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Article *in* New Technology Work and Employment · February 2011

Impact Factor: 0.89 · DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-005X.2010.00258.x

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# Work at home and time use in Finland

Jouko Nätti, Mia Tammelin, Timo Anttila and Satu Ojala

*This study examines the relationship between home-based work (HBW) and time use by comparing unpaid (overtime) home workers, paid (agreed) home workers and non-home workers. Especially, unpaid HBW was linked to the stretching of working hours and the reduction of free time.*

## Introduction

### The heterogeneity of home-based work

Regardless of the recent interest in home-based work (HBW), it is not a new phenomenon, in fact, it is the case that work has returned home (Raines and Leathers, 2001; Pyöriä, 2003). Alladi Venkatesh and Vitalari (1992) discussed, almost 20 years ago, how the emergence of information and communication technologies radically increased the ability of organisations to distribute their work processes. In particular, their study discussed computer-based work at home. It seems that since the early 1990s HBW has remained relevant due to continuous change in the nature of work, and particularly because of the increase of knowledge intensive work. Our study questions the characteristics of HBW and its relation to patterns of time use by focusing on the heterogeneity of HBW.

HBW has been defined in various concepts. These concepts often overlap and sometimes different concepts are used to describe the same phenomenon. At the same time, various concepts and classifications indicate the broad heterogeneity of HBW (e.g. Kraut, 1989; Sullivan, 2003; Pyöriä, 2006). The first classification stressed changes that occur over time in HBW. Traditionally HBW, in addition to agricultural work, was work similar to industrial work, monotonous low paid work. This is described as traditional HBW. As, contrary to that, modern HBW refers to white-collar work, for example, planning or consultation work intensified by the possibilities of new information technologies (Felstead *et al.*, 2001).

The second classification stresses the duration of HBW; is it part-time or full-time? Comparative research on the character of HBW (Haddon and Brynin, 2005) shows that that the home as the sole work location is a numerically very small category, whereas

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partly working at home is a substantially more common phenomenon (see also Bailey and Kurkland, 2002). According to the 2005 European Working Conditions Survey, less than 3 per cent of European workers reported working all or almost all the time from home. However, 20 per cent of European workers reported working at least a quarter of the time from home (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007).

The third classification stresses the role of information technology by separating telework and other HBW (e.g. Raines and Leathers, 2001; Kaufman-Scarborough, 2006). Telework refers to paid work carried out away from the premises of the employers, often at home and using modern information technology (e.g. Haddon and Brynin, 2005). According to the 2005 European Working Conditions Survey, an average of 8 per cent of European workers reported working at least a quarter of the time at home with a personal computer (PC) doing teleworking, and 12 per cent without a PC. In Finland, the proportion of workers reporting teleworking (13 per cent) was above the European average (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007). However, as also manual work computerises fast, differentiating between telework and work at home without PC has been perceived artificial (Sullivan, 2003). Therefore, some new telework definitions do not stress the usage of certain device (e.g. Sullivan and Smithson, 2007).

The fourth classification stresses the different labour market statuses of home-based workers (HBWs). Felstead and Jewson (2000: 16) distinguish between self-employed homeworkers and home-located wage-labourers. Home-located wage-labourers, usually white-collar professionals, most often work part time at home, substituting or supplementing office-based work. In between these forms there are 'contractors' or project-based homeworkers who may run own small firms from their homes, but at the same time, get temporary project-fees or hourly wages from their customers (Osnowitz, 2005). Also additional work at home for secondary employees is enumerated (Kraut, 1989: 23).

The fifth classification stressed the compensation dimension. HBW can be unpaid overtime and supplementary work at home or working at home as agreed between the employee and employer. According to Song (2009), 12.5 per cent of US employees in 2001 took work home from their job without a formal agreement, and only 3.4 per cent were paid at-home workers based on the Current Population Survey. Unpaid at-home workers were older, more often team leaders and with higher hourly wages than other workers. The compensation dimension is also linked to the motives for HBW. According to Song (2009), the reasons for working at home varied considerably and were in accordance with an employee's pay status. Most (62 per cent) of those who took their work home without formal payment arrangement reported that they worked at home to finish or catch up on work, whereas those people that had formal payment worked at home because it was the nature of work. 'Coordinate work schedule with personal or family needs' was mentioned in connection with only four to 8 per cent of at-home workers. Furthermore, the compensation dimension is linked to the timing of at-home work. Unpaid overtime work is typically carried out in the evenings and weekends, while agreed HBW is typically carried out during normal working hours (Venkatesh and Vitalari, 1992; Sullivan, 2003). In this paper, we focus on this contractual dimension of HBW by separating unpaid and paid at-home workers.

### HBW and time use

Time is a definite property, we only have 24 hours a day; time spent at work cannot be spent to another activity. The question is; where do the hours for work come from? More specifically, is at-home work done at the cost of the leisure time activities? If work at-home substitutes work at the office then there should not be any association with the overall use of time. In addition, doing supplementary hours at the office would reduce time for other activities. The novelty of our approach is that we examine the heterogeneity of at-home work by comparing unpaid and paid at-home work from the perspective of time use.

Previous studies have found that HBW is typically linked to the *lengthening of working time*, as a result of supplementing office hours by doing further work hours at home. According to Golden (2008), working longer than standard hours was strongly associated with having work at home. It is also likely that HBW is used to cope with the long hours that work demands (Callister and Dixon, 2001). Contrary to findings on the lengthening of working time, Wight and Raley (2009) found that female home workers spend almost an hour less time in paid work than those who did not work at home. Peters and van der Lippe (2007) conclude that the new forms of control developed by positive reinforcement and output management enable (tele)-homeworking practices, but can also increase risks, especially if work standards are constantly driven up. They found that, especially among men, heavy home working practices are often accompanied by longer working hours and having less enjoyable non-working time.

In the debate on HBW, one of the arguments for HBW is *the reduced time used for travelling*, which both benefits the environment and the individual worker (e.g. Hill *et al.*, 2003). However, some studies have suggested that, contrary to assumptions, the amount of time used for travelling was not reduced (Michelson, 1998; 2000). Commuting time is not reduced if HBW supplements work at the office. According to Song (2009), only 1–5 per cent of at-home workers reported 'reduce commuting time or expense' as reason for working at home. In a similar vein, Bailey and Kurkland (2002), in their review of telework, conclude that commuting factors do not appear to be the primary motives for telework, and in many cases are absent altogether.

It is often suggested that one of the greatest advantages of HBW is the possibility to *combine work with the needs and rhythm of the family and other private spheres of life*. This notion has received much research attention and public discussion (see Bailey and Kurkland, 2002). To some extent HBW seems to allow individual flexibility to meet the needs of the family (see, e.g. Mirchandani, 2000; Roehling *et al.*, 2003). In the UK, Sullivan and Smithson (2007) suggest that there is some evidence which supports HBW as means to integrate work and family; according to their review of the literature on the subject, women working at home may be more likely to use HBW to accommodate work and family demands, while men may be more likely to use HBW for additional paid work. Still the evidence is mixed (see Felstead *et al.*, 2001; Vittersø *et al.*, 2003; Nätti *et al.*, 2006; Peters and van der Lippe, 2007), which may reflect the different positions of women at the national labour markets.

There are only a few studies which particularly analyse the associations of home working and *leisure time*. Venkatesh and Vitalari (1992) found that doing supplementary work at home was not associated with a reduction in time spent on leisure activities, watching TV or time spent with the family. Michelson's (2000) study looked at Sweden and Canada and used the national time studies, gathered, respectively, in 1991 and 1992. The daily mean time for HBW was 250 minutes in Sweden and 272 in Canada. The implications of HBW for everyday routines were similar in both national surveys, and the affects on leisure and socialising time were minor. The total number of work and travelling hours reduced the possibilities for redistributing time to leisure and socialising. However, employees doing HBW spent more time alone but socialised more with family members than did employees who did not do HBW, although employees doing HBW socialised less with friends and neighbours.

## Aims

In our study, we distinguish between unpaid home workers, who supplement office based work by doing unpaid overtime work at home, and paid home workers, who have agreed to work at home with their employer. Thus, we examine HBW in Finland by comparing three groups: unpaid (overtime) home workers, paid (agreed home work), and non-home workers. We have three specific research questions: First, we examine the characteristics of HBW. Second, we examine the duration and timing of HBW. Third, we examine the relations of HBW and time use.

## Data and methods

### Data

The analysis is based on the Finnish Use of Time data (1999–2000), collected by Statistics Finland. The data includes interviews and use of time diaries covering 10,561 days and 5,332 individuals, which constitute over 3,000 households. All individuals in a household that are aged 10 years and over are included in the data. Our analysis focuses on 15–64-year-old employees ( $n = 4,587$ ).

### Comparison groups

We use both the interview data and diary data to investigate the proportion of employees who work at home. In the *interviews* respondents were asked 'Do you sometimes do work connected with your main job at home?' The response alternatives were: 'Works occasionally or partially at home' (34 per cent); 'Works at home only' (2 per cent) and 'Does not work at home at all' (65 per cent).

In addition, in the interviews those employees working sometimes or partially at home were also asked 'Is this work mainly: Overtime work without compensation' (40 per cent of home workers; 13.6 per cent of all employees); 'Or has it been agreed that you work some of your normal working hours at home' (44 per cent; 15.0 per cent of all employees) and 'Or both' (13 per cent; 5.3 per cent of all employees).

In the *diary* data, HBW is calculated in ten minute time periods by combining the main activity and place of work. On average, 9 per cent of employees worked during the diary period (24 hours) at least partly at home. The methodological difference is clear when cross tabulating the interview data with the time use diary data: among those who reported in their interview that they at least sometimes work at home, only 19 per cent actually had worked at home during the diary period. The extent of HBW varies depending on the measure and data source. Due to fact that we are particularly interested in the timing of the HBW and relationships between homework and overall time use we focus only on diary-based home working.

When combining the information on the extent and nature of HBW from the interview-data and the reported working at home during the diary days, we get three comparison groups: unpaid home workers (overtime or both,  $n = 130$ , 2.8 per cent); paid (agreed,  $n = 165$ , 3.6 per cent) and non-home workers ( $n = 4,295$ , 93.6 per cent of employees). Paid home workers also include those who worked only at home.

### Time use

In examining overall time use, we apply Robinson and Godbey's (1997) classification of the main categories of primary activities. This classification separates (1) time for paid work, (2) committed time for household maintenance, (3) personal time devoted for self and (4) time of free time activities. Time use is examined by calculating mean durations of activities separately for each comparison group.

### Control variables

Control variables include individual-level, work and infrastructure factors. The individual variables include gender (men, women), age of the respondent, information on the family and residential area. Age was classified into three groups (15–34, 35–49 and 50–64 years old). Living with a partner or without a partner was indicated by family status. Having children was classified into two groups: no children at home, or at least one child less than 18 years old at home. The residential area was classified as urban or rural. Work-related variables include information on the socio-economic status of the employee and industry. Industry was based on the NACE classification (Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community). Infrastructure related variables

include computer, Internet connection and number of rooms at home. Information on computer (no, yes), Internet connection (no, yes) and number of rooms at home was based on the household interview.

### Methods of analysis

In the study we use cross tabulation and covariate analysis. In examining the extent, timing and duration of home working we use cross tabulation. For controlling the background factors covariate analysis is used. The results indicate estimated time use.

## Results

### The characteristics of the comparison groups

The characteristics of the comparison groups differ (Table 1). Both unpaid and paid home workers were more often older, upper-white collar employees who earned more and had a better home infrastructure, as they were more likely to have a computer, an

Table 1: The characteristics of the comparison groups (%)

	Unpaid home workers ( <i>n</i> = 130)	Paid home workers ( <i>n</i> = 165)	Non-home workers ( <i>n</i> = 4,295)	Sig.
<i>Gender</i>				0.001
Men	61	40	49	
Women	39	60	51	
<i>Age</i>				0.000
15–34	29	17	32	
35–49	44	44	43	
50–64	28	39	25	
Mean age (years)	43	46	41	0.000
Has a partner	87	75	74	0.004
Has a child	45	44	41	0.356
<i>Socio-economic status</i>				0.000
Upper level white-collar.	57	67	23	
Lower level white-collar	36	28	39	
Manual worker	8	5	38	
Living in an urban area	71	58	62	0.091
<i>Economic sector</i>				0.000
Agriculture and forestry	2	5	2	
Manufacturing, construction	14	10	30	
Retail and whole sale trade	7	5	13	
Transport, communication	4	2	8	
Financing, business services	35	7	13	
Public administration	8	1	5	
Education and research	12	50	7	
Social and health care	9	16	17	
Other services	9	5	5	
Computer at home	85	79	57	0.000
Internet connection at home	64	56	33	0.000
Number of rooms at home	3,9	4,2	3,6	0.000
Annual income (from tax register) (Euros)	35.366	34.614	24.284	0.000

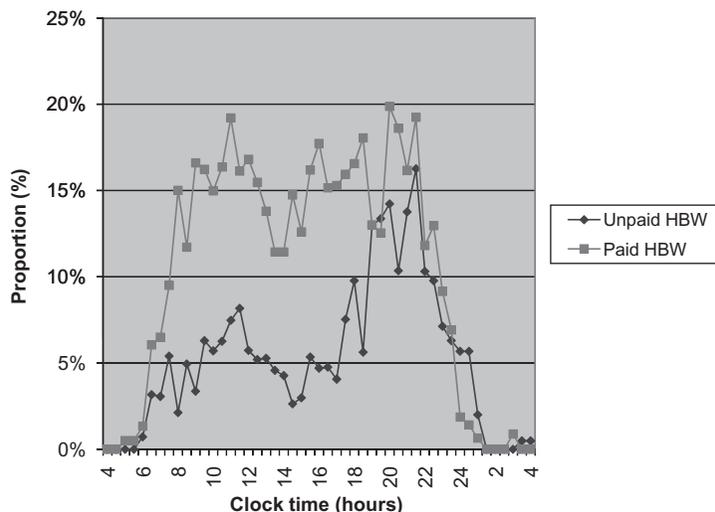


Figure 1: The prevalence of HBW in the comparison groups during the day (per cent, diary data)

Internet connection and more rooms at home compared with non-home workers. Furthermore, unpaid home workers were more often men, had a partner, and worked in financing and business services, while paid home workers were more often women, and worked in education. However, there are no differences due to the presence of children in the household or in the urbanisation rate of the residential area.

### Duration and timing of HBW

Unpaid home workers spent over one hour (76 minutes) and paid home workers spent almost 3 hours (156 minutes) a day working at home. Typically unpaid home workers spent 10–50 minutes at work while paid home workers typically spent 1–2 hours working at home. Thus, a large majority of HBW is done on a part-time basis and only very few work at home on a full-time basis.

The prevalence of HBW also varies during different clock times and between comparison groups (Figure 1). Among unpaid home workers the prevalence of HBW (participation rate) increases after 6:00 PM and reaches a peak between 8:00 PM and 10:00 PM. Among paid home workers HBW is also common during daytime.

### HBW and time use

Next we examine the relationship between home working and overall time use by comparing paid, unpaid and non-home workers (Table 2). We presume that time use varies with various background factors, which are controlled by using covariate analysis. Thus, the results indicate estimated time use. In examining overall time use we apply Robinson and Godbey's (1997) classification of the four main categories of primary activities. This classification separates contracted time for paid work, committed time for household maintenance, personal time devoted for self and free time activities.

HBW is linked to longer working hours. Especially unpaid (384 minutes) but also paid (336 minutes) home workers spend more time in paid work compared to non-home workers (304 minutes). On the other hand, paid home workers spend less time commuting compared to other groups.

Table 2: Estimated time use within the comparison groups (minutes, diary data)  
(covariate analysis)

	Unpaid home workers ( <i>n</i> = 130) (1)	Paid home workers ( <i>n</i> = 165) (2)	Non-home workers ( <i>n</i> = 4,295) (3)	Differences between groups
<i>Contracted time</i>	384	336	304	1>3***, 1>2**, 2>3**
Paid work	356	326	278	1, 2>3***
Commuting	28	10	27	2<1, 3***
<i>Committed time</i>	197	170	184	—
Household work	83	79	83	—
Construction and repairs	34	17	24	1>2*
Other household work	13	7	12	—
Child care	23	20	18	—
Shopping	26	29	27	—
Household travel	18	19	19	—
<i>Personal time</i>	603	616	619	—
Sleep	490	504	496	—
Meals	70	72	76	—
Groom	40	42	47	—
Education (adult)	6	6	5	—
<i>Free time</i>	250	306	322	1<2, 3***
Organisations	2	10	5	—
Sports and exercise	22	24	38	1, 2<3*
Culture and entertainment	5	7	5	—
Reading	39	42	40	—
Radio	2	4	4	—
Television	99	110	112	—
Socialising with family	13	9	8	1>3*
Socialising with friends	30	37	44	—
Hobbies	11	23	16	—
Other free time	10	13	18	1<3*
Free time travel	15	30	32	1<3*

F-test, \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Controlled for gender, age, family status, children, socio-economic status, type of day, urbanisation rate.

On the basis of previous literature, it could be assumed that home workers would reconcile HBW and family life and also spend more time doing household work and child care. This was not the case in our data. The only minor difference was that unpaid home workers spent slightly more time on renovating and repairing compared with paid home workers. The links of HBW to personal time, that is, sleeping, meal and grooming times, were also weak.

The amount of free time varied between the groups. Unpaid home workers (250 minutes) had less time compared to paid (306 minutes) and non-home workers (322 minutes). This was the case with sport and exercise, other free time and free time travelling. On the other hand, unpaid home workers spent more time socialising with their family compared with other groups.

In general, it would seem that HBW and especially unpaid home work is linked to the stretching of working hours and to the reduction of free time. On the other hand, the links between home working and committed and personal times were minor.

## Discussion

This study has examined HBW in Finland by focusing on the compensation heterogeneity of HBW and by comparing three groups: unpaid (overtime) home workers, paid (agreed home work) and non-home workers. The study investigated the characteristics, timing and duration of HBW among employees. In particular, we explored the relations of HBW to time by asking if working at home affects time use patterns.

According to the Finnish Time Use Survey (1999–2000) both unpaid (2.8 per cent) and paid (3.6 per cent) at-home work were almost equally common. However, in Song's (2009) study unpaid at-home work was three times more common among US employees compared to paid at-home work. One possible explanation for the difference between the United States and Finland is that in Finland the labour markets are more regulated. Furthermore, the different data sources make the comparison difficult. Song's results were based on population survey, whereas we used time use diary data. When looking the Finnish interview data, rates for unpaid work are higher, which points to the special nature of the time use data covering only certain days. It may also reflect the broad formulation of the question in the Finnish interview data: Do you *sometimes* do work connected with your main job at home?

Both unpaid and paid home workers were more likely to be older, upper-white collar employees, who earned more and had a high-grade home infrastructure: more computers, an Internet connection and more rooms at home when compared to non-home workers (see also Song, 2009). Furthermore, unpaid home workers were more often men, had a partner, and worked in financing and business services, while paid home workers were more often women, and worked in education. However, there was no association between having children and HBW. The lack of an association between having children and doing at-home work has been found to be the case in other countries as well (Callister and Dixon, 2001; Felstead *et al.*, 2001; Song, 2009), although the findings are mixed (see Sullivan and Smithson, 2007). In Finland, where both female labour force participation rates and female education rates are high, the explanation may base on the dual-earner model—Finland has never had any strong breadwinner tradition. During the last three decades, Finnish women have entered the white-collar jobs, which typically relate to work at home. This may be the trend also in other European countries, especially as the European Union promotes equal opportunities for women to education and work.

According to our results, unpaid home workers spent over 1 hour and paid home workers almost 3 hours a day working at home. Thus, the length of home working averaged around 2 hours a day, which was similar to the findings reported from New Zealand (Callister and Dixon, 2001). The prevalence of HBW varied during different clock times and between comparison groups. Unpaid overtime work was typically done in the evenings, while agreed HBW was typically done during normal working hours (see also Venkatesh and Vitalari, 1992; Sullivan, 2003).

HBW was linked to longer working hours. Especially unpaid, but also paid home workers, worked longer when compared to non-home workers. However, earlier studies have reported different results. On one hand, and according to Golden (2008), working longer than standard hours was strongly associated with having work at home. On the other hand, and contrary to findings on the lengthening of working time, Venkatesh and Vitalari (1992) reported that home working was not linked to the lengthening of working hours. One explanation to these differences may follow the different formulations of the questionnaires especially concerning the nature of work carried out at home: more informal work-at-home-hours may not be included if only formal hours are asked, as often the case especially in telework studies. The other explanation may come out from the 16-year-gap between the studies by Golden (2008) and Venkatesh and Vitalari (1992): during that time, there has been a strong international tendency to intensification of the working hours (Peña-Casas and Pochet, 2009), which may be followed by more informal work at home.

Furthermore, paid at-home work reduced time spent commuting. However, in the case of unpaid HBW, there was no such connection. Thus, commuting time is not

reduced, if HBW supplements work at the office (see also Michelson, 1998; 2000). Against the strong expectations that telework would solve even problems related to high energy consumption in commute travel, according to former Finnish study by Helminen and Ristimäki (2007), only 0.7 per cent reduce in weekly commuting kilometres took place due to telework. At the same time, the strong tendencies encouraging group and team working more possibly lead to even more travel and working in different spheres. As such, home becomes one of the many possible occasional, supplementary spheres for work.

On the basis of earlier literature, it could be assumed that home workers would reconcile HBW and family life and also spend more time doing household work and child care (Mirchandani, 2000; Roehling *et al.*, 2003). This was not the case in our data (see also Song, 2009). The only minor difference was that unpaid home workers spent slightly more time on construction and repairs compared to paid home workers. Thus again, the evidence is mixed (see also Felstead *et al.*, 2001; Peters and van der Lippe, 2007).

The amount of free time varied between the groups. Unpaid home workers had less free time compared with other groups. This was the case with sport and exercise, other free time and free time travelling. This was in contrast to Venkatesh and Vitalari's (1992) findings that supplemental work at home was not associated with a reduction in time spent on leisure activities. On the other hand, unpaid home workers in our study spent more time socialising with their family compared with other groups (see also Michelson, 2000).

In summary, it was found to be generally true that HBW and especially unpaid home work is linked to the stretching of working hours and to a reduction in free time. Thus, our study indicates that the nature of HBW is important when studying the relationship between HBW and time use. It seems that work at different physical and temporal spheres, including home, consists of somewhat more informal features than often suggested when studying formally based arrangements like telework or work during commute or travel. Associated with knowledge intensive contents of work, intensification of working time or new management modes stressing personal responsibility over one's own and for example over the team's success, the limits of formal and informal spheres are more often stretched. Combining these features may be followed by the 'autonomy paradox', pointed to by van Echtelt *et al.* (2006), describing the ongoing and deepening spiral in where the employees get more responsibility, enjoy their work more and end up with longer working hours.

All in all, in studying HBW it is important to take into account the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. This study focused on the compensation dimension of HBW comparing unpaid and paid home-based workers to non-home workers. The other dimensions of heterogeneity also require further research, although in practice these dimensions do overlap. In our data, both paid and unpaid home-based work was characterised modern HBW in contrast to traditional HBW; work at home was typically done on a part-time basis, and most home-based workers used computers at home. However, our study focused only employees. Further studies should focus also to self-employed workers, who typically work also at home. In addition, due to the cross-sectional nature of time use data, the relationship between at-home work and time use essentially point out association, not causality. Therefore, further research based on longitudinal data would be fruitful in helping to examine causality.

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