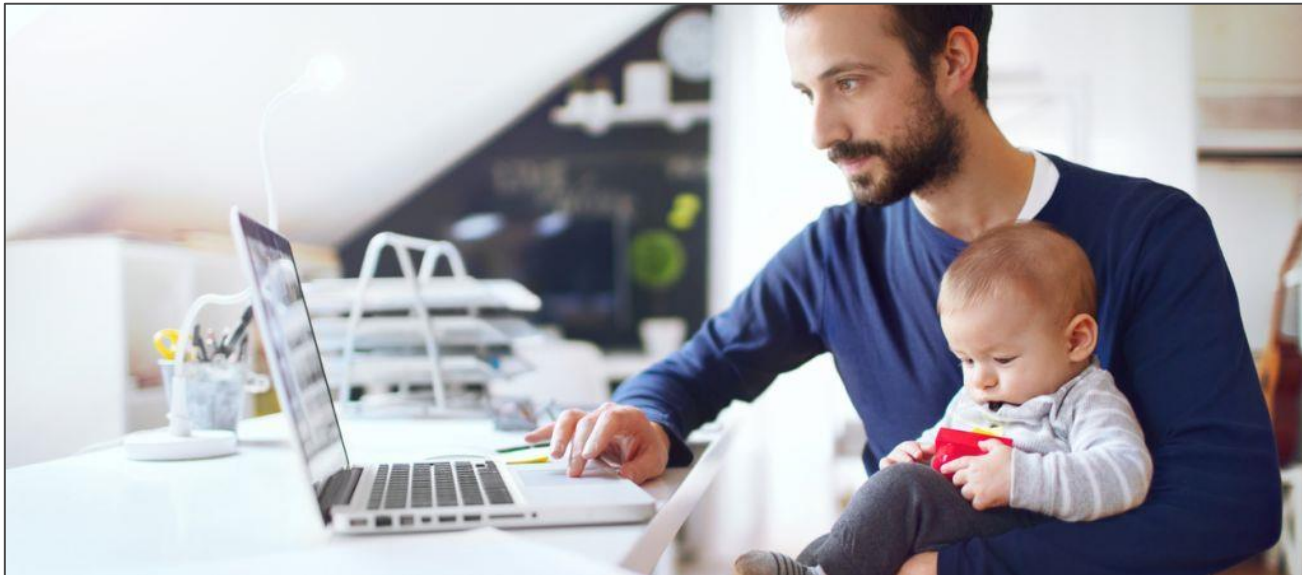


# Working from Home

## What is the impact on Wellbeing?

Stephen Bevan

Institute for Employment Studies (IES), UK



# Homeworking & Wellbeing

- Millions of workers have been WFH since the start of the 'lockdown' — biggest & quickest mass shift in working patterns ever
- Pre-COVID19, only around 7% of U.S. workers had the option to regularly work from home (17% in the UK)
- How have the physical & emotional health of workers been affected by WFH & what are the lessons for employers post-lockdown?

# The IES Survey

- IES was established in 1969 & is a not-for-profit applied research organisation focusing on labour market policy, HRM & wellbeing
- The IES Working at Home Wellbeing Survey has been tracking wellbeing since the start of the UK 'lockdown' in March
- Used the WHO5 Index of mental wellbeing
- We have data from over 850 respondents
- All data here statistically significant

# Who are the Respondents?



# Profile of Respondents

- 70% WFH only because of COVID19
- 70% female, mean age 46
- Mainly white collar, working for larger service sector or public admin. employers
- 42% share a workspace with another working adult
- 30% have children & 17% have eldercare
- 46% manage others
- 60% working longer than contracted
- 85% have work IT
- 73% have access to OH & 64% to EAP
- 25% say employer has done a risk assessment

# Physical Health



# Aches, pain & strain

- Early responses showed big 'spike' in MSK pain (eg 50-60%) – now lower
- Still more neck pain than 'normal' (37%), back pain (35%) & shoulder pain (31%)
- Eye strain (32%) and headaches/migraine (26%)
- Similar increases in:
  - chest pain
  - leg cramps
  - heartburn & indigestion
- Initial increases in pain have declined, but remain a challenge for at least 1 in 4

# Lifestyle, Sleep, Exercise & Diet





# Lifestyle & Pressure

- Almost half (44%) report losing sleep due to worry & 42% report more fatigue than usual
- 1 in 5 say alcohol consumption is up
- 60% worry they exercise too little
- One third say they eat unhealthily
- 36% say work pressure is too much
- 43% don't have enough time to get their work done

# Mental Wellbeing



# How is Mental Health Faring? (1)

- The WHO5 Index is an internationally validated measure of mental wellbeing
- In our sample, younger workers had lower scores & this group had more concerns about finance, job security, isolation etc
- The mental health of long-term homeworkers (pre-COVID19) was much better than those new to 'lockdown'

# How is Mental Health Faring? (2)

- Better mental health among those who:
  - Are committed to/engaged with their employer
  - Derive satisfaction from work and have autonomy & control over what they do
  - Are content with work-life balance
  - Feel supported & motivated to WFH
  - Have more frequent contact with their boss
  - Have fewer physical health problems
  - Intend to stay with their employer

# Work-Life Balance, Communication & Morale



# Good Work IS Good for Wellbeing

- Being trusted to work remotely & feeling involved in decision-making (voice)
- Variety, control, feeling valued & a having a sense of accomplishment from work
- Managing the work/life boundaries
- Contact with boss & team members

# What more can these data tell us?

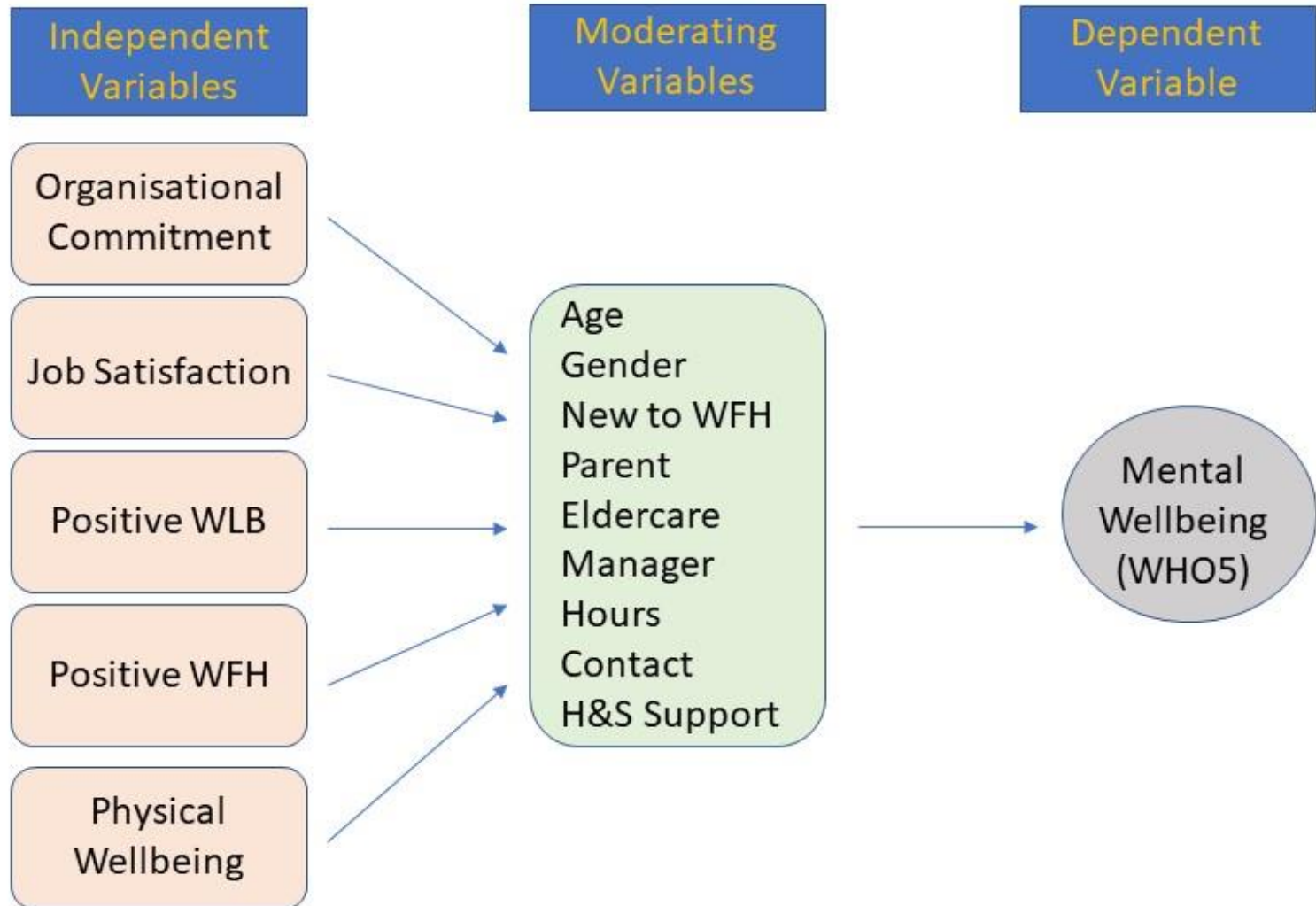


# Further Data 'Mining'?

- Can track changes in self-reported health weekly since lockdown
- Focused analysis on wellbeing of managers – the 'squeezed middle'
- Multivariate analysis to identify the most important drivers of mental wellbeing
- Comparisons with 'mirror' surveys internationally



# Drivers of Mental Health in Homeworkers?



# What are the Lessons for Managers?



# Early Lessons...

- Risk assessment, duty of care & adjustments
- Clarify performance expectations but with flexibility & employee involvement
- Encourage scheduling to support WLB, sharing availability & boundary-setting within teams
- Reduce the focus on work inputs & concentrate on outputs & quality – trust & task discretion are healthy!
- Zoom is no substitute for empathy, being observant and spotting ‘weak signals’ of declining mental health
- Remember, a random act of kindness does not make a manager ‘weak’ – especially now

# The Future of Work?



# Post-COVID19 Challenges

- Returning to work safely – the employer ‘duty of care’ & risk exposure
- WFH & flexible working – no going back?
- Compressed hours working & 4-day weeks?
- Precarious work & mental health:  
<https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/news/precarious-work-and-mental-wellbeing-lurking-covid-19-threat>

## Further information:

Complete the survey here:

<https://wh1.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=158514663787>

[www.employment-studies.co.uk](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk)

[Stephen.bevan@Employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:Stephen.bevan@Employment-studies.co.uk)

 @StephenBevan