

In Mental Distress Remote Work Explains Part of the Post-Pandemic Rise

A recent study published suggests that remote work may impact the mental [health](#) of individuals.

Comparing [pre-coronavirus disease 2019](#) (pre-COVID-19) and post-pandemic data for remote vs. non-remote jobs, researchers found that people in remote jobs, particularly those who lived alone, had fewer social interactions during and outside of work. They also experienced a greater level of mental distress compared with those in non-remote jobs.

The researchers linked about one-third of the increase in [mental distress](#) to remote work, highlighting the need to find new ways to increase social interactions among people in remote-friendly occupations.

COVID-19 led to a major shift in work practices to reduce the spread of [severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2](#) (SARS-CoV-2) and its associated health risks.

Public health authorities introduced measures to prevent social gatherings and to quarantine people who might have been exposed to the [virus](#). As a result, many employees increasingly began working from home at least part of the week.

These policies minimized human interactions and helped prevent [infections](#) and COVID-19-related deaths. However, the reduction in interactions with coworkers, friends, and other people encountered during daily routines may have negatively impacted mental health, an aspect of the pandemic that needs further investigation.



Study

In the present study, researchers explored the impact of remote work on individual well-being. To do so, they compared changes before and after the [pandemic](#) across occupations that could be performed remotely and those that required on-site work.

The team compared remote occupations (such as marketing and software engineering) to on-site occupations (such as nursing and [mechanical engineering](#)). They used the Dingel-Neiman index to classify jobs by their remotability. They obtained data from 588,322 participants across five US

surveys conducted between 2011 and 2024. They excluded 2020-2021 data, when COVID-19 was at its peak.

The researchers calculated Kessler (K-6) scores to measure generalized psychological distress. They compared the findings with those obtained before COVID-19 by analyzing Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) and [National Health Interview Study](#) (NHIS) data.

The team additionally assessed alternate measures of [psychological distress](#), such as the utilization of mental healthcare services, frequency of depression, and antidepressant medications. They also investigated whether occupations' exposure to generative artificial intelligence (AI) and recent but not current employment in a remote occupation influenced the findings.

Findings

People in remote jobs spent nearly one-third (31%) of their workdays entirely remote. Compared with workers in non-remote [occupations](#), employees in remote roles saw an 18-percentage-point larger increase in working from home.

People working in [remote occupations](#) spent significantly more time working alone. The estimates averaged about 1.2 additional hours of working alone per day for them, compared to non-remote workers.

These individuals also spent more days without interacting with others. In fact, the share of people having absolutely no [human contact](#) at all in a day increased by about 1.0 percentage point, an approximately 72% relative increase.

The effects were particularly noticeable among people in remote jobs who lived alone; their likelihood of spending the whole day alone rose by seven percentage points, an increase of 83%, while the [stricter measure](#) of having no ambient human contact rose by 3.9 percentage points.

People generally found work more meaningful when it involved social interactions than when they worked alone. An important finding was that workers in remote jobs seemed to experience more [mental distress](#).

Compared with people in non-remote jobs, [employees](#) in occupations that became more remote during the post-pandemic period showed a small but noticeable increase of 0.3 points in the K-6 score (pre-pandemic score: 3.0).

Remote work appeared to have a stronger impact on mental [health](#) among employees who lived alone, whose increase in psychological distress was nearly double that of people living with their families.

The researchers observed similar trends using alternative measures of psychological distress. Workers in remote jobs did not show any increase in non-mental [healthcare](#) use, indicating that the changes were not driven by higher doctor visits.

Researchers observed similar results after accounting for occupational exposure to generative AI and former employment in remote [occupations](#), suggesting that the current working arrangement is an important contributing factor.

[Remote work practices](#) accounted for approximately a third of the increase in psychological distress among participants during the study period. Remote work may therefore be considered a significant, but not the sole, contributor.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, although flexible work arrangements that allow employees to work from home may eliminate commuting time, they may also reduce [social interactions](#) that support emotional well-being.

People who live alone may be at a greater risk of social isolation and psychological distress. Small daily interactions with coworkers and even brief moments of contact, such as greeting a barista, may play an important role in supporting [emotional wellness](#).

As companies increasingly adopt remote and hybrid work practices worldwide, the findings underscore the importance of interacting with people and engaging in social activities inside and outside the workplace. However, the authors note that the analysis was limited to US workers, could not fully distinguish between fully remote and [hybrid work](#), and relied on occupation-level changes rather than individual remote-work choices.

The findings may inform decision-making by [policymakers](#), employers, and employees regarding remote work options that balance flexibility with mental well-being.

Source:

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20260610/Remote-work-explains-part-of-the-post-pandemic-rise-in-mental-distress.aspx>