Melbourne Institute of
Applied Economic and Social Research

Working Paper Series

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Inga Laß
Mark Wooden

Working Paper No. 18/25

December 2025

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
MELBOURNE INSTITUTE

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Inga Laß and Mark Wooden
Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research
The University of Melbourne

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* This paper uses unit-record data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The HILDA Survey project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and views reported in this paper, however, are those of the authors and should not be attributed to either DSS or the Melbourne Institute. The data used are available free of charge to researchers through the National Centre for Longitudinal Data Dataverse at the Australian Data Archive (https://dataverse.ada.edu.au/dataverse/ncld).

Melbourne Institute of
Applied Economic and Social Research
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010 Australia
T +61 3 8344 2100
F +61 3 8344 2111
E melb-inst@unimelb.edu.au
W melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a significant and long-lasting increase in the proportion of employees working from home (WFH). However, relatively little is known about the specific groups of workers that are most likely to work from home post-pandemic. This paper investigates the characteristics of employees and their employers who are WFH in post-pandemic Australia. We run logistic regression analyses based on the 2023 round of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, which contains novel information on the number of full workdays worked from home. Sixteen hypotheses are proposed and tested. The results confirm strong and powerful associations between WFH full days and both occupation and industry. However, contrary to expectations, WFH is not positively associated with caring responsibilities or the presence of long-term health conditions or disabilities, and nor is WFH more common among the oldest workers. This latter set of findings is striking given the National Employment Standards identify these employee characteristics as deserving priority when employers consider requests to work from home. Overall, while worker preferences are relevant, the results suggest that it is the nature of jobs that is the main factor determining who has the option to work from home.

JEL classification: J21, M54

Keywords: Working from home, flexible work, hybrid work, remote work, HILDA Survey

Introduction

One of the most obvious and more persistent consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the marked rise in the number of employees who spend at least part of their work week working from home (WFH). Data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, for example, reveal that about one in every four Australian employees in 2023 usually worked at least one day each week entirely from home (Laß and Wooden, 2025). While directly comparable data for earlier years are not available, it is clear that working full days from home was (at least among employees) relatively uncommon in Australia prior to the pandemic. This is evident in responses to the travel-to-work question in the 2016 Census, with just 1.7% of employees who worked on the day of the Census reporting working at home that day.[1] Furthermore, there is a growing consensus that the recent high levels of WFH, at least in industrial nations, are not returning to pre-pandemic levels any time soon (Aksoy et al., 2025).

This marked growth in the incidence of WFH has seen a resurgence in research concerned with the consequences of WFH, both for employees and employers, as well as its broader societal impacts (for a review, see Lee, 2023). The pandemic also promoted a surge of interest into the question of which jobs can be feasibly performed remotely (e.g., Alipour et al., 2023; Arntz et al., 2020; Dingel and Neiman, 2020; Garrote Sanchez et al., 2021). In contrast, while a number of studies have examined the characteristics of employees who worked from home during the pandemic, and hence when many were compelled to work from home (e.g., Abendroth et al., 2022; Beck et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2023), to date there has been relatively little examination of this issue using data collected since the pandemic ended.

In this paper we propose hypotheses about the types of workers who are most likely to be provided the opportunity to work from home and then take up that opportunity. We then test those hypotheses with a multivariate regression model using data from wave 23 of the HILDA Survey, which was conducted mostly in the second half of 2023.

A central feature of the analysis is the focus on employees who work full days from home. This is in line with the approach taken in the US Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes (see Buckman et al., 2025), but is different to most earlier studies, including studies using HILDA Survey data (e.g., Dockery and Bawa, 2014). In these studies the focus has been on persons reporting working any hours at home. They thus do not distinguish between employees for whom WFH replaces time at a traditional work site and employees who take work home with them and thus often associated with an extension in the length of the work week (Song, 2009). As emphasised by Yang et al. (2023, p. 24), studies that do not distinguish between these two types of working arrangements are 'mixing up practices with varying antecedents … [and] consequences'.

Hypotheses

Whether an employee works from home or not is the joint outcome of decisions of both the employer and the employee. For employers, a primary consideration is whether it is even feasible for a job to be performed at an employee's home. Many jobs are tied to activity undertaken at a particular location (e.g., a building site, factory, or hospital) or require extensive in-person interaction with clients (e.g., restaurant workers, nurses, or child care workers), making WFH impossible. In contrast, there are few technical obstacles to most office-based jobs (where the only equipment required is a computer,

internet connection and modest workspace) being undertaken at the employee's home. We thus expect the likelihood of WFH to vary with the nature of jobs and hence with a worker's occupation and industry.

For those jobs that can feasibly be performed remotely, employer willingness to allow WFH can be expected to be a function of the amount of trust the employer has in the employee (Daniels et al., 2001; Harrington and Ruppel, 2002), and the extent to which that employee is able to work independently and hence without the need for close supervision or monitoring (Bailey and Kurland, 2002) or the "high-bandwidth" communication inherent in face-to-face interactions (Lowy, 2020). We expect this to be a function of both employee experience and education (Drucker and Khattak, 2000; Elldér, 2019; Pauliks, 2025), as well as English language skills. We also expect workers employed on a temporary or casual basis to be less likely to be offered the opportunity to work from home (Elldér, 2019; López-Igual and Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020). In this case, a driving factor is likely to be managerial perceptions that the productivity of workers employed on a non-permanent basis will be more likely to decline when their effort is unable to be monitored. For similar reasons, it might be expected that persons employed on a part-time basis will also be less likely to be offered the opportunity to work from home (e.g., López-Igual and Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020). Very differently, Pauliks (2025) argues that part-time employees may be less likely to have access to WFH because the employer is more likely to have already granted them a degree of flexibility (presumably in when they work).

Conversely, supervisors are needed to mentor and supervise those employees who are younger and less experienced and more generally need closer supervision and

benefit most from in-person interactions. Supervisors are thus expected to be more likely to be required to work on-site (Emanuel et al., 2023).

Other factors that might be associated with the employer decision to accommodate worker preferences for WFH include firm size and government ownership. The expected association with firm size is not straightforward. On the one hand, it has been argued that the adoption and proliferation of remote work is dependent on a firm's use of advanced digital technologies (Fang et al., 2025). This suggests that larger firms, with their greater financial and technological resources, will be more likely to embrace remote working. Furthermore, the well-developed HR functions of large firms likely make them both more able to offer flexible work arrangements and more favourably disposed towards them (Peters et al., 2004). On the other hand, the more familial cultures within small firms should engender greater levels of trust between management (typically the business owner) and employees, and thus managers of small businesses may be more willing to accommodate employee preferences for WFH (Sarbu, 2015). We thus hypothesise that the relationship between firm size and the incidence of WFH will be non-linear and will be most prominent in both the largest and smallest businesses.

Independent of size, we might also expect WFH to be more common in public sector organisations, at least in Australia. The Australian Public Service Commission, for example, promotes flexible work as a core part of the way it does business, with a bias favouring the approval of employee requests for more flexible working arrangements now explicitly provided for in APS enterprise agreements (Australian Government, n.d.).

From the employee perspective, it is usually argued that the greater flexibility provided by WFH will be valued most by those who face constraints, either physical or

social, that make maintaining a full-time job outside of the home difficult (Kraut and Grambsch, 1987). Most often mentioned here are employees with caring responsibilities, especially mothers (e.g., Edwards and Field-Hendrey, 2002; Felstead et al., 2001; Mas and Pallais, 2017; Mokhtarian et al., 1998), and especially mothers of very young children (Dockery and Bawa, 2014; Edwards and Field-Hendrey, 2002; Kraut and Grambsch, 1987; Sarbu, 2015). Other demographic groups that might have strong preferences for WFH include those with work-limiting health conditions and disabilities (Edwards and Field-Hendrey, 2002; Kraut and Grambsch, 1987; Mokhtarian and Salomon, 1997) and the elderly (de Graaf and Rietveld, 2007; Edwards and Field-Hendrey, 2002). In Australia, such preferences appear to be reinforced by industrial regulation, and more specifically the right provided in the National Employment Standards (set out in the *Fair Work Act 2009*) for certain types of employees to request flexible working arrangements. Under this standard, employees who are carers or who have caring responsibilities, have a disability, or are aged 55 years or older (and have worked with their current employer for at least 12 months), have the right to request a more flexible working arrangement, which includes the option to work from home.[2]

In contrast to older employees, we expect the youngest employees to be most averse to WFH. This is because the benefits from in-person mentoring, on-the-job training and proximity to co-workers are greatest for this group (Barrero et al., 2023; Emanuel et al., 2023).

Independent of caring responsibilities, we also expect preferences for WFH to be weaker among men than women. This reflects the impact of social norms, with men traditionally expected to be the major earner within the household and women more likely to be the caregiver and secondary earner, often working in part-time jobs, or not

working at all. Men are thus more likely to be expected to comply with ideal-worker norms. This includes an expectation that they attend the office every day, and where work is undertaken at home it occurs in the evenings and on weekends. Men who do not comply with such norms will be more likely to be seen as less committed to their jobs and career, which in turn can impact adversely on future career prospects (Kasperska et al., 2025; Williams et al., 2013). Interestingly, previous studies have often reported either insignificant relationships between WFH and gender (e.g., Abendroth et al., 2022; Peters et al., 2004) or that females were actually less likely to work from home (e.g., Drucker and Khattak, 2000; López-Igual and Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020; Sarbu, 2015). We suggest that these findings reflect gender-based segregation in occupations and jobs that were not well controlled for.

There are also reasons to expect that coupled individuals might have a stronger preference for WFH than individuals who do not live with a partner, even if there are no children. Most importantly, couples might want to synchronise their schedules to maximise quality time together (Bryan and Sevilla, 2017), which could be facilitated through one or both partners WFH (Arntz et al., 2022). Conversely, for persons living alone, the social function of working onsite might be more important (Vij et al., 2023).

It has also been hypothesised that persons living in rural locations that are very distant from major urban centres will face longer average commuting times and so have stronger preferences for WFH (Edwards and Field-Hendrey, 2002; Drucker and Khattak, 2000). Whether that will necessarily result in a higher incidence of WFH for this group, however, is unclear, with others arguing that the types of firms that are most favourably disposed towards remote work arrangements are concentrated in urban growth centres (Barrero et al., 2023; López-Igual and Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020). Of considerable

importance here is the better access to superior internet infrastructure and digital labour markets in urban centres (Fang et al., 2025).

Given the option to work from home is mostly a desirable work arrangement, we would also expect its incidence to be positively associated with employee bargaining power. This reinforces our hypotheses that WFH will be more common among the most educated, the more experienced, and those employed on ongoing permanent full-time contracts. This also suggests that we might expect a positive association with union membership. Unions, however, may resist the introduction and proliferation of remote working arrangements given it will be more difficult to organise and recruit remote workers (Moon and Stanforth, 1997).

Very differently, the ability to work from home effectively is not just a function of the technical requirements of the job, but also of the employee's home situation, and in particular, access to a dedicated workspace. This, in turn, will be, at least partly, a function of the size of the home relative to the number of inhabitants.

Finally, we expect the incidence of WFH to vary across Australian States. This is a legacy of the pandemic and its associated lockdowns, which were much more widespread and prolonged in Victoria, New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). As a result, and as demonstrated empirically by Ketter et al. (2025), we expect both the levels of WFH and its persistence post-pandemic to be greatest in those States most affected by lockdowns.

To summarise, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: The likelihood of WFH will vary with both occupation and industry. It will be most common in white-collar office-based jobs and in firms operating in industries where work is not directly tied to specific locations.

H2: The likelihood of WFH will rise with an employee's length of tenure with their current employer.

H3: The likelihood of WFH will rise with an employee's education level.

H4: WFH will be less common among employees with poor English language skills.

H5: WFH will be less common among workers employed on a non-permanent employment contract.

H6: WFH will be less common among employees working on a part-time basis.

H7: WFH will be less likely if an employee has supervisory responsibilities.

H8: WFH will exhibit a U-shape relationship with firm size and will be more common in both very large and very small firms.

H9: WFH will be more common among workers employed in the public sector.

H10: WFH will be more common among employees with caring responsibilities, and especially carers of very young (i.e., pre-school) children.

H11: The likelihood of WFH will rise with age.

H12: WFH will be more common among employees with work-limiting health conditions and disabilities.

H13: WFH will be more common among female employees.

H14: WFH will be more common among employees living with a partner.

H15: WFH will be less common among residents living in relatively small dwellings.

H16: The likelihood of WFH will be greater among residents of those States most affected by lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., Victoria, NSW and the ACT).

We make no predictions about the direction of association with either trade union membership or remoteness of location.

Data and method

As indicated previously, we use data from wave 23 of the HILDA Survey. While the HILDA Survey is a longitudinal study commencing in 2001 (for details, see Summerfield et al., 2024), we restrict the analysis to data collected in wave 23 because it was not until that wave that a question identifying persons who worked full days at home was included. In prior waves, questions were asked that identified persons who worked any hours at home and the number of hours usually worked per week from home. Estimates of the incidence of WFH derived from these data thus include employees who commute to the office each day while also regularly working additional hours at home in the evenings or on the weekends.

Importantly, the self-replenishing design of the HILDA Survey helps the sample to remain representative of the population each annual wave. There is, however, a notable exception: recent immigrants. Without constant refreshment samples (and one was added in wave 11), the study cannot adequately represent migrants entering Australia after the panel commenced. Immigrants, and especially those entering Australia after 2011, are thus under-represented. Additionally, while annual re-interview rates are very high (typically in excess of 94%), the cumulative effect of non-response results in sample characteristics that differ slightly from the population.[3]

Overall, the data comprise a total of 10,436 employed persons. Given our focus on employment arrangements made between employers and their employees, and following others (e.g., Arntz et al., 2022; Dockery and Bawa, 2014; Sarbu, 2015; Pauliks, 2025), we exclude the self-employed and unpaid family workers (n=1,413). We also exclude persons who do not work an average of at least one full day per week (n=19) or

where the number of working days cannot be established (n=25), and those with missing information on whether they work full days from home (n=19) and on any of the predictor variables included in our model (n=79).[4] This resulted in an analytical sample of 8881 employees.

The primary outcome is a binary variable identifying employees who usually work entirely from home (in their main job) on at least one day a week. This is derived from a question that reads: '(Still thinking about your main job) In a usual week, how many of your workdays are worked *entirely* at home?' In a secondary analysis, we employ an outcome variable that not only distinguishes between those employees who regularly work from home and those who do not, but among the former also distinguishes between those who work all of their usual weekly work days from home (i.e., fully remote workers) and those who only work some of their usual weekly work days from home (i.e., hybrid working arrangements).[5]

The selection of explanatory variables is guided by our hypotheses and so includes measures of: occupation (dummy variables representing the major groups in the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupation); industry (dummy variables representing the major groups in the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification); length of current job tenure; highest level of educational qualification; English language speaking ability (represented by a binary variable identifying persons who speak a language other than English at home and report not speaking English very well); employment contract type (i.e., whether employed on an permanent, fixed-term or casual basis); whether working part-time (less than 35 hours in a usual week in the main job); supervisory responsibilities; firm size; whether the employer operates in the public sector; parental status interacted with the age of their

youngest own child in the household; primary caring responsibilities for someone who has a long-term health condition, is elderly, or has a disability[6]; age group; presence of a long-term work-limiting health condition or disability; gender; whether living with a partner; distance from major urban centres (categorical variables representing the major groups derived by the Australian Bureau Statistics from the Accessibility / Remoteness Index of Australia); (xvii) trade union membership[7]; dwelling size (a dummy variable indicating whether the number of bedrooms divided by adjusted household size was less than or equal to 1[8]); and State. Mean values for all of these variables are provided in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, 24.1% of our sample report usually WFH on at least one full day a week. This is close to, but slightly below, the population weighted estimate derived from the full sample of 24.9% (Laß and Wooden, 2025). This suggests that the cumulative effects of non-response and attrition, together with our sample selection rules, leads to a slight under-estimation of WFH.

Given the binary nature of the outcome variable, we investigate the determinants of who works from home by estimating a logistic regression model using the Stata Statistical Software, release 18.0 (StataCorp, 2023). Results are reported in the form of odds ratios (ORs), which are obtained by exponentiating the logit coefficients. An OR of 1 indicates no association between the selected worker or employer characteristic and the likelihood of WFH. An OR of greater than 1 indicates a positive association, meaning the odds of WFH are greater for workers with the selected characteristic relative to those in the reference group. Conversely, an OR of less than 1 indicates a negative association.

In an extension, we divided the WFH group into those working hybrid arrangements and those working fully remotely. The focus on this distinction is motivated by arguments that the types of work best suited for fully remote work are very different to those most compatible with hybrid arrangements (Barrero et al., 2023, p. 27). For this analysis we have a dependent variable with three possible discrete outcomes, with the third outcome being a traditional working arrangement where usually no days are worked entirely at home. In such cases a multinomial logit model is the appropriate estimation method. In this case, exponentiating the coefficients provides relative risk ratios (RRRs).

Results

Initial evidence is provided in Table 1, which reports mean values of firm and worker characteristics disaggregated by the primary outcome variable – i.e., whether works from home one day a week or whether works entirely on-site. As hypothesised, this table reveals that the relative likelihood of WFH varies with both occupation and industry. It is for, example, relatively common among professional and managerial employees but very uncommon among workers in the less skilled blue-collar occupation groups (i.e., machinery operators and drivers, and labourers). Also as hypothesised, the relative likelihood of WFH is much higher among employees who have university qualifications, are employed on a permanent contract, work full-time hours, are female, have children, and/or reside in a State or Territory where COVID-19 restrictions were more prolonged. Support for other hypotheses is more muted. As expected, both young employees and those with short job tenure are far more likely to work entirely on-site, but there is little evidence that the oldest and most experienced

employees are any more or less likely to WFH. Also as expected, the incidence of WFH is much more pronounced among employees of large firms, but the relative incidence of WFH is not higher among employees of very small firms. The rate of WFH is also not noticeably higher among those with long-term health conditions or disabilities (indeed, it is lower) or have caring responsibilities (for persons other than own children). And nor is the proportion living in small dwellings noticeably smaller for persons who work from home.

But will these simple bivariate associations persist after controlling for all variables simultaneously? To answer this we turn to the results from the logistic regression model, which are reported in Table 2. First, note the overall explanatory power of this model is quite high, as indicated by a pseudo R-squared value of 0.363.

Again as hypothesised (H1), there are very large differences across both occupations and industries in the likelihood of WFH. All other things held constant, the likelihood of WFH is highest among employees in a managerial occupation. They are followed by professionals and clerical and administrative workers, with relative odds that are 71% and 54% that of managers, respectively. Then come sales workers (21%), community and personal service workers (19%), and technicians and trades workers (13%). Finally, there are the less skilled blue-collar occupation groups, where the likelihood of being able to work from home is negligible.

There are also very large inter-industry differentials. At the upper extreme are financial and insurance services and information media and telecommunications, and at the lower extreme are accommodation and food services and retail trade. The difference in the odds of WFH between employees in the two industries at the extremes, for example, is almost 20 times.

Counter to our hypothesis (H9), however, we do not find public sector employees any more likely to work from home; indeed, they are significantly less likely. Note, however, that the public sector variable is correlated with industry. Most obviously, many public sector employees work in public administration and safety where the estimated odds of WFH are relatively high. Also note that this industry division combines public administration, where feasibility of WFH is high, with services such as police and fire protection, where the feasibility of WFH is much lower.

The other firm characteristic examined is firm size, and partly in line with our hypothesis (H8), but very different to what was suggested by the descriptive statistics reported in Table 1, the likelihood of WFH is highest among very small firms (the reference group). Employees in micro-businesses (fewer than 5 employees) have odds of WFH that are 2.5 times larger than those of slightly larger businesses (those with 5 to 19 employees). We also hypothesised that the likelihood of WFH would be relatively high among employees in very large firms. The results do not support this expectation. While employees of very large firms (5000 employees or more) are more likely to be WFH than employees of small businesses (5 to 19 employees), they are not more likely to be WFH than employees in either the very small firms or medium-size and large firms. Indeed, they are less likely to work from home than employees of micro-businesses (OR=0.69).

There is also no support for the hypothesis that the likelihood of WFH increases with worker experience, as proxied by length of job tenure (H2). We do, however, find an age effect, with the likelihood of WFH much lower among the youngest workers. For example, the estimated odds that an employee aged under 25 years works from home are just 29% (1/3.47) those of an otherwise comparable employee aged 35 to 44.

However, while the likelihood of WFH rises with age, it peaks among employees aged 45 to 54 years. H11 is thus only partly supported.

With respect to other worker characteristics, we find strong support for the hypotheses that WFH will be most common among the most highly educated (H3) and relatively uncommon among those with relatively poor English language skills (H4) and those who are employed on a casual basis (H5) or work part-time hours (H6). Employees on fixed-term contracts, however, are no less likely to be WFH than permanent employees. This is consistent with other Australian research, which has found with respect to other outcomes, such as commuting time or wages (Laß et al., 2024; Laß and Wooden, 2019), that employees on fixed-term contracts look very similar to permanent employees. We also find strong support for the hypothesis that employees with supervisory responsibilities will be far less likely to work from home (H7) once other worker characteristics (and notably occupation) are controlled for.

Strong support is also found for the hypothesis that female employees are more likely than male employees to be WFH (H13), with the estimated OR suggesting a differential in favour of women of 51%. What is surprising, however, is that there is no longer any evidence that the presence of children is associated with a higher likelihood of WFH, and nor are employees with caring responsibilities any more likely to work from home. These results thus suggest H8 must be rejected. Similarly, there is no support in these data for the hypothesis that WFH will be more common among persons with long-term work-limiting health conditions or disabilities (H12) or among persons living with a partner (H14). And nor is there any support for the hypothesis that WFH will be less likely for workers who reside in relatively small dwellings (H15).

Our final hypothesis (H16) concerned expected differences across States and Territories in the incidence of WFH based on exposure to COVID-19 related restrictions and lockdowns. As can be seen, this hypothesis is supported. There are clear interstate differences, with the likelihood of WFH highest among residents of Victoria, NSW and the ACT, the states that experienced the most frequent and prolonged lockdowns during the pandemic. These differences are not small, with the estimated odds of a Victorian employee WFH being more than twice as large as a Western Australian resident. Also note that within States, the likelihood of WFH is much higher among residents living in the major cities. The notion that large numbers of Australian workers have moved to rural and regional Australia because of the possibility of WFH does not appear to be supported.

Finally, our results suggest a large and significant negative association with trade union membership.

Extension 1: Interactions with gender

The most unexpected result is the lack of significant positive associations with variables that are indicative of caring responsibilities. But given it is women who shoulder most of the burden for caring, it may be that associations are masked by estimating a model that does not allow effects to differ between males and females. We thus re-estimated our logistic regression after introducing interaction terms that test whether the effects of selected variables (the presence and age of children, whether the primary caregiver for other persons, and whether partnered) vary with gender. The key results from this re-estimation are reported in Table 3. As can be seen, the main effect on the variable identifying females (which in this model represents the effect for unpartnered females

without children or caring responsibilities) is positive, large and highly significant. In contrast, with one exception, all interaction terms are statistically insignificant. The exception is the interaction with children aged 5 to 14, with an OR of 0.671. Together with the main effect for children in that age bracket (1.220) (which is the effect for men), this indicates that having children in this age bracket tends to increase the odds of WFH for men, while it decrease the odds for women (0.671 x 1.220=.0.819).

In summary, the results from this extension to our model affirm our earlier conclusion that the hypothesis that WFH is more common among employees with caring responsibilities (H10) should be rejected.

Extension 2: Disaggregated occupation

In a second extension, we replaced the dummy variables representing the eight major occupation groups with a set of dummies representing the 43 occupation sub-groups. These results are not reported in detail here given the large number of coefficients. As expected, the coefficients on variables that are correlated with occupation (and industry) – public sector, university qualifications, English language speaking ability, union membership, casual employment, and part-time work – attenuate, but in all cases remain statistically significant. As an example, consider union membership, which is the variable most affected. Its OR rises from 0.484 to 0.660. Thus, some of the estimated negative effect of unions on WFH reported in Table 2 is the result of uncontrolled differences in occupation. Nevertheless, a strong negative association remains after controlling for occupation at the more disaggregated sub-group level.

Extension 3: Distinguishing between hybrid and fully remote work

Our third extension was introduced earlier and involved dividing the WFH group into two subgroups and estimating a multinomial logit model to calculate the risk of being either a hybrid or a fully remote worker compared to working no full days at home. Results are reported in Table 4. Our main interest is in the difference in the magnitude of the two estimated RRRs for each explanatory variable, with large differences implying the variable in question has very different effects on the relative risk of being a hybrid worker compared with being a fully remote worker. For example, most of the RRRs on the occupation dummies are not that different, implying occupation has a similar effect on the relative likelihood of being a hybrid worker as compared with being a fully remote worker. The exception here is clerical and administrative workers who have a risk of being a hybrid worker that is less than half that of the reference group (managers) but a much higher relative risk (0.83) of being a fully remote worker.

Turning to other variables, we can see that the relative risk of working fully remotely appears to be very high for workers in those industries where the incidence of WFH is highest – notably information media and telecommunications, and financial and insurance services, but also administrative and support services, and public administration and safety. That said, for financial and insurance services, the difference in the risk of being a hybrid worker compared to being fully remote worker is not statistically significant. Perhaps of more interest is the marked difference in the association with education attainment. Earlier we reported that university-educated employees were, other things constant, much more likely to work from home. The results in Table 4, however, show that this only applies to hybrid arrangements: Among fully remote workers, differences in education attainment are much smaller and

statistically insignificant. A similar conclusion applies with respect to casual and part-time employment. These types of employment arrangements are associated with far lower likelihoods of being employed in a hybrid arrangement, but not a significantly lower likelihood of working fully remotely. Another difference emerges with respect to partnered persons who, while no more likely to work in hybrid arrangements than unpartnered persons, have an elevated risk of working fully remotely. This provides some limited support for H14. Finally, there is an interesting result with respect to firm size: Fully remote work is relatively most common among employees of micro-businesses (the reference category), and the difference with employees of larger businesses is substantial (a relative risk that is 2 to 3 times larger). Furthermore, among employees of larger businesses (i.e., 5 employees or more) the relative risk of fully remote work does not vary markedly with firm size. Importantly, there is no evidence that the likelihood of fully remote working is greater among employees of very large firms.

Conclusions

We exploited data from wave 23 of the HILDA Survey, which for the first time included a question that identified whether employed persons usually work entire days from home. A summary of our findings is reported in Table 5. We found that the likelihood of an Australian employee WFH varies with a range of employer and employee characteristics. Ultimately, however, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it is the type of work being undertaken, as represented by occupation and industry, which is the most important determinant of who works from home. Indeed, we found relatively little support for those hypotheses that most clearly reflected worker preferences. While

strong support was found for the hypothesis that female employees, other things constant, are more likely to work from home, no support was found for the hypothesis that the incidence of WFH would be highest among mothers of dependent children. There was also no support for the hypotheses that WFH would be positively associated with other caring responsibilities (i.e., for the elderly, sick or disabled) or the presence of long-term health conditions or disabilities, and nor was WFH more common among older workers. These findings with respect to caring responsibilities, health and worker age are striking given these are characteristics identified in the National Employment Standards as deserving priority when employers consider requests from employees for greater flexibility in where work is performed.

The findings with respect to children are especially noteworthy, not just because they were not consistent with our theoretical predictions, but because they contrast with findings from previous research involving the HILDA Survey data (Dockery and Bawa, 2014). This earlier analysis also involved the estimation of logistic regressions, but using data pooled across multiple years (2001 to 2011). In contrast to our approach, the outcome measure covered all types of work from home, and so was not restricted to persons who worked full days at home. The findings indicated that the odds of an employee working any hours from home (or alternatively, at least 8 hours per week from home) were much higher among women with school age-children than those without children (up to twice as high in the case of married women with pre-school children). While direct comparisons are complicated given the use of different outcome measures, the magnitude of the difference with our results might suggest that the surge in WFH driven by the pandemic has differentially favoured those without children.

The findings presented here also suggest that the growth in WFH may be driving further increases in labour market inequality. WFH comes with obvious benefits for workers such as reduced commuting costs and improved work-family fit (Laß and Wooden, 2025), and these benefits are mostly being captured by workers in higher paying jobs and occupations, employed on permanent contracts, and working full-time hours. That said, those taking advantage of the option to work from home might face long-term career penalties, with evidence from choice experiments suggesting that fully remote workers are at a disadvantage in terms of future promotion and salary increase prospects (Kasperska et al., 2025).

While our analysis has obvious strengths – notably, use of a sample that represents a broad cross-section of the Australian workforce, and an outcome measure that is superior to that used in most previous studies – we also acknowledge its limitations. First, and as noted earlier, recent immigrants are under-represented in the HILDA Survey. Second, we can only control for what is observable and measurable in the data, and there are other potentially important influences not considered here. An obvious example is commuting distance, with numerous studies hypothesising that worker preferences for WFH will be stronger the greater the distance between the worker's home and their employer's work site (e.g., Nagler et al., 2024; Metselaar, 2025; Peters et al., 2004), though causation likely works in both directions (de Vos et al., 2018). Third, the cross-sectional nature of the analysis means that causal inferences cannot be drawn.

Finally, we speculate about what our results might mean for the future of WFH. The fact that firm and job characteristics have been found to trump worker preferences suggests the most important influences will be changes in the composition of

employment and employer preferences. Past trends in the occupational composition of employment, and especially growth in the number of professional workers, have favoured WFH-compatible jobs. One important influence on these trends has been the adoption of new technology, and especially artificial intelligence (AI). Over recent decades, new technology has had the largest negative employment impacts on production jobs, where WFH is mostly not feasible. Going forward, however, many lower-skilled, routine white-collar WFH-compatible jobs are at a greater risk of automation (Bonfiglioni et al., 2025; Jobs and Skills Australia 2025).

With respect to employer preferences, despite media focus on calls from some employers and employer groups for return-to-office mandates, survey data collected in early 2025 from almost 1000 human resource managers (Australian HR Institute, 2025) suggests that, at least in the medium-term, there will be no retreat from WFH. More than 80% of respondents to this survey reported that hybrid working arrangements will remain a feature of their organisation over the next two years.

Overall, as Niels Bohr has once been widely reported to have said: 'Prediction is very difficult, especially if it about the future'. Nevertheless, most of the evidence available today suggests that WFH will remain a very important feature of working arrangements for many Australians over the years ahead.

Notes

1. Derived from Census of Population and Housing, 2016, Table Builder: MTW15P Method of Travel to Work (15 travel modes) by SIEMP Status in Employment. The Table Builder tool can be accessed from: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/tablebuilder.

2. This provision also extends to employees who are pregnant, are experiencing family and domestic violence, or provide care or support to an immediate family or household member who is experiencing family and domestic violence.
3. For an analysis of the cross-sectional representativeness of the HILDA Survey data, see Watson and Ey (2025).
4. We retain missing observations on both industry and firm size by creating, and including in the multivariate analysis, dummy variables to represent these cases.
5. To establish whether workers work all or only some of their usual days from home, we compared the total number of working days per week in the main job to the number of days entirely worked from home in the main job. The total number of working days per week was derived from the type of work schedule and, for respondents who reported that working days varied, the number of days they usually worked over a 4-week period.
6. The relevant survey questions clarify that by caring what is meant is 'care or help on an ongoing basis with self-care (for example, bathing, eating or getting dressed), mobility and communication in their own language'.
7. Persons who responded "don't know" to the question about trade union membership were classified as non-union members.
8. Bedrooms include rooms not currently used as bedrooms but could be, and household size is adjusted using the standard OECD-modified equivalence scale (Hagenaars et al., 1994).

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Table 1. Variable means by whether works at least one full day a week from home or entirely on site

Variable	*Home*	*Entirely on-site*	*All employees*
Occupation			
Managers	0.263	0.099	0.138
Professionals	0.459	0.218	0.277
Technicians & trades workers	0.035	0.132	0.108
Community & personal service workers	0.035	0.159	0.129
Clerical & administrative workers	0.187	0.106	0.126
Sales workers	0.019	0.103	0.083
Machinery operators & drivers	0.002	0.082	0.063
Labourers	0.001	0.101	0.077
Industry			
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	0.005	0.019	0.016
Mining	0.022	0.025	0.024
Manufacturing	0.047	0.078	0.070
Electricity, gas, water & waste services	0.018	0.009	0.012
Construction	0.039	0.083	0.072
Wholesale trade	0.028	0.024	0.025
Retail trade	0.026	0.116	0.094
Accommodation and food services	0.008	0.080	0.063
Transport, postal & warehousing	0.021	0.045	0.039
Information media & telecommunication	0.039	0.005	0.013
Financial & insurance services	0.120	0.009	0.036
Rental, hiring & real estate services	0.016	0.010	0.012
Professional, scientific & technical services	0.182	0.035	0.071
Administrative & support services	0.023	0.021	0.022
Public administration & safety	0.132	0.055	0.073
Education & training	0.086	0.122	0.113
Health care & social assistance	0.136	0.206	0.189
Arts & recreation services	0.015	0.019	0.018
Other services	0.025	0.032	0.030
Unknown	0.015	0.008	0.010
Public sector	0.268	0.239	0.246
Job tenure			
1 year or less	0.273	0.348	0.330
2 to 5 years	0.339	0.313	0.319
6 to 10 years	0.177	0.140	0.149
More than 10 years	0.211	0.200	0.203
Education (highest level)			
Year 11 or lower	0.041	0.178	0.145
Year 12	0.117	0.184	0.168
Trade qualification or diploma	0.218	0.350	0.318
Bachelor's degree or higher	0.625	0.288	0.369
Poor English language skills	0.014	0.023	0.021
Employment contract type			
Permanent or ongoing	0.844	0.668	0.710
Fixed-term	0.112	0.086	0.093

Casual[(a)]	0.043	0.246	0.197
Part-time	0.197	0.387	0.341
Supervisor	0.472	0.444	0.451
Firm size (no. of employees)			
Less than 5	0.041	0.047	0.045
5-19	0.084	0.147	0.132
20-99	0.132	0.149	0.145
100-499	0.166	0.137	0.144
500-4999	0.265	0.161	0.186
5000+	0.300	0.312	0.309
Unknown	0.013	0.049	0.040
Partnered	0.760	0.612	0.648
Age of youngest child			
No children	0.493	0.612	0.583
Less than 5 years	0.198	0.142	0.156
5 to 14 years	0.222	0.161	0.176
15 to 24 years	0.088	0.085	0.085
Carer of elderly or disabled	0.027	0.026	0.026
Age (years)			
Less than 25	0.041	0.211	0.170
25-34	0.254	0.244	0.246
35-44	0.311	0.197	0.224
45-54	0.227	0.161	0.177
55+	0.167	0.188	0.183
Long-term work-limiting health condition or disability	0.076	0.100	0.094
Female	0.560	0.506	0.519
Remoteness			
Major city	0.857	0.651	0.701
Inner regional	0.116	0.235	0.206
Outer regional	0.023	0.100	0.081
Remote or very remote	0.004	0.015	0.012
Trade union member	0.107	0.197	0.176
Bedrooms / modified household size ≤ 1	0.063	0.067	0.067
State			
New South Wales	0.317	0.265	0.278
Victoria	0.321	0.252	0.269
Queensland	0.178	0.236	0.222
South Australia	0.059	0.083	0.077
Western Australia	0.070	0.095	0.089
Tasmania	0.015	0.043	0.036
Australian Capital Territory	0.039	0.018	0.023
Northern Territory	0.002	0.008	0.007
Working from home type			
Hybrid	0.817	0.000	0.197
Fully remote	0.183	0.000	0.044
No. of observations	2144	6737	8881
(% distribution)	(24.1)	(75.9)	

Table 2. Determinants of who works at least one full day a week from home: Logistic regression results

	OR	*SE*	*P*
Occupation (ref. group = Managers)			
Professionals	0.707	0.067	<0.001
Technicians & trades workers	0.128	0.020	<0.001
Community & personal service workers	0.191	0.030	<0.001
Clerical & administrative workers	0.539	0.061	<0.001
Sales workers	0.207	0.045	<0.001
Machinery operators & drivers	0.014	0.007	<0.001
Labourers	0.014	0.008	<0.001
Industry (ref. group = Manufacturing)			
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1.021	0.419	0.959
Mining	2.298	0.580	0.001
Electricity, gas, water & waste services	3.754	1.130	<0.001
Construction	1.247	0.242	0.256
Wholesale trade	1.630	0.365	0.029
Retail trade	0.469	0.099	<0.001
Accommodation and food services	0.407	0.126	0.004
Transport, postal & warehousing	1.043	0.244	0.857
Information media & telecommunication	7.733	2.156	<0.001
Financial & insurance services	8.056	1.642	<0.001
Rental, hiring & real estate services	2.128	0.600	0.007
Professional, scientific & technical services	4.588	0.756	<0.001
Administrative & support services	2.236	0.557	0.001
Public administration & safety	3.016	0.558	<0.001
Education & training	0.588	0.104	0.003
Health care & social assistance	0.840	0.138	0.288
Arts & recreation services	1.295	0.345	0.331
Other services	1.660	0.377	0.025
Unknown	1.873	0.568	0.039
Public sector	0.756	0.078	0.007
Job tenure (ref. group = 1 year or less)			
2 to 5 years	1.162	0.098	0.075
6 to 10 years	1.062	0.109	0.559
More than 10 years	0.943	0.098	0.570
Education (ref. group = Year 11 or lower)			
Year 12	1.428	0.234	0.030
Trade qualification or diploma	1.073	0.162	0.642
Bachelor's degree or higher	2.010	0.308	<0.001
Poor English language skills	0.468	0.121	0.003
Employment contract type (ref. group = Permanent)			
Fixed-term	1.126	0.116	0.249
Casual	0.496	0.070	<0.001
Part-time	0.625	0.054	<0.001
Supervisor	0.596	0.043	<0.001
Firm size (ref. group = Less than 5 employees)			
5-19 employees	0.394	0.075	<0.001

20-99 employees	0.509	0.094	<0.001
100-499 employees	0.626	0.115	0.011
500-4999 employees	0.890	0.160	0.517
5000+ employees	0.687	0.126	0.040
Unknown	0.392	0.110	0.001
Partnered	1.138	0.092	0.109
Age of youngest child (ref. group = No children)			
Less than 5 years	1.098	0.112	0.360
5 to 14 years	0.966	0.096	0.729
15 to 24 years	0.780	0.095	0.042
Carer of elderly or disabled	1.274	0.255	0.225
Age (ref. group = Less than 25 years)			
25-34 years	2.231	0.345	<0.001
35-44 years	3.473	0.570	<0.001
45-54 years	3.883	0.661	<0.001
55+ years	3.029	0.509	<0.001
LT work-limiting health condition / disability	1.073	0.127	0.555
Female	1.506	0.111	<0.001
Remoteness (ref. group = Major city)			
Inner regional	0.566	0.053	<0.001
Outer regional	0.283	0.050	<0.001
Remote or very remote	0.399	0.161	0.023
Trade union member	0.484	0.047	<0.001
Bedrooms / modified household size ≤ 1	1.015	0.140	0.913
State (ref. group = New South Wales)			
Victoria	1.175	0.097	0.052
Queensland	0.786	0.073	0.010
South Australia	0.648	0.088	0.001
Western Australia	0.548	0.071	<0.001
Tasmania	0.755	0.178	0.234
Australian Capital Territory	0.940	0.177	0.743
Northern Territory	0.395	0.209	0.079
Constant	0.343	0.103	<.001
Observations	8881		
Likelihood ratio (chi-squared)	3564.0		
Pseudo R-squared	0.363		

Notes: OR = Odds ratio; SE = Standard error; P = Probability that the difference from reference group is zero.

Table 3. Gender interactions: Selected results from logistic regressions

	OR	SE	P
Main effects			
Female	1.619	0.218	<0.001
Age of youngest child (ref. group = No children)			
Less than 5 years	1.077	0.157	0.612
5 to 14 years	1.220	0.179	0.175
15 to 24 years	0.823	0.155	0.301
Partnered	1.114	0.151	0.424
Carer of elderly or disabled	1.592	0.622	0.234
Interaction effects			
Female x Child less than 5 years	1.042	0.195	0.824
Female x Child aged 5 to 14 years	0.671	0.120	0.026
Female x Child aged 15 to 24 years	0.922	0.216	0.727
Female x Partnered	1.015	0.168	0.926
Female x Carer of elderly or disabled	0.753	0.341	0.531
Observations	8881		
Likelihood ratio (chi-squared)	3570.8		
Pseudo R-squared	0.364		

Notes: Specification also includes all other explanatory variables listed in Table 2. OR = Odds ratio; SE = Standard error; P = Probability that the difference from reference group is zero.

Table 4. Determinants of who works from home: Multinomial logistic regression results

	Hybrid		*Fully remote*		*Hybrid vs. fully remote*[a]
	RRR	*SE*	*RRR*	*SE*	
Occupation (ref. group = Managers)					
Professionals	0.691***	0.068	0.833	0.148	
Technicians & trades workers	0.130***	0.022	0.134***	0.043	
Community & personal service workers	0.205***	0.034	0.147***	0.054	
Clerical & administrative workers	0.474***	0.057	0.829	0.165	***
Sales workers	0.218***	0.051	0.185***	0.083	
Machinery operators & drivers	0.018***	0.009	0.000	0.000	
Labourers	0.014***	0.010	0.013***	0.013	
Industry (ref. group = Manufacturing)					
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	0.381	0.245	3.318**	1.762	
Mining	2.390***	0.634	1.760	1.004	
Electricity, gas, water & waste services	3.642***	1.140	4.191**	2.436	
Construction	1.167	0.244	1.679	0.641	
Wholesale trade	1.609**	0.384	1.830	0.790	
Retail trade	0.464***	0.105	0.529	0.241	
Accommodation and food services	0.407***	0.138	0.447	0.295	
Transport, postal & warehousing	1.129	0.277	0.626	0.370	
Information media & telecommunication	6.347***	1.852	15.843***	6.569	***
Financial & insurance services	7.266***	1.548	12.175***	4.131	
Rental, hiring & real estate services	2.193***	0.653	1.801	1.021	
Professional, scientific & technical services	4.037***	0.704	7.252***	2.245	*
Administrative & support services	1.609*	0.451	5.515***	2.168	***
Public administration & safety	2.730***	0.532	5.502***	2.105	*
Education & training	0.572***	0.107	0.675	0.259	
Health care & social assistance	0.789	0.138	1.150	0.380	
Arts & recreation services	1.380	0.384	0.797	0.530	
Other services	1.745**	0.422	1.568	0.711	
Unknown	2.007**	0.638	1.121	0.758	
Public sector	0.867	0.094	0.324***	0.074	
Job tenure (ref. group = 1 year or less)					
2 to 5 years	1.150	0.102	1.196	0.183	
6 to 10 years	1.037	0.112	1.190	0.220	
More than 10 years	0.881	0.097	1.273	0.232	**
Education (ref. group = Year 11 or lower)					
Year 12	1.825***	0.344	0.742	0.197	***
Trade qualification or diploma	1.297	0.229	0.750	0.174	**
Bachelor's degree or higher	2.487***	0.441	1.210	0.286	***
Poor English language skills	0.485***	0.133	0.409*	0.211	
Employment contract type (ref. group = Permanent)					
Fixed-term	1.119	0.120	1.121	0.229	
Casual	0.380***	0.065	0.843	0.178	***

Part-time	0.550***	0.052	0.999	0.149	***
Supervisor	0.650***	0.049	0.394***	0.052	***
Firm size (ref. group = Less than 5 employees)					
5-19 employees	0.481***	0.107	0.323***	0.084	
20-99 employees	0.674*	0.145	0.365***	0.094	**
100-499 employees	0.854	0.181	0.383***	0.100	***
500-4999 employees	1.261	0.262	0.448***	0.114	***
5000+ employees	0.934	0.197	0.427***	0.110	***
Unknown	0.540**	0.169	0.224***	0.118	
Partnered	1.085	0.092	1.381**	0.213	
Age of youngest child (ref. group = No children)					
Less than 5 years	1.075	0.115	1.233	0.237	
5 to 14 years	0.938	0.098	1.112	0.199	
15 to 24 years	0.790*	0.102	0.759	0.167	
Carer of elderly or disabled	1.133	0.250	1.638	0.498	
Age (ref. group = Less than 25 years)					
25-34 years	2.257***	0.375	1.798**	0.538	
35-44 years	3.531***	0.620	2.796***	0.874	
45-54 years	3.702***	0.677	4.310***	1.367	
55+ years	2.852***	0.519	3.438***	1.064	
LT work-limiting health condition / disability	1.042	0.133	1.199	0.243	
Female	1.525***	0.117	1.352**	0.180	
Remoteness (ref. group = Major city)					
Inner regional	0.548***	0.056	0.650**	0.115	
Outer regional	0.239***	0.049	0.446***	0.133	*
Remote or very remote	0.104***	0.079	1.745	0.877	***
Trade union member	0.496***	0.050	0.387***	0.087	
Bedrooms / modified household size ≤ 1	0.967	0.141	1.210	0.292	
State (ref. group = New South Wales)					
Victoria	1.128	0.098	1.453**	0.217	*
Queensland	0.750***	0.074	0.997	0.170	
South Australia	0.609***	0.089	0.870	0.212	
Western Australia	0.549***	0.075	0.525**	0.142	
Tasmania	0.670	0.177	1.214	0.499	
Australian Capital Territory	0.884	0.173	1.235	0.429	
Northern Territory	0.561	0.333	0.371	0.398	
Constant	0.201***	0.068	0.076***	0.039	*
Observations	8881				
Likelihood ratio (chi-squared)	3866.2				
Pseudo R-squared	0.326				

Notes: The reference outcome group is employees who usually do not work any days from home.
a. Presents results of tests of significance of difference in coefficients.
RRR = Relative Risk Ratio. *** $p<.01$, ** $p<.05$, * $p<.10$.

Table 5. Summary of findings

Hypothesis		*Finding*
H1	The likelihood of WFH will vary with both occupation and industry	Supported
H2	The likelihood of WFH will rise with an employee's length of tenure with their current employer.	Not supported
H3	The likelihood of WFH will rise with an employee's education level	Supported
H4	WFH will be less common among employees with poor English language skills	Supported
H5	WFH will be less common among workers employed on a non-permanent employment contract.	Partly supported
H6	WFH will be less common among employees working on a part-time basis.	Supported
H7	WFH will be less likely if an employee has supervisory responsibilities.	Supported
H8	WFH will exhibit a U-shape relationship with firm size and will be more common in both very large and very small firms	Partly supported
H9	WFH will be more common among workers employed in the public sector	Not supported
H10	WFH will be more common among employees with caring responsibilities	Not supported
H11	The likelihood of WFH will rise with age, but with differences most pronounced in the tails of the age distribution	Partly supported
H12	WFH will be more common among employees with work-limiting health conditions and disabilities.	Not supported
H13	WFH will be more common among female employees	Supported
H14	WFH will be more common among employees living with a partner.	Partly supported
H15	WFH will be less common among residents living in relatively small dwellings	Not supported
H16	The likelihood of WFH will be greater among residents of those States most affected by lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic	Supported

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