



New Hybrid Work and Gendered Domestic Responsibilities in Sweden: Equalizer or Reinforcer?¹

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ABSTRACT

We examine the gendered implications of intensified working from home (WFH) and the normalization of hybrid work in Sweden. Using nationally representative time-use data collected after the lifting of pandemic-related WFH recommendations, we investigate whether increased time spent at home under WFH conditions affects gender gaps in unpaid labor. Focusing on WFH preferences and the daily allocation of time, we compare women's and men's activities on WFH and office-based days. While access to WFH has become more gender-equal, domestic responsibilities remain unevenly shared. Gender gaps in childcare and routine household tasks persist—and in some cases widen—on WFH days. Women's WFH decisions are more caregiving driven, while men's are shaped by occupational factors. These findings complicate optimistic expectations that spatial and temporal flexibility supports gender-equal outcomes, showing instead that hybrid work may reinforce traditional divisions of labor, even in contexts with strong institutional support for gender equality.

KEYWORDS

Caregiving / children / flexible work / gender equality / housework / men / telework / time allocation / unpaid work / women / work from home

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled many office workers to work from home (WFH) for extended periods. This sudden co-location of paid work and domestic life required people to reorganize their time for employment, housework, childcare, shopping, and socializing in novel ways. These shifts catalyzed a broader adoption of a 'home-based work life' (Thulin et al. 2023), which many employees now seek to maintain and refine (Asmussen et al. 2024; Nolan et al. 2023; Smite et al. 2023).

In Sweden, as of 2024, 39% of *all* employed individuals WFH at least once a week, with one-third doing so on three or more days (Statistics Sweden 2024). These levels have remained stable since the pandemic, marking a shift from emergency arrangements to normalized, voluntary hybrid work routines—defined here as the alternating of days between home and office work. Notably, compared to the *pre-pandemic* era, hybrid work rates have more than doubled (Elldér 2019; Thulin et al. 2023), spanning

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more days per week, covering full workdays, and extending across a broader range of occupations—not just knowledge workers (Felstead 2022).

The widespread adoption of hybrid work has renewed debates about its broader implications for productivity, work-life balance, and gender equality (Brundin 2025, 2026; Felstead 2022; Rosengren et al. 2024). This study focuses on a critical dimension of this transformation: does sustained increase in time spent at home under hybrid arrangements mitigate or reinforce gender disparities in unpaid domestic labor and the double burden of paid and unpaid work that disproportionately affects women? We adopt a situated time-use perspective, analyzing how office workers allocate their time across different settings – comparing WFH and in-office days.

It is well established that WFH reduces commuting time and increases exposure to household needs, thereby reshaping daily routines (Aksoy et al. 2023; Thulin & Vilhelmson 2026; Wray 2024). However, such reorganization may affect women and men differently over time (Brundin 2025; Craig 2020; Lyttleton et al. 2022). Pre-pandemic research—conducted when regular WFH was limited to a privileged segment of the workforce—and pandemic-era studies carried out under emergency conditions have examined gendered time use (for overviews, see Charma et al. 2025; Grip & Åkerlund 2025). Together, these studies demonstrate that working from home does not automatically reduce gender inequalities in unpaid labor. Yet, relatively little is known whether persistent gender gaps in domestic labor and care are narrowing—or reconfiguring—under today’s more stable and widespread voluntary hybrid arrangements (Charma et al. 2025; van Tienoven et al. 2023). The prolonged period of enforced WFH may have disrupted established routines and opened space for renegotiating work–family arrangements, but whether such changes endure remains unclear.

Hybrid work may act as an equalizer by granting both women and men greater temporal flexibility and spatial proximity to household activities (Craig & Churchill 2021). Men’s greater presence at home could lead to a more equitable division of time for household and caregiving tasks (van Tienoven et al. 2023; Webster Jr. & Rashotte 2009). Conversely, the ‘more time at home’ dynamic may reinforce gender inequalities, with working women assuming an even greater share of routine and reproductive responsibilities (Craig 2020).

To examine these possibilities, we focus on two sets of research questions:

1. *Gender selectivity in WFH preferences:* To what extent do women and men differ in their willingness to continue WFH post-pandemic? How are these preferences shaped by sociodemographic factors, household context, and job characteristics?
2. *Gendered time-use patterns in WFH settings:* How do daily time allocations for household labor, caregiving, and discretionary activities differ between women and men on WFH days? Furthermore, how does work location (home vs. office) influence these patterns, and what gender gaps emerge?

Sweden provides a particularly relevant case. Gender gaps in labor market participation are relatively narrow, supported by long-standing policies such as gender-neutral parental leave and universal preschool (Hagquist et al. 2016; Paihlé et al. 2019). Swedish gender equality policy is built on assumptions of equal access to time and resources, aiming both to support women’s employment and promote a more equitable division of

domestic responsibilities. Examining hybrid work in this context therefore offers insight into whether increased time at home reshapes gender gaps even under comparatively egalitarian institutional conditions.

Our analysis draws on nationally representative time-use survey data collected in autumn 2021, just after Swedish authorities lifted general WFH recommendations. This moment captures a critical ‘habit-disrupting’ phase (Asmussen et al. 2024; Nolan et al. 2023), when office workers were more deliberately able to choose whether to return to the office or sustain WFH routines. By linking detailed time-use reports with respondents’ work locations, our study provides new insights into whether the normalization of hybrid work narrows, reproduces, or reorganizes gendered inequalities in domestic labor. Theoretically, and consistent with the quantitative nature of our survey data—measuring time allocation and socio-economic characteristics—the analysis primarily engages with and critically examines the relative resource and time-availability perspectives. Gender performativity approaches further inform our interpretation of how hybrid work interacts with enduring norms of care and responsibility. In doing so, we move beyond documenting inequality to assess how increased time spent at home and spatial proximity to domestic life interact with persistent gendered responsibility structures, potentially reorganizing, but not necessarily reducing, gender gaps.

2. Theoretical perspectives

Over recent decades, women’s and men’s time allocation has significantly converged in many countries (Kan et al. 2011; Leopold et al. 2018; Paihlé et al. 2021). Women have increased time in paid work while reducing unpaid activities, and men have taken on more unpaid work – though not enough to offset women’s withdrawal. Time diary data from Europe and the United States show convergence particularly in housework, largely driven by women reducing their hours, while childcare time has increased for both sexes (Paihlé et al. 2019). These trends were consistent across countries, despite variations in policy and social norms regarding gender, family, and work, and were driven by behavioral shifts rather than demographic changes. In Sweden, despite persistent gaps, time in paid work and unpaid work is relatively more evenly distributed compared to many other countries (Hagquist et al. 2016).

Academic discourse (e.g., Chung & van der Lippe 2020; Paihlé et al. 2019) proposes several explanatory models for gender differences in daily time use. We consider the *relative resource perspective*, *time-availability perspective*, and *gender performativity perspectives* as complementary frameworks for analyzing gender gaps in unpaid labor under hybrid work arrangements.

The *relative resource perspective* views men’s and women’s engagements in domestic work as gender neutral, shaped by the enduring unequal distribution of resources and power in society (Bianchi et al. 2000; Estes et al. 2007). Gender gaps in time use stem primarily from differences in education, labor market participation, and income. Those with fewer resources, historically women, tend to take on more housework and more caregiving due to limited bargaining power. Alternatively, this is seen as a rational family strategy to maximize utility and earnings through specialization (Becker, 1965). In contexts such as Sweden, where gender differences in education, employment, and income

have narrowed – and where policies actively promote equality—one might expect gender gaps in domestic time use to continue decreasing.

Closely related, the *time-availability perspective* attributes gender disparities in housework to differences in available time (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bittman et al. 2003; Davids & Greenstein 2004). Since paid work largely dictates time availability, women—who have historically worked fewer hours or part-time—have had more time for household chores and unpaid work. As women’s paid work hours align more closely with men’s, these disparities are expected to diminish. The shift toward home-based work could further equalize gendered time use, as it often involves both women and men similarly (Craig & Churchill 2021). With work and daily life co-located, both gain greater temporal flexibility and spatial proximity to household activities and family life, due to reduced commuting and their constant physical presence at home (Thulin et al. 2023). Over time, the initially mandated WFH during the pandemic may become an established routine (Asmussen et al. 2024; Brundin 2026; Nolan et al. 2023), reshaping domestic labor division. This increased flexibility could encourage men to take on more housework and childcare, while also allowing women to expand their paid work hours relative to men’s (Fan & Moen 2022).

Both perspectives represent rational choice models that emphasize equalizing resources and time between women and men, and have gained empirical support. As women’s employment hours have increased, their unpaid household work has declined (Chung & Van der Lippe 2020; Leopold et al. 2018; Paihlé et al. 2019). However, domestic work imbalances persist, even in gender-equal countries like Sweden (Hagquist et al. 2016). This suggests that resource and time availability alone do not fully explain gender differences in domestic time use (Goldberg 2013; Kolpashnikova & Kan 2026).

The *gender performativity perspectives* interpret persistent gaps in household activities as reflections of internalized and institutionalized gender identities, norms, and power relations (Craig & van Tienoven 2021; Taylor & Scott 2018; West & Zimmerman 1987; van Tienoven et al. 2023). Everyday time use is inherently gendered, shaping not only activities and temporal arrangements (Pabilonia & Vernon 2023), but also the emotional and physical spaces like the home, where design, furnishing, and technology reinforce certain behaviors while discouraging others (Listerborn et al. 2005; Rosengren et al. 2024; Wajcman 2001). Feminist scholarship on gendered love labor further emphasizes that care is not merely a matter of time allocation, but also of moral and relational responsibility; the expectation to anticipate needs and remain responsively available (Jónasdóttir 2014; Lynch et al. 2009). More broadly, the politics of time perspective highlights that control over temporal rhythms and flexibility is structured by organizational power and social norms rather than evenly distributed (Wajcman 2015). Domestic labor inequalities can therefore be understood as rooted in gendered power over time (Bryson 2007; Wajcman 2015), whereby men are more able to manage and protect their time, while women’s time is more frequently characterized by continuity of responsibility and interruption. In childcare, this often manifests in men having designated, planned time with children, while women assume ongoing responsibility for coordination and responsiveness (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir 2020; Rafnsdóttir & Júlíusdóttir 2018). From this perspective, the capacity to work flexibly from home is not a neutral resource but embedded within gendered expectations of availability.

These asymmetries are visible in the division between routine, time-bound tasks, such as meals, school coordination and bedtime, and more discretionary forms of housework (Chung & Booker 2023; van Tienoven et al. 2023). Women remain more constrained by reproductive time-space arrangements (Davis & Wills 2014; Hantrais 1993; Knights & Odih 1995; Williamson 2023), while men more often perform episodic or non-routine household tasks (Bianchi et al. 2012; van Tienoven et al. 2023), which are often discretionary and occur outside the home (Gil Solá 2021). Gender gaps are particularly pronounced in two-parent households, where mothers assume greater responsibility for physical and supervisory care and more frequently combine childcare with paid work (Craig & Jenkins 2015; Craig & Mullan 2011; Pepin & Sayer 2018).

From a gender performativity perspective, intensified WFH alone may not disrupt these patterns. Although WFH increases spatial and temporal flexibility, such flexibility is unevenly accessible and may reinforce women's responsibility for domestic tasks (Chung & Booker 2023; Eikhof 2012; İlkcaracan & Memiş 2021; Karjalainen 2022). This dynamic aligns with the 'flexibility paradox', whereby autonomy over time and space coexists with persistent or even intensified inequalities (Chung 2022). Spatial proximity and increased time at home may thus be interpreted as availability, particularly for mothers, amplifying expectations of responsiveness associated with gendered love labor (Hochschild 1983; Lynch et al. 2009).

At the same time, this perspective has been critiqued for its potentially static framing and for underestimating the fluidity of gender norms across time and place (Deutsch 2007; Eklund & Eklund 2015; Goldberg 2013). If norms are continually negotiated through everyday practice, then shifts in work organization, such as the rapid expansion of WFH during and after the pandemic, may also open space for renegotiation. Pandemic-induced changes in work routines have therefore been described as a potential opportunity to challenge established divisions of labor. For example, recent studies suggest that intensified WFH during the pandemic years allowed some to reconsider family and work roles and explore arrangements previously seen impractical or undesirable (Cox et al. 2024; de Laat 2023; Gunasekera et al. 2022). In Nordic contexts, where strong gender equality norms shape expectations around fatherhood and shared care, the shift to WFH may thus support both gender-equal (Chung et al. 2022; van Tienoven et al. 2024; Williamson 2023) and gender-traditional (Craig & Churchill 2021; Lyttleton et al. 2022) norms and practices in complex ways hard to foresee. Against this backdrop, our study examines whether chosen hybrid work reproduces or challenges gendered divisions of domestic time under comparatively egalitarian institutional conditions.

3. Literature review: gendered time use implications of work from home

Empirical research on the time-use implications of intensified post-pandemic WFH remains limited, particularly regarding how voluntarily adopted hybrid work arrangements interact with gendered temporal regimes and care responsibilities in comparatively gender-equal contexts. Pre-pandemic studies on telework—a broader term encompassing

remote work, including WFH—provide little evidence that home-based work inherently fosters more equal divisions of labor. Instead, early findings suggest telework often served as a coping strategy to manage, rather than challenge, gender-traditional responsibilities (Chung & Booker 2023; Laß & Wooden 2023; Okubo 2023). These insights remain useful for comparison, though their relevance is limited, as earlier research focused on a narrow group of highly skilled workers engaged in sporadic, part-time and often informal telework (Messenger & Gschwind 2016; Vilhelmson & Thulin 2016)—a practice that differs significantly from today’s more widespread, routinized WFH.

During the pandemic, a few studies directly examined time use, household activities, and gender dynamics under the conditions of intensified WFH. Although shaped by exceptional lockdown circumstances, these studies provide preliminary insights into how home-based work may reshape gendered patterns of time-use.

Two studies using the American National Time Use Survey examined how teleworking parents adjusted their routines. Pablonia and Vernon (2023) found that both mothers and fathers maintained their paid work hours while increasing time spent on housework and childcare—suggesting intensified WFH affected time use similarly across genders, with no significant narrowing of the gender gap. Lyttleton et al. (2022), using the same data, found no difference in parent’s primary childcare time. However, teleworking mothers bore a greater share of ‘on call’ childcare—attending to children as a secondary task while working. Mothers also adjusted their work schedules more than fathers, shifting more work to early mornings and evenings. This suggests that greater spatial and temporal flexibility under WFH may reinforce, rather than disrupt, women’s time spent on reproductive and domestic labor.

Van Tienoven et al. (2023), drawing on the Belgian Time Use Survey, found that despite altered work conditions under lockdown, overall time allocation patterns remained stable. Gender divisions between routine and non-routine housework persisted, indicating that increased male presence in the home did not translate into greater gender equality in unpaid labor.

Several other studies during the pandemic indirectly examined time use through activity participation and saved commuting time. Craig and Churchill (2020, 2021), studying Australian households during lockdown, found increases in domestic work for both genders, but persistent gender gaps remained. Men’s participation in childcare rose slightly more than women’s, indicating some convergence. In Turkey during lockdown, İlkcaracan and Memis (2021) found that men working from home significantly increased unpaid work, but as women’s contribution grew even more, the gender gap widened. Huls et al. (2022), studying Dutch office workers, showed women used more of their saved commuting time for domestic labor than men. A cross-national study by Aksoy et al. (2023) found that having children strongly influenced how saved time was spent—mostly on household tasks. In the United States, Barrero et al. (2020) reported broadly similar time use for women and men, with key differences emerging based on the presence of children in the household.

In summary, studies conducted during lockdown suggest modest shifts in unpaid work, with men increasing their participation to some extent—seen by some (e.g., İlkcaracan & Memis 2021) as a potential window of opportunity. However, there is little evidence that WFH substantially equalized domestic time use or responsibilities. Overall, gender gaps largely persisted. Given that these findings reflect exceptional conditions of confinement—when paid work, schooling, and leisure were all concentrated

in the home—their applicability to post-pandemic ‘new normal’ is uncertain. Our study addresses this gap by examining time use during a later phase, after restrictions were lifted and workers could voluntarily adopt hybrid routines and broader social life returned to everyday patterns. By focusing on Sweden, a context characterized by strong gender equality norms and extensive dual-earner support policies, we assess whether WFH reconfigures or reproduces gendered divisions of domestic time under comparatively egalitarian conditions.

4. Data and method

4.1. Data

We use individual-level microdata from the 2021 Swedish Time Use Survey (TID), conducted by Statistics Sweden (SCB). Commissioned by the Swedish government, the survey aimed to assess gender policy goals related to the division of paid and unpaid work. The sample is nationally representative of individuals aged 18–84 years and stratified by gender, household type, and migration background.

Respondents reported the time they spent on a range of daily activities, including paid work, housework, maintenance, childcare, shopping, social interactions, and sleep. Key to our study, the survey also captured whether paid work was performed at home or on-site. To enrich the dataset, we merged the survey data with administrative register data from the Swedish Register of the Total Population (RTB), Education Register, Occupational Register, and Income and Tax register. This allows us to examine associations between work location and a wide range of sociodemographic characteristics.

The study was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2023-00520-01).

4.2. Data collection, period, and context

The TID survey was administered in Swedish and English and could be completed via paper form, online, or telephone interview. Before launch, the instrument was tested by measurement specialists through cognitive interviews and a pilot study (SCB 2022). Time-use data were collected for a predetermined measurement day, ensuring even distribution across the week. Respondents reported the total time spent on specific activities in hours and minutes (e.g., ‘How much time did you spend cooking during the day?’).

Data collection occurred between mid-September 2021 and December 2021, just after the Swedish Public Health Agency lifted its general recommendation to WFH. This period represents a turning point in the pandemic trajectory, marking the shift from 18 months of mandated WFH—during which daily routines and habits had significantly changed—to individually negotiated and increasingly normalized hybrid work arrangements. Unlike many other countries, Sweden relied on voluntary guidelines rather than strict lockdowns during the pandemic. Recommendations included social distancing, WFH, and avoiding nonessential travel. Preschools and elementary schools remained

open, while secondary schools and universities intermittently switched to remote learning. The most restrictive measure limited public gatherings, which also were fully lifted in September 2021.

4.3. Sample

Of all respondents, 2224 reported being gainfully employed on their assigned measurement day. Among them, 626 individuals reported whether they worked from home or at a regular workplace, forming the analytical sample. This corresponds to 28.1% of all employed individuals in the full survey dataset. While this proportion may appear relatively low and could represent a potential source of bias, it was primarily influenced by a technical error in the digital survey interface, whereby some participants were not presented with the WFH question.

To assess potential bias, we conducted comparison checks between respondents who answered the WFH question and the overall group of gainfully employed individuals in the survey sample (Appendix, Table A1). These analyses show no statistically significant differences across key background variables, which supports the analytical validity of the study and strengthens confidence in the representativeness of the analytical sample.

Within the analytical sample, 32.8% worked from home and 67.2% worked on-site on their observation day (Table 1). Gender composition was similar across groups: both consisted of 52.0% women and 48.0% men. Respondents more likely to WFH included those with young children, immigrant backgrounds, skilled occupations, higher income, and those living in detached houses, and in metropolitan areas (Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö). No significant differences were found based on cohabiting status, education level, employment terms (fixed term vs. permanent), or work schedule (full-time vs. part-time). The distributions are consistent with patterns in the Swedish Labour Force Survey³ (AKU) and existing research (Thulin & Vilhelmson 2026) on WFH in Sweden, lending further validity to the sample

4.4 Comparison groups and activity categories

To examine gendered time use by work location, we divided the sample into four analytical groups: 1. Women working from home ($n = 115$); 2. Men working from home ($n = 91$); 3. Women working from the office ($n = 238$); 4. Men working from the office ($n = 182$).

Respondents reported the total time spent on various daily activities (for descriptive statistics, see Appendix Table A2). These activities included *paid work*, *housework* (e.g., cooking, baking, setting the table; cleaning, washing dishes, making the bed, disposing of garbage; washing, ironing, clothing care); *household planning* (e.g., organizing

³ According to the monthly surveys of the Swedish labour force conducted by Statistics Sweden (2024), 32.8% of all gainfully employed worked from home at least 1 day per week in Q3 2021 and 32.2% in Q3 2021. Post-pandemic, in Q3 2023, the share remained essentially unchanged at 35.0%. Of these, 49.0% were women and 51.0% men.

Table 1 Sociodemographic and job characteristics of the sample, by work location

Variable	Working from home (n = 206)	Working from office/ other place (n = 420)
Sex		
Woman	52.0	52.0
Man	48.0	48.0
Marital status*		
Single living	23.6	24.9
Cohabiting	58.6	53.9
Other	17.8	21.2
Children 0–12 yrs*		
0	55.2	69.2
1	20.0	13.5
2	16.2	13.3
3	8.6	4.0
Domestic/foreign background*		
Foreign born	25.3	18.6
Domestic background	74.7	81.4
Education*		
Primary/upper secondary school	43.2	46.1
University <3 yrs	13.6	12.8
University ≥3 yrs	43.2	41.0
Housing*		
Apartment building	49.9	39.9
Detached house	50.1	60.1
Occupation*		
Qualified administration, specialists	52.7	35.8
Administration, service, care	41.9	42.2
Blue collar (construction, manufacturing, transport)	5.4	22.0
Employment contract		
Fixed term	7.3	7.3
Permanent	92.7	92.7
Employment scope*		
Full time	83.0	81.1
Part time	17.0	18.9

(Continued)



Table 1 (Continued)

Variable	Working from home (n = 206)	Working from office/ other place (n = 420)
Disposable income*		
Quartile 1 (SEK 0–249,999)	21.7	31.2
Quartile 2 (SEK 250,000–349,999)	29.8	34.0
Quartile 3 (SEK 350,000–499,999)	30.3	25.0
Quartile 4 (SEK ≥500,000)	18.3	9.8
Living region*		
Urban region (Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö)	56.0	36.6
Other region	44.0	63.4
Age		
Mean	43.5	45.0
Median	42	47
Standard deviation	12.45	13.60
Hours worked per week		
Mean	39.6	38.8
Median	40	40
Std. dev.	7.15	8.00

Weighted by population. (Categorical variables in percent, continuous variables with mean, median, and standard deviation).

* Note: Significant between-group difference at $p < 0.05$.

household activities; managing finances); *home maintenance and repair* (e.g., housing, furniture; vehicles; grounds and gardens); *shopping and errands* (for goods and services); *childcare and children’s activities* (e.g., assisting with school work, reading, playing, attending activities, family interactions, bedtime routines and hygiene); *providing assistance to others* (outside one’s household, e.g., childcare, practical help, support due to illness or disability); *pet care*; *socializing and interactions with others*; *studying*; *night sleep*; and time spent *away from home*. Leisure activities were not included in the survey.

Furthermore, in our analysis, we distinguish between bound (routine) and flexible (non-routine) activities (Blair-Loy et al. 2015; van Tienoven et al. 2023). *Bound (routine) activities* are time-sensitive, demanding, and difficult to postpone. They form the cornerstones of everyday life, often requiring specific locations or rooms and occurring at fixed times (Vilhelmson 1999). In the analysis, these include housework, childcare duties, and pet care. *Flexible (non-routine) activities* are less time-dependent, more discretionary, and often take place in open settings. These include household maintenance and repair, household planning, shopping and errands, social interactions, and children’s flexible activities (e.g., playing and reading).

4.5. Analytical strategy

We begin with cross-tabulations to compare background characteristics of WFH and on-site workers (Table 1). We then use logistic regression to identify factors associated with WFH preferences stratified by gender (Table 2). Next, we conduct bivariate comparisons of mean time spent on domestic activities and caregiving across the four comparison groups (Tables 3 and 4). To control for potential confounding factors, we apply covariate-adjusted regression models (Table 5). These models estimate time-use differences while accounting for known influences on WFH and for the weighted sampling, including cohabitation status, number of children under 12 years, migration background, occupation, household income, housing type, and region of residence. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how gender and work location intersect to shape daily time allocation in the post-pandemic period. The main effects reported in the models reach conventional levels of statistical significance, and model diagnostics indicate stable estimates.

Finally, a brief methodological reflection is warranted. Time-diary data, although often regarded as relatively precise measures of daily activity patterns, remain socially situated accounts rather than direct observations. Diary-based measures may be influenced by recall bias, social desirability effects and gendered norms shaping how unpaid work is perceived, valued, and reported (Cornwell et al. 2019). For example, certain forms of care, particularly coordination, emotional support, or multitasking, may be underreported or categorized differently depending on respondents' interpretation of these activities. While diary methods are considered more reliable than stylized retrospective survey questions (Michelson 2005), especially when referring to a specific day, they do not eliminate interpretive and normative influences. The analyses presented here should therefore be understood as reflecting reported time-use patterns, shaped by social context, rather than exact behavioral measurements.

5. Results

5.1. Factors influencing the likelihood of working from home

Logistic regression analyses (Table 2) reveal that WFH likelihood is influenced by several sociodemographic and occupational factors, with gender-specific patterns. Overall, women and men WFH at similar rates. WFH is significantly associated with having young children ($p = 0.005$), living in detached houses ($p = 0.039$), higher income, and white-collar occupations. In contrast, those in blue-collar jobs or lower income quartiles are significantly less likely to WFH ($p \leq 0.05$).

Gendered patterns emerge in separate models. For women, having young children strongly predicts WFH ($p = 0.005$), whereas for men, cohabitation ($p = 0.004$), white-collar status ($p = 0.004$), and full-time employment ($p = 0.023$) are more relevant. Lower income significantly limits WFH access, particularly among women. Housing type matters for men—those in detached homes are more likely to WFH ($p = 0.01$)—but not for women.



Table 2 Factors associated with work from home

Variable	Model 1 All (n = 626)		Model 2 Women (n = 353)		Model 3 Men (n = 273)	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Sex (ref = woman)						
Man	0.101	0.693	-	-	-	-
Marital status (ref = single living)						
Cohabiting	0.554	0.111	-0.044	0.916	2.523**	0.004
Other	0.215	0.632	-0.43	0.461	2.116**	0.033
Children 0–12 yrs , number	0.357**	0.005	0.447**	0.005	0.152	0.524
Domestic/foreign background (ref = foreign born)						
Domestic born	-0.535	0.066	-0.713	0.074	-0.524	0.281
Education (ref = primary/upper sec. school)						
University <3 yrs	-0.004	0.992	-0.223	0.65	0.176	0.765
University ≥3 yrs	-0.427	0.117	-0.441	0.206	-0.573	0.259
Occupation (ref = qualified administration, specialists)						
Administration, service, care	0.158	0.565	0.599*	0.093	-0.719	0.142
Blue collar (e.g., construction, manufacturing, and transport)	-2.208**	0.004	-20.017	0.999	-2.584**	0.004
Employment contract (ref = fixed term)						
Permanent	-0.087	0.866	0.556	0.357	-22.417	0.999
Employment scope (ref = full time)						
Part-time	-0.38	0.251	-0.216	0.554	-2.493*	0.023
Disposable income (ref = quartile 4; SEK ≥500,000)						
Quartile 1 (SEK 10,000–249,999)	-1.385**	0.003	-1.57**	0.009	-1.358	0.173
Quartile 2 (SEK 250,000–349,999)	-1.095**	0.002	-1.052*	0.033	-2.07**	0.002
Quartile 3 (SEK 350,000–499,999)	-0.676*	0.037	-1.079*	0.031	-0.677	0.165
Living region (ref = other region)						
Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö regions	0.400	0.092	0.463	0.145	0.507	0.236
Housing (ref = apartment building)						
Detached house	0.542*	0.039	0.298	0.385	1.295**	0.01
Nagelkerke R ²	0.196		0.211		0.369	

Logistic regression: people working from their ordinary workplace = 0, people working from their home = 1. Unweighted.
* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$.

Overall, the stronger association between women’s WFH preferences and the presence of small children (< 13), a proxy for caregiving responsibilities, suggests that these preferences are not merely expressions of individual work–life optimization. Rather, they

may reflect gendered expectations of availability and coordination within the household. This raises a crucial question: does hybrid work translate into more egalitarian allocations of unpaid labor, or does it reproduce the very asymmetries that may motivate women’s preferences? To address this, we turn to an examination of how time is allocated on WFH and non-WFH days.

5.2. Gender gaps in time use: WFH vs. office

Using time-diary data, we compare men’s and women’s allocations of paid work, routine housework, and childcare on days worked from home and days worked on-site. This design enables us to evaluate whether hybrid work is associated with shifts in the gendered distribution of unpaid labor. Results (Table 3) show persistent gender gaps, especially on WFH days. Women who WFH spend 97 minutes more per day than men on routine domestic tasks ($p \leq 0.05$), with the largest disparity found in childcare (+81 minutes, $p \leq 0.05$). These gaps are significantly smaller among WFO individuals.

Table 3 Gender gaps in time spent on activities, by work location

Activity	WFH Women (n = 115)	WFH Men (n = 91)	Gender gap (Women – Men)	WFO Women (n = 238)	WFO Men (n = 182)	Gender gap (Women–Men)
Housework	136	99	37	110	68	42*
Childcare	127	46	81*	49	40	10*
Children’s bound activities	72	21	50*	30	22	8
Children’s flexible activities	55	24	30*	19	18	1
Household planning	28	25	3	19	19	0
Household maintenance/ repair	14	30	–16*	13	29	–15*
Pet care	30	20	9*	19	6	14
Shopping, service errands	35	31	5	30	30	–1
Helping others	13	18	–6	15	14	1
Social activities	56	48	8	45	36	9*
Studies	8	9	–1	12	8	4*
Sleep	435	412	23	420	409	11
Paid work	429	456	–27	481	487	–5
Time away from home	235	222	13	614	608	6

(Continued)



Table 3 (Continued)

Activity	WFH Women (n = 115)	WFH Men (n = 91)	Gender gap (Women – Men)	WFO Women (n = 238)	WFO Men (n = 182)	Gender gap (Women–Men)
Aggregated activities						
Bound routine activities ^a	238	141	97*	159	95	64*
Flexible non-routine activities ^b	200	176	24	142	146	–4

Mean minutes per day. Weighted by population.
Note: $p \leq 0.05$ (*). ^a Includes housework, children's bounded activities, and pet care.
^b Includes household planning, household maintenance/repair, shopping and service errands, children's flexible activities, helping others, and social activities.

Housework is higher among all WFH participants but still gendered: WFH women spend 37 minutes more than WFH men (n.s.), while the WFO gap is 42 minutes ($p \leq 0.05$). Pet care follows a similar pattern. In contrast, men consistently spend more time on maintenance and repairs across both settings ($p \leq 0.05$). Other tasks—shopping, planning, helping others, studying—show no significant gender gaps.

Table 4 compares WFH and WFO workers by gender. WFH women spend significantly more time than WFO women on housework and childcare (up to +78 minutes for childcare, $p \leq 0.05$), suggesting intensified domestic responsibilities. For men, WFH leads to modest increases in housework (+31 min, $p \leq 0.05$), pet care, and social time, but not in childcare.

5.3. Controlling for background characteristics

Covariate-adjusted models (Table 5) confirm key patterns. Even when controlling for sociodemographic factors, WFH women spend significantly more time than WFH men and WFO individuals on routine domestic tasks ($p \leq 0.001$). The gender gap in flexible tasks is less pronounced but still present, especially in non-routine childcare activities.

WFH women spend more time on housework and childcare than all other groups ($p \leq 0.001$), while WFH men maintain greater involvement in household repairs. For paid work, no gender gap is found among WFH individuals; however, both WFH women and men report fewer work hours than WFO counterparts ($p \leq 0.001$ to $p \leq 0.05$), possibly reflecting altered daily rhythms.

Overall, the findings indicate that WFH days are not consistently associated with more egalitarian divisions of unpaid labor. While some minor shifts are observed, gender gaps in routine housework and childcare persist and, in certain cases, widen. These results suggest that increased proximity and time spent at home under WFH conditions, in themselves, do not fundamentally alter established patterns of domestic responsibility.

Table 4 Time use differences between women who WFH and WFO, and between men who WFH and WFO

Activity	Difference: Women WFH – Women WFO	Difference: Men WFH – Men WFO
Housework	26	31*
Childcare	78*	6
Children's bound activities	42*	–1
Children's flexible activities	36*	6*
Household planning	9*	6*
Household maintenance/repair	1	1
Pet care	11*	14*
Shopping, service errands	5	1
Helping others	–2	4
Social activities	11	12*
Studies	–4*	1
Sleep	15	3
Paid work	–52	–31
Time away from home	–379*	–386*
Aggregated activities		
Bound routine activities ^a	79*	46
Flexible non-routine activities ^b	58*	30

Mean minutes per day, weighted by population.
Note: $p \leq 0.5$ (*).
^a Includes housework, bounded children's bound activities, and pet care.
^b Includes household planning, household maintenance/repair, shopping and service errands, children's flexible activities, helping others, and social activities.

Table 5 Estimated time use within the comparison groups (in minutes)

Activity	Group 1: Women WFH (n = 115)	Group 2: Men WFH (n = 91)	Group 3: Women WFO (n = 238)	Group 4: Men WFO (n = 182)	Group differences
Housework	127	97	111	73	1 > 4***; 3 > 4***
Childcare	90	34	47	48	1 > 2, 3, 4***
Children's bounded activities	49	17	26	25	1 > 2, 3, 4**
Children's flexible activities	41	17	21	24	1 > 2, 3**; 1 > 4*
Household planning	25	23	21	22	ns
Household maintenance/repair	19	42	11	25	2 > 1*, 3**; 4 > 3*
Pet care	31	20	18	7	1 > 3**, 4***; 2 > 4*; 3 > 4**

(Continued)



Table 5 (Continued)

Activity	Group 1: Women WFH (n = 115)	Group 2: Men WFH (n = 91)	Group 3: Women WFO (n = 238)	Group 4: Men WFO (n = 182)	Group differences
Shopping, service errands	33	29	30	28	ns
Helping others	17	21	13	21	ns
Social activities	51	42	41	42	ns
Studies	8	9	8	8	ns
Sleep	434	416	417	408	ns
Paid work	431	448	491	488	3 > 1 ^{***} , 2 ^{**} ; 4 > 1 ^{***} , 2 [*]
Time away from home	234	205	626	601	1, 2 ns; 3, 4 ns
Aggregated activities					
Bound routine activities	207	134	154	105	1 > 2, 3, 4 ^{***} ; 3 > 4 ^{***}
Flexible non-routine activities	185	175	138	142	1 > 3 ^{**} , 4 [*]

Covariate analysis based on estimated marginal means controlling for key factors. Weighted data.
Note: Controlling for marital status, number of children (<12 years old), domestic/foreign background, type of profession, income, housing, and living region. $p < 0.05$ (*), $p < 0.01$ (**), $p < 0.001$ (***). 'ns' indicates nonsignificant differences.

6. Concluding discussion

This study is among the first to examine how the intensification of working from home, as practiced and preferred by many office workers, and the broader institutionalization of hybrid work influence the gendering of everyday life and time use. While earlier research largely focused on telework either as a selective benefit for privileged knowledge workers pre-pandemic or as an emergency response during the pandemic, our findings offer insights into the social implications of normalized, high levels of hybrid work, particularly how being physically present at home during the day intersects with domestic responsibilities.

We addressed two key questions: (1) whether women and men differ in their preferences for continuing to WFH post-pandemic, and (2) how WFH influences the gendered division of time spent on housework and caregiving. Using nationally representative time-use data, we captured a transitional moment in which work location arrangements were being renegotiated, shaped by the interplay between employee preferences, organizational policies, and household constraints. Our key findings concern three thematic areas.

First, regarding *gender preferences and structural shifts in hybrid work*, our findings confirm that WFH remained significantly more common than before the pandemic period, with around 33% of Swedish employees working from home. Importantly, WFH preferences and practices were broadly gender-equal, contrasting with pre-pandemic patterns in Sweden where men were more likely to telework (Vilhelmson & Thulin 2016). This supports the emergence of hybrid work as a structurally embedded practice

(Batur et al. 2023; Felstead 2022; Thulin & Vilhelmson 2022), marked by substantially higher participation rates, extending to more diverse occupations and worker groups and representing a long-term shift in the space-time organization of work.

However, motivations for WFH differed by gender. Women's WFH decisions were closely linked to the presence of young children, while men's choices were more strongly associated with work-related factors such as occupation type and working full-time. These results suggest that WFH remains gendered in rationale: women are often driven by caregiving demands, while men are influenced by professional considerations. This aligns with pre-pandemic research on telework (Allvin et al. 2011; Wheatley 2012) but highlights a sharpened gendered dynamic in the current hybrid context.

Second, concerning persistent gender gaps in time use, our analysis shows that domestic time use remained markedly gendered. In fact, certain gaps, especially in routine domestic work, were even more pronounced on WFH days. Women working from home spent approximately 1.5 hours more than men on routine household tasks, suggesting that increased time-space availability does not necessarily lead to a more balanced division of labor. This finding is consistent with long-standing patterns in domestic work (Hagquist et al. 2016) and challenges the optimistic expectation that the temporal and spatial flexibility of WFH inherently promotes greater equality. Rather than disrupting gendered divisions of labor, increased proximity and time spent at home appears to operate within, and ultimately reproduce, existing norms and responsibility structures.

Disaggregating the data reveals that childcare—both bound and flexible—was the primary driver of these disparities. While no significant gender gap in childcare was observed among office-based workers, the gap widened significantly on WFH days. This suggests that being present at home may prompt a renegotiation of childcare roles—one that disproportionately increases women's responsibilities. These findings align with pre-pandemic studies on the role of children in how gained time from commuting was allocated during WFH (Aksoy et al. 2023; Barrero et al. 2020), though they contrast with research from the lockdown period, which often reported more equal sharing (Craig & Churchill 2020, 2022; Wray 2024).

In contrast, gender gaps in routine housework were less consistent. While both women and men working from home spent more time on household tasks than their office-working counterparts, the gender difference was no longer significant on WFH days, possibly indicating a converging trend. Housework, being highly routine-bound and home-centered, remains time-consuming and, according to some research (Gershuny 2013), the least favored household task. Still, the distribution may be slowly shifting. Meanwhile, men continued to spend significantly more time on household maintenance and repair, with this gender gap remaining stable regardless of work location. These findings reflect broader trends reported in studies of domestic work time use during the pandemic (Chung & Booker 2023; Craig & Churchill 2020, 2021; Nagy et al. 2022; Pabilonia & Vernon 2023), which suggest an increase in domestic responsibilities among both women and men but do not provide strong evidence of a shifting gender gap.

Third, on the gendered impact of work relocation, relocating work to the home had greater implications for women's daily routines than for men's, whose routines remain largely unchanged. Women working from home spent significantly more time on both routine and flexible domestic activities compared to women working on-site, particularly involving childcare-related activities. Men working from home also showed some increase in time spent on routine housework, but the difference was modest. However, overall

differences in time use between men WFH and those WFO were relatively small. These results support pre-pandemic claims that telework may be more disruptive—and more demanding—for women (Fan and Moen 2022; Gajendran & Harrison 2007), likely due to the continued double burden of combining paid work with unpaid care. Similar findings were noted by Lyttleton et al. (2022), who observed that mothers working from home made greater adjustments to their work schedules to accommodate childcare than fathers did.

7. Conclusion

In sum, our study finds no strong evidence that intensified hybrid work serves as a transformative force for gender equality in the domestic sphere. Although access to WFH has become more gender-equal, the allocation of time to unpaid household labor remains uneven and, on WFH days, in some areas even more unequal. Even within a Nordic context characterized by strong equality policies, WFH appears to reorganize, rather than redistribute, the gendered division of unpaid labor.

These findings complicate expectations derived from time-availability or resource-based theories (Kolpashnikova & Kan 2026). Instead, they align more closely with perspectives emphasizing gender performativity and the persistence of normative caregiving roles (Chung & Booker 2023; Gunasekera et al. 2022). Hybrid work interacts with established domestic roles in ways that reinforce rather than disrupt gendered divisions of labor, particularly in childcare. In the Swedish context—often viewed as a leader in gender equality – this persistence underscores the limits of formal policy frameworks in reshaping everyday practices. Longstanding feminist critiques of the double burden (Gerber 2022; Pailhé et al. 2021) remain salient: the home continues to operate as a site of both physical and emotional labor.

The results highlight the limits of the resource-based and time-availability perspectives at the individual level and underscore the persistence of gender inequality in unpaid work (Kolpashnikova & Kan 2026). Gendered expectations and social norms attached to unpaid work and care continues to shape the domestic division of labor. Consistent with scholarship on gendered love labor and affective inequality (Lynch et al. 2009), care within WFH arrangements appears structured not only by time allocation but also by enduring moral expectations of responsiveness and coordination. As hybrid work stabilizes, the permeability between paid work and domestic life may intensify these expectations. This reflects the ‘flexibility paradox’, whereby autonomy over time and space coexists with persistent or intensified inequalities (Chung 2022; Grip & Åkerlund 2025). Time, in this sense, is not a neutral resource but structured by social and gendered power relations (Bryson 2016). Further research should examine how the spatiotemporal flexibility of hybrid work interacts with enduring social norms of responsibility and care, and how these affect the continuing double burden of paid and unpaid work that disproportionately affects women.

Our study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference and raises the possibility of selection bias; that is, we cannot determine whether hybrid work reshapes domestic time allocation or whether individuals with gendered preferences and responsibilities are more likely to adopt WFH. More robust insights would require repeated time-use data from multiple days and, ideally, information from all household members to assess intra-household dynamics more directly. Second, the

survey was conducted shortly after a prolonged period of mandatory WFH, meaning reported routines may still have reflected pandemic-era adaptations rather than fully stabilized post-pandemic arrangements. Third, while the dataset captures whether respondents worked from home on the survey day, it does not include detailed information on the usual frequency or institutionalization of remote work, which may shape its implications. Continued research would benefit from incorporating more detailed measures of frequency and stability of hybrid work.

Nevertheless, given the limited evidence on post-pandemic hybrid work and domestic labor, our findings make a timely contribution to debates on the gendered effects of flexible work. Future research should continue to track these dynamics as hybrid arrangements mature and embed themselves further into everyday life. Policy responses must also reckon with these complexities, recognizing that equal access to hybrid work does not automatically translate into gender-equal outcomes at home.

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APPENDIX

Table A1 Characteristics of the total sample of gainfully employed individuals and the subsample of respondents declaring whether they worked from home or their regular workplace

Characteristics	Total Sample (n = 2224)	Subsample (n = 626)
	Percent	Percent
Marital status		
Cohabiting	47.2	47.0
Single	38.3	39.0
Other	14.5	14.1
Domestic/foreign born		
Domestic	78.2	81.4
Foreign	21.8	18.5
Children (0–6 yrs)		
0	89.5	89.5
1	8.2	8.0
2	2.2	2.4
3	0.1	0.2
Children (0–24 yrs)		
0	48.5	51.0
1	19.9	18.4
2	23.2	21.1
3	6.8	8.3
4+	1.6	1.3
Education		
Primary school	5.7	5.4
Upper secondary school	34.6	35.6
University (<3 yrs)	17.9	14.9
University (≥3 yrs)	40.9	43.3
University postgraduate	1.0	0.8
Employment contract		
Fixed term	6.5	5.4
Permanent	75.5	77.8
Unknown/no answer	17.9	16.8
Employment scope		
Full time	78.2	76.2
Part time	14.4	16.8

Characteristics	Total Sample (n = 2224)	Subsample (n = 626)
Unknown/no answer	7.4	7
Occupation - Main		
Employed	82.5	84.3
Self-employed	10.8	9.4
Other	4.7	5.0
Sex		
Woman	48.5	43.6
Man	51.5	56.4
Profession		
Managers	9.9	10.2
Occupations requiring advanced level of higher education	33.8	34.9
Occupations requiring higher education qualifications or equivalent	15.2	16.3
Administration and customer service clerks	6.3	8.2
Service, care and shop sales workers	13.3	12.7
Agricultural, horticultural, forestry and fishery workers	2.3	2.4
Building and manufacturing workers	5.1	3.9
Mechanical manufacturing and transport workers, etc.	4.0	4.6
Elementary occupations	2.7	2.2
Not answered/unknown	6.7	5.3
Hours worked during the measurement day (minutes)		
Mean	464	473
Median	480	495
Standard deviation	129.6	120.4
Range	1070	920
Minimum	70	70
Maximum	1140	990

Note: No statistically significant difference was found ($p \leq 0.05$).



Table A2 Time use measures of the sample, by work location

Activity	Working from home (n = 206)	Working from office (n = 420)
Housework	119 (90; 116.1)	90 (70; 89.1)
Childcare	88 (0; 140.5)	47 (0; 98.9)
Children's bound activities	48 (0; 89.5)	26 (0; 69.7)
Children's flexible activities	40 (0; 69.3)	18 (0; 53.4)
Household planning	27 (15; 33.2)	19 (10; 27.9)
Household maintenance/repair	21 (0; 51.3)	21 (0; 58.9)
Pet care	25 (0; 49.1)	13 (0; 32.1)
Shopping, service errands	33 (23; 39.4)	30 (15; 41.1)
Helping others	15 (0; 49.1)	15 (0; 59.8)
Social activities	52 (20; 88.4)	41 (15; 74.2)
Studies	8 (0; 33.6)	10 (0; 54.1)
Sleep	424 (420; 79.1)	415 (420; 94.3)
Paid work	442 (450; 125.0)	484 (510; 117.6)
Time away from home	229 (150; 210.3)	611 (600; 192.5)
Bound routine activities ^a	192 (140; 173.7)	128 (95; 121.9)
Flexible non-routine activities ^b	189 (160; 153.3)	143 (110; 143.1)

Mean minutes per day (median; standard deviation). (Weighted by population).
Note: ^aBound routine activities include housework, childcare, and household planning.
^bFlexible non-routine activities include social activities and studies.