Can work from home (WFH) expand employment opportunities for the disadvantaged?

Work from home (WFH) has surged in America, rising from 5% of workdays in 2019 to almost 30% by February 2023, and looking likely to settle near 25%. This project will investigate the employment implications for population groups defined by demographics, skills, health status, family circumstances, and location. On average, employees value the opportunity to WFH much of the week at 8% of pay. So, there is a potential for WFH to expand employment, especially among disadvantaged groups – by drawing them into the labor force, by mitigating the effects of long commutes and a scarcity of nearby jobs, and by accommodating people with mobility limitations and adverse health conditions. To address these issues, the project will build on the PI's monthly Survey of Working Arrangements and attitudes (SWAA), which currently polls 10,000 US residents aged 20-64 each month. The SWAA is the longest-running monthly survey of WFH in the US, having started in May 2020. It is used extensively in academic, policy, business and media work on working from home, with public micro and aggregate data and research available at www.wfhresearch.com.

In addition to our current questions on demographics, working arrangements and more, we will integrate new survey questions on health and disability status, how that status affects desires to work from home, caregiving responsibilities, the availability of nearby jobs, whether opportunities to WFH mitigate the negative effects of long commutes and limited public transit options, and how desired and actual WFH rates vary over time and by race, ethnicity, gender, location, population density, and more. We will also leverage large differences across cities to estimate how the abundance of WFH affects the employment rates and earnings of disadvantaged persons. Our results will inform debates around the effects of WFH and help formulate policies to raise employment and earnings among disadvantaged persons, including those with physical limitations and caregiving responsibilities at home.

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Project areas:
Focal Area 1: Disparities by Race, Ethnicity, and Sex.
Focal Area 6: Addressing Employment Barriers for People with Disabilities