

Associations of rest break behaviour routines with health and psychological wellbeing in alternating home office workers



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Purpose

Stress-related illnesses and health costs are increasing in modern societies on the one hand. On the other hand, flexible working at a main office and at home (i.e. alternating telework) is increasingly popular such as in Switzerland. Working time regulations entitle employees' rest break provision rights in order to protect their well-being and performance. And social norms and rituals influence whether and how employees recover in conventional offices. However, little is known about the recovery behaviour of home office workers. This study aims to answer the question of how home office users' rest break behaviour (i.e. timekeeping, perceived frequency, type of break activity) is related to their health (i.e. general health, sleeping quality) and psychological well-being.

Design/Methodology

A total of N=450 (mean age = 42.2 years; 50.9 % women) alternating home office workers, whose main place of work is in German-speaking Switzerland and who work in different sectors and companies, participated in the second Swiss «Home Office» online survey.

Limitations

The data represents the general population of Swiss alternating home office workers well with respect to sector, and age, but significantly more women participated in the survey.

Results/Practical Implications

The results will be presented and the implications for the management of organizations with flexible working structures and future research will be discussed.

Originality/Value

This study, one of the first on this topic, analysed the effects of recovery behaviour routines on employee health and wellbeing in the context of flexible working in the home office.

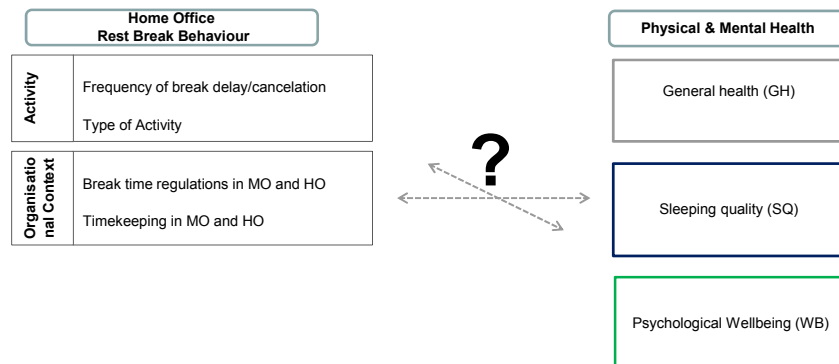
Background

- i.e. alternating teleworking / telecommuting in Main Office (MO) and Home Office (HO)
- CH: job tasks 53% working people allow to work mobile, 27% work HO, 0.8 day/week (Weichbrodt, 2014)
- Knowledge work: mental work, alone ↔ cooperation, desk-based, sedentary
HO preferred for concentration tasks, work undisturbed, flexibility (e.g. Gisin et al., 2012)
- higher job satisfaction and productivity, reduced facility costs (Gisin et al., 2012; Gurstein, 1996; Hill et al., 2003; Salaff, 2002)
- Illnesses related to sedentary work / lifestyles and psychological stress have increased, e.g. burnout, cardiovascular
- within-working day recovery has received comparably less attention than leisure time recovery (for review, see Sianoja, Kinnunen, de Bloom & Korpela, 2015)

- Psychological detachment or being-away facilitate recovery experiences (Allmer, 1996; Bakker et al., 2011; Hammit, 2004; Hartig, 2004; Kaplan, 1995; Sonnentag & Fritz 2007)
- several short (micro) breaks are better than few longer breaks, active breaks better than passive breaks (for mental recovery) (Allmer, 1996; Degenhardt & Buchecker, 2012; Franke, 1998; Sonnentag, 2001; Tucker, 2003; Zimmermann, 2014)
relaxation positively affects motivational and emotional recovery (Sianoja et al., 2015)
- autonomy, and fit with preferred break activity during and after micro-breaks is positively associated with positive emotions, vitality (Troughakos et al., 2008; Sianoja et al., 2015)
feeling «free and unreglemented» is positively associated with recovery from work in nearby natural environments (e.g. Degenhardt & Buchecker, 2012)
- exercising in natural environment (e.g. nature walk) improves mental wellbeing more than indoor or urban exercise (e.g. Bowler et al., 2010; Brown, Barton, Pretty & Gladwell, 2014)

Aim

How is home office users' rest break behaviour related to their health and psychological wellbeing?



Study Design

Online survey

13.June - 6.Dec 2013 (reminder Oct)

Ø 27.5 Minutes

Convenience sample, German-speaking Swiss

→ 450 Self-reports from alternating home office workers

Sample

$N = 346^a - 450^b$

Age ^a	42.2 (SD 9.9, 23-69)		
Women ^a	50.9%		
Sector ^b		Company size ^b	
primary	1.3%	1-249	44.9%
secondary	8.4%	250-1499	22.0%
service	90.2%	1500+	33.1%
University, High School	20.9%	Household size ^a	
ICT	18.7%	1	13.3%
Public Administration, Embassy		2	48.0%
etc.	12.9%	3-6	38.7%
Fixed contract ^b	87.1%		
Employment level ^b		Satisfaction with housing ^a	8.35
up to 80%	31.8%		(SD 1.83, 1-10)
90-100%	68.2%		
Leadership position ^b	60.4%		
Satisfaction with HO Work ^b	7.89 (SD 1.98, 1-10)		

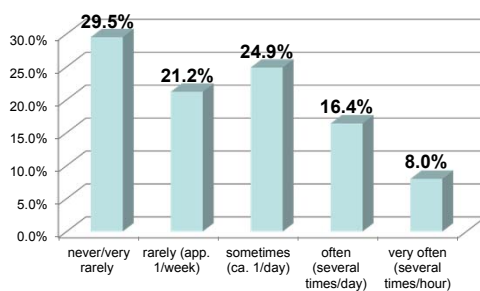
Results

Frequency

How often do you not have a break or rest delayed due to too much work in the Home Office?

1 (never/very rarely) to 5 (very often/several times per hour);
ISTA (Semmer, Zapf & Dunkel, 1998)

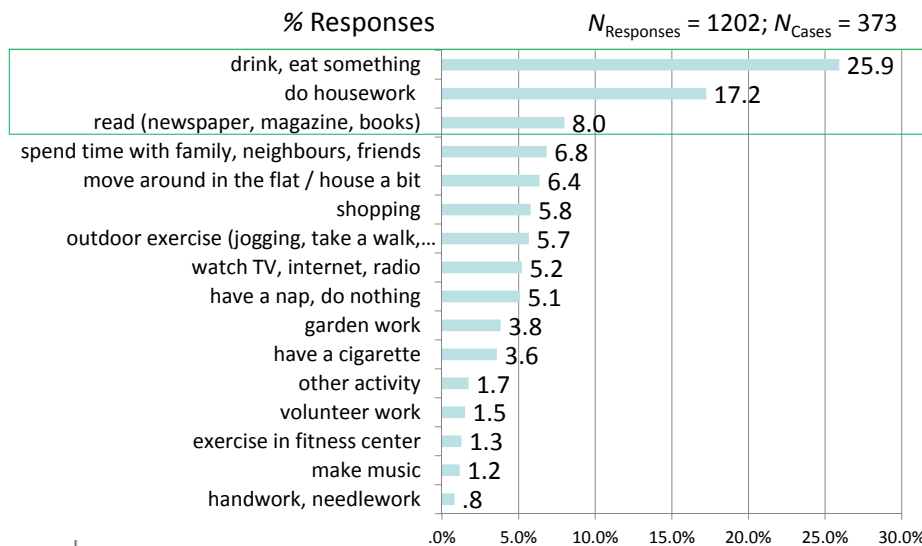
$M = 2.52$ ($SD\ 1.27$), $N = 373$



Frequency & Psych. Wellbeing:

$\tau\text{-}b = -.10$, $p < .02$
 $N = 344$

Break Activities



	<i>M</i> ^a	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Health																
1. General health	3.62	.80			.37***	.37***										-.11**
2. Sleep Quality	3.97	.97			.34***		-.12**									
3. Psychological Wellbeing	4.50	.75								.10**						
Break activities																
4. drink, eat something							.12*						-.14**			
5. do housework												.21***				
6. move around in the flat / house a bit										-.10*						
7. read (newspaper, magazine, books)																
8. spend time with family, neighbours, friends															.14**	
9. outdoor exercise (jogging, take a walk, bicycling)																
10. shopping																
11. watch TV, internet, radio														.12*		
12. have a nap, do nothing																
13. garden work																
14. have a cigarette																

Note. *N* = 344-347; ^avalues ranging from 1 to 5; Kendall's tau-b, **p* ≤ .05, ***p* ≤ .01, ****p* ≤ .001 (pairwise deletion of missing values)

Break regulations

Exist regulations with respect to break times in the MO and HO?

No	55.1%	N = 450
Yes, but often I take my breaks not or shorter than I am allowed to	30.0%	
Yes, and I take my breaks consequently	11.3%	
Other	3.6%	

Regulation adherence & General Health:

"Yes, but not or shorter" worse than "Yes, consequently"

Tamhane $T^2 = -.26, p < .09$

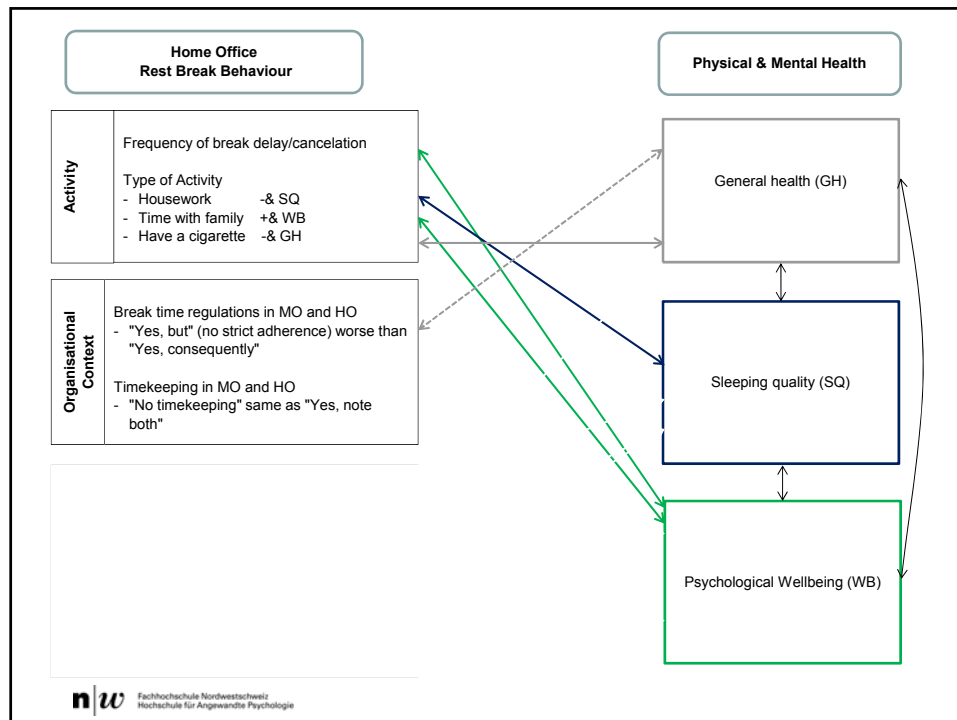
Timekeeping

Do you record your working and break times in the MO and HO?

No	42.9%	N = 441
I clock in and out with a badge	9.1%	
Yes, I just note my working hours	39.1%	
I just note my break times	0.2%	
I note working hours & break times	11.1%	
Don't know / No answer	0.7%	

Timekeeping & Health

No associations.



Discussion

- Neg. association of Frequency of delayed/cancelled breaks with Psych. WB provides evidence that reduction of stressor is not enough to sustain WB (i.e. more privacy via retreat from MO stressors in HO);
regular breaks are necessary in HO, even though only 0.8 hrs/week spend in HO (vgl. Weichbrodt, 2014)
- Housework:
low-to medium intense indoor PA provides not enough recovery; negatively associated with Psych. WB (Degenhardt & Gisin, 2013); but no association with Psychological Detachment (Zimmermann & Degenhardt, 2015)
? nature of activity, i.e. no autonomy in break activity choice but responsibility that hinders detachment
? spatial interdependence between kitchen and HO workplace (Schoggen, 1989), i.e. missing environmental qualities «distant, fascinating, coherently ordered, compatible» (ART, e.g. Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989)
- Spend time with family, friends, neighbours: non-work social contacts in work breaks support recovery from work strain (e.g. Degenhardt & Buchecker, 2012; Trougakos, et al., 2014; Zimmermann & Degenhardt, 2015)

- No evidence that indoor and outdoor medium-level and strenuous ADL support health and WB in alternating HO workers ((«moving around, shopping, gardening, jogging, fitness centre»; Degenhardt & Gisin, 2013);
however, «reading», «go out into the fresh air» associated with better recovery experiences (detachment) in Scientific Workers (Zimmermann & Degenhardt, 2015)

? inconstant finding, or difference between effects of short term unwinding and long term health and WB?
- Limitations: self-reports; convenience sample representative for age, sector; cross-sectional, organisational context not specific for HO

New challenges for recovery routines in flexible, everyday work settings and salutogenic flexible workplace design!

Thank you!

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