

Covid-19 and the Workplace

What is the research telling us so far?

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Topics for Today

- Wellbeing in different employee groups
- The IES WfH Wellbeing Survey
- Job quality, management & wellbeing
- Evidence gaps & challenges
- Some ongoing IES research

Wellbeing During Covid-19

- Key workers: PPE, risk assessment, BAME employees, mental health, trauma, burnout & 'moral injury'
- Vulnerable groups: BAME workers, older workers, those living with obesity & other high-risk comorbidities
- Employees working from home: physical & emotional wellbeing, lifestyle factors, management, culture, communications & work-life balance
- Workforce health as a 'business continuity' challenge

Homeworking & Wellbeing

- Millions of workers have been WfH since the start of the 'lockdown' — biggest & quickest mass shift in working patterns ever
- Pre-COVID19, only around 7% of U.S. workers had the option to regularly work from home (12% in the UK)
- How have the physical & emotional health of workers been affected by WfH & what are the lessons for employers post-lockdown?
- Important not to over-medicalise

The IES Survey

- IES was established in 1969 & is a not-for-profit applied research organisation focusing on labour market policy, HRM & wellbeing
- The IES Working at Home Wellbeing Survey has been tracking wellbeing since the start of the UK 'lockdown' in March
- Used the WHO5 Index of mental wellbeing
- We have data from over 850 respondents
- All data here statistically significant

Respondent Profile



Survey Respondents

- 70% WfH only because of COVID19
- 70% female, mean age 46
- Mainly white collar, working for larger service sector or public admin. employers
- 42% share a workspace with another working adult
- 33% have children & 16% have eldercare
- 46% manage others
- 60% working longer than contracted
- 85% have work IT
- 73% have access to OH & 64% to EAP
- 25% say employer has done a risk assessment

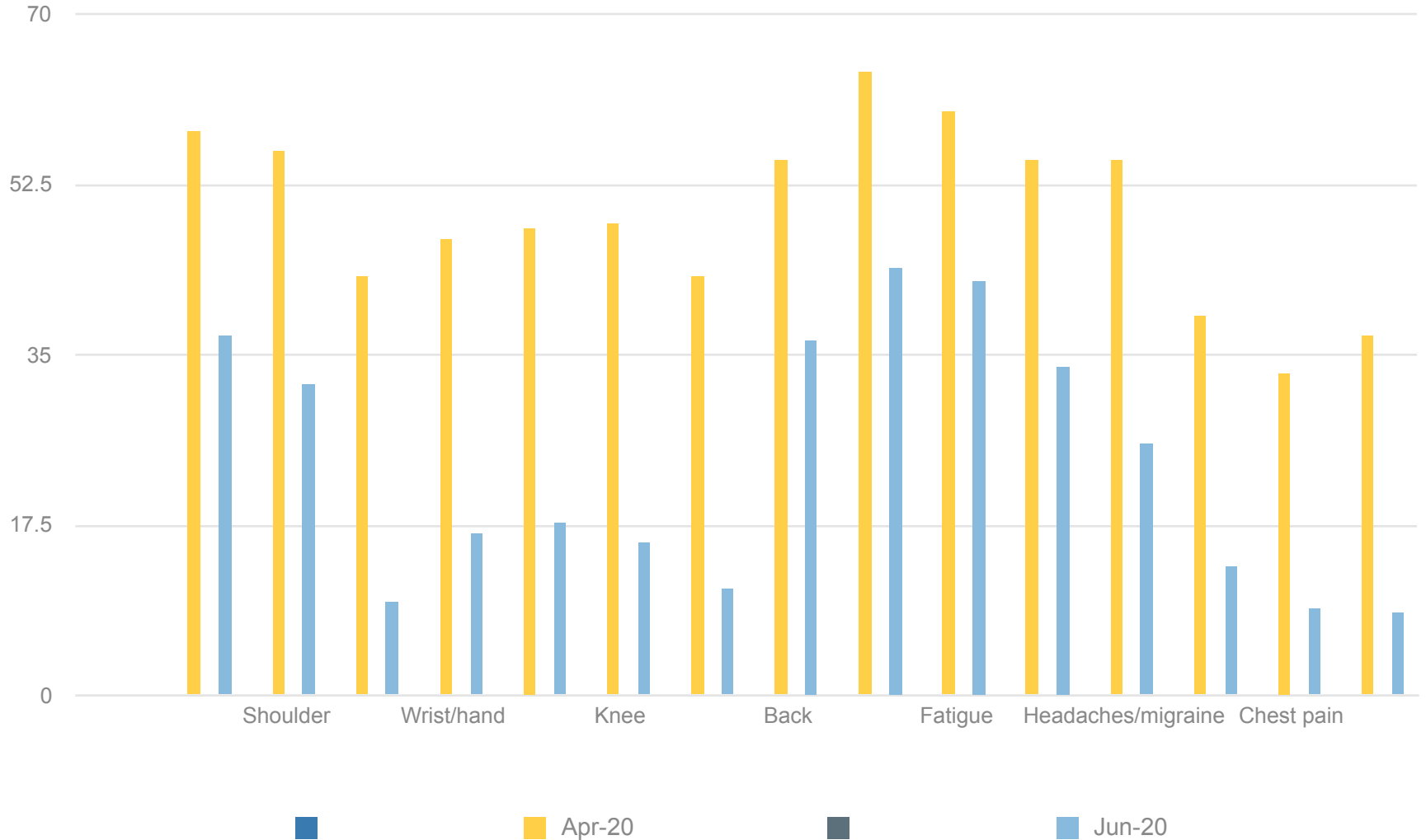
Physical Health



Aches, pain & strain

- Early responses showed big 'spike' in MSK pain (eg 50-60%) – now lower
- Still more neck pain than 'normal' (37%), back pain (37%) & shoulder pain (32%)
- Eye strain (34%) and headaches/migraine (26%)
- Similar increases in:
 - chest pain
 - leg cramps
 - heartburn & indigestion
- Initial increases in pain have declined, but remain a challenge for at least 1 in 4
- Lower among those reporting a risk assessment

Physical Health During Lockdown



Source: Bajorek, Mason & Bevan, 2020

Lifestyle, Sleep, Exercise & Diet



Lifestyle & Pressure

- Almost half (44%) report losing sleep due to worry & 43% report more fatigue than usual
- 1 in 4 say alcohol consumption is up
- 60% worry they exercise too little
- One third say they eat unhealthily
- 33% say work pressure is too much
- 48% don't have enough time to get their work done

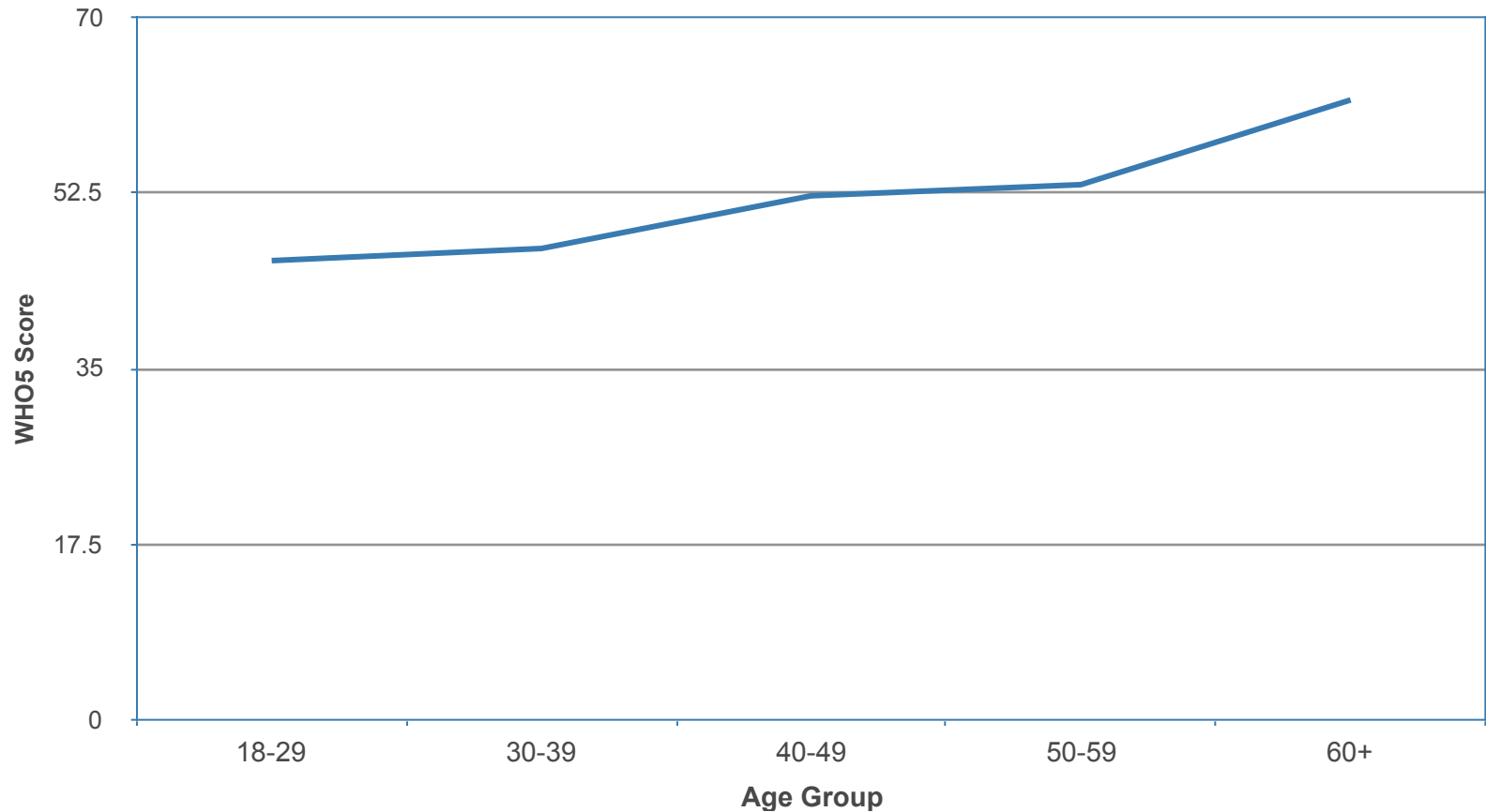
Mental Wellbeing



How is Mental Health Faring? (1)

- The WHO5 Index is an internationally validated measure of mental wellbeing
- In our sample, younger workers had lower scores & this group had more concerns about finance, housing, job security, isolation etc
- The mental health of long-term homeworkers (pre-COVID19) was much better than those new to 'lockdown'

Mental Health Worse Among the Young

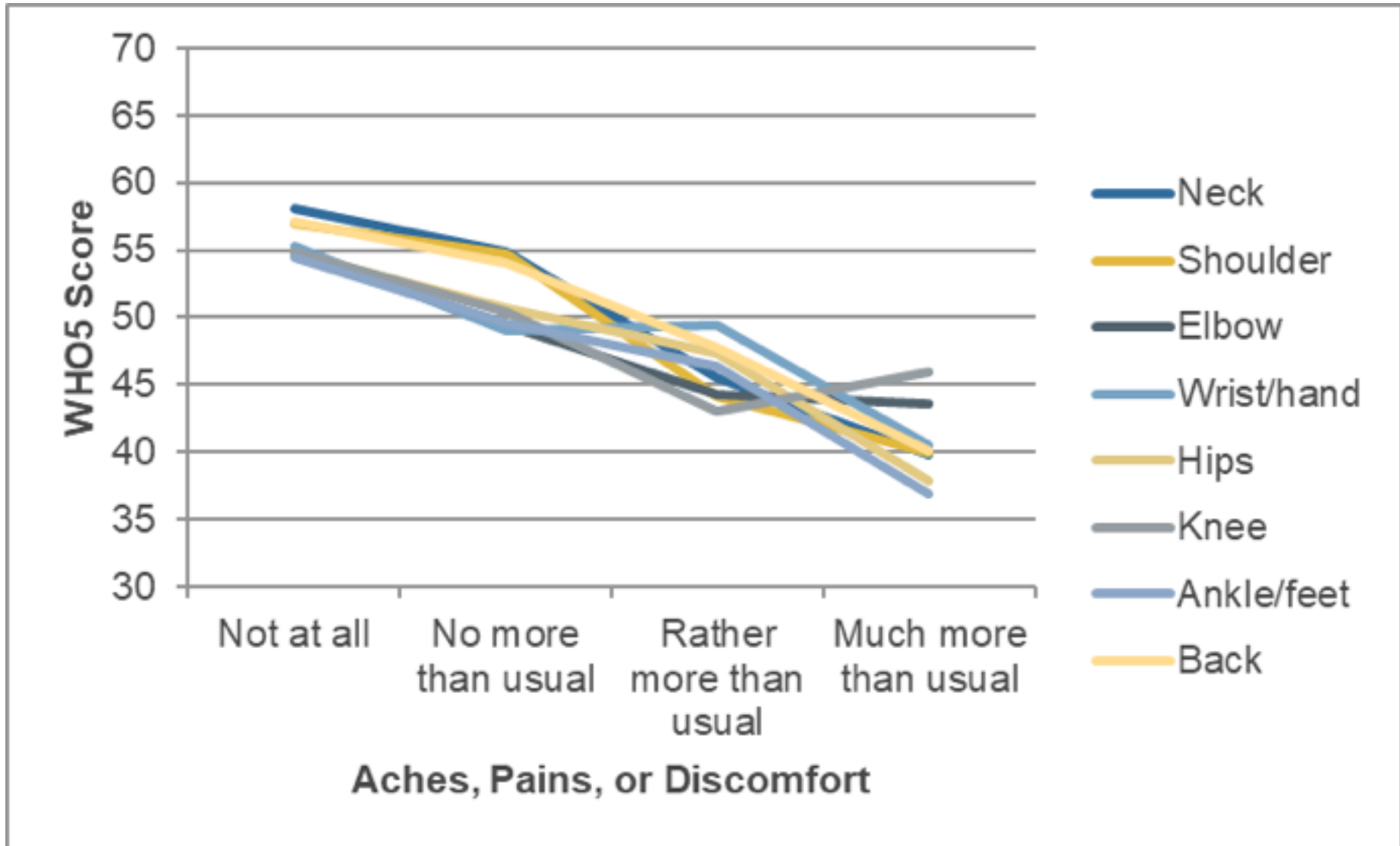


Source: Bajorek, Mason & Bevan, 2020

How is Mental Health Faring? (2)

- Better mental health among those who:
 - Are committed to/engaged with their employer
 - Derive satisfaction from work and have autonomy & control over what they do
 - Are content with work-life balance
 - Feel supported & motivated to WfH
 - Have more frequent contact with their boss
 - Have fewer physical health problems
 - Intend to stay with their employer

Physical & Mental Health are Linked



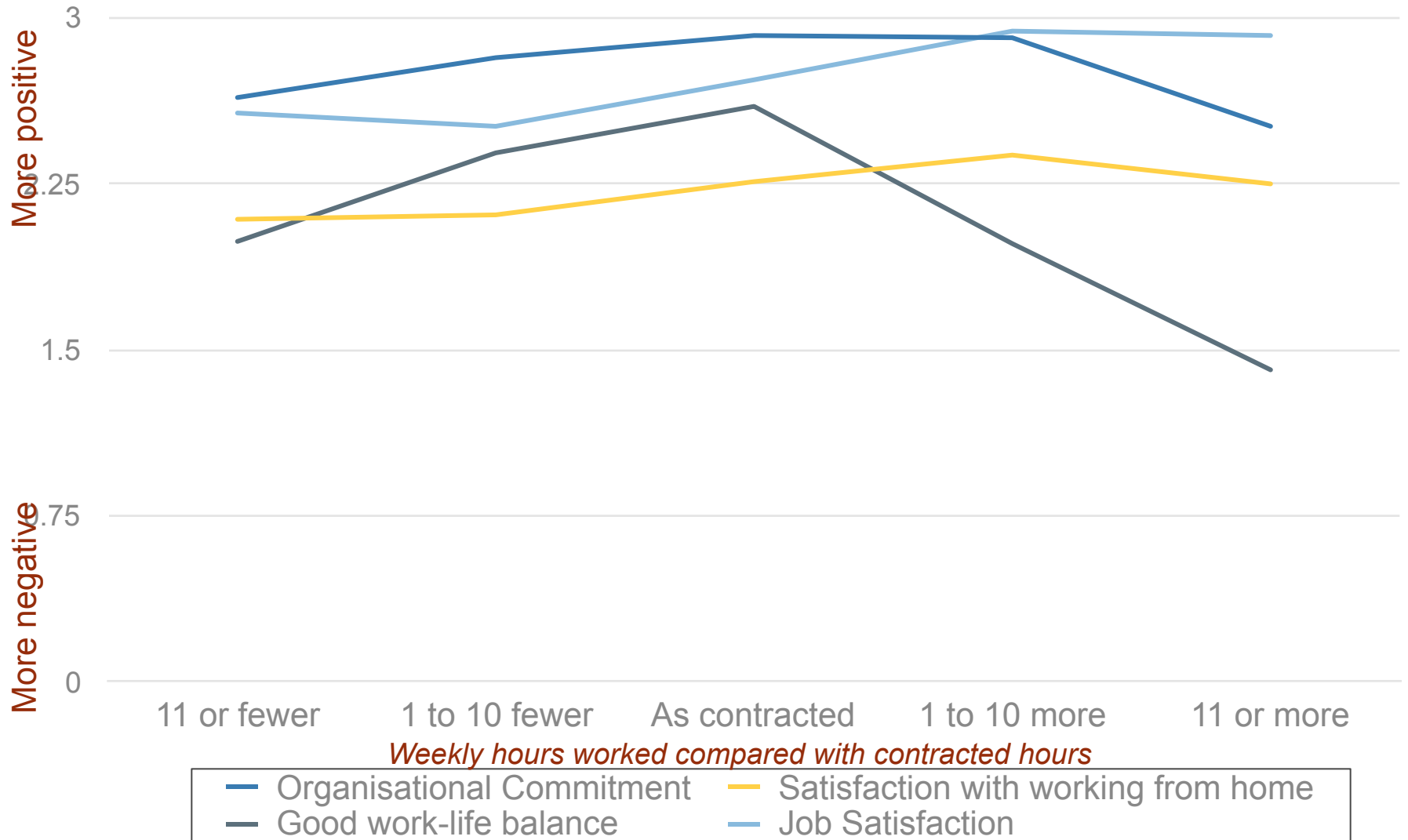
Work-Life Balance, Communication & Morale



Good Work IS Good for Wellbeing

- Being trusted to work remotely & feeling involved in decision-making (voice)
- Variety, control, feeling valued & a having a sense of accomplishment from work
- Managing the work/life boundaries
- Contact with boss & team members

Satisfaction with WfH – Working Hours Compared to Contracted Hours



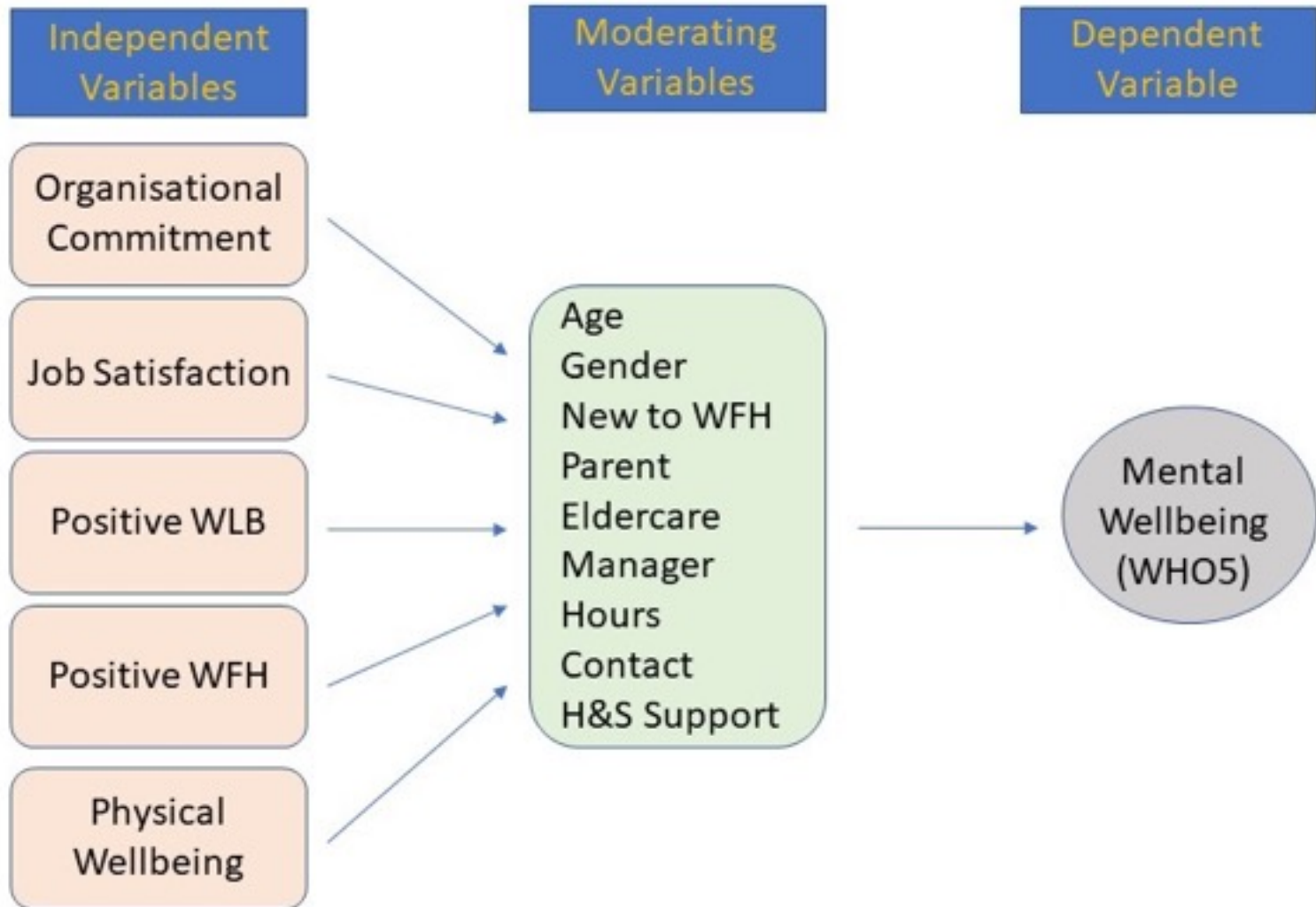
What more can these data tell us?



Further Data 'Mining'?

- Can track changes in self-reported health weekly since lockdown
- Focused analysis on wellbeing of managers – the 'squeezed middle'
- Multivariate analysis to identify the most important drivers of mental wellbeing
- Comparisons with 'mirror' surveys internationally (India, ROI, Brazil, UAE)

Drivers of Mental Health in Homeworkers?



Challenges & Evidence Gaps



Challenges & Gaps

Remote Working

Job Design & Crafting

Line Manager Capability & Health

Work-Life Balance

Absence & Presenteeism

Prevention & Early Intervention

Performance & Productivity

Upskilling in Lockdown

Vocational Rehabilitation

Mental Health – Demands/resources

Trades Union Roles

Inequality & Inclusivity

Questions for Key Players

- Are senior leaders more convinced now that Wellbeing should be a strategic priority? Beyond a 'business continuity' risk?
- Can OH/HR grasp the opportunity to 'mainstream' workforce health or will it revert to being about employee benefits, fruit & Pilates?
- What HR processes need to be reassessed in the light of Covid-19?
- Do policy 'silos' present a risk to effective & sustained improvements in outcomes?

Current IES Projects



ESRC-Funded project with Southampton Business School & half the Sky. Case studies and surveys in Local Government and the Legal profession to examine how work organisation, culture, WLB and wellbeing are managed over a year post-lockdown



Qualitative research with 20 older workers who are living with chronic & fluctuating health conditions. Examining how they have managed health & work before, during & after Covid-19. Using Interviews and journals

Further information:

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