



# Flexible work and psychological safety - Best practice to advance psychologically safe work from alternate locations: A report on findings from a survey of New South Wales employees





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# Phase 1 Report

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# Executive Summary

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## Background

The changing world of work encompasses emerging trends that are complex and require nuanced and holistic solutions, such as those offered through flexible work arrangements. In 2020, remote working became an increasingly common form of flexible work arrangement as governments, employers and workers responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by rapidly adopting working from home. In fact, according to the NSW Innovation and Productivity Council (2020), by May 2020, it is estimated that 46% of NSW workers were working remotely due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Whether the proportion of NSW workers who work remotely will remain at this level in the post-COVID-19 pandemic landscape is unknown, however, indications are that many workers will continue to work remotely in some capacity in the future. This shift towards new ways of working highlights the need for employers to ensure that they are meeting their obligation to provide a safe working environment for flexible workers.

## Overview of the study

This research study examined the psychosocial risks associated with undertaking flexible and remote work, seeking to provide employers and workers with evidence-based information to aid in the prevention of psychological harm for flexible workers. The study comprised three phases: 1) a survey of a diverse sample of flexible workers which collected data concerning their exposure to psychosocial risks; 2) interviews concerning psychosocial risk exposures, and the barriers that flexible workers face when seeking to engage with workplace health and safety (WHS) systems; and 3) the development of a model of best practice for flexible working arrangements that promotes participation in workplace health and safety by flexible workers.

In this report, we discuss the findings from Phase One. The report aimed to develop new knowledge concerning the nature and extent of exposure to psychosocial risks for flexible and remote workers within NSW organisations, and the level of exposure across different demographic groupings. The first phase of the project had two primary objectives:

- 1) Examine the psychosocial risks associated with flexible work arrangements, with a focus on employees within New South Wales.
- 2) Explore and model the extent to which flexible workers with diverse demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, carer responsibilities, disability etc.) are exposed to psychosocial risk.

A complementary line of enquiry examined the engagement of flexible and remote workers with the general Work, Health and Safety (WHS) processes within their organisation. The analysis of

the new knowledge is then used to provide an evidence-based platform, from which recommendations can be drawn regarding how organisations can manage flexible workers with different demographic characteristics more effectively within a psychologically safe work environment.

## Methods

In Phase 1 of the study, a questionnaire survey was used to solicit anonymous data from NSW flexible workers about the potential psychological risks a worker can be exposed to in the workplace, as well as a wide range of data about job demands and job resources, wellbeing-related outcomes, and the degree of engagement with workplace health and safety. The survey development, which was undertaken as a co-design exercise with the CWHS, included a review of the literature on psychosocial risks and flexible work arrangements to identify suitable survey tools and measures. Decisions regarding which survey instruments were selected for inclusion in the study were based on three considerations: variables that had been found to be relevant to flexible workers and wellbeing; variables relevant to WHS participation; and the adoption of a conceptual model derived from the scholarly literature and based on findings from previous studies on psychosocial risks.

A total of 1318 respondents completed the survey, of which 1039 respondents identified themselves as being flexible (and/or remote) workers. A large diversity of demographic characteristics for flexible workers was captured within the sample, along with a wide range of industry sectors, work roles and levels. The survey also collected data about the type of remote or flexible working arrangements carried out by respondents, and detailed demographic information. To meet the first, aforementioned objective, statistical group tests were used to compare the responses to the psychosocial risk variables by the flexible workers sample (i.e. n=1039), and the non-flexible workers sample (n=279), to meet the second objective, regression modelling of the responses of the flexible workers sample (n=1039) identified the statistical relationships between demographic, work characteristic variables, and a variety of psychosocial risk outcomes.

## Findings

Overall, our analysis of the experiences of NSW-based flexible workers suggests that:

- Flexible working did not create additional cognitive load or psychological demand on workers, compared to office-based employees, with the exception of social isolation and ill-treatment.
- Respondents who worked flexibly experienced a more positive working environment than non-flexible workers, and in particular, more support.



- Psychological health did not differ significantly between flexible and non-flexible workers. Wellbeing, psychological distress, job stress or burnout were reported at similarly moderate levels by flexible and non-flexible workers alike.
- The regression analyses highlighted that flexible workers' industry, contract type, and demographic features were not overly efficacious in shaping psychosocial risk. However, across several psychosocial risk outcomes, age was significant in reducing risk, while having a disability, caring for a partner, or caring for children under five were associated with increased risk level for negative health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Safety compliance and safety participation were rated significantly lower by flexible workers.

### Implications for practice and research

The findings from Phase 1 of this study suggest that flexible workers experience a positive work environment, facing similar levels of job demand compared with non-flexible workers. The findings also identified that flexible workers rated their safety compliance and participation significantly lower than non-flexible workers, suggesting the need for a greater research and practice focus about involvement in WHS for flexible workers.

The study found that the flexible workers perceived a superior work environment, with the exception of exposure to ill-treatment and professional isolation. Marginalised flexible workers had increased risk of negative psychosocial conditions and health outcomes, notably flexible workers with ongoing disability and those with caring responsibilities. Age also decreased risk of exposure to psychosocial risks and negative health outcomes. Generally we found that demographic and industry factors are not overly helpful in understanding psychosocial risk as it applies to flexible work. As most past research has found, the work environment is likely to be a better predictor of psychological health outcomes and wellbeing than individual-level factors, suggesting that workplace intervention should focus on job design to enhance job resources and reduce the level of job demands. For those workers who work remotely, social isolation is an especially important consequence of loss of in-person contact and requires additional support and strong relational management to ensure remote workers feel connected.

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

The changing world of work encompasses emerging trends that are complex and require nuanced and holistic solutions. Workplace arrangements for flexible work (e.g. part-time, job-share) and remote work (also called 'telework', 'telecommuting', 'working from home', and 'e-working') have been around for many years, however, recent technological advances, a push towards more inclusive practices and increased workplace flexibility have brought this emerging trend to the forefront of mainstream practice for many organisations (Bentley et al. 2016; Donnelly & Johns, 2020; Felstead & Henseke, 2017). In 2020, remote working became an increasingly common form of flexible work globally, with governments and employers responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by requiring workers to work from home where possible (Donnelly & Johns, 2020; Green, Tappin, & Bentley, 2020). According to the NSW Innovation and Productivity Council (2020), approximately 63% of NSW workers had the potential to work remotely for at least one day per week in 2019, although only about 25% of NSW workers worked remotely. By May 2020, it is estimated that 46% of NSW workers were working remotely due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Whether the proportion of NSW workers who work remotely will remain at this level in the post-COVID-19 pandemic landscape is unknown, although indications are that many workers would like to continue to work remotely at least one day a week in the future (NSW Innovation and Productivity Council, 2020; Donnelly & Johns, 2020). This highlights the need for employers to ensure that they are meeting their obligations to provide a psychologically safe working environment for NSW workers.

SafeWork NSW (July 2020) reports that individual mental health and psychological wellbeing can be adversely affected by exposure to a range of workplace hazards, one of which is the conditions associated with remote or isolated work. Indeed, several research studies indicate that remote work increases the likelihood of social and professional isolation, work-family conflict, and other risk factors, which increase a worker's risk of psychological injury (Bentley et al. 2016; Donnelly & Johns, 2020; Green, Tappin, & Bentley, 2020). The risk of psychological injury is not limited to remote work, with research suggesting that flexible ways of working (e.g. part-time, casual, weekend workers) as well as personal and lifestyle factors that promote a preference for flexible work (e.g. parenting and/or carer responsibilities, cultural responsibilities, gender, age) can also impact psychological safety at work (Feijó, et al., 2019). In the workplace, the risk of psychological injury increases where workers are exposed to, or experience, workplace hazards such as bullying, violence, undesired sexual attention, or feel that they have excessive workloads, receive persistent unwarranted criticism or that work-related information is withheld from them, thus, impeding their ability to be productive at work (Bentley et al., in press; Feijó, et al., 2019). Further, prolonged exposure to psychosocial risks leads to stress,

burnout and negative health outcomes for employees. Fortunately, research is beginning to understand more about protective factors for flexible workers, including organisational support and how accessing personal resources can minimise psychological injury for flexible workers (Bentley et al. 2016). Hence, this study using a psychosocial safety climate (Dollard and Bakker, 2010) and job demands-resources model approach (Demorouti et al., 2001), examines the psychosocial risks associated with undertaking flexible and remote work, and provides a timely evidence-based platform from which governments and organisations can develop new policies and practices that aid in the prevention of psychological harm for flexible workers.

## 1.2 The research study

The Centre for Workplace Health and Safety (CWHS) engaged researchers from Edith Cowan University (ECU), the University of New South Wales (UNSW), and Southern Cross University (SCU) to conduct research into the changing nature of work to aid the prevention of workplace psychological harm in the future. The overall aim of this research study, *Flexible work and psychological safety: best practice to advance psychologically safe work from alternate locations*, was to examine the psychosocial risks associated with undertaking flexible, remote and telecommuting work arrangements (henceforth 'flexible work arrangements' unless otherwise stated) as increasingly prevalent 'new way of working'. While the study was conceived prior to the COVID-19 pandemic which necessitated widespread adoption of remote working among Australian employees, the data were collected during a period of varying COVID-19 restrictions and, therefore, provide a snapshot of the psychosocial risks and wellbeing outcomes experienced by NSW workers when working flexibly.

The research study comprises three phases. The first phase involves a broad survey of flexible workers and collects data concerning their exposure to psychosocial risks. The second phase involves interviews concerning psychosocial risk exposures, the barriers that flexible workers face when seeking to engage with workplace health and safety (WHS) systems, and will gather perspectives as to how these can be overcome. The third phase connects the two previous stages and, using a co-design activity, will work collaboratively with key stakeholders to develop a model of best practice for flexible working that promotes participation in workplace health and safety by flexible workers.

This report details the results from Phase One. In line with our two research objectives, in Phase One, the research team:

- Examined the psychosocial risks associated with flexible work arrangements, focusing on New South Wales based employees who were knowledge workers, and the relative perceived exposure to psychosocial conditions at work, ill-treatment, and level of WHS engagement for flexible versus non-flexible workers;

- Explored the extent to which flexible workers with diverse demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, carer responsibilities, disability etc.) were exposed to psychosocial risks.

The report aimed to develop new knowledge concerning the nature and extent of exposure to psychosocial risks within NSW organisations and the level of exposure across different demographic groupings. The evidence-based findings provide a platform from which governments and organisations can draw upon in designing policies and practices likely to promote psychologically safe work environments for managing flexible workers with different demographic characteristics.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Survey Development

Survey development, which was undertaken as a co-design exercise with the CWHS, including a review of the literature on psychosocial risks and flexible work arrangements to identify suitable survey tools and measures. Decisions regarding which survey instruments were selected for inclusion in the study were based on three considerations: variables that had been found to be relevant to flexible work and wellbeing; variables relevant to WHS participation; and the adoption of a conceptual model derived from the scholarly literature and based on findings from previous studies on psychosocial risks by these authors. The conceptual model included predictors, mediators/moderators and outcome variables, that reflected two related theoretical approaches to workplace psychological safety: psychosocial safety climate (Dollard and Bakker, 2010) and the Job demands resources model (Demorouti et al., 2001). The survey instruments selected are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Measuring instruments used in the survey

Construct Measured	Name of Scale	Description of Scale
Psychosocial Conditions at Work	Quantitative Demands	Measures the perceived quantity of work and pressure to work at high speed to complete work tasks.
	Role Clarity	Measures how well an employee perceives that they understand specifically what is expected of them in their job.
	Role conflict	Measures an employee's perception regarding incompatible demands being placed upon them.
	Quality of leadership	Measures an employee's perceptions of the quality of leadership at their organisation using a series of questions about their supervisor's behaviours.
	Social support from supervisor	Measures the perceived level of support from an immediate supervisor.
	Social support from colleagues	Measures the perceived level of support from work colleagues.
	Inclusion Climate	Measures the extent to which an employee perceives that all employees in their workplace are treated fairly, valued, and have input in decision-making processes.
	Work engagement	Measures the degree to which an employee is engaged in the work itself.
	Work-life conflict	Measures an employee's perception of incompatible work and life demands being placed upon them.
	Vertical Trust	Measures an employee's perceived level of trust from their immediate supervisor.
Self-determination	Measures the degree to which employees have control over their own work activities	

	Psychological Capital (PsyCaP)	Measures an employee's propensity for hope, resilience, self-efficacy and optimism in dealing with challenging work circumstances.
	Professional Isolation	Measures the extent to which an employee perceives a sense of isolation from their professional peers.
III-Treatment	Negative Acts	Measures the degree to which a person perceives that they are exposed to, or subjected to negative behaviours (e.g. gossip, slander, harassment).
	Workplace bullying	Measures the frequency of exposure to workplace bullying.
	Managerialism	Measures the degree to which an employee perceives a reliance on the use of professional managers in administering or monitoring their work.
	Employee Wellbeing	Measures an employee's perceived wellbeing for aspects of working life, from the physical environment, to how people feel about their work, their working environment, the workplace climate and the organisation.
Health	K6 (Kessler 6 Anxiety and Depression)	Measures the extent to which an employee has been affected by depression or anxiety over the last 4 weeks.
	Sleeping Troubles	Measures an employee's perception of their sleep quality, depth and restoration over a one week period.
	Burnout	Measures the degree to which an employee feels energy depletion or exhaustion or feelings of job-related negativism or cynicism; and reduced professional efficacy.
	Work Stress	Captures an employee's perceptions regarding the amount of stress that they are subjected to while at work.
	Somatic Stress	Measures the extent to which an employee perceives physical manifestation of stress.
	Cognitive Stress	Measures the extent to which an employee perceives the mental or psychological manifestation of stress.
Workplace Health & Safety Engagement	Psychosocial Safety Climate	Represents an employees' perceptions concerning the organisation's priority for employee wellbeing and psychological safety
	Safety Compliance	Measures an employee's perception of how well individual employees act in accordance with established safety standards and regulations.
	Safety Participation	Measures the degree of employee involvement in establishing, operating, evaluating, and improving the safety culture of the workplace.
	WHS Engagement	Measures the degree to which a person perceives they engage in positive WHS/OHS practices and behaviours in their work circumstances.
	In-role behaviour	Measures an employee's perceptions concerning their performance at work.

The questionnaire survey (of approximately 150 questions) collected anonymous data concerning the psychological risks a worker can be exposed to in the workplace, including a

wide range of job demands and job resources, wellbeing-related outcomes, and engagement with workplace health and safety. The survey also collected data about the type of remote or flexible working arrangements carried out by respondents, and detailed demographic information.

## 2.2 Analysis - Part 1: Relative perceived exposure to psychosocial conditions at work for flexible and non-flexible workers

To examine the first objective of the study, survey data was collected from 1318 employees working in New South Wales, in the month of October, 2021. The month is important, as much of the workforce within the State were working from home as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. Of the sample of 1318 employees, n=1039 identified as working in a flexible or remote capacity. Of these, n=718 undertook flexible and remote work from home, in addition to other forms of flexible working activity (overtime, shift work, job sharing etc.). This cohort is termed the 'working-from-home-plus' (WFH+) cohort. The remaining n=279 undertook some form of flexible work, but this did not involve working from home.

The psychometric variables used in the statistical analysis were drawn from established tools. Linear composites were derived by averaging the results of each item used in a scale, where all items were weighted equally. The data analysis techniques, using IBM SPSS 26, included simple descriptive statistics, and tests of significance between means (independent t-tests comparing the flexible and remote worker group (n=1039) with the non-flexible worker group (n=279)).

### *Normality testing*

An underpinning assumption of (parametric) statistical group comparison tests is that the variables examined are normally distributed. An initial assessment of normality for the linear composites used in analysis involved an examination of the skewness and kurtosis of the linear composites. George & Mallery<sup>1</sup> (2010) indicate that skew and kurtosis scores of outside of the ranges of -2 to +2 represent thresholds for identifying the presence of non-normal distributions. The descriptive statistics of the n=1318 sample, inclusive of skewness and kurtosis scores, are provided below:

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<sup>1</sup> George, D., & Mallery, P. (2010). Using SPSS for windows step by step: a simple guide and reference. Boston, MA; Allyn and Bacon.

Table 2: Descriptive and Normality Statistics for the 1318 Sample

Variable	Mean	SD	Highest	Lowest	Skew	Kurtosis
K6 Anxiety and Depression	2.30	.97	5	1	.51	-.46
Employee Wellbeing	3.61	.92	5	1	-.74	.48
WHS Engagement	3.37	.92	5	1	-.37	-.04
Sleeping Troubles	2.46	1.01	5	1	.46	-.49
Somatic Stress	2.04	.94	5	1	.90	.13
Work-Life Conflict	2.55	1.07	5	1	.21	-.78
Quantitative Demand	2.83	.67	5	1	.01	.44
Managerialism	2.50	1.01	5	1	.30	-.58
Role Conflict	2.63	1.00	5	1	.16	-.60
Role Clarity	3.88	.86	5	1	-.75	.39
Psychosocial Safety Climate	3.29	1.00	5	1	-.48	-.16
Leadership	3.33	1.03	5	1	-.45	-.22
Safety Compliance	3.98	.81	5	1	-.85	1.23
Safety Participation	3.72	.81	5	1	-.40	.36
Social Support from Supervisor	3.48	1.01	5	1	-.45	-.25
Social Support from Colleagues	3.47	.90	5	1	-.36	.13
Trust	3.53	.94	5	1	-.51	-.04
Inclusion Climate	3.68	.89	5	1	-.54	.06
Self-Determination	3.72	.92	5	1	-.70	.34
Professional Isolation	2.20	.96	5	1	.47	-.65
Psychological Capital	4.43	.95	6	1	-.60	.51

n= 1318

Field (2013) argues that null-hypothesis testing of normal distribution using traditional Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests can be problematic because, when applied to larger samples of data, small or insignificant violations of normality are overstated. As such, Field recommends that scanning Q-Q plots, provides a fair indication of distribution against expected normality. Significant violations are those where the shape of the distribution runs at an angle that is not congruent with expected normal.

Further scanning of Q-Q plots indicated minimal deviation from expected normal distribution. As normality was robust, the linear composites were subject to parametric group analysis tests (t-tests).

### 2.3 Analysis - Part 2: Relative perceived exposure to psychosocial risks by demographic and work characteristic grouping variables

To explore the impact that particular demographic and/or work characteristic variables may have had on selected psychological risks for flexible workers, multivariable regression analysis was used. As part of this, several separate regression models were assembled, each with the same independent variables, but different dependent variables were used in each case. The multivariable regression focussed on the relative contribution of the different independent variables on a single outcome. There were no hierarchical steps applied in the modelling.



The sample used in the modelling was the n=1039 respondents who noted that they work flexibly or remotely in some capacity. The independent variables used in analysis comprised demographic and work characteristic variables, shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Independent variables used in analysis

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Employment categories</b>	<b>Industry/sector</b>
- Female (gender)	- Casual Employee	- Information, media and telecommunications
- Non-binary (identified as genderqueer / nonbinary gender identity)	- Length of Tenure	- Finance and insurance
- Gay, Lesbian or Queer	- Professional	- Administrative, business & support services
- Language Other Than English (LOTE)	- Administrative	- Government
- I live alone	- Technical/support staff	- Health and community services
- Share house	- Consultant	- Professional and scientific
- Care for children under 5 years	- Researcher	- Agriculture
- Care for children 5-16	- Supervisor/line manager	- Accommodation and food
- Care for children over 16 years	- Executive level	- Mining and resources
- Care for partner		- Manufacturing
- Care for parents		- Education and training
- Disability		- Power and utilities
- Level of education		- Real Estate services
- Age		- Arts and Recreation
		- Defence

The majority of the independent variables were dummy coded (1 for present, 0 for not present). Exceptions include age, which possessed ordinal categories in the following groupings: 18-25, 26-33, 34-41, 42-49, 50-57, 58-65, above 65 years of age. The length of time a person was employed in an organisation (tenure) was also an ordinal variable, with the following groupings: <12 months, 1 to less than 5 years, 5 years to less than 10 years, 10 years or above. Finally, level of education was also an ordinal variable with the following groupings: not stated, less than high school, high school only (completed year 12), certificate or diploma, bachelor degree or higher.

While other variable were collected in the survey, these were excluded as a result of either, a) under representation within the sample (i.e. possessing less than 6 cases where a variable was present), or b) concerns over multicollinearity affecting the results (i.e. high correlations between different independent variables used in the same model)<sup>i</sup>. A full list of the variables that were excluded from analysis, and a justification as to their exclusion, is provided as an endnote in this document.

The dependent variables used in the analysis, and representing psychological risks associated with flexible workers, are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Dependent variables used in the analysis

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Regression Estimator</b>
K6 Anxiety and depression	Interval composite	Linear Regression (parametric)
K6 Dichotomous Variable – Probable Serious Mental Illness (1), No Probable Serious Mental Illness (0)	Dichotomous	Binary Logistic
Employee Wellbeing	Linear composite (average of items; between 1-5)	Linear Regression (parametric)
Work Health & Safety (WHS) Engagement	Linear composite (average of items; between 1-5)	Linear Regression (parametric)
Negative Work Acts	Ordinal latent variable	Robust weighted least squares estimator (non-parametric)
Bullying from Supervisor (Dichotomous Variable) in the last 6 months	Dichotomous	Binary Logistic (binomial)
Bullying from Colleagues (Dichotomous Variable) in the last 6 months	Dichotomous	Binary Logistic (binomial)
Threats of Violence from Domestic Partner (Dichotomous Variable) while working remotely in the last 12 months	Dichotomous	Binary Logistic (binomial)
Exposure to work-related harassment on social media (e.g. Facebook), by e-mail or text message during the last 12 months (Dichotomous Variable)	Dichotomous	Binary Logistic (binomial)
Somatic Stress	Linear composite (average of items; between 1-5)	Linear Regression (parametric)
Work-Life Conflict	Linear composite (average of items; between 1-5)	Linear Regression (parametric)

### *Estimators used in the regression analysis*

Noted in the middle column of Table 3, as the types of data underpinning the dependent variables (above) was different, different kinds of estimators/regression models were deployed. All of the interval and linear composite variables were analysed using a traditional linear regression model. An assumption of this model is that the dependent variable is normally distributed. The analysis responding to this assumption is presented in the following section.

Binomial logistic regressions were used to analyse the dichotomous variables. This kind of multivariable regression predicts the probability that an observation falls into one of two categories (either present, or not present).

The negative work acts data was subject to non-parametric regression using a robust weighted least squares estimator (and through the use of the MPlus software package). The reason for this is that the Likert scales that comprise the negative work acts items are not interval data, but rather ordinal. While disciplinary approaches have varied their approach to analysing this scale (with some approaches treating it as an interval/linear variable); the first published analysis of the negative work acts scale used a weighted least squares estimator technique<sup>2</sup>. As such, this estimator type was applied in the analysis herein. Model fit indices are listed in the results table, and are within acceptable thresholds.

### *Confirming Assumptions for linear regression analysis*

With regards to the composite variables subject to linear regression, an assumption is that these variables are normally distributed. An initial scan of normality for the five items used in the parametric analysis, with the n=1039 sample, yielded that kurtosis and skewness scores were within acceptable thresholds (+2 to -2). A manual scan of Q-Q plots evidenced no meaningful deviations from expected normal. This is outlined in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Descriptive and Normality Statistics for the 1039 Sample

	Mean	S.D.	Highest	Lowest	Skew	Kurtosis
<b>K6 Anxiety and Depression</b>	13.81	5.79	30	6	.52	-.41
<b>Employee Wellbeing</b>	3.65	.877	5	1	-.65	.36
<b>WHS Engagement</b>	3.61	.881	5	1	-.36	.02
<b>Somatic Stress</b>	2.06	.944	5	1	.88	.04
<b>Work-Life Conflict</b>	2.56	1.069	5	1	.17	-.81

N=1039

## 2.4 Analysis - Part 3: Health; Work, Health and Safety (WHS) climate and engagement

The analysis for Part 3 followed the same method as described above for Part 1, with comparisons between means (t-tests) for flexible and non-flexible workers made for the four variables relevant to WHS engagement: Psychosocial safety climate; safety participation; safety compliance; WHS engagement.

<sup>2</sup> Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Notelaers, G. 2009. Measuring exposure to bullying and harassment at work: validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised. *Work & Stress*, 23(1): 24-44.

### 3. Results: Sample size and demographics

#### 3.1 Sample size and demographics

A total of 1318 completed surveys were included in the analysis, of which 1039 respondents identified themselves as being flexible workers, and 279 reported that they did not work in a remote or flexible capacity. A limitation of the study is that the response rate cannot be accurately calculated as our respondents were recruited through a panel company. On the other hand, the majority of respondents were flexible workers, which is consistent with the focus of the study. Accordingly, the data from non-flexible worker respondents has been included to examine the similarities and differences between respondents who were working under flexible arrangements, and those who were not, at the time of the survey. The survey questionnaire was structured so that respondents could select more than one type of flexible work arrangement, which reflects contemporary employment arrangements (e.g. remote workers could also be part-time). For this reason we have provided a summary of the entire sample, as well as more focused analysis on particular forms of flexible work, particularly *working remotely from home*.

Flexible workers fall broadly into three categories: spatial flexibility, temporal flexibility and contractual flexibility (Joyce et al., 2010). The majority of flexible workers reported spatial flexibility (working remotely from home, remotely from another location). Approximately one-fifth reported temporal flexibility (overtime, weekends, flex-time) and others reported contractual flexibility (part-time, shift work and job-sharing). Table 6 shows the proportion of the flexible workers who worked under each of the flexible work arrangements.

Table 6: Respondents' flexible work arrangements (n=1039)

Type of flexible work arrangement	Flexible Workers	
	%	N
<b><i>Spatial Flexibility</i></b>		
Remotely from home	69.2	719
Remotely from another location	13.2	137
<b><i>Temporal Flexibility</i></b>		
Overtime	16.0	166
Weekend work	18.2	189
Flex-time	20.1	209
<b><i>Contractual Flexibility</i></b>		
Part-time	15.0	156
Shift work	9.8	102
Job-sharing	2.9	30

Please note: Table does not add up to 100% because respondents could select more than one option

Given the fact that respondents could select multiple flexible work arrangements, the data were analysed to identify how many workers were only participating in one form of flexible work arrangement and how many participated in multiple types of flexible working. The analysis

found that there were 628 respondents with only one type of flexible work arrangement, with most respondents working from home (66.7%), followed by part-time (11.9%) and under flex-time work arrangements (5.9%) (Table 7).

Table 7: Respondents with only one type of flexible work arrangement (n=628)

Type of flexible work arrangement	Proportion of the respondents (%)	N
ONLY working remotely from home	66.7	419
ONLY working remotely from another location	3.5	22
ONLY Overtime	4.1	26
ONLY Weekend work	2.7	17
ONLY Shift work	3.8	24
ONLY Flex-time	5.9	37
ONLY Part-time work	11.9	75
ONLY Job-sharing	.6	4
ONLY Other	.6	4

A cross-tabulation analysis of the data where flexible workers were participating in more than one form of flexible work arrangement is presented in Table 7. This analysis shows that respondents with spatial flexibility, such as working from home, also participated in temporal and contractual flexible work arrangements. This can be seen in Table 8 where respondents working from home were also working from another location (n=91), working flex-time (n=137) and engaged in weekend work (n=109).

Table 8: Number of respondents with multiple types of flexible working

	Working remotely from home	Working remotely from another location	Overtime	Week-end Work	Shift work	Flex-time	Part-time work	Job sharing	Other
<b>Working remotely from home</b>									
<b>Working remotely from another location</b>	91								
<b>Overtime</b>	80	41							
<b>Weekend work</b>	109	40	79						
<b>Shift work</b>	26	18	37	49					
<b>Flex-time</b>	137	37	41	45	20				
<b>Part-time work</b>	49	15	20	25	21	23			
<b>Job-sharing</b>	11	5	11	9	5	11	11		
<b>Other</b>	6	1	1	1	0	5	0	0	

Please note: Respondents could select more than one option

### 3.1.1 Reasons for engaging in flexible work

Across all categories of flexible working, respondents reported that COVID-19 had caused a change in their work patterns. For the group who were working from home, 70.6% of the respondents (n=734) reported that they were working from home due to changes caused by COVID-19; 33.7% of the respondents (n=350) noted that their employer has a policy and process for flexible working that they applied through; 3.3% of the respondents (n=34) noted that they appealed to work remotely on the basis of the 2009 Fair Work Act; and 7.9% of the respondents (n=82) noted that they worked remotely for ‘other’ reasons.

### 3.1.2 Gender Identity

Women comprised the largest respondent group within the sample. The sampling frame was open to all respondents working with set industries (and a panel company was contracted to collect the data). The majority of the flexible worker respondents identified as being female (51.8%) or a male (47.4%), and the majority of the non-flexible worker respondents identified as being female (58.1%) or a male (40.5%) (Table 9).

Table 9: Respondents’ Gender Identity

Gender Identity	Flexible Workers		Non-Flexible Workers	
	(%)	N	(%)	N
Female	51.8	538	56.6	158
Male	47.4	492	40.4	113
Non-Binary	0.7	7	0.8	2
Do not wish to disclose	0.1	1	2.2	6

### 3.1.3 Age

Overall, just over one-half of the respondents were aged between 26-41 years (53.2% flexible workers, 45.1% non-flexible workers). The distribution of non-flexible worker age groups was notably different, with less flexible workers (18.7%) aged over 50 years compared with non-flexible workers (26.2%) (Table 10).

Table 10: Respondents’ Age

Age Range (Years)	Flexible Workers		Non-Flexible Workers	
	(%)	N	(%)	N
18-25	13.5	140	16.8	47
26-33	26.7	277	22.9	64
34-41	26.4	274	22.2	62
42-49	14.7	153	11.8	33
50-57	10.5	109	12.3	34
58-65	8.2	85	14	39

### 3.1.4 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders

One respondent, who was a flexible worker (0.1%), and 3.2% of the non-flexible worker respondents, identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders.

### 3.1.5 Languages other than English at home

Approximately three quarters of flexible worker respondents (76.9%) and most of the non-flexible worker respondents (86.4%) only spoke English at home. A small number of respondents indicated speaking other languages such as Chinese, Korean, or Spanish.

### 3.1.6 Ongoing disability

For the purpose of this survey, a person has a disability if they report that they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 6 months and restricts everyday activities. A similar proportion of the flexible worker respondents (7.8%) and the non-flexible worker respondents (8.2%) reported having a disability.

### 3.1.7 Sexual Orientation

Overall, the majority of respondents described themselves as heterosexual, with similar proportions of both flexible and non-flexible workers for each of the other categories of sexual orientation (Table 11).

Table 11: Respondents' Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation	Flexible Workers		Non-Flexible Workers	
	%	N	%	N
<b>Bisexual</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Gay</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Heterosexual</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>790</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>Lesbian</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Queer</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Do not wish to disclose</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Are you 'out' in the workplace?</b>				
<b>Yes to all</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Yes to a few</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>8</b>

### 3.1.8 Marital Status

More than half of the respondents had a partner. For the flexible worker respondents, 49.4% were married and 14.8% partnered. For the non-flexible worker respondents, 33.7% were married, and 18.3% partnered. Many of the remaining respondents were single/never married (30.4% flexible worker and 39.8% non-flexible worker respondents).

### 3.1.9 Living circumstance and carer responsibilities

Living with others (partner, children, friends or parents) comprised the largest proportion of the sample, with differences identified in the distribution between flexible workers and non-flexible workers. In particular, slightly fewer flexible workers lived alone, and instead a greater percentage were living with a partner and children. Notably more flexible workers (32.5%) than non-flexible workers (21.9%) had caring responsibilities (Table 12). Additionally, the proportion of flexible workers caring for children was higher than that for non-flexible workers.

Table 12: Respondents' living circumstances and carer responsibilities

Living Circumstances	Flexible Workers		Non-Flexible Workers	
	%	N	%	N
I live alone	17.2	179	24.4	68
I share the house with friends and/or flatmates	7	73	8.2	23
I live with my partner/spouse without kid(s)	22.9	238	20.8	58
I live with my kid(s) only without a partner/spouse	3.6	37	4.3	12
I live with my partner and children	36.4	378	26.5	74
I live with my parent(s) only	10.1	105	12.9	36
I live in a multigenerational home (e.g., I live with my partner/spouse, my parent(s) and my kid(s))	2.8	29	2.9	8
<b>Carer Responsibilities</b>				
Cared for children under 5 years	11.1	115	6.8	19
Cared for children aged 5-16 years	13.3	138	5.7	16
Cared for children over 16 years of age	3.1	32	1.8	5
Cared for a partner	5.2	54	3.9	11
Cared for parent(s)	5.2	54	3.9	11

### 3.1.10 Education

More of the flexible worker respondents had a Bachelor's degree or higher (62.3%), compared to non-flexible workers. In contrast, non-flexible worker respondents more often identified as having a certificate/diploma (33%), and while there were more respondents who had not completed high school (6.8%) it was still a fairly small proportion of the sample (Table 13).

Table 13: Respondents' highest level of education obtained

Education	Flexible Workers		Non-Flexible Workers	
	%	N	%	N
Not stated	0.2	2	0.4	1
Less than high school (year 12 or equivalent)	3	31	6.8	19
High school only: completed (year 12)	10.7	111	10.8	30
Certificate or diploma	23.9	248	33	92
Bachelor's degree or higher	62.2	646	49.1	137



### 3.1.11 Employment

Overall, most of the respondents had permanent or ongoing full-time employment. There were only small differences when comparing flexible and non-flexible workers across the other categories, although flexible workers were more likely to be full-time, on-going employees, and less likely to be part-time or casual staff. More than half of the respondents had worked for their current employer for less than 5 years (Table 14). The respondents were mainly professionals (47.8% flexible workers, 36.6% non-flexible workers) or managers (36.1% flexible workers, 18.3% non-flexible workers).

Table 14: Respondents' current employment status, category and length of employment

Employment status	Flexible Workers		Non-Flexible Workers	
	%	N	%	N
Full-time	83.1	863	75.6	211
<b>Employment category</b>				
Independent contractor	0.1	1	2.5	7
Casual, intermittent or irregular	9.2	96	14.3	40
Fixed term contract	10.6	110	10	28
Permanent or on-going	80.1	832	73.1	204
<b>Length of employment at current organisation</b>				
Less than 12 months	11.1	115	14.3	40
1 to less than 5 years	45.8	476	36.2	101
5 to less than 10 years	22.6	235	21.9	61
10 years and above	20.5	213	27.6	77

Table 15: Respondents' work role (n=1318)

Work Role	Flexible Workers		Non-Flexible Workers	
	%	N	%	N
Trained professional	25.6	266	36.6	102
Management (executive, middle or junior)	36.1	375	18.3	51
Administrative staff	15.9	165	22.9	64
Technical/support staff	7.6	79	8.6	24
Skilled labourer	6.9	72	9.7	27
Consultant	5.9	61	3.2	9
Researcher	2	21	0.7	2
<b>Supervisory Role</b>				
Supervisor/line manager	36.1	375	26.2	73
Senior manager/executive	22	229	14	39

### 3.1.12 Industry sector

The entire sample contained respondents working across 15 NSW industry sectors. While the proportions differ slightly for each category, there was a reasonable distribution of flexible and non-flexible workers across all the industry sectors (Table 16).

Table 16: Industry Sector in which Respondents' worked (n=1318)

Industry Sector	Flexible Workers		Non-Flexible Workers	
	%	N	%	N
Information Media and Telecommunications	8.6	89	1.4	4
Finance and Insurance Services	12.2	127	5	14
Administrative, Business and Support Services	7	73	5.7	16
Government Administration	6.6	69	4.3	12
Health and Community Services	10.5	109	16.8	47
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	11.9	124	3.6	10
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	1.3	14	0.4	1
Accommodation and Food Services	3.4	35	5	14
Mining and Resources	1.2	12	1.8	5
Manufacturing	6.7	70	5.7	16
Education and Training	7.3	76	17.2	48
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	1.5	16	1.1	3
Real Estate Services	3.1	32	2.9	8
Arts and Recreation Services	1.8	19	1.4	4
Defence	0.9	9	0.7	2

Further analysis was conducted to understand more about the flexible work arrangements and the industries in which the flexible workers were working. Firstly, an analysis for flexible workers who reported that COVID-19 caused changes in their work patterns was conducted which highlighted the differences for key industries (Table 17). The analysis revealed that COVID-19 caused changes in work patterns for a larger proportion of flexible worker respondents from Defence (89%), and the largely white-collar industries of Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (82%), Finance and Insurance Services (80%), and Government Administration (80%).

Table 17: Changes in work patterns due to COVID-19 by industry (n=1039)

<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Proportion of respondents from each industry (%)</b>
Defence	89%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	82%
Finance and Insurance Services	80%
Government Administration	80%
Information Media and Telecommunications	76%
Manufacturing	76%
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	75%
Real Estate Services	75%
Education and Training	70%
Administrative, Business and Support Services	69%
Arts and Recreation Services	68%
Mining and Resources	67%
Accommodation and Food Services	63%
Health and Community Services	58%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	39%
Other	59%

Next, cross-tabulation was conducted to understand more about the types of flexible work patterns reported by respondents from the range of industries (Table 17). The analysis revealed that working remotely from home was more commonly reported by flexible workers working in the Information Media and Telecommunications (93%), Finance and Insurance Services (87%), Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (86%), and Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services (81%) industries. Approximately, one quarter (26%) of flexible workers from the Accommodation and Food services industry were working from another location. Spatial flexibility (overtime, weekend work, and flex-time) was more frequently reported in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, and Accommodation and Food Services industries. In regard to contractual flexibility, shift work was more frequently reported in the Mining and Resources Industry, few respondents were engaged in job share arrangements, and approximately one quarter of flexible workers in Accommodation and Food Services (26%), Education and Training (26%), Arts and Recreation Services (26%), and the Health and Community Services (25%) were working flexibly under part-time work arrangements.

Table 18: Types of flexible work arrangements by industry (n=1039)

<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Working remotely from home</b>	<b>Working remotely from another location</b>	<b>Over-time</b>	<b>Week-end work</b>	<b>Shift work</b>	<b>Flex-time</b>	<b>Part-time work</b>	<b>Job-sharing</b>
<b>Information Media and Telecommunications (n=89)</b>	93%	16%	16%	15%	4%	25%	8%	0
<b>Finance and Insurance Services (n=127)</b>	87%	9%	9%	9%	5%	13%	6%	1%
<b>Administrative, Business and Support Services (n=73)</b>	66%	10%	8%	12%	3%	11%	16%	4%
<b>Government Administration (n=69)</b>	74%	7%	17%	13%	6%	38%	10%	7%
<b>Health and Community Services (n=109)</b>	41%	13%	24%	27%	28%	17%	25%	6%
<b>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (n=124)</b>	86%	14%	15%	20%	6%	19%	8%	1%
<b>Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (n=13)</b>	31%	8%	31%	31%	0%	46%	15%	0%
<b>Accommodation and Food Services (n=35)</b>	37%	26%	31%	26%	31%	14%	26%	0%
<b>Mining and Resources (n=12)</b>	67%	17%	25%	8%	42%	17%	25%	0%
<b>Manufacturing (n=70)</b>	64%	13%	29%	26%	14%	26%	9%	7%
<b>Education and Training (n=76)</b>	58%	14%	12%	18%	0%	22%	26%	5%
<b>Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services (n=16)</b>	81%	6%	19%	25%	6%	31%	13%	6%
<b>Real Estate Services (n=32)</b>	78%	16%	22%	13%	6%	38%	19%	3%
<b>Arts and Recreation Services (n=19)</b>	68%	5%	0%	21%	5%	5%	26%	0%
<b>Defence (n=9)</b>	56%	22%	11%	22%	0%	22%	0%	0%
<b>Other (n=16)</b>	63%	16%	12%	20%	11%	16%	20%	1%

## 4. Results – Part 1: Relative perceived exposure to psychosocial conditions at work, ill-treatment, health, and level of WHS engagement for flexible and non-flexible workers

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The correlations between study variables are provided in Appendix A (flexible workers) and B (all sample). All relationships between study variables (psychosocial conditions, health, and WHS engagement) were in expected directions (positively or negatively correlated). The strongest correlations were observed between negative health variables. Psychological distress (K6) was strongly related to a range of negative variables, notably stress and sleeping troubles, with coefficients between 0.6 and 0.7. On the positive side, psychosocial safety climate was strongly related to wellbeing, as was WHS engagement, supervisor support, trust, psychological capital, inclusive climate, and quality of leadership.

The following sections report perceived exposure to psychosocial conditions, health and level of WHS engagement for flexible and non-flexible workers. For each set of question items the entire sample (n=1318) were analysed using two categories – Flexible workers and non-flexible workers. The mean, standard deviation, Cronbach’s alpha, and an interpretation of the findings is provided for each scale item. Next, the data for those respondents who were working from home, some of whom had other flexible work arrangements, were analysed (n=718). The mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach’s alpha for this subgroup of flexible workers who were working from home (hereafter ‘WFH+’) are also provided for each scale item. Note, tests of significance between means (t-tests) were undertaken to compare flexible and non-flexible workers, although tests of significance were not carried out for the WFH+ group as this sub-sample was not independent from the flexible working sub-sample.

### 4.1 Quantitative Demands

#### Quantitative Demands Scale Questions

Is your workload unevenly distributed so it piles up?

How often do you not have time to complete all your work tasks?

Do you get behind with your work?

Do you have enough time for your work tasks?

This instrument measures the perceived quantity of work and pressure to work at high speed to complete work tasks. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1= Never/hardly ever, 2= Seldom, 3= Sometimes, 4=Often and 5=Always.

Table 19: Means and Standard Deviations for quantitative demands

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	2.62	0.76	0.67
Non Flexible Workers	2.61	0.83	0.70
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	2.64	0.75	0.69

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible and non-flexible workers appear to be exposed to a similar workload and work pressure, with perceived levels for all samples at slightly above the mid-point of the scale.

## 4.2 Role Clarity

### Role Clarity Scale Questions

Does your work have clear objectives?

Do you know exactly which areas are your responsibility?

Do you know exactly what is expected of you at work?

This instrument measures how well a person perceives that they understand specifically what is expected of them in their job. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=To a very small extent, 2=To a small extent, 3=Somewhat, 4=To a large extent, and 5=To a very large extent.

Table 20: Means and Standard Deviations for role clarity

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.88	0.85	0.86
Non Flexible Workers	3.90	0.89	0.90
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	3.92	0.81	0.86

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible and non-flexible workers appear to be exposed to a similar, moderately high, level of role clarity.

## 4.3 Role Conflict

### Role Conflict Scale Questions

Are contradictory demands placed on you at work?

Do you sometimes have to do things which ought to have been done in a different way?

Do you sometimes have to do things which seem to be unnecessary?

The instrument measures a person's perception regarding incompatible demands being placed upon them. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=To a very small extent, 2=To a small extent, 3=Somewhat, 4=To a large extent, and 5=To a very large extent.

Table 21: Means and Standard Deviations for role conflicts

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	2.63	0.98	0.83
Non Flexible Workers	2.63	1.06	0.87
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	2.62	0.96	0.83

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible and non-flexible workers appear to be exposed to the same level of role conflict, with perceived levels for both samples at slightly above the mid-point of the scale.

#### 4.4 Quality of Leadership

##### Quality of Leadership Scale Questions

*To what extent would you say that your immediate supervisor...*

...makes sure that the members of staff have good development opportunities?

...is good at work planning?

...is good at solving conflicts?

The instrument measures the respondent's perceptions of the quality of leadership at their organisation using statements about their supervisor. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=To a very small extent, 2=To a small extent, 3=Somewhat, 4=To a large extent, and 5=To a very large extent.

Table 22: Means and Standard Deviations for quality of leadership

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.37*	0.99	0.86
Non Flexible Workers	3.17*	1.14	0.90
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	3.37	0.98	0.86

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed) <sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Quality of leadership was perceived to be significantly higher by flexible workers.

#### 4.5 Social Support from Supervisor

##### Social Support from Supervisor Scale Questions

How often is your immediate superior willing to listen to your problems at work, if needed?

How often do you get help and support from your immediate superior, if needed?

How often does your immediate superior talk with you about how well you carry out your work?

The instrument measures the respondent's perceived level of support from their supervisor. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Never/hardly ever, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, and 5=Always.

Table 23: Means and Standard Deviations for social support from supervisor

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.54*	0.97	0.84
Non Flexible Workers	3.28*	1.12	0.90
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	3.56	0.96	0.85

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Social support from their supervisor was perceived to be significantly higher by flexible workers than non-flexible workers.

#### 4.6 Social support from Colleagues

##### Social Support from Colleagues Scale Questions

How often do you get help and support from your colleagues, if needed?

How often are your colleagues willing to listen to your problems at work, if needed?

How often do your colleagues talk with you about how well you carry out your work?

The instrument measures the respondent's perceived level of support from their colleagues. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Never/hardly ever, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, and 5=Always.

Table 24: Means and Standard Deviations for social support from colleagues

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.51*	0.87	0.82
Non Flexible Workers	3.33*	0.96	0.86
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	3.52	0.83	0.80

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Social support from colleagues was perceived to be significantly higher by flexible workers than non-flexible workers.

#### 4.7 Inclusion climate

##### Inclusion Climate Scale Questions

Where I work I am treated with respect

I can openly discuss my opinion without fear of negative consequences

My organisation has a work environment where different ideas and perspectives are valued

My organisation is free of discrimination

My organisation is free of intimidation



The decisions made by managers about employees are fair

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The instrument is a subjective measure of an employee's perception concerning the inclusivity of their workplace. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 25: Means and Standard Deviations for inclusion climate

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.72*	0.86	0.91
Non Flexible Workers	3.51*	0.98	0.93
WFH+ Flexible Workers^	3.75	0.81	0.91

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers report significantly higher perceived levels of inclusion climate than non-flexible workers.

## 4.8 Work Engagement

### Work Engagement Scale Questions

When working, I feel bursting with energy.

I am enthusiastic about my job.

I am immersed in my work.

The instrument measures the person's perceived relationship with the work itself. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, and 5=Always.

Table 26: Means and Standard Deviations for work engagement

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.42*	0.77	0.77
Non Flexible Workers	3.24*	0.96	0.88
WFH+ Flexible Workers^	3.42	0.75	0.76

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported a significantly greater perceived level of work engagement than non-flexible workers.

## 4.9 Work-life conflict

### Work-life Conflict Scale Questions

Do you feel that your work drains so much of your energy that it has a negative effect on your private life?

Do you feel that your work takes so much of your time that it has a negative effect on your private life?

---

The demands of my work interfere with my private and family life?

---

Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for private and family activities?

---

The instrument measures a person’s perception regarding incompatible work and life demands being placed upon them. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=To a very small extent, 2=To a small extent, 3=Somewhat, 4=To a large extent, and 5=To a very large extent.

Table 27: Means and Standard Deviations for work-life conflict

	Mean	SD	Cronbach’s alpha
Flexible Workers	2.56	1.07	0.91
Non Flexible Workers	2.51	1.05	0.92
WFH+ Flexible Workers^	2.53	1.07	0.91

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible and non-flexible workers appear to be exposed to a similar levels of work-family conflict, with perceived levels for both samples at around the mid-point of the scale.

#### 4.10 Vertical Trust

##### Vertical Trust Scale Questions

---

Does the management trust the employees to do their work well?

---

Can the employees trust the information that comes from the management?

---

Are employees able to express their views and feelings?

---

The instrument measures the respondent’s perception of the level of trust from their supervisor. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=To a very small extent, 2=To a small extent, 3=Somewhat, 4=To a large extent, and 5=To a very large extent.

Table 28: Means and Standard Deviations for vertical trust

	Mean	SD	Cronbach’s alpha
Flexible Workers	3.59*	0.91	0.84
Non Flexible Workers	3.32*	1.05	0.88
WFH+ Flexible Workers^	3.60	0.89	0.85

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported a significantly greater perceived level of trust from their supervisor than non-flexible workers.

## 4.11 Self-determination

### Self-determination Scale Questions

I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job

I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work

I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job

The instrument measures the respondent's perceived level of control over their work. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 29: Means and Standard Deviations for self-determination

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.77*	0.92	0.88
Non Flexible Workers	3.56*	0.92	0.89
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	3.89	0.87	0.88

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported a significantly greater perceived level of self-determination/autonomy over their work than non-flexible workers.

## 4.12 Psychological Capital

### Scale Questions

I feel confident in representing my work area when meeting with management

I feel confident contributing to discussions about my workplace's strategy

I feel confident presenting work information to a group of colleagues

If I find myself in a jam at work, I could think of many ways to get out of it

Right now, I see myself as being pretty successful at work

I can think of many ways to reach my current work goals

At this time, I am meeting the goals that I have set for myself (at work)

I can be on my own, so to speak, at work if I have to

I usually take stressful things at work in my stride

I can get through difficult times at work because I've experienced difficulty before

I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job

I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to work

Psychological capital (PsyCap) captures the psychological states of hope, optimism, resilience and self-efficacy. PsyCap is an individual-level variable which amounts to the positive resources an employee brings to their role, that aids their focus and motivation at work, and ultimately their performance. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 30: Means and Standard Deviations for psychological capital

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	4.47*	0.90	0.94
Non Flexible Workers	4.26*	1.08	0.95
WFH+ Flexible Workers^	4.52	0.87	0.94

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported significantly higher levels of psychological capital than non-flexible workers.

#### 4.13 Professional Isolation

##### Professional Isolation Scale Questions

*During the last four months, how often have you had the following feelings?*

I have felt left out of activities and meetings that could enhance my career

I have missed out on opportunities to be mentored

I have missed face-to-face contact with co-workers

I have felt out of the loop

I have felt isolated

I have missed the emotional support of co-workers

I have missed informal interaction with others

The instrument measures the respondents perceived sense of isolation from their professional peers. The survey contained a list of statements, and respondents were asked, 'During the last four months, how often have you had the following feelings?' Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Sometimes, 4=Frequently, and 5=Most of the time.

Table 31: Means and Standard Deviations for professional isolation

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	2.29*	0.95	0.90
Non Flexible Workers	1.90*	0.97	0.93
WFH+ Flexible Workers^	2.31	0.94	0.89

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported a significantly greater perceived level of professional isolation than non-flexible workers.

#### 4.14 Exposure to Negative Acts

##### Exposure to Negative Acts Scale Questions

Have you been exposed to workplace gossip and slander during the last 12 months?

Have you been involved in work-related quarrels during the last 12 months?

Have you been exposed to unpleasant teasing during the last 12 months?

Have you been exposed to work-related harassment on social media (e.g. Facebook), by e-mail or text messages during the last 12 months?

Have you been exposed to undesired sexual attention during the last 12 months?

Have you been exposed to threats of violence during the last 12 months?

Respondents were asked, whether in their capacity as a worker, they had been exposed to gossip and slander, quarrels, unpleasant teasing, work-related harassment on social media, undesired sexual harassment, threats of violence or bullying at their workplace during the last 12 months. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=never, 2=now and then, 3=monthly, 4=weekly, and 5-daily. Table 31 shows the proportion of respondents who reported that they had been exposed to negative acts in the past 12 months.

Table 32: Frequency with which respondents report being exposed to negative acts (n=1318)

Negative Act	Flexible Workers				Non-flexible Workers			
	Yes, a few times (%)	Yes, monthly (%)	Yes, weekly (%)	Yes, daily (%)	Yes, a few times (%)	Yes, monthly (%)	Yes, weekly (%)	Yes, daily (%)
Gossip and Slander	29.93	7.41	7.12	2.69	31.18	5.38	7.89	5.73
Conflicts and quarrels	22.04	7.03	2.12	1.44	22.94	3.23	1.79	0.72
Unpleasant teasing	12.80	5.39	2.50	0.67	15.41	3.58	0.72	0.36
Harassment in social media	9.82	3.46	2.12	0.58	5.38	0.36	0.36	1.08
Sexual harassment	7.12	4.04	2.02	1.06	6.45	0	0.36	0.36
Threats of violence	6.83	3.75	1.83	0.58	6.45	1.08	0	0.72
Bullying	11.65	3.85	2.02	0.77	15.77	0.72	1.08	0.36

Please Note: for undesired sexual attention, non-flexible workers did not report exposure for 'monthly'.

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported a greater perceived level of exposure to negative acts than non-flexible workers across all types of negative acts with the exception of gossip and slander.

## 4.15 Subjected to Negative Acts

### Subjected to Negative Acts Scale Questions

*In the past six months ... how often have you been subjected to the following acts?*

---

Someone withholding information which affects your performance

---

Being ignored or excluded

---

Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach

---

Spreading gossip and rumours about you

---

Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes or your private life

---

Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes

---

Persistent criticism of your work and effort

---

Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous rage

---

Practical jokes carried out by people you do not get along with

---

Utilising the Short Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R), an instrument for measuring perceived exposure to workplace bullying, respondents were asked, whether in their capacity as a worker, they had been subjected to negative acts in the last six months. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=never, 2=now and then, 3=monthly, 4=weekly, and daily. Table 32 shows the proportion of respondents who reported that they had been subjected to negative acts at work at least weekly in the past six months.

Table 33: Frequency with which respondents report being subjected to negative acts (n=1318)

Negative acts	Flexible Workers				Non-flexible Workers			
	Now and Then (%)	Monthly (%)	Weekly (%)	Daily (%)	Now and Then (%)	Monthly (%)	Weekly (%)	Daily (%)
Someone withholding information which affects your performance	27.82	8.76	4.81	2.69	29.39	3.23	4.30	1.79
Being ignored or excluded	29.93	7.89	6.74	3.37	33.33	6.45	3.23	2.51
Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach	18.48	7.99	5.77	2.50	20.43	5.38	2.51	2.87
Spreading gossip and rumours about you	15.11	6.93	5.20	2.12	19.71	4.30	1.43	1.43
Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes or your private life	12.70	6.35	5.00	2.31	13.98	4.30	1.08	0.72
Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes	21.08	6.83	6.35	2.79	23.66	5.02	1.79	1.08
Persistent criticism of your work and effort	17.13	7.41	4.91	3.37	19.71	3.23	4.30	0.72
Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous rage	12.90	5.97	5.68	1.92	14.34	3.58	2.51	0.00
Practical jokes carried out by people you do not get along with	12.32	5.20	4.43	3.08	7.89	3.23	2.15	0.00

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported a greater perceived level of being subjected to negative acts than non-flexible workers across all types of negative acts, with larger differences reported by flexible workers for being ignored/excluded, insulting and offensive remarks, being the target of rage and practical jokes.

#### 4.16 Managerialism

##### Managerialism Scale Questions

The organisation that I work for sets unrealistic targets

I experience excessive work monitoring in my job

I am given meaningless tasks at work

The instrument measures degree to which respondents perceive a reliance on the use of professional managers in administering or monitoring their work. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 34: Means and Standard Deviations for managerialism

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
--	------	----	------------------

Flexible Workers	2.49	1.02	0.84
Non Flexible Workers	2.53	0.98	0.79
WFH+ Flexible Workers^	2.47	1.01	0.83

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible and non-flexible workers appear to be exposed to a similar level of managerialism, with perceived level for both samples at around the scale mid-point.

#### 4.17 General Health

Respondents were asked to describe how their health and wellbeing had been during the past four weeks using the following descriptors: poor, fair, good, very good and excellent.

Table 35: Respondents' general health

General health	Flexible Worker (%)	Non-flexible Worker (%)
Poor	4.5	4.7
Fair	14.9	18.6
Good	30.0	33.3
Very good	30.4	29.7
Excellent	20.1	13.6

Interpretation: Flexible and non-flexible workers reported similar levels of health across all categories, with the majority of respondents self-reporting their health as being good or very good. Notably more flexible workers reported being in excellent health.

#### 4.18 Employee Wellbeing

An employee's psychological wellbeing relates to all aspects of working life, from the physical environment, to how people feel about their work, their working environment, the workplace climate and the organisation.

##### Employee Wellbeing Scale Questions

Overall, I am reasonably happy with my work life

Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment in what I do at work

I feel content with my work

I get a sense of joy from my work

The instrument measure respondents' perceptions regarding the overall experience using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 36: Means and Standard Deviations for employee wellbeing

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.65*	0.88	0.90



Non Flexible Workers	3.46*	1.04	0.95
WFH+ Flexible Workers	3.67	0.87	0.90

\*statistically significant at p<0.01 (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported significantly higher levels of wellbeing than non-flexible workers.

#### 4.19 K6 Mental health

##### Kessler 6 Anxiety and Depression (K6) Scale Questions

*During the past 30 days, how often did you feel...*

nervous?

hopeless?

restless or fidgety?

so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?

that everything was an effort?

worthless?

The Kessler Anxiety and Depression Checklist (K6) is a measure of psychological distress. It is used as a brief screening tool to identify levels of distress. Respondents were asked about how they have been feeling during the past 30 days (see questions below) and can select from none of the time (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4) and all of the time (5). The scores were summed, yielding a minimum score of 6 and a maximum score of 30.

Using the optimal scoring methods proposed by Kessler and colleagues, we used the dichotomous grouping method to interpret the scores. The following K6 risk ranges were used to represent a person's level of psychological distress<sup>3</sup>.

Table 37: Risk ranges from K6 Questions

K6 Score	Level of Psychological Distress
6-18	No probable serious mental illness
19-30	Probable serious mental illness

Table 38: Results for flexible worker and non-flexible worker K6 Scores

K6 Score	Flexible Workers (%) (n=1039)	WFH+ Flexible Workers due to COVID-19 (%) (n=575)	WFH+ Flexible Workers (%) (n=719)	Non-flexible workers (%) (n=279)
6-18	79.7	82.6	82.1	79.9
19-30	20.3	17.4	17.9	21.1

Interpretation: Overall, flexible and non-flexible workers appear to have similar levels of psychological distress (with 20.3% and 21.1% respectively scoring 19 points or more). The

<sup>3</sup> ABS classification - <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/4817.0.55.001Chapter92007-08>

perceived levels of psychological distress for both the flexible worker and non-flexible worker groups were commensurate with population level reporting. Further analysis on the WFH+ flexible worker subgroup found that this group of flexible workers reported lower levels of psychological distress. Our analysis suggests that regardless of whether the WFH+ flexible workers were working remotely from home due to COVID-19 or for other reasons, both 'WFH+' and 'WFH+ due to COVID' groups had a lower proportion of flexible workers on the K6 scale scoring 19 or above (17.4% and 17.9% respectively) and both WFH+ groups were below population level reporting. Across all subgroups, few respondents reported very high levels of psychological stress (30 points) from any subgroup of worker.

## 4.20 Sleeping troubles

### Sleeping Troubles Scale Questions

*These questions are about how you have been during the last 30 days*

How often have you slept badly and restlessly?

How often have you found it hard to go to sleep?

How often have you woken up too early and not been able to get back to sleep?

The instrument measures a person's perceived sleep quality, depth and restoration over a week period. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Not at all, 2=A small part of the time, 3=Part of the time, 4=A large part of the time, and 5=All of the time.

Table 39: Means and Standard Deviations for sleeping troubles

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	2.49**	1.02	0.89
Non Flexible Workers	2.35**	0.99	0.89
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	2.45	0.98	0.88

\*\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  (2-tailed)

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported significantly lower levels of sleeping troubles than non-flexible workers.

## 4.21 Burnout

### Burnout Scale Questions

*These questions are about how you have been during the last 30 days*

How often have you felt worn out?

How often have you been physically exhausted?

How often have you been emotionally exhausted?

How often have you felt tired?

The instrument measures the extent to which a person feels energy depletion or exhaustion or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to their job; and reduced professional efficacy. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Not at all, 2=A small part of the time, 3=Part of the time, 4=A large part of the time, and 5=All of the time.

Table 40: Means and Standard Deviations for burnout

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	2.70	1.07	0.92
Non Flexible Workers	2.80	1.12	0.93
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	2.65	1.06	0.92

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Burnout levels were similar for flexible and non-flexible workers, with slightly less burnout among flexible workers, however the difference was not significant.

#### 4.22 Work Stress

##### Work Stress Scale Questions

*These questions are about how you have been during the last 30 days*

How often have you had problems relaxing?

How often have you been irritable?

How often have you been tense?

The instrument measures a person's perceptions regarding the amount of stress that they are subjected to while at work. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Not at all, 2=A small part of the time, 3=Part of the time, 4=A large part of the time, and 5=All of the time.

Table 41: Means and Standard Deviations for work stress

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	2.49	1.05	0.90
Non Flexible Workers	2.40	1.08	0.90
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	2.46	1.02	0.89

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Stress levels were similar for flexible and non-flexible workers, with slightly (ns) more stress among flexible workers.

#### 4.23 Somatic Stress

##### Somatic Stress Scale Questions

*These questions are about how you have been during the last 30 days*

How often have you had stomach ache?

How often have you had a headache?

How often have you had palpitations?

How often have you had tension in various muscles?

The instrument measures the extent to which the respondent's perceived physical manifestation of stress. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Not at all, 2=A small part of the time, 3=Part of the time, 4=A large part of the time, and 5=All of the time.

Table 42: Means and Standard Deviations for somatic stress

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	2.06	0.94	0.86
Non Flexible Workers	1.96	0.90	0.85
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	1.98	0.90	0.85

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Somatic stress levels were similar for flexible and non-flexible workers, with slightly (ns) more somatic stress among flexible workers.

#### 4.24 Cognitive Stress

##### Cognitive Stress Scale Questions

*These questions are about how you have been during the last 30 days*

How often have you had problems concentrating?

How often have you found it difficult to think clearly?

How often have you had difficulty in taking decisions?

How often have you had difficulty with remembering?

The instrument measures the extent to which a person perceives the mental or psychological manifestation of stress. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Not at all, 2=A small part of the time, 3=Part of the time, 4=A large part of the time, and 5=All of the time.

Table 43: Means and Standard Deviations for cognitive stress

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	2.30	1.00	0.92
Non Flexible Workers	2.22	1.04	0.93
WFH+ Flexible Workers <sup>^</sup>	2.24	0.96	0.91

<sup>^</sup>non-independent sample

Interpretation: Cognitive stress levels were similar for flexible and non-flexible workers, with slightly (ns) more cognitive stress among flexible workers.

## 4.25 Psychosocial Safety Climate

Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) described as a perceptions of top management commitment to and support for psychological safety, prioritisation of psychological safety, communication of and employee involvement in psychosocial safety.

### Psychosocial Safety Climate Scale Questions

In my workplace senior management acts quickly to correct problems/issues that affect employees' psychological health

Senior management acts decisively when a concern of an employees' psychological status is raised

Senior management show support for stress prevention through involvement and commitment

Psychological wellbeing of staff is a priority for this organization

Senior management clearly considers the psychological health of employees to be of great importance

Senior management considers employee psychological health to be as important as productivity

There is good communication here about psychological safety issues which affect me

Information about workplace psychological wellbeing is always brought to my attention by my manager/supervisor

My contributions to resolving occupational health and safety concerns in the organization are listened to

Participation and consultation in psychological health and safety occurs with employees', unions and health and safety representatives in my workplace

Employees are encouraged to become involved in psychological safety and health matters

In my organization, the prevention of stress involves all levels of the organization

The variable has been consistently linked to positive wellbeing and performance outcomes. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 44: Means and Standard Deviations for psychosocial safety climate

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.36*	0.96	0.97
Non Flexible Workers	3.06*	1.11	0.98
WFH+ Flexible Workers	3.39	0.94	0.97

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported significantly higher levels of psychosocial safety climate than non-flexible workers.

## 4.26 Safety Compliance

### Safety Compliance Scale Questions

I use all necessary safety equipment/tools to do my job

I use the correct safety procedures for carrying out my job

I ensure the highest levels of safety when I carry out my job

I carry out work in a safe manner

The instrument measures a person's perception of how well they act in accordance with established safety standards and regulations. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 45: Means and Standard Deviations for safety compliance

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.95**	0.80	0.91
Non Flexible Workers	4.07**	0.82	0.93
WFH+ Flexible Workers	3.97	0.77	0.91

\*\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported significantly lower levels of safety compliance than non-flexible workers.

## 4.27 Safety Participation

### Safety Participation Scale Questions

I put in extra effort to improve the safety of where I do my work

I help my co-workers when they are working under risky or hazardous conditions

I voluntarily carry out tasks or activities that help improve the safety of where I do my work

The instrument measures a person's perception of how well they act in accordance with established safety standards and regulations. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 46: Means and Standard Deviations for safety participation

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.69*	0.83	0.85
Non Flexible Workers	3.83*	0.76	0.84
WFH+ Flexible Workers^	3.64	0.81	0.85

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported significantly lower levels of safety participation than non-flexible workers.

## 4.28 Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) Engagement

### Scale Questions

I am consulted about and involved in the risk assessment process related to your work

I have been trained to understand how the general principles of prevention are applied to develop health, safety and wellbeing measures

I am encouraged to propose ideas for improving employee health, safety and wellbeing standards

I am trained to report hazards and any defects while undertaking work for your employer

I am consulted about and involved in the drafting of OH&S instructions, procedures, policies etc.

When changes are planned, I am consulted and involved before the final measures are adopted

I am trained to be proactive in looking for improvements in arrangements for employee health, safety and wellbeing

I am consulted about and involved in the selection of tools, work equipment, personal protective equipment and the ergonomic set up of workspaces, before such items are bought

Solutions are 'trialled' and 'piloted' with me to get your feedback before final decisions are made

Adapted from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU), the instrument measures the degree to which a person perceives they engage in positive WHS practices and behaviours in their work circumstances. In this study, responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 47: Means and Standard Deviations for workplace health and safety engagement

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	3.41*	0.88	0.93
Non Flexible Workers	3.25*	1.04	0.95
WFH+ Flexible Workers	3.37	0.88	0.93

\*statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers reported significantly higher levels of workplace health and safety engagement than non-flexible workers.

## 4.29 In-role Behaviour Performance

### In-role Behaviour Performance Scale Questions

I adequately complete my assigned work duties

I fulfil the responsibilities specified in my job description

I perform tasks that are expected of me at work

I meet the formal performance requirements of my job

The instrument is a subjective measure of an employee's perception concerning their performance at work. Responses were collected using a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 48: Means and Standard Deviations for in-role behaviour

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Flexible Workers	4.17	0.71	0.89
Non Flexible Workers	4.21	0.73	0.93
WFH+ Flexible Workers	4.21	0.67	0.89

^non-independent sample

Interpretation: Flexible workers report similar levels of in-role performance to non-flexible workers.



## 5. Results – Part 2: Relative perceived exposure to psychosocial risks by demographic grouping variables

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In order to explore the impact of different demographic and work characteristic variables on the presence of psychosocial risk and associated negative or positive outcomes for flexible and remote workers, a series of regression models were assembled. There is a paucity of previous research looking at the effect of diverse workforce characteristics on the presence of risk for remote workers. As such, this analysis is important for understanding the broader effect that working in different industrial sectors, under different contractual arrangements and/or role types; and the impact of diverse individual demographics have on the manifestation risk for flexible workers.

The following three pages show the outputs of linear and binominal (logistic) regression analyses undertaken on several key dependent variables representing psychosocial risk and/or positive or negative workplace outcomes. The regression analysis was applied to the sample of 1039 remote and/or flexible workers. Key findings and interpretation of each analysis are presented below.

Table 49: Linear Regression Results

Independent Variables	K6	Employee Wellbeing	WHS Engage.	Somatic Stress	Work-Life Conflict
<b>Demographics</b>					
Age	-.32***	.09*	-.05	-.27***	-.26***
Female	.07*	-.01	-.01	.09**	-.03
Non-binary	.07*	-.06*	-.03	.00	-.01
Gay, Lesbian or Queer	.04	-.02	.00	.05^	.02
LOTE	-.02	.02	.08*	-.02	.03
I live alone	.04	-.05	-.02	.05^	.02
Share house	-.03	-.03	.03	-.05	-.02
Care for children under 5 years	.03	.06^	.02	.10**	.03
Care for children 5-16	.02	.04	.01	.00	.03
Care for children over 16 years	-.04	.03	.04	-.03	-.03
Care for partner	.12***	.00	.01	.14***	.11**
Care for parents	-.02	-.02	-.04	.04	.01
Disability	.15***	-.04	-.02	.12***	.11***
Level of education	-.02	-.01	-.02	-.03	.06^
<b>Employment categories</b>					
Casual Employee	.01	.04	.01	-.01	-.04
Length of Tenure	.00	.03	.04	.01	.07*
Professional	-.02	.04	-.02	-.07*	.01
Administrative	-.01	-.01	-.06	-.03	.01
Technical/support Staff	.01	-.01	.01	.01	.07*
Consultant	.01	-.03	-.02	-.01	.00
Researcher	.01	.01	-.01	.04	.01
Supervisor/line manger	.02	.00	.08*	.12**	.10**
Executive level	.02	.05	.17***	.10**	.12**
<b>Industry/sector</b>					
Information, media and tele.	-.01	.00	.02	.00	.03
Finance and insurance	-.05	.04	.02	-.06^	-.01
Administrative, business & sup. serv.	.05	-.05	-.05	.04	.02
Government	.00	.04	.03	-.03	-.02
Health and community services	.01	.04	.07^	.00	.00
Professional and scientific	.01	.01	.01	.00	.05
Agriculture	-.03	.02	.03	-.04	.01
Accommodation and food	.05	.01	.08*	.02	.02
Mining and resources	.02	.00	.04	.06*	.03
Manufacturing	.03	.03	.05	.01	.01
Education and training	.03	.00	-.03	-.01	-.01
Power and utilities	.02	.03	-.04	-.01	-.01
Real estate services	.01	.00	-.02	.01	.00
Arts and recreation	.03	.01	-.02	.02	.02
Defence	-.03	.01	.03	-.03	-.08**
<b>Remote Working Arrangement</b>					
COVID-19 - cause for remote working	-.02	-.05^	-.02	.00	-.03
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.20	.03	.04	.17	.14

All regression weights (Beta values) are standardised, p^<.1 (approaching significance), p\*<.05, p\*\*<.01, p\*\*\*<.001, n=1039

Table 50: Binomial Logistic Regression Results

Independent Variables	K6 Dichotomous (Probable Serious Mental Illness)	Bullying from Supervisor	Bullying from Colleagues	Threats of Violence from Domestic Partner	Exposure to work-related harassment on social media
<b>Demographics</b>					
Age	.658***	.831*	.726**	.246**	.560***
Female	1.297	1.090	.953	.199*	.800
Non-binary	2.800	.000	2.151	.000	9.006*
Gay, Lesbian or Queer	1.189	1.154	.747	.694	1.165
LOTE	.734	.604^	1.101	.344	1.023
I live alone	1.276	2.049**	.668	.811	1.506
Share house	.723	.773	.856	.559	.994
Care for children under 5 years	1.427	3.181***	1.602	7.329**	1.845*
Care for children 5-16	1.093	.711	.777	1.868	.715
Care for children over 16 years	.377	1.682	.621	9.525	1.016
Care for partner	3.016**	2.512*	.702	2.141	4.752***
Care for parents	1.110	.797	1.263	.380	.398^
Disability	3.407***	3.122***	1.293	.000	4.326***
Level of education	.998	.861	.780	.840	.948
<b>Employment categories</b>					
Casual Employee	.864	.573	1.124	.377	.695
Length of Tenure	1.085	1.172	1.294^	.917	1.339*
Professional	.885	1.052	1.370	.719	.484*
Administrative	.828	1.291	1.373	.931	.741
Technical/support Staff	1.198	.743	.747	.427	.638
Consultant	1.211	.890	1.070	.626	.906
Researcher	2.014	2.739	2.099	1.434	4.281*
Supervisor/line manger	1.338	1.880*	2.339**	.559	2.226**
Executive level	1.080	1.838^	1.807	1.029	2.659**
<b>Industry/sector</b>					
Information, media and tele.	.80	2.685*	.800	.573	1.498
Finance and insurance	.648	1.178	1.281	.513	.487^
Administrative, business & sup. serv.	1.221	1.769	.801	.368	.925
Government	.786	.714	.441	.000	.785
Health and community services	1.056	1.117	.639	.357	.704
Professional and scientific	1.322	1.042	.481	.544	.844
Agriculture	1.161	.970	1.264	.000	.241
Accommodation and food	1.519	1.358	.681	2.313	1.172
Mining and resources	2.893	1.024	.998	.000	7.188**
Manufacturing	1.154	.468	.404	2.14	.727
Education and training	.669	.901	.555	.000	1.042
Power and utilities	1.628	1.792	1.293	.000	.741
Real estate services	1.010	1.452	.265	1.292	1.833
Arts and recreation	1.113	2.181	.000	.991	.766
Defence	.579	.000	.665	.000	.000
<b>Remote Working Arrangement</b>					
COVID-19 - cause for remote working	1.068	.963	1.083	3.391	1.247
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.17	.17	.10	.35	.29%
Overall Percentage	20.3% of the sample	9.7% of sample	7.6% of sample	1.4% of the sample	14.1% of the sample

Exponential coefficients [Exp(B)] are indicated next to their p value (significance) markers,  $p < .1$

(approaching significance),  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $n=1039$

Table 51: Robust Weighted Least Squares Estimator Results

Independent Variables	Negative Work Acts (latent variable)
<b>Demographics</b>	
Age	-.196***
Female	-.031
Non-binary	.044
Gay, Lesbian or Queer	.023
LOTE	-.024
I live alone	.057^
Share house	-.014
Care for children under 5 years	.097**
Care for children 5-16	-.008
Care for children over 16 years	.034
Care for partner	.180***
Care for parents	.029
Disability	.195***
Level of education	.003
<b>Employment categories</b>	
Casual Employee	-.005
Length of Tenure	.068*
Professional	-.042
Administrative	.001
Technical/support Staff	-.013
Consultant	-.041
Researcher	.057^
Supervisor/line manger	.190***
Executive level	.196**
<b>Industry/sector</b>	
Information, media and tele.	.193*
Finance and insurance	-.024
Administrative, business & sup. serv.	.201*
Government	-.032
Health and community services	-.042
Professional and scientific	.013
Agriculture	-.157
Accommodation and food	.304*
Mining and resources	.218
Manufacturing	.109
Education and training	-.027
Power and utilities	.162
Real estate services	.074
Arts and recreation	.336*
Defence	-.263
<b>Remote Working Arrangement</b>	
COVID-19 - cause for remote working	-.074
R <sup>2</sup>	.21
CFI	.946
TLI	.938
SRMR	.021

Standardised estimate next to two-tailed p value (significance) markers, p^<.1 (approaching significance), p\*<.05, p\*\*<.01, p\*\*\*<.001, n=1039

## 5.1 K6 Anxiety and Depression

### 5.1.1 Linear regression results

The linear regression analysis highlighted that 'age' had a significant, negative association with respondent's K6 (anxiety and depression) scores, indicating that older respondents were more likely to note lower levels of anxiety and depression. Being a female, non-binary, caring for a partner, and having a disability were all significantly associated with higher K6 scores. In all, the variables explained 20% of the variance of K6; representing a small-to-moderate effect. On the basis of this finding, it is apparent that there are some demographic and work characteristics that shape a person's experience with anxiety and depression while working remotely or flexibly.

### 5.1.2 Binomial Logistic Regression Results

In relation to the binomial logistic regression applied to the K6 dichotomous variable, 20.3% of the sample indicated that they had K6 scores commensurate with probable serious mental illness. Age had the most substantial relationship with a lower likelihood of having a probable serious mental illness. Those that cared for a partner were 3 times more likely to have a probably serious mental illness, and those with a disability were 3.4 times more likely.

## 5.2 Employee Wellbeing

The regression model examining the association of work and demographic characteristics was not overly meaningful in explaining employee wellbeing, with the independent variables explaining less than 3% of the variance in wellbeing. Age had a slight, positive and significant association with wellbeing, and 'caring for children under five' had a very slight positive effect that was 'approaching significance'. Those identifying as non-binary (gender) had slightly lower wellbeing scores; and there was a small effect noted tying 'working remotely as a result of COVID-19' to (slightly) lower wellbeing scores.

## 5.3 WHS Engagement

Employees who don't engage with WHS arrangements, policies and procedures pose a risk to themselves and their organisation. The regression model did not find a strong overall trend linking demographic and work characteristic variables with WHS engagement; with only 4% of the total variance explained by the independent variables. Having a language other than English (LOTE), being a line manager or senior manager/executive had slight, significant and positive effects on WHS engagement. Those in Health and Community Services, and those working in Accommodation and Food had slightly higher WHS engagement scores.

## 5.4 Somatic Stress

The regression model was effective in explaining 17% of the variance of Somatic Stress, indicating a small effect. While Age, being a professional and working in the finance industry had a small negative association on somatic stress; being a female, living alone, caring for children under 5 years, being a supervisor or senior manager/executive, and working in the mining and resources sector had a positive impact on somatic stress (i.e. associated with higher instances of somatic stress).

## 5.5 Work-Life Conflict

The model was effective in explain 14% of the variance in work-life conflict. While age appeared to have a negative influence on work-life conflict; caring for a partner, having a disability working in a technical/support staff capacity, being a supervisor or senior manager/executive were all associated with higher levels of work-life conflict. Working in an organisation for a longer period of time (tenure) was also associated with higher work-life conflict for flexible workers.

## 5.6 Negative Work Acts

The work and demographic characteristics proved to be somewhat efficacious in explaining the total variance of Negative Work Acts, with 21% of the total variance explained. There were several significant independent variables that were associated with Negative Work Acts in the model. Those positively related to Negative Work Acts, indicating significantly higher scores, included:

- Living alone (approaching significance)
- Caring for children under 5 years
- Caring for a partner
- Having a disability
- Having worked in an organisation for a longer period of time (tenure)
- Being a researcher, line manager or senior manager
- Working in the Information, Media and Communication Industry, or in Accommodation and Food, or in the Arts and Recreation sector.

Age was significantly, negatively associated with Negative Work Acts; indicating that exposure to bullying for flexible workers, may decrease with age (though not necessarily with experience if a person stays within the same organisation; noting the association with tenure which was 'approaching significance').

## 5.7 Other Negative Work Acts

### Binomial Logistic Regression Results

#### Bullying from Supervisor

9.7% of the sample noted that they had been bullied by their supervisor in the last 6 months. Age had a negative association with experiencing this form of bullying. Those with care responsibilities for children under 5 years were 3.2 times more likely to note bullying from their supervisor; and those with a disability were 3.1 times more likely to note this form of bullying. Caring for a partner, and being a line manager also increased likelihood.

### **5.8 Bullying from Colleagues**

7.6% of the sample noted that they had been bullied by their colleagues in the last 6 months. Those who were older were less likely to experience such bullying. Supervisors were 2.4 times more likely to note being bullied by colleagues.

### **5.9 Threats of Violence from Domestic Partner**

Only 1.4% of the sample indicated that they had received threats of violence from their domestic partner. Age was negatively associated with being exposed to such threats. Perhaps counterintuitively, females were less likely (than males) to express exposure to threats of violence from a domestic partner. This result was confirmed with a Chi-Square difference test (12 males and non-binary people (of a sample of 488) noted threats of domestic violence; and 4 females (from a sample of 535) – confirming females were significantly less likely to express threats of domestic violence (chi-square = 4.702\*). However, with such a small portion noting this within the sample, it is important not to take these results herein to be truly representative of the broader population. People caring for children under 5 years old were 7.3 times more likely to indicate that they had experienced domestic violence threats.

### **5.10 Exposure to work-related harassment on social media**

14.1% of the sample indicated that they had been exposed to work-related harassment via social media in the last twelve months. Again, age was negatively associated with this form of harassment. Notable significant associations include; having a disability (4.3 times more likely), caring for a partner (4.7 times more likely), and being a senior or line manager (2.2-2.6 times more likely).

### **5.11 Exposure to psychosocial risk factors for age, disability and carer responsibilities**

The following analyses offer a summary breakdown of the statistics concerning the exposure to psychosocial risk factors for those three variables identified as being strongest predictors of psychosocial risks and outcomes in the above regression analyses: age, ongoing disability, and carer responsibilities.

### 5.11.1 Age group

The analysis suggests that when we consider the experience for flexible workers by age group it appears that risks associated with somatic stress, managerialism, role conflict and professional isolation decreases with age (Figure 1).

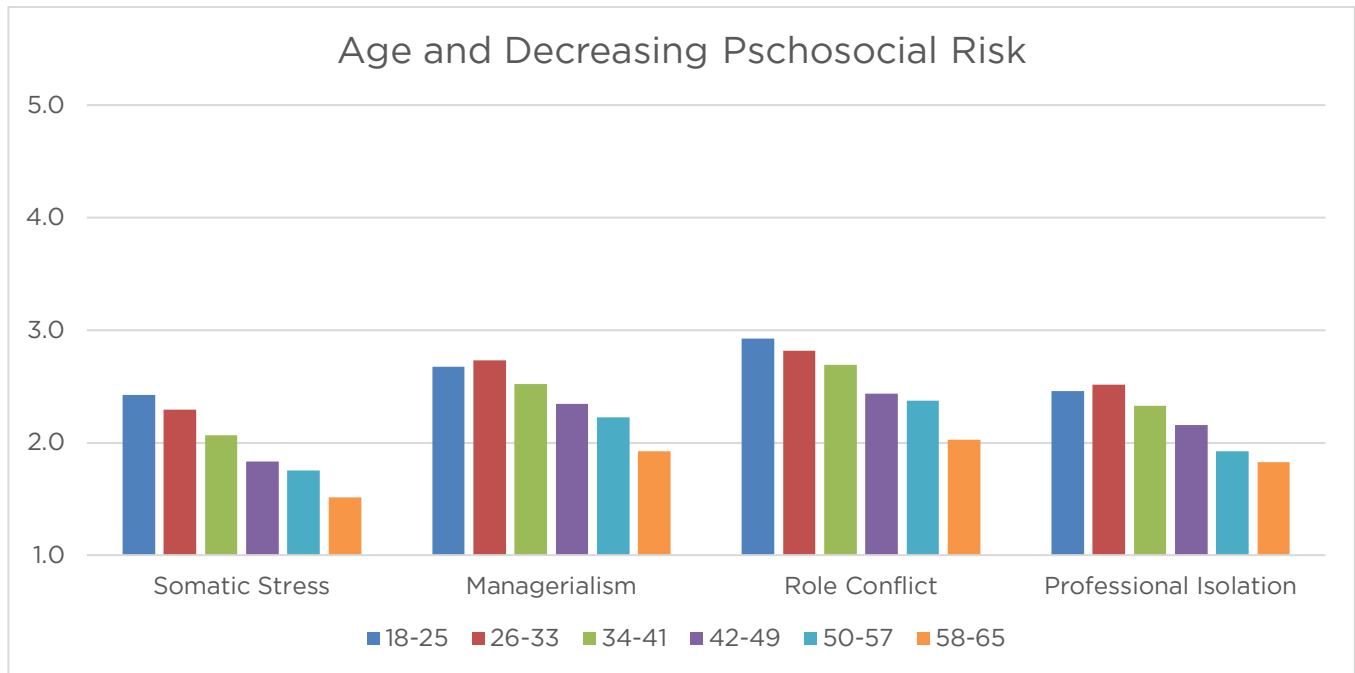


Figure 1: Flexible worker psychosocial risk by age

### 5.11.2 Disability

The analysis suggests that when we consider the experience for flexible workers by whether or not they described themselves as having an ongoing disability, there are notable differences in the means for managerialism, somatic stress, role conflict and professional isolation (Figure 2).

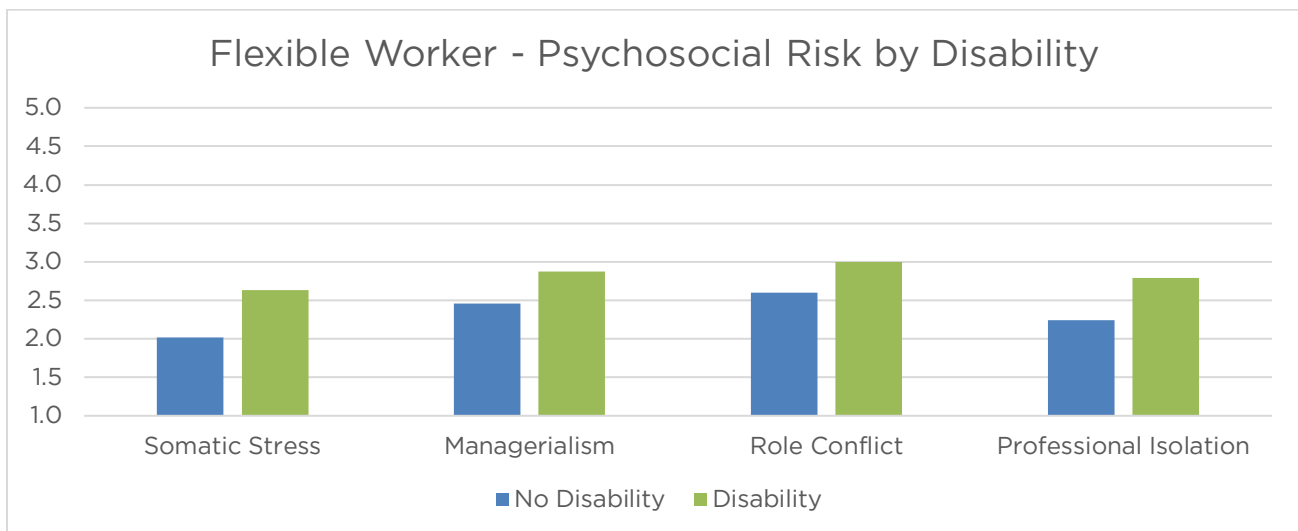


Figure 2: Flexible worker psychosocial risk by disability



### 5.1.1.3 Carer responsibilities

The analysis suggests that when we consider the experience for flexible workers with particular carer responsibilities (caring for a partner, and caring for children under five years of age) it appears that risks associated with managerialism, somatic stress, role conflict and professional isolation are lower if you do not have carer responsibilities (Figure 3).

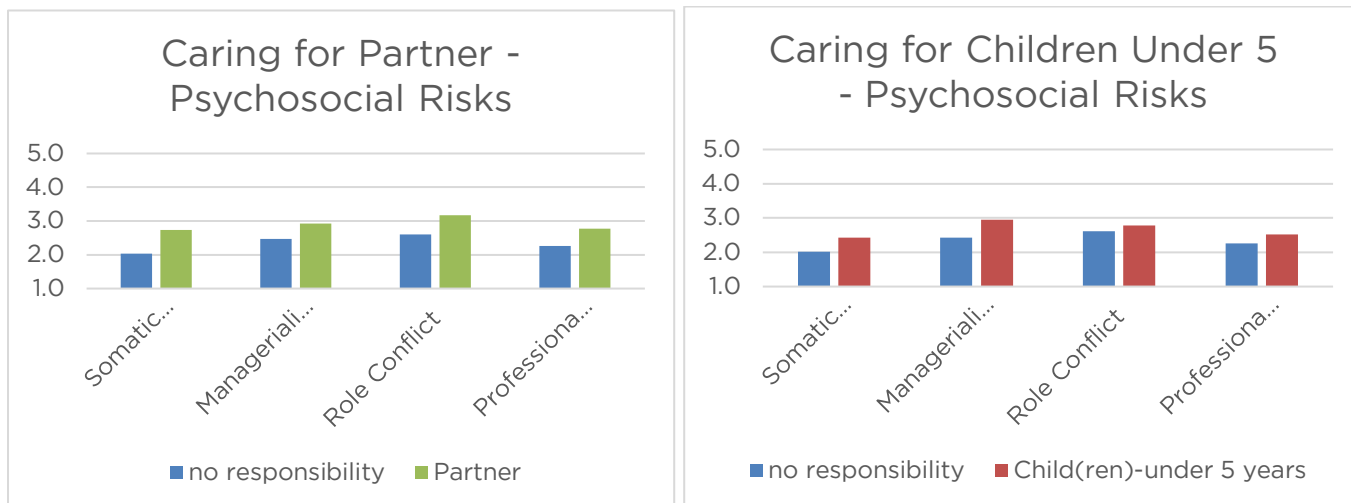


Figure 3: Flexible worker psychosocial risk by carer responsibilities

## 6. Discussion

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The key objectives of this Phase One study were to examine the psychosocial risks associated with flexible work arrangements, focusing on employees working within New South Wales, and to explore the extent to which flexible workers with diverse demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, carer responsibilities, disability) were exposed to psychosocial risks. A large diversity of demographic characteristics for flexible workers was captured within the sample, along with a wide range of industry sectors, work roles and levels.

Following the Job demands-resources approach (Bakkar and Demerouti, 2007), this study examined the balance of job demands and resources in the work environment of flexible workers. Exposure to psychosocial conditions at work were at a moderate level for the various *job demand* variables, including quantitative demands, role conflict, and work-life conflict, with no significant differences between the reporting of these psychosocial risks between flexible and non-flexible workers. This finding suggests **flexible working does not create additional cognitive load or demand on workers, compared to office-based employees**. One important exception to this general finding was for professional isolation, with **flexible workers experiencing significantly higher levels of perceived professional isolation than non-flexible workers**. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has highlighted social isolation as a psychosocial risk associated with remote working (e.g. Bentley et al., 2016; Contreras & Abid, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Teator, Chonody & Hannan, 2021). This finding is of concern as social isolation has been found to impact stress, mental health and sleep (Johnson et al. 2020), and should be an important focus for attention within work teams and organisations. It is also important to note that previous research studies examining psychological demands on remote workers have produced mixed-findings, with workload (quantitative demands) and working hours in particular associated with remote working in a recent large-scale study of Australian Public Service workers (Colley and Williamson 2020). Furthermore, studies have also identified work-life balance to be both a goal and a challenge for flexible working (Eurofound, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020), while the present study found work-life conflict, a related construct, to be rated no higher for flexible workers than for non-flexible workers.

The various *job resources and support* variables examined in the study were rated as moderately high by NSW workers, including supervisor and co-worker support, quality of leadership, and vertical (supervisor) trust. For each of these job resource and support variables, flexible workers perceived higher levels than non-flexible workers, indicating **respondents who worked flexibly experienced a more positive working environment and felt more supported at work than non-flexible workers**. This finding supports previous research where trust and

social support have been found to be critical determinants of effective flexible work outcomes and employee wellbeing (Bentley et al., 2016; Contreras & Abid, 2020; Rysavy & Michalak, 2020).

An important exception in the experience of flexible and non-flexible workers with regards to the psychosocial work environment was perceived exposure to workplace bullying and other forms of ill-treatment. Indeed, **flexible workers reported higher levels of workplace bullying/negative acts than non-flexible workers**, with larger differences reported by flexible workers for being ignored/excluded, insulting and offensive remarks, and being the target of rage and practical jokes. While the research literature on workplace bullying among flexible workers is fairly limited, the published empirical evidence does indicate a higher risk of being exposed to workplace bullying for those employees working in flexible work arrangements (Ariza-Montes et al., 2015; Feijo et al., 2019), including working remotely. This is an important area for future research, with more and more people working from home and in other remote locations as a consequence of COVID-19 potentially increasing the prevalence of ill-treatment and cyber-bullying and harassment in particular.

There were no marked or significant differences in health outcomes. **Wellbeing, psychological distress, job stress and burnout were reported at similarly moderate levels by flexible and non-flexible workers**. Levels of psychological distress, as measured by the Kessler Anxiety and Depression scale K6 scale, suggested that the large majority of the sample were not experiencing major mental health problems (just under 19% with probable serious mental illness). Unsurprisingly, psychological distress had relatively high correlations with other negative outcomes, including sleeping troubles, stress, burnout, and workplace bullying. Psychosocial safety climate has been found in previous Australian and international research to be a powerful predictor of employee wellbeing outcomes (Bentley et al., in press; Dollard and Bakker, 2010; McLinton, Dollard and Tuckey, 2018; Teo, Bentley and Nguyen, 2020). In the present study, **flexible workers perceived a higher-level psychosocial safety climate than non-flexible workers, indicating that these individuals worked within organisational climates that prioritised and supported psychological health and safety**. Psychosocial safety climate was also positively related to wellbeing and negatively related to psychological distress (K6), workplace bullying, stress, and other negative outcomes, consistent with previous Australian and international research (e.g. Bentley et al., 2021; Law et al., 2011, Teo, Bentley and Nguyen, 2020). These findings indicate the importance of top leadership commitment to psychological health and safety performance, clear communication of support for employee wellbeing, and the involvement of all organisational members in psychological safety (Dollard and Bakker, 2010).

Past research has highlighted an “increasing invisibility of occupational health and safety in the digitized world of work,” due to WHS professionals and regulators having reduced access to employees (Robelski and Sommer, 2020). A primary concern for the WHS discipline and organisations, therefore, is how to engage remote employees in WHS and to enable WHS representation from distributed workforces (Nielsen et al., 2019; Robelski and Sommer, 2020). Flexible workers in the present study rated their engagement with workplace health and safety higher than non-flexible workers, although **safety compliance and participation were rated significantly lower by flexible workers**, suggesting the need for a greater research and practice focus on involvement in WHS for flexible workers. This will be addressed through Phase 2 research and will be the key focus of Phase 3.

Regression and t-test analyses revealed that **flexible workers, including those who work from home, experience less job demands, or negative psychosocial factors, as they age and more job resources. Age was also negatively associated with exposure to workplace bullying.**

These findings are consistent with other recent research that has found younger adult workers to experience higher levels of job demands, including loneliness and social isolation during COVID-19, than their older peers (Teater, Chonody & Hannan, 2021). Furthermore, flexible working practices were positively associated with work-life balance and wellbeing employee among Australian workers, with age moderating work-life balance and turnover intentions (Ferdons, Ali & French, 2021). Studies of working populations outside the context of COVID-related remote working also indicate a decreased perceived exposure to job demands and increase in job resources as workers age. For example, lack of organisational justice and job control have been shown to be greater in early adulthood (Kim et al., 2020), while older workers report a higher level of resilience and job satisfaction than younger employees (Hsu, 2018; Ng & Feldman, 2010). These findings suggest that time and experience in an occupation and within a work environment is valuable for promoting healthy work conditions. Indeed, Kim et al. (2020) argue that younger workers have less opportunities through which to combat unfair organisational policies and unsatisfactory organisational support. As Hsu (2018) notes, younger employees are early in their careers and often under pressure, while in later working life workers learn to find their place and fit better within the working environment.

In the present study, **older workers also reported better psychological health** than younger respondents, with age being negatively related to psychological distress. There is support for the protective effect of older age in relation to work-related psychological stress, including studies of burnout (Teo et al., 2021) and job demands associated with depressive symptoms (Kim et al., 2020). **Psychological health outcomes were found to be worse for female respondents who worked flexibly.** This finding is in-line with previous research that has found gender differences in both exposure to psychosocial risks and psychological health outcomes

(Kim et al., 2020), although these differences are age-related, with depressive symptoms more prevalent in early and mid-life for females, but across the lifespan for males. Other recent research from Europe (Mensah, 2021) has found women to have higher effect size than men in the relationship between job stress and mental health.

**Flexible workers who had an ongoing disability experienced higher levels of job demands and lower levels of job resources, along with poorer psychological health,** with workers with a disability over 3.4 times more likely to have a probable serious mental illness. Flexible workers with an ongoing disability were also much more likely to experience bullying and ill-treatment from supervisor and co-workers. The literature on disability and work is considerable, with much evidence for the role of limitations in physical and cognitive functioning on workability and employment outcomes (see Carolan, 2020; Uccelli et al., 2019). While flexible work practices have been recommended as an approach to enable work participation by workers with disability, our findings suggest that additional levels of support and consideration of job design and work scheduling are important to this cohort.

**Flexible workers with carer duties (for children under 5, and for partners) reported higher levels of exposure to psychosocial risks across the board, and notably ill-treatment.** These workers also experienced poorer psychological health. Most notably, those that cared for a partner were almost 3 times more likely to have a probable serious mental illness. These findings are supported by the extant literature, where caregiving has been found to impact the ability to engage with work and adversely affect Australian caregivers' mental health (Farrugia et al., 2019). Similarly, Lum & Lee (2019) found employment adjustments made by workers with care responsibilities in a Canadian sample to be significantly associated with negative mental health and higher stress levels, while caregiving was found to impact mental health through work-family conflict (Kayaalp, Page & Rospenda, 2020). Other studies have suggested flexible work practices as a way of enabling participation with employment for individuals with carer responsibilities (e.g. Bainbridge & Townsend, 2020), although our findings indicate that workers with caring responsibilities face considerable challenges through exposure to psychosocial risk factors, including workplace bullying, meaning strong organisational and manager support is required to ensure better outcomes for workers with care responsibilities.

A final point to note stemming from the regression analyses is that, aside from age, carer responsibilities and having a disability, demographic and/or work characteristic variables were not overly effective in explaining the variance in psychosocial risk outcomes. This finding furnishes a more complete picture relative to existing research, which has not previously achieved conclusive findings concerning the effect of gender and industry type on flexible worker outcomes (Charalampous et al., 2019). Based on the analysis completed as part of this

report, gender was not overly (or directly) effective in explaining the presence of psychosocial risk, nor positive or negative outcomes that flow on from this; however, undertaking caring duties was a risk factor. In Australia, as in many other societies, caring responsibilities typically disproportionately fall to females, and there is thus an indirect association between gender and psychosocial risk for flexible workers. However, our analysis did not evidence a significant correlation of note between being female and care duties<sup>ii</sup>.

## 7. Implications

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Key contributions of this study include insights gained about flexible working during a period where COVID-19-restrictions were to some extent impacting working practices and the psychosocial conditions for work in NSW. The study found that flexible workers, including those who worked from home, perceived a superior work environment in terms of the balance of job demands and resources they experienced, with the exception of ill-treatment and social isolation; known psychosocial risks for flexible workers. These findings suggest the need to examine how organisations manage both social isolation associated with extended remote working and ill-treatment toward flexible workers, including effective bullying and harassment policy and reporting systems (Einarsen et al., 2011). The phased approach to this research project enabled these findings to inform Phase 2 of the study, where further insight as to the nature, causes and management approaches in relation to psychosocial risks is being sought.

Further, the overall findings from Phase 1 suggest that exposure to psychosocial conditions at work varied across a number of demographic sub-groups. Of note, flexible workers appear to experience less job demands as they age and acquire greater resources to manage these demands, as is the case with more experienced workers. One implication of these findings for organisations is to provide opportunities for mentoring between older and more experienced workers and those with less time on the job on how to craft healthier work conditions, particularly when working remotely. This might include methods to improve time-management, resource acquisition, and more effective relationship building. However, this should not detract from the need for organisations to provide strong leadership for psychological health and safety. Indeed, our study found that higher reported levels of psychosocial safety climate (comprising top management commitment to and prioritisation of psychological safety, support for workers and effective communication regarding psychological safety, and employee involvement in psychological safety) were associated with improved psychosocial conditions and better psychological health outcomes. This suggests a clear need for organisations to adopt and communicate high-level prioritisation of psychological safety for flexible workers.

Our finding revealed a number of vulnerable worker groupings amongst the flexible worker sample and the sub-sample that worked from home. Flexible workers with an ongoing disability or care responsibilities (specifically for children under five years of age, and caring for a partner) reported higher levels of exposure to psychosocial risks and inferior health outcomes. High exposure to bullying behaviours were of particular note for these cohorts. Organisations need to ensure inclusive and supportive work practices are encouraged, and provide high-inclusion leadership and HR practices to ensure all workers are treated fairly and respectfully. The insights gained from Phase 1 which indicate marked differences in the experience of remote working for

workers with different demographic characteristics will be explored through deeper analysis of this dataset and through the Phase 2 qualitative research study.

Finally, our study was concerned with the level of WHS participation of flexible workers, as workers undertaking part-time work, shift-work, job-share, or work from home may not have the opportunity to fully engage in workplace health and safety or may be at greater risk due to reduced WHS participation or the nature of their remote work environment. The study found that flexible workers reported significantly lower levels of workplace health and safety participation and safety compliance than non-flexible workers, indicating a need to develop WHS systems that enhanced flexible worker involvement in health and safety. This will receive further consideration in Phase 2 and will be the major focus of Phase 3 of the project.



## 8. Limitations

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In conducting this research we encountered several limitations. Firstly, there may have been a self-selection bias where NSW workers interested in the topic may have been more likely to participate and complete the survey. This was at least partially mitigated by the use of a panel data company for data collection, meaning respondents were not selected on the basis of their interest in the topic, but rather as a member of a panel that received incentives for participation. A further concern was the cross-sectional nature of the study, with data collected at one point in time. This meant that associations observed between study variables were correlational in nature, and the direction of causality could not be known. Finally, several survey questions allowed for multiple responses, where participants could select all of the options that applied to their situation. Consequently, this limited the way some of the data could be categorised for further analysis.

## 9. Conclusions

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In Phase 1 of the research study, a questionnaire survey captured the perceptions of 1318 NSW-based workers, including 1039 NSW-based flexible workers, regarding exposure to psychological risks in the workplace. These data were collected during a period of varying COVID-19 restrictions and, therefore, provide a snapshot of the psychosocial risks and wellbeing outcomes experienced by NSW workers when working flexibly. The study provides a broad understanding of psychosocial WHS risks faced by flexible workers, their psychological health outcomes, and insight into how flexible workers engaged with WHS systems. Findings indicate that flexible workers face similar levels of job demands to non-flexible workers, with the exception of having increased exposure to social isolation and bullying from co-workers and supervisors. Flexible workers of younger age, those with a disability, and workers with carer responsibilities were exposed to greater psychosocial risk and had relatively poor health outcomes. Furthermore, engagement in WHS was poorer for flexible workers. Implications for practice are considered.

## 10. References

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## Appendix A: Correlation Matrix for study variables - Flexible workers

Correlation - 1039

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1. K6 Anxiety and Depression	13.81	5.79	1																					
2. Employee Wellbeing	3.65	0.88	-.31**	1																				
3. WHS Engagement	3.41	0.88	-.10**	.499**	1																			
4. Negative Work Acts	1.60	0.86	.526**	-.183**	0.034	1																		
5. Sleep Com	2.49	1.02	.667**	-.162**	0.029	.469**	1																	
6. Somatic Stress	2.06	0.94	.694**	-.151**	0.006	.630**	.638**	1																
7. Work-Life Conflict	2.56	1.07	.462**	.302**	.082**	.463**	.373**	.456**	1															
8. Quantitative Demands	2.89	0.60	.289**	0.037	0.05	.291**	.238**	.313**	.364**	1														
9. Management	2.49	1.02	.454**	.343**	-.127**	.535**	.375**	.462**	.522**	.312**	1													
10. Role Conflict	2.63	0.98	.406*	.300**	-.078*	.433**	.303**	.400**	.569**	.381**	.566**	1												
11. Role Clarity	3.88	0.85	.248**	.428**	.233**	.292**	.091**	.230**	.288**	-.073*	.327**	.260**	1											
12. Psychosocial Safety Climate	3.36	0.96	.180**	.553**	.625**	-.139**	.095**	-.075*	.228**	0.008	.282**	.269**	.344**	1										
13. Leadership	3.37	0.99	.106**	.529**	.474**	.086**	0.047	0.034	-.161**	0.017	.295**	-.182**	.464*	.564*	1									
14. Safety Compliance	3.95	0.80	-.153**	.386**	.405**	.206**	0.054	-.143**	-.213**	0.041	-.157**	-.213**	.418**	.379*	.274*	1								
15. Safety Participation	3.69	0.83	.100**	.420**	.541**	-.073*	0.002	0.043	-.123**	0.027	-.073*	.088**	.290**	.362*	.308*	.652*	1							
16. Supervisor Support	3.54	0.97	.196**	.512**	.421**	.203**	-.135**	-.112**	.242**	0.022	.352**	-.218**	.451**	.561**	.692*	.344*	.311**	1						
17. Colleague Support	3.51	0.87	.139**	.441**	.385**	.104**	-.066*	-.076*	.149**	0.013	.203**	.090**	.385**	.410**	.476*	.324*	.343*	.582*	1					
18. Trust	3.59	0.91	.196**	.580**	.452**	.203**	.082**	-.122**	.207**	0.015	.401**	.285**	.491**	.580*	.632*	.325*	.307*	.641**	.484*	1				
19. Inclusion climate	3.72	0.86	.255**	.631**	.566**	.266**	-.148**	-.176**	.295**	-0.02	-.391**	-.317**	.385**	.688*	.571**	.450*	.408*	.582*	.455*	.645*	1			
20. Determination	3.77	0.92	.192**	.486**	.278**	-.179**	-.074*	-.162**	-.216**	0.025	.233**	-.217**	.395**	.389*	.278*	.396*	.241**	.354*	.299*	.448*	.464*	1		
21. Professional Isolation	2.29	0.95	.484**	-.182**	-.073*	.539**	.380**	.479**	.440*	.311**	.471**	.389**	.276**	.134**	.116**	.213**	.144**	.191**	.104**	.185**	.219**	.124**	1	
22. Psychological Capital	4.47	0.90	.329**	.643**	.569**	.244**	-.162**	.200**	.292**	0.032	.292**	.270**	.460*	.569*	.425*	.571**	.541**	.480*	.425*	.541**	.710**	.522*	.238**	1

Standardised estimate next to two-tailed p value (significance) markers,  $p^{\wedge}<.1$  (approaching significance),  $p^*<.05$ ,  $p^{**}<.01$ ,  $p^{***}<.001$ ,  $n=1039$

Appendix B: Correlation Matrix for study variables - whole sample

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1. K6 Anxiety and Depression	13.82	5.81	1																					
2. Employee Wellbeing	3.61	0.92	-.317**	1																				
3. WHS Engagement	3.37	0.92	-.103**	.512**	1																			
4. Negative Work Acts	1.56	0.81	.489**	-.183**	-0.05	1																		
5. Sleep Com	2.46	1.01	.638**	-.173**	0.038	.433**	1																	
6. Somatic Stress	2.04	0.94	.695**	-.182**	0.009	.582**	.614**	1																
7. Work-Life Conflict	2.55	1.07	.467**	-.308**	-.082**	.454**	.357**	.446**	1															
8. Quantitative Demands	2.83	0.67	.295**	-.062*	0.046	.304**	.234**	.308**	.384**	1														
9. Management	2.50	1.01	.444**	.350**	-.134**	.511**	.350**	.438**	.516**	.336**	1													
10. Role Conflict	2.63	1.00	.387**	-.315**	-.107**	.415**	.296**	.380**	.568**	.391**	.568**	1												
11. Role Clarity	3.88	0.86	-.233**	.432**	.255**	-.284**	-.102**	-.217**	-.277**	-.071**	-.306**	-.246**	1											
12. Psychosocial Safety Climate	3.29	1.00	-.187**	.564**	.630**	-.152**	.093**	.089**	.235**	-0.011	-.315**	.288**	.339**	1										
13. Leadership	3.33	1.03	-.110**	.528**	.472**	-.096**	-.056*	0.045	-.168**	0.022	-.312**	-.201**	.466**	.582**	1									
14. Safety Compliance	3.98	0.81	-.152**	.348**	.379**	.225**	0.054	-.149**	-.186**	-.054*	-.151**	-.195**	.409**	.351**	.242**	1								
15. Safety Participation	3.72	0.81	-.087**	.387**	.521**	-.082**	0.008	0.048	-.097**	0.022	-.065*	-.072**	.311**	.346**	.285**	.644**	1							
16. Supervisor Support	3.48	1.01	-.181**	.532**	.436**	-.196**	-.127**	-.112**	-.240**	0.045	-.362**	-.241**	.447**	.575**	.696**	.301**	.286**	1						
17. Colleague Support	3.47	0.90	-.131**	.437**	.385**	-.105**	-.061*	-.073**	-.141**	0.026	-.200**	-.075**	.357**	.407**	.467**	.305**	.345**	.580**	1					
18. Trust	3.53	0.94	-.185**	.568**	.450**	-.212**	-.088**	-.119**	-.211**	0.044	-.417**	-.311**	.475**	.593**	.635**	.311**	.289**	.656**	.478**	1				
19. Inclusion climate	3.68	0.89	-.258**	.624**	.579**	-.272**	-.146**	-.176**	-.293**	-.058*	-.402**	-.341**	.382**	.706**	.573**	.416**	.382**	.591**	.442**	.669**	1			
20. Determination	3.72	0.92	.210**	.483**	.291**	-.175**	-.088**	-.172**	.220**	0.004	.238**	-.219**	.390**	.380**	.281**	.361**	.235**	.343**	.292**	.432**	.453**	1		
21. Professional Isolation	2.20	0.96	.451**	-.191**	-.094**	.537**	.358**	.441**	.437**	.303**	.441**	.386**	.263**	-.138**	-.094**	-.226**	-.139**	-.178**	-.105**	-.174**	-.230**	-.149**	1	
22. Psychological Capital	4.43	0.95	-.333**	.642**	.590**	-.237**	-.167**	-.207**	-.279**	0.037	-.283**	-.255**	.451**	.573**	.425**	.526**	.506**	.487**	.437**	.520**	.699**	.509**	-.247**	1

Standardised estimate next to two-tailed p value (significance) markers, p<.1 (approaching significance), p<.05, p<.01, p<.001, n=1039

<sup>i</sup> Regression model notes:

The following variables were removed from analysis, avoiding potential issues with multicollinearity:

- 'Live with a partner and children', 'living with a partner (no children)', 'living with parents', 'living with children (no partner)', 'living in a multigenerational home', 'married' and 'de-facto' - these items possessed a high correlations with each other, and 'single', 'age', 'caring for children under 5,' and 'caring for children between 6 and 16.'
- 'Working-from-home' and 'Working-from-home-plus' and 'other-flexible-work'; these variables had significant correlations with each other, and with the item - 'COVID-19 was the reason for remote working'.
- 'Fixed term employment', 'full time' and 'Permanent employee' - possessed a high negative correlation with each other, 'age' and 'tenure'.
- 'Male' possessed a high negative correlation with 'female' - as females are considered to be the more marginalised group in workplaces, male was removed from analysis.
- 'Skilled labour' had a high negative correlation with education, and was removed.
- Identifying as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island (only one person in the sample identified as ATSI).
- Identifying as 'heterosexual' had a high negative correlation 'gay, lesbian or queer', and as the latter form are considered to be more marginalised in Australian workplaces, the former variable was removed.
- Heterosexual (high negative correlation with other demographic - sexuality variables).

<sup>ii</sup> Correlation coefficient table for variables - Female, and care duties.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Female	1					
2. Care for children under 5	-.016	1				
3. Care for children between 5-16	-.049	.142***	1			
4. Care for children over 16	-.051	-.045	.144***	1		
5. Care for Partner	.017	.014	.036	.134***	1	
6. Care for parents	.069*	.028	.023.	.059	.082**	1

*Standardised estimate next to two-tailed p value (significance) markers,  $p^{\wedge}<.1$  (approaching significance),  $p^*<.05$ ,  $p^{**}<.01$ ,  $p^{***}<.001$ ,  $n=1039$*