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KING'S GLOBAL INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

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EMPOWERING WORKING DADS

WHEN FATHERS WORK FROM HOME

Why fathers working from home, without penalty, matters for families, equality, wellbeing, and business

Shiyu Yuan and Professor Heejung Chung

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King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership, King's Business School, King's College London
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Working from home (WFH) has become one of the most significant and contested shifts in working life since the pandemic. For fathers, its importance lies in the possibility of sustaining strong work commitment while creating more space for family life, care, and wellbeing. This report makes the case for enabling fathers to work from home without penalty, while showing why formal access alone is insufficient. Drawing on UK evidence from the Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes UK (SWAA-UK), Understanding Society, and the Labour Force Survey, supplemented by experimental design and international research, it presents robust evidence on why fathers' WFH matters for wellbeing, family life, gender equality, and business outcomes.

The report highlights fathers' growing preference for WFH in the "post" pandemic period, the persistent gap between the flexibility they want and the flexibility they can access and comfortably use, and the conditions under which fathers' WFH delivers wider benefits. It also shows that the benefits of fathers' WFH are conditional. WFH is most likely to support wellbeing, family life, gender equality, and business outcomes when fathers can use it without stigma or career penalty, when households have the practical capacity to share care, and when norms at work and at home recognise fathers' caregiving as part of ordinary working life. The report sets out the evidence behind these claims and offers a coordinated set of recommendations for employers, HR leaders, and policymakers.

It is worth noting that much of the evidence in this report is drawn from studies of different-sex couples due to data availability. Throughout the report, we use "fathers" as shorthand for fathers and any other secondary carer — including non-binary parents and partners other than the birthing mother — and "mothers" to refer to the birthing or primary-caring parent. We adopt this language for readability and consistency with the source data, while recognising that families take many forms and that these findings may apply across a wider range of caring arrangements than the binary terms suggest.

Key findings:

01 Fathers increasingly value WFH — preferences have risen to around 2.4 days per week, yet employer-allowed days remain far lower, leaving a persistent preference–access gap (authors' analysis of UK SWAA data).

02 WFH can supports fathers' mental health, gender equality at home, family planning, and employers' retention and recruitment (e.g., Beaufils & Chung, 2026; Chung et al., 2021; Yuan, forthcoming).

03 Yet these benefits of fathers' WFH are conditional as access alone is not enough without penalty-free use. Fathers who use WFH face a stronger career penalty than any other group of workers (Chung, et al., forthcoming; Kasperska et al., 2024; Wang & Chung, 2026).

04 Three mutually reinforcing conditions must align to maximise the benefits of fathers' WFH: fathers' access without penalty, women's structural labour-market position, and caring-masculinity norms at work and at home.

AUTHORS

Shiyu Yuan

Shiyu Yuan is a researcher at the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, King's College London, with her PhD research at University of Kent. Her research focuses on remote working, fatherhood, equality, and family well-being.

Professor Heejung Chung, FAcSS

Heejung Chung is the Professor of Work & Employment and Director of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, King's College London. Author of The Flexibility Paradox; with over two decades of research on flexible working, gender and care. She is also an advisor to the European Commission, UK and Korean governments.

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INTRODUCTION

Working from home (WFH) is one of the most significant changes to working life since the pandemic and remains one of the most popular and yet most controversial employment practices (Chung & Yuan, 2025). For fathers in particular, it opens a possibility long out of reach: to be more present at home without stepping back at work. That possibility matters for fathers themselves, but also for families, gender equality, and business performance. This report makes the case for enabling fathers to work from home without penalty, while showing why formal access alone is not enough. For WFH to deliver its full potential, fathers must be able to use it without stigma, career costs, or pressure to remain constantly available.

Before the pandemic, only a small minority of employees WFH regularly (ONS, 2020a), but during lockdowns this rose to nearly half of all employees in the UK (ONS, 2020b). With increasing calls from employers to return to the office, this number has declined in recent years. However, WFH remains a central feature of the post-pandemic workplace, with around two in five employees in the UK still WFH at least some of the time by April 2026 (ONS, 2026). It has also drawn conflicting conclusions from researchers and practitioners alike, particularly around productivity, equality, and wellbeing.

Fathers are central to this debate because their WFH can affect more than their own working day. It shapes how employers retain and support staff (Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019), how families organise care (Chung et al., 2021; Yuan & Jung, forthcoming), and whether mothers continue to absorb most domestic responsibilities or gain real opportunity to participate in paid work on equal terms (Leshchenko & Chung, 2025). Moreover, it also helps build more positive views of masculinities in our society, as fathers' greater involvement at home — enabled through WFH — may directly shape children's gender roles (Chung, 2021). Hence, fathers' WFH is a wellbeing issue, a family issue, a gender-equality issue, and a business issue. Yet flexibility is still treated as a women's issue, overlooking the role fathers play in shaping outcomes for organisations, families, and gender equality.

This report sets out to explore this question by examining fathers' access to and use of WFH, the barriers that prevent fathers from using it freely, and the conditions under which it can support wellbeing, family life, gender equality, and business outcomes. It argues that enabling fathers to WFH without penalty should not be treated as a matter of personal preferences or a discretionary workplace benefit. It is part of a wider agenda for inclusive work, employee wellbeing, and gender equality at home and in the labour market. The report also addresses a key misconception: that fathers' WFH automatically provides benefits. Under existing "always-on" working cultures and traditional traditional gender roles, the benefits of fathers' WFH are conditional. Finally, the report outlines practical recommendations for employers, HR leaders, and policymakers to ensure that WFH supports equality, wellbeing, and organisational performance rather than reproducing existing inequalities.

DEFINITION OF WORKING FROM HOME

Flexible working refers to a broad set of arrangements that change where, when, or how much people work. Some forms of flexible working refers to flexibility in when people work, such as flexitime, while others refers to flexibility in how much people work, including part-time work, job sharing, or term-time working (UK Government, 2026). A further group of arrangements refers to flexibility in where work is carried out, including working from home (UK Government, 2026).

This report focuses on the "where" of flexible working, and specifically on working from home. Remote work can refer to paid work carried out away from the employer's premises in a range of locations, including the home, co-working spaces, or other non-office settings (ILO, 2020). In this report, however, we use "working from home", abbreviated hereafter as WFH, to mean paid work carried out from the employee's home for at least part of their usual working hours, using digital technologies where needed to communicate with colleagues, managers, clients, or customers (Chung, 2024). This includes hybrid arrangements, where employees divide their time between home and the workplace, as well as more regular home-based arrangements, including fully home-based work. We use "working from home" as the main term because the report is concerned with how the location of paid work inside the home may affect fathers' family routines, wellbeing, domestic engagement, and gender equality.

Where the report refers to wider evidence or policy debates using terms such as remote work, hybrid work, or homeworking, these are treated as related forms of location-based flexible working. Where relevant, the report distinguishes between occasional, hybrid, and more regular forms of working from home.

INSIGHT 1:
FATHERS INCREASINGLY VALUE WORKING FROM HOME

Fathers want to work from home, but cannot freely use it

Since late 2021, fathers' preference for working from home (WFH) has risen steadily from around 1.85 days per week to 2.24 days by 2025 (Figure 1). Over the same period, employer-allowed and actual WFH days have remained much lower, generally around 1 to 1.4 days per week. This points to a persistent gap between the amount of WFH fathers would like and the amount current workplace arrangements make possible.

The pattern suggests that fathers' lower use of WFH is not simply a matter of low demand. Fathers increasingly value WFH, but employer-allowed days remain well below their preferred level.

2X

Fathers want twice as many working-from-home days as their employer currently allows, around 2.10 days preferred versus 1.10 days allowed

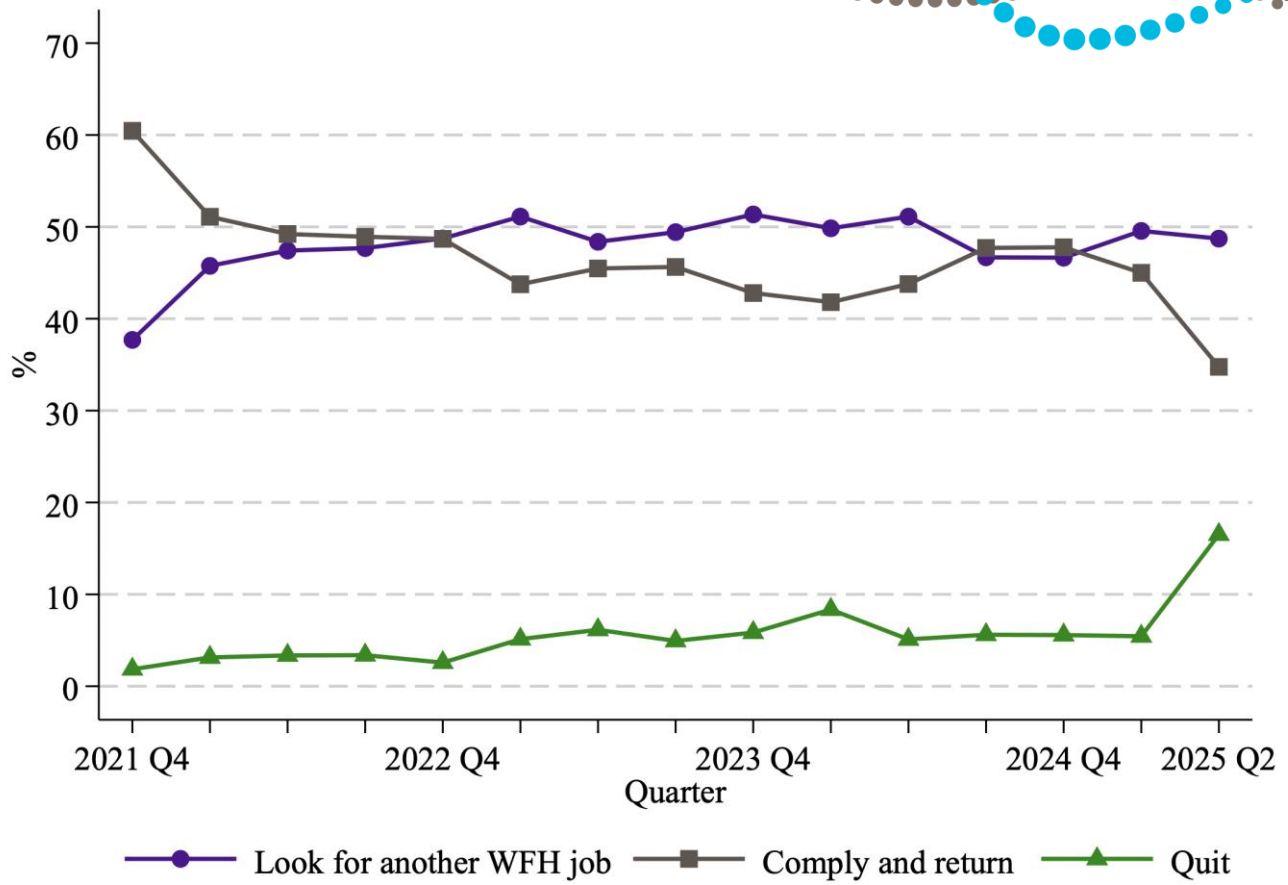


Figure 1. Fathers' preferred and employer-allowed working from home days per week, 2021–2025
Source: The UK Survey of Working Arrangement and Attitude data, weighted.
Note: This figure is based on full-time fathers (35+ hours per week) with a child under 18 rather than all fathers.

Figure 2 shows the share of fathers with at least some employer-allowed WFH and the share who actually use any WFH in a given week. A slightly larger share of fathers report being formally allowed some WFH than actually use it — on average around 41% compared to 39%.

This does not mean fathers with access are simply choosing not to use it. Among those who do work from home, actual use tends to be intensive — averaging around 3.2 days per week, compared to about 2.8 days that employers formally allow. In other words, some fathers with formal access do not use WFH at all, but those who do tend to use it as much as — or even more than — they are permitted.

Thus, WFH appears to be highly valued by those who feel able to use it. However, for many fathers, having access on paper is not enough. Workplace culture, visibility expectations, and the stigma attached to men using flexibility for family reasons remain important barriers (Chung & Wang, 2024; Wang & Chung, 2026).

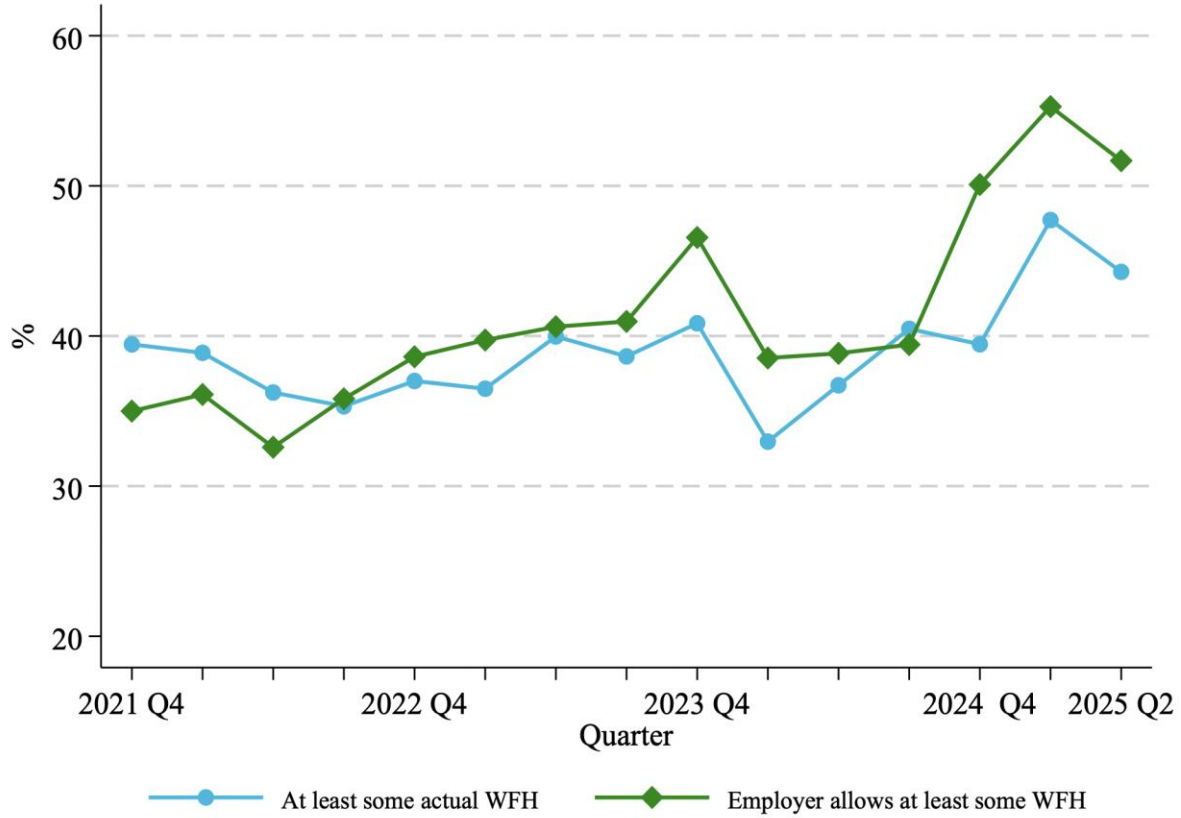


Figure 2. The share of full-time employed fathers with at least some employer-allowed and actual working from home , 2021–2025
Source: The UK Survey of Working Arrangement and Attitude data, weighted.
Note: This figure is based on full-time fathers (35+ hours per week) with a child under 18 rather than all fathers.

Fathers willing to leave their jobs when asked to return-to-office

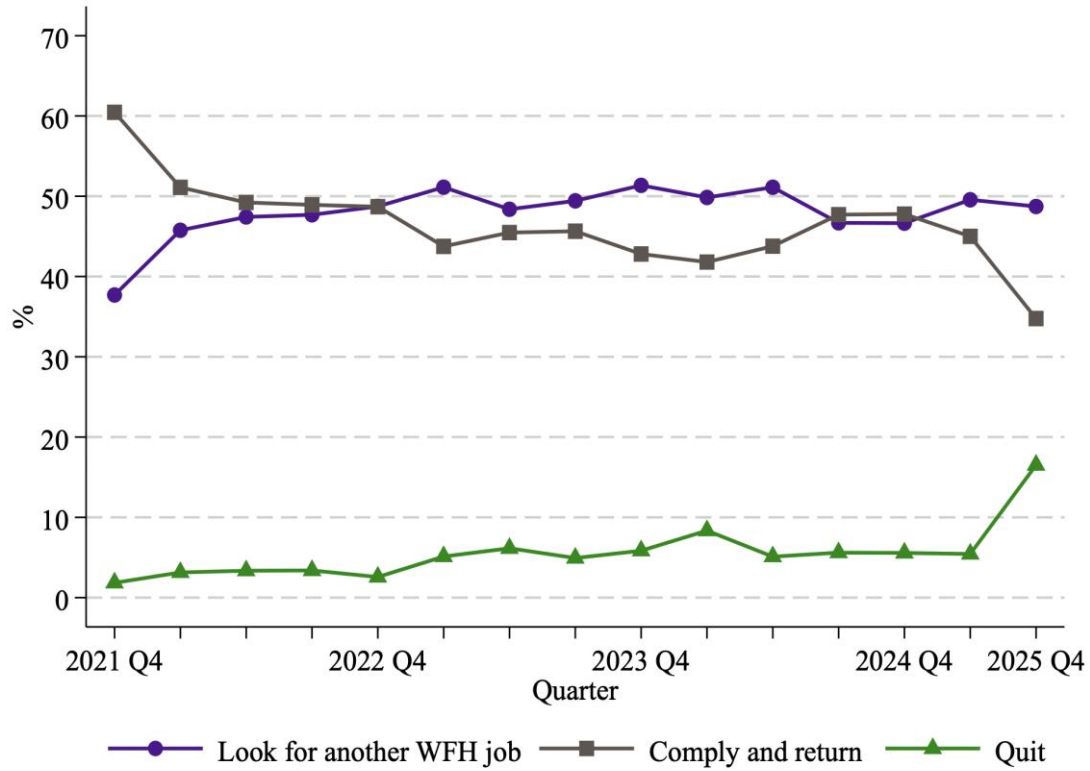


Figure 3. RTO responses among full-time employed fathers currently working from home, 2021–2025
Source: The UK Survey of Working Arrangement and Attitude data, weighted.
Note: This figure is based on full-time fathers (35+ hours per week) with a child under 18 who currently work from home rather than all fathers. Under a 30-hour full-time definition the comparable trend is quite similar with around 15% fathers would quit if forced back to office.

Beyond preferences, fathers are increasingly prepared to act when WFH is withdrawn. In the late 2021, around 60% of full-time homeworking fathers said they would comply with a five-day RTO mandate, while fewer than 3% said they would quit outright. By mid-2025, compliance had fallen to around 35%, while the share of fathers saying they would quit outright had risen to approximately 17%. Although the latest estimate should be interpreted with caution, it fits a broader upward trend in fathers' willingness to leave jobs that remove access to WFH.

This matters because WFH is not simply a workplace preference. It has become part of how fathers organise family life. Wider evidence shows that fathers who worked from home were more likely to increase their share of childcare and housework (Chung et al., 2021; Leshchenko & Chung, 2025). For these fathers, a full-time RTO mandate does not just change where they work but disrupts how their family manages care. Employers considering blanket RTO policies should weigh these retention risks carefully, particularly as fathers increasingly view WFH as a baseline expectation rather than a discretionary benefit.

17%

of full-time working fathers said they would quit outright if forced to return to the office full-time in June 2025, compared to 5% in early 2022

INSIGHT 2:
WHY FATHERS' WORKING FROM HOME MATTERS

Evidence shows when fathers can work from home, everyone gains — fathers, families, gender equality, and the businesses they work for.

Fathers' working from home can support mental health

WFH gives fathers more control over their time, reduces commuting, and makes the daily juggle of work and family more manageable. Before the pandemic, higher levels of WFH within men's occupations were linked to their better mental health (Figure 4, left panel) (Beaufils & Chung, 2026). Greater autonomy and flexibility meant fathers could now manage work and family demands more effectively without the two constantly colliding. However, since the pandemic, those gains weakened (Figure 4, left panel). Emergency WFH may have disrupted routines during lockdowns, while increased monitoring and closer managerial oversight "post" pandemic may have stripped away the autonomy that had made WFH beneficial, and the mental health advantage for men no longer held.

But women's WFH improved their mental health since the pandemic (Figure 4, right panel). It is possible that as men began working from home more since the pandemic, their partners benefited. Greater presence at home, and in some cases greater involvement in domestic responsibilities, appears to have eased the mental load on mothers, with positive effects on women's wellbeing.

The longer-term picture is still emerging. As post-pandemic WFH becomes more settled — with less crisis pressure and increased acceptance— the wellbeing benefits for fathers may also re-emerge over time.

Men's WFH improved their mental health before the pandemic, but the benefit weakened when WFH happened under crisis conditions, closer monitoring, or blurred boundaries.

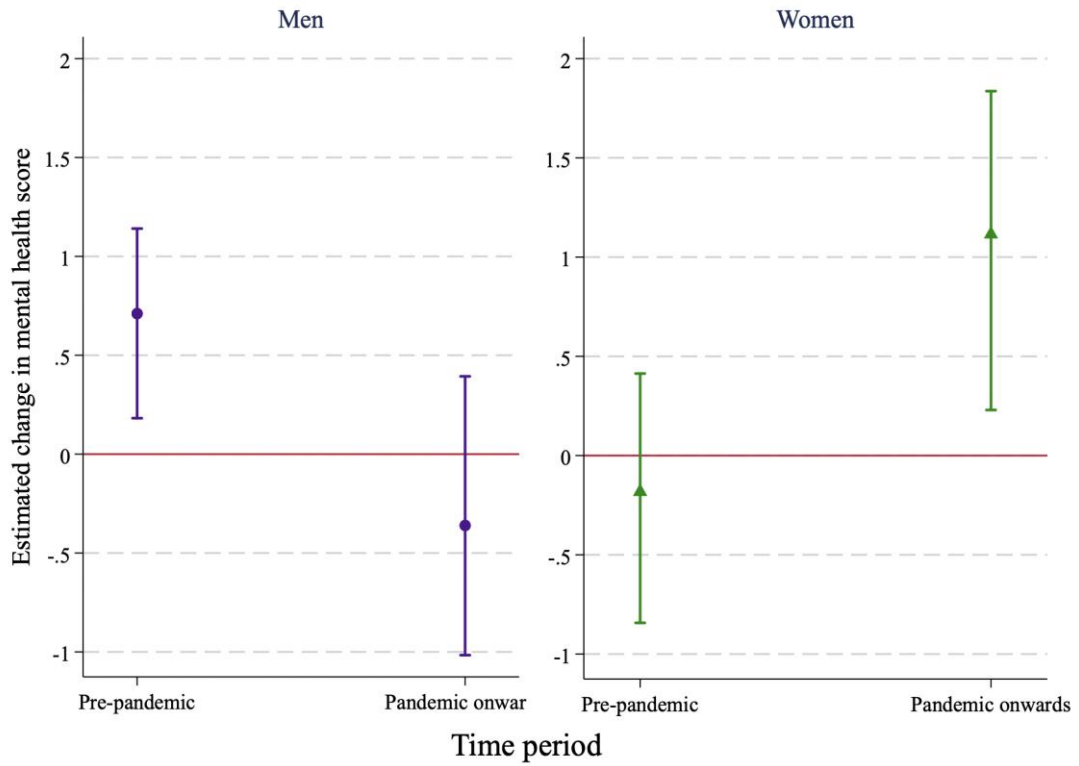


Figure 4. Effect of WFH on men's and women's mental health before and from March 2020, UK, 2009–2023
Note: Dots above zero indicate mental health improvement; dots below zero indicate worsening
Source: Beaufils and Chung (2026), using UK Household Longitudinal Study and Labour Force Survey data.

Fathers' working from home can support gender equality at home

3X

In UK households surveyed during COVID lockdowns, fathers who worked from home were three times more likely to have increased their share of childcare than fathers who did not (Chung et al., 2021).

67% -> 55%

Using 14 years of UK data, researchers show that in couples where only the father worked from home and the mother held a higher occupational position, the mother's share of total housework fell from **67% to 55%** (Yuan & Jung, forthcoming).

GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES MATTER

Using 14 years German Family Panel data, researchers show that egalitarian fathers' WFH significantly increased their involvement in childcare. This shift was not found among fathers with more traditional views (Leshchenko & Chung, 2025).

Fathers' WFH can support gender equality at home when it leads to greater involvement in care and housework. But this does not happen automatically but depends on who works from home, how, and under what conditions. In UK households surveyed during the COVID-19 lockdowns, fathers who worked from home were three times more likely to have increased their share of childcare than fathers who did not (Chung et al., 2021). Evidence from UKHLS also suggests that when **fathers worked from home alone**, mothers' share of housework fell, especially in couples where **mothers held higher occupational status (Yuan & Jung, forthcoming)**. German evidence further shows that **egalitarian fathers** increased their childcare involvement when they gained access to WFH, while the same shift was not found among more traditional fathers (Leshchenko & Chung, 2025). Thus, WFH can give fathers more time, flexibility, and everyday presence at home, creating opportunities for greater involvement in family life and a more equal division of unpaid work. However, these gains depend on whether fathers are expected, enabled, and willing to use WFH for care and domestic responsibilities. Where fathers worry that visible caregiving may damage their career prospects, professional commitment, or masculine identity, the gender-equality potential of WFH may remain unrealised.

Fathers' domestic involvement benefits the whole family

Fathers' involvement at home matters beyond the division of unpaid work. Emerging evidence suggests that fathers' WFH or other flexible working can produce wider family benefits when it leads to greater domestic engagement.

1 Mothers' employment and careers.

Fathers' flexibility can support mothers' employment and career outcomes. In the Netherlands, fathers' post-pandemic WFH was linked to more equal childcare and enabled mothers to increase their working hours (Von Gaudecker et al., 2024). In Germany, women whose partners began working flexible hours experienced wage increases over time, especially among mothers (Langner, 2018). Thus, when fathers are more available for care, mothers may have more room to remain in paid work, increase their working hours, or progress in their careers.

2 Relationship wellbeing.

Fathers' involvement can support relationship wellbeing. Mothers report greater satisfaction with the domestic division when fathers work from home (Petts et al., 2023). Wider evidence also shows that unequal divisions of childcare and housework are linked to higher stress, poorer mental wellbeing, lower relationship satisfaction, and greater risk of relationship breakdown, especially when mothers experience the division as unfair or underappreciated (Schober, 2013; Ruppanner et al., 2018). Fathers' involvement at home can therefore reduce strain within couples and support a healthier family environment.

3 Children's outcomes

Fathers' involvement can benefit children. Wider research links fathers' involvement with children's emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and educational outcomes (Flouri et al., 2016; McMunn et al., 2017). Researchers even found that fathers' childcare involvement has a bigger impact on the educational outcomes of children than that of the mothers' involvement in the UK (Norman & Davies, 2023). Research also suggests that children who see fathers involved in care and domestic work may develop more egalitarian views of housework and caregiving (Chung, 2021). Thus, fathers' involvement can matter not only for current family wellbeing, but also for how future generations understand care, work, and gender roles.

4 New Masculinities

Fathers who do more at home also shape how children think about gender. Research consistently finds that the more time fathers spend on housework and childcare, the more gender-egalitarian their children become, not because of what parents say, but because of what they see parents do (Cano & Hofmeister, 2023). This effect is visible as early as age two (Herbaut, 2025) and holds into adolescence, shaping the behavioral outcomes into adulthood (Cano & Hofmeister, 2023). What is more, fathers' involvement at home also changes father's own view of masculinity. WFH can therefore help build new more positive views of masculinities in our society (Chung, 2021).

Fathers' working from home can support family planning

Fathers' WFH can also increase fertility rates, but the pattern depends on how couples organise paid work and care.

When both partners work full-time, **fathers' WFH is linked to mothers wanting more children** (Figure 5) (Yuan, forthcoming). In these dual-career couples — where both partners face strong work demands and mothers hold established career positions — fathers' flexibility may make having another child feel more manageable, rather than a sacrifice of career or income.

This was not found in couples where mothers already work part-time. In those households, domestic arrangements are typically already organised around the mother's greater availability, and fathers' WFH is less likely to change how work and care pressures are shared. Where fathers use time at home mainly to protect their own paid work rather than take on more care, existing patterns may even be reinforced.

Even for traditional families with mothers staying at home, fathers' WFH seems to provide some benefits (Yuan, forthcoming) — for example, by increasing fathers' availability to handle emergencies, school runs, even without domestic role renegotiations.

Fathers' WFH supports family planning when couples face real work-care pressures and fathers can use flexibility as a shared household resource.

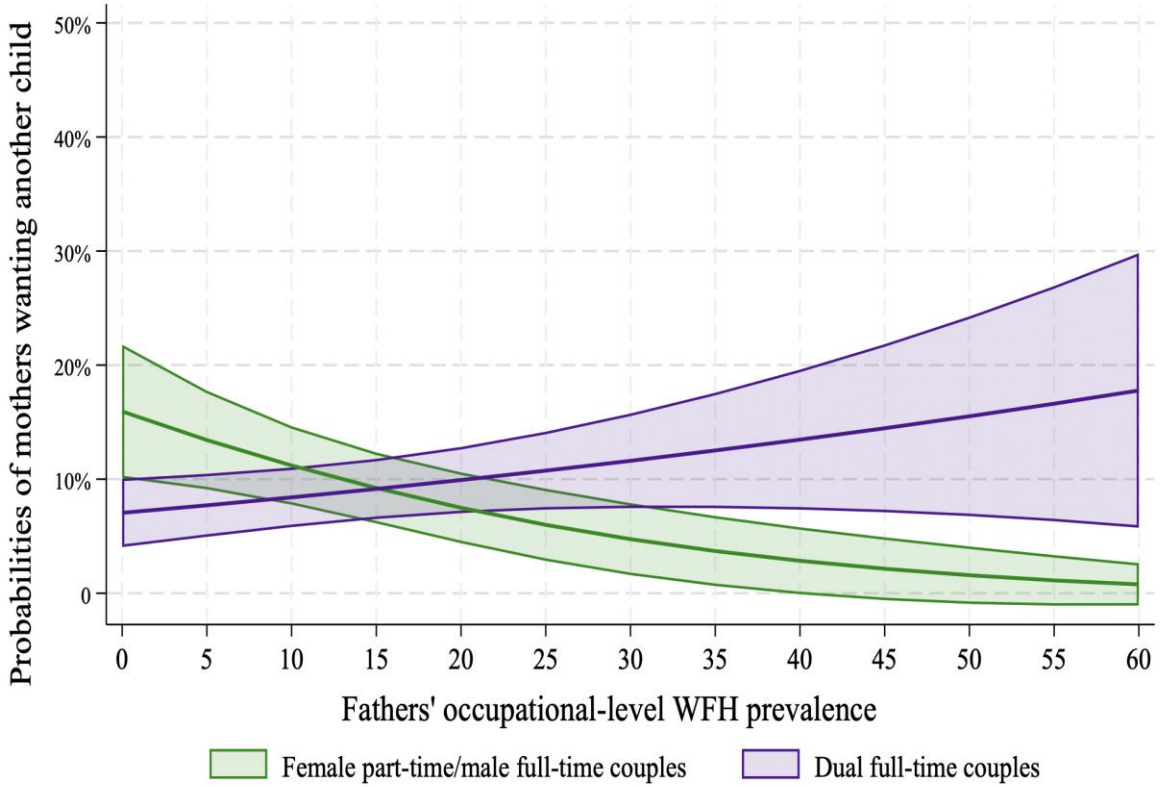


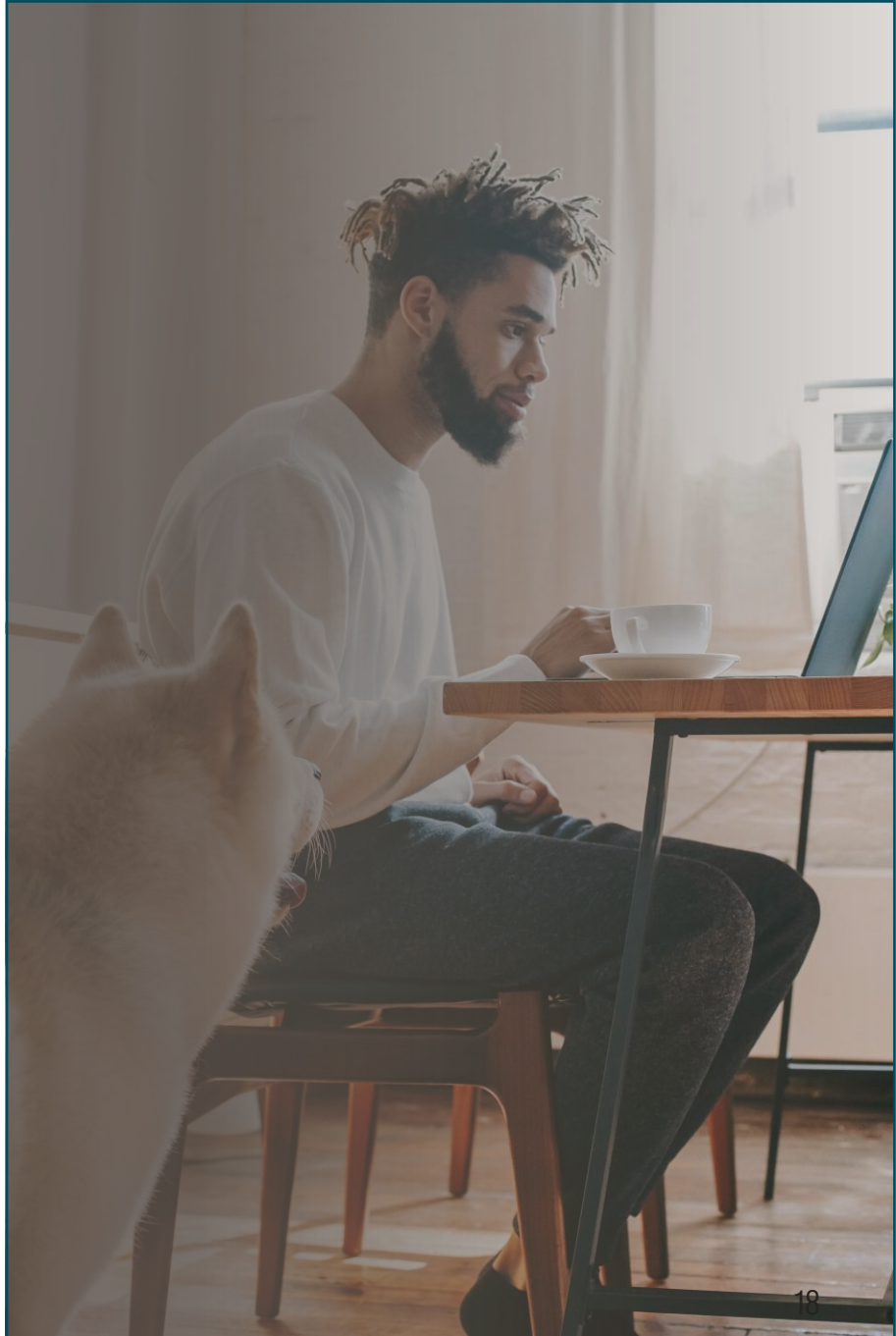
Figure 5. Predicted probability of mothers intending to have another child within next 3 years by fathers' occupational-level WFH prevalence and couples' employment structure, 2018-2020
Note: Upward trend indicates increased intentions to have a child; downward trend indicates decreased intentions to have a child.
Source: Yuan (forthcoming), using UK Household Longitudinal Study and Labour Force Survey data.

Fathers' working from home can speed up transition to parenthood

For couples without children, men's WFH is also associated with an earlier transition to parenthood — but this depends on women's commuting times (Yuan et al., forthcoming).

When women have longer commutes, time for family life is already compressed. Longer commutes may also reflect a stronger attachment to career opportunities further from home (Huinink & Feldhaus, 2012). For childless couples, these pressures are significant because decisions about having a first child are often tied to practical questions about how work and family life will need to change. When men work from home, household flexibility increases, making parenthood feel more feasible while allowing women to protect their careers. When women's commutes are short, the time pressures and career gains are lower, and men's WFH may add less additional household support.

These findings reinforce a consistent pattern across the report: men's WFH supports family planning when it provides real control over time, manageable workloads, and a genuine possibility of sharing care. Its value lies in helping couples organise paid work and family life together, rather than adding pressure to prove commitment or career dedication.



Fathers' working from home can benefit employers

Fathers' WFH is not only a family issue but also a business issue. When fathers value WFH and cannot freely use it, the consequences show up in retention, engagement, performance, and recruitment.

1 Skill retention

Working from home can also help employers retain staff. Research has long linked WFH with lower intentions to leave, and studies across different countries find similar patterns (Allen et al., 2015). A large workplace intervention also found that flexibility works best when paired with manager support, reducing both turnover intentions and actual exits over time (Moen et al., 2017). For fathers specifically, WFH has become embedded in how families organise work and care. For many families, fathers' WFH is no longer a nice-to-have but a must-have for managing the cost-of-living crisis and keeping household finances stable. Withdrawing it risks losing talent pool to companies who still provide WFH.

2 Engagement

WFH can also enhance job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Workers with WFH were found to show higher engagement and commitment than their office-based peers (Bloom et al., 2015). This is because employees usually perceive flexibility as an investment by the organisation and reciprocate with greater effort and loyalty. Thus, fathers' WFH is not simply a work-life benefit but a mechanism that actively strengthens organisational attachment.

3 Performance

The wider research also suggests that WFH can support rather than undermine performance. Workers who WFH tend to be at least as productive as those who do not, and often report greater job satisfaction, lower absenteeism, stronger commitment (Allen et al., 2015; Masuda et al., 2012), and higher productivity (Bloom et al., 2015). For fathers, the wellbeing and domestic engagement benefits of WFH reduce work-family conflict — which is itself associated with more consistent and sustainable performance over time (Masuda et al., 2012).

4 Recruitment and enhancing labour supply

Employers facing challenges with recruitment, retention, sickness absence, or skills shortages should consider WFH not as a concession but as a strategic tool (Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019). Jobs that advertise flexible working attract significantly more applications (Behavioural Insights Team, 2021). Organisations that normalise WFH and make it visible in job advertisements gain access to a wider and more experienced talent pool and signal a culture of outcomes-based management that appeals to high performers at all career stages (Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019). Furthermore, WFH will increase the labour supply of the workforce overall, by allowing workers who were once unable to engage in the labour market better access, including workers whose participation may otherwise be constrained by caring responsibilities (Chung & Van der Host, 2020), disability (Hoque & Bacon, 2022), health conditions, long commutes, or limited access to local employment opportunities (Holland et al., 2026).

INSIGHT 3:
WHY THE BENEFITS ARE CONDITIONAL

Evidence shows that fathers' WFH can benefit families and workplaces, but only when it is usable without penalty.

The benefits are real, but conditional

The evidence in this report shows that fathers' WFH can support wellbeing, gender equality, family planning, and retention. But these benefits do not follow automatically from working at home. Access is only the starting point.

Across the evidence, a consistent pattern emerges: fathers' WFH is most beneficial when it becomes a shared household resource , namely when it gives fathers real control over time, allows them to take part in care and housework, reduces pressure on mothers, and makes paid work and family life easier to manage together.

Yet fathers need to be able to use WFH without career penalties. Workloads need to be manageable, with clear boundaries rather than always-on expectations. Household conditions also matter: fathers' WFH is more likely to support equality when mothers have strong career attachment, when families face real work-care pressures, and when gender norms make fathers' care expected rather than exceptional.

When these conditions are missing, the benefits weaken. WFH may simply relocate men's paid work into the home, increase pressure to prove commitment, or leave existing traditional care divisions unchanged. This is why the next issue is not only whether fathers have access to WFH, but whether they can use it as care-compatible work without stigma or penalty.

Fathers' WFH works when...

- Fathers can use it without career penalty or stigma
- Workloads and boundaries between work and family are manageable
- Fathers are expected to care, not just be the breadwinner (e.g., egalitarian norms)
- Mothers have strong labour-market positions (e.g., higher occupational status, full-time work)
- Household routines create a real need for shared care (e.g., both partners working full-time, longer commutes)

Fathers' WFH fails when...

- WFH is monitored or treated as a gift or sign of lower commitment
- Fathers use it mainly to protect or expand paid work rather than to contribute at home
- Care remains a mothers' responsibility by default
- Work culture or breadwinner norms make men afraid to use flexibility for family reasons

Fathers who work from home face career penalties

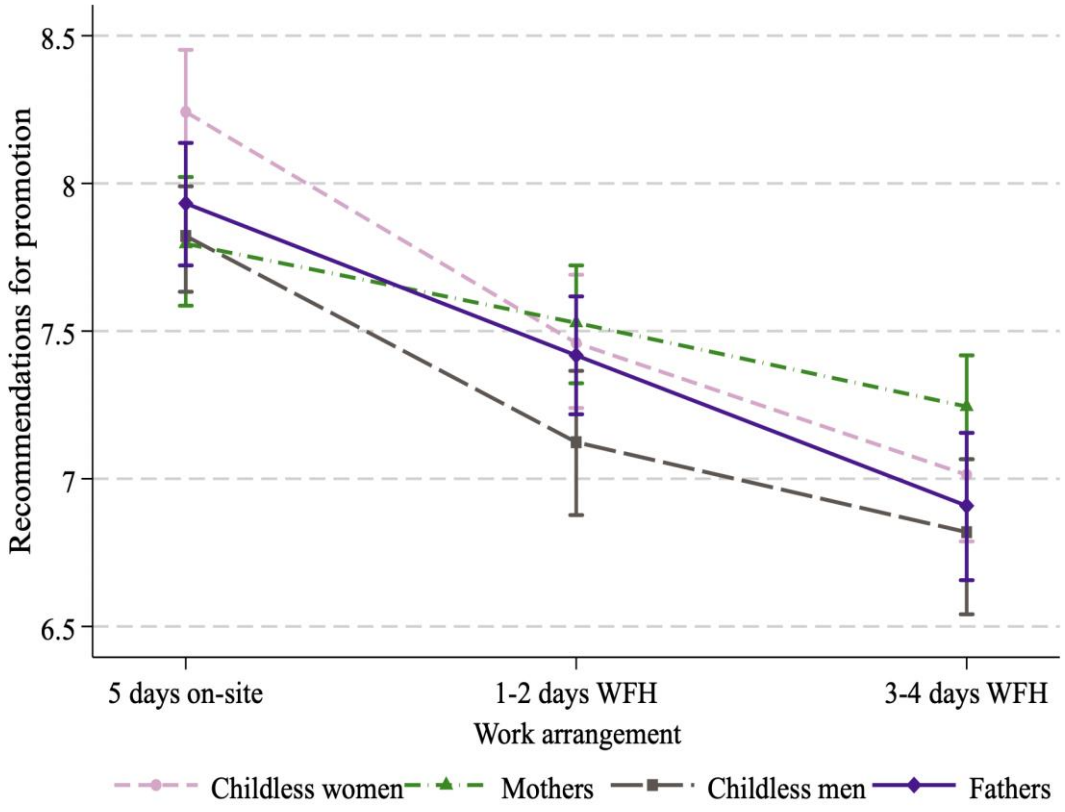


Figure 6. Degree of recommendation to promotion by WFH days, UK
Note: Higher degree means more likely to be promoted
Source: Chung et al. (forthcoming), using UK Household Longitudinal Study Innovation Panel.

One reason the benefits of fathers' WFH are conditional is that men can be penalised for using it. Figure 6 shows that workers who work from home are rated less favourably for promotion by managers in the UK (Chung et al., forthcoming). This penalty is especially strong for fathers compared to other groups of workers, especially when it comes to 3-4days WFH. Other evidence from the UK also shows that WFH employees are less likely to be considered for promotion, salary increases, and training — and this penalty falls hardest on men, both fathers and childless men (Kasperska et al., 2024).

Such career disadvantage for WFH employees is largely driven by assumptions about performance and commitment in the absence of direct information (Matysiak et al., 2025). As managers expect fathers and men to adhere to the ideal worker norm – namely someone without any responsibilities outside of work, i.e. caring responsibilities – and should be able to come into the office, they are penalized more than for example mothers.

These findings reveal a fundamental bias in how flexibility is interpreted at work, especially when it is used by fathers. This matters because fathers' ability to use WFH for care depends not only on formal access, but on whether their workplace treats flexibility as compatible with commitment and productivity. When fathers expect WFH to damage how they are perceived at work, they avoid using it altogether (Working Families, 2025), when working from home end up working harder and longer, rather than engaging in family life (Chung, 2022b).

How WFH is framed matters

The design of workplace policy also matters. Figure 7 shows that when WFH is framed as a special arrangement for mothers, it can reinforce the idea that flexibility signals lower commitment, penalising everyone who uses it (Chung et al., forthcoming). Where flexible working is available to all employees regardless of caring responsibilities, the penalty weakens significantly.

This is especially important for fathers. If WFH remains coded as a mothers' policy, may it be through policy framing or through patterns of use within the organisation, fathers face stronger pressure to avoid using it for family reasons or to use it only in ways that signal continued career dedication (e.g., working longer hours, staying online outside core hours) (Chung, 2022b). A flexibility-for-all approach can help reduce stigma by making to normalise fathers' use of WFH making it visible, and legitimate. Where all workers use WFH, it is more likely to be treated as and result in a performance-enhancing feature of modern work.

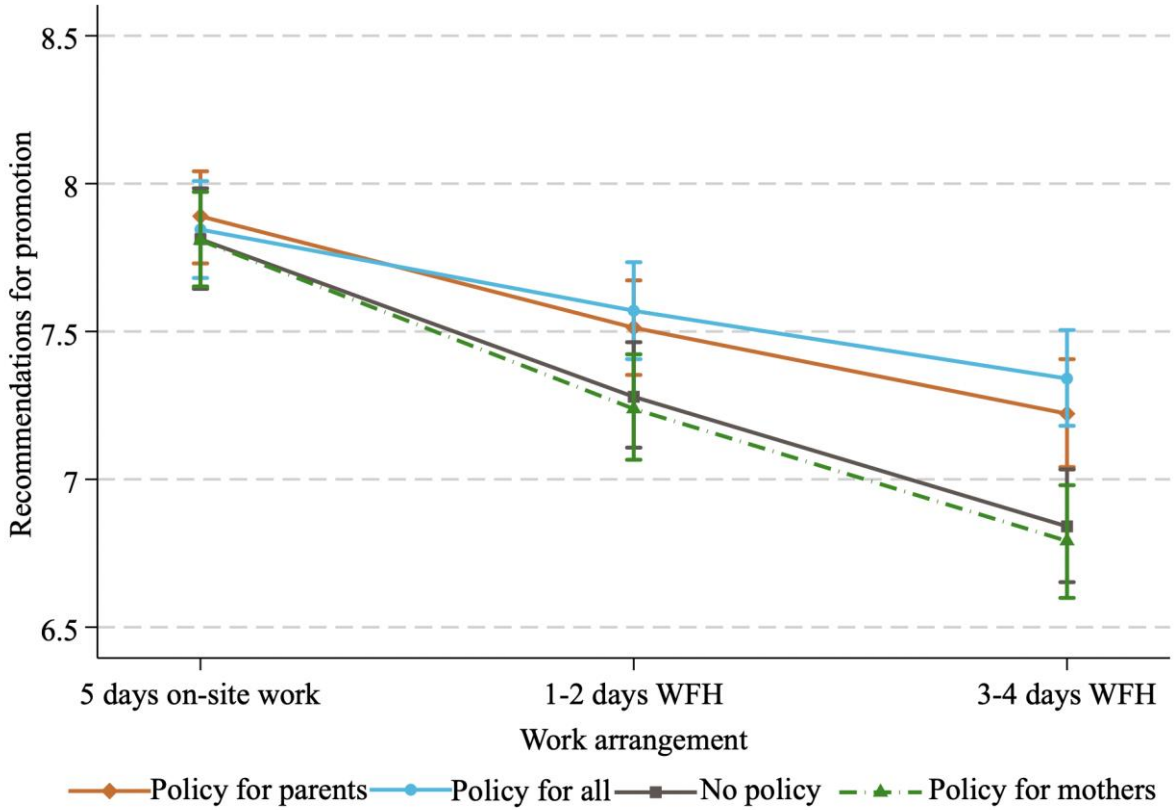
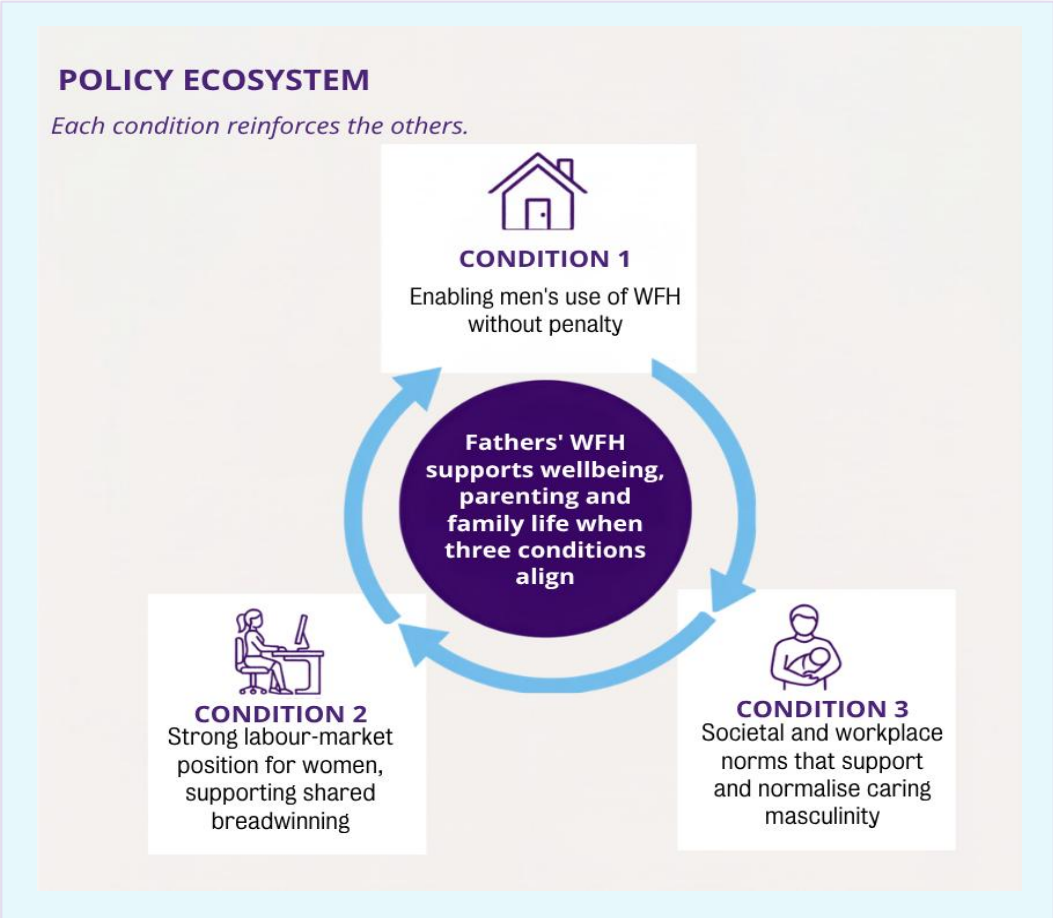


Figure 7. Degree of recommendation to promotion by WFH days and policy framing, UK
Note: Higher degree means more likely to be promoted
Source: Chung et al. (forthcoming), using UK Household Longitudinal Study Innovation Panel.

RECOMMENDATIONS: HOW TO MAXIMISE THE BENEFITS

A coordinated policy ecosystem

How to maximise the benefits



This report presents evidence that fathers' WFH can support wellbeing, gender equality, and family life. WFH can benefit every family — giving fathers more time at home, easing daily pressures, and supporting wellbeing regardless of how paid work is divided. But the report also shows that its power to shift the division of care and advance gender equality is conditional, and is realised most fully when three mutually reinforcing conditions align: fathers having genuine access to WFH without career cost; a labour market and workplace culture that supports women's employment[1] and strengthens mothers' position where they are employed; and gender norms, at work and at home, that make fathers' caregiving a norm rather than an exception. No single condition is sufficient on its own.

Progress in one domain creates the conditions for the others to operate; gaps in any one limit the overall impact. Formal access for fathers is not enough to drive sustainable shifts without bargaining power and supportive norms. Women's bargaining power is harder to exercise if fathers have no opportunity to contribute at home or face career penalties when doing so. Supportive norms matter less if workloads make care impossible for fathers and mothers. Governments and organisations both have an essential role to play, and neither can afford to wait for the other to act first. The recommendations that follow address each condition directly, drawing on the evidence presented in this report.

[1] It is worth noting that even in traditional male-breadwinner households including those where mothers are not in paid work, fathers' WFH is valuable as it supports fathers' wellbeing, presence, and involvement in family life (Yuan, forthcoming). It is just that the potential to rebalance care and advance gender equality may be greatest where these conditions are met.

Enable men to use working from home without penalty

1 Frame WFH as smart working tool, for all workers

When flexible working is positioned primarily as an arrangement for mothers or carers, it becomes more stigmatised for everyone who uses it — and fathers pay the heaviest price (Wang & Chung, 2026). Thus, making framing WFH a future proof smart working policy that is available to all employees without career consequence, regardless of caring status, and role modelled by senior staff are the most direct ways to reduce the stigma that currently discourages fathers, and others, from using flexibility for care or other personal reasons.

2 Move from the right to request towards the right to have

The current right to request flexible working places the burden of negotiation on individual employees, reproducing existing power imbalances between workers and employers. Fathers in lower-status jobs — who may benefit most from WFH (Brega et al., 2026) — are often least able to secure it. Narrowing the statutory grounds for refusal, and requiring transparent reporting of approval rates by gender and occupational status as part of the gender pay gap report, would shift the framework from formal entitlement to genuine access. Stronger anti-discriminatory measures for workers who use flexible working and other family-friendly arrangements are also necessary.

3 Measure performance on outcomes, not by hours or presence

Visibility in the office and long hours work continues to be treated as a proxy for commitment in many workplaces, and this is one of the mechanisms through which fathers who WFH face career penalties. When performance expectations are explicit and output-based, the promotion and salary penalty for WFH can largely disappear (Matysiak et al., 2025). Organisations can shift this by building performance frameworks around clear deliverables and results rather than hours worked or visibility, and by training managers to evaluate remote employees consistently with in-office colleagues. This change benefits productivity, company profitability, as well as equality — and removes one of the most significant practical barriers to fathers using WFH for care.

Strengthen women's labour market position

1 Expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare

UK childcare costs remain among the highest in the OECD (OECD, 2023), creating significant pressure on families but ultimately in many cases, push mothers to reduce working hours if not drop out of the labour market after childbirth. This concentration of part-time and lower-status employment of women can act as a barrier for what the report identifies as the key condition for domestic rebalancing – namely the strong labour market attachment of women. Expanding public childcare provision beyond the 38 weeks, reducing out-of-pocket costs, and extending coverage to younger children to sync with parental leave systems, would support mothers' continued labour market position — again a key condition the rest of the ecosystem depends on.

2 Link flexible and remote working data to gender pay gap reporting

The existing gender pay gap reporting framework, strengthened from 2027 with mandatory action plans, provides an established mechanism for accountability in companies. This framework, however, can be extended to include flexible working requests, uptake, and approval rates by gender and occupational position, as well as career progression outcomes for those who use flexible arrangements. Making this data public would show whether men and women have equal opportunity to access and use WFH in practice, whether doing so carries a career cost, what it means for gender equality. This will allow us to indirectly measure workplace cultures to see if they actively support or discourage men's use for family reasons — creating transparency across all three conditions of the ecosystem simultaneously.

3 Consider broader working time reform

The ideal worker norm — built around long, uninterrupted working hours and complete dedication to work — systematically disadvantages those with caring responsibilities. Moreover, as more couples move to dual-full-time employment (ONS, 2022), total household labour-market hours have risen substantially, leaving families less collective time for care even as the need for it remains, or even intentisfied under intensive parenting norms. Working-time reforms such as reduced standard hours (a four-day week) for everyone — rather than relying on part-time work, which stays concentrated among women and carries persistent pay and progression penalties — would give all parents more time to care while tackling the bias against non-standard working patterns at its source (Chung, 2022a). In doing so it addresses a structural feature of the labour market that rights-based frameworks alone have not resolved. Studies of reduced-hours models show that productivity is maintained, and often improved, alongside better work–family and wellbeing outcomes (Celestin & Vanitha, 2023), giving that reform a business as well as an equality rationale.

Enable men to care and be cared for

1 Reform paternity leave to be well-paid and non-transferable

The design of paternity leave shapes fathering norms not just for early-years but throughout a child's life. The UK's current two-week provision at a low flat rate signals that fathers' early caregiving is supplementary, putting the primary if not sole responsibility on mothers. Evidence shows that extended, well-compensated, non-transferable leave can shift fathers' attitudes and behaviour over time. These early attitudinal shifts shape whether fathers later treat WFH as a legitimate tool for care (Cano & Hofmeister, 2023). Reforming paternity leave to increase its duration, improve wage replacement, and introducing a meaningful use-it-or-lose-it element will send a clear sign that fathers' caregiving is expected rather than an exception. As surveys show most fathers alongside businesses agree with such an approach.

2 Introduce a right to disconnect

WFH only supports fathers' domestic engagement and improved wellbeing when it provides genuine time and space for care, not when it extends the working day or requires constant always-on availability. A statutory right to disconnect, already implemented in several countries, would protect work-family boundaries and ensure that WFH creates genuine opportunities for involvement at home rather than simply relocating paid work there resulting in the encroachment of family and private time. This is particularly important for fathers, who face greater cultural pressure to demonstrate commitment through extended availability to live up to their ideal worker and breadwinner standards.

3 Support public campaigning that normalises caring fatherhood, starting from the public sector

Structural reform changes what is possible; sustained public campaigning changes what is expected. Evidence from countries with long-running paternity leave reform shows that norms shift, but only when policy support is maintained over time and reinforced culturally. Education and media campaigns that present involved fatherhood as normal — rather than optional or heroic — complement institutional change by shaping the social expectations that fathers themselves internalise. Without this cultural shift, even well-designed policy may leave behaviour largely intact. Experience from other countries have shown that the public sector policies is important, as a model employer, expanding and protecting fathers right to care through leave provision and supporting their flexible working can help shift these norms.

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