

Productivity and stress in Japanese new teleworkers: mandatory versus voluntary introduction

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In our study of the introduction of teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic, we avoid a common self-selection bias by controlling for agents' preferences and whether the introduction was voluntary or mandatory. In a survey (n=1500) conducted in December 2020, we inquired about working arrangements and agent preferences in January, April and December 2020.

Productivity levels initially did not significantly differ for newly teleworking individuals after correcting for age, gender, marital status, breadwinner and management roles, childcare gap, area, job type and general health awareness, but were negatively impacted by a preference mismatch (around -3pp) and a cognitive dissonance (not going with one's preference in spite of having a chance to do so, adding another -5pp). By December 2020, individuals in partially remote telework showed a significant positive productivity differential (around 7pp), almost offsetting the mismatch impact. Similarly, stress levels initially did not differ for newly teleworking individuals using largely the same controls as before. By December 2020, stress levels for individuals newly undertaking fully remote telework were significantly lower than for the control group of individuals with unchanged working arrangements, but the preference mismatch contributed significantly to higher stress levels.