

Over 80% of HK workers preferred to work from homes for 1 to 2 days per week when the coronavirus crisis is over

There has been an outpouring of media attention about working from home (WFH) amidst the spread of COVID-19. To work from home or not to work from home is the most-talked-about question at workplaces lately. With so many different views out there, we want to get the viewpoints of workers themselves - Does WFH help increase productivity? Does WFH make work-life balance better? Will WFH affect relationships? Is communication or loneliness a problem?

This timely research project by Prof. WONG Hiu Kan Ada of the School of Graduate Studies is part of the concerted effort of "Fighting COVID-19 @ Lingnan University (Discovery, Service and Education)" led by Vice-President Prof. Joshua Mok.

Here's what we initially found:

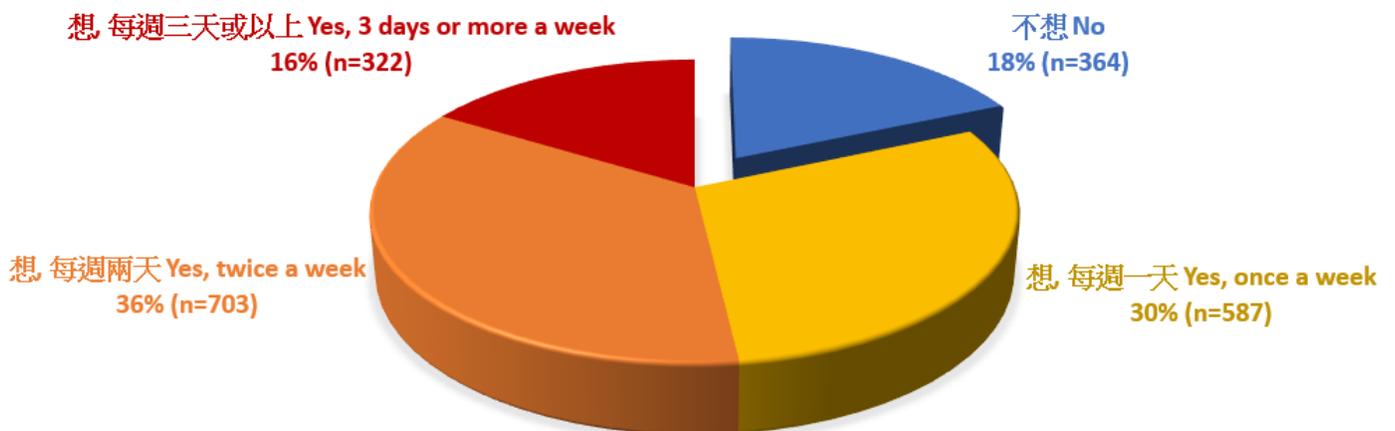
(a) An overwhelming majority of the respondents preferred to continue to work from homes for 1 to 2 Days per Week when the current coronavirus crisis is over:

An overwhelming majority (1,612 or 81.6%) of the respondents preferred to continue to work from homes when the current coronavirus crisis is over while 364 or 18.4% said "NO". The order of preference was "Twice a week (35.6%)", "Once a week (29.7%)" and "Three days or more a week (16.3%)". Figure 1 summarizes the responses.

Figure 1. Preference of Working from Home when the Coronavirus Crisis is Over

Q7. 當疫情完結，一切如常，你仍希望繼續在家工作嗎？

When the current coronavirus crisis is over, would you still want to continue working from home?



(b) Advantages of Working from Home compared to Working at Office:

As compared to working in an office, nearly half or over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed the following statements (listed in order of agreement).

Figure 2 presents the responses to all ten statements:

- (i) Get more time to rest (1,427 or 72.2%);
- (ii) Reduce work stress (1,260 or 63.8%);
- (iii) Improve work-life balance (1,200 or 60.7%);
- (iv) Bring a better quality of life (1,154 or 58.4%)
- (v) Get more time to work (1,052 or 53.2%);
- (vi) Get more time to exercise (1,003 or 50.8%); and
- (vii) Maintain a better relationship with family members (973 or 49.24%)

Figure 2. Advantages of Working from Home Compared to Working at Office (n=1976)

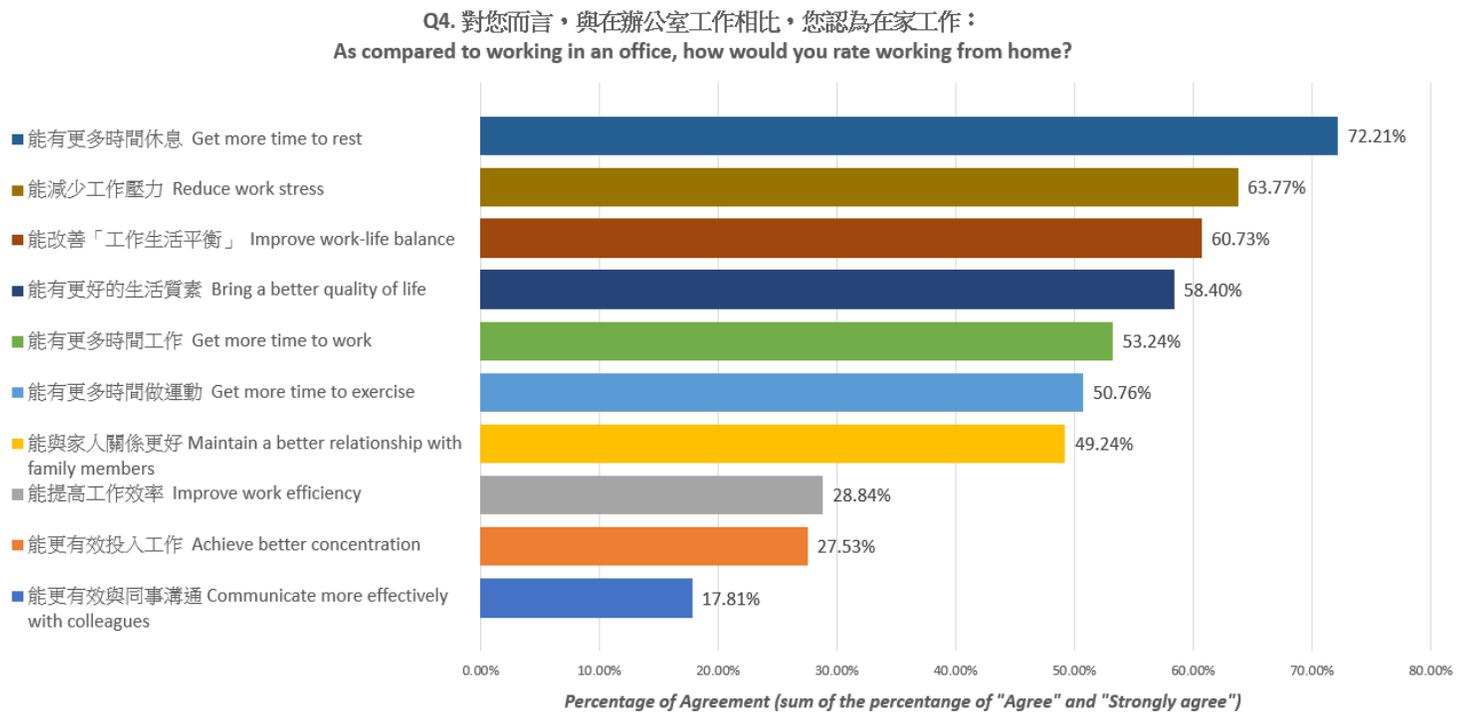


Table 1. Advantages of Working from Home Compared to Working at Office

| Question 4: 對您而言，與在辦公室工作相比，您認為在家工作： As compared to working in an office, how would you rate working from home? | 非常不同意 Strongly disagree | | 不同意 Disagree | | 中立 Neutral | | 同意 Agree | | 非常同意 Strongly agree | |
|---|----------------------------|-------|--------------|-------|------------|-------|----------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count |
| 能有多餘時間休息 Get more time to rest | 3.49% | 69 | 10.78% | 213 | 13.51% | 267 | 46.96% | 928 | 25.25% | 499 |
| 能減少工作壓力 Reduce work stress | 4.71% | 93 | 15.44% | 305 | 16.09% | 318 | 44.79% | 885 | 18.98% | 375 |
| 能改善「工作生活平衡」 Improve work-life balance | 4.61% | 91 | 12.50% | 247 | 22.17% | 438 | 40.23% | 795 | 20.50% | 405 |
| 能有更好的生活質素 Bring a better quality of life | 3.59% | 71 | 12.75% | 252 | 25.25% | 499 | 40.59% | 802 | 17.81% | 352 |
| 能有多餘時間工作 Get more time to work | 3.49% | 69 | 20.85% | 412 | 22.42% | 443 | 40.64% | 803 | 12.60% | 249 |
| 能有多餘時間做運動 Get more time to exercise | 4.86% | 96 | 18.37% | 363 | 26.01% | 514 | 37.15% | 734 | 13.61% | 269 |
| 能與家人關係更好 Maintain a better relationship with family members | 3.44% | 68 | 12.35% | 244 | 34.97% | 691 | 37.65% | 744 | 11.59% | 229 |
| 能提高工作效率 Improve work efficiency | 5.57% | 110 | 33.10% | 654 | 32.49% | 642 | 23.63% | 467 | 5.21% | 103 |
| 能更有效投入工作 Achieve better concentration | 5.26% | 104 | 32.49% | 642 | 34.72% | 686 | 22.27% | 440 | 5.26% | 104 |
| 能更有效與同事溝通 Communicate more effectively with colleagues | 8.45% | 167 | 39.07% | 772 | 34.67% | 685 | 15.28% | 302 | 2.53% | 50 |

Note:

Sample size = 1976; Statements are ranked in order of the total number of responses to “agree” and “strongly agree”.

Ms. Joyce Cheung of the School of Graduate Studies has done a WFH project using different research methods of reviewing online discussion forums. Examples listed under all the tables are extracted from her study.

Excerpts 1. Examples of online posts which expressed similar advantages

- (i) Get more time to rest
“Home office is quite comfortable, I can sleep till 8.45 a.m. yet need not dress or make up.” (BabyKingdom, March 11 2020)
“Most importantly we need not commute in crowded transport during peak hour.” (Timable, February 10 2020)
- (ii) Reduce work stress
“I still till 8.45 a.m., check email at 9 a.m., join conference calls and web meetings as usual, whatsapp and call colleagues when there’s any issue. I go out to have lunch, and then continue to work till I switch off the computer at 6 p.m. It’s a bit more free. I can listen to songs during work.” (BabyKingdom, February 2 2020)
- (iii) Improve work-life balance
“That’s just your friend. My team of colleagues who work from home by large start working at 9 a.m. Of course it’s more relaxing at home, I also go out for lunch and grocery at noon, and go home to work till I switch off the computer at 6 p.m.” (BabyKingdom, February 2 2020)
- (iv) Bring a better quality of life
“I also buy something online during home office. Daily necessities are all purchased online cause bulk delivery is so convenient.” (BabyKingdom, February 26 2020)
- (v) Get more time to work

"We need not report duty but we have a lot of ad hoc duties due to this pandemic. The workload has increased by 50%. No need to report but you will find me company IM online for straightly 12 hours a day." (BabyKingdom, April 6 2020)

(vi) Get more time to exercise

"Cooking, listening to songs. More time spent on exercise, running, yoga, weight lifting. Reading. Recently I am reading this book about pathology, a good read." (BabyKingdom, February 28 2020)

"Also I will do some exercise. When coming home after work in the office, I didn't want to exercise because I will go to shower once I come home. Showering after exercise is very troublesome." (BabyKingdom, April 15 2020)

(vii) Maintain a better relationship with family members

"Since we don't need to work the next day, [my husband and I] chat a lot about the past till very late every night. We recaptured the feeling of just falling in love." (BabyKingdom, February 25 2020)

"It depends. There are more conflicts due to more encountering with family members, but we become closer after such conflicts." (BabyKingdom, April 8 2020)

(c) Challenges of Working from Home:

As compared to working in an office, over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed the existence of the following challenges (Figure 3 shows the full responses to all six items):

- (i) Lack of office hardware, e.g. computer and printer (1,312 or 66.4%);
- (ii) Easily distracted by household chores during work (1,300 or 65.8%);
- (iii) Easily disturbed by family members, children or others who live together during work (1,262 or 63.9%)
- (iv) Lack of office software including work-related IT system (1,189 or 60.2%); and
- (v) Can't communicate timely with colleagues (1,118 or 56.6%).

Figure 3. Challenges of Working from Home

Q5. 對您而言，與在辦公室工作相比，在家工作是否存在以下挑戰？

As compared to working in an office, do you find the following a challenge when working from home:

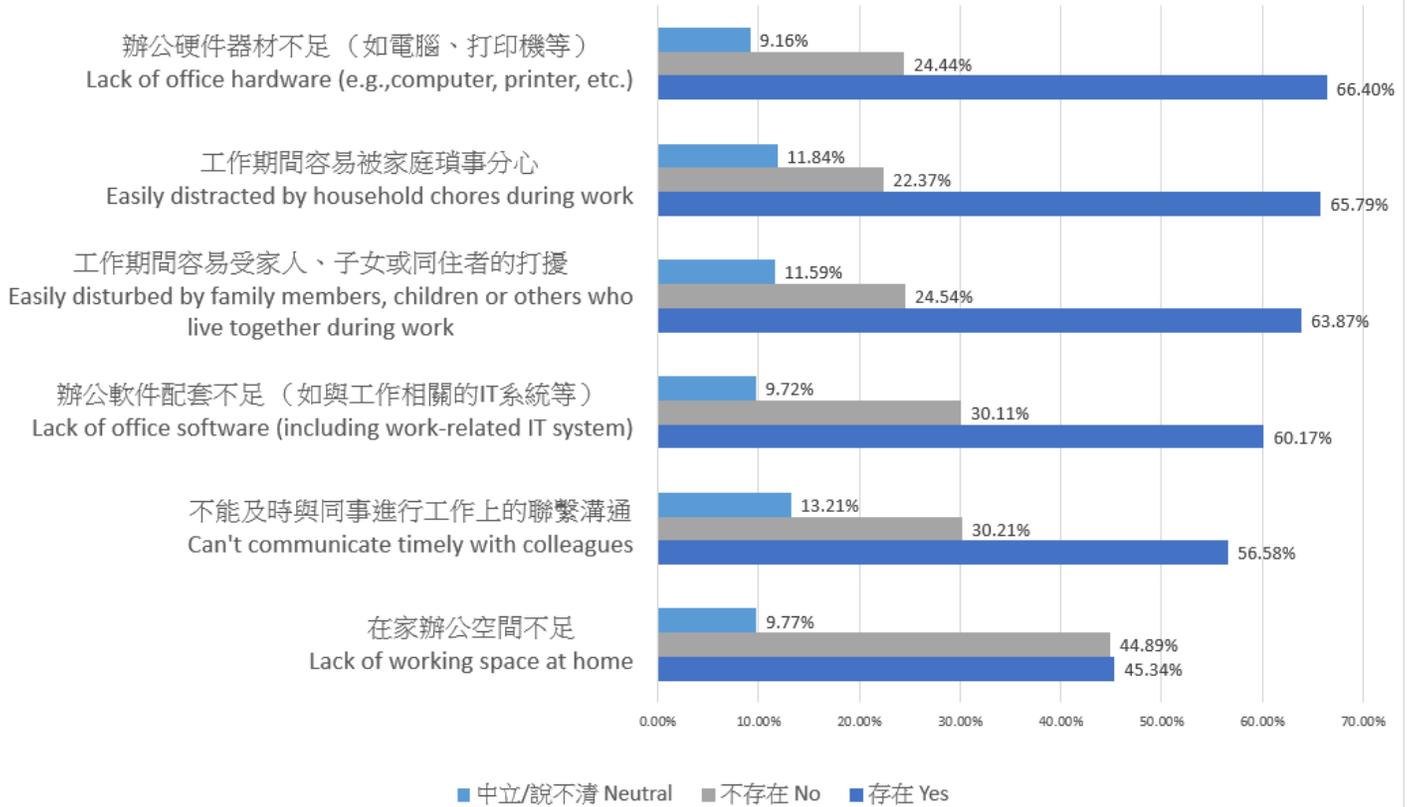


Table 2. A Summary of Responses on Challenges to Working from Home

| Q5. 對您而言，與在辦公室工作相比，在家工作是否存在以下挑戰？ As compared to working in an office, do you find the following a challenge when working from home: | 存在 Yes | | 不存在 No | | 中立/說不清 Neutral | | Total |
|--|--------|-------|--------|-------|----------------|-------|-------|
| | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | |
| 辦公硬件器材不足 (如電腦、打印機等) Lack of office hardware (e.g., computer, printer, etc.) | 66.40% | 1312 | 24.44% | 483 | 9.16% | 181 | 1976 |
| 工作期間容易被家庭瑣事分心 Easily distracted by household chores during work | 65.79% | 1300 | 22.37% | 442 | 11.84% | 234 | 1976 |
| 工作期間容易受家人、子女或同住者的打擾 Easily disturbed by family members, children or others who live together during work | 63.87% | 1262 | 24.54% | 485 | 11.59% | 229 | 1976 |
| 辦公軟件配套不足 (如與工作相關的IT系統等) Lack of office software (including work-related IT system) | 60.17% | 1189 | 30.11% | 595 | 9.72% | 192 | 1976 |
| 不能及時與同事進行工作上的聯繫溝通 Can't communicate timely with colleagues | 56.58% | 1118 | 30.21% | 597 | 13.21% | 261 | 1976 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|--------|-----|--------|-----|-------|-----|------|
| 在家辦公空間不足 Lack of working space at home | 45.34% | 896 | 44.89% | 887 | 9.77% | 193 | 1976 |
|---|--------|-----|--------|-----|-------|-----|------|

Excerpts 2. Examples of online posts which expressed similar challenges

- (i) Lack of office hardware, e.g. computer and printer (1,312 or 66.4%);
“My job requires me to print and verify copies all the time. Using the monitor is not so convenient after all. How can I claim the printing cost (A4 paper/ink) during home office? Besides, for copying bulk reports, even most people have printers at home few have feeders. Isn’t copying [bulk reports] page by page time-consuming?” (Timable, February 16 2020)
- (ii) Easily distracted by household chores during work (1,300 or 65.8%);
“I didn’t need to prepare lunch, now I do. Vacuuming depends... I can’t if someone is on the phone. I used to turn up the volume of radio or television during work, now I can’t. When I mop the floor, they [family members] walk around. After tidying up they turn the things all over again.” (BabyKingdom, February 11 2020)
- (iii) Easily disturbed by family members, children or others who live together during work (1,262 or 63.9%)
“When you are busy replying to email non-stop, you need to hurry the daughter to go e-learning. Later on, husband said he’s hungry so you need to make breakfast. All I can say is ‘can’t agree more’.” (100 Most, March 27 2020)
- (iv) Lack of office software including work-related IT system (1,189 or 60.2%);
and
“I also went to office four days this week. Sometimes the so-called working from home is very difficult. Will they ever let you take restricted files home?” (U Magazine Facebook Page, February 7 2020)
- (v) Can’t communicate timely with colleagues (1,118 or 56.6%).
“My company no longer allows home office, as too many colleagues thought they needed not wake up [on time]. Whatsapping them at 9.30 a.m., people gradually responded to set up meetings after 11 a.m. Meetings must only be in the afternoon.” (BabyKingdom, March 18 2020)

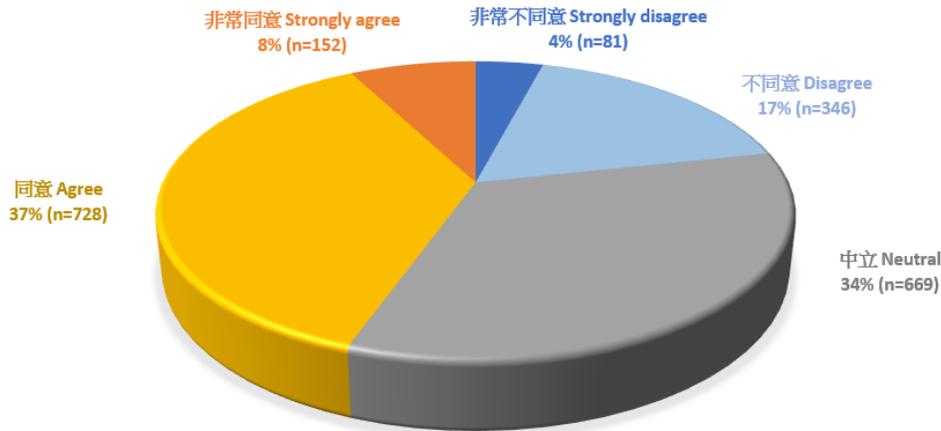
(d) Employers Generally Provided Sufficient Support to Enable Employees to Work from Home Effectively:

Majority (880 or 45%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the employer has provided sufficient support to enable them to work from home in an effective manner. In contrast, only 21% or 427 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Figure 4 summarizes all types of responses.

Figure 4. Has the Employer Provided Sufficient Support to Enable Employee to Work from Home in an Effective Manner?

Q6. 請問您是否同意以下說法：“僱主提供足夠的支援，以便我高效率地在家工作”。

To what extent do you agree with the following statement "The employer has provided sufficient support to enable me to work from home in an effective manner"?



(e) Nearly half of the respondents (831 or 42% out of 1976 respondents) had experience in working from home prior to the coronavirus outbreak.

Observations and Policy Implications:

- (i) The survey results revealed that there are more pros than cons to having work-from-home as an alternative work arrangement.
- Most respondents agreed that they get “more time to rest (72.2%)”, “more time to work (53.2%)” and “more time to exercise (50.8%)” and that WFH “reduce[s] work stress (63.8%)” and “improve[s] work-life balance (60.7%)”. However, major challenges remain that they are “easily distracted by household chores during work (65.8%)” and “easily disturbed by family members (63.9%)”.
 - Specifically, nearly half (49.2%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that WFH enables them to maintain a better relationship with family members. Such view was generally consistent across respondents of different gender, age groups, marital status, and living alone or with others.
- (ii) The Government announced a series of isolation measures in wake of the coronavirus outbreak, which also encouraged employers to allow employees to work from home. Offering work-from-home and flex time options might become a viable long-term arrangement even after the COVID-19 pandemic is over.
- The survey results confirmed that an overwhelming majority (81.6%) of the respondents preferred to continue to work from homes when the COVID-19 situation is resolved while only a small percentage (18.4%) preferred not.

Most respondents chose "Twice a week (35.6%)", followed by "Once a week (29.7%)".

- There was no significant difference between groups with respect to gender, age, marital status, living alone or with others, position at workplace, or previous experience in working from home prior to the coronavirus outbreak (please refer to Charts 1 to 6 as given in the attachment). In other words, most respondents had a strong desire for continuing to work from homes for 1 or 2 days per week when the current coronavirus outbreak is over.

(iii) Some countries such as Finland, Netherlands, UK and Canada have already established acts governing home/flexible working arrangements.

- The purposes behind the regulations are mostly for: (i) enhancing employees' satisfaction with the company, (ii) fostering a better work-life balance for employees, and (iii) instilling employees' sense of belonging to the company.
- However, the labour laws of many countries do not yet include a right to work from home. Restricting by the nature of work, home/flexible working arrangements could be difficult to implement in industries such as catering, hotel and healthcare. With small and medium-sized enterprises being the backbone of Hong Kong's economy, there are practical difficulties in making arrangements for work from home.
- Without hurting the core value of Hong Kong as a free economy, the government can play an advocacy role to help improve communication between employers and employees. The government can also take the lead in doing more research on the feasibility of working from home and look for ways to boost employees' sense of belonging and productivity in work from home settings, thereby strengthening the implementation of family-friendly employment practices

Methodology: An online survey questionnaire was developed and posted on LU website to collect views from full-time Hong Kong workers who have WFH experience during the coronavirus outbreak. Invitation to join the survey was extended to the public via different social media channels. Data collection was done between 8 Apr 2020 and 26 April 2020. A total of 2573 questionnaires were collected, with 1,976 effective responses for data analysis. An extra 84 online posts with 3187 comments published between January 28 and April 18 2020 were collected from BabyKingdom and Facebook lifestyle pages to exemplify the survey findings. Detailed analysis will be performed in May 2020.

Respondents' Profile: The majority of the respondents were female (67.7%); 71.7% were in the age group 26-45; 55.6% were single while 43.0% were married; 58.3% lived with family; 51.1% from frontline or basic level roles while 38.9% from middle grade.

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Attachments: Various Charts (Chart 1 to 6) on Working from Home Preference

Chart 1. Working from Home Preference by Previous Experience

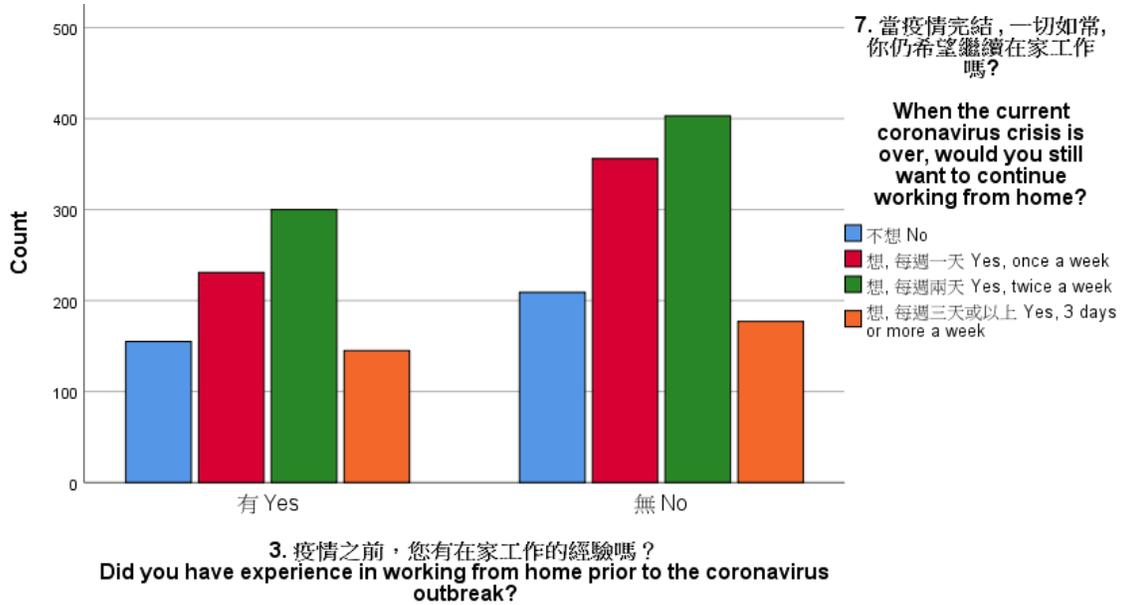


Chart 2. Working from Home Preference by Gender

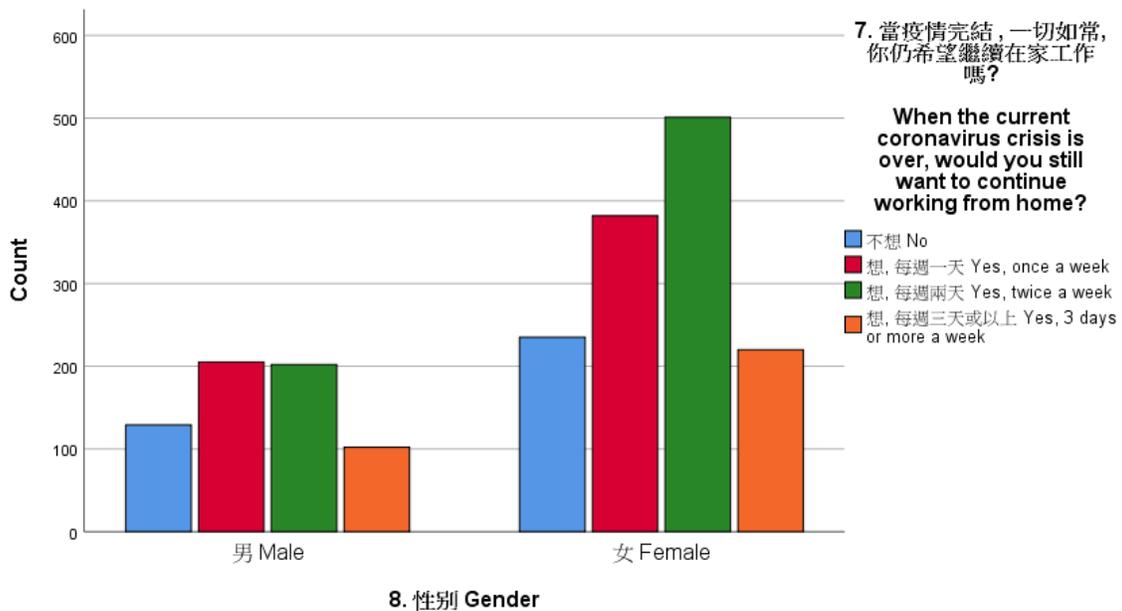


Chart 3. Working from Home Preference by Age

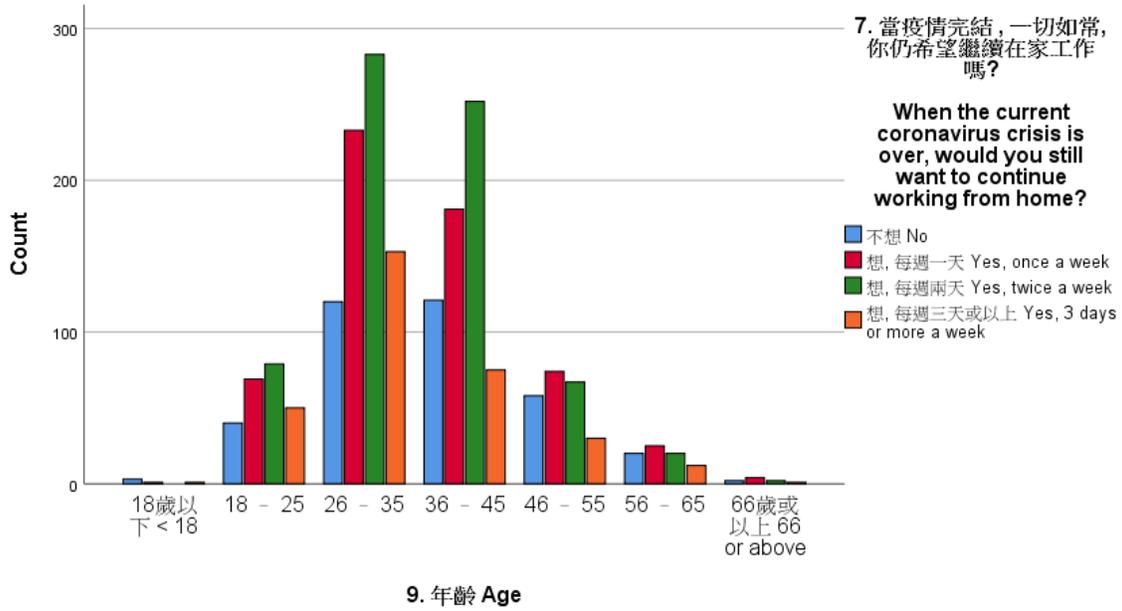


Chart 4. Working from Home Preference by Marital Status

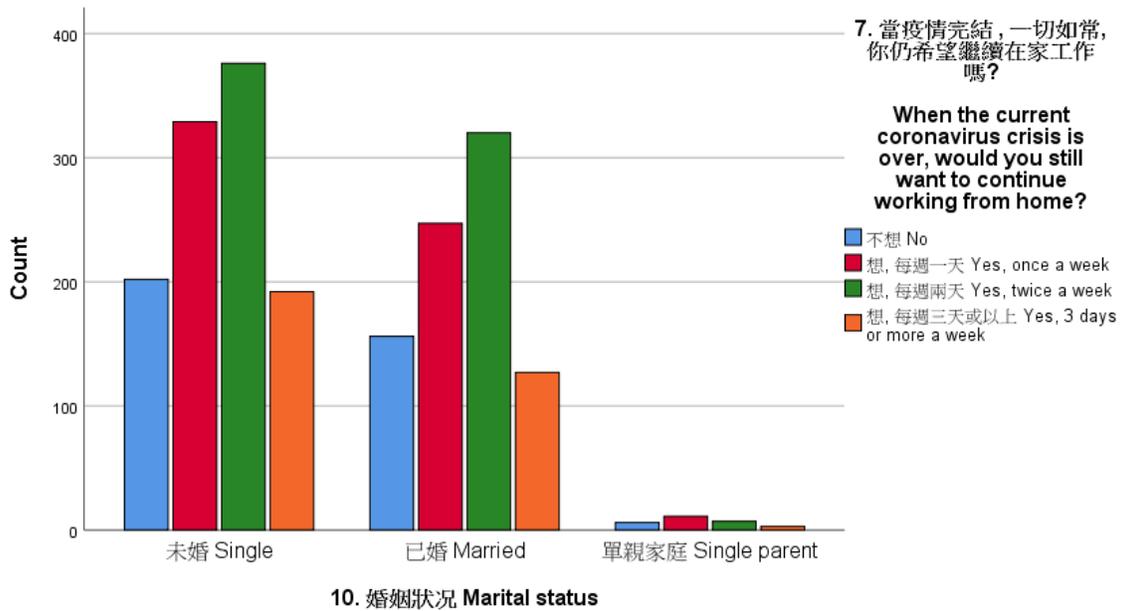
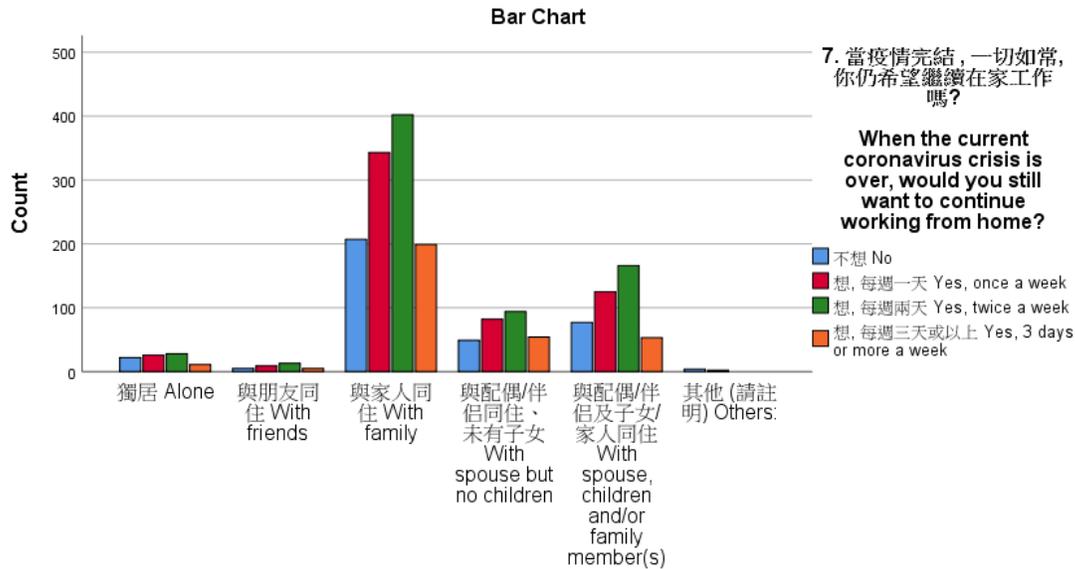
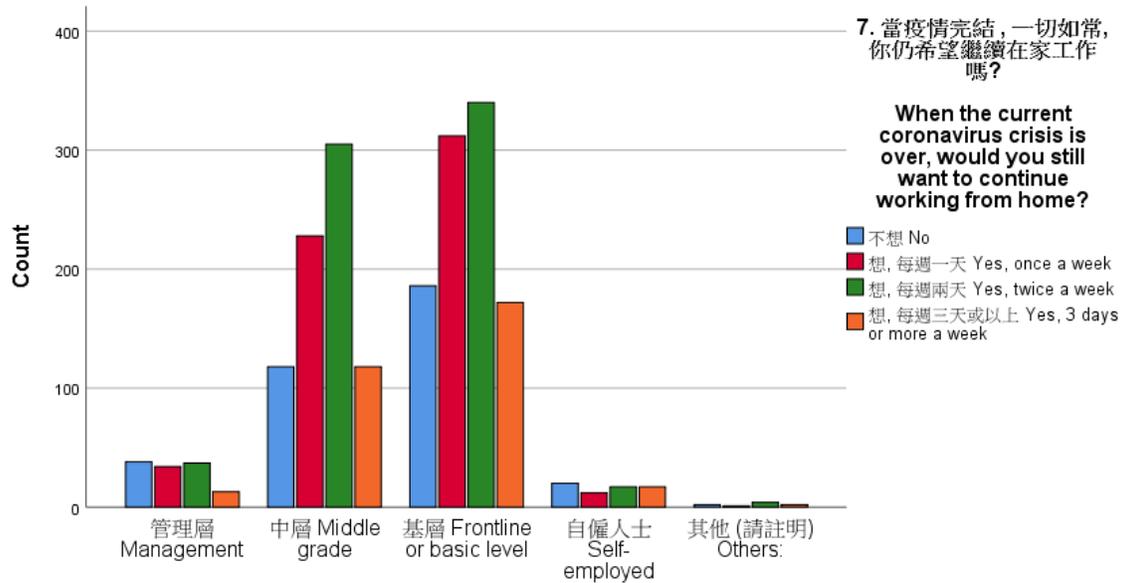


Chart 5. Working from Home Preference by Living Condition



11. 居住情況 Living alone or with others? - Selected Choice

Chart 6. Working from Home Preference by Position at Workplace



13. 職級 Position - Selected Choice