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Working Alone in South Africa: A Tale of Increased Precarity and Deepened Inequality

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Working alone[1]

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[1] The term "working alone" in the title of this paper is derived from the work by Putnam (2000).

Introduction

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the world of work in South Africa, with over a million working people losing their jobs (Francis, Ramburuth-Hurt & Valodia, 2020a). For those working in the informal economy, the five-week lockdown between March and April 2020 was a period of unprecedented insecurity and hunger, without work, income or benefits (Ranchhod & Daniels, 2020a; Rogan & Skinner, 2020). However, for the minority professional and middle classes with plenty of space to work and access to a computer, wi-fi and reliable electricity, working from home was less disruptive (Kerr & Thornton, 2020).

While home-based work is not a new phenomenon, the global pandemic, COVID-19, and the resulting lockdown and social distancing measures have relocated previously office-based workers to working remotely. Hence, at no time in history have we had such a large and heterogeneous group of workers being home based. A report by the ILO notes that "Across the developing world, particularly in Asia, homeworkers can be found at the bottom of global supply chains in the apparel, electronics, and houseware industries, but they are also prominent in domestic supply chains" (ILO, 2021: 5-6). In terms of gender, women workers represent over half of all home-based workers. This strongly correlates with the fact that prevailing gender roles result in women bearing the larger share of the care burden, coupled with other norms that restrict their ability to work outside of the home.[2]

Given the historical prevalence of homework, in this paper we reflect on why this recent shift to homework is receiving increased attention and, in so doing, we discuss the South African context. South Africa is a country mired in massive inequality along multiple intersecting lines, namely race, gender, wealth/income, spatially and in access to digital connectivity (Francis & Webster, 2019). In South Africa, unskilled workers and individuals earning low wages have often worked from home since the pre-apartheid era (Callinicos,1987). These workers were typically black and mostly female. Hence, we argue that the ability to work from home and the profile of the new homeworker (predominantly white, higher skilled and high-wage earners, possessing the space and access to other infrastructure that enables homework), has highlighted homework in a manner that will deepen some of these pre-existing inequalities. In this paper, we discuss the shift to homework in South Africa through an inequality lens.

Instead of being the great leveller, as pandemics have been throughout history, the coronavirus pandemic has revealed and compounded inequalities in wealth, race, gender, age, education and geographical location. This is the paradox with which Ian Goldin – the former CEO of the Development Bank of Southern Africa and now a professor at the University of Oxford – begins his recently published book, "Rescue: from global crisis to a better world" (Goldin, 2021).

We have adopted a three-pronged research strategy. Firstly, we scanned the literature on the history and development of homework, focusing on the transition to factory work and then the re-emergence of homework in the age of globalisation and digitalisation. Secondly, to discuss worker well-being post-COVID-19, it is important

2 Barret, 2020. ILO.

to understand the impact of the pandemic on a selection of labour market outcomes. To do this we draw on findings from the National Income Dynamics Study: Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM). This is a follow-up survey of a sub-sample of households in the fifth wave of a national longitudinal survey, the National Income Dynamics Study. The objective of the NIDS-CRAM study is to investigate the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 as well as any government interventions on South African households.[3] Finally, we undertook a short survey titled "Working from home: what it means for employees, managers and the future of work" to capture the experience of working from home under COVID-19. We conducted online in-depth interviews via Zoom with two Virtual Customer Service Associates (VCSAs) and two managers of private companies.

The origins and development of homework

The origins of self-employed home-based workers goes back to the work undertaken in the household in the pre-industrial era and continues into the present in large parts of the global South (WIEGO, 1997). In Europe, as well as Asia, home-based production was firmly established before the industrial revolution (Massey, 1995). Work took place in the household: men worked as weavers and women as spinners, for example, and they made garments from their homes (Thompson, 1991). The men and women owned the raw materials, the looms and other production tools, and they would sell these garments at the local market. Alternatively, an intermediary would bring them the raw materials and they would collect the final goods (Thompson, 1991). It was only with the rise of the factory that increasing volumes of production moved from the household to the factory, an institution set up for the sole production of goods.

Nonetheless, the factory did not lead to the disappearance of homework as Peck shows in his discussion on Domesticating Work (1996:153-183). In fact, certain technological innovations such as the sewing machine accelerated the use of homework in production. Schmiechen (1984: 26) showed that the "Early predictions that the sewing machine would encourage the centralistion of production in the factory turned out to be unfounded: most machine-made clothes were not made in a factory". In fact, the promotional postcards for the sewing machine from 1892 displayed a nuclear family posed around their Singer sewing machine, affirming a patriarchical family and disciplined seamstresses working from home (Domosh, 2006: 64). Similarly, in the lacemaking industry of Nottingham, "the emergence of the factory system was associated with the expansion of homework assigned to women, who took on these tasks to support their household income" (ILO, 2021: 75). Surprisingly mechanisation of the production process "generated work for thousands of women and children. Domestic industry, homework and labour-intensive handwork were integral to the development of numerous industries in the last half of the nineteenth century" (Rose, 1988: 183). These sub-contracted individuals worked from home for remuneration in a

[3] The survey was administered telephonically to over 7 000 respondents. The first wave of the data was collected between May and June 2020. The second wave of the survey was undertaken in July and August. This chapter discusses findings from this unique data set as a proxy for the likely impact of working from home on various labour market outcomes.

supply chain, with a certain level of security as the product or service was specified by the employer, irrespective of who provided the equipment, materials or other inputs used (WIEGO, 1997).

While homework never disappeared in Europe and North America, much homework in manufacturing and, particularly, apparel shifted to developing countries. Since the 1970s, beedi manufacturers have increasingly shifted the work into households. As Mazumdar (2018) shows, it is a problematic occupation due to the occupational health and safety risks associated with handling tobacco. "It is also plagued by abysmally low earnings, estimated at approximately 17% of the annual wages of workers in other manufacturing sectors" (Mazumdar, 2018). Most of the world's garment production occurs in the developing world in Latin America, parts of Africa, Eastern Europe, South Asia (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) and China, the world's leading garment exporter (Ibid, 81). With the spread of the apparel industry and the rise of "fast fashion" there has been increased pressure on suppliers to contain labour costs (Anner, 2019, 2020). It has also given buyers the upper hand in negotiations with suppliers.

In South Africa, particularly, many people worked from home during the apartheid era, as spatial mobility was restricted. The racially segmented apartheid labour market had relatively stable working conditions and higher wages for white workers who occupied the primary labour market, contrasted with significant levels of insecurity and poverty in the secondary labour market occupied predominantly by black workers (Webster, 1985). The unemployed and often unskilled black workers were excluded from permanent jobs in the formal urban market through policies that sought to control the influx of black workers to the city. Over this period, many women specifically relied on working from home. Such women hand-sewed garments, brewed beer[4] and sold it at *shebeens*, unlicensed venues that sold liquor in the home, or operated *spaza* (retail) shops selling goods from their homes (Callinicos, 1987: 208; Liedholm & McPherson, 1991). Men worked as cobblers and furniture makers (Callinicos, 1987). These workers used their homes as domestic spaces and places of work. They were self-employed home-based workers and in control of the entire labour process.

The introduction of the computer and Information Communication Technology (ICT) spawned the global supply chain. These are networks that span multiple continents and countries for the purpose of sourcing and supplying goods and services. It is now possible to work from home, but not necessarily as a self-employed person, rather as an intermediary. For example, in South Africa there are "domestic factories" where someone will be producing clothing from their home because they are contracted to do a particular job with a specified output (Joynt & Webster, 2016). Such individuals rely on family labour and work long hours to deliver the contract. Although they are working from home and it might appear that we have returned to pre-industrial times, this is not entirely the case as the rhythm of work is now driven by the global commodity chain. This market chain is very competitive because participants are vying against other global suppliers to receive these tenders.

[4] During the Apartheid era, it was illegal for Africans to drink or brew beer. Homes were constantly raided and brewers risked hefty fines and imprisonment if caught. While the wages earned varied, on average such female brewers could match a man's weekly average wage (Callinicos, 1987).

Globalisation of capitalism has intensified pressure on the employer to increase productivity, flexibility and business competitiveness. This has often meant that people have had to work longer hours (Kalleberg, 2009). The demand for an eight-hour working day became a central demand from the beginning of the industrial revolution. Suddenly, "work hours have direct implications for the workers' income, job satisfaction, career development and life quality" (Kalleberg, 2009). Additionally, long working hours are detrimental to the employee's health and well-being and cause, for example, burnout. Conversely, shorter hours necessitate limited earnings and career opportunities, which is frequently associated with precarious work (i.e. nonstandard, unstable, low wage and unprotected) and which has become prevalent in many cases of homework (Kalleberg, 2009).

As capitalism globalised, competition intensified and development took place. This development created vast inequalities unevenly between the so-called core countries – the global North (and the periphery) and the global South (Kvangraven, 2020). This global unevenness led to capital-shifting investments from areas of high wage to those countries where the costs of the reproduction of labour power were lower. This dynamic leads to 'a race to the bottom' and a squeeze on prices as buyers search for the lowest price (Anner, 2020).

Therefore, we observe that globalisation has provided the biggest shift in how work is done. The economic rationale for homework is three-fold: it results in savings on both variable and fixed costs; it allows employers to achieve heightened levels of production flexibility as workers are usually paid piece work rates; and it serves as a deunionisation strategy (Peck, 1996: 166-167). This has now been magnified by growing digitalisation and the introduction of technology that enables large numbers of workers across the globe to work remotely. New information technology has enabled large technology firms, such as Amazon, to employ Virtual Customer Service Associates (VCSAs) to work from their homes in Johannesburg servicing customers in the United States. As the ILO concludes, "Homework has not disappeared with technological progress nor should it necessarily do so since technological progress can in some cases facilitate the fragmentation of tasks, making them more prone to piece rate work done by homeworkers" (ILO, 2021: 85). We have cited three examples – the sewing machine, the loom and the personal computer – as examples of how technology has facilitated the use of homeworking. But the flexibility and low cost of homework can come at a high price for homeworkers. In this section, globalisation and digitalisation have been used as lenses through which to discuss historical homeworking trends. These shifts are necessary to imagine the world of work in the post-COVID-19 era.

A snapshot of the South African economy and labour market

South Africa's triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality have their roots in the apartheid period when the economy was deliberately structured in a non-inclusive manner (Tregenna, Ewinyu, Oqubay & Valodia, 2021). The level of inequality and the rate of unemployment are among the highest in the world. Furthermore, official poverty rates remain extremely high given the country's level of per capita income. In addition to discussing inequality along racial and class lines, inequality in South Africa encompasses gender, spatial and other dimensions with unemployment and poverty following similar patterns.

Following initial high levels of economic growth over the early 2000s, growth in the labour force outpaced growth of employment, resulting in a significant rise in unemployment levels (Tregenna et al, 2021). The number of new entrants into the labour force has continued to grow much faster than the economy's ability to absorb these individuals. This has resulted in even higher unemployment rates. Structural shifts in the economy and growing demand for skilled labour shows that, at the occupational level, there has been growing bias towards high-skilled workers compared to the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Consequently, the profile of the unemployed person in South Africa in the post-apartheid era remains largely female, unskilled or semi-skilled, younger, black and mostly rural-based.

Labour market impacts of COVID-19

In March 2020, South Africa responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by legislating a five-level lockdown in order to control the spread of the Coronavirus. The imposed lockdown not only affected movement and gatherings, but also stood to affect employment and other labour market outcomes. Restrictions went from Level Five, the most stringent in March, reducing in limitation to the least severe in September. South Africa's strict lockdown regulations were lifted between April and June – corresponding to the two waves of the NIDS-CRAM study. This is the period under review in this paper as it provides the best proxy for a shift to working from home entirely. As employment trends shifted towards working remotely, in response to the legislated COVID-19 social distancing restrictions, it is important to recognise that the structure of the economy would have a gendered impact on employment as women disproportionately carry the care burden and are faced with higher unemployment and low participation rates. The same is also true of youth, individuals with low skills and disabilities as well as other minority groups who typically experienced heightened unemployment. To measure the well-being of workers, we look at the impact of the lockdown across four variables access to employment, earnings, hours worked and working from home. These outcomes are discussed across two time periods: February to April and April to June.

Access to employment

Using a broad definition of unemployment, that is, workers actively seeking work opportunities and those discouraged after extended periods of unemployment, Ranchhod and Daniels (2020a) estimate that the proportion of adults who were employed decreased from 57% in February 2020 to 48% in April 2020. Using a recreated variable that classified furloughed workers as unemployed, they estimated further that one in three workers was without employment, either permanently or temporarily between February and April.

Approximately one in three informal workers who did not completely lose their livelihoods after the March lockdown were 'locked out' of employment in April. This is contrasted against one in four workers in formal employment. Women were more likely than men to be locked out of both formal and informal sectors of the economy in April compared to February. The largest share of unemployed individuals in April was disproportionately African, female, younger and more likely to be working in low-skilled and/or low-wage jobs. We observe therefore that this significant unemployment was concentrated among groups of workers that have historically faced adverse labour market outcomes. Such inequality arising from legislated social distancing and

remote work appears to entrench inequality rather than reduce it. Somewhat positively, we observe that full-time employment levels returned to their pre-lockdown level of 85% in June. The share of workers in furloughed employment also declined by five percentage points to 5% of workers (Ranchhod & Daniels, 2020b).

Earnings

Preliminary findings from South Africa echo the findings of the ILO (2021) that, with few exceptions, homeworkers earn less than non-homeworkers (Benhura & Magejo, 2020). This is mostly because homeworkers typically work in unskilled or low occupations and often work fewer hours to accommodate other caring responsibilities. As females constitute the largest share of homeworkers, these low earnings coincide with the pre-existing gender pay gap that means that female homeworkers will expect lower wages than men. Between April and June 2020, wages among formal workers declined by 68% while the decline for informal workers (who are a proxy for homeworkers) was almost double that, at 120% – a difference of 52 percentage points. However, when they control for differences in worker characteristics, these differences disappear, implying that workers across both sectors experienced a reduction of similar magnitude in their wages. When disaggregated by gender, we observe that female workers across both the formal and informal sectors faced a decline of similar magnitude in their wages.

Hours worked

Homeworkers report working fewer hours per day than those individuals that work outside the house (ILO, 2021). However, these hours are fraught with uncertainty as work and, therefore, wages in future periods are not guaranteed. Casale and Posel (2020) calculate that in February, women worked a weekly average of 35 hours compared to men's 39 hours. By April, the average hours reported by women declined to 23 hours while men reported working 29 hours – a far greater decline for women compared to men. Male and female workers experienced a decrease in hours worked between April and June. The decline was higher for workers in the informal sector, regardless of gender, compared to those in formal work.

Working from home

Wave 2 of the NIDS-CRAM dataset specifically asked employed individuals whether they could work from home[5]. Ranchhod and Daniels (2020b) calculate that only 15% of the respondents could work from home in June most of the time while 75% were unable to ever work from home. In terms of individual characteristics, we observe that the share of workers who could not work from home were individuals with low educational levels (less than a high school qualification), mostly African and younger. Female workers were more likely than male workers to indicate that they could work from home some of the time – 16.6% compared to 13.8%.

Our discussion in this section has revealed that female, younger and less-skilled black workers have been most sensitive to labour market shifts arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. This category of workers was more likely

[5] Respondents were asked to answer the following question: "Are you able to work from home? If yes, some or most of the time?" This question was only asked to employed individuals.

to lose jobs, earn less and work fewer hours. A small proportion of surveyed respondents indicated that they could work from home most of the time. Hence, the shift to homework as a result of the pandemic, and indeed other crises, would pose a larger challenge to female workers. This should precipitate the enactment of suitable policies, legislation and arrangements to be made in anticipation of such a move. We turn now to an exploration of how workers and managers experience working from home.

Experiences of working from home

The rise of homework has enhanced greater access to the labour market for those participants who had previously been locked out due to other obligations or impediments, for instance, female workers who bore disproportionately large caring responsibilities. Workers with varying levels of disability who could not previously access the labour market, are now able to work remotely. After all, the main attraction to remote work, at least according to the workers interviewed in our study, was the hope of autonomy, flexibility and freedom (Webster, 2020b). To test this idea of 'increasing freedom' from homework, we examined the experiences of two virtual customer service associates (VCSAs), ex and current employees at one of the largest tech giants in South Africa. In an interview conducted in July 2020, when asked what their expectations were in this line of work, Katlego[6] responded as follows:

> "Working from home was a whole new experience for me, something I had never done before, and I felt that it would bring [me] freedom. I would have the freedom to do this and that, it's going to be nice … I'm with my kids, I have got more time on my hands."

Many believe that remote work will allow them to spend more time with their families and manage other care responsibilities. Katlego added that her reality would prove that this was not true. "There is no freedom there … 8 hours here is like 24 hours. Once you're exhausted mentally you are also physically exhausted, you don't want to do anything."

Similarly, as stated by the International Labour Office (ILO, 2021), certain kinds of homework have been accompanied by the increased use of monitoring software for surveillance during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to monitor performance and improve productivity. "The software can measure the time employees spend on different windows, allowing managers to play back or live-stream a view of an employee's screen and record his or her every keystroke. It can also raise a flag if certain predetermined words are typed" (ILO, 2021:8). Hence, the desire for independence is undermined and trust in managers is eroded as workers increasingly feel they are being externally controlled or being micromanaged. As noted by Katlego: "…there is always someone watching you, from the time you 'log in', to your toilet breaks, your lunch breaks … everything you do. There is always some form of micromanagement that happens. The quality of calls, spelling, grammar, when you write out reports you are constantly checked". These comments highlight the mismatch between worker expectations that led them to seek

[6] We have used pseudnyms for the two virtual customer services associates (VCSAs) interviewed (Katlego and Fatima).

homework and the reality of being constantly surveilled and micromanaged. Below, we discuss in further detail the experiences of workers and managers involved in our working-from-home survey.

Work-life balance and mental health

There are two key challenges that arise from working from home. The first one is the growing psychological stress that emerges from the described working conditions. Some people feel that the lack of social interaction creates loneliness and anxiety and it further affects their self-esteem because they are so isolated (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008, Webster, 2020b). Homeworkers are also increasingly isolated as they lack access to colleagues in a meaningful way (Shibata, 2020). Increased demands for productivity and efficiency could magnify high stress levels faced by these workers. These feelings were expressed by Fatima, another of the VCSAs interviewed:

> "You are basically at home and not going outside at all, you are not meeting anybody at all. You work unsociable hours. If you do like to have parties and socials and things like that, for instance … I have worked for a couple of months until 11 o'clock. This work is isolating."

Furthermore, it may also, over time, lead to tension at home where one partner may feel that the other is constantly working (Webster, 2020). Working from home brings the factory or the office into the home. This creates tension because people tend to work longer hours as they do not know when to stop working and a commute which previously allowed for such a transition from home to work and vice versa is now absent. When home and work are the same place there is no space or time to relax. This blurs the boundary between work and leisure. Dwolatzky[7] highlights his experience:

> "People are now 'living at work' as they are constantly working. There's absolutely no difference between work and non-working time, so work just flows into everything."

Financials costs and savings from homework

For many, the shift to working remotely has been sudden and far from ideal. Some people lack the necessary infrastructure to accommodate such a transition, because they lack access to the internet and a designated working space. In reality, some tasks are only partially suitable to be performed at home while others cannot be undertaken from one's place of residence. This highlights some of the limits of spatial re-organisation and domestication of work.

While there are negative aspects to working from home, there are also benefits to be enjoyed. An initial caveat is that it depends on individual characteristics (Felstead & Jewson, 2000). The costs and benefits depend on your gender, the nature of your job and your specific occupational level (Phizacklea & Wolkowitz, 1995). One clear

[7] Emeritus Professor Barry Dwolatzky interviewed in June 2020.

advantage of working from home is that it saves transport costs. This is a major factor in South Africa because spatial racial segregation means that individuals spend a significant proportion of income and time commuting to and from the office. Furthermore, old and aging infrastructure means that trains, which are much cheaper, do not run efficiently and people not working at home end up using mini-bus taxis that are more expensive, such that individuals end up spending 20% of their salary on transport (Kerr, 2017; Webster, 2020b). Working from home is a great cost saver in terms of both money and time. Fatima confirmed this:

> "We don't have to be stressed about travelling to work or paying for petrol and getting stuck in traffic. We are comfortable at home. It is quite a comfortable space to work in."

Inequality and the digital divide in South Africa

As previously mentioned, South Africa is one of the most unequal country's in the world (Chatterjee, Czajka & Gethin, 2021; Francis et al, 2020b; Francis & Webster, 2019). The digital era is exposing this inequality more explicitly. Working from home seems to be more favourable to professionals and managerial people who have the means to work remotely, whereas people at the lower end of the skill spectrum are left behind (Kerr & Thornton, 2020). One example of these differences is between households that are digitally connected and those that are not. Although 56% of South Africans have internet access, only 11% have it at home (Castel-Branc, Mapukata & Webster, 2020). While workers gain access to the internet when working from the office, for instance, once they are required to work remotely, only one in ten South Africans have access to the internet at their place of residence.

For the small minority working from home with reliable internet connection and reliable electricity supply, they can increase overall output as well as skill and earnings. For the majority, however, it is likely they will continue to slip behind, deepening the earnings and inequality gap in South Africa.

Worker isolation makes it hard to organise effectively

While working from home for some seems to be ideal, for others – women and those with low skills – it is exploitative in nature. Trade unions, in such instances, could play a vital role here. However, the challenge to unionise under these conditions is far greater as it is difficult to organise workers who are often scattered over a wide spatial area and isolated from each other[8]. This was confirmed in our interview with Katlego:

> "You are on your own, and you must answer for yourself, because everybody else is looking out for themselves. There is no sense of collectiveness…"

The closing decades of the twentieth century were devastating for organised labour (Harvey, 2005). Unions faced a challenge as they were increasingly becoming delegitimised by globalisation as the world economy was increasingly organised around flexible, insecure and informal employment (Chun and Agarwala, 2016; Kalleberg, 2009). The rise

[8] Jane Barrett interviewed in June 2020.

of the digital era continues to leave much of the "global workforce subject to either non-unionised low-wage employment or wage-less employment" (Harvey, 2005). Standing (2014) sees this as the growing 'precariat'. This can be seen today in the growing insecurity of those who work remotely.

Homework has increased precarity for some, as the employers have transferred the risk and cost to workers, and have got away with paying such workers less. The workers are the ones who incur the responsibility of resources that the employers have always carried as well as ensuring that they have the right workspace and/or environment to complete the work. In a country with unmatched levels of unemployment, this further increases precarity as workers are isolated and cannot organise. Where they can, the fear of unemployment dampens the appetite for collective bargaining. This is sharply in contrast with workers employed at a factory who are easier to organise as they have a higher probability of belonging to at least one union, and are subject to some form of minimum wage with legislated standards of health and safety (Barret, 2020). If working conditions are unsafe and the products are exhausted, the employer bears the responsibility.

Conclusion: the future of working from home

What are the implications of working from home for the future of work? Firstly, not everyone can work from home. If you are a bus driver or a taxi driver, in the absence of the widespread use of driverless vehicles, you cannot work from home. Certain occupations, such as health care workers, retail assistants or street traders cannot work from home. Hence, there will always be a significant proportion of men and women who will continue working away from home at official or designated places of work, due to the nature of their work. The best way to think about the future of work is therefore as a hybrid work model where some people will continue to work away from their homes as a growing number work permanently from home, while others will work part of the time from home and the rest at the office.

Secondly, the impact of working from home will differ based on race, class, gender, occupation and skill levels, care responsibilities and the location of the individuals (rural/urban). These factors must be carefully considered and the relevant mitigating factors put in place to ensure minimal job losses and continued high levels of productivity. Failure to consider such pre-existing cleavages in South Africa might result in deeper and entrenched inequalities within society.

Thirdly, home workers are workers and should be recognised accordingly. This has been legitimised by the ILO as long ago as 1996 in the Home-Work Convention (ILO, 2021: 177). Trade unions need to recruit such workers as members. Employers need to recognise the existence of home-based workers in their value chains and ensure they get a fair income and protection from occupational hazards associated with the job. National governments should look at ways of meaningfully measuring home work in national labour surveys to give such workers a voice in decision making.

Finally, our findings suggest that, for those forced to work from home during COVID-19, there was an initial honeymoon period when it seemed fun and exciting. But after three or four months workers started to experience

a sense of anxiety and isolation; they wanted to get back to work to meet their colleagues. This is unsurprising. People work for not only economic reasons, but also social needs. Work brings people together and gives a sense of purpose and structure to life.

The new information technology that is used currently has the capacity to increase productivity and human connectivity across the globe. This is a wonderful innovation. The history of capitalism is the tale of growing technological innovation starting with the steam engine and progressing to electricity, the telephone, the computer and so on (Frey, 2020). What COVID-19 and the lockdown have revealed is that we have the necessary technology to work from home but working alone is a poor substitute for people spending time together.

We are social beings and, if you take away the social interaction that is essential to work, you take away what makes us human. Not only does working from home risk loneliness, "it is also bound to reduce on-the-job learning, creativity and innovation – all of which are often tied to serendipitous encounters" (Giugliano, 2020). Indeed, Andy Haldane[9], suggested in a recent speech that excessive home working can have a damaging effect on two important aspects of professional life; creativity and developing social connections. "Whether it is creative sparks being dampened, existing social capital being depleted or new social capital being lost, these are real costs which would be expected to grow silently but steadily over time"(Giugliano, 2020). He concluded that these disadvantages reduce the benefits and raise doubts whether working from home can be a permanent solution to employers.

What is apparent is that work, has and will always remain a fundamental feature of any society. Whether the COVID-19 crisis continues or not, home work could well become the next terrain of worker struggle. Impactful and meaningful provision has to be put in place, particularly for women who have to juggle care responsibilities while working from home, as well as those who are do not have access to because of their location and social status.

[9] The chief economist at the Bank of England (Source: https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/about/people/andy-haldane/biography).

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