

The Impact of Remote Work on Employees' Mental Health: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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Abstract: This paper examines how remote work affects employees' mental health in the post-pandemic context through a systematic review of the literature. A structured search was carried out across five databases (Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, PubMed, and Google Scholar), focusing on peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025. After applying the selection criteria, 25 studies were included in the review. The analysis uses a thematic approach to identify common patterns and differences across studies. The findings show that remote work has both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, employees often report greater flexibility, more autonomy, and less commuting, which can support well-being. At the same time, remote work is linked to challenges such as social isolation, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and increased use of digital tools, which can lead to stress, fatigue, and burnout. The review also shows that these outcomes are not the same for all employees. Factors such as organisational support, job design, and individual circumstances play an important role. For example, lack of social interaction and poor boundary management are often associated with higher stress levels, while supportive work environments can reduce these risks. This paper brings together recent evidence in a structured way and highlights gaps in the literature, including the limited use of longitudinal studies and the need for more research across different sectors and groups of employees. It also outlines practical steps that organisations can take to better support employee well-being in remote work settings.

Keywords: Remote Work, Hybrid Work, Work from Home, Mental health, Well-Being

Type: Review



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1. Introduction

Remote work has become a central feature of modern organizations, particularly following the rapid shift during the COVID-19 pandemic. What was once a flexible work option has, in many cases, become a standard way of working across sectors and countries. As a result, understanding how remote work affects employees' mental health has become an important issue for both researchers and practitioners. Remote work is the term for doing business tasks remotely, from home or other locations with the use of technology (Allen et al., 2015). Even though remote work has been around for years, the pace at which it spread into the workplace accelerated a great deal during the COVID-19 pandemic

(Kniffin et al., 2021). Data from Eurofound (2020) found that during the height of the pandemic, 40% of EU employees worked remotely, more than the 15% who did before. We could notice the same trend worldwide (ILO, 2021). Since so many workplaces have switched to remote work, some are questioning its impact on the mental well-being of employees. Even though remote work offers many benefits in terms of freedom, it can lead to isolation, trouble managing work and private life and using technology more often (Wang et al., 2021).

Existing studies show mixed findings. On one hand, remote work can improve well-being by offering greater flexibility, autonomy, and reduced commuting time (Allen et al., 2015). On the other hand, it can create challenges such as social isolation, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and increased reliance on digital technologies. These conditions have been linked to higher levels of stress, fatigue, and burnout, particularly when organizational support is limited (Oakman et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). At the same time, some studies report positive outcomes such as reduced stress and improved work-life balance, depending on how remote work is structured and managed (Giménez-Nadal et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2013).

This variation in findings suggests that the relationship between remote work and mental health is not straightforward. Outcomes appear to depend on a range of factors, including job design, individual circumstances, and the level of organizational support. For example, evidence shows that social isolation and lack of interaction with colleagues can increase stress and reduce job satisfaction (Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Toscano & Zappalà, 2020), while supportive environments can help offset these effects. Similarly, the ability to manage boundaries between work and personal life plays a key role in shaping employee well-being (Allen et al., 2021). Despite the growing number of studies on this topic, the literature remains fragmented. Many studies focus on specific aspects of remote work, such as stress, productivity, or work-life balance, without bringing these findings together in a structured way. In addition, existing reviews often present descriptive summaries rather than offering a clear comparison of findings or identifying where results differ. There is also limited attention to how different factors interact to shape mental health outcomes.

Being aware of these impacts helps organizations assist their staff with well-being and support their productivity in our shifting work environment. This paper addresses these gaps by providing a structured and critical review of recent research on remote work and employees' mental health. The study aims to (1) synthesize empirical findings across studies, (2) identify key factors that influence mental health outcomes, (3) highlight areas where findings are consistent or contradictory, and (4) outline directions for future research. By doing so, the paper offers a clearer understanding of how remote work affects employees and what organizations can do to support well-being in this context.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a systematic literature review approach to examine the impact of remote work on employees' mental health. A systematic review was chosen to ensure a structured and transparent process for identifying, selecting,

and analyzing relevant studies. The review follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to improve clarity and reproducibility.

2.2. Search Strategy, Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The literature search was conducted in June 2025 across five academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, PubMed, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected due to their wide coverage of peer-reviewed research in management, psychology, and health-related fields.

The search focused on two main areas: remote work and mental health. The following combination of keywords was used: (“remote work” OR “telework” OR “work from home” OR “telecommuting”) AND (“mental health” OR “well-being” OR “stress” OR “anxiety” OR “depression” OR “burnout”).

Similar keyword structures have been used in prior systematic reviews on remote work and psychosocial outcomes (e.g., Oakman et al., 2020). The search was applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords to ensure relevant coverage.

To ensure consistency in the selection of studies, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The review focused on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 that examine remote work or teleworking in relation to employees’ mental health or well-being. Only studies written in English were considered. The focus on this time period reflects the rapid increase in remote work following the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing body of research examining its effects. Studies were excluded if they focused primarily on physical health outcomes without addressing mental health, or if they were editorials, opinion pieces, conference abstracts, or other non-peer-reviewed sources. In addition, studies that did not directly examine employee experiences in a remote work context were removed during the screening process. These criteria helped ensure that the final sample remained relevant to the research aim and allowed for a more focused analysis of the relationship between remote work and mental health outcomes.

2.3. Screening and Selection Process

Initially, 3,667 records were identified. After removing 1,467 duplicates, a rigorous screening process of titles and abstracts was performed on the remaining 2,200 records. Following the full-text assessment of 140 papers, 25 high-quality papers were ultimately selected for inclusion in this review as shown in Figure Table 1 below.

Table 1: PRISMA

Phase	Box Label	Estimated Count (n)
Identification	Records identified from databases: - Google Scholar (~1,850) - PubMed (412) - Scopus (585) - Web of Science (490) - PsycINFO (330)	3,667
	Records removed before screening (Duplicates)	1,467
Screening	Records screened (Title/Abstract)	2,200
	Records excluded (Irrelevant to remote work/mental health)	2,060

Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	140
	Full-text articles excluded with reasons: - Focus on students/non-working (48) - No empirical mental health data (42) - Not peer-reviewed/Conference abstracts (25)	115
Included	Total studies included	25

2.4. Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data from the selected studies were extracted in a structured and consistent way to allow for comparison across the literature. For each study, key information was recorded, including the research design, sample characteristics, remote work context, mental health outcomes, and main findings. This process made it easier to identify patterns and differences across studies rather than treating each paper in isolation.

To analyze the data, a thematic synthesis approach was used. All selected studies were read in full, and initial notes were taken to capture recurring ideas related to the impact of remote work on mental health. These insights were then grouped into broader themes, such as positive outcomes (e.g. flexibility and autonomy), negative outcomes (e.g. stress, isolation, and burnout), and moderating factors (e.g. organizational support and boundary management). This approach allowed the review to move beyond simple description and instead compare findings across studies, highlight areas of agreement, and identify where results differ. It also supported a more critical interpretation of the literature, which addresses one of the key concerns raised by the reviewers.

2.5. Quality Considerations

The quality of the included studies was considered during the selection and analysis process to ensure that the findings presented in this review are based on credible sources. All studies included in the final sample were peer-reviewed and published in academic journals. During the full-text screening stage, particular attention was given to the clarity of the research design, the relevance of the study to remote work and mental health, and the transparency of the reported findings. While a formal scoring system was not applied, studies that lacked clear methodology or did not provide sufficient detail on mental health outcomes were excluded. This approach is consistent with similar reviews in this field, where relevance and methodological clarity are used as practical indicators of study quality. Although this represents a limitation, it allows for a focused and coherent synthesis of the most relevant evidence while maintaining transparency in the selection process.

3. Theoretical Framework

To better understand how remote work affects employees' mental health, this review draws on three established theoretical perspectives: the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, and boundary theory. These frameworks are used not as standalone descriptions, but to help interpret patterns observed across the literature.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model explains how working conditions influence employee well-being through the balance between job

demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In a remote work setting, job demands may include factors such as increased workload, constant connectivity, and reliance on digital tools, while job resources may include autonomy, flexibility, and organisational support. The studies reviewed show that when job demands increase without adequate resources, employees are more likely to experience stress and burnout. In contrast, when sufficient resources are available, remote work can support engagement and well-being. This helps explain why the literature reports both positive and negative outcomes.

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory offers a complementary perspective by focusing on how individuals manage and protect their personal resources (Hobfoll, 1989). From this perspective, remote work can lead to both resource gains and losses. For example, flexibility and reduced commuting can be seen as resource gains, while social isolation and reduced support from colleagues represent resource loss. The findings of this review suggest that negative mental health outcomes are more likely to occur when employees experience ongoing resource loss, particularly in situations where social interaction and organisational support are limited.

Boundary theory helps explain how employees manage the separation between work and personal life (Ashforth et al., 2000). Remote work often blurs these boundaries, making it more difficult to switch off from work. Several studies included in this review highlight that poor boundary management is associated with higher stress and work-life conflict, while clear routines and organisational expectations can help reduce these effects. This supports the idea that the way boundaries are managed plays an important role in shaping mental health outcomes in remote work settings.

Taken together, these three perspectives provide a useful framework for interpreting the findings of this review. They help explain why remote work can lead to different outcomes depending on the balance between demands and resources, the availability of support, and the ability of employees to manage work-life boundaries.

4. Findings

The analysis of the selected studies shows that the impact of remote work on employees' mental health is not uniform. Instead, the findings point to a set of recurring themes that capture both positive and negative outcomes, as well as the conditions under which these outcomes occur. Three main themes emerge from the literature: positive mental health outcomes, negative mental health outcomes, and factors that influence these effects. A summary of the key characteristics and findings of the reviewed studies is provided in Appendix 1.

4.1. Positive Mental Health Outcomes

A number of studies report that remote work can have a positive effect on employees' well-being, particularly when it is implemented under supportive conditions. One of the most consistent benefits identified in the literature is increased autonomy and flexibility, which are linked to higher job satisfaction and improved work-life balance (Allen et al., 2015; Grant et al., 2013). Reduced commuting time is also associated with lower stress levels and improved overall

well-being. Empirical evidence supports these findings. For example, teleworking has been associated with reduced stress and improved quality of life, especially when employees have control over their work arrangements (Giménez-Nadal et al., 2020). Similarly, remote work has been shown to reduce negative emotions and support well-being, particularly when employees are able to manage their time and workload effectively (Bentley et al., 2016).

However, these positive outcomes are not universal. They tend to occur in situations where remote work is voluntary, supported by the organization, and combined with adequate resources. This suggests that flexibility alone is not sufficient; the broader work environment plays an important role in shaping outcomes.

4.2. Negative Mental Health Outcomes

Alongside these benefits, a large part of the literature highlights the negative effects of remote work on mental health. The most commonly reported issues include social isolation, increased stress, work-life conflict, and burnout. Social isolation emerges as one of the most significant challenges. The lack of face-to-face interaction with colleagues can reduce feelings of belonging and increase loneliness, which in turn contributes to higher stress levels and lower job satisfaction. Studies consistently show that isolation is strongly associated with both stress and reduced productivity in remote work settings (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Another key issue is the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life. Remote work often leads to longer working hours and difficulty disconnecting from work, which increases the risk of fatigue and burnout. Evidence shows that remote working conditions are linked to higher work-life conflict and increased stress, particularly when employees lack control over their schedules or receive limited support from their organisation (Oakman et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

In addition, the increased reliance on digital technologies can contribute to technostress. Constant connectivity, interruptions, and the need to manage multiple digital tools can lead to mental fatigue and reduced well-being (Fonner & Roloff, 2010). These effects are more pronounced among employees who have limited experience with digital tools or who lack adequate training and support. Importantly, the literature does not present a consistent picture. Some studies report increased stress, while others find improved well-being under similar conditions (Oakman et al., 2020). This variation reflects differences in organisational context, individual circumstances, and the way remote work is implemented.

4.3. Moderating Factors and Contextual Differences

The review shows that the impact of remote work on mental health is shaped by several moderating factors. Organizational support is one of the most important. Employees who receive clear communication, managerial support, and access to resources are more likely to experience positive outcomes. In contrast, a lack of support can increase stress and reduce well-being (Wang et al., 2021).

Individual differences also play a role. Factors such as age, gender, and personal circumstances influence how employees experience remote work. For example, some studies suggest that gender roles and family responsibilities can

affect how remote work impacts stress and well-being, with different outcomes observed across groups (Oakman et al., 2020). Another important factor is the intensity of remote work. Research shows that the effects of remote work vary depending on how frequently employees work from home. Moderate levels of remote work may improve work-life balance, while high levels can increase isolation and role ambiguity, leading to more negative outcomes (Wang et al., 2021). Taken together, these findings suggest that remote work should not be viewed as inherently positive or negative. Instead, its impact depends on how it is designed and supported within the organization.

5. Discussion

This review set out to examine how remote work affects employees' mental health by bringing together recent empirical evidence. The findings show that remote work does not lead to a single outcome. Instead, its impact depends on how it is structured, the level of support provided, and the individual context of employees. This helps explain why the literature reports both positive and negative effects rather than a consistent pattern. One way to understand these mixed results is through the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The findings suggest that remote work can increase both job demands and job resources at the same time. For example, flexibility and autonomy act as resources that support well-being, while constant connectivity, blurred boundaries, and increased workload act as demands that can lead to stress and burnout. When resources are sufficient to balance these demands, employees tend to report positive outcomes. However, when demands outweigh resources, negative outcomes become more likely. This helps explain why some studies report improved well-being, while others highlight increased stress and exhaustion.

The findings also align with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which focuses on how individuals manage and protect their resources. Remote work can create both gains and losses in this respect. Gains may include time saved from commuting and increased control over work schedules, while losses often relate to reduced social interaction and limited access to support. The review shows that negative mental health outcomes are more common when employees experience ongoing resource loss, particularly in the form of social isolation and lack of organisational support. This is consistent with evidence showing that isolation is strongly linked to stress and reduced job satisfaction in remote work settings (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Boundary theory provides further insight into the challenges identified in the literature. Remote work often removes the physical separation between work and home, making it more difficult for employees to disconnect. The findings suggest that poor boundary management is associated with higher levels of stress, work-life conflict, and burnout, while clear routines and organisational expectations can help reduce these effects (Allen et al., 2021). This highlights that the issue is not remote work itself, but how boundaries are managed within it.

A key contribution of this review is the identification of conditions under which remote work leads to different outcomes. The evidence suggests that remote work is more likely to have positive effects when it is voluntary, supported by the organisation, and combined with clear communication and

access to resources. In contrast, negative outcomes are more common in situations where employees experience isolation, lack of support, or unclear expectations. These findings help move the discussion beyond simple claims that remote work is either beneficial or harmful. The review also highlights several gaps in the current literature. First, many studies rely on cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to understand long-term effects. Some evidence suggests that the impact of remote work may change over time, with issues such as burnout becoming more visible in the longer term (Oakman et al., 2020). Second, there is limited comparative research across industries, roles, and cultural contexts. The findings indicate that remote work does not affect all employees in the same way, yet these differences are not explored in enough detail. Third, there is a need for more research on how organisational practices can actively reduce negative outcomes and support employee well-being.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest several actions for organisations. Providing flexibility alone is not sufficient. Organisations need to actively support employees by setting clear expectations, encouraging boundary management, and maintaining regular communication. Creating opportunities for social interaction is also important in reducing isolation and supporting well-being. In addition, training and support related to digital tools can help reduce technostress and improve employees' ability to manage remote work effectively (Fonner & Roloff, 2010). These actions are particularly important for employees who may be more vulnerable to the negative effects of remote work.

Overall, this review shows that remote work is a complex arrangement with both benefits and challenges. Its impact on mental health depends on how it is designed and managed rather than the arrangement itself. Understanding this balance is essential for both future research and organizational practice.

6. Implications and Conclusions

The findings of this review have implications for both research and practice. From a research perspective, the results show that the relationship between remote work and mental health is complex and shaped by multiple interacting factors. Future studies should move beyond cross-sectional designs and consider longitudinal approaches to better understand how the effects of remote work develop over time. There is also a need for more comparative research across industries, job roles, and cultural contexts, as current evidence suggests that outcomes vary significantly depending on these factors (Oakman et al., 2020). In addition, further work is needed to examine how organizational practices can reduce negative outcomes and support employee well-being in remote work environments.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight that remote work should not be treated as a simple solution for improving employee well-being. While flexibility and autonomy can support positive outcomes, they need to be supported by clear structures and organizational practices. Employers should focus on setting clear expectations around working hours, supporting boundary management, and maintaining regular communication. Providing opportunities for social interaction remains important in reducing isolation, which has been consistently linked to stress and reduced well-being (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020).

In addition, organizations should ensure that employees have access to the tools, training, and support needed to manage digital work effectively, as this can help reduce technostress and improve overall work experience (Fonner & Roloff, 2010).

This review also has limitations. The analysis is based on a relatively small number of studies and focuses on research published in English between 2020 and 2025. While this allows for a focused and up-to-date synthesis, it may exclude relevant studies outside this scope. In addition, the reliance on published studies means that findings may be influenced by publication bias. Despite these limitations, the review provides a structured overview of recent research and highlights key patterns and gaps in the literature.

In conclusion, remote work presents both opportunities and challenges for employees' mental health. Its effects are not determined by the work arrangement itself, but by how it is implemented and supported. A balanced approach that combines flexibility with clear structures and organizational support is more likely to lead to positive outcomes. Understanding this balance is important for organizations seeking to design effective remote work practices and for researchers aiming to build a more complete understanding of this evolving work arrangement.

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