IPS Working Papers

ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK AND WORKPLACE ARRANGEMENTS AMIDST COVID-19 IN SINGAPORE

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APRIL 2022
IPS Working Papers No. 45

Institute of Policy Studies

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK AND WORKPLACE ARRANGEMENTS AMIDST COVID-19 IN SINGAPORE[1]

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April 2022

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The researchers are grateful for the valuable inputs and comments offered by IPS colleagues.
We would like to thank Samantha Nah for her invaluable help in preparing this report.

CONTENTS

ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK AND WORKPLACE ARRANGEMENTS AMIDST COVID-19 IN SINGAPORE

Executive summary

This paper presents the attitudes and perceptions of Singaporeans towards work and workplace arrangements amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic. It also examines their work experiences, beliefs and aspirations, as well as their well-being during this period.

The pandemic has pushed both employers and employees to consider new ways of work. While many employers, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, have been slow in initiating flexible working arrangements, the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of such practices. Indeed, the world's biggest experiment on remote working has proven that employees generally remain productive even when they are not on-site. A major draw of flexible working arrangements has been its potential to allow greater work-life harmony. For working parents, especially females who typically carry a heavier caregiving burden, flexible working arrangements has allowed them to work while taking care of their children. It has also given more opportunities for men, who otherwise would have been confined to the office, to better share in domestic work.

In this paper, we used data from an online consumer panel of Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents maintained by technology company, Toluna, over 19 waves (14 July 2021 to 11 April 2022). This period encompassed the second Phase 2 (Heightened Alert) (P2HA) to the present day, after the easing

of community measures and border measures. The survey was conducted with over 2000 respondents, about 500 of whom were polled at every wave, and was conducted about once in a fortnight.

Overall, the findings show that more respondents have been going back to the workplace on most days. While at least half of the study respondents have been doing so during the course of the pandemic, the proportion has been increasing in 2022, with 74 per cent returning to workplaces on most days in W49 (1 April 2022 - 11 April 2022) following the announcement of easing of workplace safe management measures. Some have however, felt cajoled to return. Between 37 to 42 per cent of respondents who currently worked from home most or all of the time felt pressured to return to the office on most days. This proportion though has been steadily decreasing.

Preferred work arrangements have shifted considerably throughout the pandemic. From W31 (14 July 2021 - 25 July 2021) to W49 (1 April 2022 - 11 April 2022), between 41 and 52 per cent felt that flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore. In the same period, around 20 to 35 per cent felt that working from home on most days should be the new norm for workplaces.

In more recent waves, around four in 10 (37 to 43 per cent) felt that employees should be allowed to work from home three days a week. During the same period, 34 to 37 per cent felt that employees should be allowed to work from home one to two days a week, while 24 to 26 per cent felt that employees should be allowed to work from home four to five days a week.

Among respondents with children at home, 44 per cent felt that flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces. Around 28 per cent preferred working from home on most days.

Respondents with aged persons at home were more likely to feel that flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore (52 per cent) as compared to those with children or those with both children and aged persons at home; they may prefer the flexibility to arrange their work schedule around caregiving needs of the aged persons. More respondents with both children and aged persons at home also feel that working from office on most days should be the new norm for workplaces (38 per cent) as compared to respondents with children or respondents with aged persons at home.

The differential gendered preferences for work arrangements in the new norm possibly reflects how females continue to be burdened with the lion share of domestic care work. Around 73 per cent of female respondents felt that working from home on most days or flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore, as compared to around 66 per cent of male respondents. Females with dependents (94 percent) were more likely to prefer working from home on most days or flexible work arrangements, in contrast to males with dependents (86 percent) who were comparably less likely to do so.

Moving forward, deliberations on the ideal working arrangement in Singapore should note that workers have better psychological well-being when their current workplace arrangements matched their preferred work arrangements. Respondents with younger children also had lower levels of well-being if they had to return to the office on most days. Hence, given how employees have adapted to working in the new normal and the ongoing conversation about work-life harmony, consideration should be given to employees' needs when deciding on working arrangements.

Our results show that more than 4 in 10 respondents felt that employers should allow employees to choose which days they would prefer to return to office (45 per cent), communicate with employees on the precautions and safety measures the company is taking to safeguard employees' health (44 per cent), and provide flexible policies allowing for work-cations (41 per cent), in order to ease the transition back to working in office/hybrid work mode.

When asked about the top three reasons behind respondents' preference to work from office rather than at home, respondents cited easy access to office network/IT systems (79 per cent), ease of collaborating with colleagues on projects (78 per cent), and conducive/dedicated working space (76 per cent). On the other hand, more than 8 in 10 respondents felt that reduced chances of getting COVID-19 (87 per cent), greater flexibility in incorporating personal life needs with work schedules (83 per cent) and the ability to attend to family needs (81 per cent) were important reasons as to why they would prefer to work from home rather than the office.

Around eight in 10 respondents who work from home most or all of the time enjoyed working from home, and about the same proportion felt that they were productive working from home. The proportions who have a positive appraisal of working from home have increased over the last two waves.

Following from the earlier finding that respondents had greater psychological well-being when their work arrangement was congruent to their preferences, those who are required to return to the office when their preference was for greater flexibility are more likely to indicate an inclination towards finding new employment. Among respondents who were currently working from home and felt that working from home on most days or flexible working arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces, around 42 per cent of the respondents indicated that they would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days. Around 48 per cent of respondents, whose work aspirations have changed as a result of the pandemic, would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days, while around 28 per cent of respondents, whose work aspirations have not changed, would consider looking for another job. Around 45 per cent of respondents who believed that the job market will be better in the next six months would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days, while around 32 per cent of respondents who believed that the job market will be bad or the same in the next six months would consider looking for another job.

On job outlook and skills upgrading, we find that about half felt that they have learnt new skills during the pandemic, which would help in their career. This especially resonated with respondents who were younger, more highly educated, and have higher salaries. More than half of the respondents polled over the waves were confident that they would be able to keep their job in the next six months. Respondents who were higher salaried and were more educated were more confident of being able to keep their jobs. We also find that respondents with lower educational qualification, who predominantly worked in the labour, retail and transportation sector, expressed the lowest confidence in keeping their job in the next six months. This possibly indicates the vulnerability faced by this group of workers in the predominantly blue-collared sector, who perceive less job security.

Respondents' perception on the job market outlook in the next six months fluctuated across the pandemic. In general, the proportion of respondents who felt that the job market outlook was negative outweighed the proportion of respondents who felt that the job market outlook was positive during periods when cases were rising and safe management measures were tighter. In later waves, as the Omicron variant struck our shores, there was generally a higher proportion of respondents who perceived the job market outlook to be positive rather than negative, possibly as the government had been consistent in not implementing stricter measures. High vaccination rates and the perception that the Omicron variant resulted in milder symptoms may have bolstered confidence in the job market outlook as well.

Among those who were currently working from home, 44 per cent cited their biggest challenge as not being able to unplug from work after working hours, while 37 per cent cited lack of social interaction with colleagues as a main challenge, and 35 per cent cited developing mutual trust between employer and employee as a main challenge.

When asked on their preference to work remotely in companies based overseas, around 53 per cent of respondents polled would prefer this arrangement if given the opportunity to do so.

Among the employed and unemployed looking for a job, around 47 per cent felt that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations. Among those whose work aspirations have changed, 69 per cent have considered a career switch. Respondents who were younger and more educated were more likely to have changed their work aspirations as a result of the pandemic.

On safe management measures at the workplace, we find that respondents were more likely to prefer taking precautions to lower their risk of getting infected at the workplace. Slightly more than half of respondents polled over the waves when asked about differentiated measures in workplaces based on vaccination status, were positive of stricter, restrictive measures for the unvaccinated.

On COVID-19 at the workplace, among those who have to return to their workplace on most days, about half of the respondents polled across the waves were afraid of being infected with COVID-19 when they return to work more regularly. However, these concerns have been tapering off in the most recent waves, as the COVID-19 situation stabilized and measures were eased.

In summary, as Singapore transitions towards living with COVID-19, more consideration should be given to the needs of employees in deciding what future work arrangements should be in order to achieve better work-life harmony in Singapore. The pandemic has made us reconsider new possibilities in our life and work, and has highlighted the importance of psychological well-being. As the COVID-19 situation stabilises and measures continue to be eased, more can be done to support employees in achieving their work and personal goals, and encourage progressive practices in workplaces.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK AND WORKPLACE ARRANGEMENTS AMIDST COVID-19 IN SINGAPORE

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, economic activities and labour markets have experienced major disruptions. Across the globe, major job losses were observed as businesses were shut due to lockdowns (Jackson et al., 2021; Saw et al., 2021). Some industries were more badly affected than others; the tourism and aviation sectors came to a near standstill in many places. Similarly, in Singapore, many adjustments had to be made due to the implementation of numerous measures to cope with the virus.

Amidst the different transitions as a result of these measures, there were major adjustments in the workplace to ensure safety and the continuation of economic activities. For instance, workplaces have had to adopt safe management measures, such as complying with capacity limits in the workplace, curbing social activities, and ensuring that on-site employees have been vaccinated, in order to resume operations (MOM, 2022). Despite the initial hesitancy, the majority of the population adhered to the regulations. Businesses and establishments have also restructured their entry and exit points to facilitate the validation of one's vaccination status through an app (TraceTogether App) on their phones or a device (TraceTogether token) before entering any premises.

The greatest change in most workplaces was the move towards working from home when the pandemic was still in its early stages and when there were new variants such as the Delta strain of COVID-19. These work from home arrangements were often necessitated by government mandates. In Singapore, the government enabled this arrangement through grants for businesses to purchase the necessary information technology solutions to make work from home possible, and to keep a portion of their workers away from the office (IMDA & ESG, 2020). Capacity limits set at about 50 per cent of the workplace necessitated various flexible arrangements at workplaces, where employees took turns to return to the office or booked slots to return on designated dates.

While the pandemic has propelled remote work in many countries including Singapore (MOM, 2020), global discussions on flexible work arrangements had been ongoing since before the pandemic. Research has demonstrated the positive benefits of such arrangements, such as better physical health, reduced absenteeism, and better work-life balance (McNall et al., 2009; Shifrin & Michel, 2022). While some organisations have implemented such work arrangements for years, others have remained reluctant due to various reasons, such as negative attitudes towards working flexibly and resistance to the use of new technology (Dex & Scheibl, 2002).

The pandemic has also led to many workers reconsidering their long-term career aspirations. For instance, employees have indicated willingness for salary reduction in favour for flexible working hours (Barnes et al., 2021). Employees have also left organisations that did not match their changing priorities, and are less willing to tolerate high levels of stress at work.

For those with caregiving responsibilities such as needing to care for young children or the elderly, the large-scale introduction of flexible work arrangements arising from the pandemic has allowed them to continue working whilst ensuring adequate care for their dependants. This has been particularly important for females, who have expressed their preference for such arrangements following the pandemic (Wong et al., 2020).

Significantly, workplace flexibility has also allowed fathers to contribute to a more active role in childcare, a caregiving responsibility often relegated to mothers (Alon et al., 2020). Gender stereotypes that locate women at home and men in the office were challenged when people of both genders had to engage in economic activities based out of their residences.

Even so, research has shown that females remain disproportionately disadvantaged. For instance, females were more likely to report lower productivity at work, and reduced job satisfaction when they had to work from home (Feng & Savani, 2020). In a study of accounting professionals in Australia, females were more likely to experience higher levels of work-family conflict compared to their male counterparts, and this contributed to a reconsideration of their career aspirations (Barnes et al., 2021). This suggests a need to continue rethinking policies to support female labour force participation, and to increase the opportunities for both genders in paid employment and care giving (King et al., 2020).

Indeed, the shift towards flexible working arrangements has not benefitted all groups within society equally. Individuals in some industries, such as gig workers who provide transport services, have experienced reduced income due to a decrease in demand for commuting to and from work (Spurk & Straub, 2020). There have also been concerns that while flexible working arrangements have allowed for an increase in work efficiency and greater work-life balance (Wiatr, 2021), it has also made it difficult for some to negotiate work demands from their personal, private life. The myriad of articles on burnout related to work-from-home initiatives during the pandemic have further highlighted the need to more clearly set out boundaries within an organisation (Lim, 2020; Rajah, 2020; Thomason, 2021). Moreover, greater flexibility may not translate to better outcomes if co-workers and employers do not support the use of such arrangements (Shifrin & Michel, 2022). Supporting this view, a study found that improvements in job satisfaction and reduction in burnout and job stressors for individuals who adopted flexible work arrangements were, in part, dependent on the availability of mentoring relationships (Almer & Kaplan, 2002).

Following the shift towards endemic living in Singapore, there is a need to re-examine and explore the benefits and drawbacks of sustaining working environments that are more welcoming to flexible work arrangements.

Current Study

Given the changes that have occurred in the workplace as a result of the pandemic, it is important to examine work and workplace arrangements during the past year. What arrangements have been common among Singaporeans?

How have their preferences changed over the last few months of the pandemic in terms of their desired workplace arrangements and what informs these preferences? How comfortable are Singaporean workers to pursue economic activities in the shadow of the pandemic and how satisfied are they with various safe management measures at the workplace? Finally, what is their perception of the outlook on the local job market? This paper presents findings on a range of Singaporeans' attitudes towards work while living with COVID-19 as an endemic disease in Singapore.

The data used in this report was drawn from an online survey panel of the marketing research firm, Toluna, which IPS has used since April 2020 (i.e. Wave 1). Polling efforts are still ongoing to keep track on sentiments among Singaporeans[2]. The data covered in this report was taken from the period of 14 July 2021 (Wave 31) to 11 April 2022 (Wave 49), covering the period from the second Phase 2 (Heightened Alert) (P2HA) to the present day, after the easing of community measures and border measures. The survey drew on over 2,000 respondents, about 500 of whom were polled every wave. Each wave of the survey was conducted about once in a fortnight. The sample is representative of the national population's gender and race breakdown. The same group of respondents in a wave would be asked to do the survey again after 4 waves,

[2] This paper is the fourth paper in a series of reports covering the population sentiments on the pandemic in Singapore.
The first paper was released in May 2020: Mathew, M., Tan, A. & Syafiq, M. (2020). Attitudes Towards the Use of Surveillance Technologies in the Fight Against COVID-19.
The second paper was released in April 2021: Mathew, M., Syafiq, M., Hou, M. & Tan, A. (2021). The COVID-19 Pandemic in Singapore, One Year On: Population Attitudes and Sentiments. IPS Working Paper No. 40.
The third paper was released in December 2021: Mathew, M., Syafiq, M., Hou, M. and Phoa, F. (2021). Living with COVID-19 in Singapore: Attitudes, Challenges and the Way Ahead. IPS Working Paper No. 43.

creating a block of around 2,000 unique respondents in every 4 consecutive waves. Table A below shows the dates of execution for each wave.

Table A: List of wave start and end dates

Wave	Start date	End date	Remarks
31	14 July 2021	25 July 2021	- 22 Jul: Start of second P2HA
32	26 July 2021	7 August 2021	- 6 Aug: Relaxation of P2HA rules announced
33	7 August 2021	19 August 2021	
34	20 August 2021	30 August 2021	- 22 Aug: Lowest number of community cases reported since mid-July
35	2 September 2021	10 September 2021	- 10 Sept: Sharp spike in cases to be expected in the community
36	15 September 2021	21 September 2021	- 15 Sept: Singapore reported more than 800 daily cases - 20 Sept: More than 1,000 cases reported, higher than the daily count in April 2020
37	22 September 2021	29 September 2021	- 24 Sept: Stabilisation Phase announced - 27 Sept: Start of Stabilisation Phase
38	1 October 2021	11 October 2021	- 8 Oct: PM Lee's address to the nation on living with COVID-19
39	15 October 2021	27 October 2021	- 20 Oct: Extension of Stabilisation Phase announced - 25 Oct: Start of extended Stabilisation Phase
40	28 October 2021	1 November 2021	
41	10 November 2021	17 November 2021	- 10 Nov: Calibrated adjustments to Stabilisation Phase
42	19 November 2021	23 November 2021	- 20 Nov: Transition Phase announced - 22 Nov: Start of Transition Phase
43	30 November 2021	9 December 2021	- 2 Dec: Imported Omicron cases reported in Singapore
44	28 December 2021	8 January 2022	- 1 Jan: Working from home no longer default working arrangement - 4 Jan: Weekly infection rate above 1, warnings of impending Omicron wave

			- 5 Jan: Announcement of changes in vaccination status policy
45	12 January 2022	25 January 2022	- 21 Jan: Maximum isolation period for fully vaccinated individuals shortened. - 21 Jan: VTL travellers to take ART only if they leave home, no need to report results.
46	31 January 2022	8 February 2022	- 4 Feb: Number of cases cross 10,000 after Chinese New Year backlog
47	14 February 2022	22 February 2022	- 16 Feb: Announcement of simplified rules for gatherings and travel on 25 Feb (subsequently postponed) - 18 Feb: Budget 2022 announced
48	18 March 2022	25 March 2022	- 24 Mar: Announcement of easing of community safe management measures and border measures on 29 March
49	1 April 2022	11 April 2022	-

Lower proportions of older persons and those from lower income households were sampled as the study was conducted using an online consumer panel. This limits the generalisability of the results. To correct such a limitation, age was weighted in each wave according to national proportions[3]. Attempts to correct other variables, like education or housing, resulted in over-magnification of these populations instead and were thus not used. Graphical comparisons of the representativeness of the gender, race, and age profile of the sample in Wave 44 with Singapore's resident population are shown in Figures A to C.

[3] Weights were applied only when reporting top line figures in each wave, and were not used in aggregated data or further statistical analyses.

Figure A: Comparison with survey and national proportions, by gender, W44 (%)

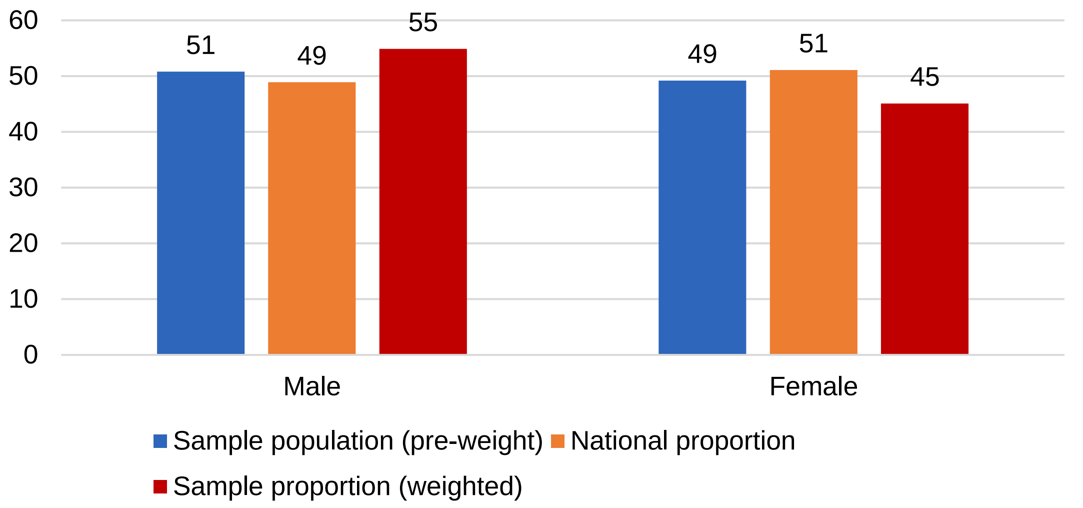
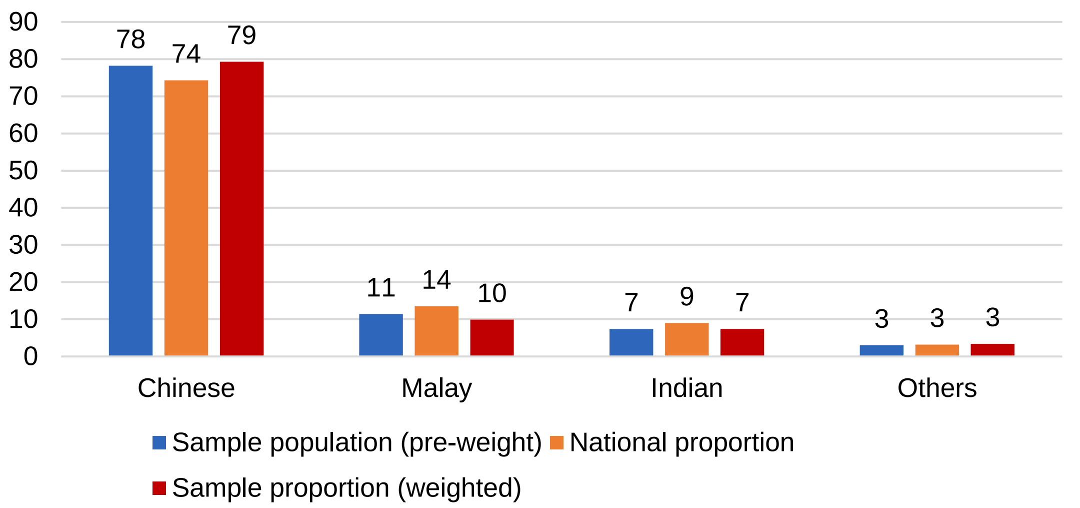
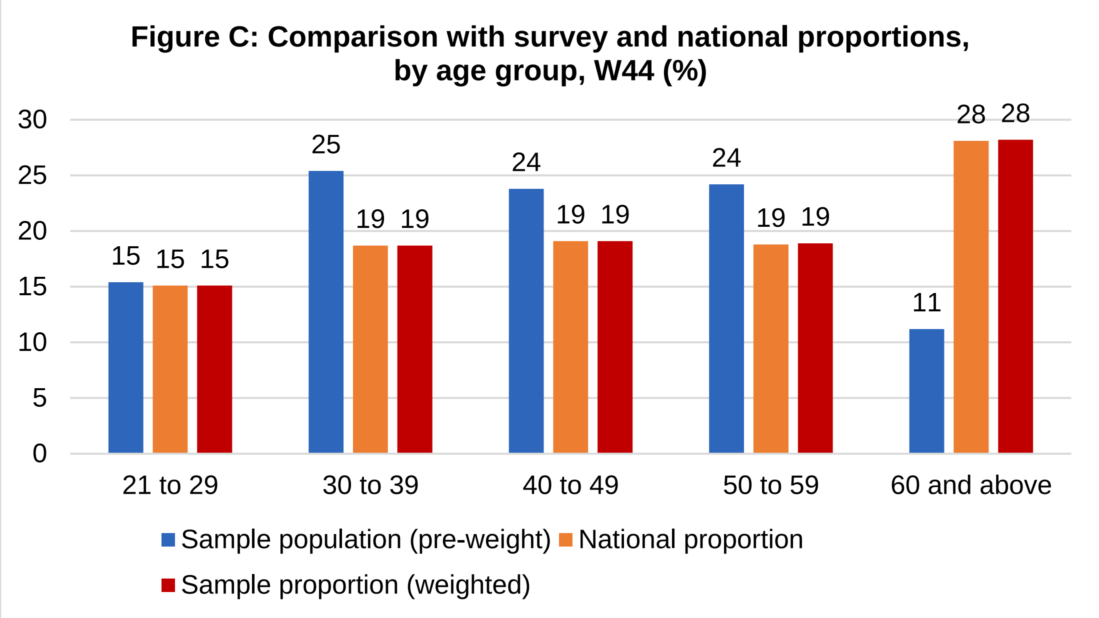


Figure B: Comparison with survey and national proportions, by race, W44 (%)





Despite the sample limitations, the data captures useful insights on the attitudes of Singaporeans towards work as Singapore begins to live with COVID-19 as an endemic disease, especially as more people get infected and recover from the virus with only mild symptoms.

Where regression models were carried out, data from W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022) to W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022) were aggregated into a single block to represent the views of Singaporeans during the period when the Omicron variant was detected to the period of the Omicron wave.[4] Regressions were carried out to determine the effect of variables over various dependent variables reported in this paper. The regression results are illustrated as cross-tabulations[5] where appropriate.

[4] Data from later waves (W48-W49) were not included in the regressions as they were inconclusive. As the same group of respondents in a wave would be surveyed after four waves, W44-W47 consists of the full set of unique panel respondents.
[5] The regression model and relationships presented in this paper are statistically significant (p <.05).

1. WORKPLACE ARRANGEMENTS

1.1 Current workplace arrangement

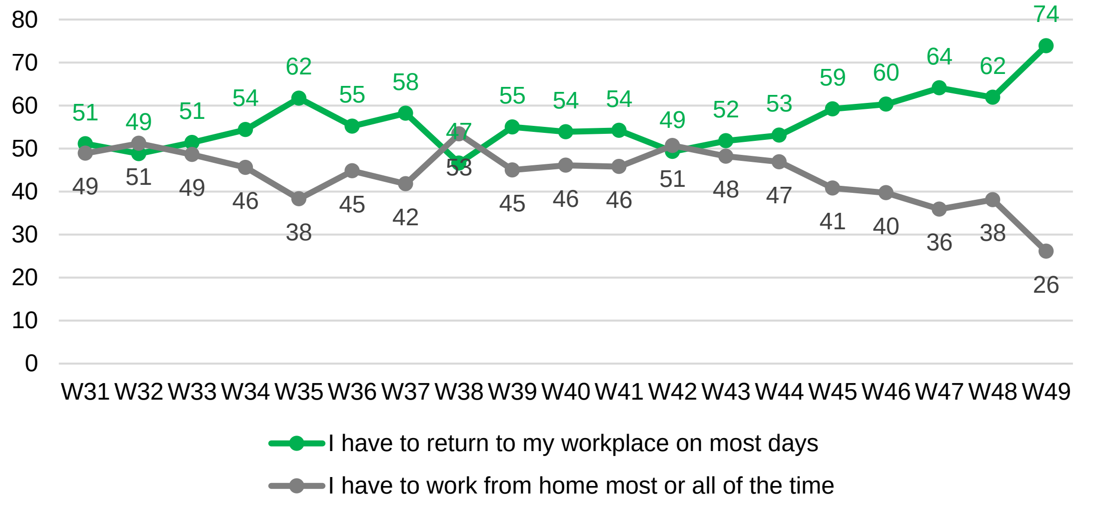
Around half of the respondents in this study had to return to the workplace on most days in W31 (14 July 2021 – 25 July 2021) to W33 (7 August 2021 – 19 August 2021). This proportion then increased to 54 to 62 per cent during W34 (20 August 2021 – 30 August 2021) to W37 (22 September 2021 – 29 September 2021), which was the period when employees could return to the office and work from home was no longer the default working arrangement.

The proportion then fell to 47 to 55 per cent in W38 (1 October 2021 – 11 October 2021) to W42 (19 November 2021 – 23 November 2021) during Stabilisation Phase and Transition Phase. As Singapore moved towards endemic living, the proportion rose from 52 per cent in W43 (30 November 2021 – 9 December 2021) to 64 per cent in W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022), even as the Omicron variant resulted in large spikes in cases. This could be because respondents were less fearful of the Omicron variant, which is seen to be less deadly, and more were convinced of this fact given their knowledge of those who had been infected by the virus. Moreover, work from home was no longer the default working arrangement from 2022, given government messaging in more recent months. This may have signalled to Singaporeans that they should be ready to move towards endemic living and returning to some form of normalcy at the workplace.

While the proportion returning to workplaces reduced slightly to 62 per cent in W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022), it increased to 74 per cent in W49 (1

April 2022 – 11 April 2022), following the announcement of easing of workplace safe management measures.

Figure 1.1 Which is more accurate about your current workplace arrangement? (Among the employed,%)



Respondents earning higher salaries (see Figure 1.2) and who were working in the professional services sector[6] and had a degree (see Figure 1.3) were more likely to work from home most or all of the time. As can be seen from these figures, just 51 per cent of those who earned $6,000 and above returned to their workplace on most days, compared to 69 per cent of those who earned less than $3,000. Similarly, only 50 per cent of degree holders in professional services had to return to their workplace on most days, compared to 72 per cent of those without a degree who worked in labour, retail and the transportation sector.

[6] See Appendix A for the classification of industries.

Figure 1.2 Which is more accurate about your current workplace arrangement?, by salary, W44-W47 (Among the employed,%)

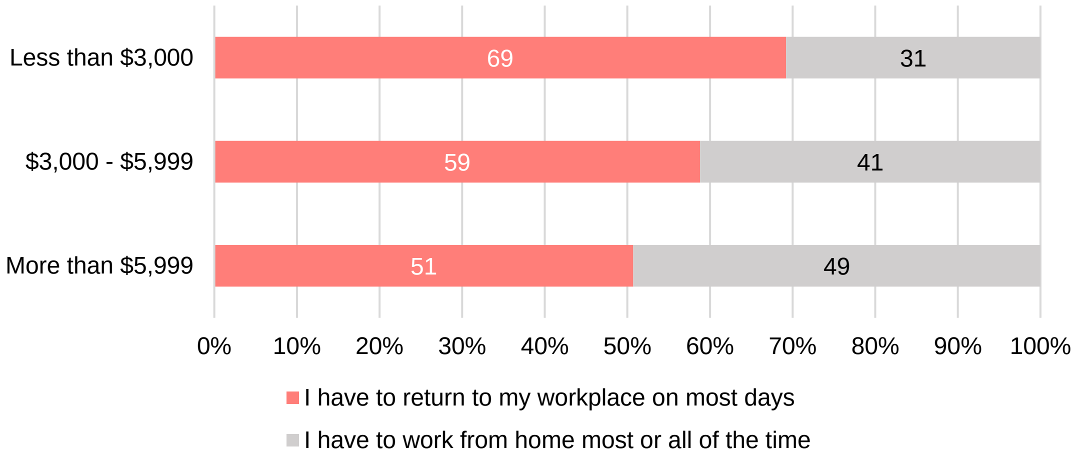
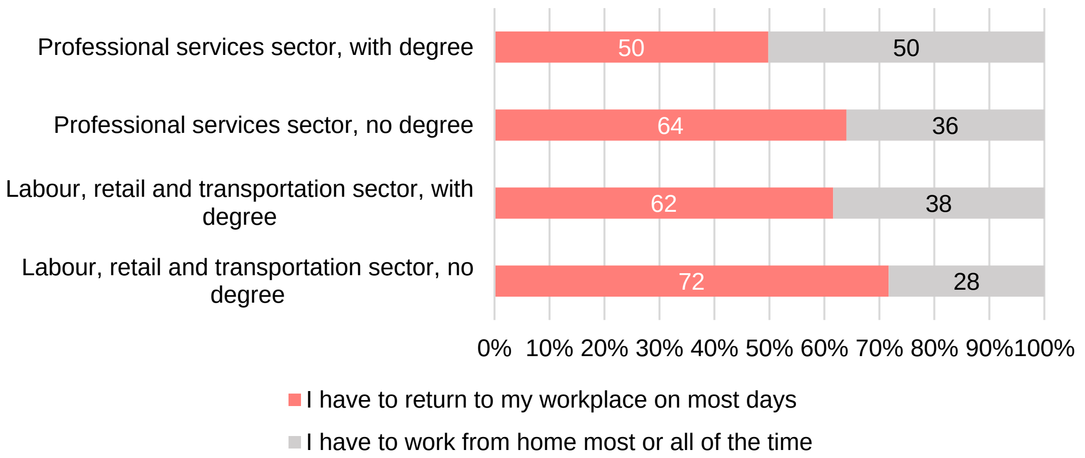


Figure 1.3 Which is more accurate about your current workplace arrangement?, by sector and education level, W44-W47 (Among the employed,%)



1.2 Preferred new norm for workplaces in Singapore

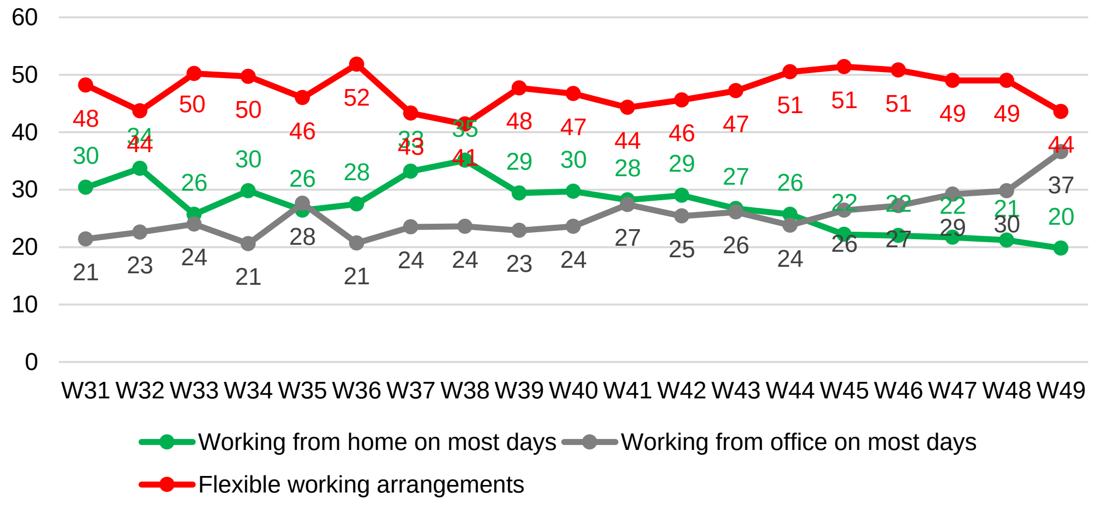
When respondents were asked about which workplace arrangement should be the new norm in Singapore — with the options of working from office on most days, working from home on most days, or flexible working arrangements — the largest group (approximately half of respondents during the course of the pandemic) chose flexible working arrangements. Between 20 and 30 per cent of respondents preferred the pre-pandemic norm of mostly working from the office, while similar proportions were keen on mostly working from home.

Preferred work arrangements have shifted considerably throughout the pandemic. From W31 (14 July 2021 – 25 July 2021) to W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022), 41 to 52 per cent felt that flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore.

Dips in preference for flexible work arrangement for W32 (26 July 2021 – 7 August 2021), W37 (22 September 2021 – 29 September 2021) and W38 (1 October 2021 – 11 October 2021) coincided with an increase in preference for working from home on most days (41 to 43 per cent). This also coincided with a rise in cases in the community, which may suggest that respondents preferred to work from home out of fear of being infected.

A slight decrease from 49 per cent to 44 per cent between W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022) and W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022) was also observed, alongside an increase in the preference to work from office (30 to 37 per cent). This coincided with the easing of community safe management measures announced on 24 March 2022 at the end of W48, which allowed a greater percentage of employees to return to workplaces. This suggests that there has been a shift in attitudes towards living with COVID-19 as more employees return to the office, and as COVID-19 case numbers come under control.

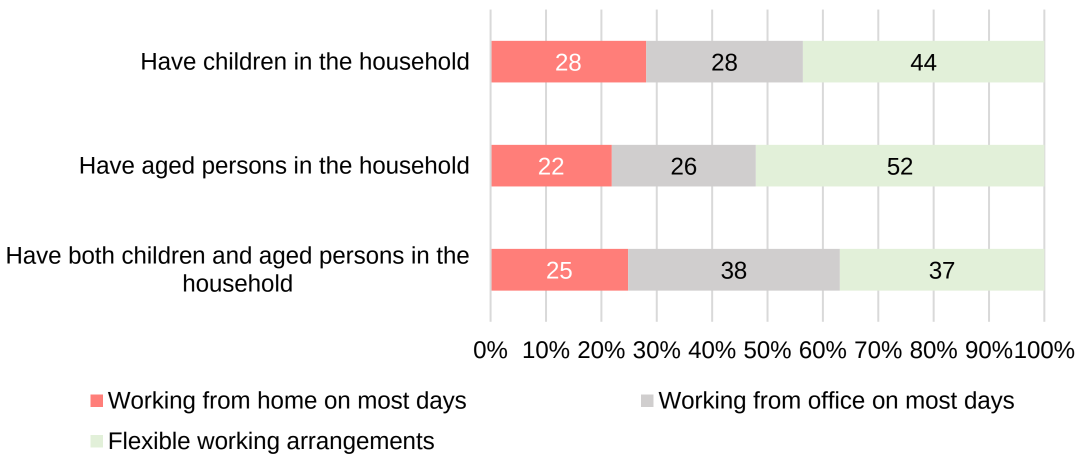
Figure 1.4 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore? (%)



Among respondents with dependants at home (i.e., have children aged 12 and below and/or have aged persons aged 60 and above at home), those with children at home were more likely to feel that flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore (44 per cent). Nonetheless, they were also more likely to feel that working from home on most days should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore (28 per cent, see Figure 1.5) as compared to those with aged persons at home (22 per cent) and those with both children and aged persons at home (25 per cent).

Respondents with aged persons at home were more likely to feel that flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore (52 per cent) as compared to those with children or those with both children and aged persons at home. They may prefer the flexibility to arrange their work schedule around caregiving needs of the aged persons. There were more respondents with both children and aged persons at home who feel that working from office on most days should be the new norm for workplaces (38 per cent) as compared to respondents with children or respondents with aged persons at home. One possible reason for this could be that aged persons at home might serve as a helpful resource for some families in the care of their children when respondents go to work.

Figure 1.5 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, by type of dependents, W44-W47 (among those with dependents, %)



A binary logistic regression was conducted to determine the profile of respondents who feel that working from home on most days or flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore[7]. The outcome variable and the list of predictor variables used for this analysis can be found in Table 1.1.

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[7] The regression was conducted to determine the profile of respondents who would prefer new ways of work over the traditional way of work. Hence, the outcome variable was recoded into two categories: 1) Working from office on most days and 2) Working from home on most days or flexible working arrangements.

Table 1.1: List of predictor variables

Outcome variable: **Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?**	
Predictor variables	**Description**
Age	• 21 to 29 • 30 to 39 • 40 to 49 • 50 to 59 • 60 and above
Education	• Secondary and below • Post-secondary • Degree and above
Salary	• Below $3,000 • $3,000 to $5,999 • $5,999 and above
Gender	• Female • Male
Current workplace arrangement	• I have to return to my workplace on most days • I have to work from home most or all of the time
Confidence in engaging in activities in new normal while virus is in our midst	• Composite scale of a series of variables measuring respondents' level of confidence in carrying out activities in the new normal while the virus is still in our midst • A higher score would mean that the respondent has greater confidence • See Appendix B for full list of variables
Psychological well-being	• Composite scale of a series of variables measuring respondents' level of psychological well-being represented by their recent experiences • A higher score would mean that the respondent has better psychological well-being • See Appendix B for full list of variables

Respondents' current work arrangement, confidence in engaging in activities in the new normal while the virus is circulating, psychological well-being and gender were significant predictors in determining who would feel that working from home on most days or flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore.

The interest among respondents who were already currently working at home most or all of the time for this new norm might be due to their current experience that their work can be done away from the office. These respondents have thus adjusted to the new way of working.

Respondents who had lower confidence in engaging in activities in the new normal because of the virus were more open to flexible arrangements as they sought to limit their exposure to possible infection, which is more likely if they are back in the office every day.

The correlation between better psychological well-being and preference for working from home on most days and flexible working arrangements is less intuitive. Perhaps this group represents those who have adapted to the demands of the pandemic and are open to new possibilities. Alternatively, this correlation may also imply that those with poorer psychological well-being may prefer to work from the office because they look forward to the stability of a former norm, and perhaps feel better supported with social connections with colleagues.

The gendered preferences for work arrangements in the new norm possibly reflects how females continue to be burdened with the lion's share of domestic care work. Flexible work arrangements allow them to tend to the domestic needs of the household while they are at work, something which fewer men have to contend with. While having dependants did not show up as significant in our regression model, when we introduced variables distinguishing males and females by whether they had dependants, females with dependants were more likely to prefer these work arrangements. Males with dependants were comparably less likely to do so.

Table 1.2: Regression analysis for "Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?" to determine preference for working from home on most days and flexible working arrangements over working from office as new norm for workplaces in Singapore[8]

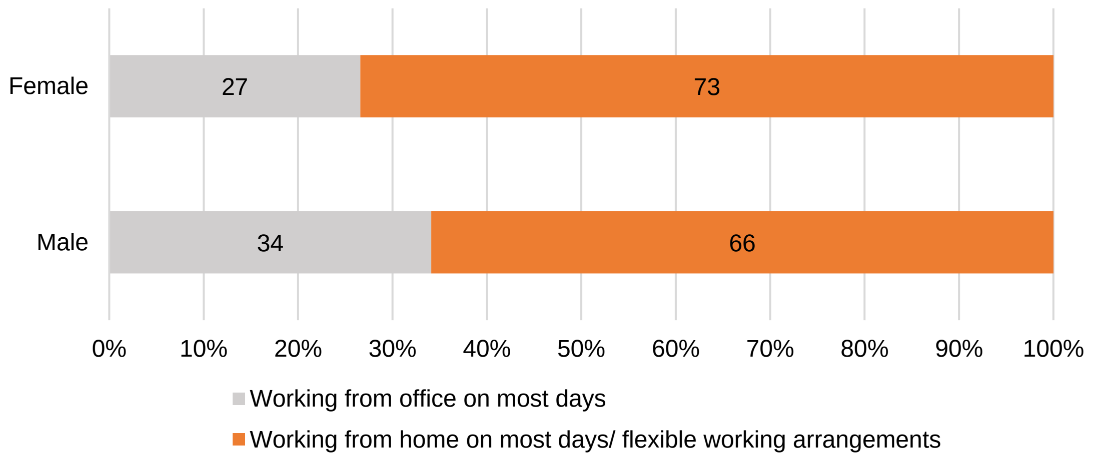
Predictor variables	Coefficient	Standard error	p-value	Odds Ratio
Age	-.055	.051	.283	.946
Education	.067	.098	.495	1.069
Salary	.087	.086	.314	1.091
Gender	-.423	.118	<.001	.655
Current workplace arrangement	1.736	.137	<.001	5.672
Confidence in engaging in activities in new normal while virus is in our midst	-.922	.315	.003	.398
Psychological well-being	.778	.262	.003	2.176
Constant	-1.000	.406	.014	.368

[8] Data from later waves (W48-W49) were not included in the regressions as they were inconclusive. As the same group of respondents in a wave would be surveyed after 4 waves, W44-W47 consists of the full set of unique panel respondents.

To illustrate the results of the regression, we conducted the following cross-tabulations:

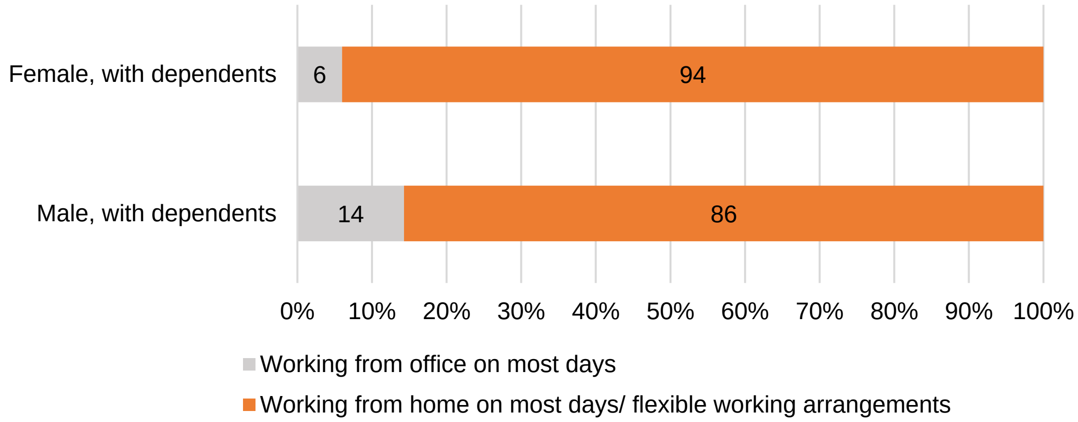
Around 73 per cent of female respondents felt that working from home on most days or flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore, as compared to around 66 per cent of male respondents (see Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, by gender, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



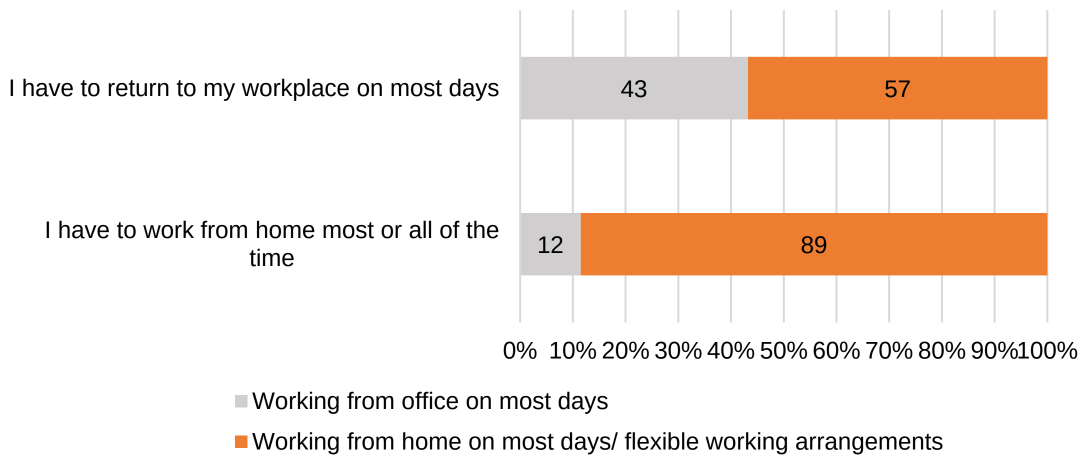
Among those who currently work from home and have dependants, female respondents were more likely to prefer working from home on most days, or to have flexible working arrangements, as compared to male respondents. Around 94 per cent of female respondents with dependants preferred working from home on most days or having flexible working arrangements as compared to 86 per cent of male respondents with dependants (see Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, by gender, W44-W47 (among the employed, currently work from home most or all of the time and have dependents, %)



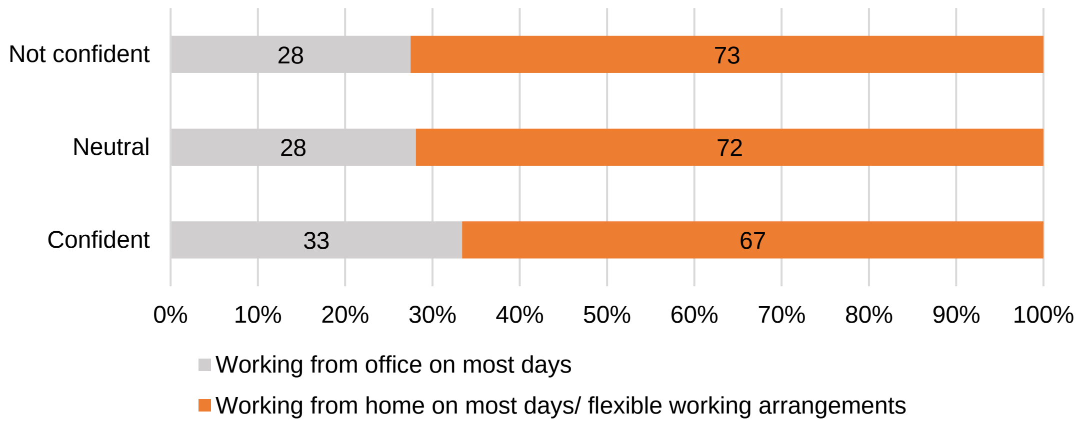
Around 89 per cent of respondents who currently work from home most or all of the time felt that working from home on most days or flexible working arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore (see Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, by current workplace arrangement, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



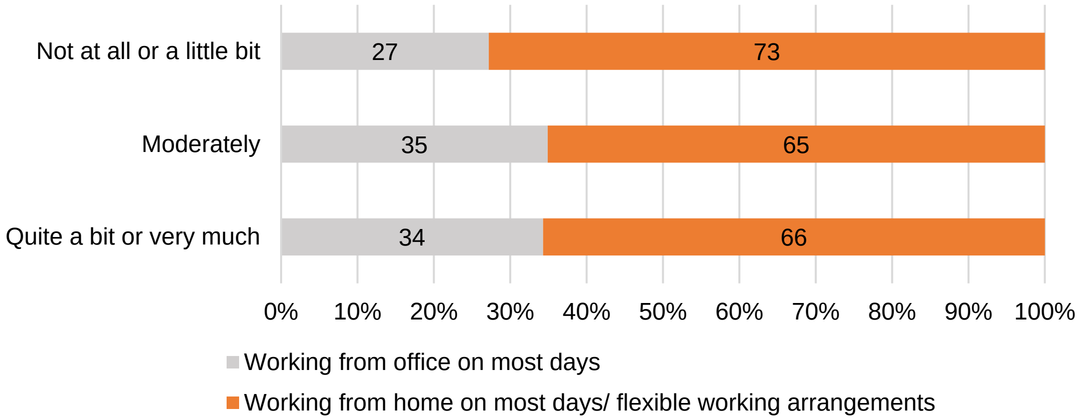
Around 73 per cent of respondents who were not confident of taking public transport in the new normal while the virus in still in our midst felt that working from home on most days or flexible working arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore. This is compared to 67 per cent of those who were confident of taking public transport (see Figure 1.9). Comfort with taking public transport is one of several items we used to create a composite variable in the regression model to denote comfort with living with the virus.

Figure 1.9 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, by confidence in taking public transport while virus is still in our midst, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



Around 73 per cent of respondents who had not felt or had felt a little bit irritable or had anger outbursts recently felt that working from home on most days or flexible working arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore. This is compared to 65 to 66 per cent of those who had at least felt moderately irritable or had anger outbursts recently (see Figure 1.10). The degree of irritability and experiencing anger outbursts is one of several items we used to create a composite variable in the regression model to denote psychological well-being.

Figure 1.10 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, by whether respondents had felt irritable or had anger outbursts recently, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



We also found that respondents who were not worried that in the next six months their friendships would be strained or they would lose their psychological well-being in the next six months (Figures 1.11 and 1.12) were more likely to feel that working from home or flexible working arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces. These statistical relationships suggest that those who feared waning levels of psychological well-being or friendship ties, may prefer working from the office to have social interactions and connections. Respondents who have not been experiencing family-related problems recently were also more disposed to new flexible working arrangements (Figure 1.13). We infer that those who may have had family related problems would prefer to be at office to get away from some of the strain at home.

Figure 1.11 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, by whether respondents were worried that their friendships would be strained in the next six months, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)

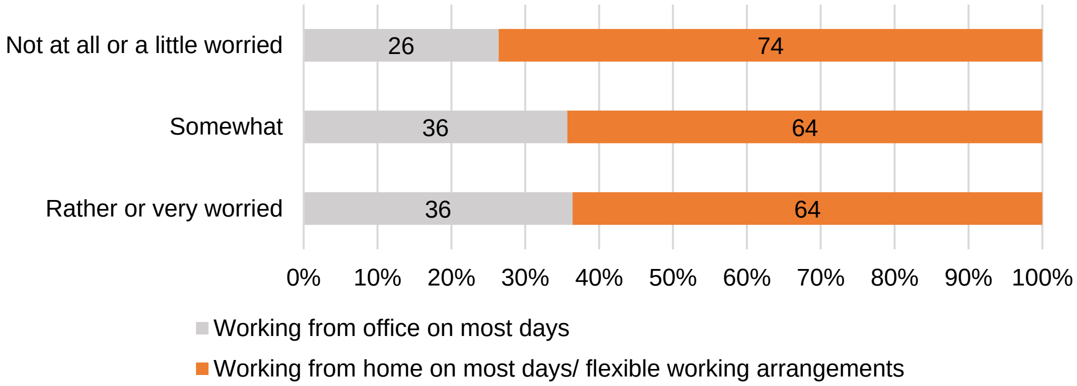


Figure 1.12 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, by whether respondents were worried that they would lose their psychological well-being in the next six months, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)

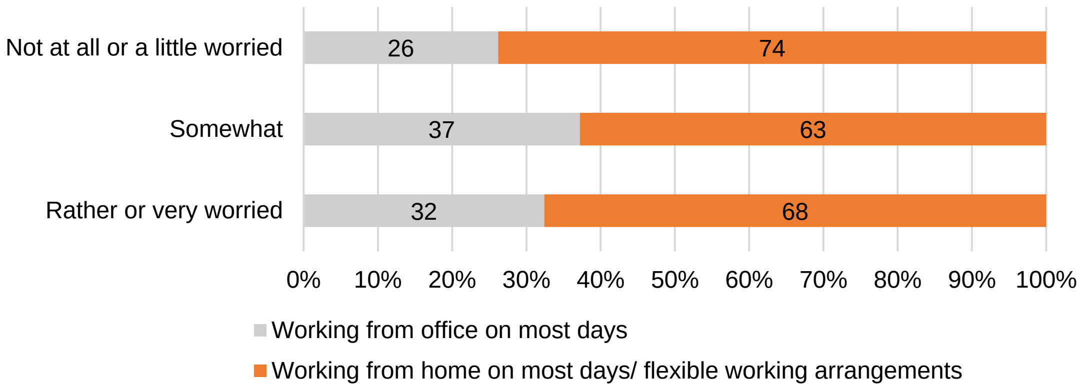
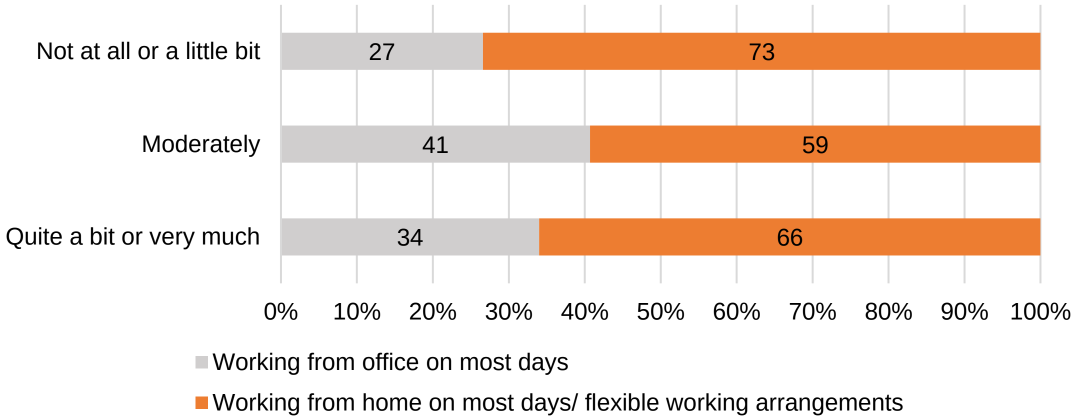


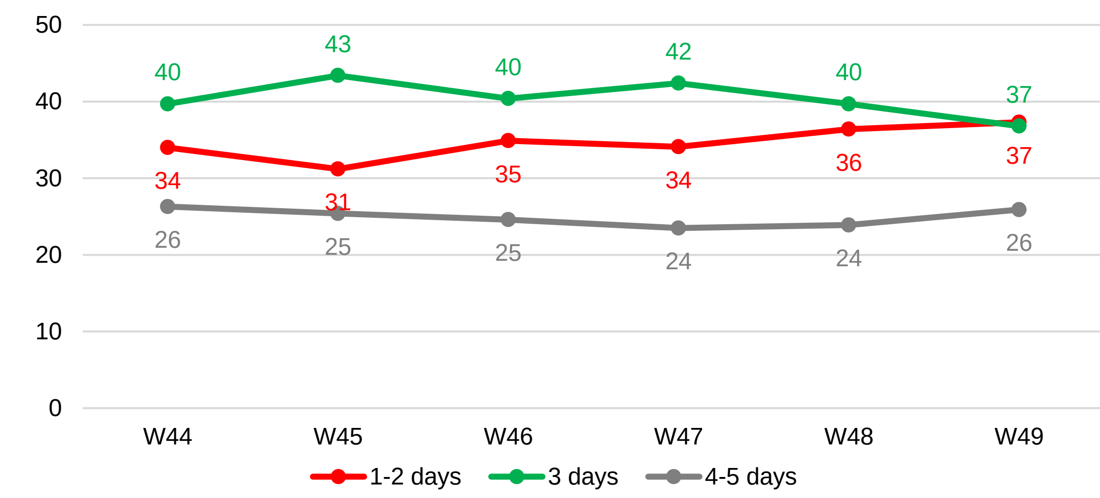
Figure 1.13 Which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, by the extent to which respondents have experienced family related problems recently, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



1.3 Preference on number of days employees should be allowed to work from home every week

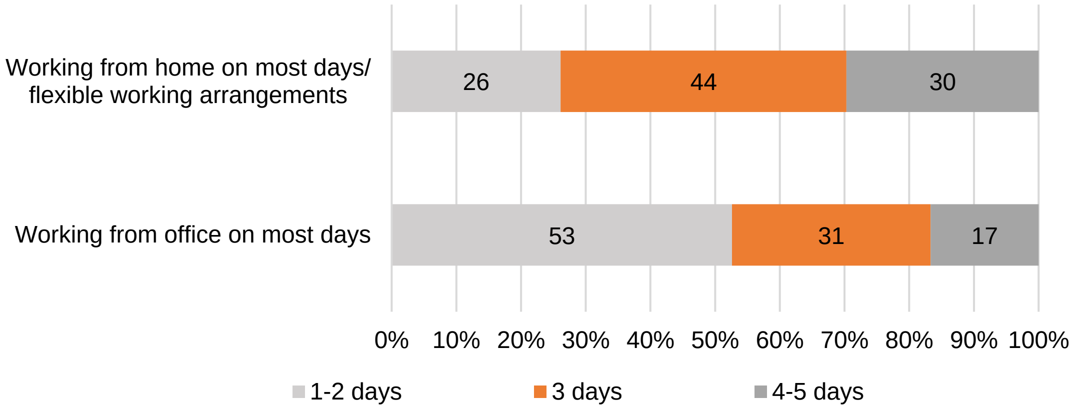
Substantial number of respondents were keen to be allowed the opportunity to work from home for more days. In W44 (28 December 2021 - 8 January 2022) to W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022), around four in 10 (37 to 43 per cent) felt that employees should be allowed to work from home three days a week. During the same period, 31 to 37 per cent felt that employees should be allowed to work from home one to two days a week, while 24 to 26 per cent felt that employees should be allowed to work from home four to five days a week (see Figure 1.14).

Figure 1.14 How many days do you think employees should be allowed to work from home every week?, W44-W49 (%)



Respondents who felt that working from home on most days or flexible work arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces were more likely to feel that employees should be allowed to work from home for more days every week. Around 30 per cent of those who subscribed to this belief stated that employees should be allowed to work from home four to five days every week, as compared to 17 per cent of those who felt that working from office on most days should be the norm for workplaces (see Figure 1.15).

Figure 1.15 How many days do you think employees should be allowed to work from home every week?, by which workplace arrangement do you feel should be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore?, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)

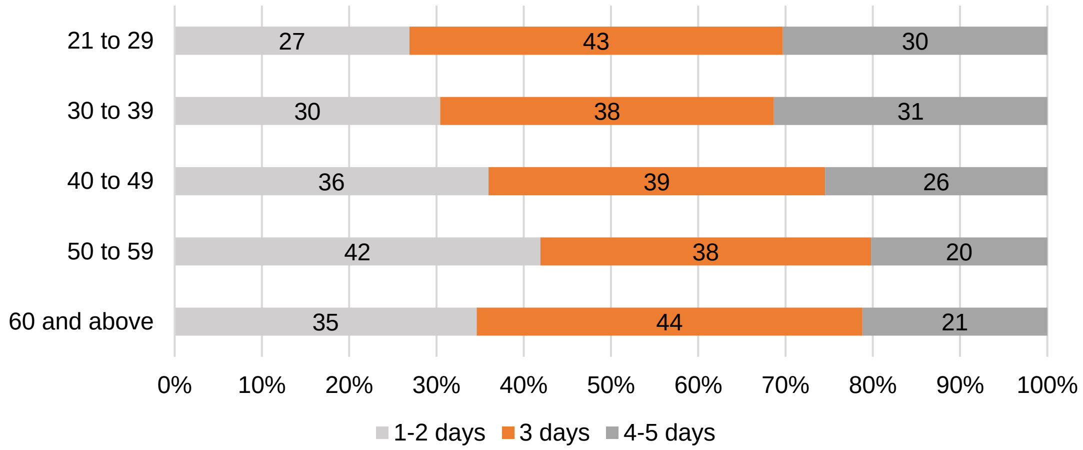


Respondents who were younger, had younger children, and respondents who currently work from home most or all of the time were likely to feel that employees should be allowed to work from home for more days every week.

The following cross-tabulations illustrate this:

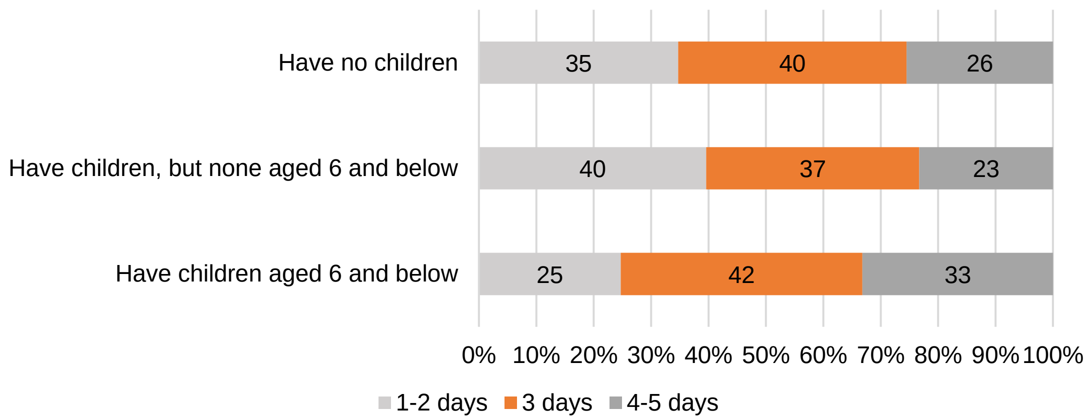
Around 30 to 31 per cent of respondents aged 21 to 39 felt that employees should be allowed to work from home four to five days every week, while 20 to 21 per cent of respondents aged 50 and above felt the same way (see Figure 1.16).

Figure 1.16: How many days do you think employees should be allowed to work from home every week?, by age, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



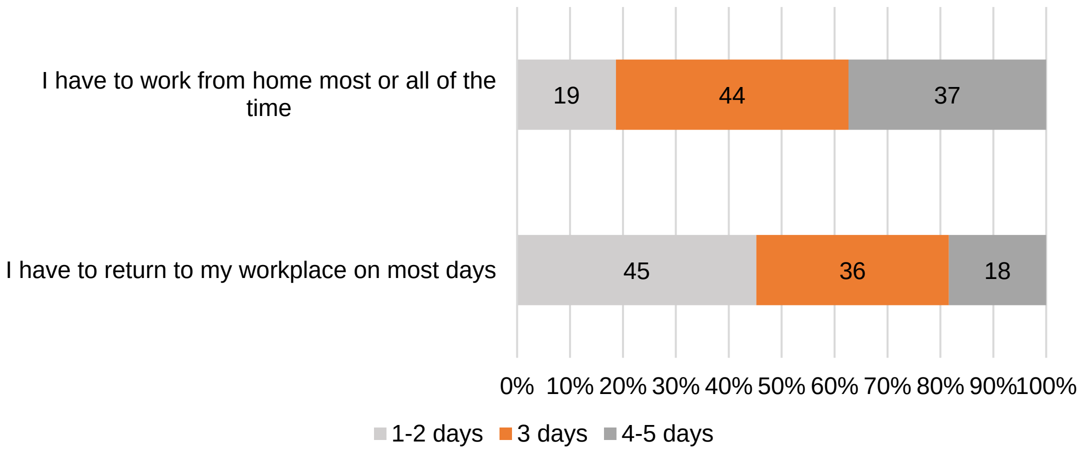
Around 33 per cent of respondents who had children aged six and below felt that employees should be allowed to work from home four to five days every week, as compared to 26 per cent of those with no children and 23 per cent of those with older children who felt the same way (see Figure 1.17).

Figure 1.17: How many days do you think employees should be allowed to work from home every week?, by whether respondents have young children, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



Around 37 per cent of respondents who have to work from home most or all of the time felt that employees should be allowed to work from home 4 to 5 days every week, as compared to 18 per cent of those who had to return to their workplace on most days (see Figure 1.18).

Figure 1.18: How many days do you think employees should be allowed to work from home every week?, by current workplace arrangement, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



1.4 Current workplace arrangement and psychological well-being

Workers have better levels of psychological well-being when their current workplace arrangement matches their preferred work arrangements. Those with young children had lower levels of well-being if they had to return to office on most days.

We sought to find out if an interaction effect between respondents' current work arrangement and whether they have young children was present in predicting respondent's psychological well-being.[9] The dependent variable, psychological

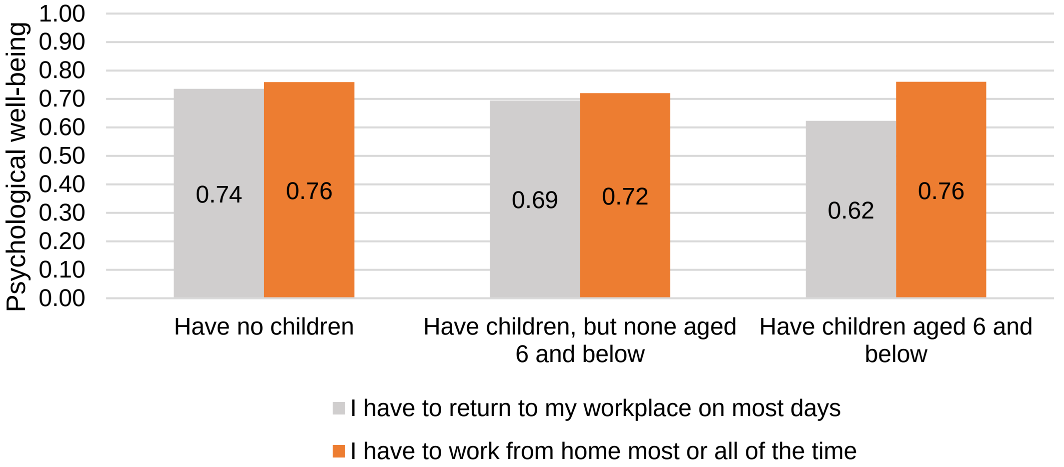
[9] Data from later waves (W48-W49) were not included in the model as they were inconclusive. As the same group of respondents in a wave would be surveyed after 4 waves, W44-W47 consists of the full set of unique panel respondents.

well-being, is a composite scale constructed with a series of questions on psychological well-being.[10] The scores on the scale for psychological well-being range from 0 to 1, where a score closer to 1 represents better psychological well-being. The interaction effect was significant for respondents who had children aged six and below. The results show that among respondents who have children aged six and below, those who had to return to the workplace on most days would experience lower psychological well-being (mean = 0.62) as compared to those who worked from home on most days (mean = 0.76), $p < .001$ (see Figure 1.19).

This result supports ongoing conversations about the need for employers to adopt progressive practices to provide flexibility for working parents, who have had to manage both work and family commitments during the pandemic. Working parents with young children may appreciate having the flexibility to attend to family needs as and when possible. Having to return to the office on most days would take away some of that flexibility.

[10] Composite scale computed to represent psychological well-being. A score close to 0 represents poorer psychological well-being, while a score close to 1 represents better psychological well-being. For list of variables used, please refer to Annex A.

Figure 1.19: Interaction effect between respondents' current work arrangement and whether they have young children on psychological well-being, W44-W47 (mean score)



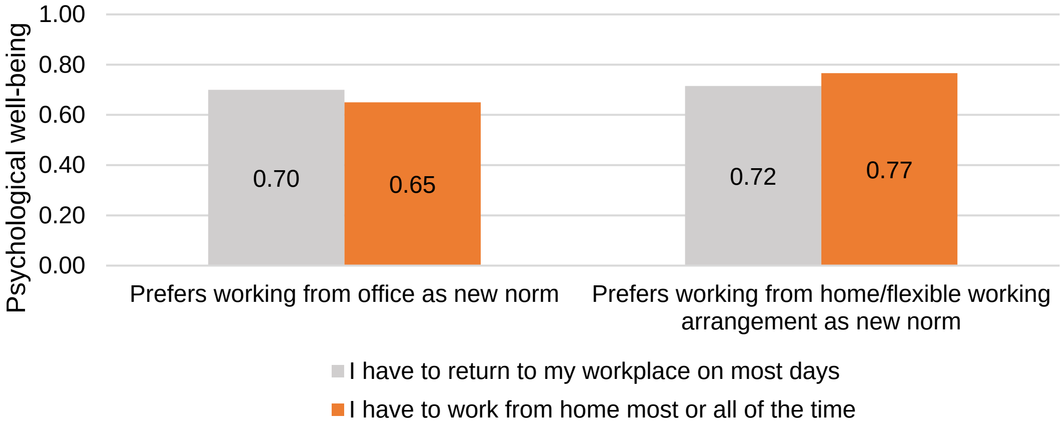
*Age, education and salary were included in the model as controls.

We also examined if congruence between respondents' current workplace arrangement and their preferred new norm for workplaces would predict their psychological well-being, by examining how respondents' psychological well-being may be influenced by the match between their current workplace arrangement and their preferred new norm for workplaces. Results show that there was a significant interaction effect between respondents' current workplace arrangement and their preferred new norm for workplaces on respondents' psychological well-being. [11] Respondents had better psychological well-being when their current work arrangement matched their preferred new norm for workplaces. On the other hand, respondents who had a mismatch between their current work arrangement and preferred new norm for workplace would have poorer psychological well-being.

[11] Data from later waves (W48-W49) were not included in the regressions as they were inconclusive. As the same group of respondents in a wave would be surveyed after 4 waves, W44-W47 consists of the full set of unique panel respondents.

Specifically, respondents who have to return to their workplace on most days and preferred working from office as the norm for workplace in Singapore had better psychological well-being (mean = .70) as compared to those who worked from home on most days but preferred working from office as the norm for workplace in Singapore (mean = 0.65). Respondents who currently work from home on most days and preferred working from home or flexible working arrangements as the new norm for workplaces in Singapore (mean = 0.77) had better well-being as compared to those who currently had to return to their workplace on most days but preferred working from home on most days as the new norm for workplaces in Singapore (mean = 0.72) (see Figure 1.20).

Figure 1.20: Interaction effect between respondents' current work arrangement and their preferred new norm for workplaces on psychological well-being, W44-W47 (mean score)

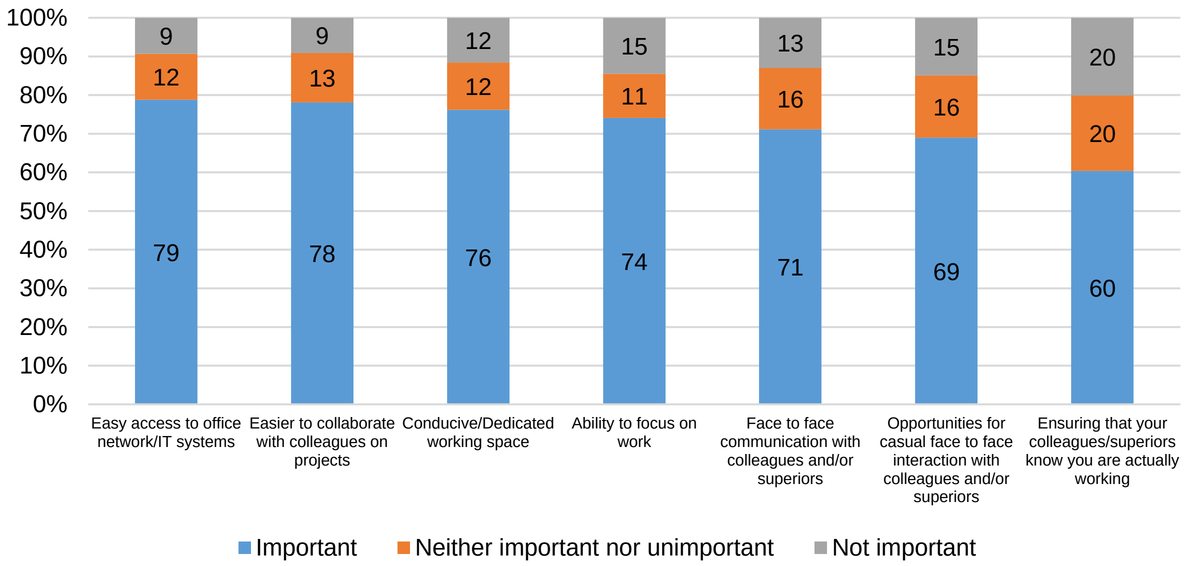


*Age, education and salary were included in the model as controls.

1.5 Reasons why respondents want to work from office or work from home

The top three reasons why respondents would prefer to work from office rather than at home are: easy access to office network or IT systems (79 per cent), ease of collaborating with colleagues on projects (78 per cent) and conducive or dedicated working space (76 per cent).

Figure 1.21: How important are each of the following reasons as to why you may want to work from the office rather than at home?, W44-W47 (Among the employed, %)



When asked about the reasons why they would want to work from home rather than the office, more than eight in 10 respondents felt that reduced chances of getting COVID-19 (87 per cent), greater flexibility in incorporating personal life needs with work schedules (83 per cent) and the ability to attend to family needs (81 per cent) were important reasons.

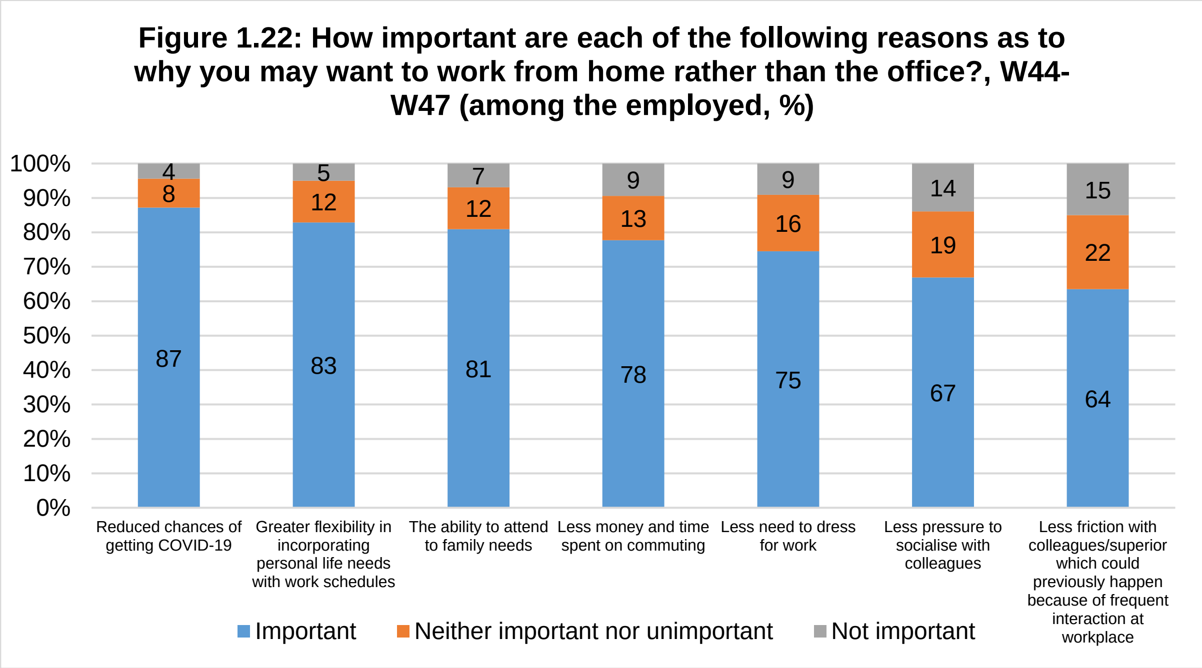


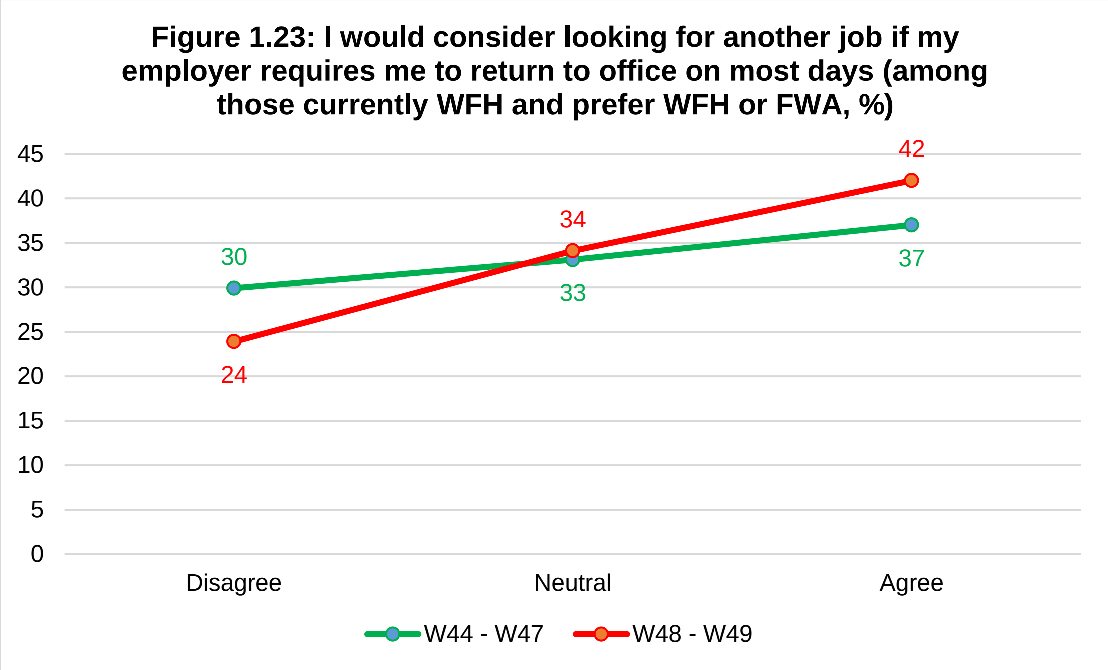
Figure 1.22: How important are each of the following reasons as to why you may want to work from home rather than the office?, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
4
8
87
5
12
83
7
12
81
9
13
78
9
16
75
14
19
67
15
22
64
Reduced chances of getting COVID-19
Greater flexibility in incorporating personal life needs with work schedules
The ability to attend to family needs
Less money and time spent on commuting
Less need to dress for work
Less pressure to socialise with colleagues
Less friction with colleagues/superior which could previously happen because of frequent interaction at workplace
Important
Neither important nor unimportant
Not important

1.6 Sentiments on whether one would consider looking for another job if required to return to office on most days

Following the earlier finding that respondents had greater psychological well-being when their work arrangement was congruent with their preferences, those who are required to return to the office when their preference was for greater flexibility are more likely to want to find new employment.

In W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022) to W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022), among respondents who were currently working from home most or all of the time and felt that working from home (WFH) on most days or flexible work arrangements (FWA) should be the new norm for workplaces, 37 per cent would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days.

In W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022) to W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022), this proportion increased, with 42 per cent of the respondents indicating that they would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days.



An ordinal regression was conducted to determine which respondents would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days. The outcome variable and the list of predictor variables used for this analysis can be found in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: List of predictor variables

Outcome variable: **I would consider looking for another job if my employer requires me to return to office on most days**	
Predictor variables	**Description**
Age	• 21 to 29 • 30 to 39 • 40 to 49 • 50 to 59 • 60 and above
Education	• Secondary and below • Post-secondary • Degree and above
Salary	• Below $3,000 • $3,000 to $5,999 • $5,999 and above
Have young children	• Have children aged 6 and below

	• Have children, but none aged 6 and below • Have no children
Confidence in engaging in activities in new normal while virus is in our midst	• Composite scale of a series of variables measuring respondents' level of confidence in carrying out activities in the new normal while the virus is still in our midst • A higher score would mean that the respondent has greater confidence • See Appendix B for full list of variables
Psychological well-being	• Composite scale of a series of variables measuring respondents' level of psychological well-being represented by their recent experiences • A higher score would mean that the respondent has better psychological well-being • See Appendix B for full list of variables
COVID-19 has changed my work aspirations	• No • Yes
Believes the job market will be better in the next six months to come	• Believes that the job market will be bad or the same in the next six months • Believes that the job market will be better in the next six months
Finds that lack of social interaction with colleagues has been a challenge while working from home in the past year	• No • Yes

Among respondents who were working from home and preferred working from home or flexible working arrangement as the new norm in workplaces, ordinal regression analysis showed that respondents who had less confidence in engaging in activities in the new normal while the virus is still in our midst, and respondents who had poorer psychological well-being, were more likely to consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to the office on most days. This could suggest that respondents who had less confidence in engaging in activities would want to avoid returning to the office to prevent themselves from being subjected to higher risk of getting infected by COVID-19, and would consider changing jobs to minimise the risk.

Respondents who have poorer psychological well-being currently may also want to avoid potential stressors associated with returning to the office and so may prefer to find new employment if they are pressured to return to the office.

We posit that respondents who felt that COVID-19 has changed their work aspirations were also likely to consider looking for another job if their employer requires them to return to office on most days, possibly as the pandemic has caused many to re-evaluate their career and life goals. Furthermore, many of those who have been working from home during the pandemic would have enjoyed the flexibility to manage their time and would like to continue having this flexibility.

Respondents who believe that the job market will be better in the next six months may feel that it would be easier to find another job if they wish to do so, while those who did not find the lack of social interaction with colleagues to be a challenge may feel that being required to return to office was not aligned with their current needs.

Table 1.4: Regression analysis for "I would consider looking for another job if my employer requires me to return to office on most days."[12]

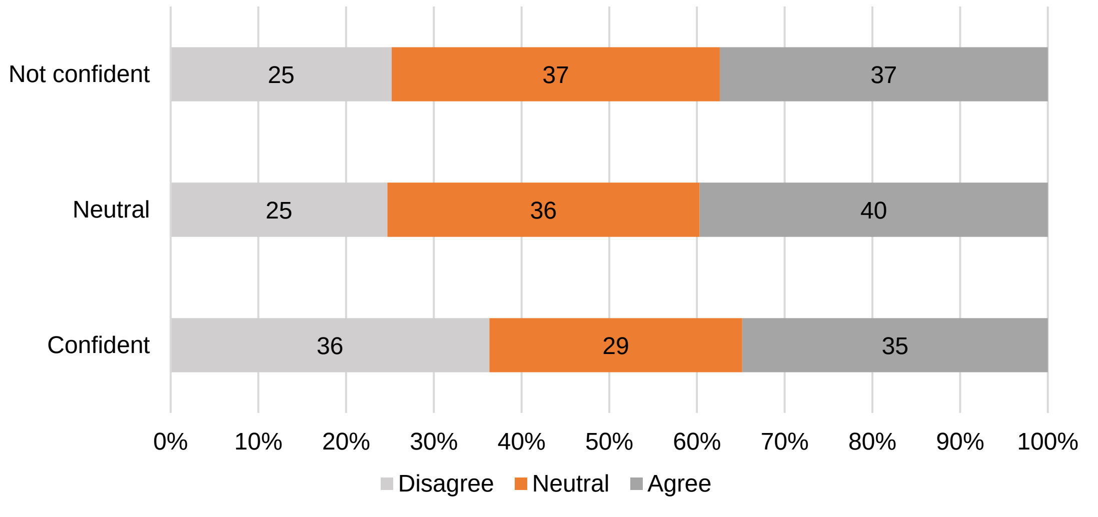
Predictor variables	Coefficient	Standard error	p-value	Odds Ratio
Age	-.059	.048	.220	0.943
Education	.143	.096	.138	1.154
Salary	.046	.082	.575	1.047
Have young children				
Have children aged 6 and below	-.061	.158	.698	0.941
Have children, but none aged 6 and below	.184	.139	.185	1.202
Reference group: Have no children				
Confidence in engaging in activities in new normal while virus is in our midst	-.714	.291	.014	0.490
Psychological well-being	-.842	.287	.003	0.431
COVID-19 has changed my work aspirations	.460	.112	<.001	1.584
Believes the job market will be better in the next six months to come	.382	.113	<.001	1.465
Finds that lack of social interaction with colleagues has been a challenge while working from home in the past year	-.531	.108	<.001	0.588

[12] Data from later waves (W48-W49) were not included in the regressions as they were inconclusive. As the same group of respondents in a wave would be surveyed after four waves, W44-W47 consists of the full set of unique panel respondents.

To illustrate the regression results, we conducted the following cross-tabulations:

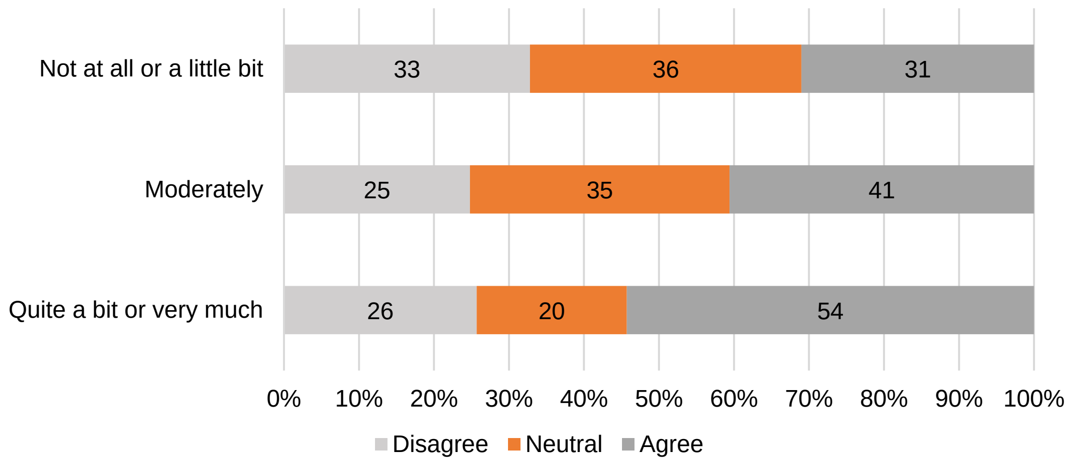
Around 36 per cent of respondents who were confident in taking public transport in the new normal while the virus is in our midst would not consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days. This is compared to 25 per cent of those who were not confident in taking public transport (see Figure 1.24). Comfort with taking public transport is one of the items we used to denote comfort with living with the virus.

Figure 1.24: I would consider looking for another job if my employer requires me to return to office on most days, by confidence in taking public transport in the new normal, W44-W47 (among those currently WFH and prefer WFH or FWA, %)



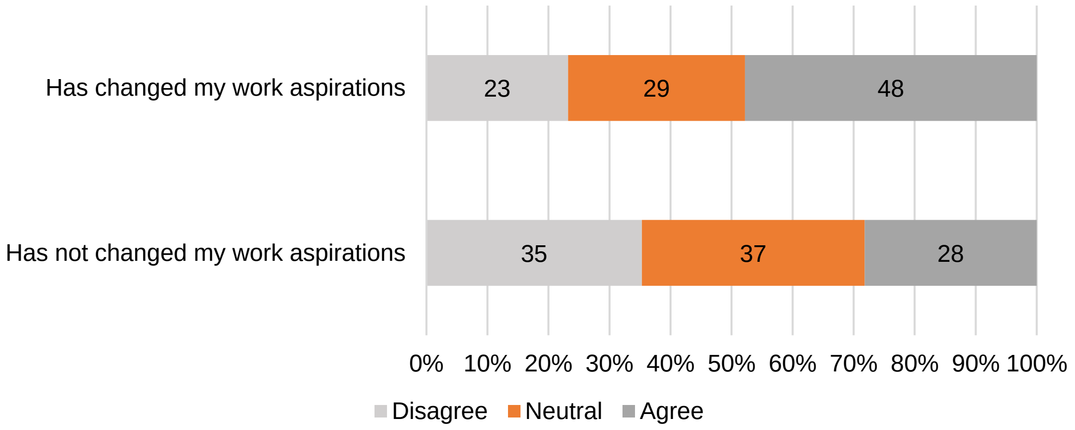
Around 54 per cent of respondents who experienced quite a bit or a lot of repeated and disturbing thoughts or dreams recently about what is happening would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days. This is compared to 31 per cent of respondents who did not experience or had experienced a bit of repeated and disturbing thoughts or dreams recently about what is happening (see Figure 1.25). The frequency of such dreams is one of the items we used to denote psychological well-being.

Figure 1.25: I would consider looking for another job if my employer requires me to return to office on most days, by whether respondents have repeated & disturbing thoughts/dreams recently, W44-W47 (among those currently WFH and prefer WFH or FWA, %)



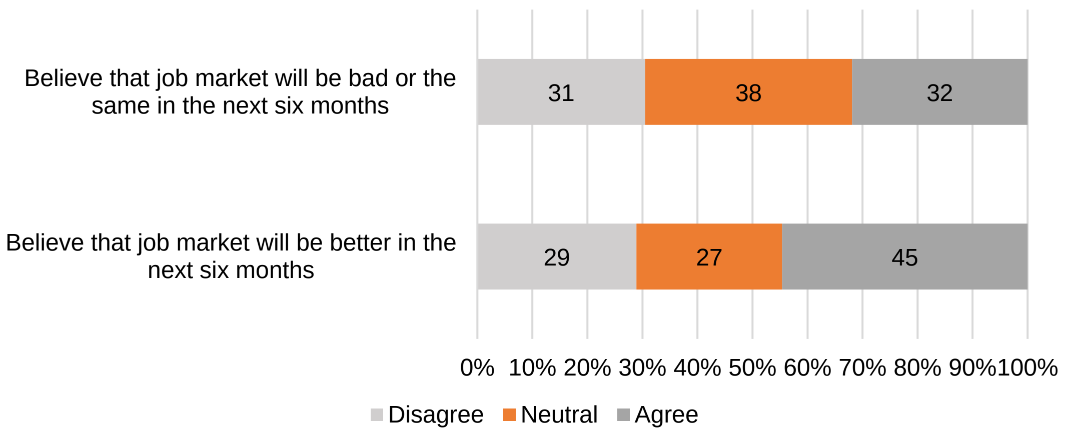
Around 48 per cent of respondents whose work aspirations have changed as a result of the pandemic would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days, while around 28 per cent of respondents whose work aspirations have not changed would consider looking for another job (see Figure 1.26).

Figure 1.26: I would consider looking for another job if my employer requires me to return to office on most days, by COVID-19 pandemic has changed my work aspirations, W44-W47 (among those currently WFH and prefer WFH or FWA, %)



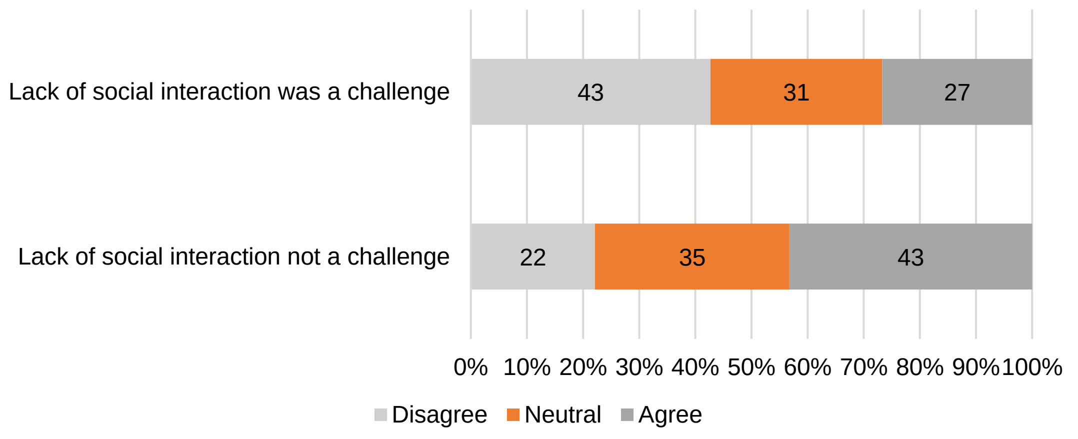
Around 45 per cent of respondents who believed that the job market will be better in the next six months would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days, while around 32 per cent of respondents who believed that the job market will be bad or the same in the next six months would consider looking for another job (see Figure 1.27).

Figure 1.27: I would consider looking for another job if my employer requires me to return to office on most days, by perception of job market outlook, W44-W47 (among those currently WFH and prefer WFH or FWA, %)



Around 43 per cent of respondents who felt that lack of social interaction was not a challenge while working from home in the past year would consider looking for another job if their employer required them to return to office on most days, as compared to 27 per cent of respondents who felt that the lack of social interaction was a challenge (see Figure 1.28).

Figure 1.28: I would consider looking for another job if my employer requires me to return to office on most days, by lack of social interaction with colleagues as challenge while working from home, W44-W47 (among those currently WFH and prefer WFH or FWA



1.7 Sentiments on whether one enjoys working from home or is productive working from home

Around eight in 10 of the respondents who work from home most or all the time enjoyed working from home. About the same proportion felt that they were productive working and/or learning from home (see Figures 1.29 and 1.30). The proportions who have a positive appraisal of working from home have increased over the last two waves[13].

Figure 1.29: I enjoy working from home (Among those who work from home most or all of the time, %)

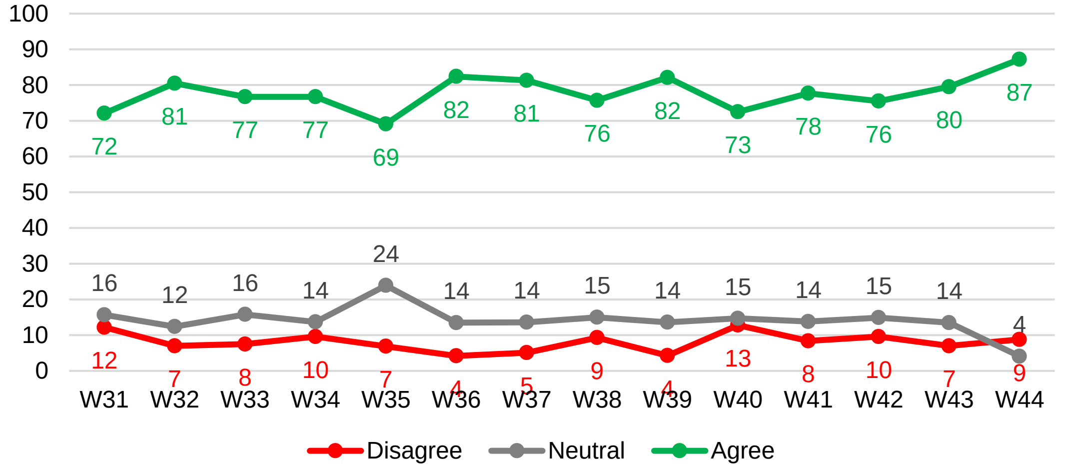
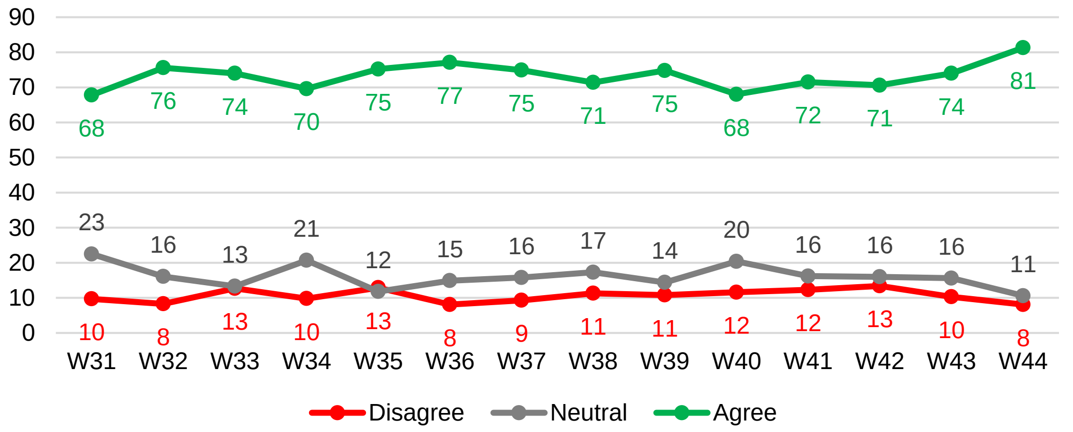


Figure 1.30: I am productive working and/or learning from home (Among those who work from home most or all of the time, %)



[13] Questions were not asked after W44.

1.8 Sentiments on whether one feels pressured to return to the office on most days

Between 37 to 42 per cent of respondents who currently worked from home most or all of the time felt pressured to return to the office on most days, though the proportion has been steadily decreasing.

Around 42 per cent of respondents who have to work from home most or all of the time in W33 (7 August 2021 – 19 August 2021) to W36 (15 September 2021 – 21 September 2021) felt pressured to return to the office on most days (see Figure 1.31). The relaxation of the Phase 2 Heightened Alert (P2HA) measures happened during W33 to W36, when people were allowed to return to the office.

The proportion of respondents who felt pressured fell slightly to 39 per cent in W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022) to W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022). This could signal a change in attitudes towards returning to the office.

In W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022) to W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022), there was a slight decrease in respondents indicating that they felt pressured to return to the office on most days (37 per cent). At the same time, however, the same proportion of respondents indicated that they did not feel pressured to return to office on most days (37 per cent), suggesting that there are still varied attitudes towards returning to the office.

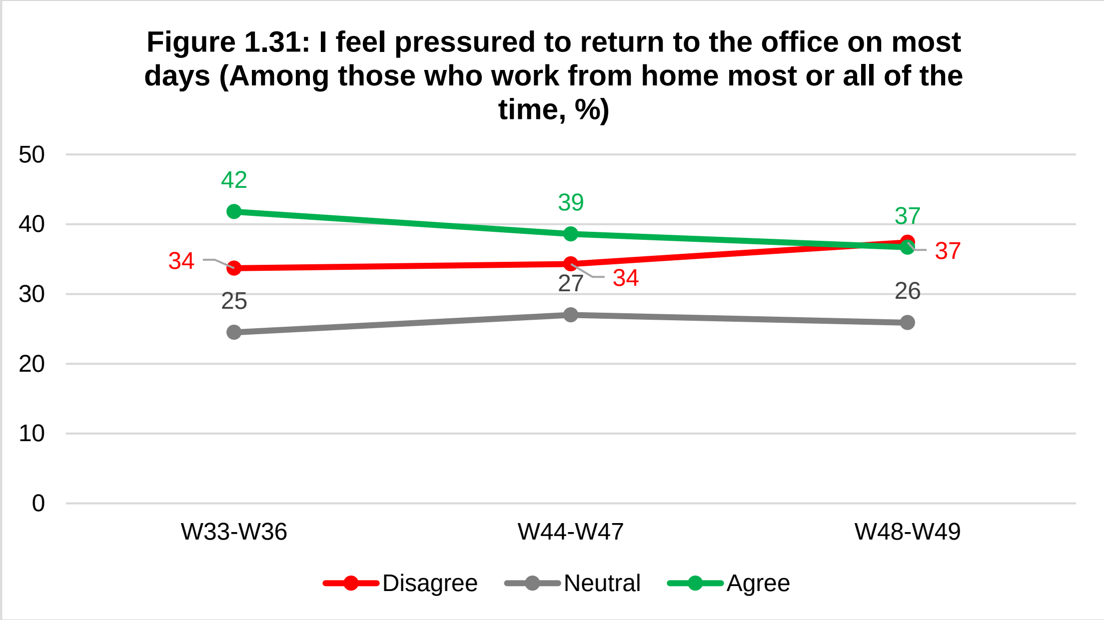


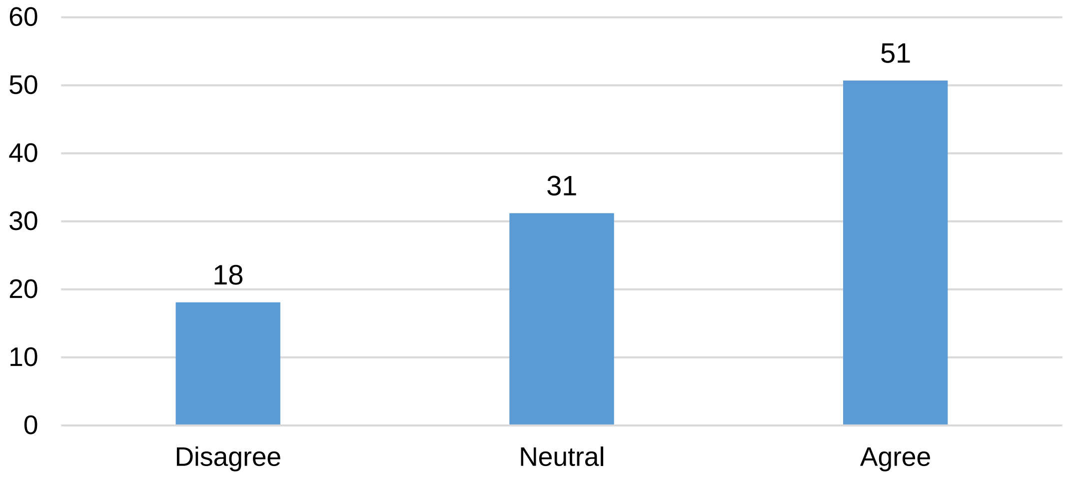
Figure 1.31: I feel pressured to return to the office on most days (Among those who work from home most or all of the time, %)
50
40
30
20
10
0
42
39
37
34
34
37
25
27
26
W33-W36
W44-W47
W48-W49
Disagree
Neutral
Agree

2 JOBS OUTLOOK AND SKILLS UPGRADING

2.1 Learning new skills during the pandemic

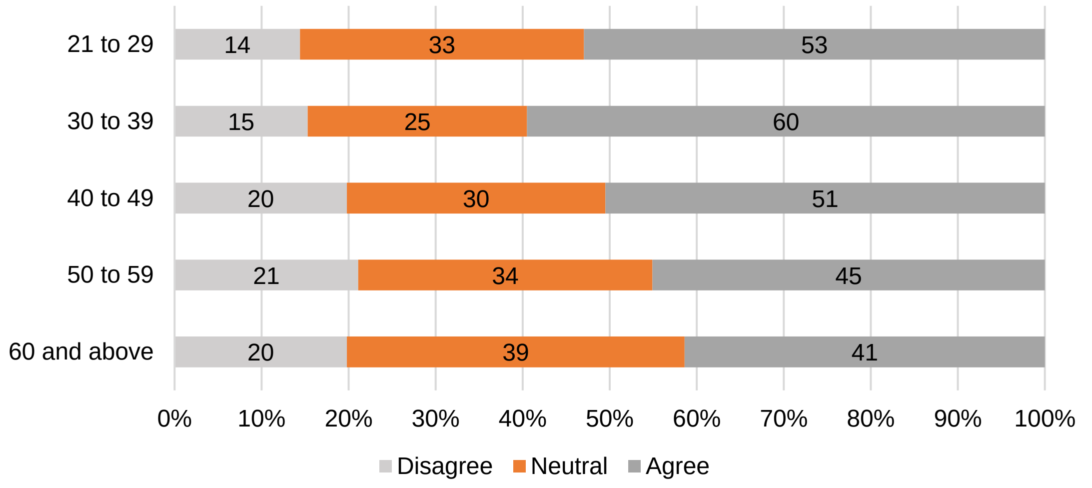
About half (51 per cent) of the respondents felt that they have learnt new skills during the pandemic which will help in their career (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: I have learnt new skills during the pandemic which will help me in my career, W44-W47 (%)



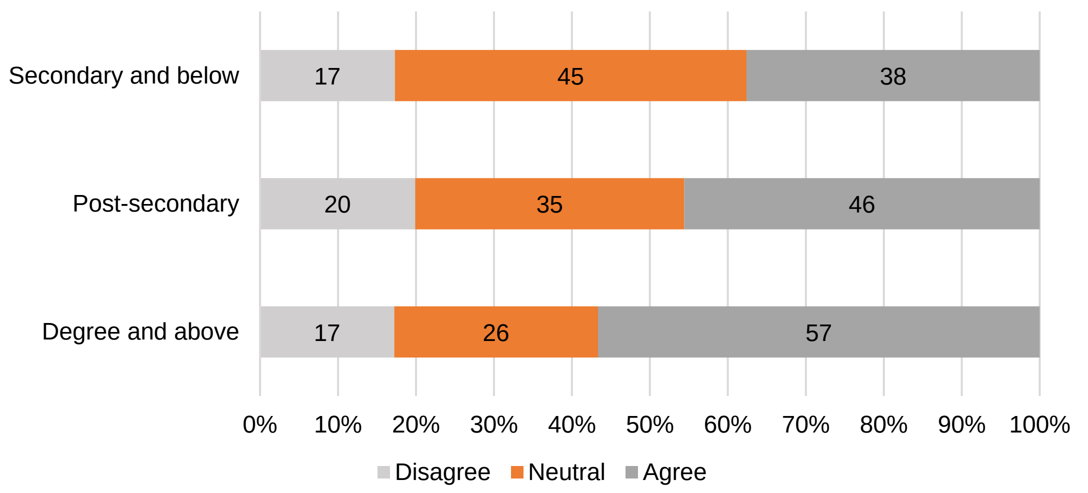
Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to feel that they have learnt new skills which will help them in their career. For example, around 60 per cent of respondents aged 30 to 39 agreed that they have learnt new skills during the pandemic which would help them in their career, as compared to 41 per cent of respondents aged 60 and above (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: I have learnt new skills during the pandemic which will help me in my career, by age group, W44-W47 (%)



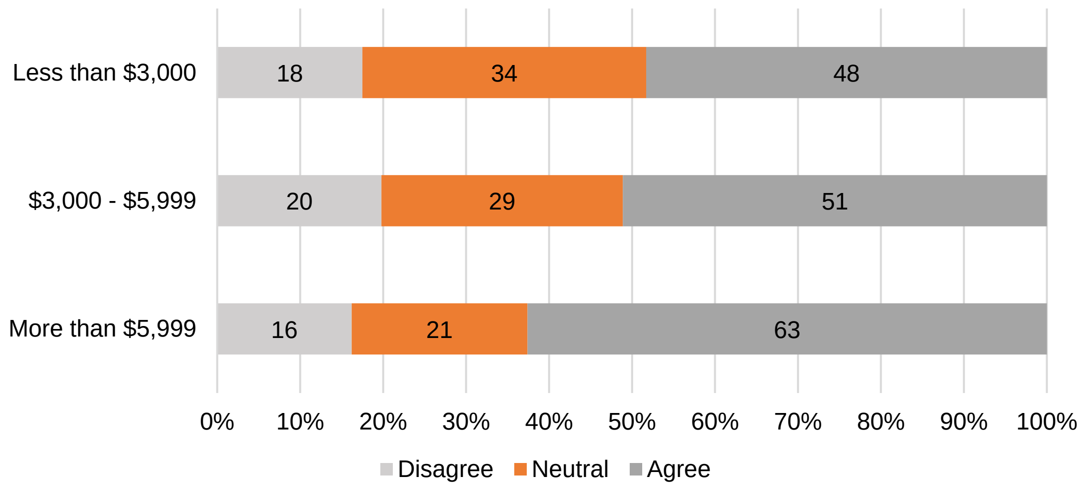
Higher educated respondents were more likely than lower educated respondents to feel that they have learnt new career-relevant skills. For example, around 57 per cent of respondents who had a degree and above agreed that they have learnt new skills during the pandemic, as compared to 38 per cent of respondents with a secondary education and below (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: I have learnt new skills during the pandemic which will help me in my career, by education, W44-W47 (%)



Respondents with higher salaries were more likely than those with lower salaries to feel that they have learnt new skills which will help them in their career. For example, around 63 per cent of respondents who earned more than $5,999 agreed that they have learnt new skills during the pandemic, as compared to 48 per cent of respondents who earned less than $3,000 (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: I have learnt new skills during the pandemic which will help me in my career, by salary, W44-W47 (%)



2.2 Confidence in being able to keep job in the next six months

More than half of the respondents polled over the waves felt confident that they would be able to keep their job in the next six months. The proportion of respondents who felt confident rose from 54 per cent in W31 (14 July 2021 – 25 July 2021) to 61 per cent in W33 (7 August 2021 – 19 August 2021) as Phase 2 Heightened Alert (P2HA) measures were relaxed in W33.

The proportion then fell to 52 per cent in W36 (15 September 2021 – 21 September 2021), when the number of COVID-19 cases was rising in

Singapore and even reached 1,000 daily cases — the highest since the pandemic first started. With the rise in cases, respondents may have been concerned about the possible implementation of stricter measures and how it would affect their livelihoods.

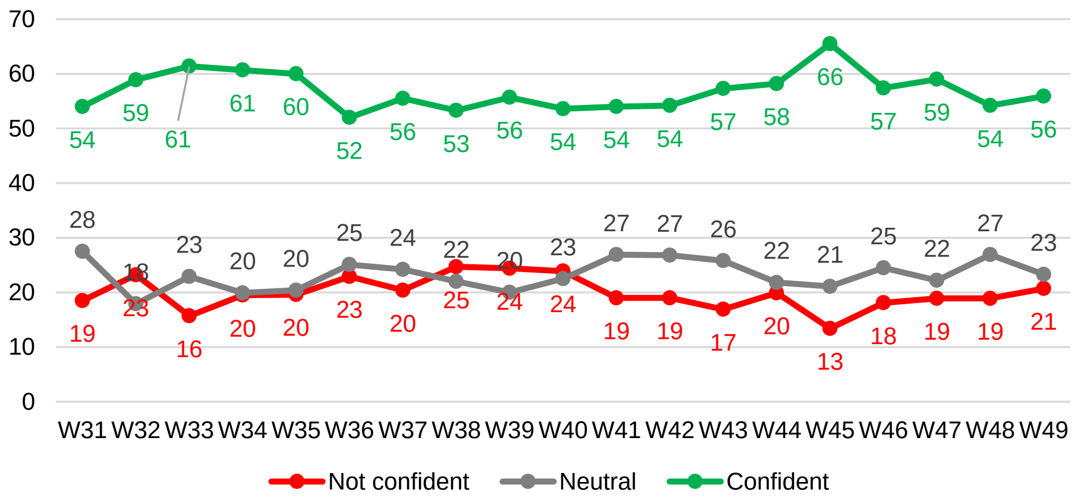
The proportion then stabilised at around 53 to 56 per cent in W37 (22 September 2021 – 29 September 2021) to W42 (19 November 2021 – 23 November 2021), during the period when Singapore was undergoing the Stabilisation Phase to cope with the rising infections, before moving to the Transition Phase at the end of W42 as cases fell.

The proportion of those who felt confident that they would be able to keep their job in the next six months rose from 57 per cent in W43 (30 November 2021 – 9 December 2021) to 66 per cent in W45 (12 January 2022 – 25 January 2022), when the number of cases were not high as the Omicron wave had not made much of an impact in Singapore.

The proportion then fell to 59 per cent in W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022) when the Omicron wave resulted in a high number of cases. However, the proportion of those who were confident that they would be able to keep their jobs was still higher than previous waves as respondents felt more confident of the future, with government assurances that there would not be stricter measures. Budget 2022 also signalled a shift towards post-pandemic growth, which may have continued to strengthen workers' confidence in the availability of jobs based on their perception of government intervention to push for economic growth.

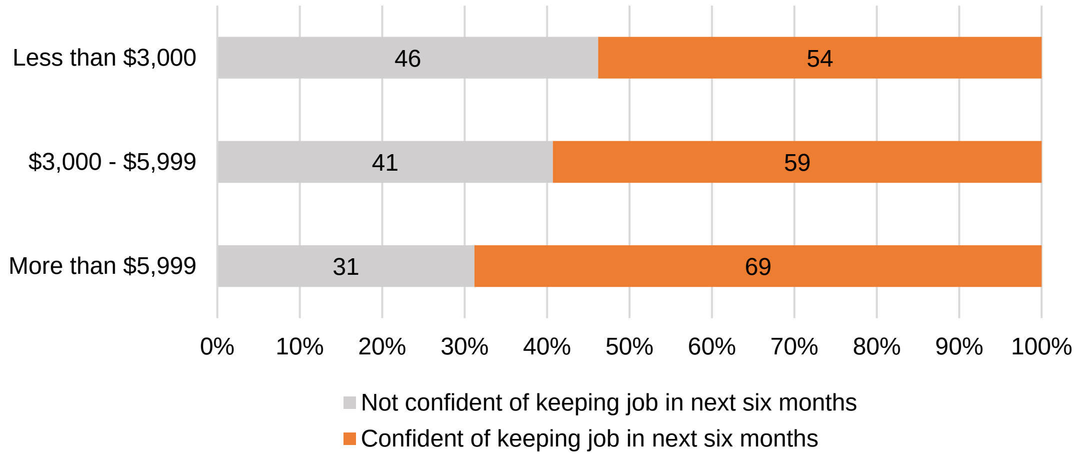
In W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022), the proportion fell to 54 per cent, but slightly increased to 56 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). Respondents may have felt more confident by W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022) after the government announced relaxation of measures at the end of W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022).

Figure 2.5: How confident are you that you will able to keep your job in the next six months? (%)



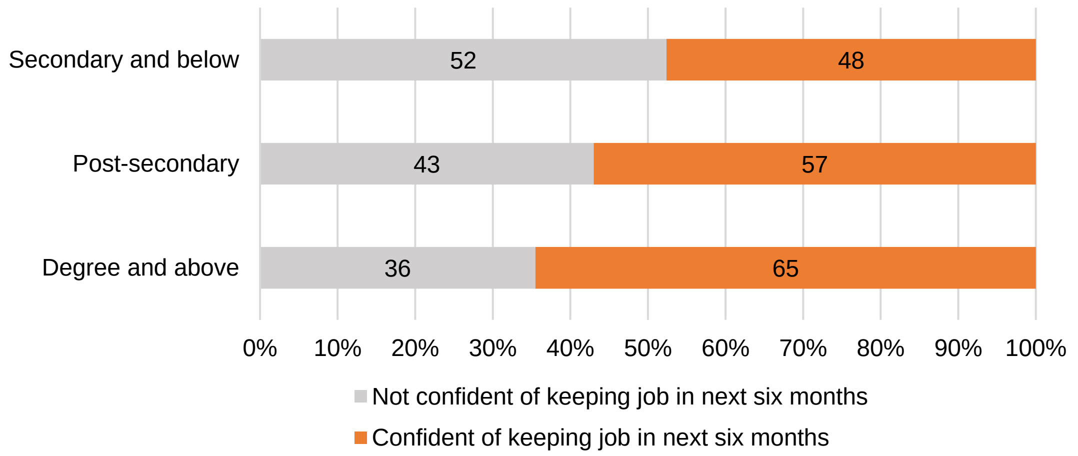
Respondents who earned more than $5,999 were more confident that they would be able to keep their job in the next six months as compared to those who earned less. Around 69 per cent of respondents who earned more than $5,999 were confident about this, as compared to 54 to 59 per cent of those who earned less than $5,999 (see Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6: How confident are you that you will able to keep your job in the next six months?, by salary, W44-W47 (among full-timers and part-timers, %)



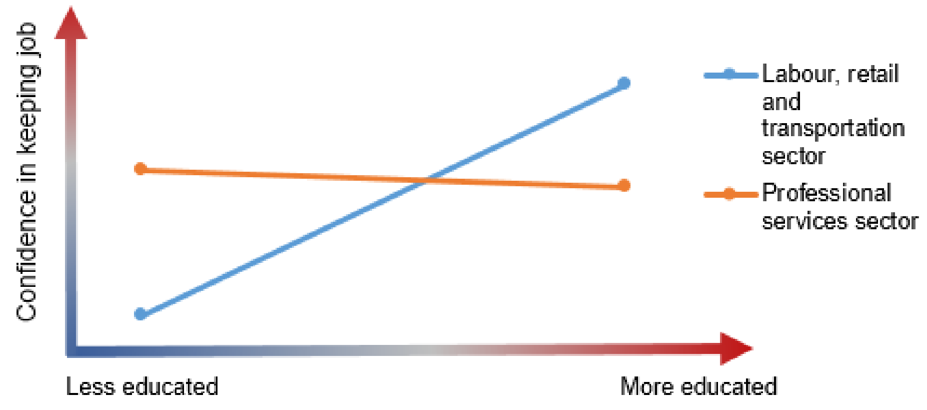
Respondents who had a degree and above were more confident that they would be able to keep their job in the next six months as compared to those without a degree. Around 65 per cent of respondents who had a degree and above were confident about this, as compared to 48 to 57 per cent of those without a degree (see Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7: How confident are you that you will able to keep your job in the next six months?, by education, W44-W47 (among full-timers and part-timers, %)



We found an interaction between sector type and education level in predicting respondents' level of confidence in keeping their job in the next six months.[14] Specifically, lower educated respondents who predominantly worked in the labour, retail, and transportation sector expressed the lowest confidence in keeping their job in the next six months. On the other hand, higher educated respondents in those industries and respondents who worked in the professional services sector expressed similarly high levels of confidence towards their job retention. These results are indicative of a particular vulnerability faced by lower educated respondents in the predominantly blue-collared sector, in terms of perceptions of job security.

Figure 2.8 : Interaction effect between sector and education on confidence in keeping job in the next six months, W44-W47 (among full-timers and part-timers, %)



*Age and salary were included in the model as controls.

[14] Data from later waves (W48-W49) were not included in the regressions as they were inconclusive. As the same group of respondents in a wave would be surveyed after four waves, W44-W47 consists of the full set of unique panel respondents.

Respondents who were not at all worried or a little worried that they would lose their psychological well-being or purpose for living in the next six months were more likely to be confident of keeping their job in the next six months, as compared to those who were at least somewhat worried about losing their psychological well-being or purpose for living in the next six months. Around 69 per cent of those who were not at all or a little worried about losing their psychological well-being were confident about being able to keep their jobs in the next six months, as compared to 49 to 55 per cent of those who were at least somewhat worried about losing their psychological well-being (see Figure 2.9). Similarly, around 67 per cent of those who were not at all or a little worried about losing their purpose for living in the next six months were confident of keeping their jobs, as compared to 50 to 55 per cent of those who were at least somewhat worried about losing their purpose for living (see Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.9: How confident are you that you will able to keep your job in the next six months?, by whether respondents were worried that they would lose their psychological well-being in the next six months, W44-W47 (among full-timers and part-timers, %)

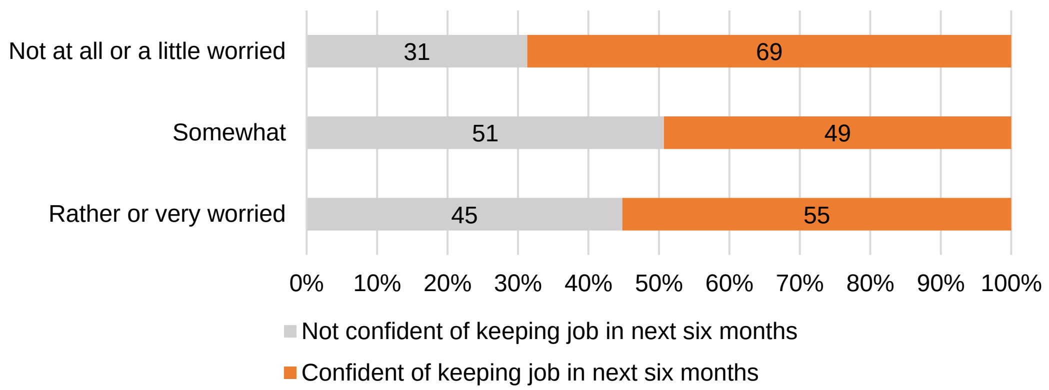
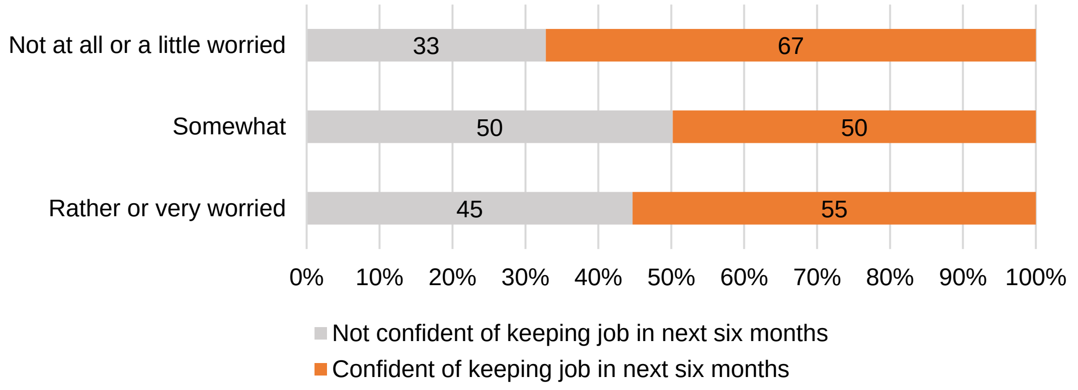


Figure 2.10: How confident are you that you will able to keep your job in the next six months?, by whether respondents were worried that they would lose their purpose for living in the next six months, W44-W47 (among full-timers and part-timers, %)



2.3 Perceptions of job market outlook

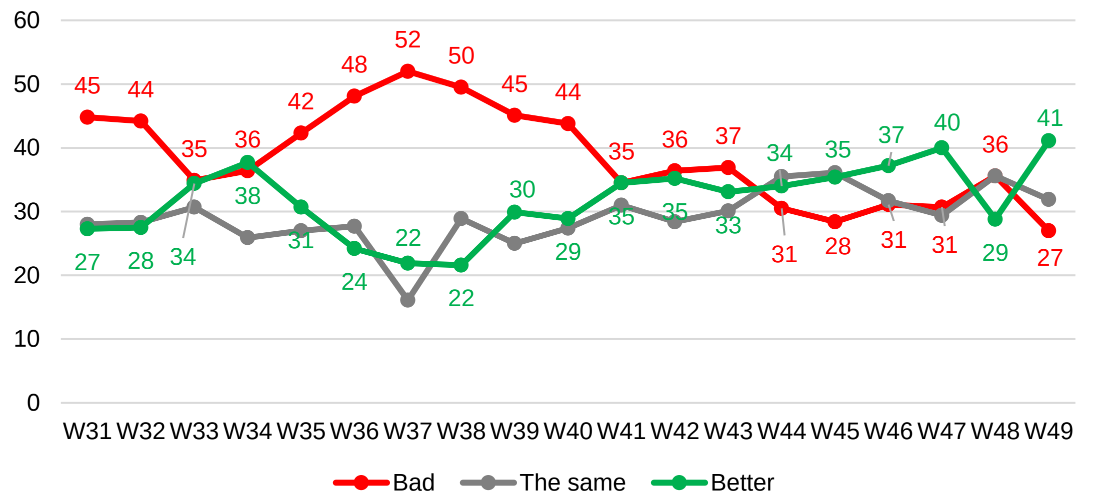
Around 45 per cent of respondents in W31 (14 July 2021 – 25 July 2021) felt that the job market outlook for the next six months would be bad. The proportion decreased to around 35 per cent in W33 (7 August 2021 – 19 August 2021) before increasing to 52 per cent in W37 (22 September 2021 – 29 September 2021). Since then, the proportion of respondents who felt that the job market outlook was bad steadily declined, falling to around 31 per cent in W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022).

A much higher proportion of respondents felt negative about the job market outlook in W31 (14 July 2021 – 25 July 2021) to W32 (26 July 2021 – 7 August 2021) and W35 (2 September 2021 – 10 September 2021) to W40 (28 October 2021 – 1 November 2021). This was possibly due to the higher number of community cases and stricter measures, which would have impeded economic recovery. Singapore returned to the Phase 2 Heightened Alert (P2HA) during W31 and W32, and exited P2HA during W33 (7 August 2021 – 19 August 2021). This may have resulted in an improvement in the respondents' perception on the job outlook. Similarly, a sharp spike in cases was recorded in W35, and there was a high number of cases recorded during W35 to W40. Singapore entered the Stabilisation Phase with stricter measures in W37 (22 September 2021 – 29 September 2021), which may have resulted in slightly more than half of the respondents to view the job market outlook negatively.

The proportion of respondents in W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022) to W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022) who felt that the job market would be better in the next six months was consistently higher than the proportion of respondents who felt that the job market would be bad. Perhaps the fact that the government has been consistent in not implementing stricter measures even as the Omicron wave struck our shores (unlike in some other countries) added to confidence in the labour market. Moreover, the lower perceived fallout from the Omicron infection due to it being relatively milder than earlier strains and very high vaccination levels locally may have bolstered this confidence.

There was an unexpected dip in confidence in the job market in W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022), but a reverse was observed in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022), where a greater proportion of respondents felt that the job market would be better. The short blip in job market confidence may have stemmed from the crisis in Ukraine and the concern of how the war would affect the global economy and subsequently, jobs. However, perhaps with greater confidence that the war was localised and was a domestic situation, and in light of further easing of community safe management measures announced on 24 March 2022 at the end of W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022), there was an increase in positive perception of the outlook of the job market in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022).

Figure 2.11: How do you think the job market will be in the next six months? (%)



A binary logistic regression was conducted to determine which respondents were more likely to view the job market outlook in the next six months positively. The outcome variable and the list of predictor variables used for this analysis can be found in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: List of predictor variables

Outcome variable: How do you think the job market will be in the next six months to come?	
Predictor variables	**Description**
Age	• 21 to 29 • 30 to 39 • 40 to 49 • 50 to 59 • 60 and above
Education	• Secondary and below • Post-secondary • Degree and above
Salary	• Below \$3,000 • \$3,000 to \$5,999 • \$5,999 and above
Have dependents	• No dependents • Have dependents

I have learnt new skills during the pandemic which will help me in my career	• Likert scale from 1 "Strongly disagree" to 7 "Strongly agree"
How confident are you that you will able to keep your job in the next six months?	• Not confident in keeping job in the next six months • Confident in keeping job in the next six months
Worried that the number of community infections will rise again in the next six months	• Likert scale of 1 "Strongly disagree" to 7 "Strongly agree"
Government satisfaction	• Composite scale of a series of variables measuring respondents' level of satisfaction with how the government has managed the COVID-19 pandemic • A higher score would mean that the respondent has greater satisfaction • See Appendix B for full list of variables
Confidence in engaging in activities in new normal while virus is in our midst	• Composite scale of a series of variables measuring respondents' level of confidence in carrying out activities in the new normal while the virus is still in our midst • A higher score would mean that the respondent has greater confidence • See Appendix B for full list of variables

Younger respondents were more likely to feel that the job market will be better in the next six months. As the economy recovers and as work transformation continues to take place, younger respondents who may be more tech savvy than their older counterparts may be looking forward to new job roles becoming available for them, especially more remote job options, regardless of whether the job is based in Singapore or overseas.

Moreover, respondents who had learnt new skills during the pandemic were also more likely to feel that the job market will be better in the next six months. This is possibly because the skills they have learnt would put them in good stead to tap on new job opportunities as the economy recovers.

Intuitively, respondents who were confident of being able to keep their job in the next six months were more likely to be more positive about the job market outlook.

The link between satisfaction with how the government has managed the pandemic and a more positive perception of the job market outlook in the next six months is also clear — if there is a perception that the government keeps community cases at a stable level and leads Singapore well into the post-pandemic economy, there is more optimism about jobs.

Finally, as the regression model showed, respondents who had confidence in engaging in activities in the new normal while the virus is still in our midst were more likely to be positive about the job market outlook in the next six months. This may suggest that these respondents have been able to carry on their lives without much fear of the virus, and may have a sense of a return to normalcy, which may result in them being more optimistic about the job market outlook.

Table 2.2: Regression analysis for "How do you think the job market will be in the next six months to come?"[15]

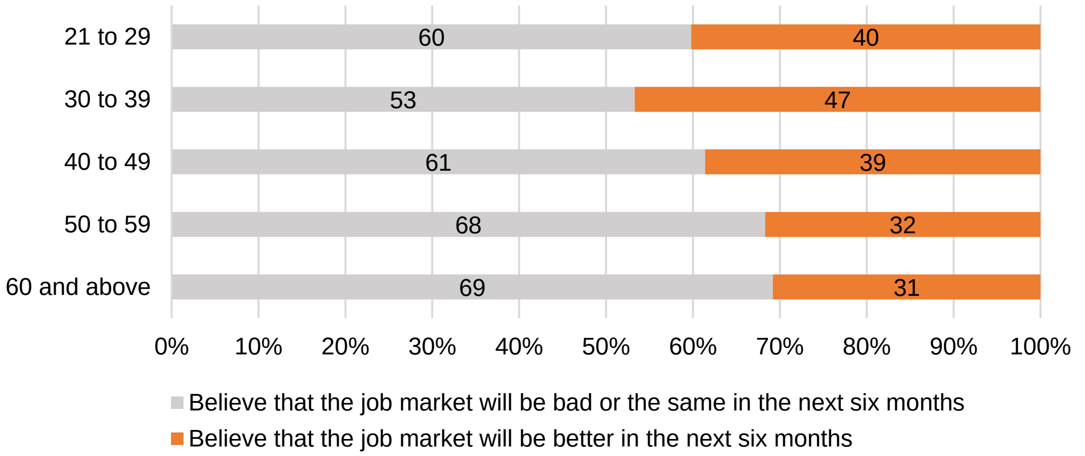
Predictor variables	Coefficient	Standard error	p-value	Odds Ratio
Age	-.120	.055	.029	.887
Education	-.052	.114	.650	.949
Salary	.026	.097	.786	1.027
Have dependents	.085	.127	.503	1.089
I have learnt new skills during the pandemic which will help me in my career	.400	.046	<.001	1.491
How confident are you that you will able to keep your job in the next six months?	1.589	.143	<.001	4.897
Worried that the number of community infections will rise again in the next six months	.057	.051	.264	1.058
Government satisfaction	3.234	.474	<.001	25.380
Confidence in engaging in activities in new normal while virus is in our midst	1.480	.368	<.001	4.395
Constant	-6.428	.555	<.001	.002

To illustrate the results from the regression, we conducted the following cross-tabulations:

Around 47 per cent of respondents who were aged 30 to 39 felt that the job market will be better in the next six months, as compared to 31 to 32 per cent of those who were aged 50 and above (see Figure 2.12).

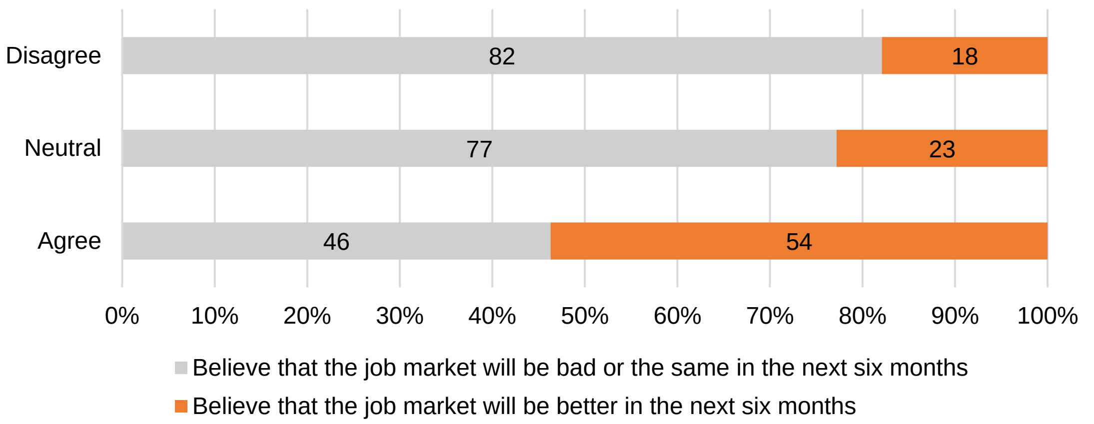
[15] Data from later waves (W48-W49) were not included in the regressions as they were inconclusive. As the same group of respondents in a wave would be surveyed after four waves, W44-W47 consists of the full set of unique panel respondents.

Figure 2.12: How do you think the job market will be in the next six months to come?, by age, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



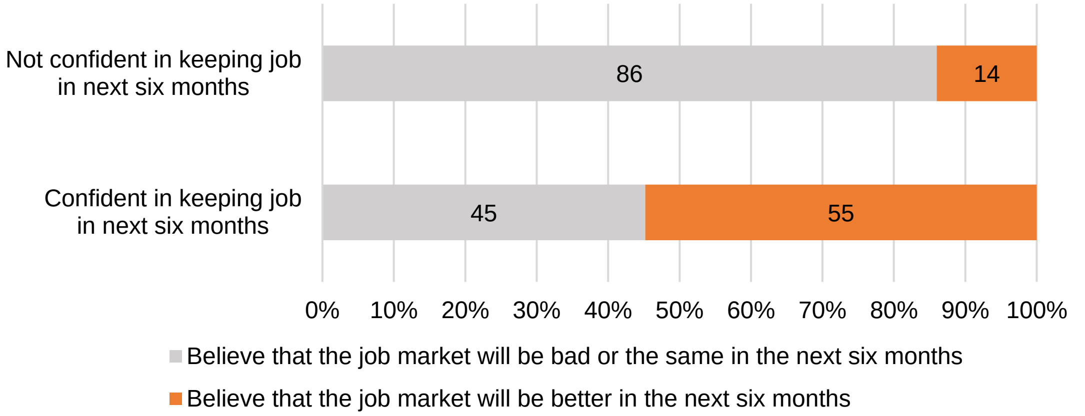
Around 54 per cent of respondents who have learnt new skills during the pandemic which will help in their career felt that the job market will be better in the next six months, as compared to 18 per cent of those did not learn new skills during the pandemic (see Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13: How do you think the job market will be in the next six months to come?, by whether respondents have learnt new skills during the pandemic which will help in their career, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



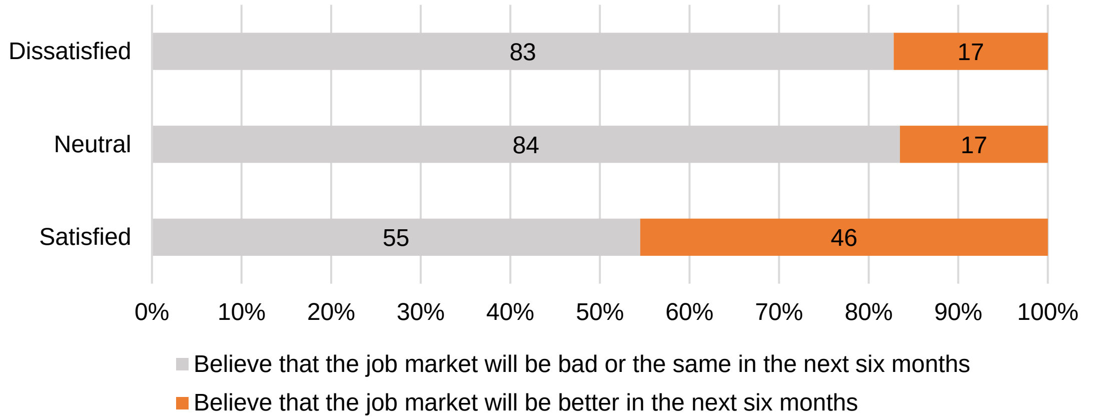
Around 55 per cent of respondents who were confident that they would be able to keep their job in the next six months felt that the job market will be better in the next six months, as compared to 14 per cent of those who were not confident in keeping their job in next six months (see Figure 2.14).

Figure 2.14: How do you think the job market will be in the next six months to come?, by whether respondents were confident that they will be able to keep their jobs in the next six months, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



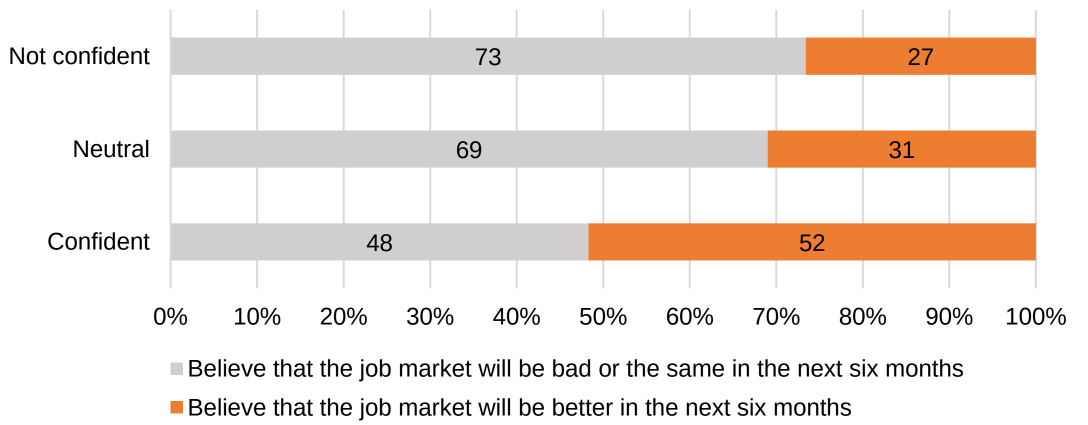
Around 46 per cent of respondents who were satisfied with how the government has kept the economy running (an item to denote government satisfaction) felt that the job market will be better in the next six months, as compared to 17 per cent of those who felt neutral or were dissatisfied with how the government has kept the economy running (see Figure 2.15).

Figure 2.15: How do you think the job market will be in the next six months to come?, by level of satisfaction with how the government has kept the economy running, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



Around 52 per cent of respondents who were confident in dining out in public places (an item to denote confidence in living with the virus) felt that the job market will be better in the next six months. This is compared to 27 per cent of those who were not confident in dining out in public places (see Figure 2.16).

Figure 2.16: How do you think the job market will be in the next six months to come?, by confidence in dining out in public places in the new normal while the virus is still in our midst, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)

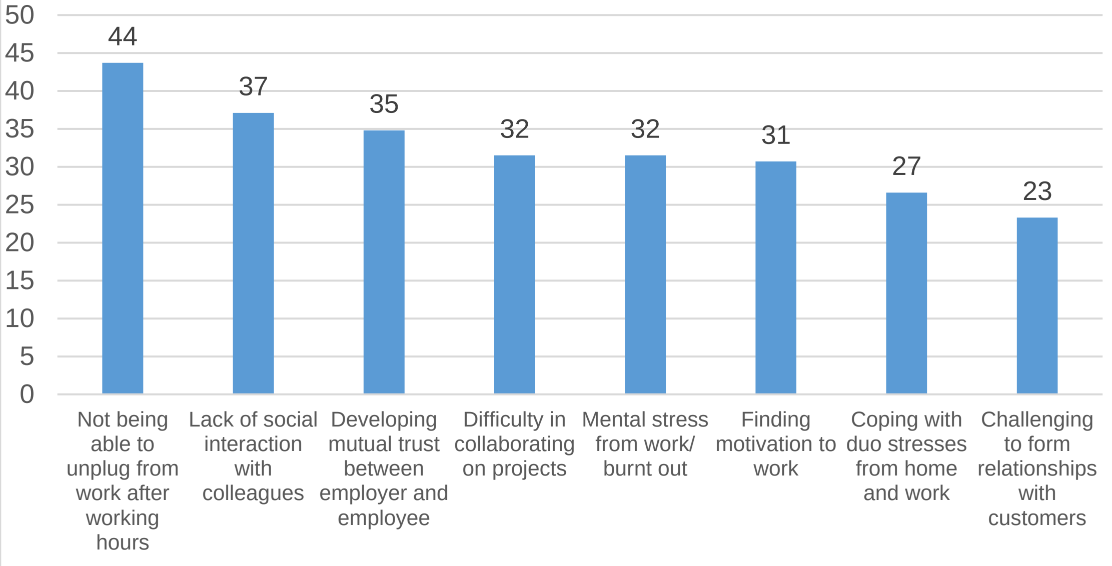


3 NEW WAYS OF WORK

3.1 Challenges faced while working from home

Among those who are currently working from home on most days, 44 per cent cited their biggest challenge as not being able to unplug from work after working hours, 37 per cent cited a lack of social interaction with colleagues and 35 per cent cited difficulties developing mutual trust between employer and employee (see Figure 3.1).

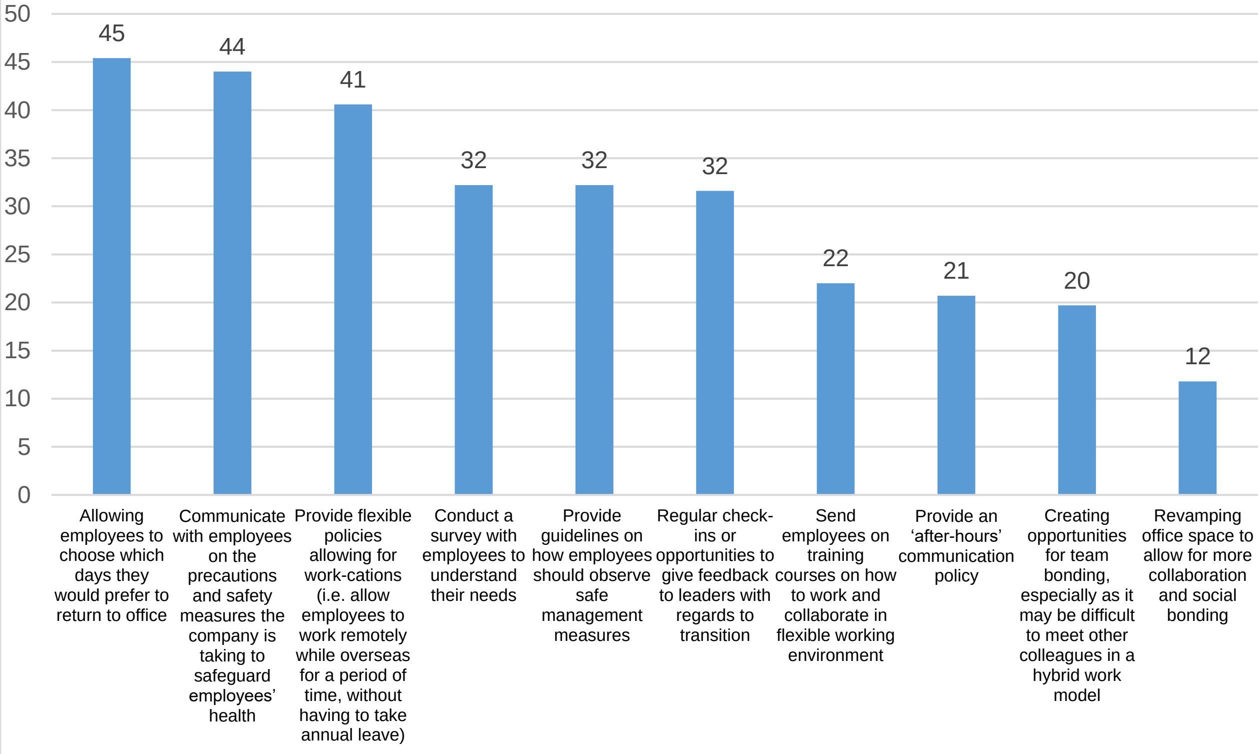
Figure 3.1: As you reflect on the past year, what would be the biggest challenge you have faced while working from home?, W44-W47 (among those who worked from home most or all of the time, %)



3.2 Top 3 actions employers should take to ease the transition back to working in office/ hybrid work model

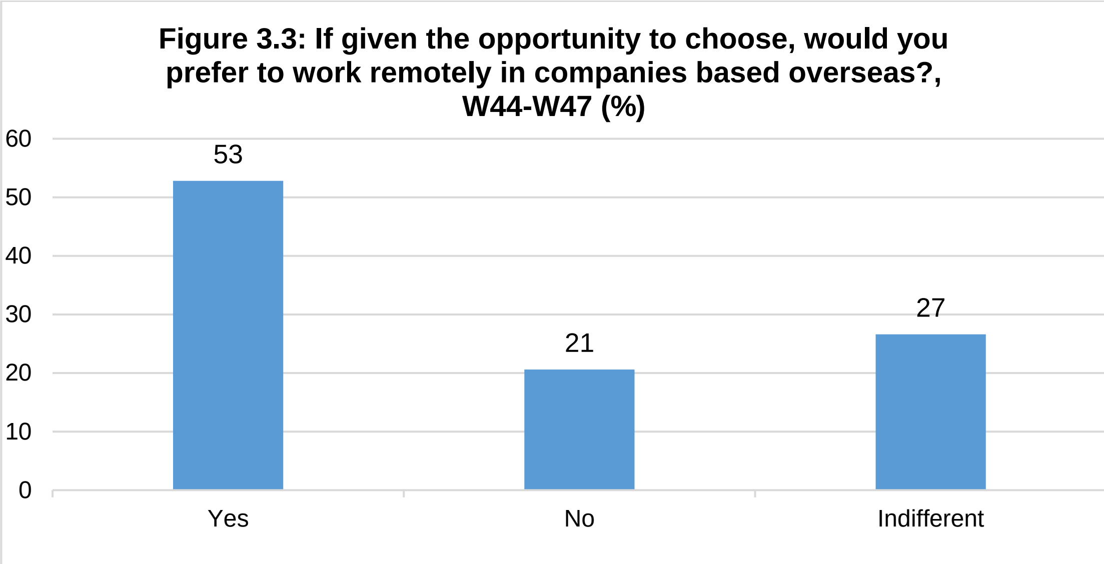
More than four in 10 respondents felt that employers should allow employees to choose which days they would prefer to return to office (45 per cent), communicate with employees on the precautions and safety measures the company is taking to safeguard employees' health (44 per cent) and provide flexible policies allowing for work-cations (41 per cent) in order to ease the transition back to working in office or to a hybrid work model (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: From 1 Jan 2022, working from home would no longer be the default working arrangement. In your opinion, what are the top 3 actions employers should take to ease the transition back to working in office/ hybrid work model?, W44-W47 (%)



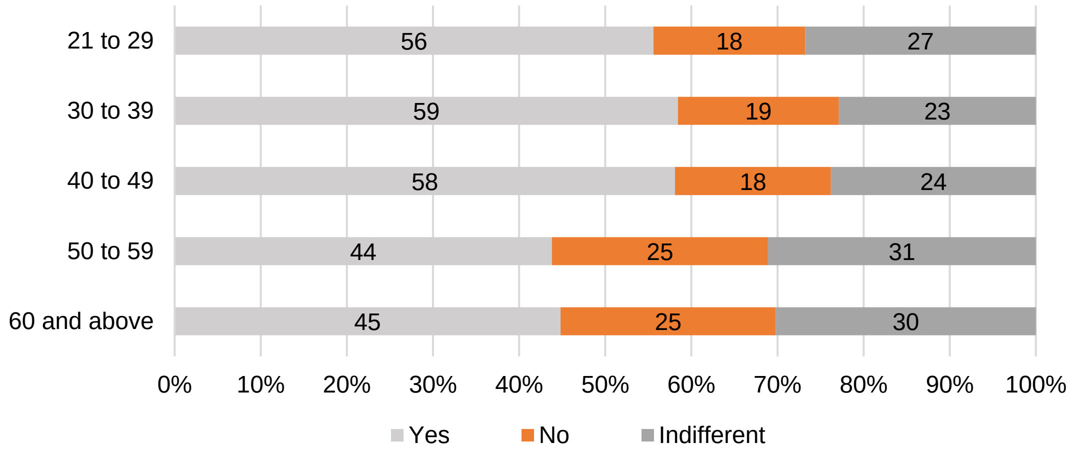
3.3 Preference to work remotely in companies based overseas

Slightly more than half (53 per cent) of respondents polled would prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas if given the opportunity to do so (see Figure 3.3).



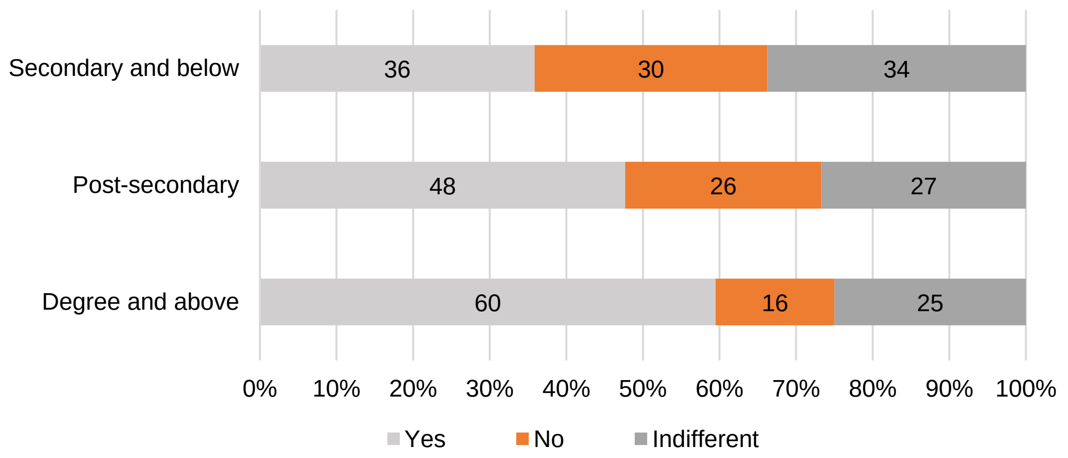
Younger respondents were more likely to prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas as compared to older respondents. Around 56 to 59 per cent of respondents aged below 50 would prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas, as compared to 44 to 45 per cent of respondents aged 50 and above (see Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: If given the opportunity to choose, would you prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas?, by age, W44-W47 (%)



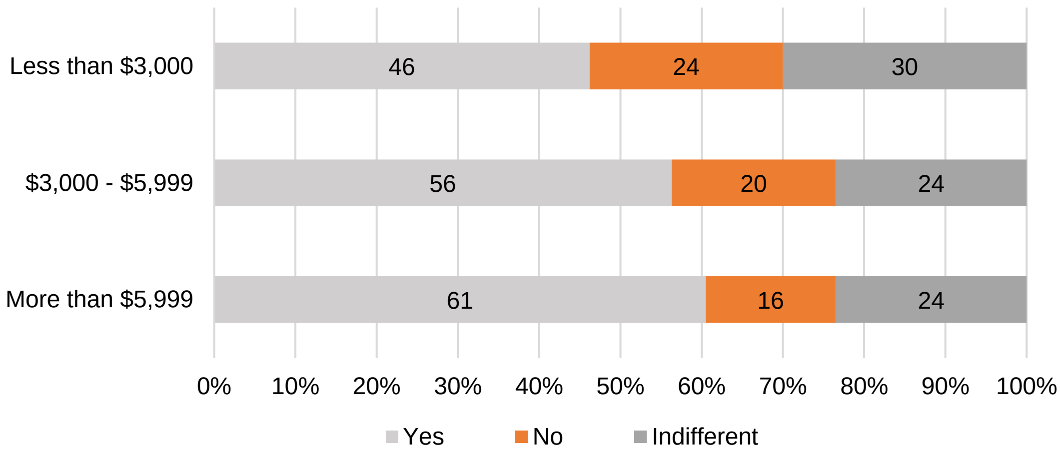
Respondents who were higher educated were more likely to prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas as compared to lower educated respondents. Around 60 per cent of respondents with a degree and above would prefer this work arrangement, as compared to 36 per cent of respondents with a secondary education and below (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: If given the opportunity to choose, would you prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas?, by education, W44-W47 (%)



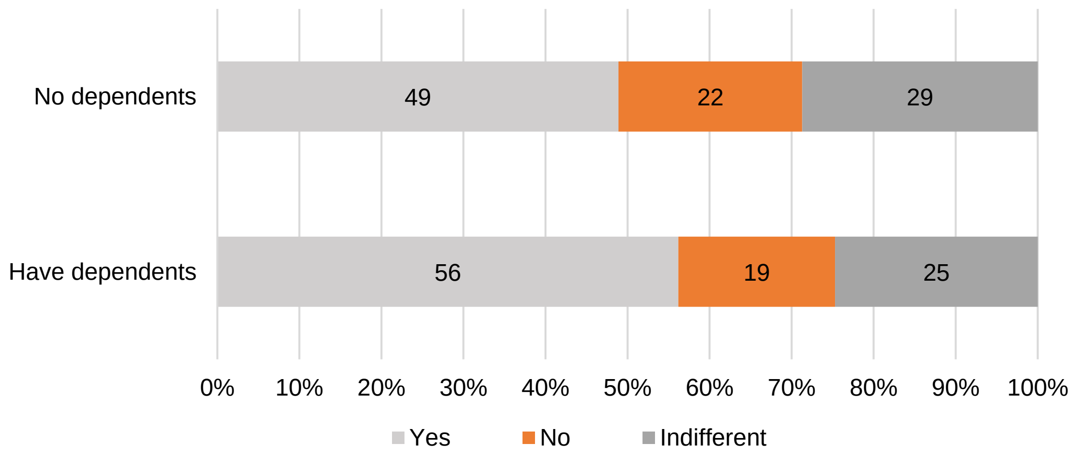
Respondents who earned higher salaries were more likely to prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas as compared to respondents with lower salaries. Around 61 per cent of respondents who earned more than $5,999 would prefer this work arrangement, as compared to 46 per cent of respondents who earned less than $3,000 (see Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: If given the opportunity to choose, would you prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas?, by salary, W44-W47 (%)



Respondents who have dependants were more likely to prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas as compared to respondents with no dependants. Around 56 per cent of respondents with dependants would prefer this work arrangement, as compared to 49 per cent of respondents with no dependants (see Figure 3.7). This could suggest that remote working has provided respondents with dependants an alternative work option to work in companies overseas. Without such an option, respondents with dependants may find it difficult to relocate to companies based overseas if they wished to.

Figure 3.7: If given the opportunity to choose, would you prefer to work remotely in companies based overseas?, by whether respondents have dependents, W44-W47 (%)

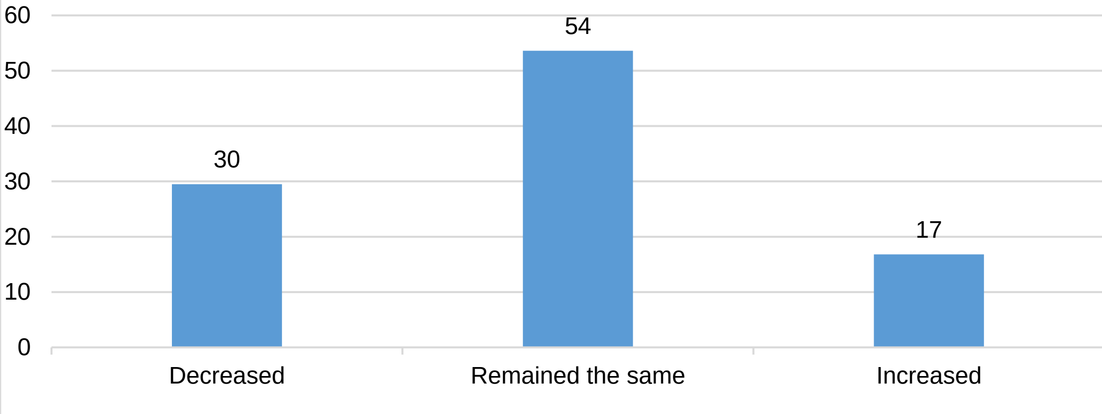


4 CHANGES IN WORKING HOURS/REMUNERATION AND WORK ASPIRATIONS

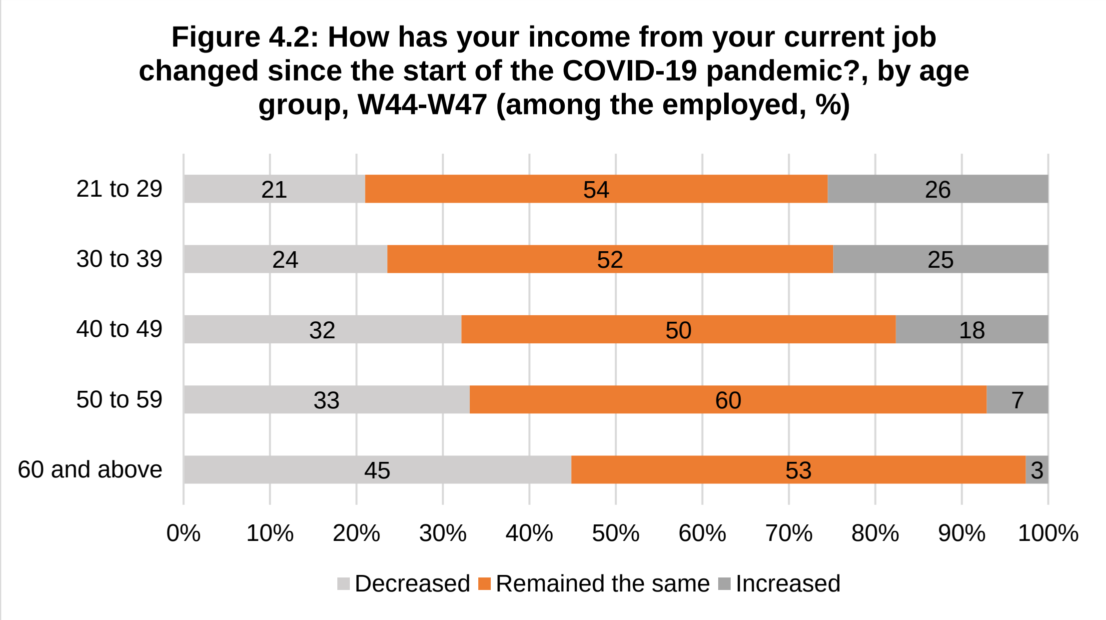
4.1 Changes in income from current job since the start of the pandemic

Slightly more than half (54 per cent) of the respondents stated that their income from their current job has remained the same since the start of the pandemic. Around three in 10 (30 per cent) stated that their income has decreased, while 17 per cent stated that their income has increased (see Figure 4.1).

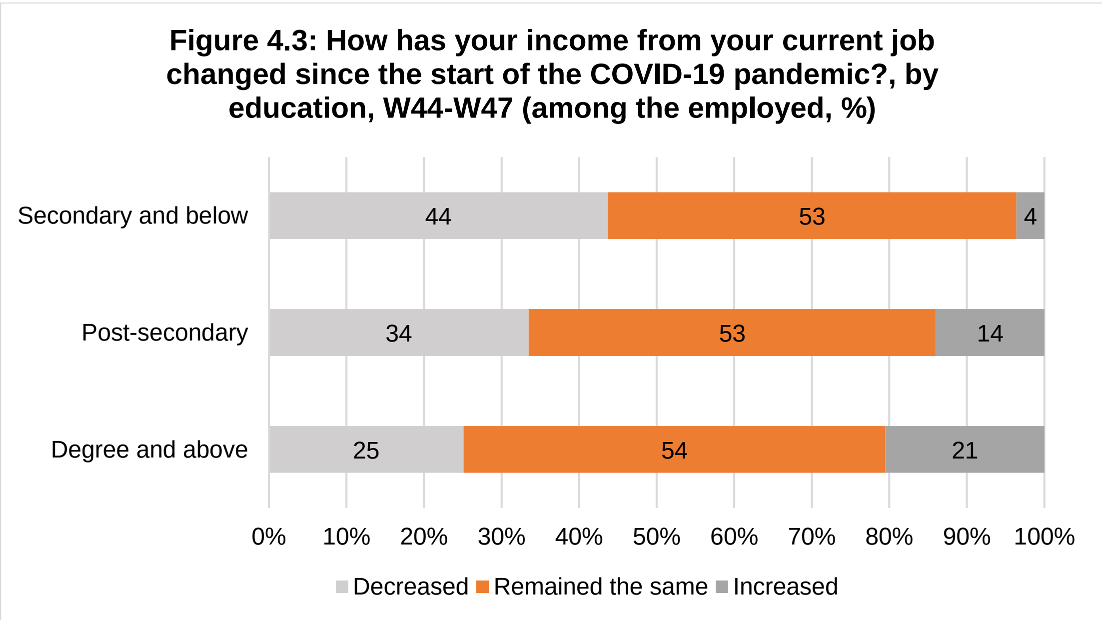
Figure 4.1: How has your income from your current job changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



Younger respondents were more likely to have seen an increase in their incomes in their current job as compared to older respondents. Around 25 to 26 per cent of respondents aged below 40 had an increase in their incomes while around 3 to 7 per cent of those aged 50 and above had such a raise (see Figure 4.2).

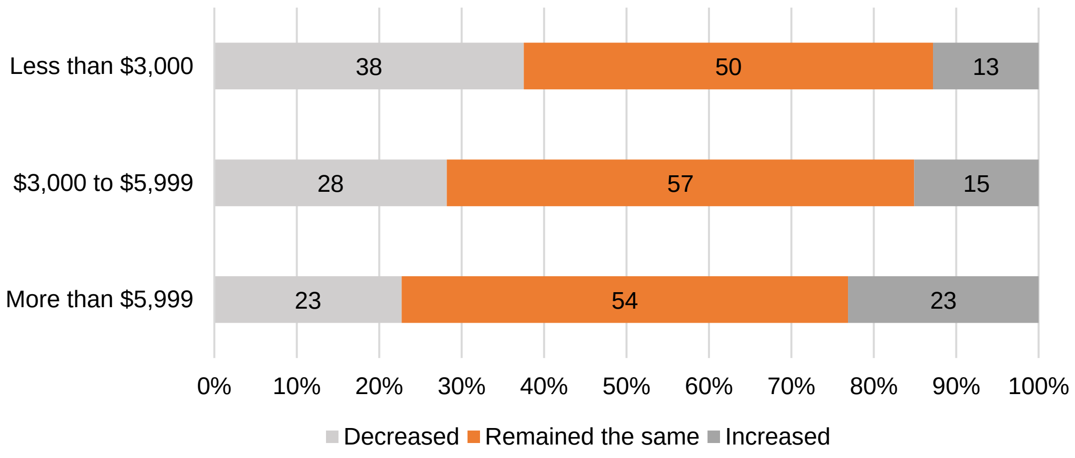


Higher educated respondents were more likely to have seen an increase in their incomes in their current job as compared to lower educated respondents. Around 21 per cent of respondents with a degree and above had an increase in their incomes compared to around 4 per cent of those with secondary education who had such an increase (see Figure 4.3).



Respondents with higher salaries were more likely to have experienced an increase in income in their current job as compared to respondents with lower salaries. Around 23 per cent of respondents who earned more than $5,999 had experienced such an increase, as compared to 13 per cent of respondents who earned less than $3,000 (see Figure 4.4).

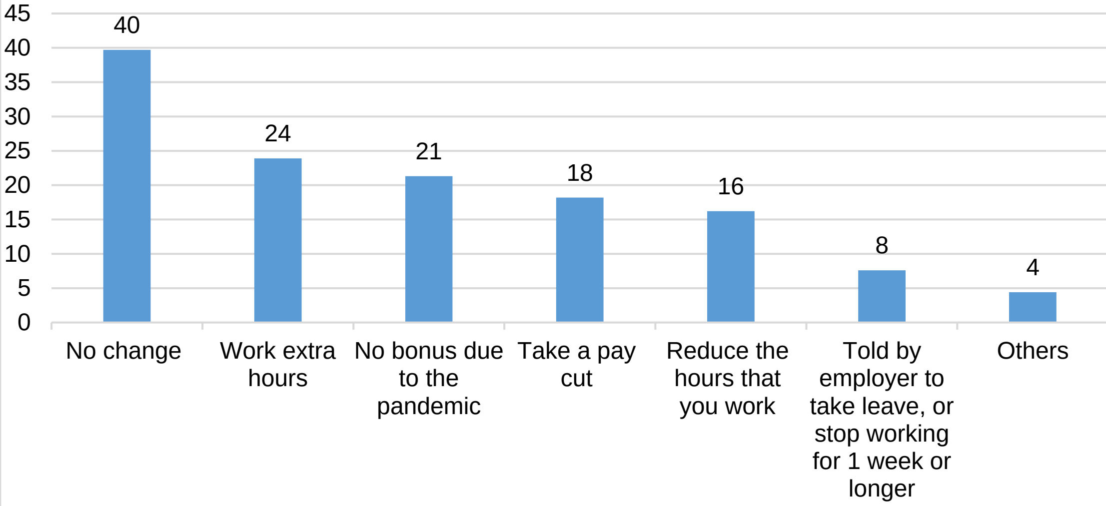
Figure 4.4: How has your income from your current job changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?, by salary, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



4.2 Changes in working hours or remuneration in current job as a result of the pandemic

Around four in 10 (40 per cent) respondents stated that there have been no changes to their working hours or remuneration in their current job as a result of the pandemic. About two in 10 respondents stated that they worked extra hours (24 per cent), had no bonus due to the pandemic (21 per cent) and had to take a pay cut (18 per cent) (see Figure 4.5).

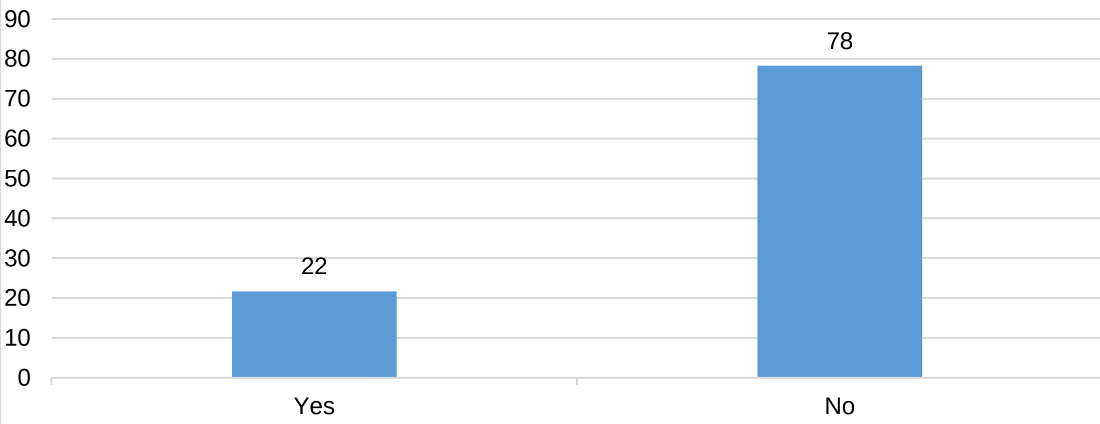
Figure 4.5: As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you had any change in your working hours or remuneration at any point in your current job?, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



4.3 Left or lost a paid job as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

About two in 10 (22 per cent) respondents had left or lost a paid job as a result of the pandemic, even if it was a temporary role (see Figure 4.6). Of those who had left or lost a paid job, about a quarter stated that it was due to work stress (26 per cent), that they had increased work responsibilities with no equal raise in remuneration (26 per cent) and that they were laid off (25 per cent; see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.6: Did you leave or lose a paid job as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, even if it was a temporary role?, W44-W47 (%)



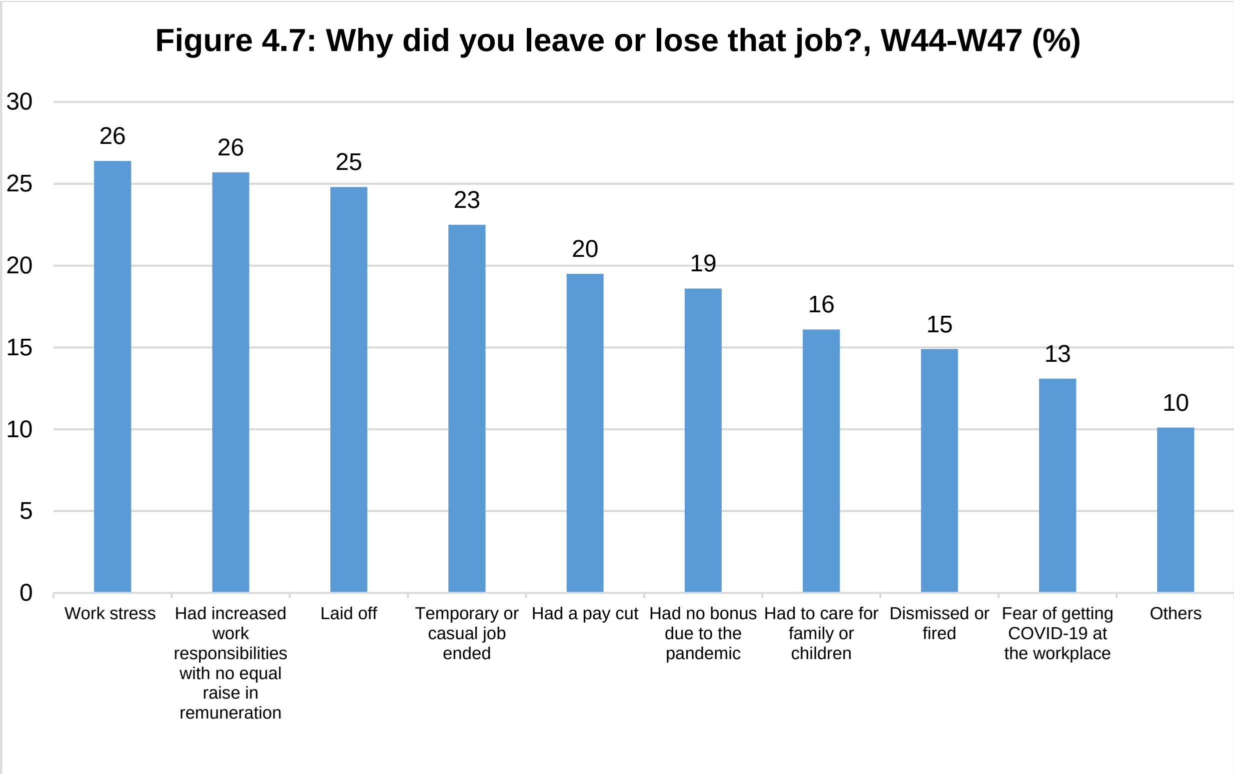


Figure 4.7: Why did you leave or lose that job?, W44-W47 (%)
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
26
26
25
23
20
19
16
15
13
10
Work stress
Had increased work responsibilities with no equal raise in remuneration
Laid off
Temporary or casual job ended
Had a pay cut
Had no bonus due to the pandemic
Had to care for family or children
Dismissed or fired
Fear of getting COVID-19 at the workplace
Others

4.4 Change in work aspirations

Among the employed and unemployed looking for a job, slightly less than half (47 per cent) of respondents felt that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed their work aspirations (see Figure 4.8). Of those whose career aspirations have changed as a result of the pandemic, 69 per cent have considered a career switch (see Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.8: Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work aspirations?, W44-W47 (among the employed and unemployed looking for job, %)

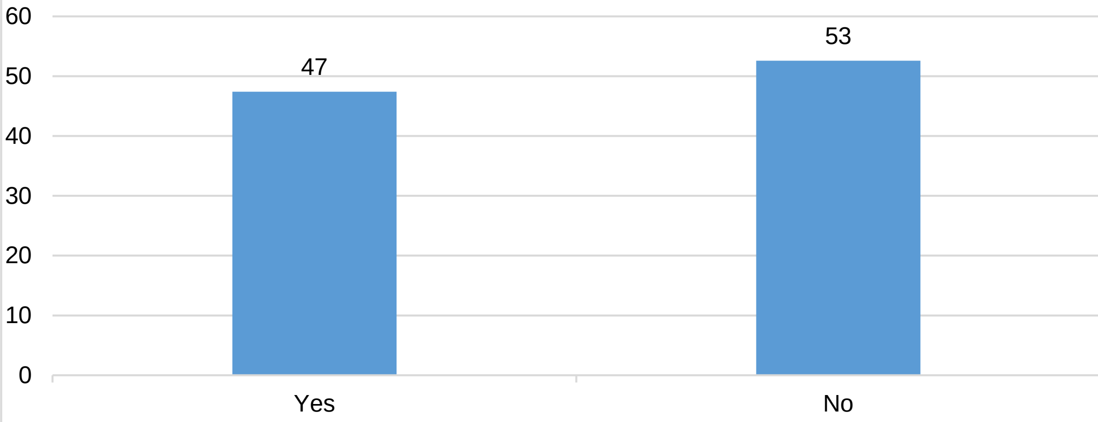
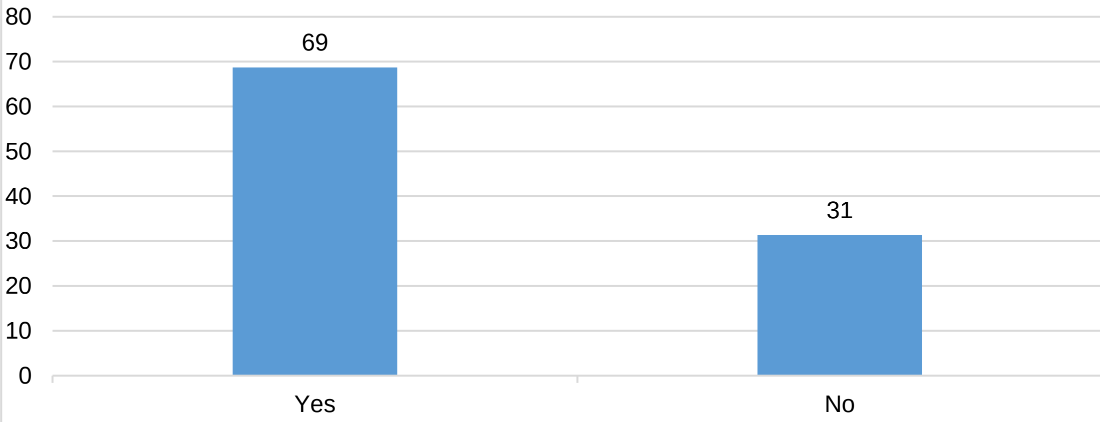


Figure 4.9. Have you considered a career switch as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?, W44-W47 (among those whose career aspirations have changed, %)



A binary regression was conducted to determine who were the respondents whose work aspirations have changed as a result of the pandemic. The outcome variable and the list of predictor variables used for this analysis can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: List of predictor variables

Outcome variable: **Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work aspirations?**	
Predictor variables	**Description**
Age	• 21 to 29 • 30 to 39 • 40 to 49 • 50 to 59 • 60 and above
Education	• Secondary and below • Post-secondary • Degree and above
Salary	• Below $3,000 • $3,000 to $5,999 • $5,999 and above
Have children	• Have children aged 12 and below • Have children, but none aged 12 and below • Have no children
Left or lost a paid job as a result of the pandemic	• No • Yes
Change in working hours/remuneration as a result of the pandemic	• No • Yes
Worried that you will lose your purpose for living	• Likert scale of 1 “Not at all worried” to 5 ”Very worried”
Confidence in engaging in activities in new normal while virus is in our midst	• Composite scale of a series of variables measuring respondents’ level of confidence in carrying out activities in the new normal while the virus is still in our midst • A higher score would mean that the respondent has greater confidence • See Appendix B for full list of variables

Regression analysis showed that respondents who were younger and respondents who were more educated were more likely to have changed their work aspirations as a result of the pandemic. This could suggest that younger respondents, who may be more open to finding alternate paths of success and have a different definition of success as compared to older generations, had re-evaluated their long-term career goals in order to have time and energy to pursue other life goals. Respondents who were more educated would also have the necessary knowledge and skill sets to pivot to different careers.

Respondents with children aged 12 and below were also more likely to have changed their work aspirations as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic might have highlighted the need to prioritise family relationships and therefore the need to better manage the work-family interface. Working parents with younger children would hence gravitate towards wanting work arrangements which allow greater flexibility to manage their work and family commitments.

The regression analysis also showed that respondents who left or lost a paid job as a result of the pandemic and respondents whose working hours or remuneration had changed as a result of the pandemic were likely to state that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations. This could suggest that such changes in their careers may spur respondents to rethink their career plans, especially if they perceive that their employers had not managed pandemic related changes well.

Undoubtedly, respondents who were worried about losing their purpose for living were also likely to state that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations. We assume that those who are more concerned about matters such as purpose for living are more connected to their passions and interests, and possibly look forward to new work norms to ensure there is congruence between these and their work.

Table 4.2: Regression analysis for "Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work aspirations?"[16]

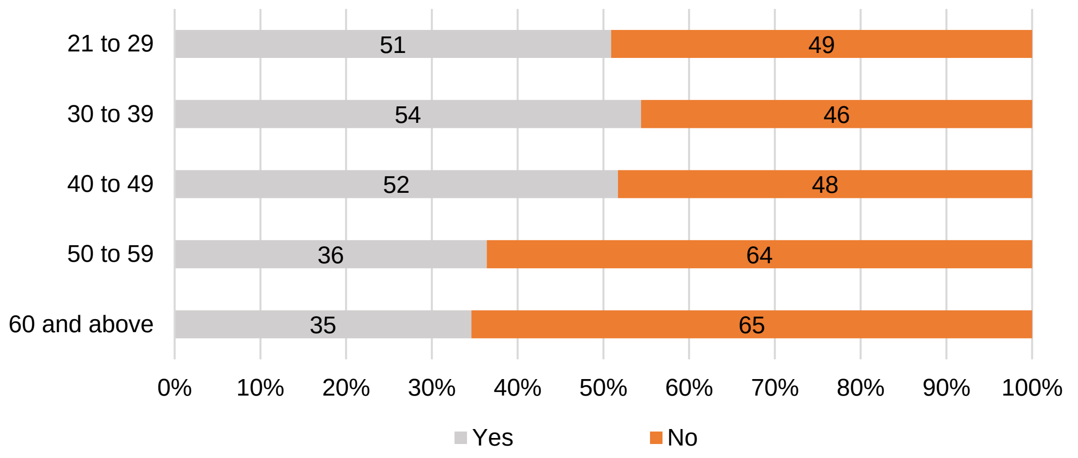
Predictor variables	Coefficient	Standard error	p-value	Odds Ratio
Age	-.124	.049	.011	.883
Education	.302	.097	.002	1.352
Salary	-.102	.084	.221	.903
Have children				
Have children, but none aged 12 and below	.289	.182	.111	1.336
Have children aged 12 and below	.264	.129	.041	1.302
Reference group: Have no children				
Left or lost a paid job as a result of the pandemic	1.263	.145	<.001	3.536
Change in working hours/remuneration as a result of the pandemic	.803	.114	<.001	2.232
Worried that you will lose your purpose for living	.299	.040	<.001	1.349
Confidence in engaging in activities in the new normal while virus is in our midst	-.384	.299	.200	.681
Constant	-1.684	.351	<.001	.186

[16] Data from later waves (W48-W49) were not included in the regressions as they were inconclusive. As the same group of respondents in a wave would be surveyed after four waves, W44-W47 consists of the full set of unique panel respondents.

To illustrate the regression results, we conducted the following cross-tabulations:

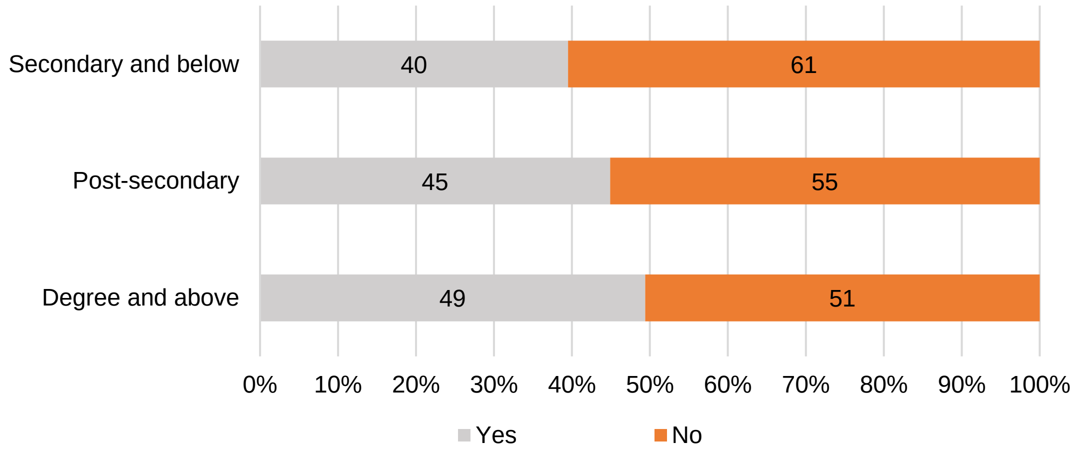
Respondents who were younger were more likely to feel that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations. Around 51 to 54 per cent of respondents aged below 50 felt that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations, as compared to 35 to 36 per cent of respondents aged 50 and above (see Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10: Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work aspirations?, by age group, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



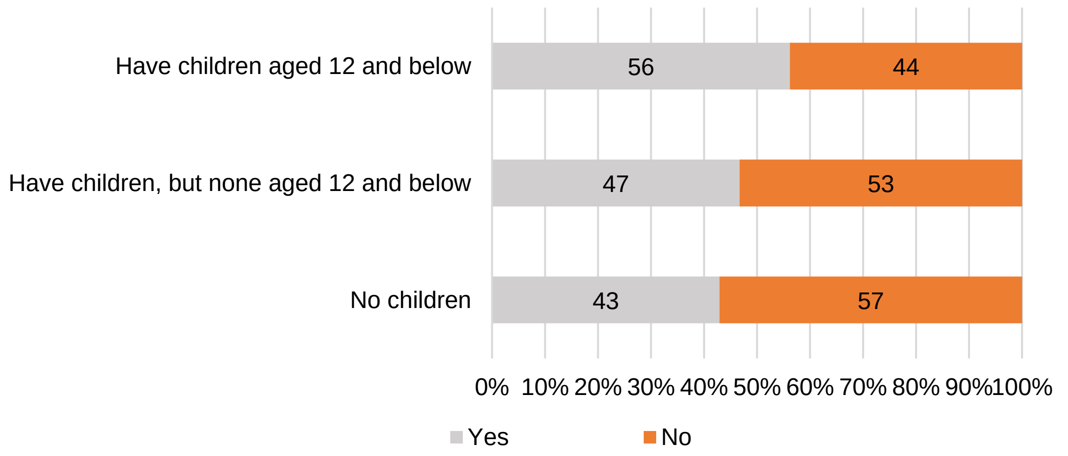
Respondents who were more educated were more likely to state that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations. Around 49 per cent of respondents with at least a degree felt that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations, as compared to 40 per cent of respondents with a secondary education and below (see Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11: Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work aspirations?, by education, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



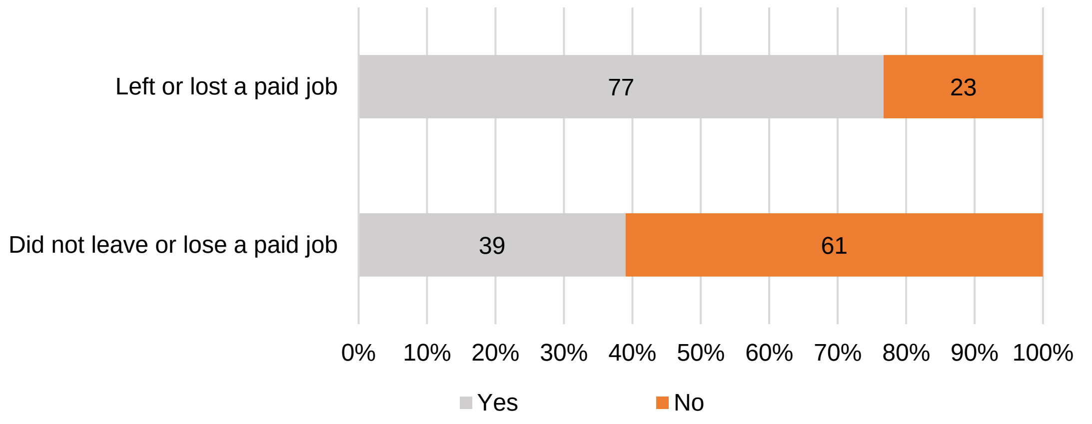
Respondents who had younger children were more likely to state that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations. Around 56 per cent of respondents with children aged 12 and below felt that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations, as compared to 47 per cent of respondents with children but none aged 12 and below, and 43 per cent of respondents with no children (see Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12: Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work aspirations?, by whether respondents have children aged 12 and below, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



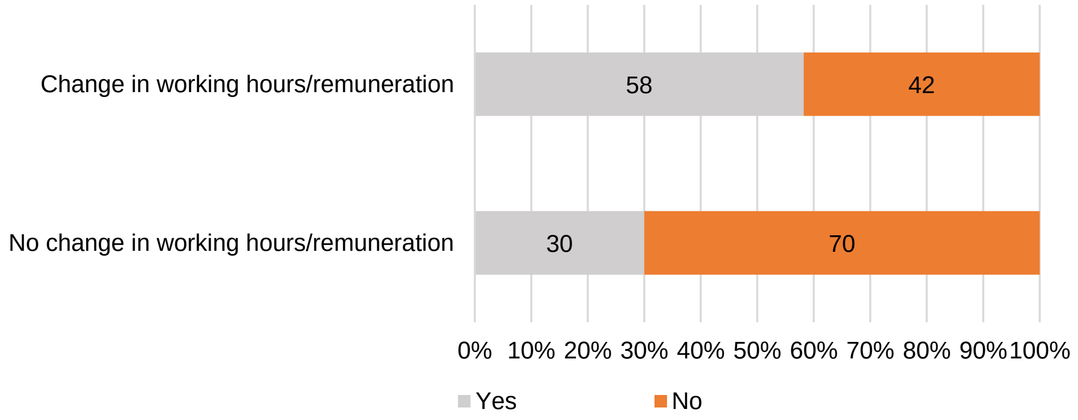
Respondents who left or lost a paid job as a result of the pandemic, even if it was a temporary role, were more likely to feel that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations. Around 77 per cent of respondents who left or lost a paid job as a result of the pandemic felt that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations, as compared to 39 per cent of respondents who did not leave or lose a paid job (see Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13: Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work aspirations?, by left or lost a paid job as a result of the pandemic, even if it was a temporary role, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



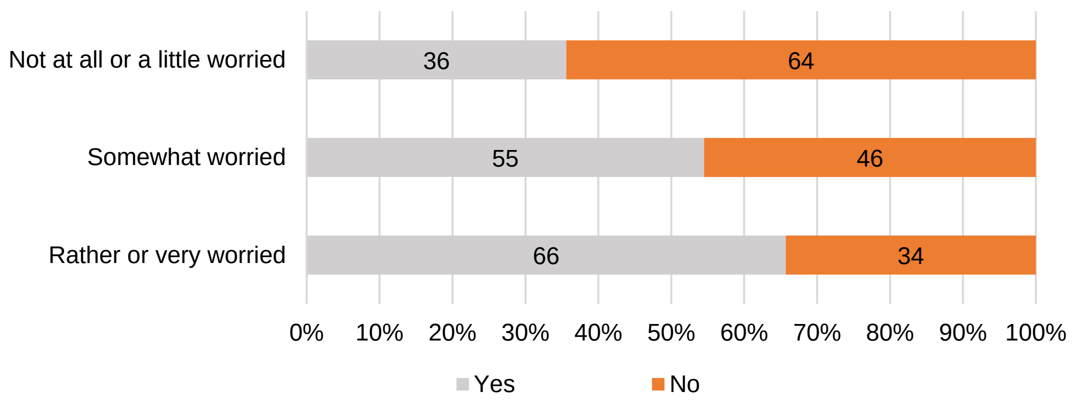
Respondents who experienced changes in their working hours or remuneration at any point in their current job as a result of the pandemic were more likely to feel that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations. Around 58 per cent of respondents whose working hours or remuneration in their current job had changed as a result of the pandemic felt that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations, as compared to 30 per cent of respondents whose working hours or remuneration has not changed as a result of the pandemic (see Figure 4.14).

Figure 4.14: Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work aspirations?, by change in working hours/remuneration at any point in current job as a result of the pandemic, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



Respondents who were more worried that they would lose their purpose for living in the next six months were more likely to feel that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations. Around 66 per cent of respondents who were rather or very worried about losing their purpose for living in the next six months felt that the pandemic has changed their work aspirations, as compared to 36 per cent of respondents who were not at all or a little worried about losing their purpose for living in the next six months (see Figure 4.15).

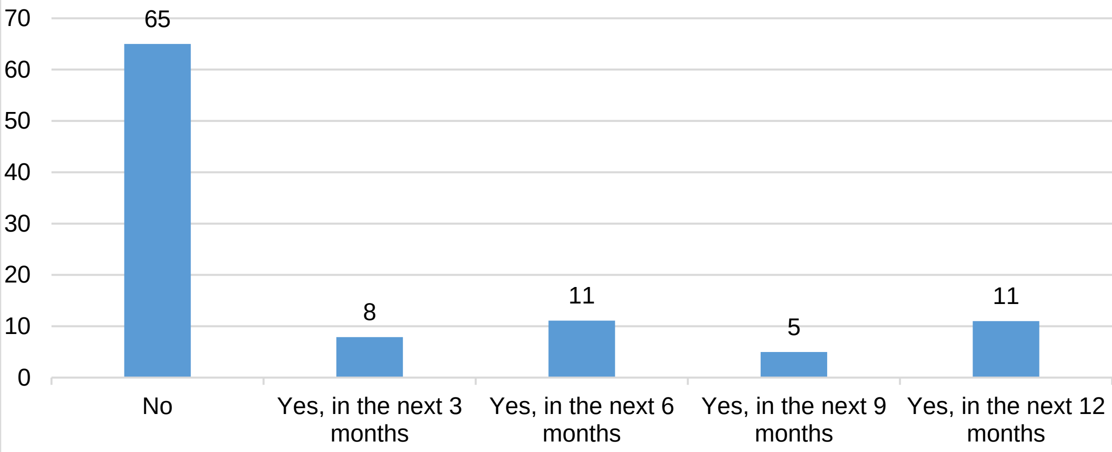
Figure 4.15: Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work aspirations?, by whether respondents were worried that they would lose their purpose for living in the next six months, W44-W47 (among the employed, %)



4.5 Plans on leaving job in the next 12 months

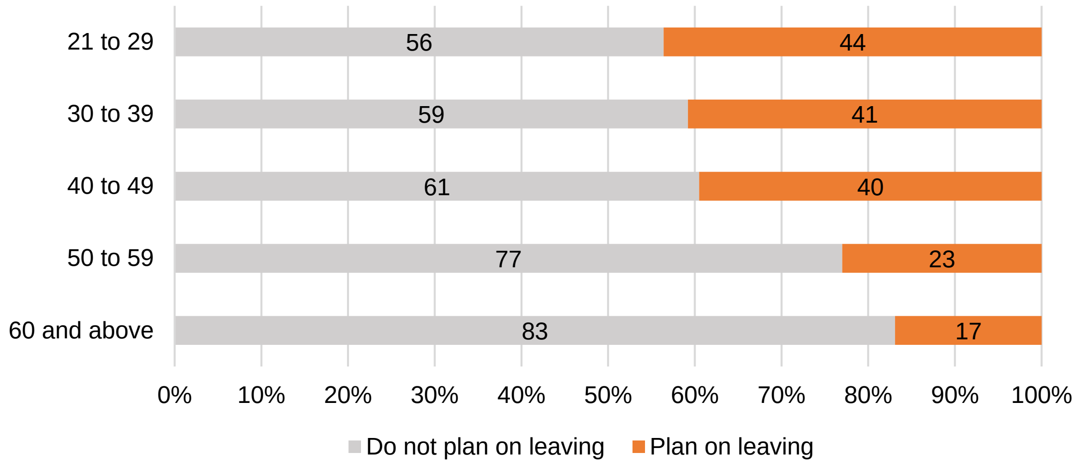
Around 65 per cent of respondents were not planning on leaving their job in the next 12 months, while around 35 per cent of respondents were planning to do so. About 8 per cent are planning to leave within the next three months, while 11 per cent are planning to leave in the next six months (see Figure 4.16).

Figure 4.16: Do you plan on leaving your job in the next 12 months?, W45-W48 (among the employed, %)



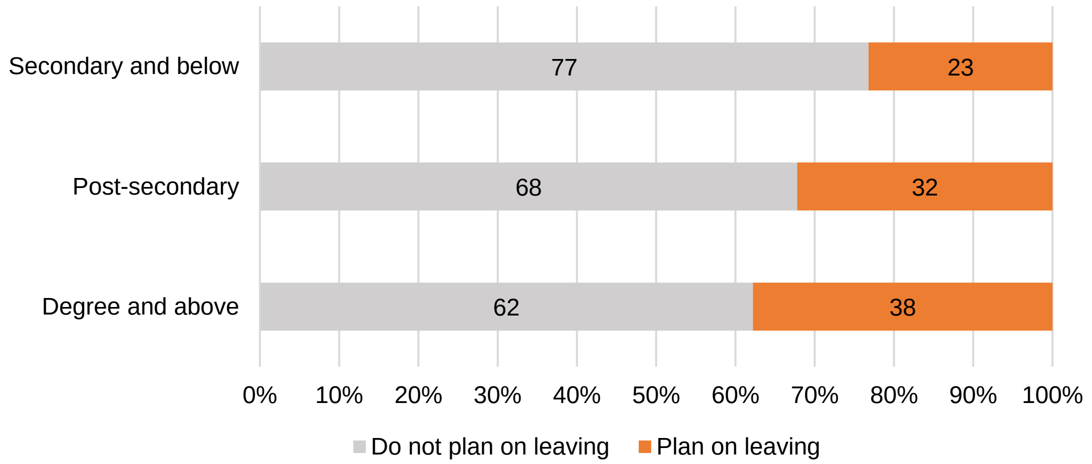
Younger respondents were more likely to plan on leaving their jobs in the next 12 months as compared to those who were older. Around 40 to 44 per cent of respondents aged below 50 were planning to leave their job in the next 12 months, while 17 to 23 per cent of respondents aged 50 and above are planning to do so in the same duration (see Figure 4.17).

Figure 4.17: Do you plan on leaving your job in the next 12 months?, by age group, W45-W48 (among the employed, %)



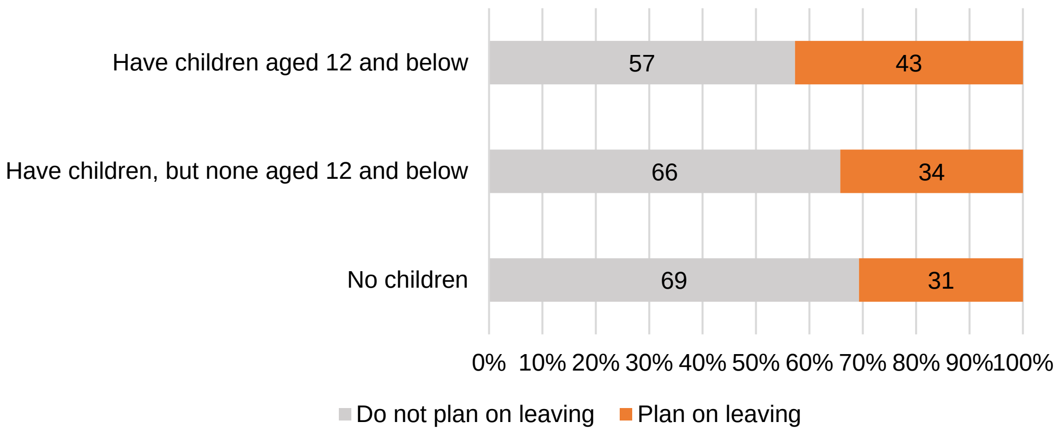
Respondents who were higher educated are more likely to plan on leaving their jobs in the next 12 months as compared to those who were less educated. Around 38 per cent of respondents who had at least a degree were planning to leave their job in the next 12 months, compared to 23 per cent of respondents with a secondary education (see Figure 4.18).

Figure 4.18: Do you plan on leaving your job in the next 12 months?, by education, W45-W48 (among the employed, %)



Respondents who had children aged 12 and below were more likely to plan on leaving their jobs in the next 12 months as compared to those without children. Around 43 per cent of respondents with children aged 12 and below were planning to leave their jobs in the next 12 months, while 31 per cent of respondents with no children were planning to do so over the same time period (see Figure 4.19).

Figure 4.19: Do you plan on leaving your job in the next 12 months?, by whether respondents have children aged 12 and below, W45-W48 (among the employed, %)



5. SAFE MANAGEMENT MEASURES AT THE WORKPLACE

5.1 Sentiments on unvaccinated employees facing stricter, restrictive measures at the workplace

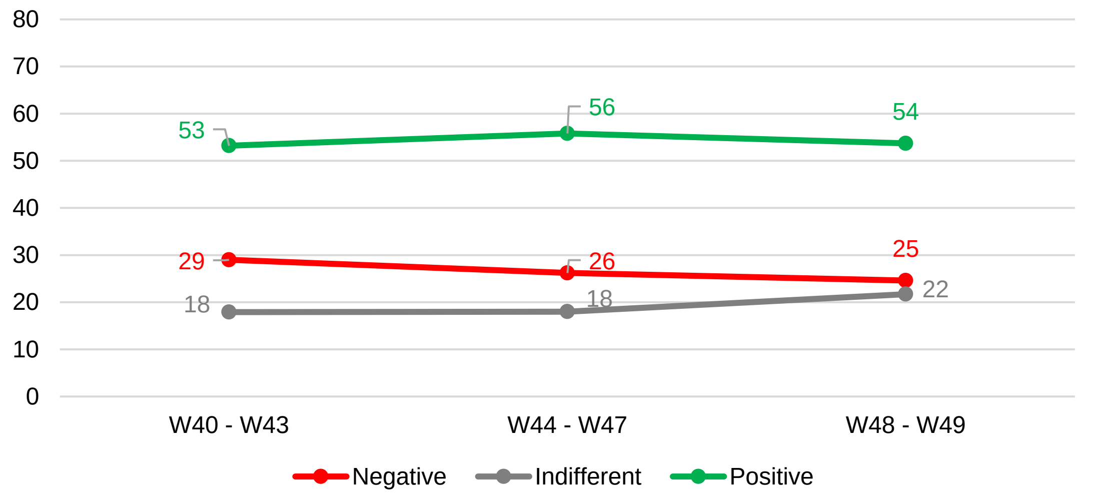
Of the respondents polled over the waves when there were differentiated measures in workplaces based on vaccination status, slightly more than half felt positively about stricter, restrictive measures at the workplace for the unvaccinated.

The proportions who were supportive of these restrictive measures were fairly constant, though there were some fluctuations. Around 53 per cent of respondents felt positive towards this during W40 (28 October 2021 – 1 November 2021) to W43 (30 November 2021 – 9 December 2021). This proportion increased to 56 per cent in W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022) to W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022) as the Omicron variant entered Singapore and became the dominant COVID-19 variant. There was a slight decline to 54 per cent in W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022) to W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022).

While it is not easy to attribute causes to these small changes, perhaps the level of concerns among Singaporeans to the pandemic may have shaped some of the attitudes towards vaccination-differentiated measures at the workplace. As Singapore saw its biggest caseload of COVID-19 cases during W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022) to W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022) ever since the pandemic began in 2020, more respondents may have preferred having unvaccinated employees be subjected to stricter measures so as to have precautions in place.

The easing of community safe management measures and border measures during the latest two waves of our polls, together with the decreasing daily case count, might have contributed to the shift towards respondents feeling slightly more indifferent towards stricter, restrictive measures at the workplace for unvaccinated employees.

Figure 5.1 How unvaccinated employees face stricter, restrictive measures at the workplace (%)

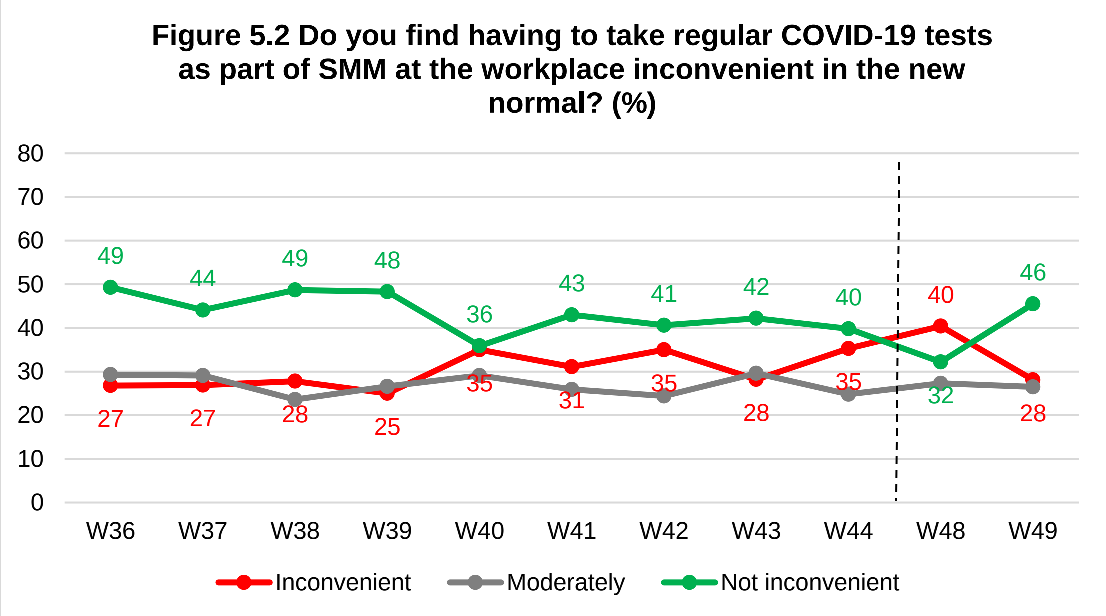


5.2 Level of convenience in taking regular COVID-19 tests as part of SMM at the workplace in the new normal

A large proportion of respondents felt that it was not inconvenient to take regular COVID-19 tests as part of SMM at the workplace in the new normal. Nearly half felt that it was not inconvenient in W36 (15 September 2021 – 21 September 2021) to W39 (15 October 2021 – 27 October 2021), which could reflect respondents' preference for regular COVID-19 tests as cases began to rise during this period after the relaxation of measures in August 2021. The number of daily cases also crossed the 1,000 mark in W36 (15 September 2021 – 21 September 2021), and measures were subsequently tightened during this period to control the rise in cases in Singapore.

The proportion of respondents who felt that taking regular COVID-19 tests was not inconvenient fell in W40 (28 October 2021 – 1 November 2021) to W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022), with 36 per cent feeling that way in W40 and around 40 per cent with similar sentiments in subsequent waves. As the number of COVID-19 cases fell during this period and measures were relaxed slightly, more respondents may have felt that the pandemic situation was under control and may have preferred not to take regular tests.

The question was reintroduced in W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022) and W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). While the proportion of respondents who felt that taking regular COVID-19 tests was not inconvenient fell further to 32 per cent in W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022), this proportion increased to 46 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). This change in respondents' perceptions about regular testing could be due to the change in measures put forth during these two waves. The relaxation of measures announced on 24 March 2022 at the end of W48 included allowing a greater percentage of employees to return to the workplace. As a result, respondents may have preferred to take regular tests.



5.3 Sentiments on allowing people to be unmasked if they are at the workplace with their regular colleagues

Around 46 to 48 per cent of respondents disagreed with allowing people to be unmasked if they are at the workplace with their regular colleagues in W37 (22 September 2021 – 29 September 2021) to W40 (28 October 2021 – 1 November 2021). Meanwhile, around 36 to 38 per cent agreed with this measure. This coincided with the Stabilisation Phase and extension of the Stabilisation Phase, which took place from September to October 2021, and hence may reflect respondents' inclination to be more wary of COVID-19 at that point in time.

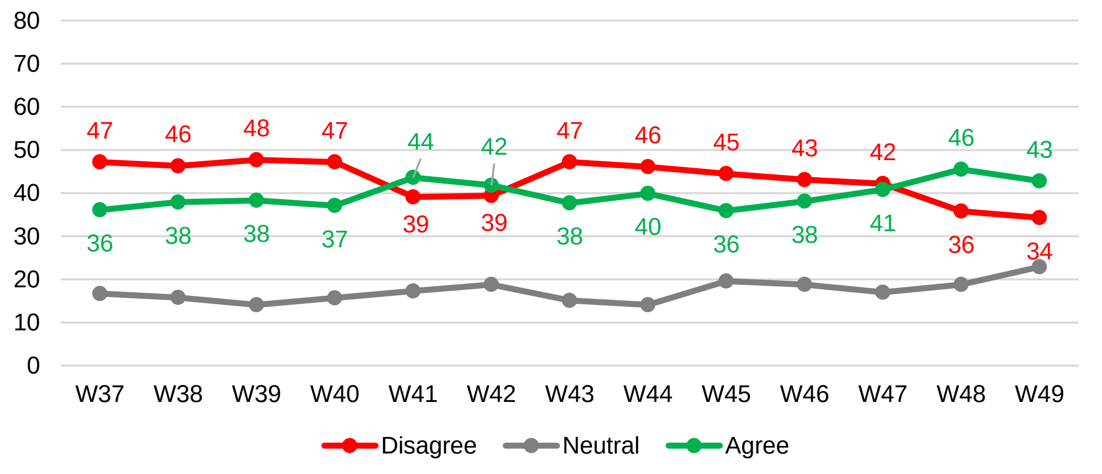
The proportions reversed in W41 (10 November 2021 – 17 November 2021) to W42 (19 November 2021 – 23 November 2021), when around 39 per cent disagreed with allowing people to be unmasked at the workplace, as compared to around 42 to 44 per cent who agreed. This could reflect respondents' slightly more relaxed attitude towards COVID-19 as cases were more controlled during this point in time, and measures were adjusted in the Stabilisation Phase and Transition Phase in response to the controlled case numbers.

In W43 (30 November 2021 – 9 December 2021) to W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022), there was a higher proportion of respondents who disagreed as compared to those who agreed to the proposition of allowing colleagues at workplaces to be unmasked as the Omicron variant came to our shores. Nevertheless, while the proportion of respondents who disagreed increased to 47 per cent in W43 (30 November 2021 – 9 December 2021) when the first few cases of imported Omicron cases were reported in Singapore, the proportion fell to 42 per cent in W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022), possibly because people had become less fearful of the virus as more were infected but suffered only mild symptoms. The government also communicated during these waves that Singapore would be able to make the transition to living with COVID-19 as most of the population have already been vaccinated.

More respondents agreed than disagreed to the prospect of colleagues unmasking at workplaces in W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022) and W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). The proportion of respondents who disagreed decreased to 36 per cent in W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022), and declined further to 34 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). In comparison, the proportion of respondents who agreed increased to 46 per cent in W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022), before falling slightly to 43 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). The reversal could be due to the decrease in daily case count, but also came with the government announcing on 24 March 2022 about further easing of restrictions such that mask wearing was no longer mandatory outdoors.

Respondents may have gotten used to returning to the workplace, which may have led to the proportion of respondents agreeing to allow people to be unmasked at the workplace increasing since W45 (12 January 2022 – 25 January 2022) and eventually reaching a new peak of 46 per cent in W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022). These may have contributed towards more positive attitudes towards allowing people to be unmasked if they are at the workplace with their regular colleagues.

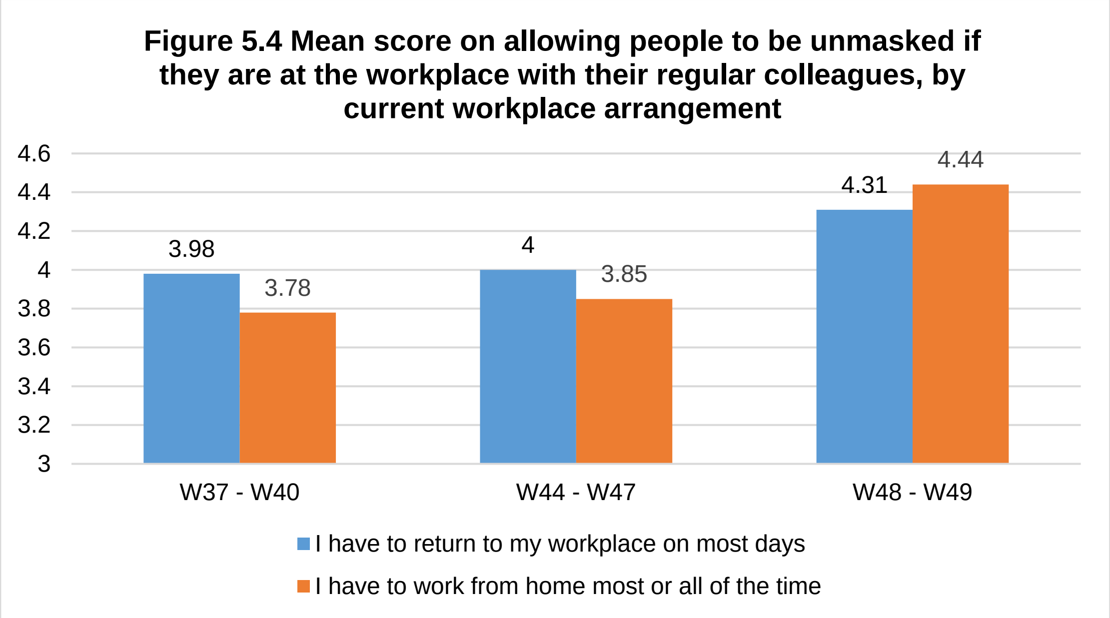
Figure 5.3 Allowing people to be unmasked if they are at the workplace with their regular colleagues, W37-W49 (%)



Looking at periods W37 (22 September 2021 – 29 September 2021) to W40 (28 October 2021 – 1 November 2021) when cases were high, we found that those who had to return to their workplace on most days were more likely to agree to allowing people to be unmasked at the workplace (mean=3.98, SD=1.86) as compared to those who had to work from home most or all of the time (mean=3.78, SD=1.87; $p < .05$). It is possible that among those who went back to work regularly, there might have been greater confidence that their colleagues would be responsible and have tested themselves to be COVID-free before coming to work. Thus, masks were perceived to not really be important in such a context.

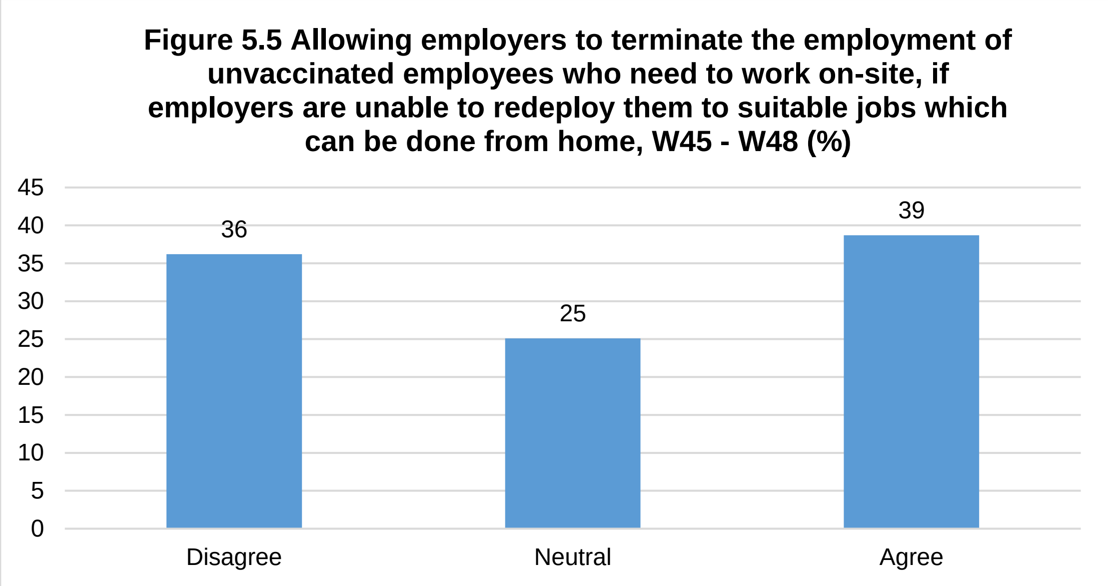
On the other hand, there were no significant differences between those who had to return to their workplace on most days (mean=4.00, SD=1.93) and those who had to work from home most or all of the time (mean=3.85, SD=1.83; $p = .10$) during the periods of W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022) to W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022), during which cases were high due to the Omicron variant (see Figure 1.4). This may suggest a general shift in attitudes towards masking at the workplace as people become less fearful of the virus and Omicron variant.

Supporting this view, there were also no significant differences between those who had to return to their workplace on most days (mean=4.31, SD=1.78) and those who had to work from home most or all of the time (mean=4.22, SD=1.84; $p = .64$) during the periods of W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022) to W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). Regardless of work arrangements, respondents demonstrated an increase in agreement towards allowing people to be unmasked at the workplace (see Figure 5.4).



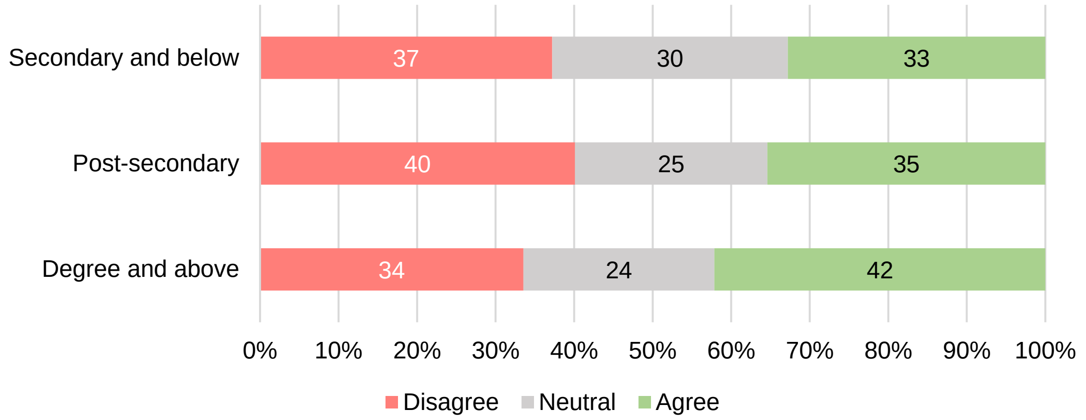
5.4 Sentiments on allowing employers to terminate the employment of unvaccinated employees who need to work on-site (except those who are medically ineligible for vaccination), if employers are unable to redeploy them to suitable jobs which can be done from home

Around 39 per cent supported the measure to allow employers to terminate the employment of unvaccinated employees who need to work on-site if they cannot be redeployed. This question was asked in W45 (12 January 2022 – 25 January 2022) to W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022) of the survey (see Figure 5.5).



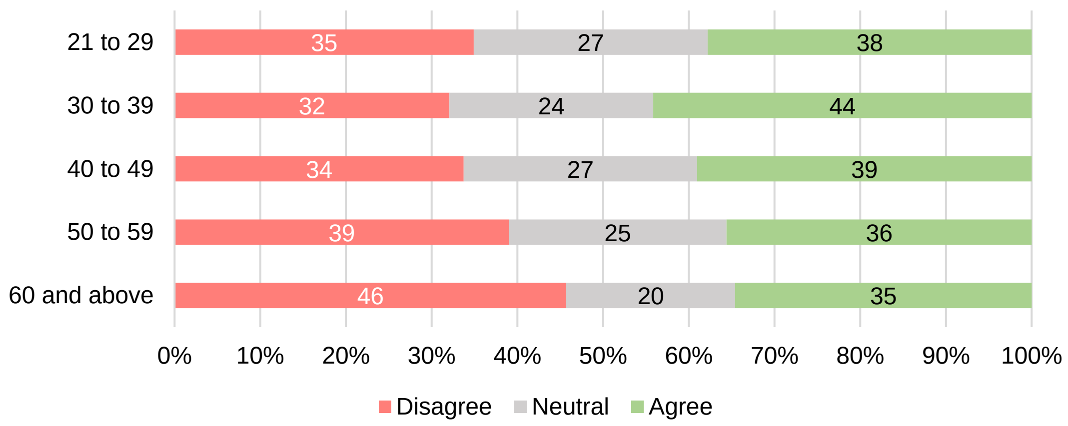
Respondents who did not have a degree were more likely to disagree with this measure as compared to those with a university education. While 42 per cent of those with degree and above agreed with this measure, only 33 to 35 per cent of those without a degree agreed with this measure (see Figure 5.6). It is hard to speculate on why there was such a difference based on educational qualifications. This was possibly because those with degrees were likely to have access to jobs which would allow them to work from home. Those without a degree might have been more aware of people in their networks who were liable to lose their job because it was harder to redesign these more technical roles for work from home.

Figure 5.6 Allowing employers to terminate the employment of unvaccinated employees who need to work on-site, if employers are unable to redeploy them to suitable jobs which can be done from home, W45 - W48 (%)



Older respondents were more likely to disagree with this measure as compared to younger respondents. While 44 per cent of respondents aged 30 to 39 agreed with this measure, only 35 to 36 per cent of those aged 50 and above agreed with this measure (see Figure 5.7). Since there was some correlation between older workers being in roles that were less likely to allow work from home, there were more concerns about those who might lose their jobs in their social circles.

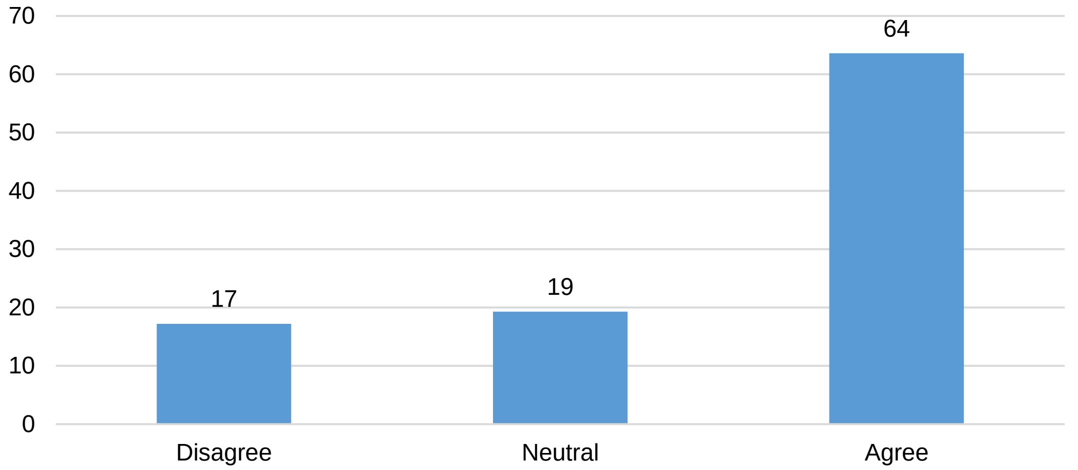
Figure 5.7 Allowing employers to terminate the employment of unvaccinated employees who need to work on-site, if employers are unable to redeploy them to suitable jobs which can be done from home, W45 - W48 (%)



5.5 Sentiments on employees and students not requiring a memo from the doctor to certify that they have recovered from COVID-19 before returning to work or school

Around 64 per cent of respondents agreed with the measure that did not require memos to be produced by employees and students in order to return to work or school after recovering from COVID-19. This question was asked in W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022) to W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022) of the survey. This reflects awareness and acceptance of newer measures considering that former measures, especially in the earlier stages of the pandemic, required individuals to seek medical attention promptly when they had any COVID-19 symptoms and needed to be cleared through a PCR test before exiting from quarantine and returning to work or school (see Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8 Employees and students do not require a memo from the doctor to certify that they have recovered from COVID-19 before returning to work or school, W47-W49 (%)



6 COVID-19 AT THE WORKPLACE

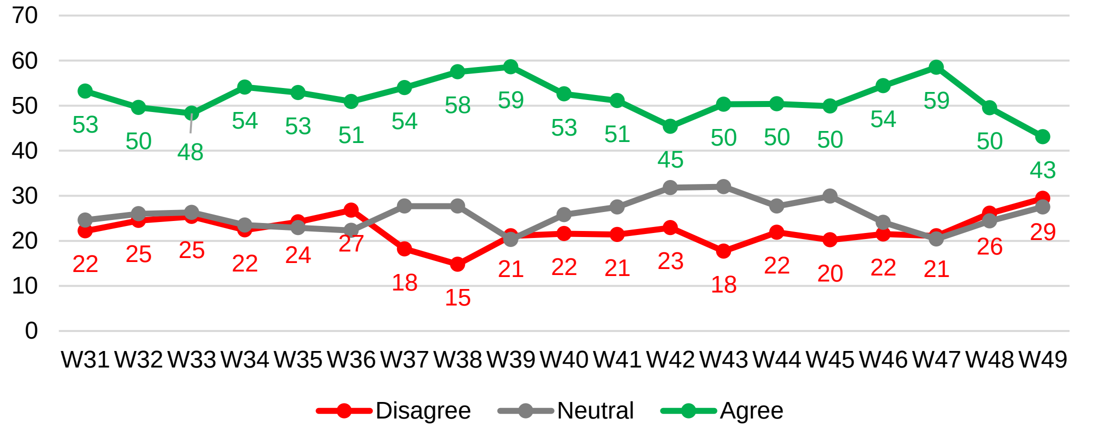
6.1 Sentiments on whether one is afraid of getting infected due to returning to the workplace more regularly

Among those who have to return to their workplace on most days, about half of the respondents polled across the waves of this study were afraid of being infected with COVID-19 when they return to work more regularly. However, these concerns have been tapering off in recent waves.

Around 53 per cent of respondents in W31 (14 July 2021 – 25 July 2021) felt afraid that they would be infected with COVID-19 as they have started to return to the workplace more regularly. The proportion decreased to around 48 per cent in W33 (7 August 2021 – 19 August 2021). Singapore returned to the Phase 2 Heightened Alert (P2HA) during W31 and W32, and exited P2HA during W33.

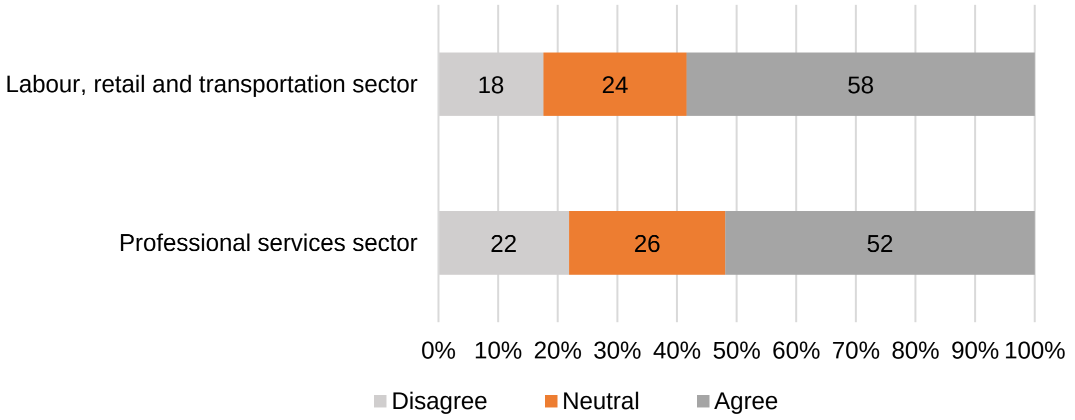
The proportion increased between 51 to 54 per cent in W34 (20 August 2021 – 30 August 2021) to W36 (15 September 2021 - 21 September 2021) as daily cases were expected to rise, before increasing further to 59 per cent in W39 (15 October 2021 – 27 October 2021) as the number of COVID-19 cases climbed quickly and the Stablisation Phase was extended. The proportion fell to 45 per cent in W42 (19 November 2021 – 23 November 2021) but increased thereafter, reaching 59 per cent in W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022) as more people returned to the office after work from home was no longer the default work arrangement. The proportion of respondents afraid of infection dropped to 43 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). The changing levels of infection in the community and various changes to safe management measures may have influenced perception on this issue.

Figure 6.1: I am afraid that I would be infected with COVID-19 as I have started to return to my workplace more regularly, W44-W47 (among those who return to workplace on most days, %)



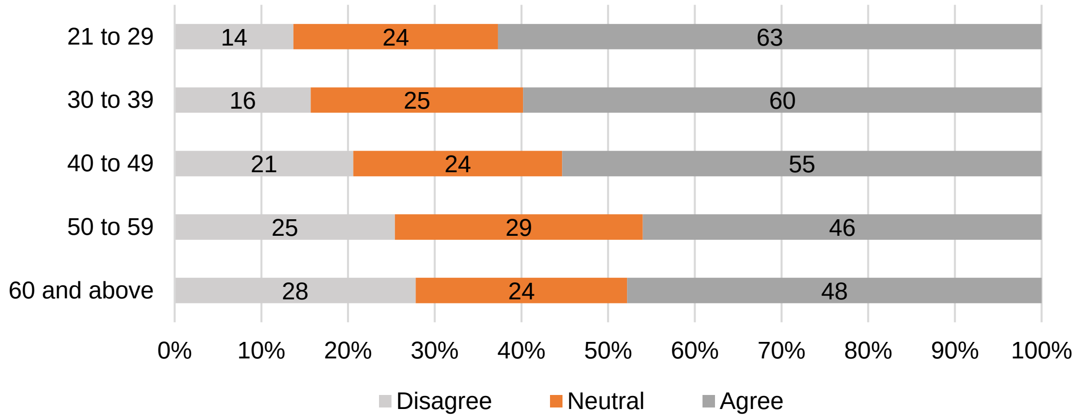
Respondents who worked in predominantly blue-collared industries, i.e. labour, retail and transportation were more likely to be afraid that they would be infected with COVID-19 as they have started to return to their workplace on most days, as compared to respondents working in the professional services sector. Around 58 per cent of respondents in predominantly blue-collared industries were afraid that they would be infected with COVID-19 as they have started to return to their workplace more regularly, as compared to 52 per cent of respondents in the professional services sector (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: I am afraid that I would be infected with COVID-19 as I have started to return to my workplace more regularly, by sector, W44-W47 (among those who return to workplace on most days, %)



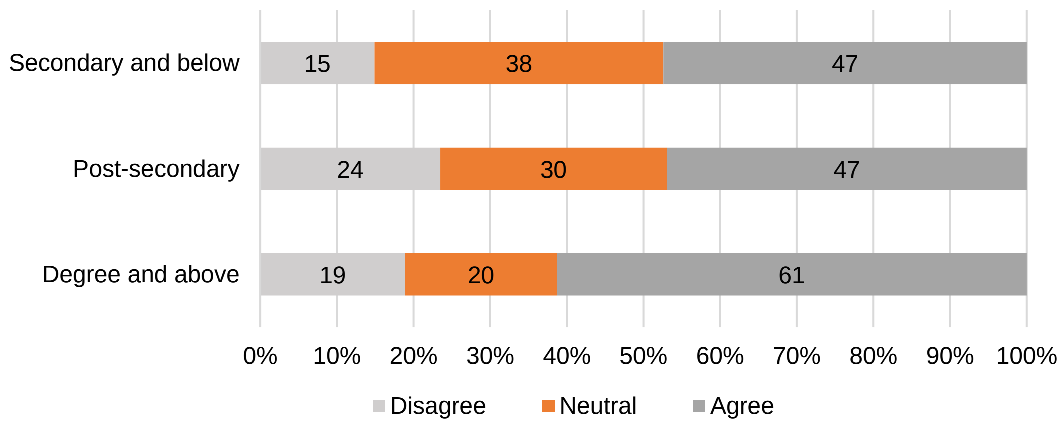
Younger respondents were also more likely to be afraid that they would be infected with COVID-19 as they have started to return to their workplace on most days, as compared to older respondents. Around 60 to 63 per cent of respondents aged below 40 years old were afraid that they would be infected with COVID-19 as they have started to return to their workplace on most days, as compared to 46 to 48 per cent of those aged 50 and above (see Figure 6.3). This is not an intuitive finding since earlier waves had shown greater concern and fear of COVID-19 among those who were older, who were at greater risk to negative health outcomes if they were infected. Perhaps this finding reflects that more older respondents have become confident that with vaccines and boosters, there was less to be concerned about an infection. It could also indicate that younger people, possibly because they are more likely to have young and unvaccinated children, may be more concerned about the implications of an infection and how it could possibly affect their child's health.

Figure 6.3: I am afraid that I would be infected with COVID-19 as I have started to return to my workplace more regularly, by age group, W44-W47 (among those who return to workplace on most days, %)



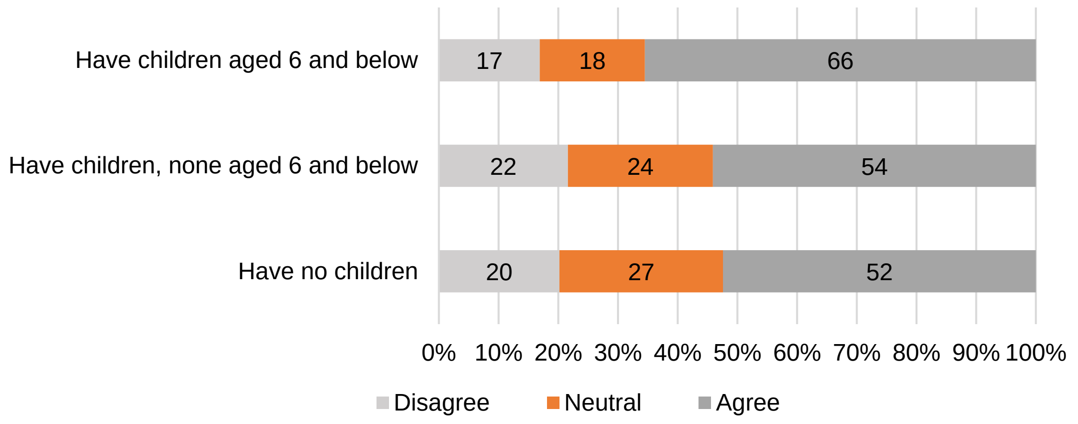
Higher educated respondents were also more likely to be afraid that they would be infected with COVID-19 as they have started to return to their workplace on most days, as compared to lower educated respondents. Around 61 per cent of respondents with a degree and above were afraid that they would be infected with COVID-19 as they have started to return to their workplace on most days, as compared to 47 per cent of those without a degree (see Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4: I am afraid that I would be infected with COVID-19 as I have started to return to my workplace more regularly, by education, W44-W47 (among those who return to workplace on most days, %)



Respondents who have children aged six and below were more likely to be afraid that they would be infected with COVID-19 as they have started to return to their workplace more regularly, as compared to those with older children and those without children. This may also reflect the trajectory of the pandemic in more recent months, when larger numbers of young children have been infected (see Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5: I am afraid that I would be infected with COVID-19 as I have started to return to my workplace more regularly, by whether respondents have young children, W44-W47 (among those who return to workplace on most days, %)

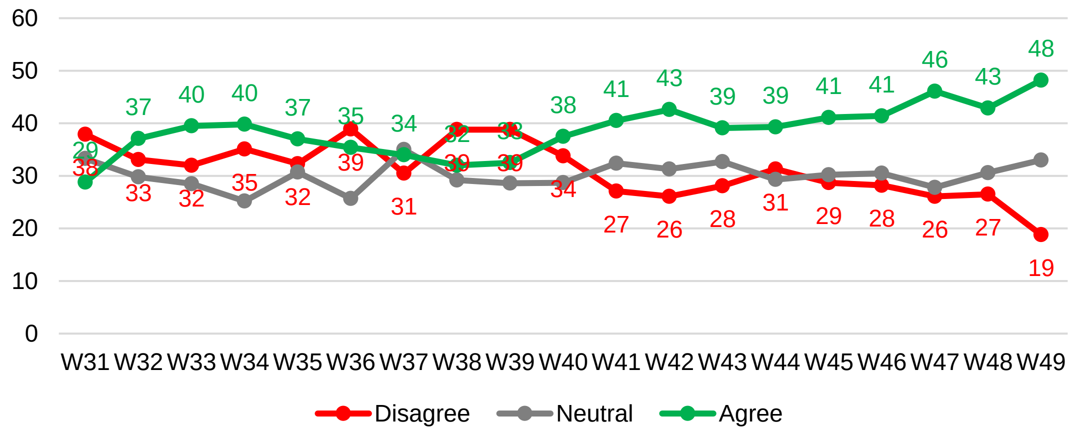


6.2 Level of comfort towards family members going back to former work routines common before the pandemic even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19

For the most part, respondents indicated feeling less comfortable with family members returning to former work routines when there was a surge in community cases (e.g. W36 (15 September 2021 – 21 September 2021) to W39 (15 October 2021 – 27 October 2021)). Nevertheless, the steps taken to transition towards endemic living (e.g. high vaccination rates) may have led to respondents feeling more comfortable over time.

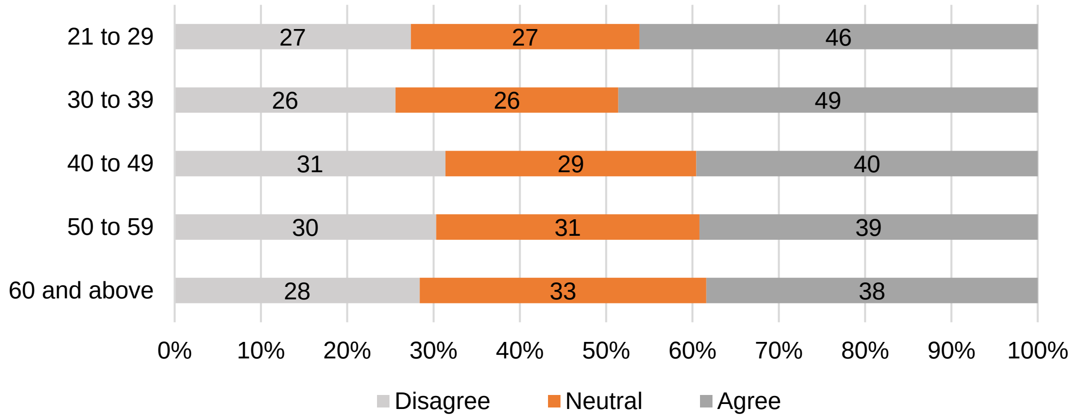
The proportion of respondents who were comfortable for family members to go back to former work routines common before the pandemic has been on the rise in later waves, eventually increasing to 48 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). Due to mild symptoms observed in most cases, reduced daily case counts, and relaxation of measures, respondents may have felt more comfortable with family members returning to their pre-pandemic work routines even if they might contract COVID-19.

Figure 6.6: I am comfortable for family members going back to former work routines common before the pandemic even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19 (%)



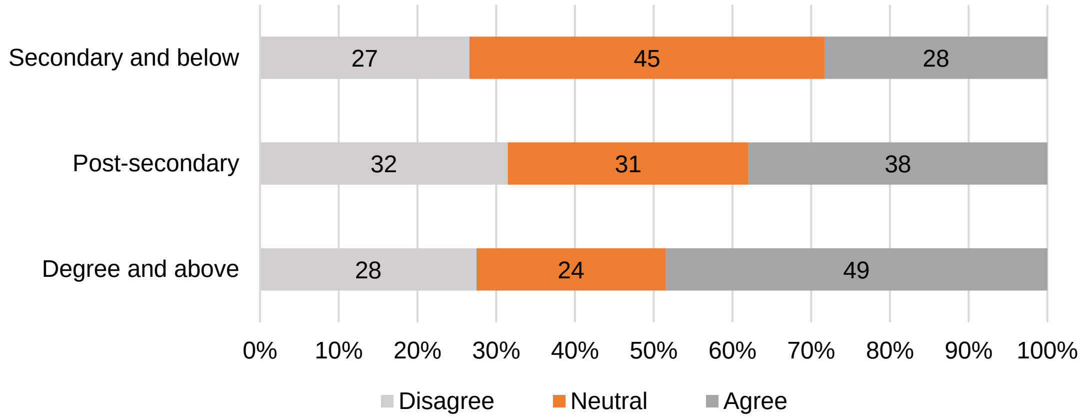
Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to be comfortable with family members going back to former work routines that were common before the pandemic, even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19. Around 49 per cent of those aged 30 to 39 would be comfortable with family members going back to former work routines, as compared to 38 to 40 per cent of those aged 40 and above (see Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.7: I am comfortable for family members going back to former work routines common before the pandemic even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19, by age group, W44-W47 (%)



Respondents who were more educated were more likely than lower educated respondents to be comfortable with family members going back to former work routines that were common before the pandemic, even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19. Around 49 per cent of those with a degree and above would be comfortable with family members going back to former work routines, as compared to 28 per cent of those with secondary education and below (see Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.8: : I am comfortable for family members going back to former work routines common before the pandemic even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19, by education, W44-W47 (%)



Respondents who have to return to their workplace on most days were more likely than respondents who work from home most or all of the time to be comfortable with family members going back to pre-pandemic work routines, even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19 (see Figure 6.9). Similarly, respondents who felt that working from office should be the norm for workplaces were more likely to be comfortable with family members going back to former work routines, as compared to those who felt that working from home or flexible working arrangements should be the new norm for workplaces (see Figure 6.10).

Figure 6.9: : I am comfortable for family members going back to former work routines common before the pandemic even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19, by current workplace arrangement, W44-W47 (among those employed, %)

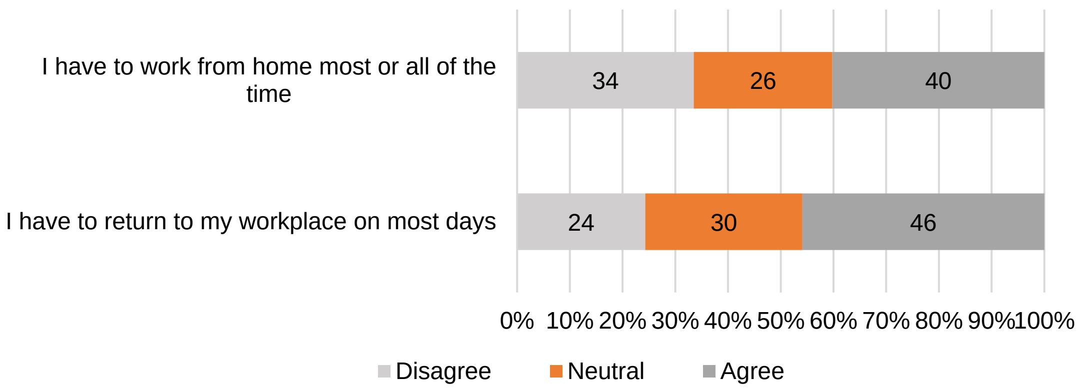
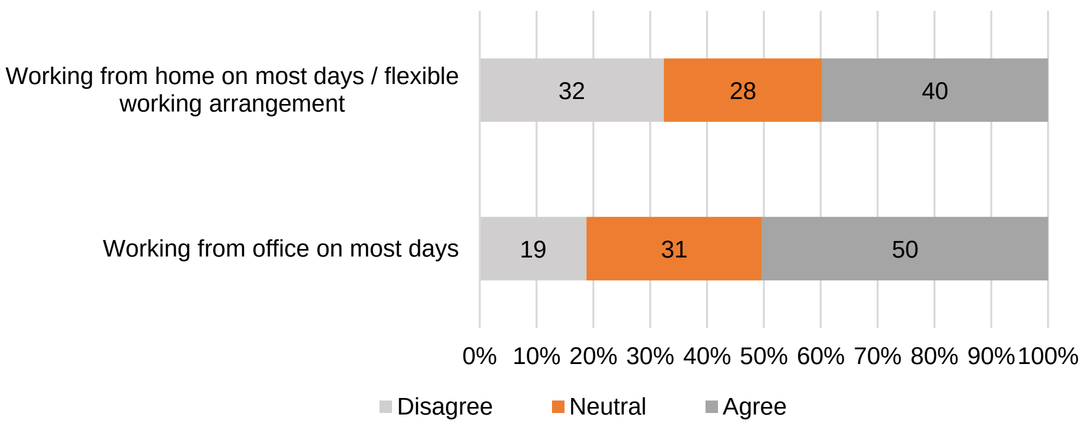
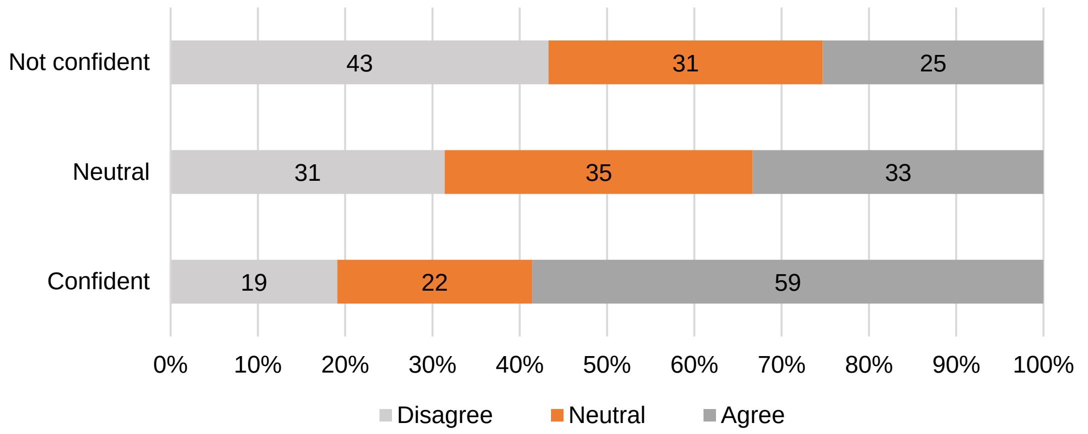


Figure 6.10: : I am comfortable for family members going back to former work routines common before the pandemic even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19, by preferred new norm for workplaces, W44-W47 (%)



Intuitively, respondents who were more confident about living with COVID-19 as endemic, as seen in their confidence in taking public transport in the new normal, were more likely to be comfortable with family members going back to former work routines common before the pandemic, even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19, as compared to those who were less confident of taking public transport (see Figure 6.11).

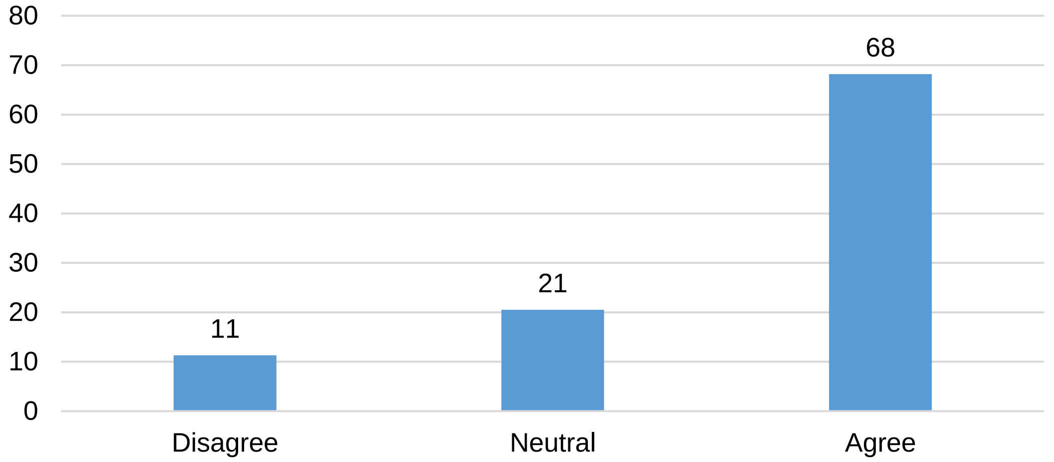
Figure 6.11: I am comfortable for family members going back to former work routines common before the pandemic even if there is a chance that they may get infected with COVID-19, by confidence in taking public transport in the new normal, W44-W47 (%)



6.3 Sentiments on whether one is afraid that the number of COVID-19 community cases will rise when working from home is no longer the default working arrangement

Nearly seven in 10 respondents (68 per cent) were afraid that the number of COVID-19 community cases would rise when working from home is no longer the default working arrangement (see Figure 6.12).

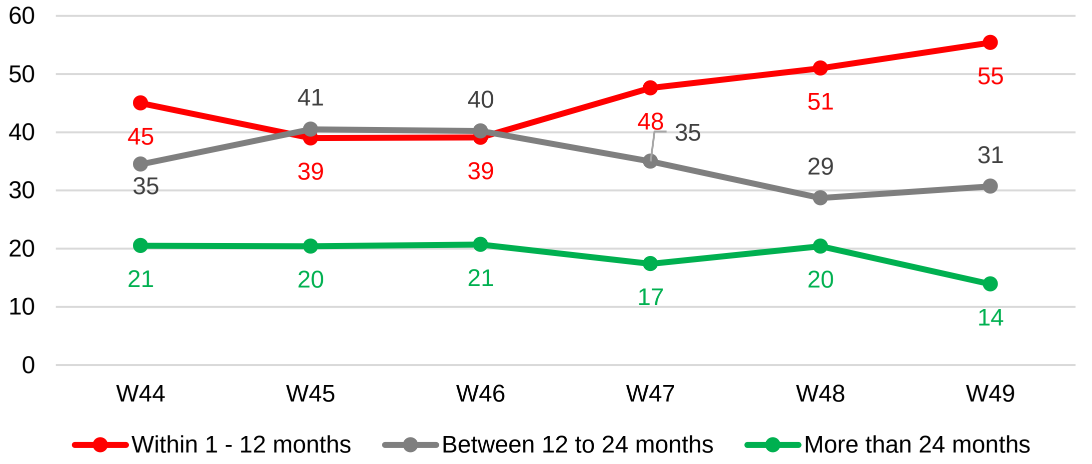
Figure 6.12: I am afraid that the number of COVID-19 community cases will rise when working from home is no longer the default working arrangement, W44-W47 (%)



6.4 Sentiments on when Singaporeans would be able to go back to former work routines common before the pandemic

Around 45 per cent of respondents polled in W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022) felt that Singaporeans would be able to return to work routines that were common before the pandemic within the next year. This proportion fell to around 39 per cent in W45 (12 January 2022 – 25 January 2022) and W46 (31 January 2022 – 8 February 2022). The proportion then increased from 48 per cent in W47 (14 February 2022 – 22 February 2022) to 55 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022). The announcement of Budget 2022 in W47 and the easing of measures at the end of W48 may have signalled Singapore to move towards post-pandemic living. Hence, respondents may believe that work routines will return to normal soon.

Figure 6.13 : In your opinion, how long would it be before Singaporeans can go back to work routines that were common before the pandemic?, W44-W49 (%)

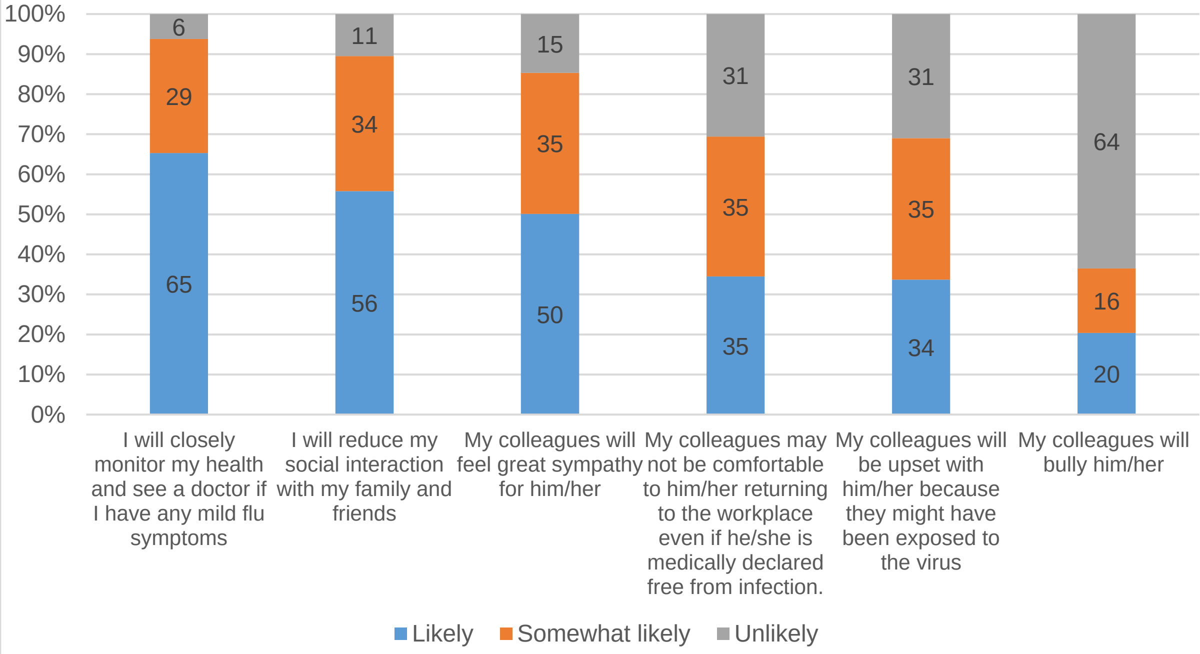


6.5 Actions one would take if a colleague has been found to be COVID-19 positive

In our polls, we also asked respondents what their response would be if they have a colleague who had been found to be COVID-19 positive. Respondents were more likely to closely monitor their health and see a doctor if they have any mild flu symptoms (65 per cent). They were also likely to reduce social interaction with family and friends (56 per cent). These responses were consistent with current measures of how one should react if one has been in close contact with someone who was infected.

Though not the majority, there was a third of respondents who felt that their colleagues would not be comfortable with a previously infected person returning to the office and that colleagues would be upset with the person because he or she could have transmitted the virus to them. In fact, 20 per cent of respondents even felt that their colleagues would bully someone who had been infected. Nevertheless, such concerns about colleagues’ negative responses to an infection need to be understood in the context of the 50 per cent of respondents who felt that their colleagues will feel great sympathy for the one who was infected (see Figure 6.14).

Figure 6.14: If a colleague at your workplace has been found to be COVID-19 positive, how likely will the following happen?, W44-W47 (%)



7. CONCLUSION

As Singapore resumes its re-opening efforts, more employees have been allowed to return to the workplace. With remote working having been widely adopted during the pandemic, questions now arise as to what *should* be the new normal with regard to workplace arrangements as Singapore lives with COVID-19. With the most recent government announcements that from 26 April 2022 all workers can return to their workplaces, some businesses might insist on the same pre-pandemic norms of work, with little flexibility for workers.

Against this backdrop, the present report attempted to shed light on Singaporeans' attitudes and perceptions towards work and workplace arrangements, their experiences and beliefs in their careers, and how these may have impacted their aspirations, priorities, and well-being. This information should hopefully help businesses better take into account worker preferences.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a common thread across the findings is Singaporeans' preference for sustaining flexible work arrangements. Notably, the vast majority of employees who have been predominantly working from home appeared firm in their belief that flexible work arrangements ought to be the new norm for workplaces in Singapore. This, coupled with the finding that people have become increasingly productive while working from home, is testament to Singaporeans' effective adaptation to such working arrangements and perhaps inevitably, the questioning of the necessity of returning to the office when work required can still be delivered remotely. However, given that reasons such as ease of collaboration and conduciveness of the workplace environment are highly important to employees, the value proposition of the workplace ought not to be undermined, but instead, redefined. Workplaces should no longer be viewed as sites for workers to produce the necessary output required of them given that many workers can do this successfully at home. Rather workplaces should provide the space for greater collaboration, fostering of organisational identity and belonging, as well as a sense of shared purpose.

The strength of one's preference for flexible work arrangements were also differentially endorsed across population segments. Women in particular, including those with dependents, were more likely to prefer flexible work arrangements, perhaps as part of the ever-delicate balance between caregiving expectations and career aspirations. Indeed, our respondents were most likely to indicate their desire to incorporate their personal life needs and their family needs, together with the reduced risk of getting infected, as the chief reasons for preferring to work from home. These results suggest a need for organisations to sustain much-needed conversations with their employees on how best to implement work arrangements that are both balanced and enabling. This could include prioritising workers' autonomy over their work schedules, while at the same time safeguarding workers' safety and health if their physical presence is required at the workplace.

The issue of workplace arrangements goes beyond mere preferences. It has important implications on individuals' well-being. Although over the months, our results showed that Singaporeans have slowly gotten used to resuming workplace activities and were feeling less pressured to go back to their workplaces, our analyses revealed that those who were able to have an arrangement that they prefer experienced a higher level of psychological well-being than those who could not. For example, working parents, especially those with young children, expressed the poorest levels of well-being when their workplace arrangement required them to return to their workplaces. Compatibility between existing and preferred workplace arrangements is, and should continue to be, an important conversation piece between employers and employees — perhaps with due consideration given to unique individual or familial circumstances.

Like it or not, the pandemic has also encouraged — or forced — people to give further thought to their life priorities. During the past years, some have unfortunately faced retrenchment, while others have had to re-skill and transfer to different industry sectors depending on the prevailing economic demands. It is little wonder that people's job aspirations have undergone a change during this tumultuous time.

In this vein, our findings revealed that younger workers, more educated workers, as well as those who have experienced job disruptions (e.g., left or lost a job, or had changes in their remuneration) were more likely to express a change in their career aspirations as a result of the pandemic. Indeed, many were forced to re-think what is important in their lives, or how differently they may wish to live or work, given their experiences during the pandemic. Some may feel stronger that their work should not hinder their efforts to raise their children and expect that the organisations they work for ensure sufficient provision of flexibility so they can be present with their children when needed, during the formative years. Others who may be passionate about traveling for longer periods of time or simply need a change in their routines, may want employers to seriously allow work-cations where they can be actively engaged with their work while feeling recharged through travelling. In the longer term, given that people may also experience changing priorities across life stages, employment schemes can also be enhanced to allow for greater flexibility in deployment and rotation, so as to cater for a higher degree of exploration and all-rounded exposure while at the same time ensuring organisational commitment.

Moving forward, it will be important for our society to continue to think about how we can support our workers in their pursuit of a meaningful and dignified life. Already, it is encouraging to note that a sizeable proportion of respondents in our study have indicated that they have acquired new skills during the pandemic that would help them in their career. This is indicative of an adaptive and forward-looking workforce. It will therefore be crucial for society to continue this trajectory of re-skilling and up-skilling our workers — not simply as a means to put food on the table, but to provide a sense of purpose and agency to Singaporeans. Maintaining such a flexible workforce will be all the more important, given the uncertain nature of COVID-19 and the disruptions to the economy that it will bring about.

Appendix A

Industries classified under Professional Services sector:

- Information and communications
- Financial and insurance services
- Real estate activities
- Professional, scientific and technical activities
- Administrative and support service activities
- Public administration (Civil Service) and defence
- Education
- Health and social services
- Arts, entertainment and recreation
- Other service activities
- Others

Industries classified under labour, retail and transportation sector:

- Agriculture and fishing
- Mining and quarrying
- Manufacturing
- Electricity, gas, steam and air-conditioning supply
- Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities
- Construction
- Wholesale and retail trade
- Transportation and storage
- Accommodation and food service activities

Appendix B: Composite scales

Confidence in engaging in social activities in the new normal (α = .91): This composite scale captures the level of confidence a respondent has in engaging in social activities in the new normal while the virus is still in our midst, with a score closer to 0 representing low confidence and a score closer to 1 representing high confidence.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of confidence based on a five-point scale (1 being "not at all confident" and 5 being "very confident") on the following items: "In the new normal, with COVID-19 circulating in our midst, how confident are you in carrying out the following activities?"

- Dining out at public places like hawker centres, restaurants or bars
- Attending a live event with a large number of spectators e.g. National Day, sports events
- Going out shopping at crowded places like shopping malls, wet markets, supermarkets
- Travelling to other countries with relatively low cases of COVID-19 for leisure
- Taking public transport
- Having close personal contact e.g. handshaking, hugs, standing together in a group
- Visiting friends and relatives more regularly

Psychological well-being (α = .92): This composite scale captures respondents' psychological well-being, with a score closer to 0 representing poorer psychological well-being and a score closer to 1 representing higher psychological well-being.

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they have experienced the following recently based on a five-point scale (1 being "not at all" and 5 being "very much") on the following items: "To what extent have you experienced the following recently?"

- Having repeated and disturbing thoughts or dreams about what is happening (reverse coded for consistency)
- Having difficulty concentrating (reverse coded for consistency)
- Having trouble falling or staying asleep (reverse coded for consistency)
- Feeling irritable or having anger outbursts (reverse coded for consistency)
- Feeling hopeless (reverse coded for consistency)

Government satisfaction (α = .92): This composite scale captures respondents' level of satisfaction with the government's management of the pandemic, with a score closer to 0 representing lower levels of government satisfaction and a score closer to 1 representing higher levels of government satisfaction.

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they were satisfied with how government has handled the pandemic based on a seven-point scale (1 being "strongly dissatisfied" and 7 being "strongly satisfied") on the following items: "For each of the following measures, to what extent are you currently satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the government implemented these following policies in handling the COVID-19 pandemic?"

- Opening Vaccinated Travel Lanes with more countries, so that Singaporeans and foreign nationals can travel without quarantine
- Communicating COVID-19 related policies and measures (e.g. precautions to take, Circuit Breaker, loosening of restrictions) to the public
- Communicating the government's plans and measures for re-opening
- Travel bans and border control
- Keeping the healthcare system running
- Keeping the economy running
- Protecting jobs
- Providing financial aid packages to citizens
- Reducing the number of daily infections in the community
- Overall handling of COVID-19

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