living away from the cohort member's household.

299 (none, NVQ1-5); father's social class in childhood (manual, non-manual); mode of
300 survey (CAWI, CATI); number of rooms in the home.

301 **M3: Family** - covariates reflecting household composition, likely reflecting domestic
302 responsibilities: whether lived with a partner in W3 (yes, no); whether children lived
303 in the household at W3 (none, youngest age 0 to 4, youngest age 5-18, youngest
304 child 18 or older).

305 **M4: Job** - covariates expected to indicate gendered labour market segmentation:
306 pre-pandemic occupation (1-digit/2-digit SOC classification³); part-time work (based
307 on job in March 2020, under 30 hours per week); binary key worker status for work in
308 essential jobs in 2020 (based on 4-digit SOC classification as in Wielgoszewska et
309 al. (2023); binary indicator of whether cohort member changed job since March
310 2020;

311 **M5: Pre-pandemic outcome equivalents** - conditioning on pre-pandemic
312 equivalent of outcomes effectively estimates change in outcome between the two
313 timepoints, allowing better isolation of the effects of the pandemic. Pre-pandemic
314 propensity to work from home in 2019 derived from 3-digit SOC was included as an
315 equivalent of work location⁴, log gross hourly pay at the time of the outbreak of the
316 Coronavirus in March 2020⁵, and standardised⁶ life satisfaction collected from pre-
317 pandemic surveys (NCDS 2008⁷, BCS 2016, NS 2015).

³ Low counts in several 2-digit SOC categories resulted in these being dropped from regression models. Some 2-digit groups were therefore aggregated to 1-digit. This is the case for SOC 9 (Elementary Occupations), SOC 8 (Process, Plant and Machine Operatives) and SOC 5 (Skilled Trades Occupations).

⁴ Work location was not routinely asked before the pandemic. This indicator was based on the 2019 Annual Population Survey using the 3-digit occupational classification. This approach is similar to that used by Wels et al. (2023) (for details of the approach see their supplementary file 4).

⁵ Asked retrospectively at W3

⁶ Life satisfaction was measured in NCDS and BCS on 10-point scales but on a 5-point scale in Next Steps

⁷ Question had not been asked in NCDS 2013 survey

4. Results:

4.1 Descriptive statistics:

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of all the dependent variables in the analytical sample as well as by cohort, and by gender and work location (see Appendix B for descriptive statistics on other covariates). Older workers were more likely to work on-site, while younger workers, especially men, were more likely to work from home.

In terms of pay, both women and men working from home earned more per hour than their counterparts working on-site. However, as in the wider labour market (ONS, 2021) women earned less than men across all work locations and cohorts. The gender pay gaps were smaller among those who worked on-site, particularly in the youngest cohort, but larger for those working hybrid than those working exclusively from home, and particularly in the older cohorts.

Wellbeing patterns were generally consistent across the three indicators, men and older cohorts were generally more satisfied with life and displayed lower levels of anxiety and depression. Men had higher levels of wellbeing if they worked on-site, particularly in the older cohorts. Among women, hybrid workers had the lowest life satisfaction and the highest anxiety and depression. This was driven mainly by women in the younger cohorts.

*** TABLE 1 HERE ****

4.2 Which workers worked from home a year into the COVID-19 pandemic?

Figure 1 shows the gender differences in the probability of working from home, by cohort. The unadjusted estimates (M1) indicate that women were no more likely to

work from home than men, except for women in Next Steps, who were on the
borderline of being significantly less likely to work exclusively from home.

**** FIGURE 1 HERE ****

The results are very similar when adjusted for basic characteristics (M2). The basic adjustment allows that, compared to those who work on-site, home workers are generally younger, better educated, more likely to live in London, to have more rooms in their houses and less likely to have had fathers in the manual social class. Adjusting for family characteristics (M3) also made little difference. The presence of children was not associated with more working at home. On the contrary, when comparing those with and without children in the household, mothers appear to be less likely to work from home than women without children, or men. Many mothers of young children were outside the analytical sample as they were not in paid work at the outset or stopped working during the pandemic to take care of children following school closures (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020, Wielgoszewska et al., 2023).

When adjusted for job characteristics (M4), the difference between men and women in the youngest generation disappeared, but 51-year-old women in the BCS70 cohort were significantly more likely to work remotely than their male counterparts, both hybrid and exclusively from home. The shift of coefficients to the right, when adjusting for job characteristics, indicates that the probability of working from home was to a large extent related to the features of their jobs prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, rather than their household characteristics. Key workers, part-timers (who were mainly women) and those who worked in occupations that tend to be less “remotable” (such as process, plant and machine operations, elementary occupations, sales and skilled trades) were less likely to work from home. In

contrast, workers in white-collar and office-based jobs were more likely to work from home. Home workers, as compared to those who work on-site, were also more likely to work full-time and as professionals (or associate professionals) in business, public service, science, research, engineering and technology. These results for gender differentials hold with the final adjustment (M5). Adjusting for pre-pandemic pay also shows that home workers had been better paid than those who worked on-site.

In summary, there is no strong tendency for either men or women to be the more likely to work from home or hybrid. An exception was for the 51 year old women in higher occupations and full-time jobs who were more likely than similar men to work remotely.

4.3 How is working from home related to the gender gaps in pay?

Figure 2 displays pay gap coefficients from a linear regression model for log hourly pay, comparing different workers to men working on-site. The coefficients from M1 reveal that women working on-site had the lowest pay, significantly below men working on-site. Women working from home and hybrid were paid more than men working on-site but significantly less than men working from comparable locations, as seen from the lack of overlap in the confidence intervals in Figure 2 and confirmed by analyses with different reference categories in Appendix E. The raw earnings of women working from home were 0.27 log points higher than those of men working on-site, but also 0.27 log points lower than those of men working from home. The raw gender gap was the largest within hybrid workers, 0.44 log points.

**** FIGURE 2 HERE ****

Analysis by cohort showed the greatest gender gaps within work locations for 51-year-olds and the smallest for the younger cohort of 31-year-olds, where there was

no significant difference between men and women working on-site. This is consistent with previous studies which show smaller gender pay gaps among young adults (Foliano et al., 2024), widening during the childrearing years and peaking in mid-life (Costa Dias et al., 2020, Gardiner, 2017).

Among men, those working in either remote arrangement earned more than those working on-site, especially in the older cohorts. The raw differences in M1 narrowed when controlling for basic characteristics (M2) and slightly more when family characteristics are also included (M3), but the cohort gradient was still present albeit reduced. The differences among men were further attenuated once job characteristics (M4) and pre-pandemic outcomes (M5) were included but remained significantly different: men working in either of the remote arrangements were still paid more than men working on-site, especially in the oldest cohort. Thus, the differences in pay among men working in different locations largely, but not completely, reflect pre-pandemic inequalities.

Among women, there is a similar gradient – women working on-site had the lowest pay per hour and women working exclusively from home the highest, with the pay of women in hybrid arrangements in an intermediate position. However, across all locations, women were paid significantly less than male counterparts in the same arrangement. Accounting for basic (M2) and family characteristics (M3) attenuated these raw differences for women working remotely, but for women working on-site the gap widened. All these differences in pay are further attenuated by the job adjustment (M4). Although women working exclusively from home earned slightly more and women working on-site earned less than men working on-site, these differences were only borderline significant when conditioned on pre-pandemic

outcomes (M5). Differences between the pay of men and women in the same work location remained significant in all models.

**** FIGURE 3 HERE ****

As fatherhood and motherhood have opposite associations with pay (Costa Dias et al., 2020, Grimshaw and Rubery, 2015), analogous analyses were also run separately for men and women living with and without their children, as shown in Figure 3. The estimates for men with and without children follow similar patterns to the overall estimates shown in Figure 2, the pay lead in both types of remote work being progressively, but not completely, attenuated with adjustments. This is also true for women living with and without children who worked exclusively from home compared to those working on-site. However, there are substantial differences between women living with and without children who worked hybrid. The raw gap (M1) between mothers who worked on-site and who worked hybrid was smaller than for women without children. This indicates the highest ‘motherhood penalty’ in hybrid work. These significant differences disappeared once the job characteristics (M4) were taken into account.

In summary, both men and women received a higher pay in remote arrangements than for those working on-site. However, even when comparing within similar jobs, women were paid less than men in any given arrangement and mothers working hybrid faced the biggest gender pay gap.

4.4 How is working from home related to the gender gaps in wellbeing?

Figure 4 shows the coefficients for work location by gender for the three wellbeing outcomes: life satisfaction, anxiety, and depression. Life satisfaction showed only small differences in M1 among men, regardless of work location (Panel A). Those

working on site were marginally more satisfied, but the differences diminished with subsequent adjustments. In contrast, women generally reported lower life satisfaction compared to men, reflecting the broader trends in gender wellbeing gap (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2024a). These differences were particularly large between men and women who worked hybrid and smaller but still significant for those who worked on-site. For both remote locations, differences were no longer significant when adjusted for job characteristics. Men and women working exclusively from home were, on average, equally satisfied with their lives.

**** FIGURE 4 HERE ****

Cohort differences show that hybrid work was linked to lower life satisfaction particularly at age 51, where the levels of life satisfaction were also lower for men working hybrid as compared to those working on site, even in fully adjusted models. Similarly for anxiety (Panel B), no significant differences were observed among men. However, women reported higher levels of anxiety than men in the same work location. These differences were particularly large for those working hybrid and smallest for those working exclusively from home. Unlike life satisfaction, these differences were significant at all stages of adjustment though substantially attenuated once adjusted for job characteristics.

In terms of depression (Panel C), men working from home reported significantly higher levels of depression than those working on-site in all models, while differences between men who worked hybrid and on-site were only borderline significant. However, also in this case, the differences are more pronounced for women, who reported being more depressed. Gender differences were particularly large for those who worked hybrid, and smaller but still significant for those who

worked on-site. These differences were significant at all stages of adjustment, although substantially attenuated once adjusted for job characteristics. The levels of depression were particularly high for women working hybrid and if they lived with children. As with life satisfaction, there were no significant differences in terms of depression between men and women who worked exclusively from home.

In summary, on all three measures men's wellbeing did not vary a great deal by work location, but women had poorer outcomes, especially if they worked hybrid

5. Discussion:

5.1 The work-life balance hypothesis:

This evidence supports the notion that fully remote work may enhance work-life balance and hold the potentially level the playing field, at least for the relatively privileged group of women who had access to such options during the pandemic.

Remote working, as a form of flexible employment practice, is often assumed to be family-friendly and therefore a convenient option for combining paid work with domestic responsibilities. Given that the traditional division of labour prevailed during the pandemic (Chung and Booker, 2023), one might expect higher rates of women in remote work than men. There is some evidence for this but not at all stages of the lifecourse. It was the 51-year-old women who were more likely than their male contemporaries to work from home, once job characteristics are accounted for.

These results also show that work from home was associated with better pay than work on-site for both men and women. However, this was to large extent conditional of the types of job which permitted continued working through the first year of the pandemic, with its school closures, as well as jobs which were already more adaptable to remote work before the pandemic.

In terms of wellbeing, men had comparable mental health outcomes whatever their work location. There was no significant difference observed on average between men and women working from home in terms of their life satisfaction or depression, although there was for those who work on-site. This indicates that fully remote work is associated with more gender equality in mental wellbeing and can be expected to offer work-life balance to these employees.

5.2. The work-life conflict hypothesis:

However, there is also evidence linking remote work to greater gender inequality. Hybrid work is associated with the most detrimental outcomes for women, in terms of gender pay as well as wellbeing, not only as compared to work on-site, but also as compared to fully remote work. Thus, hybrid working does not appear to be as effective as fully remote work in relieving the conflicts from combining the demands at work and home.

The women in the oldest and youngest cohorts were not more likely than men to work from home. The 31-year-old millennial women – who potentially have the highest demands for flexibility - were the least likely group to work from home. Their family characteristics - particularly children in the household - were not associated with work location. This challenges the perception of remote work as a primarily family-friendly policy.

Those who remained working a year into the COVID-19 pandemic were a privileged group, those working remotely particularly so. Remote working was taken up by individuals with higher levels of education, working in more prestigious and better paid jobs, which tend to be male dominated. Thus, the present evidence appears in line with the notion that flexible working might be a viable way of enhancing the

performance outcomes of companies (Chung, 2022). Those with higher performance demands, rather than higher family and care demands, reaped the rewards of such arrangements.

This evidence also links remote work, either conducted exclusively from home or hybrid to greater gender pay gaps. One interpretation of this is that autonomy in terms of location of work might be considered as an amenity of higher value for women than men, for which they are willing to accept lower pay. Alternatively, it could reflect “flexibility stigma” (Chung, 2020), whereby employers perceive men as able to be more productive when working from home than women, expecting men’s contribution to domestic and childcare responsibilities to be limited. These pay gaps are largely but not entirely explained by differences in personal circumstances and characteristics of the pre-pandemic jobs, thereby reflecting pre-pandemic gender inequalities, rather than being an effect of the pandemic. Furthermore, adjusting for family characteristics in subgroup analysis, which allows for opposite effects of motherhood and fatherhood, did not attenuate the gaps, indicating that the gaps are not solely due to a motherhood penalty, but that other mechanisms such as social norms or discrimination might be at play affecting all women.

Contrary to the idea that hybrid work would combine the benefits of both working from home and on-site, it does not appear to occupy an intermediate position of convenience in terms of gender equality. Instead, the gender pay gap amongst hybrid workers was even larger than for those who worked fully remotely. Men working hybrid had similar pay to men who work exclusively from home, but the pay of women working hybrid was more like that of women working on-site. This was especially evident among women with children, indicating that flexibility in terms of work location might play a different role for men and women. Women, who tend to

have less bargaining power and are more likely to face penalties related to flexibility stigma, might accept lower pay to retain the role of main carer. In contrast, men, who are generally less restricted by childcare responsibilities and therefore more able to adhere to the ideal worker norm, might have used the social distancing mandate to work from home as a bargaining chip with employer, compensating them for the increase in work intensity to negotiate higher pay.

While working fully remotely is related to greater gender equality in terms of life satisfaction and depression than working on-site, these results are not confirmed for anxiety. Among those working remotely, women were more anxious than men across all levels of adjustment. Furthermore, among those who work hybrid women had significantly lower life satisfaction, more anxiety and depression than men, in line with the flexibility paradox theory. The gaps for hybrid workers, were larger than for those working on-site as well as those working fully remotely. Thus, hybrid work appeared the least attractive of the work arrangement, with relatively poor pay and mental health, and does not appear to resolve work-life conflict.

5.3 Limitations

While this study offers insight into the relationship between remote working and gender equality a year into the pandemic, it has several limitations. Firstly, the outcomes were measured in March 2021, at the time when many of the social distancing restriction were still in place and working from home was still mandated by government, rather than a choice of employers or employees. The possibility that factors unaccounted for here may influence these results cannot be ruled out - for example, potential risk of COVID-19 infection, which is expected to be higher among those working on-site or hybrid. Present results do not extend to more recent post-

COVID-19 years. Secondly, even though the covariates are measured prior to the outcome variables, the possibility of reverse or reciprocal causality cannot be excluded and, therefore, the analyses cannot be considered as causal. Thirdly, the analytical sample excludes those who were self-employed or worked from other locations, so findings are only generalizable to employees who worked on-site, remotely or hybrid. Furthermore, the sample is comprised of three cohorts (aged 63, 51 and 31 at the time of data collection), so results are only generalisable to employees from these generations. While this sample allows comparison of gender gaps across different snapshots of the life course, it is not well suited to provide evidence for the critical period following the birth of first child, when the pay gaps typically widen, mental health of mothers is particularly volatile, and the provision of childcare is particularly crucial. Many of the youngest cohort had not yet had children, among the middle cohort children were at or beyond school age, and very few of the oldest cohort still had dependent children. Similarly, the full scale of all unpaid domestic responsibilities and the contribution of any partner's paid or unpaid work, are not sufficiently captured. Furthermore, the 1958 and 1970 cohort studies were recruited at birth in the Great Britain, not allowing sufficient sample to investigate intersectionality by ethnicity. Finally, while the analyses incorporated multiple indicators of job characteristics, 2-digit level occupations might not adequately reflect the tasks performed by men and women in these grouped occupations.

6. Concluding remarks:

Remote working continues to be a common feature of the labour market after its boost during the pandemic that challenged the flexibility stigma. Its potential economic and social benefits and can include greater gender equality, as it may

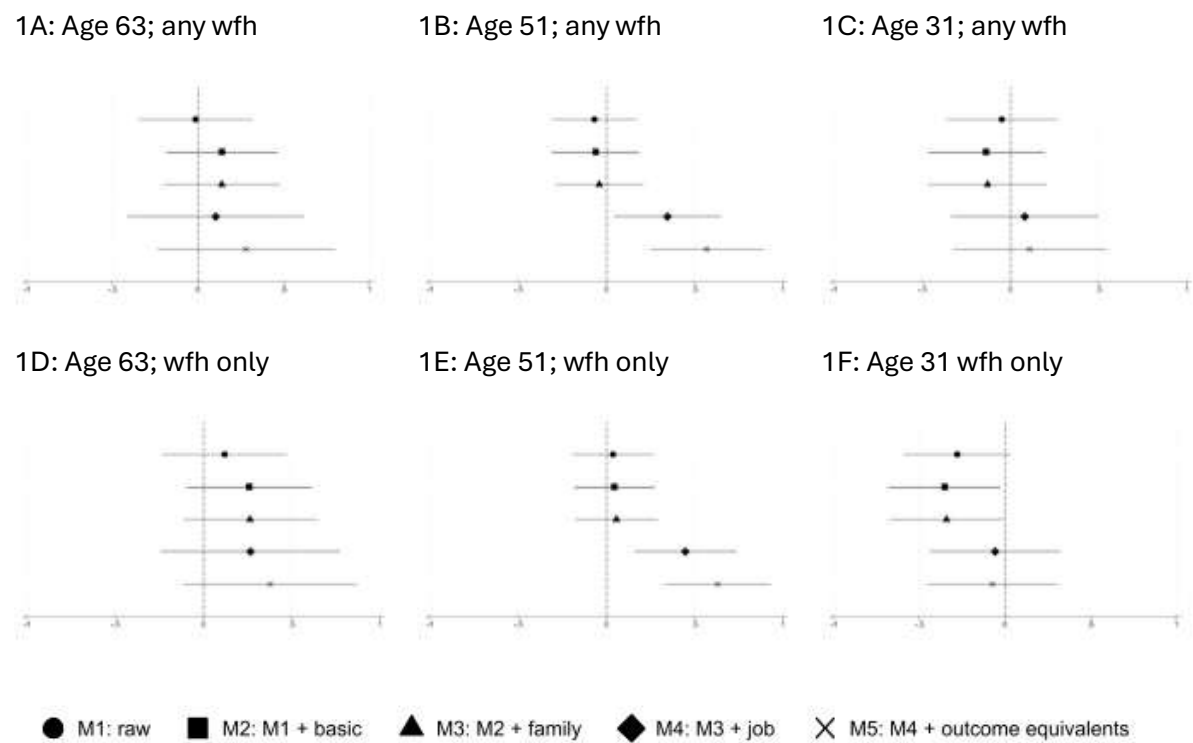
enable marginalised groups, such as women with caring responsibilities, to be economically active. There are also possible downsides. For example, remote workers may find the hours of work expected of them to be excessive, particularly when paid and unpaid duties mount up. Blurring of boundaries between home and work may lead to overwork. There is evidence here of this among hybrid workers, who juggle both working from home and on-site. Women in this group, especially those with children, had the worst outcomes, both in terms of pay as well as their mental health. This challenges the notion of hybrid work holding an intermediate position between working on-site and fully remotely, requiring re-thinking the recent shift towards hybrid work as the normalised form.

Rather than reducing or eliminating remote working arrangements, government, employers in public and private sectors, as well as unions, should continue to protect and develop flexible practices and their management. This includes flexibility in terms of hours worked, as well as location from which the work is conducted, where possible. Such measures also have the potential to help towards the slow closing of the gap between men's and women's pay. However, these findings show that large pay gaps still existed in all three work locations, indicating the progress towards gender equality was not complete, even for the relatively advantaged groups observed working during the pandemic.

603 Table 1: Distribution of outcomes in the analytical sample by gender, work site and
604 cohort

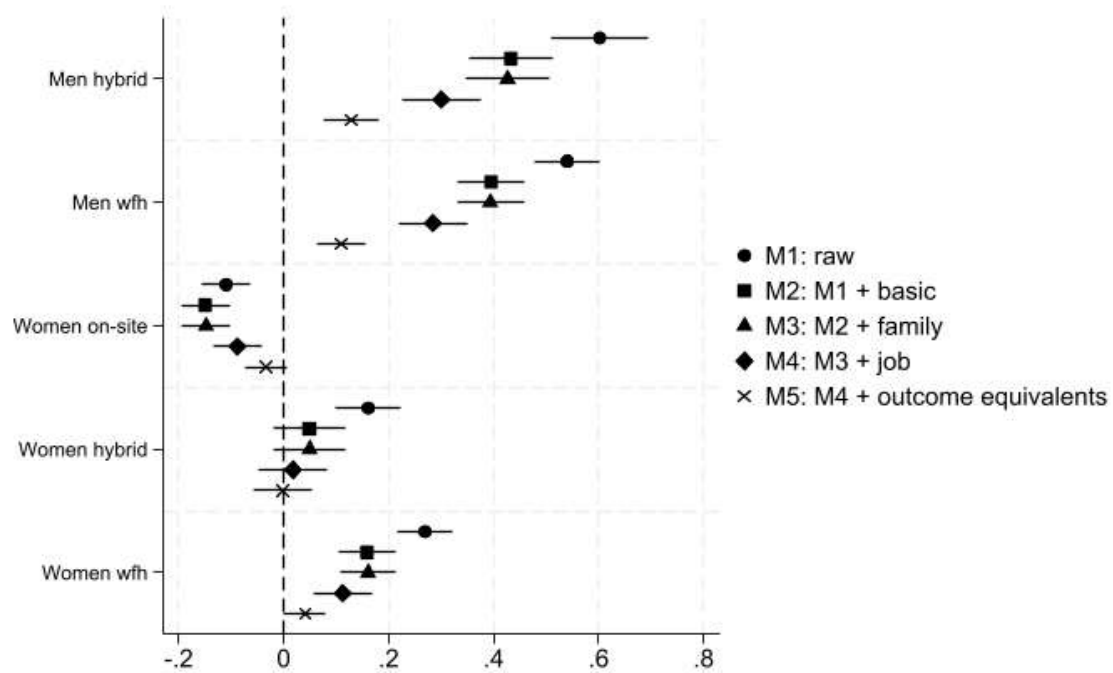
	N (Unweig hted)	Weighted proportion	Log hourly pay (mean)	Life satisfaction (mean)	Anxiety (mean)	Depression (mean)
Analytical sample:						
Men on-site	1295	0.25	2.62	7.28	0.72	0.81
Men hybrid	502	0.08	3.23	6.98	0.77	0.84
Men wfh	1268	0.19	3.16	6.92	0.94	1.07
Women on-site	1813	0.24	2.51	6.89	1.28	1.15
Women hybrid	671	0.07	2.79	6.42	1.51	1.40
Women wfh	1517	0.17	2.89	6.71	1.34	1.18
NCDS:						
Men on-site	409	0.32	2.56	7.77	0.36	0.55
Men hybrid	131	0.07	3.33	7.51	0.60	0.76
Men wfh	249	0.13	3.24	7.58	0.49	0.48
Women on-site	522	0.29	2.45	7.42	0.80	0.82
Women hybrid	112	0.05	2.85	7.25	0.90	0.80
Women wfh	286	0.13	2.82	6.92	1.06	0.95
BCS70:						
Men on-site	521	0.24	2.72	7.30	0.70	0.73
Men hybrid	231	0.10	3.33	6.69	0.79	0.84
Men wfh	528	0.18	3.33	6.97	0.75	0.91
Women on-site	735	0.23	2.52	6.85	1.17	1.01
Women hybrid	297	0.08	2.78	6.39	1.43	1.22
Women wfh	629	0.17	2.92	6.86	1.07	0.93
Next Steps:						
Men on-site	365	0.22	2.57	6.74	1.14	1.18
Men hybrid	140	0.06	2.94	7.05	0.87	0.93
Men wfh	491	0.23	3.00	6.61	1.29	1.43
Women on-site	556	0.22	2.57	6.43	1.89	1.62
Women hybrid	262	0.08	2.76	6.08	1.87	1.87
Women wfh	602	0.19	2.91	6.45	1.75	1.54

Figure 1: Gender differentials in the odds of working from home (any and exclusively) by cohort



Note: estimates are logistic regression coefficients for female dummy (ref. men). The whiskers are the 95% confidence intervals.

612 Figure 2: Gender and work location differentials in log hourly pay



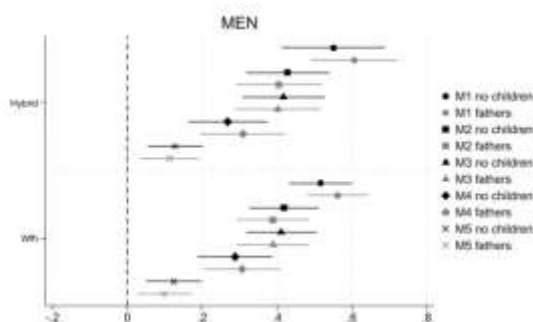
613

614 Note: estimates are linear regression coefficients; ref. men working on-site; the whiskers are the 95%
 615 confidence intervals.

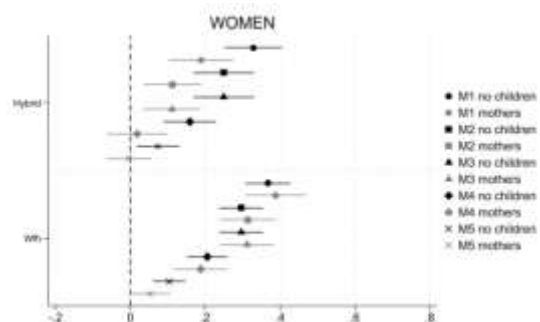
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617 Figure 3: Work location differentials in log hourly pay by gender and children within
 618 the household

3A



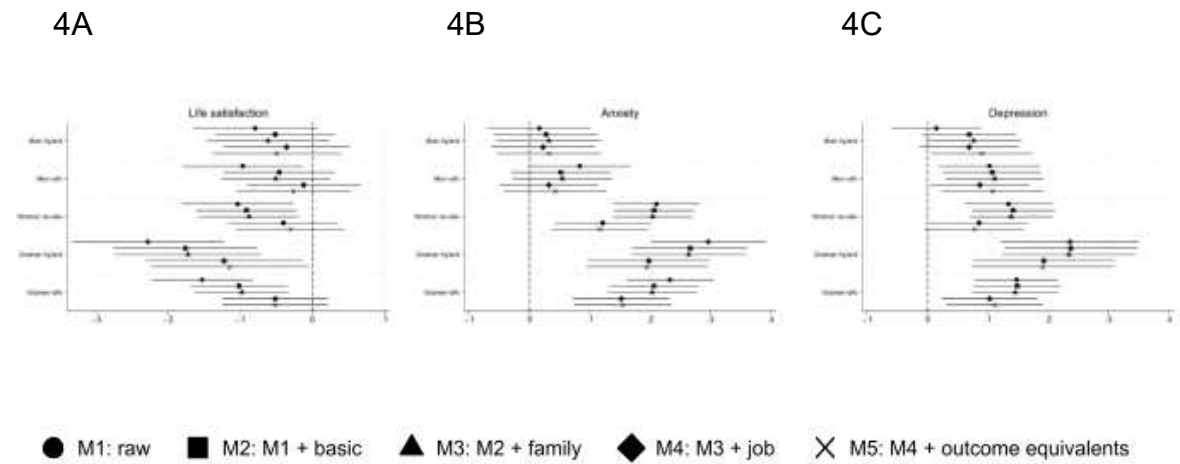
3B



619 Note: estimates are linear regression coefficients for separate analyses in the four groups: men and
 620 women living with and without children; ref. those working on-site in the given group; the whiskers are
 621 the 95% confidence intervals.

622

Figure 4: Gender and work location differentials in life satisfaction, anxiety and depression



Note: estimates are linear regression coefficients; ref. men working on-site; the whiskers are the 95% confidence intervals.

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