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Is More Really More? Evidence of a Curvilinear Relationship between the Extent of Telework and Employees' Temporal Alignment of Work and Private Life in Germany

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Abstract: Studies exploring not only whether, but also to what extent, telework can improve employees' ability to coordinate private and work-related demands are largely absent. Using a probability-based large-scale survey of employees in Germany (N = 14,999), this study provides evidence of an inverted U-shaped relationship between the extent of telework and employees' temporal alignment of work and private life, i.e., their success in considering personal and family matters when scheduling work. When telework comprised up to 40 percent of the total working time, employees were observed to temporally align their work and private life better than those who only worked on-site. Additional analyses indicated that particularly men, and even more so fathers, experience improved work and private life alignment with frequent teleworking. For women with and without children, however, highly extensive teleworking not only loses its positive effect, but is associated with less success in aligning work and private life compared to non-teleworking. To be able to benefit from telework, even when it is used extensively, clear rules are needed, for example, regarding expectations of accessibility for paid work as well as for home and care work.

Keywords: working from home; work scheduling; job autonomy; gender; parenthood



Citation: Mergener, Alexandra, Timothy Rinke, and Ines Entgelmeier. 2024. Is More Really More? Evidence of a Curvilinear Relationship between the Extent of Telework and Employees' Temporal Alignment of Work and Private Life in Germany. *Social Sciences* 13: 508. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13100508>

Academic Editors: Denis Bernardeau-Moreau and Louis Brennan

Received: 30 April 2024

Revised: 26 August 2024

Accepted: 25 September 2024

Published: 27 September 2024



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1. Introduction

The combination of private and work-related demands is a challenge for most employees today, especially those with young children. Telework, meaning a work practice that enables employees to perform paid work for the employer from home, is often discussed as a way for employees to overcome this challenge (Ojala et al. 2014). However, research findings do not clearly support this: on the one hand, studies indicate the better integration of private and work demands when teleworking due to more flexibility and control over the temporal and physical boundaries of work (Allen et al. 2015; Gajendran and Harrison 2007). On the other hand, telework is associated with conflicts between both spheres of life because it promotes overtime (Abendroth and Reimann 2018), working at atypical times, such as evenings or weekends, and accessibility even outside regular working hours (Backhaus et al. 2020).

The current state of research indicates that the design of telework is decisive for work-life-related outcomes, which might be a reason for ambivalent findings. Next to qualitative aspects of telework, e.g., organizational regulations and recognition of working time (e.g., Entgelmeier 2022; Mergener et al. 2023; Ojala et al. 2014), quantitative aspects are relevant (Allen et al. 2015). Assumptions about a curvilinear relationship are conceivable and have already been shown in the context of telework and job satisfaction (Virick et al. 2010) or well-being (Vander Elst et al. 2017) but not yet in the context of telework and the ability to coordinate work and private matters.

Drawing on boundary theory ([Ashforth et al. 2000](#)), we argue that telework usually supports the integration of work and private demands. Telework promotes boundary-crossing activities by making the boundaries between work and private life more flexible. Transitions between work and private roles can thus take place more easily. However, we expect differences depending on the extent of telework. For instance, frequent teleworking (compared to no or less teleworking) saves employees more time by eliminating commuting. Moreover, with frequent teleworking, employees have more temporal and spatial flexibility and experience in structuring their work at home and coordinating additional private demands. Thus, role transition becomes a routine, which makes switching between work and private roles while working from home less demanding ([Ashforth et al. 2000](#)). Thus, frequent teleworkers should be more successful in aligning their work and private life compared to less frequent teleworkers or employees who only work in the office, particularly in terms of the time dimension, i.e., their success in considering personal and family matters when scheduling work. On the other hand, if employees telework very extensively, these described advantages may be outweighed by disadvantages due to the boundaries between work and private life dissolving. As a result, expectations of constant accessibility and the risk of working more or at atypical hours increase and interruptions from other areas of life can intrude more freely. This, in turn, makes the temporal alignment of work and private life more difficult.

In order to determine which of these arguments are supported by empirical evidence, this study examines the first question of whether and to what extent telework is associated with the temporal alignment of work and private life. Is more really more or is there a cut-off point beyond which telework can no longer be beneficial?

Evidence suggests that employees with family responsibilities are more likely to be affected by work–family conflict ([Reimann et al. 2022](#)), and therefore, better life management through flexible working practices, such as telework, is more important for them ([Shockley and Allen 2012](#)). Thus, it can be assumed that telework is more beneficial for employees with young children than for those without when it comes to combining private and family matters with working schedules. To explore this difference, the study examines the second question: Do the relationships between the extent of telework and the temporal alignment of work and private life differ by parenthood? As there are still substantial gender differences in employees' involvement in childcare, such that women tend to perform more childcare than men ([Steinbach and Schulz 2022](#)), different gender-specific assumptions are made.

The focus of the study is on Germany, which is representative in that the share of employees working from home has for a long time roughly corresponded to the European average, but increased substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as in other countries, and has even greater potential to increase ([Mergener 2020](#)). Moreover, the rate of working mothers with at least one child has increased noticeably over the past decade, from 67 percent in 2009 to 75 percent in 2019, while the rate of working fathers remains consistently high at 93 percent ([Destatis 2021](#)). This reinforces the importance of examining the alignment of work and private life in the German labor market, particularly for employees with family responsibilities.

The analysis used data from the 2018 German Employment Survey, carried out by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) and the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (BAuA). The BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018 is a large-scale survey, representative of German employees that allows for explicitly defining telework as only paid work from home (rather than informal overtime) and captures the extent of telework by providing detailed information on hours worked at home. Finally, data collected two years before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic are highly appropriate because potential biases due to infection control measures, such as the temporary closure of childcare facilities and schools or politically mandated home-based work, can be eliminated.

This study contributes to the literature by exploring not only whether, but also to what extent telework can improve or worsen employees' temporal alignment of work and private life, also analyzing a non-linear relationship. In addition, due to our large sample size, we are able to investigate group-specific differences with a focus on gender and the role of young children. Here, we go beyond previous research, which has not yet sufficiently investigated the non-linear relationships between telework and work–family-related outcomes focusing on different subgroups. Moreover, this study has important implications for the post-pandemic period as in the aftermath of COVID-19, most employees still want to work at least a certain proportion of their time at home (Frodermann et al. 2021). Accordingly, employees and employers are currently negotiating new telework agreements. Thus, considering the up- and downsides of the extent of telework is relevant, not only for the research debate, but also for the current and post-pandemic restructuring of telework.

2. Theoretical Considerations and Previous Research

More than 30 years after Jack Nilles (1988) coined the term telework, the idea of spatially flexible work is more relevant today than ever. In this study, we follow Allen et al. (2015) and use the term telework as a work practice that enables employees to substitute regular working time that they would typically spend at the employer's premises with working time spent at home rather than performing additional unpaid work from home.

According to boundary theory (Ashforth et al. 2000), individuals perform daily role transitions by crossing the boundaries between different spheres of life, especially those between home and work. The more different these spheres are (in terms of their temporal, spatial or social context), the more stable the boundaries between them and the more difficult it is to cross them. Conversely, more similar spheres are surrounded by more flexible and permeable boundaries and can be easily crossed. However, it is more difficult to establish and maintain boundaries. This can lead to uncertainty about which role an individual should act in, as well as more interruptions from the other roles an individual has.

Telework can thus facilitate the role transition between work and private life, as temporal and spatial boundaries are minimized. For example, a teleworker does not need to cross temporal and spatial boundaries to return home from the office to check on a sick child but only needs to go into the bedroom next door to make sure that the child is well and can return to work immediately. Since time flexibility, in particular, is mentioned as a resource when it comes to reconciliation challenges, we explicitly examined the temporal boundary-crossing effect of teleworking on the alignment of work and private life, namely, the success to which employees can consider private and family interests when scheduling their working hours. This concept emphasizes the temporal dimension when it comes to the question of how individuals cross borders between work and private life. Therefore, the focus is on a specific and widely discussed aspect affecting work–family balance or conflicts, rather than the broad and more general concepts.

2.1. (The Extent of) Telework and the Temporal Alignment of Work and Private Life

It is argued that teleworkers can save time they would otherwise spend commuting and, in turn, can use this for private needs (Allen et al. 2015). Moreover, telework is associated with greater job and schedule autonomy (Gajendran and Harrison 2007; Messenger et al. 2017). Teleworkers can use temporal and spatial flexibility in work organization to better integrate private demands into their everyday life compared to employees at a fixed on-site workplace. Because flexible temporal and spatial boundaries make it easier for them to switch from a working to a private role and back again (Ashforth et al. 2000). Many studies have already shown that job and schedule autonomy are, in turn, related to a decrease in work–family conflict and a better alignment of private and working life (e.g., Allen et al. 2015; Kelly et al. 2011; Kossek et al. 2006). This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: *Teleworkers are better able to temporally align work and private life than non-teleworkers.*

However, empirical research does not yet allow for entirely clear conclusions, as studies suggest that telework may also be related to more conflict (e.g., [Russell et al. 2009](#)) and worse reconciliation of work and private life (e.g., [Sarbu 2018](#)). Here, the extent of telework is discussed as an important indicator as “[f]inding the right amount of time to telecommute may be the key to producing desired outcomes” ([Allen et al. 2015](#), p. 45).

Only a few studies have investigated the association between the extent of telework and work–life-related outcomes so far, and again, they come to different conclusions. Although some earlier studies concluded that a high extent of telework makes it easier to reconcile both spheres of life, others found that conflict rises with the increasing extent of telework. [Gajendran and Harrison \(2007\)](#) showed less work interference with family for more extensive teleworking (2.5 days or more per week) but not for less extensive telework (less than 2.5 days per week). [Golden et al. \(2006\)](#) also found that as the extent of telework increases, work interference with family decreases. However, the authors pointed to more family interference with work when telework is extensive.

More recent research has shown, in contrast, greater work–family conflict for more extensive teleworking (i.e., mainly working from home) compared with counterparts who never worked from home but also for those working once a week or even only once a month or less from home ([Kim et al. 2020](#)). [Alfanza \(2021\)](#) concluded that intensive telework is associated with a worse work–life balance. The study by [Laß and Wooden \(2022\)](#) revealed that the broad group of home workers, who typically work at least a few hours per week from home, did not differ from non-home workers in terms of work–family conflict. However, they found a sizable and statistically significant conflict-reducing effect for those with a large share of time worked from home.

One reason that frequent teleworking might lead to better integration of work-related and private demands may be, e.g., the time saved by reduced need to commute. The less time spent in transitions to and from work, the more time and energy available for other demands in the private sphere. Furthermore, frequent teleworkers have more flexibility about their working time and place ([Gajendran and Harrison 2007](#); [Golden 2006](#)) and, as a possible result, manage the boundaries between work and private life in a way that is beneficial to the alignment of both spheres.

Following boundary theory, which states that the more often a role transition is repeated, the more easily it succeeds ([Ashforth et al. 2000](#)), thus, frequent teleworkers might be better able to switch from working to private roles and back again because they have developed routines in structuring their working practices at home and coordinating additional private requirements compared to employees who telework less. This is explained by the fact that transition scripts become established over time, i.e., cognitive structures in which the sequence of behavior is laid out and can be called up automatically ([Ashforth et al. 2000](#)). In contrast, employees who telework less frequently are less experienced in dealing with this flexibility and transition between work and private role because they do not have transition scripts to fall back on when teleworking ([Ashforth et al. 2000](#); [Gajendran and Harrison 2007](#)). They might have to invest more energy each time they telework to create structures and manage their scheduled obligations compared to frequent teleworkers. This means that, even though they could better align work and private matters due to more temporal flexibility than non-teleworkers, they might benefit less from teleworking compared to frequent teleworkers.

Nevertheless, the positive effect of frequent telework is not necessarily unlimited. Studies have already found a curvilinear relationship between the extent of telework and other outcomes, e.g., job satisfaction ([Golden and Veiga 2005](#); [Virick et al. 2010](#)), well-being ([Vander Elst et al. 2017](#)), or work engagement ([Nagata et al. 2021](#)). Thus, these outcomes initially increase with more telework but drop off after a certain telework extent.

This non-linear relationship can also be expected with regard to the temporal alignment of work and private life, which, however, is not yet studied. Telework has been

associated with a loss of boundaries between the private and working spheres and an extension of work and overtime (Abendroth and Reimann 2018). The blurring of roles in work and private life is, in turn, associated with higher levels of conflict between both spheres (Glavin and Schiemann 2012). At a certain level of extensive telework, these negative aspects may increase such that they outweigh the positive aspects of more flexibility in organizing working time. Moreover, teleworkers may face an increase in private responsibilities while teleworking, as others, e.g., household members, may expect them to deal with housework activities while working from home (Allen et al. 2015). This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H2: *There is an inverted U-shaped relation between the extent of telework and employees' temporal alignment of work and private life: although the positive correlation initially increases, it falls off if telework becomes more frequent and turns negative at very extensive telework.*

2.2. Differences in the Association of Telework and the Temporal Alignment of Work and Private Life by Employees' Parenthood Status

Parenthood can be considered as a distinct status characteristic, which is subject to stronger role expectations than gender alone (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). This is consistent with Allen et al. (2015), concluding that there is little evidence that gender alone shapes the relationship between teleworking and outcomes and studies discussing the particular importance of telework as a work arrangement for parents (Hilbrecht et al. 2008). Therefore, instead of comparing women to men, the focus is on the within-gender comparison of employees with and without children. As women are still substantially more involved in childcare than men are (Steinbach and Schulz 2022), different assumptions dependent on gender are made.

2.2.1. Exploring the Role of the Extent of Telework for Mothers and Women without Children

The family devotion schema (Blair-Loy 2003) is a cultural model in which a woman's primary vocation is seen as caring for children. Thus, women experience a change in cultural expectations placed on them after the birth of a child. The use of telework may further enhance the attribution of the family devotion norm because, with this work arrangement, the temporal and spatial boundaries between work and private life become more permeable in the sense of boundary theory (Ashforth et al. 2000). Accordingly, Shockley and Allen (2012) have argued that family responsibilities favor the use of telework due to life management motives. Therefore, it can be assumed that mothers, more than women without children, are enabled or encouraged by telework to conform to existing expectations and to use this flexibility to integrate family requirements into their work schedules. In a recent study, Chung and Booker (2022) found evidence that working from home increases the likelihood that mothers in lower-income occupations will bear most of the childcare responsibility. Moreover, in their qualitative study, Hilbrecht et al. (2008) showed that working from home strengthens mothers' role perceptions and that they see flexibility as conducive to the consideration of private concerns. Another qualitative study conducted by Sullivan and Smithson (2007, p. 458) also concluded that among home-based workers and partners, "flexibility tended to be constructed as beneficial to women working at home, specifically because it facilitates their role as domestic worker and mother".

With regard to the extent of telework, the same general assumption of an inverted U-shaped relationship can be made for women with and without children as was made in H2 for employees as a whole. There is also no reason to expect the turning point for mothers to be markedly different than for women without children. However, it can be assumed that the curves have different slopes. Specifically, the initial positive effect of frequent telework should be stronger for mothers because they should benefit more than women without children from telework to meet their additional demands.

These strategies, though, can also help mothers only up to a certain point. Furthermore, family demands enforced by very extensive telework are likely to be more pronounced for

mothers. Due to having more family demands, it should also be more difficult for mothers than for women without children to accommodate private matters in their work schedules if they telework most of their working hours. Powell and Craig's (2015) study showed that especially women who work 50 percent or more of their working time at home have, on average, substantially higher levels of childcare and multitasking on a home office day than women who work less than half of their working time at home. Furthermore, in the case of non-standard working hours, Lambert et al. (2023) found that women experienced more time-related work–family conflict than men and explained this by working at socially busy times. Extensive teleworking may also lead to working at times that conflict with family responsibilities and can, therefore, pose a particular challenge for mothers.

Beyond this study, the empirical literature on the relationship between telework extent and the alignment of work and private life is still sparse with regard to the difference between mothers and women without children. Only a recent study conducted by Kim et al. (2020) investigated differences between mothers and women without children in the association of work-from-home intensity and work-to-family conflicts. The study found that compared to male employees, female employees experienced more conflicts between work and family when they frequently worked at home. With regard to parenthood, however, the authors concluded that the null hypothesis that there were no differences between mothers of young children and other employees with regard to the relationship between workplace flexibility and the examined well-being measures (including work-to-family conflict) could not be rejected. Unfortunately, the authors do not go into detail about specific associations here. However, according to the authors, the null finding may also be due to the small proportion of mothers in the sample. Due to this limitation of their study, the authors suggest further examination of the moderating influence of both gender and parenting status. In order to deepen the knowledge of possible differences between mothers and women without children, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H3a: *There is an inverted U-shaped relation between the extent of telework and the temporal alignment of work and private life for both mothers and women without children. For mothers, however, the positive correlation initially increases more strongly and the relation becomes more negative at very extensive telework than for women without children.*

2.2.2. Exploring the Role of the Extent of Telework for Fathers and Men without Children

Men without children, but also fathers, are mainly confronted with cultural expectations that can be assigned to the sphere of work and which Blair-Loy (2003) calls the work devotion schema. Behind this is the norm of a life completely focused on work, which Acker (1990) also describes in her concept of the ideal worker. Traditionally, men have been more able to comply with the norm of the ideal worker as women have been in charge of the domestic sphere (Davies and Frink 2014). A recent study based on the German Socio-Economic Panel Study examines couples' housework division after childbirth and concludes that, despite supportive work–family policy periods in Germany, especially in West Germany, re-traditionalization effects have only slightly diminished following the birth of a child (Zoch and Heyne 2023). For men, the birth of a child is not accompanied by substantial changes in the role expectations placed on them, i.e., they still do and are mainly expected to take on the role of paid workers (Maume 2008), especially in the context of the German modified male breadwinner model (Trappe et al. 2015). Thus, men can use the flexibility of teleworking to intensify their work, even if there is a child to care for in the household. Fathers do not experience substantial increased success in considering private matters when scheduling work as a result of teleworking because fathers do not experience greatly increased family demands compared to men without children. In line with this, Sullivan and Smithson (2007) concluded from their qualitative study that men saw the benefits of teleworking primarily in the context of their paid employment, and if anything, as a way to “help” with childcare. This finding is consistent with Halford's (2006, p. 399) conclusion, in which home-working “fathers' increased involvement with their

children was regarded as ‘extra’, additional to the ‘normal’ parenting routines managed by mothers”. These findings need to be nuanced to some extent, as the motivation to use telework also depends on fathers’ individual gender beliefs. This is examined by a recent study for the U.S. during the pandemic (Carlson et al. 2024), showing that for fathers with egalitarian gender attitudes, the frequency of remote work was positively associated with fathers performing more, and a greater share of, childcare.

However, as structural factors, such as, e.g., tax regulations and general gender norms, favor the modified breadwinner model in Germany, we are investigating the assumption that for men, parenthood may not have a measurable impact on the association between telework extent and the temporal alignment of work and private life. The general assumptions of a curvilinear relationship should also hold:

H3b: *There is an inverted U-shaped relation between the extent of telework and the temporal alignment of work and private life, which does not differ in its slope between fathers and men without children.*

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data

The analysis used data from the German BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018 (Hall et al. 2020), a probability-based, large-scale survey representative of German-speaking individuals working at least 10 h per week. With rich information on respondents’ personal and workplace characteristics, including in-depth measures of telework and an indicator for the temporal alignment of work and private life, this is an outstanding dataset for examining the hypotheses raised in this paper. Moreover, the BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey contains a large number of socio-demographic, educational and job-related items, which enables the adjustment for relevant control variables in order to avoid possible confounding bias (Elwert and Winship 2014).

Given the focus on the use of telework, defined as a work practice in which employees can perform regular work hours for the employer from home, the analyses are based on the sample of employees, i.e., freelancers and the self-employed who lack formal employers, are not included. The analytic sample of this study includes 14,999 employees aged 18 to 65 years.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Temporal Alignment of Work and Private Life

The dependent variable refers to employees’ temporal alignment of work and private life following a subjective approach. Employees indicated how often they succeed in considering their personal and family matters when scheduling their work hours. The responses include never (0), rarely (1), sometimes (2) and frequently (3). This item, already used by Müller and Lück (2019) and Sarbu (2018), represents a boundary-crossing activity in which a transition from a working to a private role takes place.

3.2.2. Telework

Telework was measured using a three-step approach. First, employees were asked whether they work for the employer from home, at least temporarily. Second, employees working from home stated how often they usually work from home by specifying the exact number of hours per week. Third, they additionally indicated whether the employer recognizes the hours they work from home as working time or whether they perform only informal overtime at home. Given the definition of telework, employees performing only unpaid overtime at home were not included in the group of teleworkers. Thus, the dichotomous indicator distinguishes between teleworkers, i.e., employees who work from home, at least temporarily, and whose work-from-home time is formally recognized (1), and non-teleworkers, i.e., the remaining employees (0).

To account for the extent of telework, a measure of the share of time spent in telework was generated by dividing the number of hours that teleworkers usually worked from home each week by the total number of weekly working hours. This leads to a continuous variable ranging from 0 for non-teleworkers to 1 for employees who fully telework. By calculating the extent of telework as a proportion of total working hours rather than an absolute number of telework hours, the different importance that the extent of telework can have depending on whether someone works full-time or part-time was considered.

3.2.3. Parenthood Status and Gender

The moderating variable distinguishes between employees with and without young children under the age of 12 years living in the household. By specifying the age of the children under 12 years, the intensity of care that parents of young children in particular have to provide was considered.¹ Research has shown that parents with children under 12 years of age experience greater conflict between life domains than parents with older children (Schulz and Reimann 2022).

The analyses also accounted for gender, differentiating between male and female employees.

3.2.4. Control Variables

Telework is more likely available for employees with academic degrees, high levels of job autonomy, working in high-status positions and who are expected to work long hours and overtime (Kelliher and Anderson 2010; Lott and Chung 2016). These demanding job requirements can also complicate the alignment of private and work life (Abendroth and Reimann 2018). Thus, the employees' level of education, management positions, and three indicators for job autonomy (decision on breaks, influence on amount of work, influence on work schedule), were considered. Moreover, the analyses adjusted for employee total weekly working hours and overtime (no overtime, overtime at company's place, overtime at home, overtime at company's place and at home). An employee's age was included in the analyses as it affects telework preferences (Vilhelmson and Thulin 2016) and the need for flexibility to align private interests and work. Moreover, the number of children living in the household and whether the employee has a partner who is active in the labor market was included.

To reflect aspects of cultural barriers at the workplace associated with flexibility stigmas when teleworking (Chung 2020), the employees' performance pressure and their career aspirations were considered. In addition, employees' occupational areas (based on the German Classification of Occupations 2010) were included because occupations are decisive in explaining telework possibilities (Mergener 2020) and the alignment of work and private life (Dierdorff and Ellington 2008).

Finally, company size and regional location (East vs. West Germany) and employee's years of work experience in the company were considered. Large companies are more likely to have technical infrastructures that allow telework and family-friendly reconciliation measures. Differences between East and West Germany still prevail in terms of labor market structures and gender role attitudes (Barth and Trübner 2018). With increasing tenure, employers are more willing to offer employees the option to telework based on mutual trust, and those who stay with the employer for a long time are also likely to be more satisfied with their ability to align work and private life.

Summary statistics for all variables are provided in the Supplementary Table S1. The Supplementary Table S2 reports the correlation matrix of the key variables in the analytic sample.

3.3. Analytical Approach

OLS regression models for the outcome variable of the temporal alignment of work and private life were applied. OLS regressions have long been regarded as a robust method for variables with ordinal scales (Jaccard and Wan 1996), producing estimates very similar

to those of non-linear models (Studer and Winkelmann 2011). Moreover, OLS models provide an intuitive interpretation of estimated coefficients and interaction effects.²

To test the relationship between telework and the temporal alignment of work and private life, a series of steps were followed. First, telework was included as a dichotomous variable (Model 1). Second, to capture the curvilinear relationship of the extent of telework, the share of telework as a continuous variable in its linear and squared terms was introduced (Huntington-Klein 2022) (Model 2). The results were illustrated by graphing the predicted probabilities of employees' temporal alignment of work and private life by the extent of telework. Third, separate models for female and male employees that included interactions between the linear and squared term of telework extent and young children were ran (Model 3a and Model 3b). Group comparisons of probabilities between both women with and without young children and men with and without young children were additionally illustrated.

All models included the described control variables to address potential confounding between telework and the temporal alignment of work and private life.

3.4. Sample Description

In the analytical sample, 26 percent of employees did telework (Table 1). Among mothers and fathers, the proportion of teleworkers was slightly higher than among women and men without young children. The extent of telework did not differ significantly between mothers and women without children or fathers and men without children in the sample. About half of the employees teleworked up to 20 percent of their working hours. The proportion of men teleworking to such a low extent was slightly higher than that of women. Women teleworked to a very high extent, slightly more often than men did.

Table 1. Distribution of telework and the temporal alignment of work and private life (percentages or means with standard deviations (SD) in parentheses).

	Total (N = 14,999)	Women		Men	
		No Young Children (N = 6012)	Young Children (N = 1531)	No Young Children (N = 5797)	Young Children (N = 1659)
Telework	26%	23%	31%	26%	34%
Extent of telework ⁺	0.38 (0.38)	0.44 (0.40)	0.41 (0.38)	0.34 (0.36)	0.30 (0.34)
In categories:					
1–20%	49%	43%	42%	54%	56%
21–40%	17%	17%	20%	16%	19%
41–80%	10%	9%	12%	10%	8%
81–100%	24%	31%	26%	20%	17%
Temporal alignment of work and private life	2.46 (0.81)	2.46 (0.80)	2.61 (0.70)	2.42 (0.84)	2.47 (0.80)

Notes: Sample includes employees aged 18–65. ⁺ The proportion of teleworking hours to total weekly working hours, only employees who telework. Source: BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018. Sample includes employees aged 18–65 years. Authors' own calculations.

On average, employees in the sample indicated that they often succeed in temporally aligning their work and private life (Table 1). Although mothers of young children even had better alignment than women without young children, there were no substantial differences between men who had and did not have young children.

Further descriptions of the sample can be found in the Supplementary Table S1. The average age of the employees in the sample was 43 years. Among all employees in the sample, 22 percent were parents of children under the age of 12 years; among employees who teleworked, this proportion was higher (27%) than among employees who did not telework (21%). The employees in the sample worked an average of 38 h per week (men with 42 h per week more than women with 34 h per week and teleworker with 40 h per

week more than non-teleworkers with 38 h per week). Around a quarter had managerial responsibility (men more frequently than women and teleworker more frequently than non-teleworker).

4. Results

Table 2 contains the main results of all regression models. The results of Model 1 reveal that, also under the adjustment for all confounders, teleworkers were more likely to temporally align work and private life than non-teleworkers. Thus, H1 was supported in the first step of the analyses.

Table 2. OLS regression models of the temporal alignment of work and private life by telework and family responsibilities.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3a (Women)	Model 3b (Men)
Telework (<i>Ref. no telework</i>)	0.035 * (0.015)			
Extent of telework (linear)		0.362 *** (0.096)	0.242 (0.169)	0.456 ** (0.152)
Extent of telework (squared)		−0.462 *** (0.100)	−0.418 * (0.175)	−0.464 ** (0.160)
Women (<i>Ref. men</i>)	−0.051 ** (0.015)	−0.051 ** (0.015)	—	—
Children < 12 years (<i>Ref. no children < 12 years</i>)	0.016 (0.016)	0.017 (0.016)	0.017 (0.026)	0.012 (0.027)
Interactions				
Extent of telework (linear) # Children < 12 years	—	—	−0.055 (0.289)	0.199 (0.273)
Extent of telework (squared) # Children < 12 years	—	—	0.114	−0.213
Constant	2.586 (0.124)	2.576 (0.124)	2.554 (0.319)	2.537 (0.142)
R ²	0.141	0.142	0.145	0.145
Observations	14,999	14,999	7543	7456

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Notes: Controls are included but not displayed. Estimates for the full models are presented in the Supplementary Table S3. Source: BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018. Sample includes employees aged 18–65 years. Authors' own calculations.

Model 2 includes the extent of telework as a continuous variable in its linear and squared terms. Both terms were statistically significant, which indicates the assumed curvilinear relation between telework and the temporal alignment of work and private life. Graphing the relationship shows that the curve initially increases slightly, then arcs down, becoming negative at high levels of telework (Figure 1). Specifically, the results shown in Figure 1 suggest that employees teleworking 40 percent of their working time indicated, on average, being best able to align work and private life. Moreover, teleworkers who work more than 80 percent of their total working time at home were, on average, statistically significantly less successful in aligning work and private life than non-teleworkers. These results are in line with our arguments and, thus, support H2.

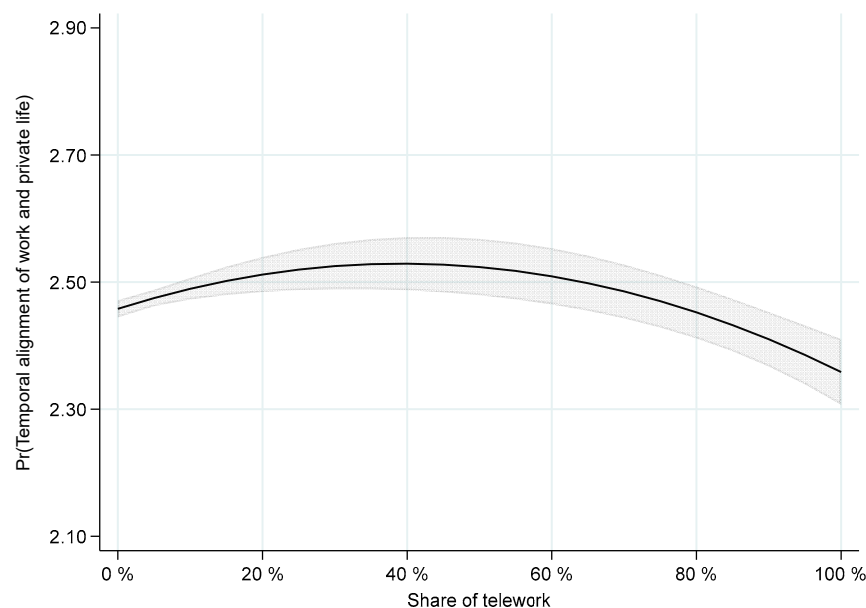
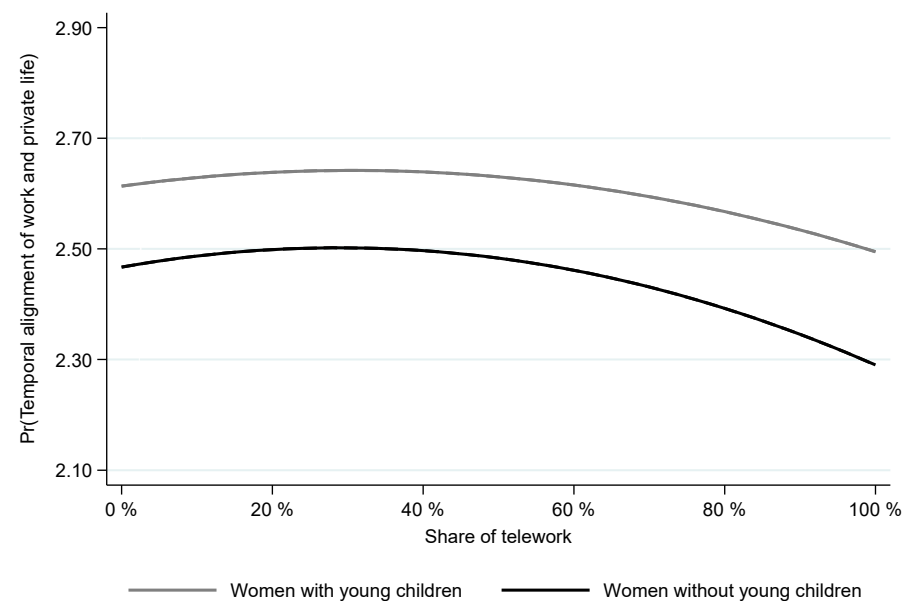


Figure 1. Average probabilities of the temporal alignment of work and private life by telework intensity (estimates of Model 2). Source: BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018. Sample includes employees aged 18–65. Authors' own calculations.

With Model 3a and Model 3b, separate models for female and male employees that included interaction effects between the extent of telework and parenting of young children were ran. The results of Model 3a, also shown in Figure 2, indicate that the curvilinear relationship holds for both mothers and women without young children. The overall interaction effects with children were not statistically significant. Both women with and without young children with an extent of telework of 30 percent of their total working time were, on average, best able to align work and private life. Thus, the optimal extent of telework for women with respect to scheduling of personal and work matters was slightly below the average. Moreover, mothers and women without children who teleworked more than 60 percent of their total working time were, on average, statistically significantly less successful in aligning work and private life than mothers and women without children who never telework. For example, the average probability of temporal alignment of mothers (women without children) with 100% telework is 0.12 (0.18) scale points lower than with no telework. Thus, the slopes of the curves did not differ, but the level at which women were successful in aligning work and private matters did. Figure 2 presents information about the significance of detailed group differences for each value of telework extent, as suggested by Long and Mustillo (2021) or Mize (2019). The results reveal that mothers were statistically significantly more likely to successfully align work and private life than women without children for each telework extent.

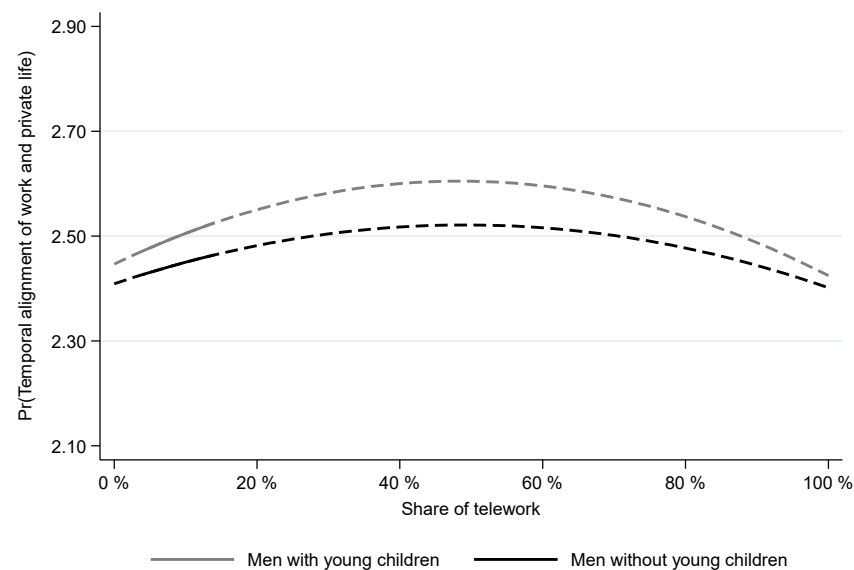
Thus, there is only partial support for the assumptions of H3a. There is an inverted U-shaped relation for both mothers and women without young children. However, the expected differences in the slope of the curve cannot be observed.

For men, the curvilinear relationship with telework intensity also holds for those with and without young children (Model 3b and Figure 3). Fathers and men without young children whose teleworking time was 50 percent of their total working time were, on average, best able to align work and private matters. Thus, the optimal extent of telework for men was slightly above the average. Moreover, fathers and men without young children who telework to a very high extent did not differ from non-teleworking men in terms of their success in temporally aligning work and their private lives.



NOTE: Group difference (Women with young children vs. Women without young children) is significant ($p < 0.05$) when lines are solid.

Figure 2. Average probabilities of the temporal alignment of work and private life by telework intensity for women with and without young children (estimates of Model 3a). Source: BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018. Sample includes employees aged 18–65. Authors' own calculations.



NOTE: Group difference (Men with young children vs. Men without young children) is significant ($p < 0.05$) when lines are solid.

Figure 3. Average probabilities of the temporal alignment of work and private life by telework intensity for men with and without young children (estimates of Model 3b). Source: BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018. Sample includes employees aged 18–65. Authors' own calculations.

The analysis of significant group differences shown in Figure 3 reveals that fathers who teleworked up to 20 percent of their work time were more likely to be successful in considering personal matters in scheduling than men without children who teleworked up to 20 percent of their work time. For fathers, the curve increases slightly more steeply than for men without children. There were no longer statistically significant differences in the temporal alignment of work and private life when men teleworked 20 percent of their work time or more.

Thus, H3b was also only partially supported. For both fathers and men without young children, an inverted U-shaped relation emerges, but contrary to the expectation, the slope of the curves differs slightly for low telework extents.

To test the robustness of these results, two additional analyses were conducted. First, the OLS estimates for the outcome variable measured on a rating scale were compared with estimates based on ordered logit regressions, leading to very similar results. In the second robustness analysis, a categorical variable (instead of the continuous variable) was included as a predictor. This variable combined both heterogeneity in non-telework (i.e., employees who did not telework due to their occupational tasks, employer decision, or their own choice and employees who did only unpaid overtime at home) and categories of the share of time spent teleworking to further test for non-linear effects of the extent of telework. The results confirm the conclusions from our main analyses, i.e., indicating the inverted U-shaped relationship and the differences by gender and parenthood. The results and further descriptions for both additional analyses are available in the Supplementary Tables S4 and S5.

5. Discussion

For some years now, research has been looking at whether telework can help employees better meet the demands of their working and private lives. In this article, boundary theory (Ashforth et al. 2000) was used to show how telework is linked to the dissolution of temporal and spatial boundaries and thus promotes role transitions from work to private life. These role transitions can facilitate cross-border activities, such as considering private demands when teleworking. Since the state of research also revealed that the extent of telework can play a decisive role in this relation (Allen et al. 2015), this study empirically examined whether and to what extent telework is associated with a temporal alignment of work and private life. This relationship was also examined separately with respect to parenthood status for women and men because the challenge of simultaneously coping with work and private demands is particularly acute for working parents. Based on the German BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018, this study reaches the following main conclusions.

First, our results show that employees in Germany often succeed in considering personal and family matters when scheduling work. For this reason, when looking at the results, it is important to bear in mind that these are subtle group differences at an overall high level of temporal alignment. Nevertheless, we found that teleworkers still seem more likely than non-teleworkers to be able to temporally align work and private life. This first dichotomous comparison, like in many previous studies, assumes that there would be a linear relationship between teleworking and work–life-related outcomes, an assumption that cannot continue to hold. At the same time, disadvantages, such as the extension of working hours, increased accessibility, and dissolution of boundaries between work and private life, appear to be minimal at this extent of teleworking.

As the second key finding shows, there is an inverted U-shaped relation. For individuals who telework up to 40% of their total working time, there is a positive correlation between the share of time spent in telework and success with the temporal alignment of work and private life. Advantages associated with teleworking, e.g., saving time by not commuting, greater time flexibility and relying on proven structures and routines (transition scripts) in switching back and forth between work and private roles, as described in boundary theory, dominate if employees work at home for about two days per week.

A third key finding is that with higher extents of teleworking, employees' success at temporally aligning work and private life decreases. Moreover, individuals who telework extensively (80% or more of total working hours) were even less able to consider private matters when scheduling their work compared to non-teleworkers. The reason for this may be that a very high level of telework blurs the boundaries between work and private life to such an extent that the negative effects predominate. For example, a high level of teleworking can lead to an extension of working hours into the private sphere, increased availability, even outside regular working hours, as well as disruptions by the respective

other non-demarcated areas of life. Demands from both areas of life can thus intrude indefinitely, overlap and make it difficult to fulfill a role without interruptions. This negative relationship, however, is driven by gender-specific differences, as the separated analyses for women and men show.

The fourth finding is that the temporal alignment of work and private life becomes worse only for women when extensively teleworking (60% or more of total working hours) but not for men. Moreover, and contrary to our expectations, the curvilinear relations do not differ in their slopes between women with and without children. A very high extent of telework seems to create new challenges for both mothers and women without children. One explanation could be that highly extensive telework imposes greater demands on women from the private and the working life simultaneously, which then makes it more difficult to temporally align work and private life. More specifically, as the extent of telework increases, the expectations of others to participate in home and care work may increase, especially for women (regardless of whether they have children or not) due to gender-specific role expectations. At the same time, highly extensive telework is often associated with higher expectations of accessibility for work. In this case, with the simultaneous demands of work and private life, boundaries become blurred and make it more challenging to consider private matters during working hours, i.e., to switch from a work role to a private role and back again. In boundary theory, this is explained on the one hand by the fact that uncertainty arises in these situations about the role in which an individual should act and, on the other hand, by the fact that a blurring of boundaries between work and private life can be accompanied by interruptions from the respective other area of life (Ashforth et al. 2000). This is in line with Badawy and Schieman's (2021, p. 342) findings that "women are more likely to experience the paradox of schedule control—that is, while schedule control is a desired resource to alleviate strains in the work–family interface, it may be undermined by the greater expectations that workers will be available during nonwork time". Even though women without children have fewer family responsibilities, they are confronted with the stigma of using flexibility in working time (Munsch et al. 2014) to reconcile domestic demands and are, therefore, again particularly challenged to show that they work productively. Then, too many private demands enter the work life for which the flexibility of telework is no longer sufficient.

This allows two assumptions to be made as to why women with and without children do not differ regarding their temporal alignment of work and private life. On the one hand, private demands are not limited exclusively to caring for children; women without children can also face demands from housework, caring for relatives or organizing private contacts and social life. On the other hand, women may want to prove themselves more occupationally than women with children in order to show that they are committed and productive at work and to avoid the stigmatization that women often face due to possible motherhood. In return, they may set themselves higher work demands. Thus, women without children may have fewer private demands than mothers but higher work ones so that the overall level is equalized and results in similar assessments of women with and without children.

The finding that this negative effect is not observed among men is likely an indicator that they still face fewer demands in the private sphere than women. Moreover, mothers were more likely to succeed in the temporal alignment of work and private life than women without children, regardless of the extent of teleworking. One reason for this could be the simple difference in the amount of private demands, which is typically greatest for mothers. The assumption here would be that the fewer private demands one has, the less often one has to consider them in work schedules, and vice versa. The greater need for mothers to consider private demands results from attributions and expectations of their role as mothers and from their assumed stronger identification with the family compared to the working sphere. Thus, this difference between women with and without children should not be overinterpreted at this point. The pattern related to the extent of time women spend teleworking is clearer and should be the focus. The improvement for mothers and women

without children, compared to female non-teleworkers, is, however, rather small, with the best chances for temporal alignment of work and private life observed at teleworking 30 percent of total working hours.

The relationship between the extent of telework and success at considering work and private demands is different for men, as the last key finding shows. Regardless of young children, men who telework half of their working hours were best able to temporally align work and private life. For fathers, the curve rises slightly more steeply than for men without children, indicating that even a small amount of telework is of greater benefit to fathers in terms of temporal alignment of work and private life. This could possibly be due to different motives in which men make use of telework to this very small extent (less than 20% of total working hours). Although men without children are more likely to use it to fulfill occasional short-term requests from the working sphere, fathers might be more likely to use it to fulfill occasional demands in family life—what [Sullivan and Smithson \(2007\)](#) have called ‘helping’ with childcare. However, if fathers and men without children telework to a greater extent (20% and more of total working hours) and thus probably more regularly, there are, as expected, no longer any differences in their temporal alignment of work and private life. Given the strong cultural expectations that can be assigned to the sphere of work ([Blair-Loy 2003](#)), which change only slightly for men in the course of having a child, the demands of the world of work become more dominant as telework increases, both for men with and without children.

Despite these novel insights, some weaknesses that might motivate further research must be mentioned. We emphasize the importance of telework for coping with private demands that may vary considerably in extent and quality across employees but which could not be included in the analyses due to data restrictions. Even if we attempted to cover this by examining differences by parenthood, it would be preferable to obtain more detailed data that could be used to examine differences according to specific private demands. It is also important to acknowledge that we lack detailed information on the distribution of tasks in the employees’ private households. Furthermore, the findings in this study are based on cross-sectional analyses that cannot account for potentially unobserved heterogeneity. However, a recent study conducted by [Laß and Wooden \(2022\)](#) investigating the association between working from home and work–family conflict demonstrates that the estimates from their cross-section and panel regression are relatively similar. Last, the survey data we used were collected before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, even if the gender-specific distribution of care work did not fundamentally change during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Hipp and Bünning 2021](#)), experiences in the teleworking phases during the pandemic, which is strongly characterized by periods of closed schools and childcare facilities ([Fan and Moen 2024](#)), should not be transferred to our results. Due to these political measures to contain the virus, we argue that pre-COVID data are preferable to data collected during the pandemic, as this very exceptional situation has likely affected the link between telework and the temporal alignment of work and private life. Nevertheless, we believe that the findings for the pre-COVID phase can provide valuable information for the post-COVID phase. However, analyzing data for the post-COVID phase would be very useful for a follow-up study—as soon as the data are available.

6. Conclusions

Telework can be an important resource for meeting both work and private demands in everyday working life and should, therefore, be allowed by employers. However, at certain levels, which differ depending on gender and parenthood status, employees do not have any further benefit from teleworking regarding the temporal alignment of work and private life. For women, highly extensive teleworking not only loses its positive effect but is associated with less success in aligning work and private life compared to non-teleworking. The flexibility associated with teleworking, then, no longer seems to be a resource but becomes a demand. Thus, in the association of telework and the temporal alignment of work and private life, this study indicates that “more is not really more”. In the future, it

should be ensured that employees benefit from telework, even when it is used extensively. This requires clear rules regarding, for example, expectations of accessibility for paid work as well as for home and care work.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/socsci13100508/s1>, Table S1: Distribution of considered variables by telework, by gender, and overall, Table S2: Correlations of key variables in the analytic sample, Table S3: OLS regression models of the temporal alignment of work and private life by telework and family responsibilities, estimates for all controls displayed, Table S4: Robustness test 1: Ordered logit regression models of the temporal alignment of work and private life by telework and family responsibilities, Table S5: Robustness test 2: OLS regression models of the temporal alignment of work and private life by telework as categorical variable accounting for heterogeneity in non-teleworking.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.M., T.R. and I.E.; methodology, A.M.; formal analysis, A.M.; writing—original draft preparation, A.M., T.R. and I.E.; writing—review and editing, A.M., T.R. and I.E. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available as Scientific Use File from the BIBB Research Data Centre via the following link: <https://doi.org/10.7803/501.18.1.1.10>.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ It can be argued that younger children (e.g., preschool age) are even more care-intensive. However, due to this high intensity of care, fathers and especially mothers of these very young children might be a very selective group in the labor market that already has adapted working lives and career aspirations to private requirements by choosing, e.g., working arrangements that offer a high level of flexibility and autonomy. Thus, in order to avoid possible biases due to strong selection, we decided to investigate the moderating role of children up to the age of 12 years. Additional analyses including fathers and mothers with children up to age 6 revealed that regression results do not markedly differ from our main results in Table 2 (analyses are available upon request).
- ² The OLS estimates in this article were also compared with Ordered Logit models, which generated similar results.

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