

# Making Homeworking work: what can we learn from the experiences of full-time workers during COVID-19?

Geary Institute COVID-19 Crisis Response Conference on Homeworking  
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# Research Background / Motivation

Prior to COVID-19:

- Low homeworking penetration in the UK despite legislation to improve access
- Low levels of homeworking uptake
- Relationship between demand for homeworking and workers' experiences of homeworking?
- COVID-19 induced lockdown and enforced homeworking presented a unique opportunity to capture:
  - Workers' direct **experiences** of homeworking
  - Workers' homeworking **preferences**
- Our aim: examine the impact of (non-voluntary) homeworking on full-time workers':

- **physical, mental and emotional wellbeing**
- **self-rated productivity and performance**
- **preferences for homeworking**

# Methodology - Primary Surveys

- Data collected using an in-depth **online survey** of UK workers
- **Sample** sourced using **Prolific Academic** survey panel provider
- Focus on **full-time workers in the UK**

## Survey 1

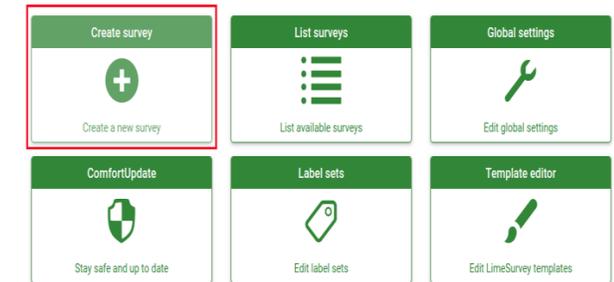
- Nov 2019 – Feb 2020
- Focus: measuring multidimensional *worker well-being*
- 994 respondents

## Survey 2

- **May – June 2021**
- Focus: ***COVID-19*** and ***homeworking***
- **808 of the original respondents** - response rate of 81%



This is the LimeSurvey admin interface. Start to build your survey from here.



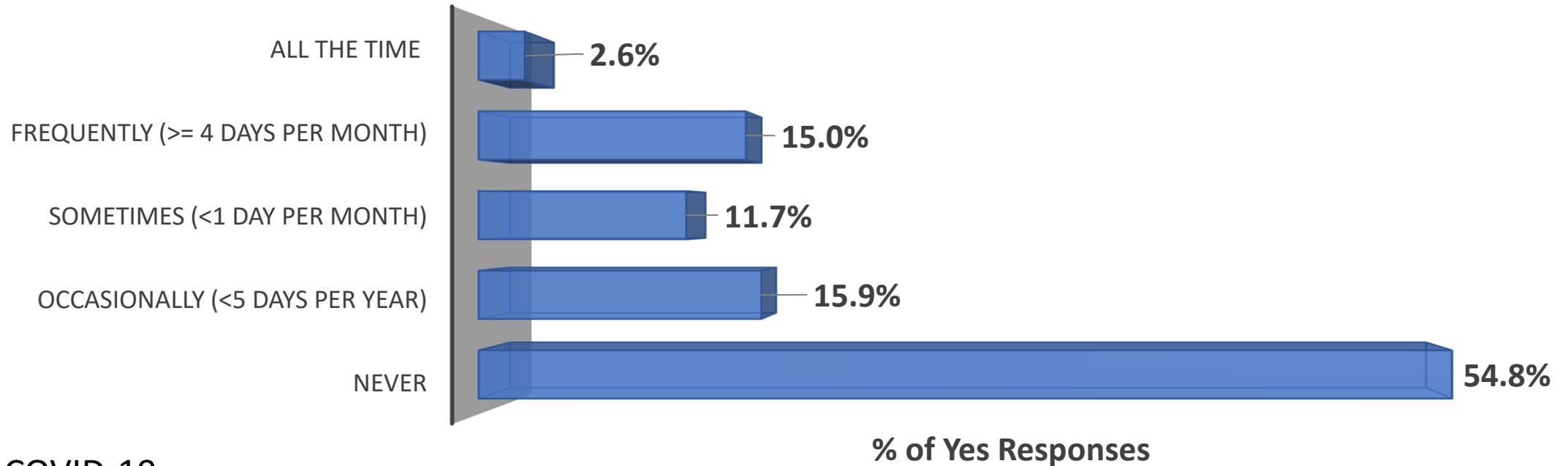
# Sample Profile

- **96%** are on a **permanent contract**
- **62%** work for companies with **> 250 employees**
- **56%** work in the **private sector**
- Average monthly (net) **salary of £1,000 - £2,000 (62%)**
- Average **tenure of 5-10 years** and **mid-level seniority**
- **22.4%** are members of a **trade union**
- **68% female; 32% male**
- Average age **38 years** (18 - 65 years range)
- **92% white; 94% British**
- Average net monthly household income: **£2,000 - £3,000 per month**
- **76%** are in a **relationship; 50%** are **parents**
- **41%** hold an **undergraduate degree; 19%** hold a **postgraduate degree**
- Self-rated physical health: **Good** (53% of the sample); **25%** report having a **physical health condition**
- Self-rated mental health: **Good** (50% of the sample); **27%** report having a **mental health condition**



# Prevalence of Homeworking prior to COVID-19

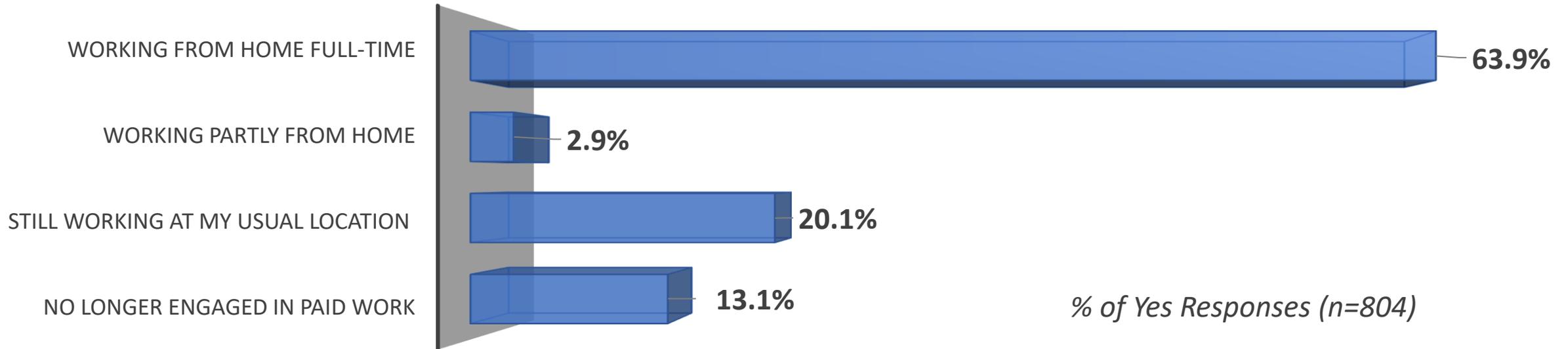
*Prevalence of homeworking prior to COVID-19*



Prior to COVID-19:

- **Just 2.6%** of the sample worked **full-time from home**
  - **65%** worked in an **office environment**
  - **6%** worked in a **medical setting**
  - **29%** worked in **schools, retail premises, construction sites and factories**

# Prevalence of Homeworking during COVID-19



- **13%** of our sample are **no longer working due to COVID-19**
  - 2% have been made *unemployed*
  - 11% have been *furloughed*
  - 1% are on *maternity / sick leave / other*
- **77% of workers still engaged in paid work** are now **working from home**
  - 74% are working from home *full-time*
  - 3% are working *partially* from home

# Homeworking Preferences

- Do workers prefer working from home in general?

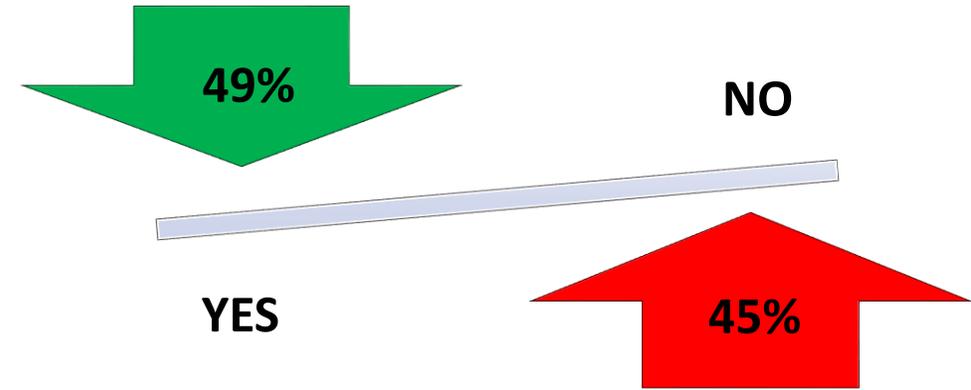
- All respondents: **49%** ✓
- Current homeworkers only: **57%** ✓

- Of those workers who prefer working from home:

- **8.4%** would be willing to take a **cut in salary** if they could work from home when they wanted
- **10.9%** would be willing to forgo some of their **annual leave** or **financial bonus**

- **84%** of current homeworkers **wish to continue homeworking after COVID-19**

- **26%** of current homeworkers wish to continue working from home **full-time**
- **58%** of current homeworkers would prefer a **hybrid homeworking option**
- **16%** of current homeworkers would prefer to return to their **pre-COVID-19 work location**



# What do workers perceive to be the main benefits of working from home?

- No commute 72%
- My appearance doesn't matter / I can wear what I want 51%
- I can save money on food / travel 50%
- I can do housework / prepare meals in-between work tasks 44%
- I get more time in bed 38%
- I can start later / finish earlier 34%
- I don't have to interact with anyone if I don't want to 34%
- I have more control over *when* I do my job 27%
- I have more control over *how* I do my job 27%
- Home is a more physically comfortable environment 27%
- I can take more breaks 23%
- I have more time to exercise 22%
- I can spend more time with my kids 20%

# What do workers perceive to be the main disadvantages of working from home?

- I miss socialising with co-workers 56%
- I miss the routine – it's harder to structure my day 38%
- I prefer to keep work and home lives separate 31%
- I eat / drink more when I work from home 29%
- I feel out of touch with my colleagues 27%
- I miss face-face interaction with customers etc. 25%
- I get too distracted by social media / TV 25%
- I find it hard to switch off at the end of the day 21%
- I find it boring 20%
- I get too distracted by housework 18%

# Homeworking and Job Satisfaction

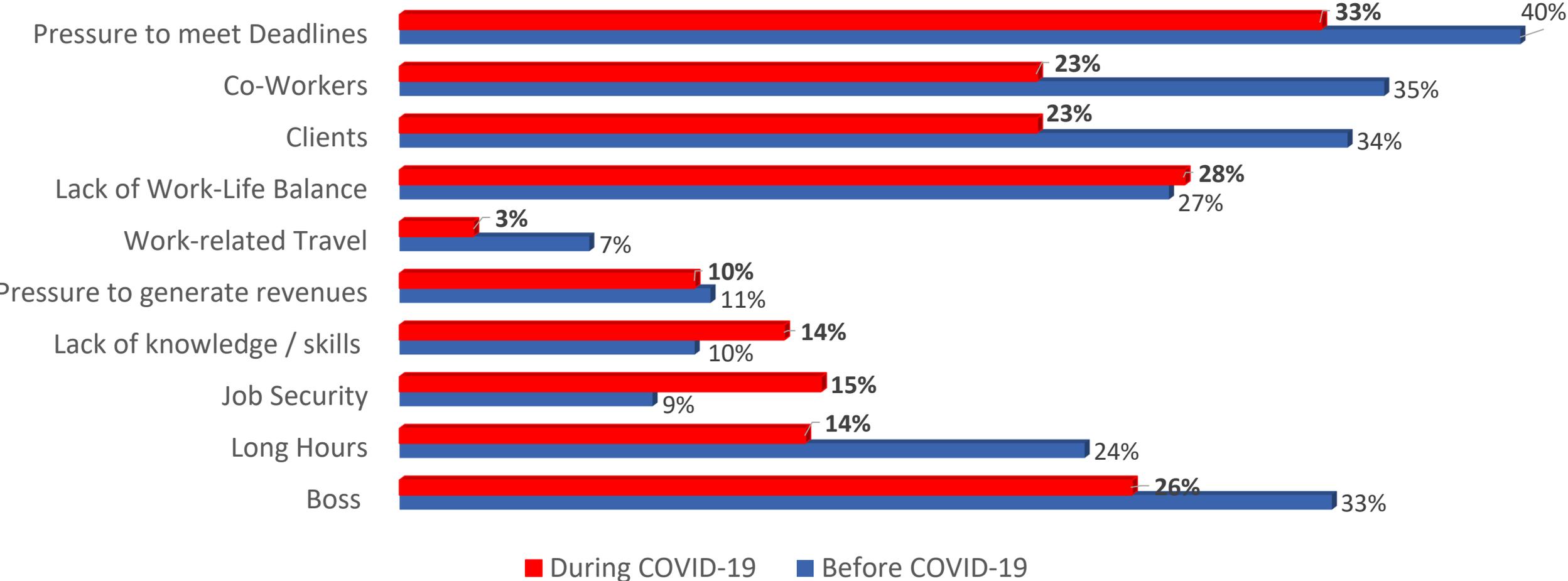


- Positive association between homeworking during COVID-19 and job satisfaction
  - Job satisfaction of *all workers* remained stable (score of 5.9 out of 10)
  - Job satisfaction of *homeworkers* increased (from 5.9 to 6.2;  $p=.04$ )
- Evidence of an adaptation process
- Who is benefitting most from homeworking during COVID-19? (*JDI, Stanton et al, 2002*)
  - Workers in the *25-34 age category* ( $+2.3$ ;  $p=.0015$ )
  - *Non-Parents* ( $+2.5$ ;  $p<.001$ )
  - *Single workers* ( $+3.1$ ;  $p<.001$ )
  - Workers with *poor self-rated mental health* ( $+4.1$ ;  $p=.016$ ) or a *mental health condition* ( $+3.0$ ;  $p=.0015$ )
  - Workers with *low Big-5 extraversion* scores ( $+2.6$ ;  $p=.002$ ) and *high neuroticism* scores ( $+2.8$ ;  $p=.0015$ )

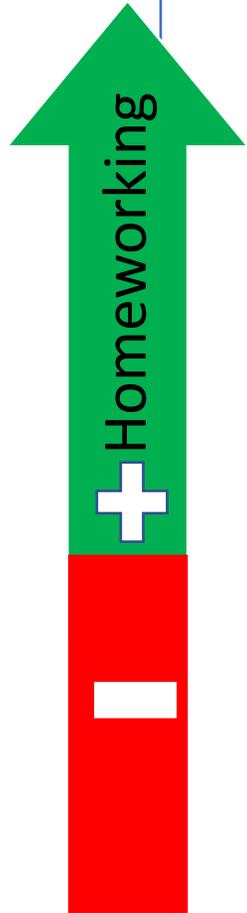
# Homeworking and Work-Related Stress

- Stress levels of workers have remained stable
- Stress levels of homeworkers during COVID-19 do not differ significantly from stress levels of non-homeworkers

*Sources of Work-Related Stress pre- and during COVID-19*



# How have COVID-19 and homeworking affected self-rated productivity?



**35%** of current homeworkers report **getting more done** when working from home

**25%** of current homeworkers report producing **work of higher quality** when working from home

**39%** of current homeworkers report **getting less done** when working from home

**20%** of current homeworkers report producing **work of lower quality** when working from home

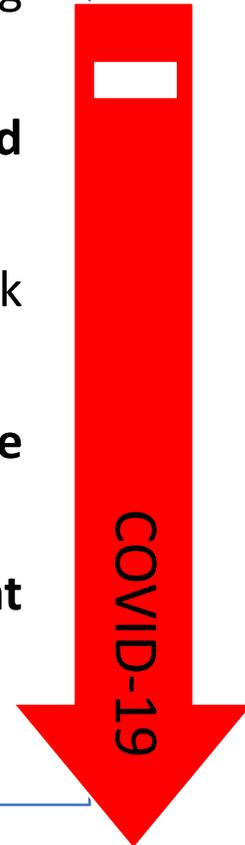
**22%** of workers are working **fewer hours** due to COVID-19

Deterioration in mean **self-rated performance**

**45%** feel “**less productive** at work than usual due to COVID-19”

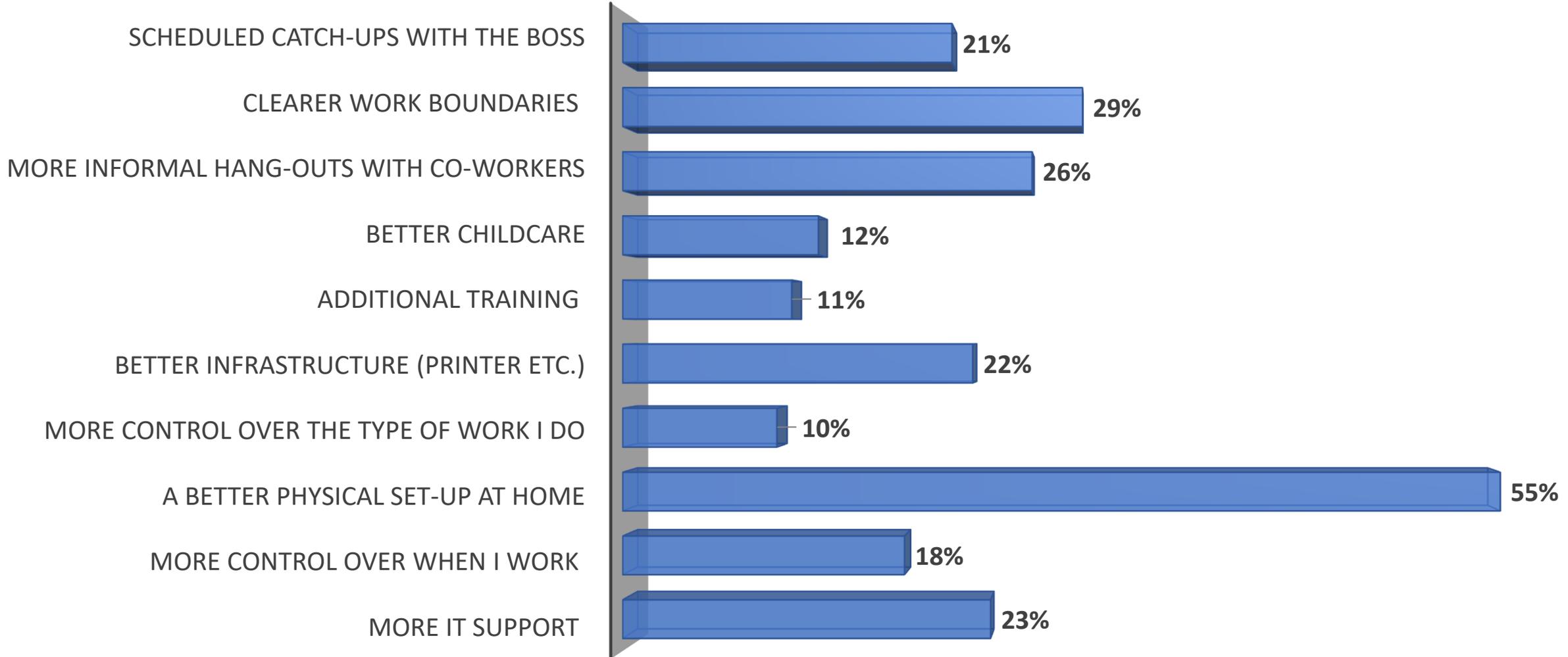
**61%** find it **difficult to motivate themselves**

**36%** feel “**work is just not that important**” right now



# What supports do workers believe would improve their homeworking experience?

Homeworking supports cited by current homeworkers



# Implications for Employers / Public Bodies

- Employers need to learn from their employees' actual experiences of homeworking
  - General attitudes towards homeworking / perceptions of homeworking ⇄ actual lived experience
- A flexible approach is required
  - Homeworking is *not possible* for all workers
  - Homeworking *does not suit* all workers
  - Not all homeworkers want to work from home on a *full-time basis*
- Next step: rigorous testing of homeworking options and homeworking supports
  - Randomised Control Test (RCT) experimental setting - Control group v Treatment Group(s)
  - Multidimensional measures of well-being and performance



**Goal: Enhance worker-wellbeing while protecting / improving productivity and profitability**

Thank you for your attention!

An Executive Summary and the full policy paper are freely available to download at **[www.publicpolicy.ie](http://www.publicpolicy.ie)**

If you have any **questions or comments** or if your organisation would be interested in discussing the possibility of **working with us on a homeworking RCT**, please contact me at:

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