

Working Remotely and Employee Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study of Irish Workers within the Pharmaceutical Sector.

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Abstract

Employee wellbeing is becoming more important in the rapidly growing remote work environment. Previous research has established that employees with varied work arrangements (fully remote, hybrid remote) can behave differently to remote working. It has also been acknowledged that recent literature concerning the effects of telecommuting on the wellbeing of workers is divisive as well as dividing. It is recognised by several studies that remote working has various positive aspects for employees. However, other research also emphasises negative implications for employees.

Furthermore, additional investigation into the correlation between remote work and employee wellbeing is necessary due to a scarcity of literature on this topic in the Irish pharmaceutical sector. This indicates a gap in the literature and as a result, there is a need to conduct research into this topic by gathering remote employee's experiences and opinions concerning their wellbeing specifically within the pharmaceutical industry in Ireland. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to bridge the gap via examining the effects of working remotely on the wellbeing of workers.

This research approach adopted a qualitative method, through means of semi-structured interviews. Eight participants were interviewed, representing a variety of fully remote and hybrid remote employees within the pharmaceutical industry. This approach allowed the investigator to critique this topic thoroughly, in addition to deriving experiences and views from employees regarding their wellbeing. The semi-structured interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams and subsequently transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to evaluate the data, allowing further coding, and grouping into common themes. Additionally, the study's ethical concerns were identified and investigated to fulfil the criteria of a competent researcher.

The findings emerged, indicating that working from home has a favourable impact on overall wellbeing. Nonetheless, it is also clear from this research that isolation had an adverse impact on remote employees' societal wellbeing. The sample size and participant demographics may be a research limitation.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|------|--|
| CIPD | Chartered Institute of Personnel Development |
| CSO | Central Statistics Office |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IEQ | Indoor Environmental Quality |
| JD-R | Job Demands-Resources |
| PHWB | Physical Wellbeing |
| PWB | Psychological Wellbeing |
| SWB | Societal Wellbeing |
| WFH | Working from Home |

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research aims to investigate the impact of working from home (WFH) on the wellbeing of remote employees in the pharmaceutical industry. The purpose of this section is to present readers with an overview of the background and main objectives of the study. The research aims and objectives will be identified along with the research methodology employed to carry out this study, in addition to taking ethical considerations into account. The structure of the research will be laid out together with a synopsis of each chapter.

1.2 Research Context

Remote working is a model in which individuals can construct work duties outside of the organisation (Ferrara *et al.*, 2022). Giovanis and Ozdamar (2020) refer to the Covid-19 pandemic for the shifts in the labour force, workplace arrangements and working styles that have influenced the present workforce. As a consequence of technological improvements, new types of working have grown in popularity today and enable work to be done remotely and from various locations. The current research investigates remote working and to what extent it effects the wellbeing of those who WFH within the pharmaceutical industry in Ireland.

Research concerning remote work and worker wellbeing was a common phenomenon amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Giovanis and Ozdamar (2020) concluded that those who work exclusively from home within the UK had lower levels of mental wellbeing, particularly regarding social isolation, overtime and moving to an unfamiliar working environment. Conversely, Yang *et al.* (2023) found that employees who worked from home have higher levels of wellbeing and higher job satisfaction than those who do not work remotely. Another study established that employees with varied dispositions can behave differently to remote working (Ferrara *et al.*, 2022). This evidence suggests that an employee's wellbeing can be influenced by whether they are fully remote or hybrid workers.

In Ireland, remote work has increased significantly, with 80% of those employed WFH at some stage since the outbreak, up from 23% before the pandemic (CSO, 2021). The findings of IDA Ireland (2021) found more employers will continue to provide remote and hybrid work alternatives, with one out of every five job listings on LinkedIn highlighting the option of remote employment. This is supported by a very recent survey in Ireland conducted by

McCarthy *et al.* (2023) which found that 59% of respondents were currently working hybrid, 38% were working fully remotely and only 3% were working fully onsite.

Furthermore, it is important within the scope of this study to distinguish between remote work and hybrid work models. Hybrid working, for the purposes of this study, will adopt the statement made by Turits (2022) that in a move for balance, many companies have implemented policies with people working three days per week in the office with two remote days (3-2), or two office days and three remote days (2-3). For the purposes of this study, a hybrid employee will be defined as anyone who works a minimum of two days and a maximum of four days from home. Conversely, a fully remote worker, following the criteria outlined by Coffey and Wolf (2018) works every day from their home and does not have to work from their company's office.

It is recognised that remote working has various positive and negative aspects for employees. Although, recent literature concerning effects of telecommuting on the wellbeing of workers as divisive as well as dividing. This indicates gaps in the research and as a result, there is a need to conduct research into this topic by gathering remote employee's experiences and opinions concerning their wellbeing. Yang *et al.* (2023) conducted research on remote working within five different industries in Germany. In addition, the other studies of remote working and wellbeing were carried out across Europe and within different sectors. Therefore, the aim of this research is to bridge these gaps through examining teleworking and its impact concerning the wellbeing of professionals in the pharmaceutical industry in Ireland. Specifically, the objective of the research is to examine the physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing of individuals working remotely within the pharmaceutical industry in Ireland.

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the impact of WFH on the physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing of remote employees. The focus of this study is aimed at finding out how each of these elements of wellbeing is impacted by WFH among remote employees.

With respect to the research reviewed, there are inconsistencies and gaps in existing studies concerning how working remotely impacts the wellbeing of employees who WFH. This research aims to provide a comprehension of how remote employees perceive their wellbeing

to have been impacted by their work environment. Considering the purpose of this study, the subsequent research question was developed.

1.4 Research Question

“How does working remotely impact the wellbeing of those who WFH within the pharmaceutical sector in Ireland?”

1.5 Research Objectives

- **To explore the physical wellbeing of employees who WFH.** This goal of the study was developed to explore how WFH affects physical traits such as the quality of equipment and the overall conditions when WFH, in addition to welfare and stress.
- **To explore the psychological wellbeing of employees who WFH.** This goal has been established to investigate how WFH affects an individual’s mental variables like fulfilment and an appropriate balance between work and life.
- **To explore the societal wellbeing of employees who WFH.** This goal was developed to investigate how WFH affects societal problems and connections, as well as how employers assist remote workers.

1.6 Research Design

A qualitative research paradigm was selected to investigate the impact of WFH on the wellbeing of employees who work remotely. This methodology enables the investigator to explain, explore, and comprehend the phenomenon of WFH and the experiences of remote employees within the context of their overall wellbeing. The research focused on the pharmaceutical industry. A snowball method was applied, and a combination of participants who work full-time and hybrid remote represented the research sample. The researcher faced a significant challenge recruiting fully remote employees for this study considering WFH is still a relatively new practice amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants, all of whom were employees within the pharmaceutical industry. From that, the data was examined by means of thematic analysis, which required coding and grouping the data into five themes in order to address the questions and objectives of the study.

1.7 Research Ethics

Ethical considerations were considered at all stages of this investigation, including data collection, privacy, and confidentiality. Given that interviews were the chosen approach of data collection, the investigator ensured sure each participant understood that participation in the interview was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from it at any time. Before the interview, each participant had to sign a consent form.

1.8 Structure of the Study

The dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 has presented an overview and background to the research. The research problem, research aims, and objectives have been outlined.

In Chapter 2, the bodies of literature concerning employee wellbeing and WFH will be reviewed to discuss the existing literature, in addition to highlighting gaps in the literature.

In Chapter 3, the research method will be presented. The research design will be presented with respect to a rationale for the adoption of an inductive, qualitative study framed in an interpretive research paradigm. The research instrument, data analysis and ethical concerns will also be presented.

In Chapter 4, the findings of the research arising from semi-structured interviews will be highlighted. The findings are categorized and presented through five themes. Furthermore, the findings of this study are discussed and analysed with reference to the literature review.

In Chapter 5, the research will be concluded, presenting how the study achieved its research aim and objectives. In addition, recommendations and a statement of personal development will be provided in order to fulfil the requirements for membership of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD).

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the aims and objectives of the research as well as the rationale for the study. An overview of the research design was provided, along with information on the methodology, sample, data collection, and data analysis methods. Additionally, ethical issues were addressed, as confidentiality and privacy have to be safeguarded throughout every step of the research process. Finally, an outline of each study chapter was provided.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The purpose of this section of the research is to present a broad overview of existing research within the domain of working remotely and wellbeing. This chapter will explore the recent growth of remote work as well as past research on how remote work influences employee wellbeing. As part of the research aim and objective, it was necessary to review, explore, and critique prior studies and highlight gaps within this field of study.

2.1 Remote Working

Today, remote employment is referred to in a variety of language, including remote work, WFH, or teleworking (Grant *et al.*, 2019). The search for an internationally recognised definition of remote working has sparked discussion and disagreements (Grant, Wallace, and Spurgeon, 2013). Furthermore, Allen *et al.* (2015) contend the lack of an agreed-upon definition of remote working has hindered comprehension of this type of employment, as the findings of numerous research tend to be contradictory. It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by remote working. Laumer and Maier (2021) define remote working as a work arrangement in which employees conduct their everyday jobs at a location other than their usual workplace, which is supported by information and communication technology (ICT). Again, Ferrara *et al.* (2022) refer to remote working as a model in which individuals can construct work duties outside of the organisation using ICT. Conversely, it can also be characterised as paid labour performed outside of the usual work environment, such as at home, but also at client locations, on the road, and communicating via ICT (Wheatley, 2012). Professionals who operate from a location that isn't at the workplace office are referred to be remote or mobile employees (Crawford, MacCalman and Jackson, 2011; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). Most research on remote work concentrates on settings in which WFH was infrequent and just a few workers, not everyone, considered adopting it in their organizations (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

The idea of remote working, although not a direct consequence of the pandemic, has shifted from a distance to the forefront of labour force. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, WFH had never been a common practice (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018). Despite being touted as the future work environment (Greer and Payne, 2014), before the pandemic, few people worked from home, and even fewer were completely remote. For example, in Europe, approximately two percent of employees teleworked primarily from home in 2015 (Eurofound, 2017). As a result of this,

before Covid-19, most employees possessed little WFH experience, and neither they nor their employers were prepared to facilitate such an arrangement (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

Remote work is becoming increasingly common in many businesses in recent years, partly due to technological advancements (Eddleston, Mulki and Clair, 2017). ICT and its application at work play a vital function in the deployment of remote work. As previously highlighted, most definitions of remote work hold a reference to the use of technology to perform work (Ferrara *et al.*, 2022; Laumer and Maier 2021; Wheatley, 2012). Giovanis and Ozdamar (2020) contend that technology has reshaped the link between the workplace and the residence, reshaping the traditional commute from home to the office. In accordance with this Choi (2018), reinforces that modern technology has provided options to work from a variety of locations. Furthermore, telecommuting provides benefits to organisations, including cost savings associated with office space and workplace expenditures (Giovanis, and Ozdamar, 2020; Grant *et al.*, 2019; Choi, 2018; Felstead and Henseke, 2017). Comparable to this, WFH supports an organization maintain stability throughout unexpected and emergency situations (Gifford, 2022; Donnelly and Proctor, 2015). In contrast, Watson (2017) contends that modern technologies can give development to robotics, reducing the number of professions available for human labour in generations to come.

In Ireland, remote work has increased significantly, with 80% of those employed WFH at some stage since the outbreak, up from 23% before the pandemic (CSO, 2021). The findings of IDA Ireland (2021) found more employers will continue to provide remote and hybrid work alternatives, with one out of every five job listings on LinkedIn highlighting the option of remote employment. This is supported by a very recent survey in Ireland conducted by McCarthy *et al.* (2023) which found that 59% of respondents were currently working hybrid, 38% were working fully remotely and only 3% were working fully onsite. Comparable with this, Gifford (2022) claims that remote work will keep growing because individual's attitudes and values are changing, in addition to significant advancements in ICT.

Recent research on remote work suggests that it is growing increasingly widespread, as evidenced by the fact that nearly 40% of full-time workers in the US now WFH, with 12.7% doing so full-time and 28.2% adopting a hybrid approach (Haan, 2023). On the contrary, there has been prior debate regarding remote work, exhibited by Yahoo, where Chief Marissa Mayer restricted employees from operating remotely owing to concerns about the influence on innovation within the organization (Allen *et al.*, 2015). Similar to this, there has been a very

recent push by some employers to get people back into office three days or even five days a week (Keogh, 2023). Moreover, Brescoll *et al.* (2013) argue that conventional gender stereotypes remain in remote working policies, with women being more attuned to WFH and more inclined to take on further responsibilities including as childcare. Similarly, Allen *et al.* (2015) notes that females are more likely to balance domestic and childcare duties when WFH. Literature further indicates that females are more likely than males to engage in remote work (Wheatley, 2017; Allen *et al.*, 2015; Brescoll *et al.*, 2013).

Furthermore, it is important for this study to distinguish between remote work and hybrid work models. Hybrid working, for the purposes of this study, will adopt the statement made by Turits (2022) that in a move for balance, many companies have implemented policies with people working three days per week in the office with two remote days (3-2), or two office days and three remote days (2-3). For this study, a hybrid employee will be defined as anyone who works a minimum of two days and maximum of four days from home. Conversely, a fully remote worker, following the criteria outlined by Coffey and Wolf (2018), works every day from their home and does not have to work from their company's office.

2.2 Wellbeing

Although the term 'employee wellbeing' is widely acknowledged, it continues to be an area of debate among researchers, because of the absence of a precise and universally accepted definition (Sandilya and Shahnawaz, 2018; Simone, 2014). Workplace wellbeing can be understood as the standard of worker performance and overall experiences within work environment (Pawar, 2016). Wellbeing can be described as the way employees evaluate oneself, encompassing factors like contentment, stress, and emotions that can be impacted by the workplace and its norms (Shier and Graham, 2010). Conversely, Kazemi (2017) argues that the absence of unfavourable attitudes along with reduced levels of stress characterize wellbeing in work setting. The wellbeing and health of workers is divided into three categories: psychological, physical, and societal wellbeing (Khoreva and Wechtler, 2018; David, 2017; Robertson and Cooper, 2011). Researchers are becoming increasingly interested in wellbeing, and there is a wealth of study on the subject. Yet, a significant amount of the research on workplace wellbeing is dispersed and incoherent across multiple sectors. Whilst preceding views on wellbeing emphasised people physical characteristics, contemporary definitions include physical, psychological, and social aspects (Simone, 2014). Physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing are further emphasised in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (Cole,

Oliver, and Blaviesciunaite, 2014). Maslow defines basic human needs including physical requirements like rest and safety, psychological features including esteem and self-actualization, and societal traits including a sense of belonging and connections with others (Taormina and Gao, 2013). Thus, people strive to fulfil these basic human needs on a daily basis (Cole *et al.*, 2014).

The growing number of employees working remotely has made employee wellbeing more important than ever, raising questions about where the line should be drawn between work and personal life (Giovanis and Ozdamar, 2020). As per Simone (2014), worker wellbeing emerges as a key concern, given that a worker's personal experiences can have both favorable and adverse effects on the employee and the business. Previous research in Ireland indicate that such work arrangements may present difficulties for workers and could impede their wellbeing (Russell, O'Connell and McGinnity, 2009). Comparable to this, David (2017) contends that advancements in ICT could result in overwork and interfere with personal and professional lives. This is supported by Felstead and Henseke (2017) who found problems with communication across time zones also have an impact on employees' ability to switch off and this is agreed with by CIPD (2018) research, which found that 87% of remote employees reported that ICT affected their ability to do switch off outside of working hours.

2.3 Physical Wellbeing

Physical wellbeing (PHWB) at work environments includes components of health and physical performance, such as fitness and rest (CIPD, 2019). It additionally encompasses issues for safety, such as the quality of equipment's and the overall conditions at work (Khoreva and Wechtler, 2018). Meanwhile, potential research concerning employee physical wellbeing might consider aspects like increased job demands and work pressure, according to Khoreva and Wechtler (2018).

2.3.1 Positives

WFH presents numerous positives for employee's physical wellbeing. A recent survey conducted by Shumway (2023) discovered hybrid work promotes healthier habits as it provides employees additional time for exercise, cooking healthy meals and sleep due to less commuting. Similar benefits are highlighted by Hallman *et al.* (2021), who found WFH can have a good impact on sleep, which is a perceived benefit of physical wellbeing. Likewise, Rohwer *et al.* (2020) also discovered that individuals slept more on WFH days than on non-

WFH days. Comparable to this, Wells *et al.* (2023) pinpoints a connection between quality of sleep and increased physical activity. Tavares (2017) notes that in order to guarantee positive results for office workers who may WFH in the near future, an in-depth awareness of the aspects in the WFH environment that relate to physical wellbeing is essential.

When WFH, employees may have more influence over the environment and environmental elements that affect Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ), such as lighting, temperature, humidity, air quality, noise level, and ergonomics, which are crucial for the physical emotional wellbeing of employees (Xiao *et al.*, 2021). Similar to this, Kim and de Dear, (2013) report that employees have complete autonomy for organising their work environments at home, allowing them to work in an environment that may have better IEQ factors conditions than being in a fixed cubicle or open-plan office. Similar to this, DeFilippis *et al.* 's (2020) research suggests that home offices may provide superior air quality than conventional workplaces. Additionally, Wells *et al.* (2023) highlighted WFH could reduce harmful health exposures such pollution exposure and illnesses due to reduced social interactions.

Astell-Burt and Feng (2021) study concluded that remote employees engage in more physical activity. Comparable to this, among remote employees, having pets and having access to green and blue environmental areas (urban parks etc) are mediating variables in relation to physical activity (Wells *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, Xiao, *et al.* (2021) found with the option of WFH, employees may take breaks from their desks and prioritise on creating a personalized strategy for their work life balance, which can improve their physical wellbeing.

2.3.2 Negatives

Nevertheless, various arguments are challenging this model of work on employee's physical wellbeing, which results in ongoing debate. Employees with families and limited living space have made it difficult for remote employees to do their duties from home (Mudditt, 2020). Wells *et al.* (2023) further report that employees may struggle to live, work, and sleep in the same setting. From the standpoint of physical wellbeing, poorly designed home workspaces, and settings have been linked to neck, shoulder, and spinal discomfort (Department of Business, Enterprise, and Innovation, 2019). Similar to this, prolonged periods of screen exposure from full-time computer work can cause fatigue, migraines, and eye-related problems (Xiao *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, the absence of an ergonomic assessment may result in persistent back pain (Russo *et al.*, 2021).

Xiao, *et al.* (2021) highlights that when WFH not everyone has a designated workspace, and some share with family or make do with makeshift desks like dining tables. Comparable to this, Bouziri *et al.* (2020) found remote workers operate from various spots in the household like kitchen counters, sofas, or even beds. Moreover, research conducted by Mahdavi and Kelishadi (2020) found an increase in stress from shared workplaces, poor posture owing to a lack of an appropriate physical workstation and extended sedentary activity can all contribute to increased discomfort and pain for remote employees. Additionally, unlike office environments equipped with centralised heating, ventilation, and aircon systems, employees might neglect the control of IEQ when WFH, which could have negative consequences on physical wellbeing (Xiao, *et al.*, 2021).

Further negative impacts of remote working on physical wellbeing are highlighted by Tavares, (2017) who found WFH prevents employees from interacting socially with their coworkers and may also result in a reduction in their physical activity, such as going to and from meetings. In addition, Xiao *et al.*'s (2021) study discovered that working parents may opt to compromise their sleep hours in order to work at night or early in the morning, as these are the only calm hours during which they can focus on work and prevent multiple distractions.

Additionally, WFH has been linked with working extended hours, disruption with personal time, and intensification of work (Grant *et al.*, 2019). According to Avis (2018), there is a possibility that those who WFH will put in more hours than their counterparts who operate from the physical office location, which might result in 'presenteeism', which has a negative influence on an individual's physical wellbeing. Despite this, Vega, Anderson, and Kaplan (2015) contend that extended hours of work when WFH occurs to meet the expectations of their line managers or office co-workers. On the contrary, 'presenteeism' may lead remote employees to WFH even when sick which can potentially impact their recovery and physical wellbeing, as well as their standard of their work (Tavares, 2017). In contrast, Greer, and Payne (2014) found that remote work can protect employers from closing due to adverse weather or other unanticipated circumstances, in addition to protecting employees from contracting a viral illness.

Varner and Schmidt (2022) argue that a potential risk connected to WFH is the risk to IT security while performing duties in locations other than the traditional office workplace. Additional scholars contend that accessibility to resources such as advanced

technology represents a significant difficulty associated with WFH (Donnelly and Proctor, 2015; Crawford *et al*, 2011).

2.3.3 PHWB Model

Simone (2014) explores a model which can assess physical wellbeing in the workplace as shown in Figure 1. This model explores various aspects of workplace wellbeing and suggests that three main factors; personality traits, work environment, and occupational stress, all have an impact on wellbeing (Simone, 2014). The work environment contains health and safety hazards and other risks such as stress that could have a negative effect on employee's physical wellbeing or, if removed, could have a beneficial impact (Simone, 2014). Risk is a significant threat to safety and health in the work setting among remote employees (Danna and Griffin, 1999). Similarly, Donnelly and Proctor (2014) state that data security, as well as health and safety, are the most pressing issues for those who WFH.

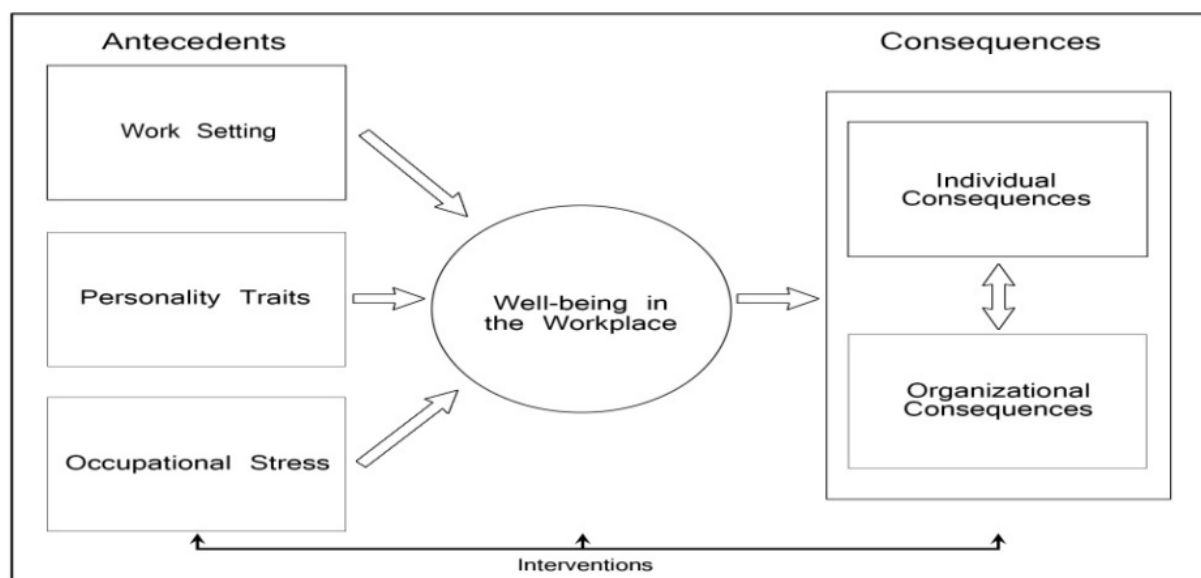


Figure 1. Model of Wellbeing in the Workplace (Source: Simone, 2014, p. 122)

2.4 Psychological Wellbeing

The concept of psychological wellbeing (PWB) is concerned with an individual's capacity to operate well in both their professional and private lives (Khoreva and Wechtler, 2018). The two main components of psychological wellbeing are the eudaimonic and hedonic approaches (Dagenais-Desmaris and Savoie, 2011). The eudaimonic approach analyses psychological wellbeing through the lens of meaning, self-acceptance, and optimum productivity (Hoffmann and Rutkowska, 2015). In contrast, the hedonic perspective reflects

psychological wellbeing in connection to contentment and life satisfaction (Dagenais-Desmaris and Savoie, 2011). Ryffs introduced a six-dimensional framework for assessing psychological wellbeing, which includes self-acceptance, personal development, meaning, positive relationships, environment mastery, and autonomy (Zheng *et al.*, 2015). On the contrary, Dagenais-Desmarais and Savoie (2011) adopt a different approach by exploring psychological wellbeing via five lenses, namely personal fitness at work, workplace success, competence, participation, and recognition.

2.4.1 Positives

Remote working presents numerous positives for employees' psychological wellbeing. According to an investigation by Niebuhr *et al.* (2022), remote workers exhibit better levels of commitment and satisfaction compared to their office counterparts. Similar to this, Ilies, Schwind and Heller (2007) highlights job satisfaction as a specific component of hedonic psychological wellbeing. Additional positives of remote work involve increased autonomy and flexibility for remote employees pertaining to work duties and schedules (Niebuhr *et al.*, 2022; Grant *et al.*, 2013; Wheatley, 2012; Crawford *et al.*, 2011). Those who WFH have more autonomy due to ICT (Gifford, 2022). Likewise, Vega *et al.* (2015) argue that remote employees get less physical monitoring than those in the office environment, indicating increased autonomy amongst remote workers. Comparably, the eudaimonic approach highlights the impact of work on wellbeing by focusing on aspects such as autonomy, which can influence feelings of meaningfulness and fulfilment (Hoffmann and Rutkowska, 2015). However, Kniffin, Narayanan and Anseel (2021) argue that more autonomy could culminate in an 'autonomy control paradox', causing workers to engage in work more intensively.

Remote working tends to provide numerous benefits for employee wellbeing, as highlighted by numerous studies, like Boland *et al.* (2020) and Felstead and Henseke (2017), which stress that remote work increases job morale and loyalty, potentially due to less commute and better flexibility in work schedules. Similarly, in regard to job loyalty, a recent survey conducted in Ireland by McCarthy (2023) found that 92% of participants suggested that remote / hybrid working would be a key component in their decision to change employer. Comparable to this, Giovanis and Ozdamar (2020) found that remote workers reported a greater degree of satisfaction. Still, there remains a gap in the literature with regards to how different remote

employees may encounter higher degrees of satisfaction compared to others (Smith, Patmos, and Pitts, 2018).

Research suggests that remote work in the context of WFH, can improve work-life balance, particularly for parents, as highlighted by Gifford (2022). Parents can benefit from WFH due to the need for flexibility when caring for children and doing household responsibilities like the school run (Wheatley, 2017). However, prior studies suggest that WFH can lead to family conflict due to increased responsibilities and the necessity for direct supervision of children (Solis, 2017; Varatharaj and Vasantha, 2012). Literature further shows that WFH improves work-life balance through minimizing commute time (Elshaiekh *et al.*, 2018; Beauregard *et al.*, 2013). The study by Beauregard *et al.* (2013) further claims that remote work cuts down on absenteeism due to illness since many employees use fewer sick days.

A key aspect of the eudaimonic approach, according to Hoffmann and Rutkowska (2015), is optimal production. Comparable to this, Nielsen *et al.* (2017) emphasize that WFH offers benefits for employers, including improved productivity of employees and lower absenteeism. Similarly, Allen *et al.* (2015) suggest that working remotely benefits an organization's overall performance. Furthermore, numerous researchers have investigated the positive influence of remote work on employee productivity (Wheatley, 2017; Crawford *et al.*, 2011). This is also apparent by a recent survey in Ireland by CIPD (2021), which reported a 48% increase in productivity among remote workers practicing this work arrangement. However, Howe and Menges (2022) argue that gauging remote employee's productivity is challenging because of variations in the physical work setting, family circumstances, or the degree of remote work.

2.4.2 Negatives

Nonetheless, there are multiple studies that disputes this working arrangement and the influence it can have on employee wellbeing, developing ongoing debate. Numerous academics argue that the lines separating professional and personal life have been become harder to distinguish as an outcome of telecommuting (Bauer *et al.*, 2018; Grant *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, Wheatley (2012) maintains that remote work undermines the traditional separation between professional duties and domestic life. In fact, a recent study carried out by CIPD (2018) discovered that 87% of remote employees reported that technology had a substantial impact on their capacity to disconnect from work during nonworking hours. Likewise, Felstead and Henseke (2017) emphasize that WFH can prove difficult for people to disconnect from their professional obligations, potentially impacting their wellbeing.

Moreover, research that examines work satisfaction and life happiness as components of hedonic psychological wellbeing offers conflicting evidence about the relationship between the two (Rode 2004; Hart 1999).

Literature reveals that while remote employees may exhibit higher levels of productivity, they can also find themselves working additional hours (Avis, 2018; Grant *et al.*, 2019). According to Wheatley (2012) and Klopotek (2017), there is a possibility that leisure time gets used for work as opposed to recreational activities. Furthermore, Avis (2018) argues that there is a risk that remote workers could end up working extra hours than their office-based counterparts, consequently experiencing ‘presenteeism’, a phenomenon that impacts employee wellbeing. Despite this, alternative perspectives suggest that WFH in a different location to the office can result in working (or perceptions of) longer hours due to the idea that in order to qualify for additional WFH benefits, remote employees might try to make themselves especially available for online interaction after work hours (Vega *et al.*, 2015; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010).

In addition, those who WFH may perceive themselves as subjected to discrimination in terms of promotion and salary advancement, which may differ from those available to employees working in a traditional workplace setting (Avis, 2018; Eddleston *et al.*, 2017). Research suggests that remote employment may have adverse effects on employment progression and limit opportunities for developing expertise (Donnelly and Proctor, 2015), which can result in an adverse effect on eudaimonic and hedonic approaches of psychological wellbeing (Dagenais-Desmaris and Savoie, 2011). Furthermore, Greer and Payne (2014) argue that remote workers physical separation from their traditional work environment may limit learning and development opportunities.

2.4.3 PWB Model

As per Robertson and Cooper’s (2011) findings, the ASSET (A Shortened Stress Evaluation Tool) model can be applied to assess PWB at work. This wellbeing model illustrates how specific factors at work, such as work relationships, workload, communication, job conditions, resources, and autonomy, can impact an employee’s psychological wellbeing (Timo and Michaelson, 2014).

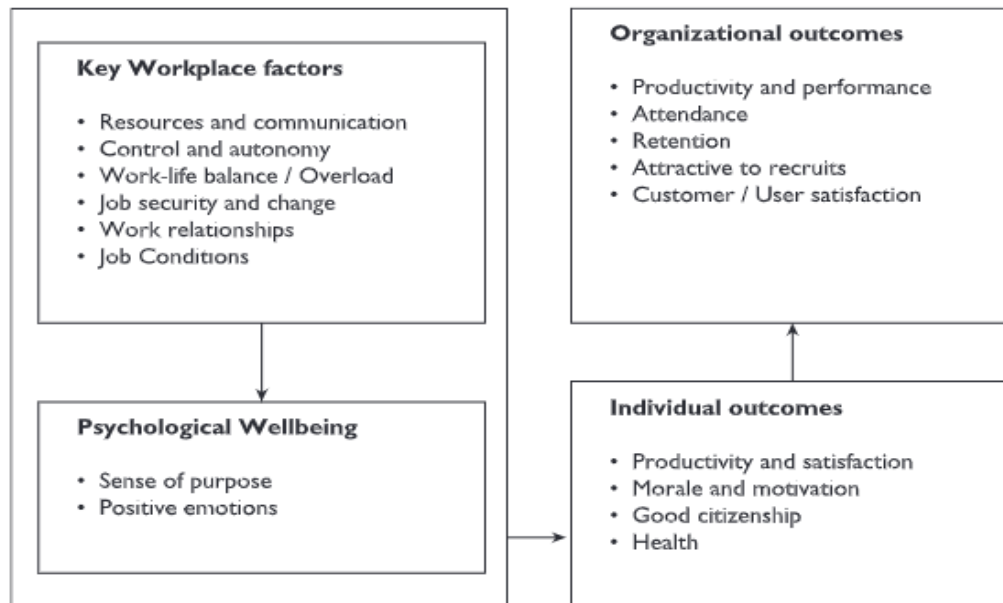


Figure 2. The ASSET Model of PWB (Source: Robertson and Cooper, 2011, p. 3)

As to Sandilya and Shahnawaz (2018), the existing literature implies that the ASSET model, as shown in figure 1, takes into factor both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of wellbeing and is impacted by both internal and external factors in work settings. The Robertson and Cooper (2011) model uses a scale of 1-5 to assess psychological wellbeing, with the average point representing the result. However, one criticism of this model is its large scope, and the questionnaire for measuring employee wellbeing can be challenging to access (Sandilya and Shahnawaz, 2018). Conversely, Robertson and Cooper (2011) contend that this model represents the most comprehensive approach to collecting data on psychological wellbeing in the workplace.

Personality traits, like Type A behavior and an individual's sense of 'locus of control' can have a considerable influence on favourable or adverse aspects of employee wellbeing, and occupational stress levels (Simone, 2014). Occupational stress is frequently caused by an intensive workload, job uncertainty, workplace relationships, role ambiguity, and limited recognition and progression opportunities (Mosadeghrad, 2014). Unlike the ASSET model, this approach also underscores the ramifications of wellbeing at work on both employees and the business as a whole. Employee outcomes could be psychological or physical factors, while organizational implications can involve absenteeism, financial losses, and negative performance (Danna and Griffin, 1999).

2.5 Societal Wellbeing

A person's societal wellbeing (SWB) requires an appropriate and empowering professional environment including connections with colleagues (Simone, 2014). According to CIPD (2019), societal wellbeing is characterised by employee 'voice', such as engagement and interaction, collaboration, and interactions with peers and superiors. Additionally, Khoreva and Wechtler (2018) recommend that prospective studies addressing societal health should investigate relationships among workers and co-workers alongside the support of the organisation.

2.5.1 Positives

In contrary to the substantial research of positive aspects between physical and psychological wellbeing and WFH, Simone (2014) highlights that societal wellbeing has received the least attention in overall wellbeing literature. Multiple studies argue that those who work remotely have the advantage of less interruptions when WFH rather than in the workplace (Madsen, 2011; Wheatley, 2012). Due to fewer direct interactions, remote employees can profit from reduced involvement in workplace drama and dispute (Crawford *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, Tavares (2017), acknowledged an advantage of WFH is the avoidance of office politics. As noted by Reuschke (2019), there is a considerable gap in literature exploring the relationship amongst social isolation and the wellbeing of remote employees. As well, Crawford *et al.* (2011) contends further study is necessary to explore the link among remote employees and their co-workers with respect to isolation.

2.5.2 Negatives

Multiple studies propose that WFH has a negative impact on employee's societal wellbeing due to concerns about social isolation (Avis, 2018; Eddleston *et al.*, 2017; Allen *et al.*, 2015; Crawford *et al.*, 2011). Remote work has the potential to raise relationship problems with coworkers and superiors because of the absence of face-to-face communication (Crawford *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, Chekwa (2018) claims that remote workers can disengage naturally due to a lack of interaction in person, thereby affecting employee wellbeing. Furthermore, Tavares (2017) study revealed that for individuals who reside alone and work remotely without daily face-to-face encounters and social support may lead to societal difficulties such as isolation and depression (Tavares, 2017). Allen *et al.* (2015) contends that the lack of in-person interactions can influence employee creativity and information sharing. In a recent study by

Al-Habaibeh *et al.* (2021), 212 remote employees reported that the lack of face-to-face discussions and informal meetings was the most prevalent difficulty they experienced. Similarly, Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer's decision to stop WFH procedures was driven notably by the considerable influence it had on innovation, which was considered key to the organization's performance (Allen *et al.*, 2015). Additional issues with communication may arise when workers are operating across different time zones, potentially impacting their capacity to disconnect from work (Felstead and Henseke, 2017).

A significant barrier that WFH poses to companies and their workers is effective interaction (Smith *et al.*, 2018). Comparable with this, Kniffin *et al.* (2021) state that communication is hindered by the absence of an in-person and verbal interaction among employees working remotely and their coworkers. Communication channels such as email are less effective for conveying emotions and messages compared to video platforms, which are more influential for achieving effective interaction (Allen *et al.*, 2015). In a similar vein, Taylor (2020) contends that virtual interactions can improve communication and reduce feelings of isolation. In contrast, Smith *et al.* (2018) argue that different methods of communication are better suited to the unique personalities of those who WFH. Klopotek (2017) contends that effective collaboration between office-based and remote employees is feasible via applications like Google Documents, facilitating simultaneous collaboration on a piece of work and potentially enhancing problem-solving.

Employers face significant challenges in evaluating the performance of remote employees, given their absence of physical presence within the workplace (Elshaiekh *et al.*, 2018; Eddleston *et al.*, 2017; Klopotek, 2017). Likewise, Beauregard *et al.* (2013) express a similar view on managing remote employee performance in contrast to that of office-based employees. Similarly, Crawford *et al.* (2011) emphasize that a key issue associated with WFH is the management of remote employees. Nevertheless, Wilkinson *et al.* (2021) argue that management ought to prioritize achieving results instead of trying to micromanage or conduct online monitoring of employees.

Trust also emerges as a key concern in the relationship between management and employees when working remotely. Despite numerous research results indicating that remote employees are more productive, managers continue to maintain that being physically present in the office signifies productivity (Avis, 2018). Supporting this, Beauregard *et al.* (2013) emphasize that a significant challenge to remote work stems from managerial trust in team members and the

notion that employee visibility correlates to productivity. Solis (2017) contends that a lack of trust in remote workers from management can have an adverse effect on performance. Recent research on telecommuting in the Irish context discovered that 69% of personnel regard remote employees as ‘dossing’, combined with a managerial culture that emphasizes worker visibility (Becker *et al.*, 2022).

2.5.3 SWB Models

The Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) was introduced by Bakker, and Demerouti (2007) as an alternative to the already existing models for employee wellbeing. Kattenbach, Demerouti and Nachreiner, (2010) employed the JD-R model for evaluating employee wellbeing in the context of flexible working arrangements. Numerous studies have utilized this model to investigate how job resources and job demands influence employee wellbeing in the workplace (Van den Tooren, and de Jong, 2014; Kattenbach *et al.*, 2010). This model posits that job demands such as high work pressure or emotionally demanding interaction with peers can lead to a negative societal wellbeing. In contrast, job resources such as autonomy, social support (from supervisors and colleagues), performance feedback, and collegiality can have a positive impact on societal wellbeing (Van den Tooren, and de Jong, 2014; Townsend *et al.*, 2014; Kattenbach *et al.*, 2010). The JD-R model proposes two processes to assess the influence of job demands and resources: the motivational process and the health impairment process (Townsend *et al.*, 2014; Van den Tooren, and de Jong, 2014).

Kattenbach *et al.* (2010) used the JD-R model in their research of the relationship between flexible work and wellbeing and categorised two approaches into demands such as time boundaries and resources into autonomy. Prior studies using the JD-R model concerning WFH found that employees who telecommuted one day per week experienced greater workflow than their peers (Townsend *et al.*, 2014). The term of ‘workflow’ was linked to outcomes such as a beneficial work schedule, perceived job autonomy, and job crafting (Wang *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, Van den Tooren, and de Jong, (2014) research found that job demands such as ambiguity and pressure negatively affected remote employee’s wellbeing, whereas job resources such as autonomy and societal support had a favourable effect.

Finally, the CIPD (2019) presents a strategy for measuring workplace wellbeing that identifies five major criteria. This first area is concerned with health such as both physical and mental, as well as the physical safety of employees in the workplace (CIPD, 2019). The second criteria address job-related concerns, including management, work environment, autonomy,

remuneration, and reward (CIPD, 2019). Furthermore, this model explores societal factors like relationships and employee voice, as well as values and principles like moral standards (CIPD, 2019). Finally, the fifth area of the model proposed by the CIPD (2019) caters to personal development, including learning, innovation, and employment advancement.

2.6 Identified Gaps

The Covid-19 epidemic has rendered prior studies on working from home ineffective (Carevale and Hatak, 2020). This unusual scenario, however, provided a unique opportunity for the researcher to perform a new study on the issues faced by the new phenomenon of remote work. This research intends to produce practical data that will help organisations navigate the challenges of remote work caused by Covid-19. According to the literature, wellbeing is an essential element of employment that may have positive as well as adverse effects for both businesses and their workers. This presents an obvious rationale for why precise and up-to-date research on this topic is required.

As noted by Ferrara *et al.* (2022), earlier research into the influence of remote work on employee wellbeing has produced inconsistent findings across multiple investigations. Similarly, Kattenbach *et al.* (2010) suggest that research on telecommuting and employee wellbeing is limited and debated, with findings ranging from positive to negative.

Grant *et al.* (2013) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to investigate remote employees' productivity, wellbeing, and work-life balance, suggesting further investigation into their wellbeing given the contradictory previous research findings. The research of Onken-Menk, Nüesch, and Kröll (2018), suggest there is little literature on the influence of WFH on employees, particularly regarding factors related to both work and non-work domains, such as social life and personal interests. Similarly, Vesala and Tuomivaara (2015) stress the evidence on the influence of working remotely on wellbeing has revealed discrepancies, as this form of work has been suggested to raise workload, leading to challenges with maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Conversely, additional literature reveals a positive association between wellbeing and telecommuting, which is attributed to shorter journeys (Boland *et al.*, 2020; Felstead and Henseke, 2017). Giovanis and Ozdamar (2020) recommend that subsequent studies ought to investigate the relationship between wellbeing and WFH.

Crawford *et al.* (2011) identify a gap in the literature on WFH and its impact on workers wellbeing, both positively and negatively, from a physical, psychological, and societal standpoint. Comparable to this, Grant *et al.* (2013) stress that there is a scarcity of knowledge about the potential effects of telecommuting practices on wellbeing. Furthermore, McLeod *et al.* (2016) highlight in their research the necessity for further studies into factors which may improve the wellbeing of remote employees as well as a greater awareness of the WFH experience.

Although the danger of Covid-19 has decreased gradually, it is obvious businesses will continue to adopt WFH practices and adapt their workplace structure appropriately (CIPD, 2022). The CIPD (2022) also emphasises the significance of understanding the influence of WFH on the wellbeing of staff. Moreover, Beauregard (2011) highlights that there is a gap in the research on the WFH culture and its influence on employees' wellbeing and overall health.

A comparable investigation by Yang *et al.* (2023), carried out research on remote working within five different industries in Germany. In addition, the other studies of remote working and wellbeing were carried out across Europe and within different sectors. None of which were within the pharmaceutical industry in Ireland. This illustrates a gap because there is little evidence of research on remote working and its influence on employee wellbeing specifically in the pharmaceutical industry and within Ireland.

An additional study reveals a scarcity of data on the support that is provided to remote employees during WFH practices (McLeod *et al.*, 2016). Eddleston *et al.* (2017) identified additional gap, recommending that research should look at how remote employees navigate the divide between work and home, along with the motives that drive employees to opt for remote working options.

2.7 Conclusion

Throughout the literature, the themes of remote work and wellbeing have been articulated by a variety of scholars with conflicting interpretations. It is apparent that there are numerous benefits and drawbacks for those who WFH. Despite this, recent literature concerning effects of telecommuting on the wellbeing of workers as divisive as well as dividing. This indicates a gap in the research and as a result, there is a need to conduct research into this topic by gathering remote employee's experiences and opinions concerning their wellbeing.

Insufficient study has been conducted regarding the influence of WFH on the physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing of remote workers. As a result, it is critical to investigate how remote employees perceive the influence of WFH on their wellbeing. In addition, there is a need for studies to explore the relationships between remote and office employees. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to explore the influence of working remotely on worker wellbeing, with particular focus on the physical, psychological, and societal aspects of remote employee wellbeing.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Following on from the literature review, this next chapter will propose that qualitative research along with appropriate data collecting and analysis methods aligns with the aims and objectives of this study. Adopting an interpretivist research paradigm, a cross-sectional qualitative study was conducted, using snowball sampling to recruit remote workers from the pharmaceutical industry to participate in semi-structured interviews. Data from the interviews was then transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Therefore, this chapter will examine and justify the research design whilst considering the research paradigm, approach and design, the sampling method, data collection method, data analysis method, limitations, and ethical concerns. In addition, this study's research design considers several methodologies and approaches that can be utilised in conducting this research. In the following sections, the rationale behind each research design choice is discussed.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm represents a belief or an assumption regarding what is important in the development of knowledge from a philosophical standpoint (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016). According to Saunders *et al.* (2016) four research paradigms (interpretivism, positivism, realism, and pragmatism) are commonly employed to guide analysis and methodologies. These paradigms are based on philosophical assumptions such as ontology (beliefs about reality), axiology (values in research), and epistemology (knowledge) (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

Due to the nature of this research the researcher must obtain remote workers experiences, this research adopted an interpretivist standpoint in undertaking this research. Quinlan (2011) defines interpretivism as a subjective approach to knowledge and reality based on firsthand experiences and understandings. From an ontological standpoint, individual's perceptions and experiences in the workplace differ based on their job title, seniority, education, and cultural background (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Whilst the interpretivist research approach has faced critique for not producing results that can be widely applied, some contend that aiming for generalization could hinder academic exploration (Gollan, Kalfa and Xu, 2015). From an axiological standpoint, interpretivist researchers acknowledge the importance of their values and beliefs in the research process, particularly during data interpretation (Saunders *et al.*,

2016), therefore attention must be taken on the part of the researcher to avoid conveying biases onto participant inputs.

On the other hand, positivism aims to describe reality objectively, utilizing scientific methods to develop generalizations (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). However, this standpoint does not account for individual's diverse realities (Bryman, and Bell, 2015). Like interpretivism, realism aims to provide an explanation for the fundamental structures of reality (Saunders *et al.*, 2015). Pragmatism, on the other hand, emphasizes action and is typically associated with a mixed-method approach.

Interpretivism is well-suited to the objectives of this research which is to explore how working remotely may impact the wellbeing of those who WFH. This paradigm allows for a more detailed gathering of experiences than a positivist paradigm.

3.3 Research Approach

The inductive and deductive approaches to research are two avenues in which research may be carried out from a theory development perspective (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The deductive approach involves adopting a theoretical standpoint and testing hypotheses using a research strategy (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). In contrast, the inductive approach involves developing objectives and hypotheses with a research strategy (Williams and Moser, 2019). The inductive approach, associated with interpretivism, allows meanings to develop from data to find patterns and connections for theory development (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Thus, this research employed an inductive approach, therefore no hypotheses have been formed to assess the findings of the study. The research was directed by its overall objectives to draw conclusions from the collected data. The inductive approach supports a qualitative research strategy, which coincides with the objectives of this research (Williams and Moser, 2019), since it allows for the development of theories from data obtained in the study.

3.4 Research Design

Research is described as an original study performed to further the body of knowledge in a certain field (Myers, 2013). There are two fundamental methods of research which can be employed namely the qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Qualitative data can be classified based on meanings expressed using language or visual information (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). As explained by Barnham (2015), qualitative methods serve to gain a thorough understanding of people's experiences, perspectives, values, and

beliefs. Therefore, qualitative approaches can help researchers address questions that aim to understand the “why?” and “how?” about a phenomenon (Quinlan, 2011). According to Mills and Birks (2014), the primary sources of qualitative studies consist of focus groups, observation, and interviews. Qualitative research takes an inductive method, centred on producing theories from obtained data (Williams and Moser, 2019).

Conversely, a quantitative approach uses questionnaires or statistics to generate numerical data (Saunders *et al*, 2016). Quantitative approaches are useful for analysing concrete data, whereas qualitative methods provide deeper insights into phenomena (Barnham, 2015). Quantitative research typically serves to examine theories since it takes a deductive approach and assesses variables using statistical analysis (Park and Park, 2016).

Quantitative approaches use existing insights to generate new information, whereas qualitative methods provide insights that create opportunities for new theoretical perspectives (Bansal, 2018). Moreover, qualitative research often uses semi-structured interviews with a small sample size, whereas quantitative approaches are highly organized and include many participants (Park and Park, 2016). In addition, a mixed methods approach to research can be formed by combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Saunders *et al*, 2016). Park and Park (2016) refer to the combination of the two methodologies as triangulation.

Qualitative research was selected as the best method to carry out this study given that the information that needed to be collected concerned individual’s experiences and perspectives on working remotely and wellbeing. Quantitative research is not suitable for this research due to its limited flexibility and inability to provide in-depth exploration (Saunders *et al*, 2016). Adopting a qualitative method allowed the researcher to examine the research question by gathering remote workers perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding working remotely and its impact on their wellbeing. Furthermore, qualitative research allows for open-ended inquiries, unlike quantitative research, which is closed-ended and inflexible (Myers, 2013). Additionally, comparable research performed by Grant *et al*. (2013) used qualitative methods to explore issues such as work-life balance, and wellbeing among remote workers.

The purpose of using qualitative methods and an inductive method is to better understand the impact of working remotely on the physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing of employees. This will enable the researcher to get perspectives and views on remote work and its potential impact on workers wellbeing.

3.5 Sampling Method

This study aims to investigate the impact of working from home on remote employee's wellbeing and subsequently remote employees were identified as the study's target population. The interpretivist research approach will gather experiences and perspectives from remote employees. The snowball method of sampling was used for non-probability sampling, which involves locating one person that will participate in the study followed by them identifying the next person (Quinlan, 2011). The researcher used a purposive sampling strategy in selecting the individuals (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The snowball method was useful for the researcher as he has access to four remote workers in the pharmaceutical industry, who can then invite other colleagues who are working remotely within the same industry. This was beneficial because the researcher was connected to remote workers through other remote workers. Considering the research will only be carried out with remote employees in the pharmaceutical industry, this method will provide the researcher with complete control over the sampling. Nonetheless, a downside of a snowball sampling strategy is the potential difficulty in contacting selected participants due to the volunteer nature of this strategy (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Remote employees in the pharmaceutical industry were specifically asked to participate in this research because they are the key subjects in this research. The validity and reliability of the research's objectives could be compromised if the researcher selected conventional office employees who do not work remotely. The researcher acquired four individuals through personal contact, while the remaining four were gathered through snowball sampling.

Given remote work is still a new practice in many organizations amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, it can be challenging to find a cohort of individuals who are all entirely remote workers. For this reason, a variety of remote workers, including full-time and hybrid remote workers, were included in the sample.

| Participants: | Ciara | Rory | Aoife | Aisling | Fiona | Aine | Lauren | Niall |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| Gender: | Female | Male | Female | Female | Female | Female | Female | Male |
| Age: | 52 | 54 | 36 | 29 | 43 | 34 | 40 | 29 |
| Parental Status: | Children | Children | No Children | No Children | Children | Children | Children | No Children |
| Length of time WFH: | 4 years | 7 years | 5 years | 4 years | 4 years | 4 years | 4 years | 4 years |
| WFH days per week: | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 2/3 | 2/3 | 3 |
| Type of Remote worker: | Full-time | Hybrid | Full-time | Hybrid | Full-time | Hybrid | Hybrid | Hybrid |
| Reason for remote working: | Flexibility | Flexibility | Commute | Commute | Childcare | Childcare | Childcare | Flexibility |

Table 1. Breakdown of Sample Participants

3.6 Data Collection

Data was collected through 30-minute semi-structured face-to-face and Microsoft Teams interviews with eight participants from the pharmaceutical industry. The data gathered was primary data, collected straight from original interviews with employees who WFH. An interview schedule was created with open-ended, comparative, and probing questions (see Appendix 4).

3.6.1 Interviews

The data collection method that was selected for this research was semi-structured interviews. Collis and Hussey (2014) define interviews as gathering information about individual beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and views. This form of research methodology was appropriate for the research since the primary objective was to obtain data concerning the physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing of remote employees. Moreover, interviews are flexible and allow for further probe questioning on key issues (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Semi-structured interviews provided the researcher the opportunity to ask questions on the primary topics of interest and to generate ideas of additional questions throughout the interview process, which was beneficial for delving deeper into specific topics (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

The interviews were performed within the one pharmaceutical organization with five remote working employees. Additionally, to accommodate employees who work remotely on a full-time basis, an additional three Microsoft Teams interviews were carried out. The interview questions in Appendix 4 centred around the impact of remote working on participants physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing.

3.6.2 Interview Schedule

The following questions were created to answer the research question *“How does working remotely impact the wellbeing of those who WFH within the pharmaceutical sector in Ireland?”* and fulfil the research’s three objectives. Appendix 4 provides the complete interview schedule.

The interview schedule was structured into five sections:

- Introduction / Demographics
- Physical wellbeing
- Psychological wellbeing

- Societal wellbeing
- Overall opinions on wellbeing and remote working

The following questions were established to fulfil the research objectives:

Objective 1: To explore the physical wellbeing of employees who WFH.

1. How would a normal day of working from home look like to you?
2. How would you describe your workspace for remote work?
3. In your opinion, how do you think remote working has influenced your stress levels?

Objective 2: To explore the psychological wellbeing of employees who WFH.

1. How do you feel working from home has influenced you are work-life balance?
2. What do you believe have been the most notable challenges of working remotely?
3. What do you believe have been the key benefits of working remotely?
4. Can you tell me why you opt to work from home?
5. How do you think working from home has influenced your ability to switch off from work?

Objective 3: To explore the societal wellbeing of employees who WFH.

1. Can you tell me about interacting with the office when working from home?
2. How has remote work influenced your relationships with coworkers? Both personally and professionally?
3. When working from home, what impression do you think your office coworkers have of you?
4. In what ways does your organization assist you with working remotely?
5. What platforms and procedures does the organization use to strengthen team relationships and interactions with others?

3.6.3 Interview Process

Following their consent to participate in the research, participants were contacted by email to set up a date and time for their interview. Before each interview, the researcher sent the participants a set of documents via email comprising an information sheet, consent form, and contact information to review to comprehend all aspects of the research.

The interviews were carried out in a private, quiet meeting room free from outside distractions to facilitate a thorough discussion. Each interview lasted thirty minutes.

As Microsoft Teams was required for conducting three of the interviews, the researcher contacted each participant beforehand to make sure they were in an appropriate setting before starting the MS Teams call.

The interview began with a series of introductory and demographic questions that enabled the participant to feel comfortable and foster conversations. Following the introduction/demographic questions from the interview schedule, the researcher probed for more information and asked more in-depth questions that they believed would be significant to the research objectives.

3.7 Pilot Study

A pilot study can help ensure questions are suitable, clear, and fit for purpose (Nunes, Martins and Zhou, 2010). It provides you with the chance to test your approach, obtain initial evidence of concept insights, and provides opportunity to evaluate and revise your work (Nunes *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, a pilot study has the added benefit of reducing complications, preventing unexpected encounters, and permitting the investigator to evaluate any additional insights for use in the following interviews (Nunes *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, a pilot study was performed with two remote workers.

Following the interview, both remote workers were asked for their opinions, and they both gave positive comments for the interview's format, flow, and content. The interviews proceeded successfully, however after the pilot study, two more questions were introduced to satisfy objective one - the impact of remote working on participants physical wellbeing and subsequently tested with both participants. The two questions were as follows:

1. Can you describe how your time previously spent commuting to work is now allocated since transitioning to remote work? How has this shift impacted your physical activity?

2. When working remotely, do you find yourself taking breaks to get outside or engage in physical activity during the day? If not, could you share what normally occupies that time instead.

The two questions were introduced because the researcher identified in the literature reviewed that despite the interest for remote work, many workers reported decreased physical movements, such as loss of walking/steps between different meeting locations (Xiao *et al.*, 2021; Tavares, 2017). The author intended to confirm this theory in the research by actively addressing this topic instead of relying on chance for discussion.

3.8 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis, according to Quinlan (2011), requires analysing collected data to construct a full understanding of the phenomenon. The data collected from the eight interviews was transcribed, and then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be defined as “a process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data” (Maguire and Delahunt 2017, p. 3352). Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six step framework is widely regarded as the most significant technique for thematic analysis (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The study followed an inductive technique in which themes were closely related to interview transcripts (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022), as opposed to being predetermined. Consequently, themes driven by data arose, which demonstrated the comprehensiveness of the interview responses (Charalampous *et al.*, 2022).

The 6-step approach was followed as described below:

Step 1: Familiarisation with data. Interview transcripts were examined repeatedly to find analogous patterns and themes (Braun and Clark, 2006).

Step 2: Generation of initial codes. The ‘Insert a comment’ function in MS Word was used to add labels or ‘codes’ to ideas / concepts that appeared regularly in the transcripts (Byrne, 2022).

Step 3: Searching for themes. The codes were subsequently categorized to determine themes and subthemes (Busetto *et al.*, 2020).

Step 4: Reviewing themes. The themes were further reviewed to ensure that they accurately reflected the data. Some themes that had emerged were ignored because insufficient evidence supported their inclusion in the analysis, while other themes fell beyond the purview of the study (Byrne, 2022).

Step 5: Define and name themes. A comprehensive analysis of the content of each theme allowed the researcher to choose passages from the data and develop corresponding narratives (Byrne, 2022). Extracts were selected from the entire dataset to accurately represent all participant perspectives.

Step 6: Produce the report: At this stage, the task of writing a thorough analysis of the findings began. The approach was reflective and repetitive, leading to several adjustments in the definitions and arrangement of the themes and the related sub-themes (Byrne, 2022). The findings are presented in subsequent chapter, chapter 4.

3.9 Limitations of Research Design

Inevitably, qualitative research has significant limitations. The first potential limitation of this study is the time constraint required for conducting interviews, as all participants work full-time, as the researcher does part-time, and have additional responsibilities such as their respective professional lives. Furthermore, the researcher was aware of the possibility that qualitative studies could be subjective because of the validity of the researcher's perceptions, as noted by Bryman and Bell (2011). In addition, after the interviews were conducted, it was discovered that transcribing the data required a significant amount of time.

The qualitative method attempts to gain insight into the views, actions, and attitudes of a certain group of people. Unlike quantitative research, which focus on statistical generalisation, interpretivist research aims to achieve deep contextual understanding of a phenomenon (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This is another limitation as I will be conducting this research with a small sample size, and I cannot make generalisations to the whole population of remote workers. Furthermore, interpretivist studies are subjective as they heavily depend on participant's and researcher's interpretations. In turn, this can make it difficult for the researcher to find the truth which is imperative for the researcher to develop their paper. Sometimes employees in multinational organisations can hesitate to speak honestly during interviews (Munthe-Kaas *et al.*, 2019). The researcher is aware that some of the questions may be challenging for the participants to respond as they might feel uncomfortable doing so or might not answer the questions truthfully. Therefore, while interpretivist research offers insights into the experiences and meanings constructed by participant's, the researcher is cognizant of its limitations in terms of generalisations, subjectivity, and scope. Nonetheless, when acknowledging the limitations of this research method, the researcher argues that its strengths and relevance were not compromised.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is “a system of moral principles by which individuals can judge their actions as a right or wrong, good or bad”, according to Denscombe (2010), who further highlights the necessity for researchers to conduct their study in an ethical manner. As noted by Given (2016), researchers need to be aware of participant’s rights and make sure the study is not harmful to them because qualitative research frequently entails gathering data from people on sensitive subjects. Therefore, this section draws on Saunders *et al.* (2016), Given (2016), Salkind (2012) and Denscombe (2010) to illustrate the research’s procedures for respecting participant’s rights and preventing harm at all stages of the interview process.

3.10.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is a necessity to the qualitative method (Salkind, 2012) and has been extensively explored (Given, 2016; Denscombe, 2010). According to Salkind (2012), informed consent involves providing those involved with complete information about the research, including their role, rights, risks, and benefits. The implications of taking part in the research must be well understood by the participants (Given, 2016). Accordingly, volunteers received a set of documents which has been included in the Appendices Chapter (Denscombe, 2010). The email sent to participants (see Appendix 1), in addition to the information sheet (see Appendix 2) and consent form (see Appendix 3), details how their data will be stored, analysed, and used, reassuring them that their identities will be kept confidential throughout the research process (Given, 2016). The documents were attentively designed to include the purpose of the study, the researcher’s identity, the request to participate, the time requirement, and the data storage security (Salkind, 2012; Denscombe, 2010). Furthermore, the documents addressed the volunteer nature of the study and that they may terminate the interview at any stage in addition to potential risks and advantages of participating (Salkind, 2012).

3.10.2 Protection of Participants

Although this study does not include children or people with an inability to comprehend their involvement in the research (Salkind 2012), the researcher must remain mindful of the possibility that participants may experience some sort of implications as a result of their participation in the interviews (Denscombe, 2010). The study focused on remote employees’ sense of wellbeing, in relation to their perceptions of working in an environment separate to their colleagues. As per the literature reviewed, this can be at times difficult for remote

employees as they may experience feelings of loneliness. Additionally, it might be uncomfortable for participants to discuss potentially uncomfortable situations at work, albeit in a remote working environment. During the interviews, the researcher was attentive to these issues and monitored for any symptoms of discomfort.

After the interview, the researcher followed up with each participant to conduct a post-interview debriefing. All participants reported that the interviews had no adverse impact on their wellbeing.

3.10.3 Data and Storage

The researcher will save signed consent forms and audio recordings of interviews in password-protected folder on the researchers own laptop. The laptop and the folder are not accessible to any other individual. These records will be stored until the researcher's degree has been conferred.

In interview transcripts, all personally identifiable information has been removed. Participants will be identified using fictional names ensuring the dissertation will not contain any identifying or personal information. If a participant mentioned a person by name in the transcripts, the name will be modified. In addition, the data is retained using identification codes and stored in a password protected folder on the researcher's own laptop. After the examination board confirms the awarding of this degree, the data will be stored on file for a further two years and then deleted.

3.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, a qualitative method has been employed to assist the researcher in collecting rich data that allows for obtaining a variety of experiences and opinions. This has been completed by means of semi-structured interviews. Through non-probabilistic snowball sampling, a cohort of eight hybrid and remote employees within the pharmaceutical industry participated in this study. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the subject, ethical considerations were taken into account when conducting this study. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step thematic analysis method was used to generate themes, which will be analysed in Chapter 4, Findings.

Chapter 4. Discussion of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to present the findings of the thematic analysis emerging from the data collected from eight participants during semi-structured interviews performed to inform this research. In addition, the findings will be examined in this chapter, along with a detailed discussion of their relevance to the study. The findings will have reference to prior research in the literature review. This study's primary objectives were to explore the physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing of remote employees.

Each of these five themes is relevant to one or more of the study objectives.

- Theme 1 and 2 is related with physical wellbeing.
- Theme 3 and 4 is associated with psychological wellbeing.
- Theme 5 is concerned with societal wellbeing.

There will be an in-depth discussion of each theme. Additional findings surfaced in regard to prior research in the literature review, highlighting gaps in research.

4.2 Overview of Demographics

As noted in Chapter 4, there were a variety of remote and hybrid employees in the sample. Three of the participants were fully remote employees, while the remaining six were hybrids who worked remotely two to three days per week. The age range of the sample was varied, spanning from 29 to 54 years old. Participants in the study spanned across a range of roles within the pharmaceutical industry such as operations, finance, HR, and administration. The sample consisted of six females and two males, reflecting a gender imbalance. However, the researcher had difficulties recruiting male remote / hybrid employees which may be due to gender stereotypes remaining in WFH practices, with women being more inclined to take up childcare commitments (Brescoll *et al.*, 2013). This may be apparent from the study as six females were recruited in comparison to two males.

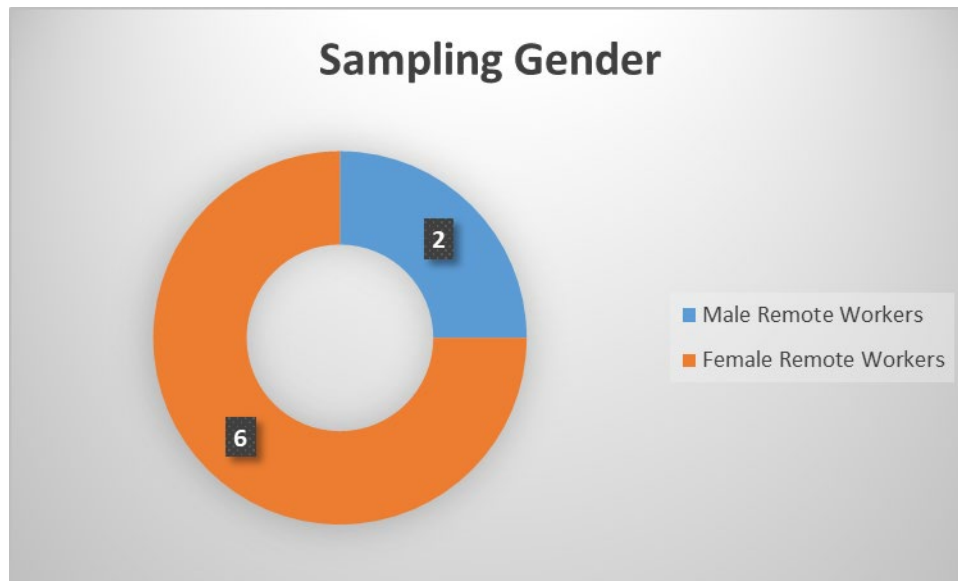


Figure 3. Overview of Sampling Gender

4.3 Themes

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from eight semi-structured interviews as described in previous Chapter 4, Methodology. Each transcript was examined separately before being cross-referenced with other transcripts to identify the most prevalent themes in the data. The data was carefully examined and classified, and fifteen themes initially emerged throughout the analysis. The fifteen themes were further examined as the researcher discovered overlaps across multiple themes, such as isolation and loneliness, which may be combined into a single theme. As a result, the researcher was able to examine the themes in greater depth and group them into five main themes that arose in the data. The researcher evaluated each of these themes and classified them into five themes:

- 1. Working Environment**
- 2. Health and Wellbeing**
- 3. Work-life Balance (WLB) / Flexibility**
- 4. Boundary Management**
- 5. Isolation**

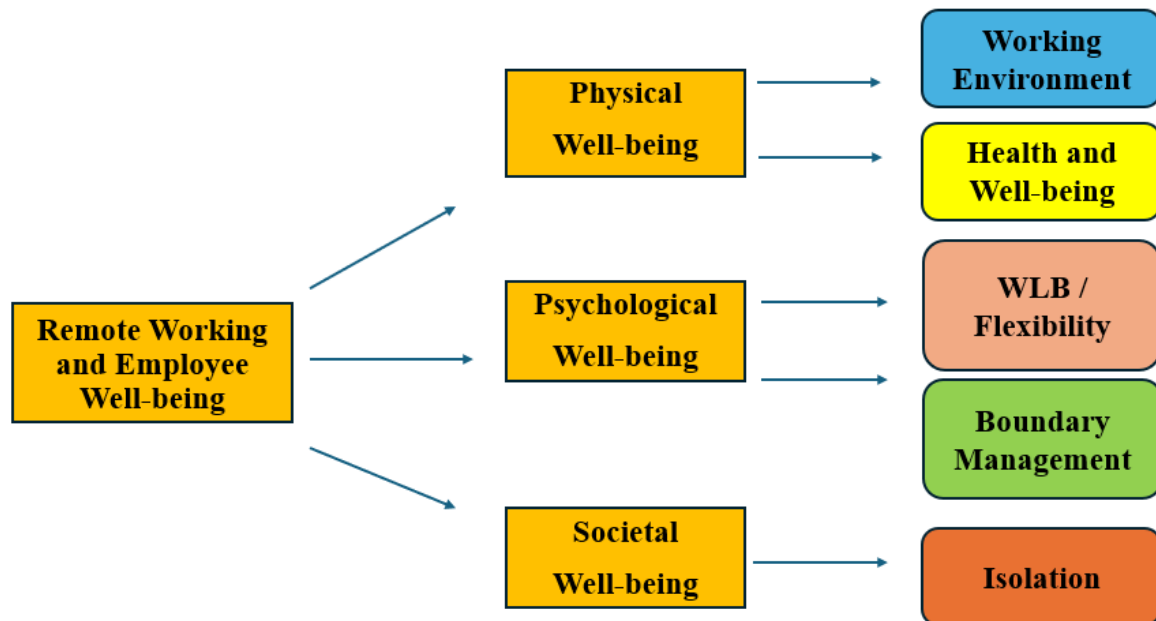


Figure 4. A thematic diagram demonstrating the connections among the research topic, the research objectives and the five themes.

4.4 Theme 1 – Working Environment

The findings from this research suggest that a participant’s working environment may have an impact on their wellbeing at work.

According to Crawford *et al.* (2011), accessibility to resources when WFH is a problem for remote employees. However, the findings of this research contradict this claim due to the fact that numerous participants have full accessibility to remote resources. The majority of participants outlined that their employer provided them with full access to resources (laptops, chairs, monitors, keyboard etc.) when WFH. Participants were asked during the interviews to provide comments regarding the importance their remote work environment. Fiona outlined, **“it’s important to have a proper desk, with two screens and that it’s well lit”**. Aine stated, **“I do think it’s important to have a comfortable workstation at my desk”**. Likewise, Lauren highlighted, **“a workstation that’s quiet, comfortable and removed from the rest of the house so there’s no distractions”**.

Physical safety in the workplace is a fundamental requirement by Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory which is identified by Taormina and Gao (2013) in the literature. Moreover, findings indicate that participants concur with this demand. Participants outlined that they had conducted an online **“ergonomic assessment”**, and one participant further stated their

employer came out to review their WFH office. Ciara further emphasized the organization's involvement in setting up the workspace for remote employees, stating that **“we all have our chairs, monitors and we were offered everything”**. Likewise, Fiona highlighted **“if I need any equipment, I know I can ask – for example I needed a printer at home, and it was arranged for me”**. These findings might indicate that a safe and healthy work environment will have a positive impact on employee wellbeing. Additionally, an original viewpoint on the potential impact of the workplace environment on wellbeing emerged as participants highlighted the need of organizing the environment so they had a **“well lit room”, “quiet space”, and “no distraction”**.

Whilst almost all of the participants acknowledged that they worked more hours, the findings indicate that participants work more hours since there are fewer distractions when WFH. Aoife stated, **“I find it less of a distraction, less people just chitchatting”**. This finding is in accordance with Vega *et al.*'s (2015) research, which suggests that working more hours may be associated with being away from an office setting because of fewer distractions. Whilst participants in this study reported to working more hours, they also reported higher productivity. Participants in this research reported being **“more productive”** and **“more focused”** owing to fewer distractions. Furthermore, Aoife stated, **“I would say for me personally I'm more productive and have a better mindset”**. Similarly, Lauren highlighted **“Working from home can be more productive in the sense that there's no distractions around you and less doorstepping and more focus on what's required”**. Likewise, Niall stated, **“I don't have any distractions at home, compared to what I have in the office”**. Numerous participants reported higher productivity, and one out of the eight notably reported to have improved **“mindset”** (Aoife), potentially aligning with Wheatley's (2012) argument that remote employees may benefit from fewer distractions. This is an interesting area for further exploration as participants are reporting to being more productive when WFH however they also indicate working more actual hours, suggesting a potential correlation between increased productivity and extended hours of work.

4.5 Theme 2 – Health and Wellbeing

The findings indicated that both fully remote and hybrid employees expressed higher levels of wellbeing while WFH. Each participant provided feedback on their general health and wellbeing since transitioning to remote work. While some reported having good wellbeing, they indicated that they would not be able to work fully remote. Rory expressed **“It's good for**

my work life balance and everything like that but personally, I wouldn't like it 100% and I am happy with the two days working from home". Nonetheless, those who work fully remote also reported elevated levels of wellbeing. Aoife who works fully remote stated **"I've been able to live in the West of Ireland, which is my home, so I have no complaints at all, like it's absolutely amazing for my wellbeing"**. This bridges a gap in the research identified in the literature, as Grant *et al.* (2013) asserted there was scarcity of knowledge on the wellbeing of remote employees.

Furthermore, saving time on the commute has been linked to an increase in employee wellbeing in the literature. Elshaiekh *et al.* (2018) and Felstead and Henseke (2017) both present the argument that better work life balance and wellbeing may be associated with less commuting. The findings of the current research align with this argument, as participants stated that their wellbeing was positively impacted by reducing their commute. Rory commented saying **"I sometimes can get more sleep for maybe an hour because I don't have to do that extra commuting into the office"**. Similarly, Lauren expressed **"the time back from commuting allows me to get homework done in the evening with the kids and allows me to prepare dinners"**. Niall also mentioned that **"I'm a lot more relaxed because I don't have to sit in traffic, and I sometimes get go to gym in the mornings"**. New insights concerning other aspects of improved wellbeing include improved sleep from reduced commuting, more family time, and an improved work-life balance.

However, another insight emerged from the findings of this study, addressing a study gap in the literature. Further studies on the relationship between stress and physical wellbeing was proposed by Khoreva and Wechtler (2018). The findings of this study provide further context for understanding the stress levels faced by remote employees. The findings indicate that compared to the male participants, female participants had higher levels of stress. There are two possible reasons for why women experience higher amounts of stress. First, participants mentioned that having childcare obligations while WFH was a challenge. Ciara noted an increased stress as **"it can be hard to juggle work and the kids when they're not independent of themselves"** with Aine and Lauren providing similar responses. Second, stress was also brought on by the problem of **"lack of face-to-face interaction"** in connection to isolation. In contrast to this, the male participants outlined feeling **"more relaxed"** (Niall) and Rory stating there's **"not much difference"** to his stress levels. This is an interesting finding that could potentially indicate, compared to male remote employees, female remote employees could be inclined to take on extra childcare duties. This also aligns with the

contention put forward by Brescoll *et al.* (2013) that women may be more inclined than men to take on further responsibilities, such as childcare duties. However, this would be an interesting area to explore further using quantitative research with a larger sample size as this study only obtained two male participants and cannot generalize for the population.

Furthermore, in relation to the health of employees, few participants reported engaging in physical activity when working remotely with the majority of participants outlining that they did not engage in outdoor physical activity during the days they WFH. Fiona highlighted **“I think it's something that I know I don't do, but I should probably make more time to, even if it's just to get out to the garden for five to 10 minutes”**. Aine expressed **“The only time I leave the house when I'm working from home is to collect the kids from school and I don't always do that”**. Similarly, Lauren stated **“No, I find that when I'm at my desk, I'm at my desk. I don't get outside at all”**. This finding is aligned with the studies of Xiao *et al.* (2021) and Tavares (2017) which both found remote workers reported decreased physical movements, such as loss of walking/steps between different meeting locations. However, one participant, Niall expressed **“I actually feel I get out for more physical activity when I am working from home as the environment where I work is not user-friendly when you want to go for a walk”**. This may be consistent with the findings of Wells *et al.* (2023) which acknowledged that when WFH, having access to green and blue environmental areas (urban parks etc) are mediating variables in relation to increased physical activity. Exploring the relationship between physical activity when WFH with consideration to employees' environmental factors may be an avenue for future research.

4.6 Theme 3 – WLB / Flexibility

Flexibility was an ongoing topic across the interviews. Flexibility in the context of work-life balance was a recurrent topic in the research. The impact of working remotely on work-life balance was positively perceived by participants. Lauren expressed that **“It's greatly influenced the quality of my work life balance as it allows some quality time back in the evening for my small family”**. Similarly, Fiona highlighted **“I couldn't have kept the job that I have with my family set up if I didn't have the work life balance which remote working offers”**. This aligns with the literature concerning work life balance, as Gifford (2022) and Avis (2018) argue that WFH may improve wellbeing, particularly for working parents.

However, contrary to these perspectives, Niall indicated that working remotely had no beneficial impact on his work life balance. Niall stated, **“I don't find I am overworked, and**

I still log off at the same time and still start at the same time". On the contrary, Vesala and Tuomivaara (2015) contend that WFH may lead to difficulties with work life balance, which coincides with the research findings as one participant acknowledged experiencing such problems. This suggests that there remains some discussions concerning the topic of work life balance when WFH.

It is apparent that for all of the research participants, flexibility is a key advantage of WFH. Aisling outlined the increased **"autonomy"** that comes with WFH. Comparably, Ciara stated, **"It's fantastic to have autonomy of your own timetable, it makes everything run much smoother"**. Similarly, Niall and Rory stated the **"flexibility is ideal"** as it gives them control over their personal agendas. These findings of the current study are aligned with the literature, as Grant *et al.* (2013) and Niebuhr *et al.* (2022) highlight that the pros of WFH include more flexibility and increased autonomy. In addition, the present findings are in accordance with the research by Van den Tooren and de Jong (2014), which revealed that employee wellbeing is positively impacted by autonomy. In contrast to this, Kniffin *et al.* (2021) argues that more autonomy could culminate in an 'autonomy control paradox', causing workers to put in more hours. This is in lieu of the findings of the present study, as the majority of respondents reported working more hours when WFH than in the traditional office owing to flexibility in their schedules.

Numerous participants additionally addressed the advantages of flexibility with regard to childcare responsibilities. Fiona outlined **"I'm here in the morning with my kids and I'm here in the evening with them"**. Similarly, Lauren and Aine stated **"more time with my kids"**. However, as noted by Brescoll *et al.* (2013) in the literature, gender stereotypes remain in WFH practices, with women being more inclined to WFH to take up childcare commitments. This may be apparent from the current study as six females were recruited in comparison to two males. Ciara further emphasised WFH to be **"a great step forward for especially for working mothers like myself"**, later adding **"I know we shouldn't generalize, but we are different in our in our approach to family life"**. This further aligns with Brescoll *et al.*'s (2013) study, that there may remain some gender disparity concerning WFH and childcare responsibilities.

The key motives for participants adopting WFH practices are flexibility and childcare responsibilities. This satisfies the gap in the literature, as highlighted by Eddleston *et al.* (2017), by exploring why employees opt to WFH. Participants who identified flexibility as the key

motive positively voiced their views. Rory expressed that **“The flexibility is ideal particularly if you have to be at home for a certain reason”**. In similar vein, Niall voiced **“I am big into my fitness, so the flexibility is ideal as it allows me have the easy option when I want to get out for exercise”**. The other primary motive for remaining to WFH is to balance family obligations and childcare. **“It’s so convenient as I can get homework done with the kids or have dinners ready”**. (Lauren). Comparable to the aforementioned statement, Fiona highlighted **“In terms of my family life, I’m here in the morning with my kids and I’m here in the evening with them”**. Likewise, Aine outlined **“I have more time at home with the kids, so it has definitely impacted my life”**.

Furthermore, each of the participants were asked about their own experiences with the benefits and challenges of WFH. The final findings are shown in the table below.

| Benefits | Challenges |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Family time | Face to face Interaction |
| Work life balance | Taking breaks |
| Autonomy | Isolation |
| No Commute | Switching off |
| Productivity | Discipline |
| Flexibility | Technology issues |

Table 2. Benefits and Challenges of Remote Work

Boland *et al.* (2020) and Felstead and Henseke (2017) argue that WFH increases worker satisfaction. This is aligned with the current research’s findings, in which participants reported feeling more satisfied since engaging in remote work. Ciara stated, **“I am now living to work and not working to live”**. Rory and Niall both stated, **“so happy with the two days working from home”**. Likewise, Aine expressed **“I am so much happier”**. In contrast, Aoife expressed being more satisfied due to **“higher productivity when working from home”**. Furthermore, according to Smith *et al.* (2018), there is a research gap on the rationale why remote employees report higher levels of satisfaction than others. The findings of this current research suggest that participants were happier when they could WFH because they had the autonomy over their schedules, could better manage their responsibilities as a family, and were more productive.

Greer and Payne (2014) and Donnelly and Proctor (2015) contend that WFH may have adverse effects on learning and development opportunities. This aligns with this research findings, as three remote employees reported it **“hard to learn when remote”** with Aine adding it

“negatively impacts growth and development 100%” as a result of not being visible in the workplace. However, as WFH is still a new practice amidst the Covid-19 pandemic (Wang *et al.*, 2021), it may not have been around long enough to measure the impact of WFH on career development. For this reason, future research over an extended period could provide insights into the current state of WFH and what this means for career development.

4.7 Theme 4 – Boundary Management

The findings suggest that participants have challenges and difficulty with establishing boundaries between their personal and professional lives. A gap in the literature of how remote employees navigate the divide between work and home was identified by Eddleston *et al.* (2017). Participants found it challenging to maintain clear boundaries between professional and private lives when WFH, since they often blurred. Consequently, most of the participants reported working more hours. Aoife highlighted **“I have found myself doing a bit extra in the evening time”**. Again, similar comments were made on the lines between professional and private life by Fiona and Aine who both commented, **“I'm more inclined to log on later at night, which I probably wouldn't do if I was in the office”**. This concurs with studies by Bauer *et al.* (2018) and Grant *et al.* (2013) who argue that the lines separating professional and personal life have become harder to distinguish as an outcome of telecommuting. Consequently, it may be evident that establishing the boundaries dividing work and personal life is challenging, inadequately managed, and blurred.

David (2017) suggested that ICT may affect the interference between personal and professional life. Similar to this, Fiona, Aoife, Lauren, and Aine all mentioned **“logging on”** after work hours in the evenings since they could easily access their laptops at home, whereas they would not have this option at the office.

In similar vein, the findings of this study suggest that numerous participants found it challenging to switch off when they were WFH. Felstead and Henseke (2017) argue that working remotely is correlated with employee's incapacity to disconnect from work. The findings coincide with this as Aisling outlined **“closing down the laptop doesn't happen”**. Likewise, Lauren and Aine stated **“it's harder to switch off”**. This argument is supported by research from CIPD (2018), which reported that 87% of remote employee's capacity to disconnect from work during nonworking hours was impacted by technology. This aligns with the findings of the present study, which illustrates that remote employees may be incapable of switching off from their work when WFH.

Furthermore, Aoife initiated a contentious conversation regarding ‘presenteeism’ of remote employees due to working more hours. Aoife stated, **“People from an outside perspective might think I am not working but I still have stuff to produce every and it still has to be done, if it wasn't, I wouldn't be here”**. The topic caught the researcher’s attention as it was mentioned in the literature by Avis (2018), whose study revealed that presenteeism could lead remote employees to work more hours, which has an adverse effect on their wellbeing. Moreover, given that semi-structured interviews were selected, this gave the researcher the opportunity to investigate the topic and get further input from other participants. The findings of this research align with Avis (2018) study and also may indicate that more hours of work has an impact on an employee’s physical wellbeing and that presenteeism is also linked to an inability to disconnect from work. Aine expressed she would **“hate if somebody see my status on yellow or inactive”** on Microsoft Teams as colleagues would **“think I'm not doing anything”**. Both Aoife and Aisling further outlined they want to be seen as **“active”** and not **“away”** on Microsoft Teams as they are not present in the office.

A contention asserted by Wheatley (2012) and Klopotek (2017), implies there is a possibility that leisure time gets used for work as opposed to recreational activities. This contention concurs with the findings as Rory stated, **“I had taken ½ day holiday but then that night I actually logged back on”** instead of switching off. Additionally, literature indicates that while remote employees may be more productive, it is also possible that they work more hours (Avis, 2018). The findings align with this, as participants stated putting in more hours when WFH.

Similar to this, the findings indicate that self-discipline impacts boundary management. This is again aligned with the studies of both Felstead and Henseke (2017) who argues that working remotely is correlated with employee’s incapacity to disconnect from work and Avis (2018), whose study revealed that presenteeism could lead remote employees to work more hours. Lauren stated, **“you need to be disciplined to work remotely”**. In a comparable manner, Aisling expressed **“I need to give myself a hard stop for 4:00 o'clock which can be difficult”**. Aine outlined **“you need to set yourself up for success as well, start as you mean to go on and get into good habits of stopping for breaks and not working extra hours”**. Overall, the main findings of this theme indicate that a **“difficulty to switch off”**, **“presenteeism”**, and **“discipline”** may be the causes of working more hours.

4.8 Theme 5 - Isolation

The literature and the results of this research suggest that social isolation represents a significant issue for remote employees. Participants addressed the benefits and challenges of working remotely and were questioned to explain how they communicate with their coworkers.

Numerous interviewees acknowledged experiencing emotions of feeling isolated and alone when WFH. All of the participants described experiencing either **“elements”** or **“complete”** isolation when WFH. Aisling expressed that **“it can be struggling at home on your own”**. Likewise, Rory stated **“I found it very isolating when I joined the company initially and I didn't know my client group, I didn't know people in the company, and they didn't know me”**. On the other hand, fully remote workers Ciara, Aoife, and Fiona, describe that they only feel **“minimal isolation”** rather than feeling **“completely isolated”**, stating they are **“used to it”**. This concurs with prior research by Avis, (2018), Eddleston *et al.* (2017), Allen *et al.* (2015), and Crawford *et al.* (2011) which all contend that social isolation brought on by WFH has an adverse impact on workers wellbeing.

According to the literature, one of the most prevalent difficulties for remote employees was the absence of face-to-face discussions (Al-Habaibeh *et al.*, 2021). It is evident that a large number of participants expressed a concern of being isolated in the workplace and missing out on interactions and conversations. In accordance with this, Aine identified **“missing the chitchats”** in the office as an element of isolation. Aine further stated **“things are lost when you're not in person with somebody, you're missing on the missing the catch ups at the end of the meetings”**. Likewise, Fiona stated missing **“seeing people when you're in the canteen”**. On the contrary, Aisling noted **“the distractions in the office might not contribute to my stress levels being good”**. Crawford *et al.* (2011) supports this viewpoint by disputing that remote employees can profit from reduced involvement in workplace drama and dispute owing to fewer direct interactions.

In reference to communication techniques, Allen *et al.* (2015) noted that channels such as email are less effective for conveying emotions and messages. This perspective is supported by Niall who expressed **“we do communicate by email often, but it may be difficult since sometimes the other person's language comes out as critical or unclear”**. Nonetheless, almost all of participants communicate via email and Microsoft Teams with their office counterparts.

A research gap on societal wellbeing was highlighted by Khoreva and Wechtler (2018), who examined relationships among workers and coworkers along with the support of the company. With respect to this, Niall highlighted **“we have a Microsoft Teams chat with everyone in**

the company which we put in if anything's going on and any milestones that people might have in their life ”. Lauren commented that **“there's always support”** in the relationship between management and employees. Furthermore, Rory stated that his team **“have our lunch through Microsoft teams”**. Ciara also noted **“in my department we've been very supportive of one another”** and the company host **“an anchor day once every month which requires everyone in the company to come into the office”**. Therefore, the gap in the literature has been addressed, demonstrating potential positive relationships between remote employees and their coworkers in addition to indications of efficient organizational support.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Human Needs as highlighted by Taormina and Gao (2013), underscores connections and a sense of belonging as key components of societal wellbeing in the literature. Supporting this, Aoife outlined feeling **“out of the loop”** on days when everyone else is in the office. Likewise, Rory stated **“there's no camaraderie with my team”**. This may indicate that remote employees feel as though they do not have a sense of belonging or connection which Maslow's theory argues is a basic human need as highlighted by Taormina and Gao (2013). However, whilst analysing the findings of the present study, the researcher uncovered that both Rory and Aoife had less than one years of service with their current employer, indicating a link between length of service with the company and feeling isolated. Interestingly, Aine also outlined **“I actually feel sorry for anybody that started during Covid or anybody that started in the new role that has to work from home or that their team members work from home because I think it would be incredibly hard”**. As WFH is a relatively new practice, it is interesting to explore whether new remote employees may experience more isolation compared to those who began working remotely before the pandemic, and the potential correlation between length of service and feelings of isolation is an interesting avenue for future research.

4.9 Summary of Findings

Many participants stressed how important it is to WFH in a safe workplace environment. However, two participants outlined work remotely from their living room table, one stated to preforming at their kitchen table, and the remainder of participants operate remotely from a home office. Additionally, only four participants received assistance from their employer setting up the remote environment, and only one participant had a visit from their employer to conduct an ergonomic assessment. While employers provided laptops and IT equipment to all participants, not all employers matched the same level of remote work resources and ergonomic assessments.

All of participants indicated to having an improved overall wellbeing. An intriguing finding concerning stress emerged as all of the participants who reported feeling more stressed working remotely were female employees. On the contrary, the male participants reported feeling either the same amount of stress or less stress when WFH. The findings of the present study indicate many female participants remained WFH after the pandemic due to childcare responsibilities, which may be why female participants experience higher levels of stress. Furthermore, the demographics of the sample could indicate to a gender disparity in WFH practices, which may require additional investigation in subsequent studies.

Flexibility was an overall favourable aspect on participants wellbeing. Furthermore, the majority of the participants outlined work life balance as a positive factor of WFH, whilst one participant reflected his work life balance had been unaffected. However, the majority of participants outlined the challenges they faced with managing boundaries between professional and private life. Furthermore, many of the participants reported to working more hours when WFH. Additionally, many participants acknowledged that it is challenging to switch off when WFH. Finally, as for isolation, all participants reported feeling elements or completely isolated when working remotely.

Chapter 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how WFH practices impacts the wellbeing of remote employees in the pharmaceutical industry. The research question was determined as “*How does working remotely impact the wellbeing of those who WFH?*”. Furthermore, the objectives of this study required an exploration of the topic as to investigate the physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing of remote employees.

This research began by reviewing existing research on WFH and wellbeing. A review of the literature indicated a number of gaps that need further research to determine the potential impact of WFH on employee’s wellbeing. Further gaps in the research indicated the need for investigation into the physical, psychological, and societal aspects of remote employees.

This research adopted a qualitative research methodology with semi-structured interviews to collect data. Eight interviews were performed with remote employees, including both fully and hybrid remote employees. This research was conducted in the pharmaceutical industry, and the data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings were then classified into five themes.

First, the physical wellbeing of employees who WFH was investigated with regard to with their workplace environment. It was highlighted in the literature, that the absence of an ergonomic assessment may result in persistent back pain (Russo *et al.*, 2021). Based on the findings, it was concluded that five out of the eight participants had received ergonomic assessment / chairs and all remote work resources to set up their WFH setting and ensure their health and safety while WFH. The remaining three participants only received laptops and screen monitors etc. and they did not receive the same full access to remote work resources or ergonomic assessments from their employer. There is now additional information on how the degree of light, space, and the lack of distractions in the workplace can impact the wellbeing of employees. Overall, WFH has a beneficial impact on remote employee’s physical wellbeing in terms of sleep, work setting, and health. However, an unprecedented finding on stress emerged and a gap in the literature concerning physical wellbeing with regard to stress was addressed. Interestingly, it emerged that, in contrast to the two male remote employees who reported no increase in stress from WFH, all female remote workers reported feeling stressed. This insight is important, as the results also could indicate that females may be balancing childcare obligations when WFH. The literature supports this conclusion, indicating that gender norms

around childcare obligations remain (Brescoll *et al.*, 2013) However, it is important to note that balancing childcare responsibilities is not exclusive to remote practices, as they remain in the traditional office environment as well. This presents an interesting debate regarding whether females are less, more, or equally likely to balance childcare responsibilities between remote and office environments, which is an interesting area for future research.

Second, the psychological wellbeing of those who WFH was explored with regard to flexibility and work life balance. For all remote employees, flexibility was a huge positive due to increased autonomy which was highlighted as an important benefit. Additionally, findings suggest that remote employees typically have a favourable work life balance, contrary to earlier concerns raised by Vesala and Tuomivaara (2015) which addressed a gap in the literature. Furthermore, new viewpoints on what motivates employees to work remotely were presented. The two key findings in this regard were brought about by flexibility or a requirement for childcare. Furthermore, it appears from the research that WFH increases overall satisfaction among employees. This addressed a study gap on the reasons why employees who WFH report greater degrees of satisfaction than those who work in traditional offices. The findings indicate that greater degrees of productivity, autonomy over their schedules and the capacity to manage family responsibilities are the primary causes of this. Subsequently, it is apparent that WFH in general has a favourable impact on the psychological wellbeing of employees.

The research's third key conclusion is that all of the participants had experiences of isolation from WFH. Participants either reported being completely isolated or experiencing certain elements of isolation. The literature was consistent this finding as earlier studies had indicated the adverse effects of WFH on societal wellbeing (Avis, 2018; Eddleston *et al.*, 2017; Allen *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, the findings of this research support the contention that societal wellbeing is adversely impacted by WFH as a result of isolation. This conclusion ignited interest given that participants described feeling isolated despite having support from coworkers and their employer. Therefore, future research might investigate if increasing the number of days spent on-site can help mitigate feelings of isolation and its adverse impact on societal wellbeing.

In conclusion, the findings suggests that the general wellbeing of remote employees is positive, as every participant reported that their wellbeing had improved while WFH. Nevertheless, societal wellbeing was adversely impacted, as were stress levels, which raised in female participants but neither fell nor raised in males.

5.2 Limitations of this study

Limitations will inevitably arise during the research process. The first limitation of this research is the study's sample, which consists of two males and six females, which may indicate a gender disparity. However, the researcher did not seek this disparity. The researcher struggled to recruit male remote employees for the study, but eventually identified two male participants.

In addition, time was a limitation because eight interviews were performed, transcribed, and then thematically analysed for this research. The researcher underestimated the time required to transcribe interviews, which posed a significant challenge. Furthermore, because the researcher works during the weekdays, it was difficult to arrange appropriate dates for all eight interviews during business hours.

Lastly, since WFH is still a recent phenomenon post the Covid-19 pandemic, few employees are fully remote at present. This posed a limitation because this investigation could only recruit three entirely remote employees; the remaining five were hybrid remote employees. If the research had exclusively recruited entirely remote employees, the findings could have been different. However, this was difficult as the hybrid working model is much more the norm today as noted by McCarthy *et al.* (2023) in the literature.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

There remains potential for further study in this field. In order to avoid a gender disparity, the researcher suggests that future studies on WFH contain a sample of fully remote employees with an equal gender balance.

The research provided fresh insights, such as the finding that female remote employees could be experiencing greater degrees of stress than male employees. A quantitative method could be used in future studies to examine this topic more thoroughly and with a larger sample size as this study only obtained two male participants and no generalisation is possible however it would be an interesting area to further exploration.

It is clear that the primary motives for people to WFH are flexibility and childcare duties. Further studies may investigate the link between stress and childcare care obligations and what strategies will be used to manage the future of work, given the growing popularity of WFH in organizations. Furthermore, studies on the societal wellbeing of remote employees and potential solutions that minimise isolation from the remote setting may potentially be conducted in the future.

5.4 Recommendations (CIPD Requirements)

This chapter seeks to provide recommendations that employers in the Pharma industry might consider when implementing WFH practices for remote employees in their workforces. The findings conclusively suggest that while working remotely has a beneficial impact on psychological and physical wellbeing, it has an adverse effect on societal wellbeing. However, the findings are conflicting and unfavourable for general health and wellbeing regarding the degree of stress and work settings.

5.4.1 Recommendation 1: Review Support for Remote Work Setting

As indicated by the findings, several of the participants described how their employer provided resources, and health and safety for their work setting. As indicated by the findings, several of the participants described how their employer provided resources, and health and safety for their work setting. However, only one participant, mentioned that their employer had come to their remote setting because of concerns regarding health and safety. Pharmaceutical companies may take this into account in the future when employing remote employees or allowing existing employees to WFH. It is recommended that businesses make sure their remote employees have a safe and healthy work setting when they are WFH. In order to make sure the remote employees' workspace is suitable for work, an HR professional may assume this responsibility and inspect the remote workplace setting. Additionally, the organization ought to provide those who work remotely with comparable resources to those in the traditional office, where possible.

Providing laptops workstations, ergonomic chairs, and other equipment may be expensive for the organization, but it is a one-time capital expense. The timeline for introducing this arrangement could take 1 month, immediately after a remote employee is employed or granted permission to WFH. In addition, every six months, the workspace, and resources would be assessed to make sure that all IT equipment and other resources are sufficient and functional.

5.4.2 Recommendation 2: Restructure Working Hours

It was highlighted in the literature that the influence of WFH on employee wellbeing has led to challenges with maintaining a healthy work-life balance. In addition, the findings of this research may indicate that those who work remotely struggle with balancing private and professional life. To combat this, it can be recommended that work schedules be revisited with different day rosters that best fit both the company and the remote employee. An

alternative to the traditional and inflexible 9am–5pm workweek would be 9am–12 noon and 3pm–7pm. A restructured work schedule could help remote employees balance their boundaries between professional and private lives which was highlighted as a difficulty by numerous participants in this study.

As suggested by the findings, numerous participants highlighted the difficulty to switch off from work when WFH. To mitigate this, the researcher recommends a time for remote employees to ‘sign off’ from their duties in order to help them ‘switch off’. This should be mutually agreed upon by the manager, HR, and the remote employee to combat trust between the manager and employee which was a significant challenge to WFH, as highlighted by Beauregard *et al.* (2013).

There would be no financial implication as this would be cost effective for employers since it allows remote employees to work agreed-upon hours that are most suited to their family circumstances and lifestyles. However, a flexible remote policy and right to disconnect policy may need to be implemented to support the above recommendations which may take HR department up to a year to draft and implement depending on the organisation. Working during suitable hours, remote employees are likely to maintain higher levels of focus, and likely to experience fewer distractions which were highlighted by the majority of participants as a positive to WFH. Consequently, this will achieve greater productivity and success, therefore benefiting the organization.

5.4.3 Recommendation 3: Enhanced Employee Support

It was indicated in the findings of this study that all participants experience feelings of isolation and consider their societal wellbeing to be adversely impacted when WFH. Furthermore, it was recognised in the literature that research was lacking on the relationship between societal health of employees and the support of the organisation (Khoreva and Wechtler, 2018). Therefore, it may be evident that employers are falling short in offering isolation and societal wellbeing supports for remote employees. To address this gap, it is recommended that organisations must support societal health, for example by offering an EAP (employee assistance programme), as part of their healthcare plan. In addition, if an EAP is already in place, it is important for employers to communicate digitally the existence of an EAP and the benefits that are provided. Furthermore, employers should invite EAP vendors to lead quarterly online presentations on mitigating employee isolation, in addition to serving manager training and cover topics such as how to identify if a remote employee is experiencing feelings of isolation. This would incur

a small fee for employers and in turn employees may experience a boost in societal wellbeing and feel less isolated which participants experienced in this research.

However, the EAP would encounter a large cost, nevertheless it could pay dividends by minimizing the expense of talent attraction, whilst boosting productivity and retention and reducing sick leave, in addition to improving remote employee's wellbeing. The researcher compared Irish Life, VHI and Laya Healthcare. Due to restricted access a business rate could not be obtained, nevertheless Laya Healthcare was determined as the preferred supplier, providing unlimited 24/7 mental health support for employees (Laya Healthcare, n.d.). The average annual cost is projected to be between €1000 and €2000 at an individual rate; however, this cost may change depending on the plan chosen, and the total expense may be less when factoring corporate rates into consideration.

5.5 Statement of Personal Development

As part of my MA in HR Management, a research study was required in order to gain my qualification. I choose to conduct my study on the topic of remote working as it is highly relevant today and has grown to be a prominent issue in organisations amidst the Covid pandemic. Equally, the topic of remote work has been of interest to me in recent years. I was aware there were not abundant of studies on the impact of WFH on employee's wellbeing and therefore, it appeared that I could go further explore this topic.

As an employee who has experience of hybrid working, I had my own experiences and feelings on remote work. Personally, I am a strong believer that remote work has a place in the future of work, however I was not sure if it would suit everyone. Through examining existing literature and carrying out qualitative research I was able to develop a much deeper understanding from others. I discovered that everyone's experience with remote work varies significantly, depending on a variety of factors such as personal preferences, home environment, parental status, and importantly the amount of support offered by their employer.

At the time of writing, I believe the majority of employers are beginning to develop a successful remote / hybrid working model that supports employee wellbeing. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is still room for improvement, as employees still experience challenges with various aspects of wellbeing when WFH.

If I were to undertake this research again, I would be interested in examining the topic from a quantitative approach. This could provide me additional perspectives and give me an avenue to gather data from a much larger sample.

In summary, I thoroughly enjoyed having the opportunity to investigate the impact of WFH on employee wellbeing. Not only did I find this study to be genuinely interesting, but I also hope that my work can help researchers and future research on this topic.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Email Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear X,

I am completing a dissertation as part of my MA in Human Resource Management at National College of Ireland (NCI). The purpose of this dissertation is to explore remote working and how it impacts employee wellbeing.

To inform my research, I will be conducting semi- structured interviews with remote workers to understand how their wellbeing has been impacted. Following the Covid-19 outbreak, remote working has become an immensely important issue, with many arguments both for and against it. Therefore, the aim of this research is to gain further insight and explore how it influences wellbeing in regard to physical, psychological, and societal wellbeing.

I have attached an information document to this email outlining all aspects of the research. If you would like to take part in this research or require additional information, please contact me by return to this email address or you can contact me on my phone number 086-379-4394.

I really appreciate your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Adam Black

Tel: 086-379-4394.

Email: x22128671@student.ncirl.ie

Appendix 2 Information Sheet for Research Participants

Title: Working Remotely and Employee Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study of Irish Workers within the Pharmaceutical Sector.

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take time to decide whether or not to take part.

Who I am and what this study is about:

My name is Adam Black, and I am undertaking research for a dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a MA in Human Resource Management at National College of Ireland.

Purpose of this study:

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact remote working has on employee wellbeing in the pharmaceutical industry.

Objectives of the study:

Objective 1: To explore the physical effects of WFH from employee's perspectives.

Objective 2: To explore how remote work impacts employee's psychological welfare.

Objective 3: To investigate how WFH impacts employee's societal wellbeing.

What will taking part involve?

You will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview that lasts approximately 30 minutes either in-person or via Microsoft Teams for your convenience. For the purpose of facilitating the interview transcription, your consent to record the audio of the conversation will be requested. You have the right to decline to respond to any questions for any reason as well as end the interview and withdraw at any time.

The interviews will cover an array of topics to address the research aims such as how working remotely has impacted your societal, physical, and psychological wellbeing, what support your employer has offered you (if any) and your overall feelings on remote working and wellbeing. Please find attached with this consent form a copy of these questions in advance.

Why have you been invited to take part?

This study seeks to understand the subjective perspectives of remote employees engaging in remote work within the pharmaceutical industry. A snowball sampling approach has been applied as the researcher has access to four remote workers in the pharmaceutical industry, who can then invite other colleagues who are working remotely within the same industry.

Do you have to take part?

It is voluntary to take part in this study. You are free to decline to participate, or to respond to any questions, and withdraw at any moment without facing any consequences.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

There should be no risks associated with participating in this study; nevertheless, should any problems emerge, or the participant feels uncomfortable answering any questions, they can terminate the interview at any time without having to provide an explanation.

Will taking part be confidential?

All stages of the research will maintain confidentiality, and any information gathered will also be kept confidential. The information provided by participants will be kept strictly confidential and used only for the research's intended purpose. Furthermore, the pharmaceutical company will not be identified in the study and no personal or identifiable information will be included in the dissertation.

How will information you provide be recorded, stored, and protected?

Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in password-protected folder on the researcher's own laptop until after the degree has been conferred. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have access to this data.

A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legalisation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the research will be included in the dissertation, which will be submitted to National College of Ireland as part of the requirements for an MA in Human Resource Management.

Who should you contact for further information?

If you seek further information, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Researcher:

Adam Black, MA Student in HRM (National College of Ireland) -
email: x22128671@student.ncirl.ie, phone: 086-379-4394.

Dissertation Supervisor:

Supervisor: Rachel Doherty
email: rachel.doherty@ncirl.ie

Thank you for your time.

Adam Black

Appendix 3 Consent Form

Consent to take part in research

As per the information sheet the primary purpose of this study is to investigate the influence remote working has on wellbeing of remote employees in the recruitment sector.

- I _____ voluntary agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves being interviewed and data recorded.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.
This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation discussion chapter.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a password-protected folder on the researcher's personal laptop and only the researcher has access to this data until the relevant period until the exam board confirms the results of the dissertation.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two-year period.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
- By signing below, I am agreeing to: Participate in this study, participate voluntarily, and give permission for the interviewer to voice record the interview.

Signed by Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signed by Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Contact Details: Adam Black - email: x22128671@student.ncirl.ie, phone: 086-379-4394.

Appendix 4 Interview Schedule

Introduction / Demographics

1. How long have you engaged in remote work?
2. How frequently do you work from home?
3. Which location setting do you operate from? Example: home, coffee shops, library etc.
4. What are the main distinctions you see between working in a traditional office setting versus working remotely?

Physical wellbeing

5. How would a normal day of working from home look like to you?
6. How would you describe your workspace for remote work?
7. In your opinion, how do you think remote working has influenced your stress levels?
8. Can you describe how your time previously spent commuting to work is now allocated since transitioning to remote work? How has this shift impacted your physical wellbeing?
9. When working remotely, do you find yourself taking breaks to get outside or engage in physical activity during the day? If not, could you share what normally occupies that time instead.

Psychological wellbeing

10. How do you feel working from home has influenced you're work-life balance?
11. What do you believe have been the most notable challenges of working remotely?
12. What do you believe have been its key benefits of working remotely?
13. Can you tell me why you opt to work from home?
14. How do you think working from home has influenced your ability to switch off from work?
15. Can you tell me about interacting with the office when working from home?

Societal wellbeing

16. How has remote work influenced your relationships with coworkers? Both personally and professionally?
17. When working from home, what impression do you think your office coworkers have of you?
18. In what ways does your organization assist you with working remotely?
19. What platforms and procedures does the organization use to strengthen team relationships and interactions with others?

Overall opinions on wellbeing and remote working

20. How do you think working from home impacts your general wellbeing?
21. What do you think should happen with remote work looking forward?
22. Do you have any other remarks on working remotely or its influence on your wellbeing?
Any suggestions for those considering working remotely.