

# **Clerical Teleworking - How it Affects Family Life**

Dr Leslie Haddon

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## 1. Executive Summary

This report examines the interrelationship of home-based teleworking and family life in the case of white-collar non-professionals - i.e. clerical information intensive workers. The aim is to explore the issues raised for families and indicate factors conducive to the success of teleworking. A better understanding of these issues can lead to:

- improvement of the selection criteria for choosing potential telework personnel;
- a better indication of who is more liable to take up telework where some self-selection is involved.
- the generating of guide-lines for potential teleworkers.
- assisting longer term staff planning, in terms of predicting the behaviour of the teleworking labourforce.
- highlighting the particular problems which may arise around telework and which managers need to address.

### Telework and Family Life

Many discussions of teleworkers focus on married women with very young children. This neglects other possible family situations such as childless couples or adults looking after elderly relatives. Such an emphasis also neglects the different factors affecting teleworkers with older children. As people move through diverse family arrangements during their lifetime, including different relationships with their partners and having dependants, they will be interested in different work options.

Telework also needs to be seen not just as an alternative form of work for people with certain suitable personalities; Instead, this mode of employment can be viewed as part of a potentially longer, diverse work career, including full-time and part-time on-site work, and self-employment. While performing on-site work, some occasional experience of what is known as 'supplementary' work which spills over from the office may prepare staff for more regular telework.

The nature of the work of the partners of teleworkers is a significant factor enabling or constraining telework options. Aspects such as the security and regularity of income and the future prospects of partners do have a bearing on the decisions to adopt telework. The nature and scheduling of the partner's work affects his or her ability to support teleworkers in terms of helping with chores and childcare. The partner's work may also provide networks of contacts through which telework options, or clients in the case of the self-employed, are located.

### The Experience of Clerical Telework

Although underrepresented in the general telework literature, a few studies of clerical work have more recently started to emerge. These show that the distinction between the experience of employed and self-employed clerical teleworkers is sometimes not clear-cut and that there is a blurred boundary between 'work from home' and 'work at home'.

There has been some discussion of the great potential for an increase in specifically clerical telework as part of the larger process of decentralisation occurring with firms. On the other hand, some forms of clerical homework have a long tradition of being conducted from home as well as from the office. The prime example is home typing, which is a familiar option for women and therefore does not have the connotations of being a radically new form of employment.

## **The Research for this Report**

In addition to the telework literature, this study examined a number of complementary areas of work experience in order to see what lessons might be learnt from these fields. These areas include flexitime, traditional homework and part-time work. Ten user case studies based on interviews with current teleworkers were also undertaken. The report is organised in terms of five areas of discussion: the management of self-discipline, of time and of space, issues related to familial support for the teleworker and the question of isolation experienced by some teleworkers.

## **1.1 Management of Self-Discipline**

There are two key reasons behind the need for teleworker self-discipline:

- Without the office day's time and space constraints, more options and temptations are open to teleworkers than on-site workers.
- A number of new demands arise by virtue of the teleworker being visible at home and perceived as being available - for children, for partners, for chores and other responsibilities, for socialising with relatives, for friends and for other outsiders. Therefore, there are more pressures to balance, more considerations to address, than in the office.

### **1.1.1 Flexibility**

Extra flexibility, and hence choice; is often seen as one of the main advantages of telework over on-site work. But it is important to note that any such flexibility is tempered by the constraints imposed by other factors. The desire for income plus the constraints imposed by children mean that some teleworkers have to work whenever they can. Hence, they may actually experience a very limited sense of freedom to choose how much work to do and when to do it. There are also constraints imposed by the nature of different types of telework, especially to the extent that the client or employing firm wants a labourforce on tap at short notice.

### **1.1.2 Autonomy and Supervision**

Despite these constraints, a greater sense of autonomy has been seen as an important benefit by many teleworkers. It is far less clear that teleworkers would feel such a sense of freedom from detailed supervision if procedures or facilities (e.g. monitoring software) constantly check their progress.

While different workers and types of work may need to be evaluated separately, it may be important to

consider using equipment:

- which does not have monitoring facilities, or
- where these facilities can be turned off, or
- where there is some arrangement for initially monitoring new recruits but where this monitoring tapers off at a later stage.

For some types of work, frequent visits on site may satisfy the need for both supervision and for the employees' social contact.

### **1.1.3 Managing Interruptions**

The perceived availability of teleworkers provides much potential for interruptions - e.g. from the teleworker's partner and especially from children, who often prove impossible to ignore. Women teleworkers often feel a dilemma here in that part of the appeal of telework is itself the hope that they would be more available for their children. Hence, it is best if some understanding and rules concerning the availability of teleworkers to their family are negotiated at the start.

Another important strategy used by teleworkers involves enlisting the support of other people, mainly partners, to prevent interruptions from children. Controlling interruptions from friends, relatives and neighbours can be easier. However, this still requires teleworkers to arrange some rules about contact amongst their wider family and their other social circles.

### **1.1.4 Preserving Family Life**

Having the self-discipline to maintain sufficient social and family life and not to let work encroach too far is important. It has a bearing on teleworkers' satisfaction and hence their willingness to continue with this mode of employment. This entails avoiding the danger of becoming a workaholic (i.e. knowing when to stop work is an issue that needs to be stressed). Many teleworkers also want to preserve sacred family times, including spending 'enough' time with children - some teleworking mothers especially feel guilty when this is squeezed out by work.

## **1.2 Time Management**

Potential teleworkers need be made aware of the greater time required to actually plan telework. More flexibility implies more choice and hence more organisational effort. This issue is usually more acute for women. Key variables shaping teleworker ability to manage their time include:

- whether the teleworker is employed or self-employed,
- whether the teleworker has one or multiple clients/sources of work,
- the degree of time flexibility, and especially predictability, associated with the work.

### **1.2.1 Contactability**

On the whole, teleworkers are often more available to managers, colleagues and clients than their office counterparts, even if some would prefer to keep weekends and evenings free. Hence, many teleworkers attempt to control that contact. This may be achieved by such means as intercepting calls on answerphone machines or arranging in advance any visits by outsiders (e.g. delivering material) in order to make them more predictable.

It would be advisable to negotiate and clarify rules concerning contactability at the outset. Such rules would have to balance the need of the teleworker for peace from outside disturbances and the need for employers or clients to make contact - with various degrees of urgency. This may involve teleworkers indicating when they will be less busy or relatively free. It may include providing a means to indicate the urgency of calls to teleworkers.

### **1.2.2 Managing Timetables**

Teleworkers juggle the different demands of work and family life. They manage amidst the interacting timetables of partner's work schedules, children's schedules and the timetables of social activities. All these schedules change over time. Therefore, it is important for the long term retention of teleworkers that flexibility concerning work schedules be built into employment contracts.

Studies suggest that many teleworkers actually cater more to their paid work. As a result, they sometimes feel a little guilty about whether they are neglecting their family. Such matters should be discussed in advance if possible. Potential teleworkers should know what to expect and what decisions they need to make at the outset.

The way teleworkers organise their timetables varies. Some prefer to set up fixed timetables to reinforce self-discipline - others do not. There are differences in the intensity with which people prefer to complete work. Some tackle one job at a time, some several simultaneously. And there are variations in the way that teleworkers take short breaks from the work, or choose to arrange longer periods of leave. Hence, it is not appropriate to lay the same rigid guide-lines down for everyone.

One major difficulty faced by teleworkers is unpredictability. To some extent, this is inevitable in the cases where firms introduce telework precisely to increase their flexibility. Here, the aim is that a labourforce should be available whenever needed. But even in these circumstances, if teleworker discontent and dropout is to be avoided, then employers need to consider ways and means to cater for the needs of their workforce. This may mean the managers have to put teleworkers in contact with one another. Or employers may initiate schemes whereby they can distribute work between each other. It may also mean that a priority is given, depending on the nature of the work, to informing teleworkers as far in advance as possible about impending workloads.

## 1.3 Space Management

Most British housing is not ideally suited to telework, since the layout is tightly planned on the assumption that the home is not a workplace. In fact, current innovations in building design are accentuating the trend toward smaller housing. There has been some discussion of how one might approach some of the space problems through innovation in furniture design (e.g. fold-away furniture, equipment which tucks away after use).

### 1.3.1 Separate Space for Telework

A separate room is seen as being optimum for teleworkers, but less than half of a clerical teleworkforce may have such space at their disposal. Thus, if the availability of a separate space dedicated for work purposes is made into a necessary condition for telework, a great many of those potentially interested would not be able to meet the requirement.

Some people can cope with working in a room also used for other purposes. Moreover, it has also emerged that a proportion of teleworkers prefer this arrangement. For example, some desire company while working, while others want to be at least partially available to other members of the family.

Nevertheless, a separate room does have the advantage of acting as a psychological boundary between home and work. In such a room, it is easier to create the image and trappings of an office. This can be more conducive to working, providing a symbolic message to others that this is real work, and that the teleworker is at work when in this area.

Another piece of advice which often emerges from telework guide-lines is that equipment should be used solely for the work. In practice, some teleworkers can manage less rigid boundaries, and some equipment and storage facilities are also used for non-work purposes. It may thus be inappropriate to set too strong a rule about using equipment only for work purposes.

Space is often the main constraint on purchasing further equipment. Therefore, when designing work-related products in addition to fax, printers, photocopiers, it is important to look beyond stand-alone products constructed according to current physical proportions. Instead, it might be useful to move in the direction of either smaller or combined units.

Given all these factors, it may be useful for firms or agencies interested in telework to promote more variety in their images of the home office. This might include portraying teleworkers operating in multi-purpose rooms using varying amounts of equipment. Some images might entail an organisation of space and design which emphasise the 'office', while others emphasise the 'home'. Such a variety would do justice to the diversity which exists and would show that people can choose to experience the presence of work in the home in different ways. This would be an improvement upon the current limited range of idealised images, such as that portraying the teleworker (dressed for work) located in a very office-like dedicated room.



## 1.4 Familial Support

This research supports the recommendation to promote a positive attitude towards telework in advance amongst the partners of teleworkers. Partners', especially husbands', views play an important role in the decision to adopt and continue with telework. The status which partners attach to telework -whether they see it as a real job - is important. Their willingness to help with childcare and chores when necessary is also a significant factor. And whether partners are willing to change expectations about standards of housekeeping, or expect more to be done simply because the teleworker is at home has a bearing on the teleworkers' experience.

### 1.4.1 Chores

Some women teleworkers feel a pressure to increase the total amount of chores done because they are simply 'around'. In fact, many find that they have to drop household standards when under pressure from work. Patterns of domestic housework vary, with some teleworkers choosing to be more flexible. In practice, some chores were harder to 'time-shift' than others, especially meal preparation.

Ultimately, the type of issues that arise here must be left for teleworkers to resolve within their families and wider social circles. But, they can be sensitised to some of the range of problems which they might well encounter. Teleworkers can then, from the start, draw upon other people's experience in thinking about the arrangements which would most suit them.

### 1.4.2 Childcare

'Childcare' is an umbrella term ranging from passively monitoring children to on-going interaction with them. There are degrees to which these different levels of involvement can easily be combined with telework. Given that state supported nursery and playgroup provision is limited in the UK, arranging for outside childcare can be both difficult and that childcare can swallow a significant portion of disposable income. For some firms operating with local teleworkers over a period of time, collecting a list of local contacts and addresses of nurseries, playgroups childminders, etc., might be justified.

With children over five, attending school can raise the different problem of school holidays. One possible way of assisting teleworkers in these circumstances is a very flexible telework contract for the year. Under such an arrangement, the more intense work could be undertaken in term time and less in the holidays. The presence of children also requires a telework contract with provision for unforeseen time off.

Problems of scheduling become acute with the presence of children both over and under five who have different timetables, which often requires them to be delivered to, and picked up from, different places. The availability for some childcare by partners, but also other relatives, is a significant factor which may facilitate telework.

### 1.4.3 Other Issues

Both partners and children may actually assist the teleworker with work done at home. Apart from taking the odd message, other family members often act as a receptionist for visitors, or help with proof-reading or the delivery of material. On the other hand there may be direct benefits of teleworking for other members of the family - e.g. access to word-processing or other software.

## 1.5 Isolation

A sense of isolation is one of the more common drawbacks which has been cited in the teleworker literature. This can be made manifest in a number of forms apart from a general wish for the company of others.

- It may be felt acutely at a particular event, such as a death in the family, when the presence of work colleagues could help.
- In practice, teleworkers often restrict their activities and personal contacts to a smaller geographical area when they are not required to travel to the town centre because of their work.
- 'What happened at work' as a topic of conversation is also limited by teleworking.

In fact, teleworkers sometimes also feel an ambivalence about isolation. This is because it is often easier to complete the work at home precisely because there are no distractions from other people at work. Problems of isolation also depend on a number of factors including the teleworker's personality and preceding experiences. For some, it is pleasant to get away from the office bustle and have the peace of their own company. Also important are the teleworkers' current circumstances, such as whether other family members are around, whether they have contacts with neighbours and friends, or have other social outlets.

One recommendation which generally emerges from the telework literature is that, if possible, there should be visits to a workplace on a regular basis. That advice is reinforced in this study - although contact need not be as often as weekly, depending on the teleworker and the nature of the telework concerned. But, it is important to build options for coming on-site into telework schemes.

Apart from face-to-face contact, it is important for teleworkers to have some facility to communicate via phone or other networks. This may mean the E-Mail facilities provided by some organisations, or simply the telephone. Firms need to appreciate the need for teleworkers to 'chat' a little when making contact with the central office. Although in many cases, teleworkers have little contact with other teleworkers, it can be important to talk to people in a similar situation, or at least know they are available to talk to if contact was ever needed. It is therefore recommended that employers supply a means for teleworkers to contact each other - e.g. arranging meetings, providing phone numbers.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Objectives and Scope

This report has been produced by BT's Laboratories. It focuses on the experience of clerical telework in relation to family life. The aim of this study is to detail any problems raised for families by telework as well as indicating factors conducive to the success of teleworking. This entails exploring issues around the management of space and time, changing patterns of domestic responsibility and forms of familial support when the work of family members becomes home based.

The research will focus not on the professional (who has received substantial coverage in the existing telework literature) but on the implications of telework for white-collar non-professionals working in such fields as sales, administrative or enquiry service capacities: the 'clerical information intensive' workers.

The current report builds upon the previous literature review conducted for the Teleworking Project [1] in a number of ways. In general terms, it elaborates the issues described in that document. For example, the report shows what exactly is meant by isolation problems, noting the ambivalences which teleworkers feel about isolation. In relation to this particular issue, it tackles the question of who is more affected by isolation as a problem, and what coping strategies teleworkers use. The aim is to provide a far more detailed and comprehensive view of telework and family life. In particular, this report examines the experience of telework over the course of people's life-cycles - about which there is very little data.

### 2.2 General

The first aim of this study is to examine the interrelationship of telework and family life. This entails detailing the issues raised for families by telework as well as indicating factors conducive to the success of teleworking. This entails, exploring the problems and pressures which emerge, how teleworkers attempt to manage these, and the degree to which they are successful.

For example, how and with what success do teleworkers manage issues of self-discipline and time-management? What are the main types of 'role conflict' which follow from the decreased separation of home and work and how might they be overcome? For what types of clerical teleworker can 'flexibility' be enhanced and in what ways? What type of interruptions can emerge in the home context, how might these be handled and with what success? What types of spatial problems emerge for different types of telework, involving different equipment and different housing configurations? What modifications have teleworkers attempted to overcome these difficulties? What types of support have been provided, or found missing, from partners and other household members? And in all these cases, how does the background experience of teleworkers (e.g. education, work, gender) influence the nature of the issues faced and ability to cope with them?

This study aims to identify and explore the key dimensions of different issues as well as evaluating:

- teleworkers' and firms' strategies to handle the issues raised by telework;

- the influence of the background experience (and expectations) of teleworkers;
- the role of perceptions and attitudes of other family members.

### **3. Background**

#### **3.1 Telework and Family Life**

There are some problems with drawing boundaries around what is a 'work' issue and a 'family' one for teleworkers. But, the previous review has already indicated some headings which form the basis for later sections of this report. These are:

- Management of Self-Discipline
- Time Management
- Space Management
- Familial Support
- Isolation

To set the scene for more detailed discussions of telework and family life, three key dimensions are first considered:

- the variation in family forms and changes over the family life cycle;
- the location of telework within the teleworker's longer work career;
- the various ways in which the work of the teleworker partner shapes teleworker experience and options.

##### **3.1.1 Family Forms and Family Life-Cycle**

Much of telework literature refers to the situation of a husband and wife with children. But there are clearly other possible family forms, and points in the family life cycle (e.g. single parent, single male/female living alone, or with parents, childless couples, retired, widowed, adults looking after elderly relatives etc.). It may be true that a majority of studies suggest that homeworkers in general and clerical teleworkers in particular are married women with young children [2]. Yet, one US survey of homeworkers showed that there were as many women with no children under 18 as there were of those with children. The former category included those approaching retirement, those returning to the labour force when children are grown up, or those caring for very elderly parents [3]. (In fact, at Pacific Bell, where they have mainly managerial teleworkers, the company discourages women with young children from taking the telework option [4]). In a survey of specifically clerical teleworkers, older women again

were as numerous as women with children [5].

Even where children are part of the household, we need to look beyond young (under five) children to the requirements of children at different ages -and suitable work arrangements for the mothers concerned. (For example, in relation to on-site employment, flexitime has been seen as being more valuable than childcare facilities, because nurseries etc. tend to be only for the under-fives while scheduling problems remain for the over-fives (to be discussed later) [6]).

In fact, marriage itself is not so stable as some of the telework literature assumes (given divorces and remarriages). There is also the possibility of partners negotiating different relationships and understandings within the same marriage at different points in time [7]. So changing work options over time needs to be located not within the life-cycle of some ideal couple but where each partner may have a 'marriage career' - a marriage which may be reassessed and redefined over time. In particular, it has been noted that women are more likely nowadays to move in and out of diverse family arrangements throughout their lifetime compared to earlier this century [8] Telework studies themselves do not usually follow the experience of teleworkers in the long term - i.e. they are not longitudinal. Hence, we have to look to other literatures and to clues from the case studies for longer term changes.

### **3.1.2 Telework within Changing Work Careers**

We can also locate telework within the more common usage of 'career' - the work career. Someone might progress through a variety of employment arrangements. This may include full-time work (with flexitime and shift-work aspects at various times), part-time work, self-employment, and either setting up a business which hires staff or working in association with others [9]. Individualised telework may therefore be not a once-and-for-all alternative to full-time employment on site. It may represent just one stage within a range of options which a person can adopt for a time before, possibly, moving into some of the other work arrangements.

In this respect, it is worth bearing in mind one conclusion of the telework literature: that teleworkers face less chance of promotion than their on-site colleagues. But the above examples show that where telework can be viewed as part of a longer career, some teleworkers may be able to create new~ challenges and alternatives to promotion within a firm. For example, they may move from being a lone self-employed individual to a collaborative practice with others. Hence, there are different ways of experiencing a sense of progress - telework need not always have little prospects.

Experiences while in full-time on-site employment of bringing work home can prepare the way for telework. For example, 88% of the US non-farm workforce do some work at home every week - which consists mainly of white collar tasks [10]. This has been conceptualised as 'supplementary homework' - i.e. which is performed in addition to work at the office. While such work has been little studied, it represents more labour than that carried out by those working permanently at home. Such supplementary homework is beyond the scope of the current study, but it is worth noting that the motivations for bringing work home are different from those of full-time teleworkers [11].

### **3.1.3 The Work of Teleworkers' Partners**

The type of work and 'careers' of the partners of teleworkers provides another vital dimension to consider. The nature of the partner's job is important in enabling or constraining telework options in the first place and subsequently in determining the experience of teleworkers. Once again, we need to consider the life-cycle, since various dimensions of the partner's work may be changing over time.

First, the income, security of income, regularity of income and future prospects from the partner's work have a bearing on the decisions to take up working from home as opposed to other options (not to work, full-time employment at a workplace, etc.). For example, when we look at homeworkers in general, a higher proportion of their partners than in the population at large are themselves self-employed. The fluctuating incomes of the self-employed may well have been one factor in the decision, mainly of wives, to adopt homework [12]. But in considering the significance of income, we are not just talking about that of the husbands of female teleworkers. For example, working wives' income can be sufficient to reduce the pressure on husbands to maximise their own income and so increase the latter's work options.

The nature, and especially scheduling, of the partner's work influences their ability to give support to teleworkers in terms of domestic labour and childcare - which will be explored in more depth later. Partner's schedules also have relevance for 'leisure' preferences and possibilities, which again reflect on teleworker options. And sometimes, a network of contacts (and hence potential teleworker clients) can be established through the partner's work.

The partner's orientation to work - e.g. whether it is 'just a job' or 'a career' (in the sense of being part of a promotional ladder) is another factor [13]. In particular, the husbands' work has a bearing on the wives' experience where female teleworkers contribute to their partners' work. This process is often described in terms of women's incorporation into their husbands' career, otherwise known as the 'two-person' career. And, of course, there is the influence of the partners' possible unemployment, given that the wives of unemployed men are more likely to drop out of the full-time labour force for a variety of reasons such as benefit regulations and the esteem and needs of their menfolk [14].

Lastly, we have the special case where both partners work at home, with the possibility of working together on some jobs as a team - e.g. wife as a secretary/receptionist for the husband's work [15].

## **3.2 Clerical Information Intensive Work**

The second dimension of this research is that it focuses not on the professional who has already received substantial coverage in the existing telework literature. Instead, the report examines the implications of telework for white-collar non-professionals working in such fields as sales, administrative or enquiry service capacities: the 'clerical information intensive' workers.

### **3.2.1 Building on Previous Research**

Other research has noted that until recently, there has been scant attention to clerical homework [1]. In a previous review of the literature it was clear that the experience of professional teleworkers, usually with fairly advantageous conditions of service, was over-represented. While this is still the case, a few studies

of clerical work have more recently started to emerge. These are covered in this report.

There is now some more data available on the number of teleworkers and known telework projects involving clerical workers. A review of research in the US reports a range of estimates: from 176,000 home based 'administrative support workers' to 406,000 secretaries, stenographers and typists [2]. One programme involving clerical teleworkers which has the merit of having run for some time (since 1980) and which has been studied in some depth is that of the Wisconsin Physicians Service Insurance Corporation [3]. Since it provides some contrasts as well as parallels with the case studies conducted for this report, the Wisconsin programme will be discussed at several points.

In addition, there is now material from several other US pilot programmes involving very small numbers of clerical teleworkers such as Blue Cross/Blue Shield (insurance form processing), Investor Diversified Services (Word-processing linked by modem to the central office) [4]. There has also been one study in Australia involving an examination of the experience of home-based word-processing, including both employees and self-employed [5].

On the Continent, teleworking is apparently less widespread than in the UK and US [6]. One report on Holland notes that a majority of telework is actually clerical, as in the case of a Dutch branch of a German mail order company [7]. Others note that one of two companies in France, such as IBM [8] and Telecommunications Corporation [9] have a few typing teleworkers, as has the pilot programme being run by the provincial Government in Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany [10].

In the UK, there is far less known about clerical teleworkers than professional ones. The relevant programmes currently being run by banks (e.g. Barclays) and some insurance companies tend not to be publicised and are only now being studied [11]: The projects of various local authorities have received a little more attention [12]. Kent County Council was approached for this report, but it employed no specific clerical teleworkers. Enfield teleworkers have been hired to process Poll Tax returns, but this initiative only became known too late to make an approach to the council. The other relevant council, Hampshire, were contacted for further information - as reported below. Amongst British research material, there was also one useful qualitative study of homeworkers in the early 1980s which included some clerical teleworkers [13].

### **3.2.2 Defining Clerical Telework**

Although this debate is beyond the terms of reference of this report, it should be pointed out that various analysts have illustrated the problems both of defining and of measuring clerical telework [14]. Of relevance for the case studies, it has also been observed that the distinction between employed and self-employed clerical teleworkers is sometimes less clear than it seems [15]. There is also in practice a blurred boundary between 'work from home' and 'work at home' [16]. And many types of work not necessarily thought of being clerical nevertheless have clerical elements (e.g. 'play-by-mail' games). Lastly, many companies and other employers do not strictly follow a BT definition of 'telework' i.e. there are variations on the equipment criteria, whether it has to be on-line or not etc.

### **3.2.3 Examples of Clerical Telework**

From previous research, clerical telework can include such things as general copy typing, or more

specialised typing (e.g. 'form letters' with a fixed format as used, say, by structural surveyors, accounts typing, audio tape transcription). The work can also include file maintenance (up-dating files) and various other data entry, processing forms (from mail order sales, insurance claims, etc.), book keeping, preparation of address labels, mailshots and any general sorting work (e.g. sorting files). Specifically relevant to the current BT experimental studies, in some programmes teleworkers acted as a buffer for fluctuating demand - e.g. Siemens in Germany [17].

### **3.2.4 The Newness of Clerical Telework**

First, it is necessary to qualify the current debates which imply that clerical telework might be a new trend. The fact is that some forms of clerical homework have a long tradition of being conducted from home as well as from the office. The prime example is typing. But, even before the invention of the typewriter, 'deserving widows' used to receive work to hand copy at home. Despite the growth of office-based typing pools, home typing has also continued on an ad hoc basis, including in the direct mail industry since the 1940s [18]. Hence, past surveys of homeworkers in general have sometimes picked up a number of such clerical workers [19].

The fact that this home based clerical work has a long tradition is important because it means that home typing is a 'familiar' option for many women. Such typing does not have the connotations of being a radically new form of employment. On the other hand, there has been some discussion of the great potential for an increase in specifically clerical telework as part of the larger process of decentralisation occurring with firms [20].

## **3.3 The Research for this Report**

### **3.3.1 Literature Analysis**

In addition to the telework literature; this study also examined a number of complementary areas of work experience in order to see what lessons might be learnt from these fields. These areas include flexitime, traditional homework and part-time work. Such material provides new insights to the discussion of telework. Thus, preparation for this report included discussions with a variety of academics, specialists in their fields, about the main areas of debate, key sources, and what type of research and analysis existed.

#### **General Homework**

This literature (referenced in the report) refers to mainly physical, often manufacturing work, but some studies include clerical (not professional) homework. On the whole, this source provides a critical and negative view, arguing that telework may be seen as an extension of exploitative homework. These views are substantiated in particular by evidence on aspects such as payment levels and conditions of service. Also, the literature provides many details on gender, which is to be expected given that most traditional homeworkers are women. The homework literature is useful in that it discusses some aspects not found in telework literature. For example, the meanings of and constraints on flexibility, the various roles of spouses, the of domestic labour and the range of issues concerning use of space in the home.



## **Family and Work**

This literature discusses the interaction between paid work and family life, especially child care and domestic labour, the effects on marriage relations the case where both partners work (dual career) and the wives' role in relation to their husbands' jobs. As regards shift-work and flexitime, there is a limited amount on hours of work, mainly discussing the implications of husbands' shifts for wives' work (including telework): i.e. the structuring of women's options and days by male schedules. There is also some material on wives working 'unsocial hours' and the implications for family life. Lastly, there is a fair amount of material on unemployment - and issues arising when the unemployed are at home.

## **Carers (for the elderly, ill and handicapped)**

Apart from being discussed in relation to homework in general [1], there is no literature on carers' work options and work-at-home experiences.

## **Telecoms Intensive Work**

There appears to have been no academic studies on telework in this area: e.g. word-processing or data-entry with a continuous telecom link to mainframes, enquiry services or telemarketing. This may be partly because the numbers involved are small. But, it may also be due to the nature of industries, where tele-sales firms come and go rapidly. Two telemarketing firms which employ teleworking staff have been referred to:

- JC Penney in the US, which organises telephone sales from home as a buffer for surges in demand [2]
- An unnamed Dutch mail order firm [3]

## **3.3.2 Case Studies**

The research for this report also involved ten user case studies based on interviews with current teleworkers to explore the themes raised both in the previous and in the current review.

The teleworkers interviewed were contacted via a variety of sources in order not to create a particular bias. Such avenues included teleworker magazines (e.g. the newsletters of local branches of 'Ownbase'), enquiries to firms and other organisations (e.g. local government), and via networks of personal contacts. A number of methodological problems in locating different types of teleworkers have been noted in previous research [4]. There employee versus self-employed distinction is significant. The self-employed are, albeit still with some difficulty, easier to locate directly since they advertise themselves or are at least more likely to be known through personal contacts. Currently, they also constitute the vast majority of those clerical workers who work from home. Within this category, those people providing straightforward typing services are in the majority and most visible. So in this study an effort was made to locate self-employed teleworkers involved in more diverse clerical activities.

The one category of teleworker which it would have been desirable to locate, but which proved to be too difficult, was home based self-employed (or employee) telemarketing staff. While these are known to

exist, it has been argued that they are often single individuals working on behalf of small (or not so small) companies - so they are not easily found through actual tele-sales agencies.

The only practical way to locate teleworkers with employee status was to go through their employers. This usually meant the personnel managers, although one interviewee was located by personal contacts within an organisation. However, organisations, while ultimately willing to co-operate, provide an extremely slow route more suited to an academic study rather than to a report for which the research has to be conducted relatively quickly. Locating and making contact with the correct personnel manager is problematic. It then takes some time to actually locate the teleworkers within the organisation and secure their co-operation. The result is that these interviewees constitute a minority of those interviewed for this report.

However, it is clear from both this research and recent American material on clerical telework that the employed/self-employed distinction is not so significant as it is sometimes made out to be. Often, a firm or other organisation could have chosen either arrangement for its labour force. One of the three major UK projects, that of Rank Xerox, arranges self-employment status for its teleworking managers and professionals and encourages them to have several clients. In contrast, ICL teleworkers have employee status. Or to take an example from the case studies, the planning department for Hampshire County Council employs people at one point in the year to punch in data from surveys. These staff are chosen from a register which the Council has compiled and they are taken on as employees on (very) short term contracts. But for this type of work, they could equally well have been 'self-employed', and indeed, it is probable that some of these staff have self-employed status at other points in the year.

The experience of employees and the self-employed differ, for example, with differences relating to the risk involved in self-employment, the purchase of equipment, the nature of supervision and the need for the self-employed to promote their services. But, for the purposes of this study, many of the experiences of employee and self-employed have proved to be similar, with differences depending on other factors concerning how the work is arranged. Examples here include a range of issues around self-discipline, time and space management etc. Moreover many employer instigated schemes are liable to involve either recruiting new labour for teleworker posts, or allowing a degree of self-selection by existing staff. Therefore, the factors shaping people's desire to take up telework will be similar to those motivating the self-employed.

## 4. The Research Results

The following sections, which form the body of this report, discuss the findings from the literature searches and interviews with teleworkers.

### 4.1 Management of Self-Discipline

This first section starts by addressing the issues concerned with self-discipline, moving from the general to the specific. The questions covered here concern how and with what success do teleworkers manage these problems of self-discipline. Inevitably, some of this spills over into the later sections, especially concerning time management.

There are two key problems particular to teleworkers which are often cited in the telework literature, and which emerge in the case studies. Both problems imply that more self-discipline is required at home than in office based work. The two reasons for this are:

- The reverse side of flexibility. Without the office days' time and space constraints, more options and temptations are open to teleworkers.
- A number of new demands arise by virtue of the teleworker being visible at home and perceived as being available - for children, for partners, for chores and other responsibilities, for socialising with relatives, for friends and for other outsiders. Therefore, there are more pressures to balance, more considerations to address, than in the office.

It is worth bearing in mind that both of these problems are relative ones in the sense that the teleworker's experience of these new options and demands depends on their previous situation. There is a difference between moving to telework from full-time work in an office, from part-time work, or from being unemployed/a housewife. In the latter case, the constraints of office working hours were already lacking, and the person concerned was previously very 'visible' to others. For such workers, telework may actually impose more constraint and be used as an excuse to curtail availability for family and social contacts. [1]

#### 4.1.1 The Management of Flexibility

In the eyes of many commentators, the flexibility often offered to potential teleworkers is one of its main advantages over on-site work. It is worth making a number of points at this stage about the exact nature of this flexibility. First, for many women especially, any 'flexibility' in the work is tempered by the constraints imposed by other factors. For example, traditional (non-professional) homeworkers often take few breaks or holidays from work, and while working many continue late into the evening and start early in the morning. This is because they have only a limited amount of time available in a normal working day due to circumstances such as having young children. Nevertheless, many still desire incomes that match up at least to some extent to work out of the home. At usually low rates per hour, they therefore have to work long hours to meet these goals. In other words, the economic needs (or wants) combined with the non-work constraints on labour which the teleworkers may bring to the work influences their

choices and behaviour [2]. The result for these homeworkers is a very limited sense of freedom to choose how much work to do and when to do it. As a result, many do not perceive their options as being flexible.

Secondly, some constraints on this problem of freedom are imposed by the nature of different types of telework [3]. For example, some forms of telephone based, on-line telework may impose constraints that make it less like traditional homeworking. For example, if the person has to be available all the time or at certain times fixed by the company then they may not be free to switch to other chores, to 'time shift' their domestic labour, or to respond to urgent family demands etc. One supposed benefit for the firm is that of a flexible labour force, where the company has the option of more easily altering the number of workers depending on the demand for its products. But greater flexibility for the firm can mean decreased flexibility for the workforce. For example, teleworkers may be bound by contract to be on call in case their labour is needed. Or, they may be pressurised to work when the company requires them. Or teleworkers may feel that they cannot turn work down now for fear of getting less in the future. [4] From the above two points it is clear that there are limits to flexibility. However, having noted these constraints, many teleworkers nevertheless feel that they experience a degree of flexibility [5]. They see this as being a positive aspect of teleworking [6]. Of course, that very flexibility and awareness of choices requires more self-discipline. As one interviewee, Jenny, noted:

*'It may be my husband's day off and he'll say "I'm just going to take the children out swimming". And I know I've got a pile of work, but I know I'd love to go with them - and I'm split between the two. Whereas, if you worked in an office, you wouldn't know that they were going off'*

#### **4.1.2 Supervision and Autonomy**

One particular aspect of the flexibility experienced by teleworkers is their freedom from supervision. Or rather, their perception of such freedom, of 'being your own boss', is the important aspect. In past studies, this freedom has been valued by teleworkers as the key merit of teleworking [7]. One qualification is that evidence from the flexitime literature suggests that males appreciated more the sense of 'feeling professional', whereas for women, flexibility is a way to manage family and work - often as a logistical solution [8]. Hence, many traditional women homeworkers have still seen working at home as a 'sacrifice' [9].

The female interviewees for this report, however, did appreciate 'being their own boss' as much as males. This remained a key reason why they would not want to go back to the office - despite the pressure which the work provided. But it is worth noting that both the self-employed and employees in this case study received little monitoring apart from the end output. They were trusted in much the same way as professional teleworkers are often treated. Given that the self-employed had multiple clients, no one client could easily demand that their work be done at a particular moment.

The sense of freedom from supervision can even exist when there is less of a sense of 'being professional'. In the US study of women processing insurance forms, the telework is strictly regimented with extremely short turnaround times. But, the fact that they were being measured by output alone with no other forms of supervision, with no one 'watching over' or 'hassling' them, was still one attraction for these teleworkers [10].

But other studies of US pilot schemes have indicated that the managers who are still wary of this new

mode of working check up frequently on the progress of their teleworking employees [11]. And clearly on-line work whether it be word-processing on a distant mainframe or answering enquiries by phone can be constantly monitored by the software. It is far less clear that teleworkers would feed such a sense of freedom from supervision under these conditions.

### 4.1.3 Visibility and Availability

Some discussions within the telework literature talk of the increased 'role conflict' which follows from the decreased separation of home and work. Often, what this can mean in practice is that more choices, and more demands on the teleworker. These arise simply because the workers are at home where there are other attractions and jobs to do. These other options are visible and other family members, and indeed employers and clients sometimes, see the teleworkers as being available. Jenny summed up the effects of having an increased number of considerations when working at home:

*'When I'm working I'm sitting there thinking, "What shall I do for supper tonight?". And I am conscious of putting them in the bath or getting them ready for bed. Whereas, if you 're out in an office, you haven't got to think about that, because you can't do anything about it. Home is 20 miles away, you can't nip home and do these things.'*

It is more appropriate to discuss the issue of other people's demands on the teleworker in later sections. But in brief, the different dimensions of 'being available' by virtue of being at home can be summed up as follows:

- Being available for chores.
- Being available for partner's demands.
- Being available for children's demands.
- Being available for friends' and relatives' demands.
- Being available for clients'/employers' demands.

### 4.1.4 Managing Interruptions

A common image of home in the more optimistic telework literature is as a quiet sanctuary for the type of work which requires concentration - in contrast to the busy office. There can be some truth in this, with a number of interviewees reporting that they are far more productive and do, indeed, have less interruptions. But the potential for interruptions is still present, both from the various family members and from employers. Often, the concern in the telework literature is about interruptions to the teleworker's work. But in the case of clients, colleagues and managers we need also to consider interruptions to the teleworker's own family and social life.

Controlling interruptions from outside the home, especially from clients and colleagues is perhaps an easier matter via the use of answerphones, E-Mail and, more drastically (but used in desperation sometimes) pulling the phone plug out. The complicated considerations of whether to use these various

storage media to intercept messages will be discussed under the later heading of 'contactability'.

The problem of interruptions from the teleworker's partner has been picked out in previous writings [12] and is also illustrated in Jenny's case:

*'He's dreadful. I find that quite difficult because quite often there are things in my mind that I know that I want to talk to him about and that I want to tell him - while I'm typing I'm thinking "I must remember to tell him this later". But if I do stop and break that pattern, I'll probably go and get a cup of coffee, I'll sit down and I'll talk to him - and half an hour will be gone before you know. And it's the same with the children in a way. I try to let them fend for themselves. But I say to David 'just go away and let me get on!' But because I'm there, and something pops into his head, and before he thinks about it he's started talking, and I've started listening and the pattern's broken.'*

Others, such as Chris and Julie, also identified these interruptions as a problem, especially when their partners first came home from work and wanted to talk about their day. But equally, these interviewees felt that it was 'fair' for their husbands to want to talk to them - especially when the telework meant that there was limited time for such social contact. In other words, to avoid interruptions was to neglect their family responsibilities. The feminist literature would suggest that this was a more acute dilemma for women, who might be more conscious of their role of fostering family harmony. Certainly Ken's marriage broke up in large part because he prioritised work over social contact with his wife. Ultimately, there is no 'correct' level of such interruptions. The teleworkers concerned had to find their own balance, when they felt they could break from the work, and when they had to tell their husbands to speak to them later. As Chris noted:

*'I've pointed out that if he really wants to socialise he'll have to get out of bed earlier in the morning.'*

The other key source of interruptions is children. As with partners, women teleworkers often feel a dilemma here in that part of the appeal of telework is that they would be more available for children. Unlike in the case of partners, children's demands can often prove impossible to ignore. Once again, Jenny described her situation - how she usually has to stop her typing work if her youngest child wants a drink or to go to the toilet.

*'Because she won't wait, she'll sit and whine. And it's easier to please than it is to argue with a 3 year old.'*

Two main strategies seemed to be used here, in addition to using the TV as baby-sitter and to the ongoing attempts to train children to be independent and not disturb the teleworker at work. The first is enlisting the support of other people to prevent interruptions from children [13]. This aspect is explored in a little more detail in the section on the family's support.

The second is to work mainly or only when the children are not around or not awake. Especially where younger children are concerned, this often means working in the evenings after the children have gone to bed. But, the nature of the work has to fit in with this - i.e. that it can be done at any time, and it requires that the teleworkers do not need to be so contactable when the children are around. One compromise noted in an American study, was to undertake different types of work when children were around compared to when they were not interrupting the parent teleworker. For example, this meant processing the simpler insurance claims when the children are awake and the more complex ones when they are asleep [14]

Controlling interruptions from friends, relatives and neighbours can be a relatively easier matter. But, studies have also noted how this presents problems [15]. Chris noted the difficulties from her past experience:

*'I used to have hoards of folk dropping in for coffee - any time of the day or night. That was one of the nice things when we moved. Peace and quiet. When I lived in London we were in a friendly tower block in Clapham, full of elderly people who had nothing better to do than wander round and chat to the neighbours. I also had a lot of friends who worked part time and had young children. When they finished their work they immediately assumed that I was available, because I wasn't working.'*

She used to have problems convincing them that she had work to do. Chris put up with the interruptions precisely because she had been planning to move house for a long time so knew that this problem was not going to last. Now she is careful to let friends know that she is working when she is at home, and to control contact with her new neighbours - as do other interviewees.

Other family members can also make claims on the teleworkers time. In the case of Jean, living in her parent's home, her mother was around most of the day, and so Jean had to regulate the times when her mother could chat:

*'That was another reason why I wanted to make it clear that it was now my working day. Because especially in the beginning, she'd come in and gossip, and then come back again later - so I had to say, "No I'm working." But now it's evolved that she might come in now and again.'*

For the most part, teleworkers have to lay down some rules about contact and build understanding amongst their wider family and other social circles.

#### **4.1.5 Controlling Work's Interference with Family Life**

Much of the concern about self-discipline in the telework literature concerns the ability of the teleworker to manage work. But, the teleworkers' own discipline is worth attention because of implications for their satisfaction and hence their willingness to continue with this mode of employment. The issue is that of having the self-discipline to maintain 'sufficient' social and family life and not to let work encroach too far.

Fundamentally, most teleworkers are balancing domestic life and work under conditions where boundaries are blurred, where the two more easily spill over into each other than with office-based work. One relevant issue here for teleworkers, noted in other studies and by some of the interviewees for this report, is the danger of becoming a workaholic [16]. Sometimes this is because of the desire to achieve a certain income - as with Ken. For others, such as Julie, since she enjoyed her Desk Top Publishing it was very easy to let work take over - to the detriment of contact with her family:

*'You have to have the will-power to get started on working from home. But equally as important, and not recognised, is the will-power to stop it.'*

Another issue is failure to 'preserve' family life and sacred family times with both work and work related phone calls intruding [17]. Dawn noted the disruption caused by calls during time reserved for her young son. Jenny discussed how she tries to control such interruptions:

*'Working from home was more convenient, but a lot harder because it interrupts the family life. For example, weekends. Its' very difficult to stipulate to clients when you can be contactable. That's why I use the answerphone. Its' easier just to leave it on to answer calls if I don't want to be interrupted. But I might be sitting down for Sunday lunchtime and somebody will ring and want something done. So, it does interrupt like that'*

Another issue is spending 'enough' time with children and having time to arrange a suitable environment for them. Other studies have also reported teleworking mothers feeling guilty because the pressures of work led them to shout at or neglect their children [18] or to treat them as though they are simply 'getting in the way' [19]. As Jenny also noted:

*'I feel guilty I want to do the work and obviously, its' nice to have the money But, I also feel guilty about the children, in that I don 't want to deprive them. I'm trying to get the best of both worlds - work and keeping the family together: entertain them, take them out to see friends, whatever So, I don't keep my week free especially for work. I'll make arrangements - like Wednesday afternoon, I've got people coming here. Tomorrow, I'm out at a friends'. Because otherwise, I could be sitting here waiting for work to come in, that's not going to arrive - and the children would then be deprived.'*

## **4.2 Time Management**

The questions in this section concern the time management issues faced by different teleworkers, and how and with what success teleworkers manage these various time demands.

### **4.2.1 Time for Planning**

One experience which is shared by most teleworkers is the greater time and effort required to plan telework. This demand is usually more acute for women because of their greater domestic responsibilities which has been noted in much of the feminist literature. As was discussed in relation to self-discipline, when the boundaries of the office day are not imposed externally, teleworkers have to concern themselves more with the organisation of work. This means managing work flows, and especially in the case of the self-employed, deciding how much to take on, and when they can agree to deliver.

In the case of women teleworkers, there are more likely to be extra decisions concerning the organisation of domestic labour and childcare. Basically, more flexibility, more choice (to the extent that there really is more - depending on the working arrangements) requires more time for planning. Because of this, Chris identified the management of schedules as a key issue which itself required some time for planning.

*'If you go to work 3 days a week, you employ a childminder 3 days a week, and the time you're at work is the only time you have to worry about. Now I employ a childminder two days a week and I fit the rest of my hours in. You have to be very strict with yourself about doing the right number of hours and organising things around the children and around when you've got to do the shopping etc. That is a lot more difficult.'*



### 4.2.2 Time Management and the Nature of the Telework.

There are different constraints and pressures on time depending on the nature of the work. Key variables include:

- (a) Whether the teleworker is employed or self-employed, with one or multiple clients.

The homework literature indicates that many homeworkers are self-employed but only work for one employer. Most of the clerical workers in this study had several clients. While most employees are liable to work for one section of a firm, it is possible that several different office-based workers may supply the work. Certainly the case of Chris indicates that the telephone enquiries which she had to answer came from several sources within her organisation. Self-employed teleworkers with multiple clients can experience particular pressures in that while a single employer might be more understanding if prioritising one piece of urgent work delays other tasks, the self-employed are contracted to several clients, all of whom expect their deadlines to be met.

- (b) The fact that there are different types of time flexibility with different telework.

With on-line work, where enquiries from outsiders or from the employing firm fall within office hours, or where the mainframe only operates at certain times, there are pressures to stick to the 9-5 timetable. The last section noted that in US pilot schemes, managers wary of new supervision techniques continually phoned up to check on the work of teleworkers during office hours whether or not the work strictly required this degree of monitoring. In effect, such a procedure forced teleworking staff to be available at least from 9-5. This contradicted the supposed rationale that the companies were providing teleworkers flexibility [1]. Meanwhile, the US Wisconsin study of clerical telework provides an example of further constraints. Forms which were delivered one day, often in the afternoon, had to be processed in time to be picked up the next morning. This left only just enough time to complete the work and so forcing people to work in the evening and early morning [2].

- (c) The predictability of different types of telework.

This problem can be more acute for the self-employed who advertise their availability and wait for any offers of work. But in part predictability also depends on the nature of the work and clientele. For example, while demands for typing can be very variable, those who picked up the student trade could expect more demand at times of the year when theses and dissertations had to be submitted. And a few regular clients, or long term projects were all that was needed to provide a stable work flow.

Other types of clerical work had particular patterns, with Desk Top Publishing being geared to the regular publication of journal issues, and book keeping to monthly or 3 monthly VAT returns. On the whole, predictability was still recognised as a problem, especially when receiving too much work to be urgently done. In other studies, there has been a plea from teleworkers for a more consistent workload [31]. Obviously teleworkers also try their best to even out the flow. Hence, Jackie chases up clients who are late with their returns and Jean avoids taking on other work at the period when book-indexing jobs tend to reach her. All the teleworkers interviewed constantly juggled the priorities associated with different types of work.

### 4.2.3 Contactability and Teleworker Strategies

One specific dimension of the way in which work and family time interact is in the case of contactability. On the whole, teleworkers are often more available than their office counterparts. Even if some would prefer to keep weekends and evenings free, and make this clear to those supplying work, in practice they are phoned up at all times and most interviewees appeared to bow to the inevitable. Many view being on 24 hour call as a selling point for their services, or at least a trade-off for the benefit of staying at home. Nevertheless, this contactability is sometimes felt as an intrusion into their lives.

There are different reasons for being contactable in relation to different types of telework. Most often for the self-employed, contactability is important to receive initial orders for work. (Some of the interviewees were surprised at how little further contact often followed until the work was ready - i.e. most clients did not check up on progress). Sometimes teleworkers needed to be contactable for the occasional enquiry, and of course contactability is the essence of the job for on-line enquiry and booking services.

The usual mode of contact was the phone, at least initially. In the case studies, answerphones were usually considered vital not only to be contactable but also to control that contact. For instance, a number of interviewees would leave the machine switched on both when they were working and at certain times of the day when they were busy but present in the home. In other words, this was a means to store the message and answer it when, and if, it suited the teleworkers - and so to avoid some of the interference in family life. Of course, more urgent messages could be answered more quickly. However, for some answerphones were not a perfect solution. These interviewees felt that potential clients might pass them over and dial another teleworker offering the same service if they were not there to answer in person. Others were aware of the frustrations experienced when enquiries, such as those concerning bookkeeping, could not be answered instantly. These teleworkers either avoided the answerphone or used it more sparingly,

The more mobile, who sometimes worked outside the home, like Julie, could provide alternative numbers where they could be reached and they themselves phoned their machines to see if messages were on the answerphone. For others, family members could be trained, sometimes imperfectly, to take messages. Where available, others, such as Chris, used E-Mail as the means to store messages and reply when it suited. The Hampshire County Council system, used by Dawn, also has a diary facility. Teleworkers can indicate when they will be available if they need to be contacted in person, just like anyone else in the council.

Lastly, there is personal contact, especially when material for processing is delivered by hand. Once again, although interviewees did not object to this, they would usually prefer visits to be arranged in advance to make them more predictable. When this was not the case, the clients just dropped by, that too could be felt as an intrusion, or at least a disadvantage of telework.

### 4.2.4 Time Management and Family Circumstances

One way of discussing the experience of women and employment in general has been in terms of seeing them as managing amidst the interacting timetables in the household. In particular, employment is influenced by their partner's work schedules.

#### **The nature of partner's work**

If partners work shifts, late evenings or irregular hours, then this fact structures the time when teleworkers, especially women, feel that they:

- can fit in the work,
- have to be more available for their partner's free time, either for socialising or to perform such chores as meal preparation [4].

As noted earlier, women homeworkers in general have a high proportion of partners who are self-employed, and who are more likely to work unusual hours - which can fit in with flexible homework [5].'

### **Children's schedules related to their age**

This includes not only daily schedules, such as the times when children come home from nursery or school, but special, yet regular events - such as school related gatherings. Clearly, the timetable varies at different points in the child's life (nursery, core school hours, school hours plus extra curricula activities etc.) may affect the teleworker's preferences for managing time vary over the life-cycle [6].

### **Social time**

Leisure time, including contacts outside the home, can be important as a safety valve against the pressures of work, and those of managing both work and family. Even so, there is a tendency for leisure (especially contacts with those outside the home) to be squeezed out where both partners perform some kind of work [7]. Sometimes, the social activities in which people engage have their own schedules which must also be accommodated.

Given the fact that all these schedules change over time, attitudinal studies of employees in mainstream on-site employment has shown that they would ideally like time flexibility to be built into employment contracts to cope with these factors [8]. It would appear that teleworkers would also like the flexibility, and some teleworker employers, such as Hampshire County Council, have tried to meet this preference in the formulation of their contracts.

## **4.2.5 Constraints on Time Management**

The telework literature often refers to the experience of juggling the different demands of work and family life - especially for women with children. The case studies, in particular, provided more scope for expanding on the constraints and strategies involved in balancing these claims on time, showing some of the different possible dimensions of time management.

First, there are the different degrees and forms of constraint on time options emerging from the nature and circumstances of the telework itself. At first sight, one of the major differences occurs between the employed and self-employed. The self-employed can regulate their work, taking on more or less as desired. But this freedom of control over work and time is in practice limited by a number of factors. One, mentioned by many interviewees, is the very personal aspect that they often find it difficult, personally, to refuse work if asked by a client with whom they have built up a good relationship. Because of financial considerations, many also feel that they cannot afford to turn down work - not because of an absolutely

low income, but because of the income to which they aspire or the debts incurred by their lifestyle. And thinking of longer term planning, self-employed teleworkers are often worried about losing customers in the future once they have turned someone down once. While these are teleworker 'choices', they can be experienced as constraints, with the outcome that the teleworkers cannot easily bring themselves to regulate the workload.

Other research on the experience of teleworking employees also shows a variety of degrees to which they are really free to choose work. For some, as with some of the Hampshire council workers, conditions of employment can have considerable flexibility. For example, employees may be committed to a certain number of hours per year, but can negotiate when these occur. Chris, for example, had this freedom, although the informal 'deal' was that she was then available for short telephone enquiries most of the week. For others, the employer's right to alter workloads (including making changes at short notice) give the teleworkers little scope for controlling work flows. And where employees did theoretically have some choice, they might still be pushed by employers to take on work.

On the other side of the equation are family demands. As is discussed in the later section on 'familial support', some chores are more easy to shift to another time, some less so. Examples would include meal preparation to fit in with the schedules of others and childcare to fit in with childminder or school hour schedules. Partly depending on family dynamics and support, some of these can be very difficult to 'time-shift' or find replacement labour to cover them. On the other hand, even these may be ultimately overcome if telework takes a very high priority. Teleworkers may be able to make 'special arrangements' for the children, allow the TV to take over as childminder, persuade others to prepare meals etc. In some, even where there appear to be constraints, there can be various ways in which teleworkers can manoeuvre.

#### **4.2.6 The Balance of Work and Family**

Within these constraints, there is a continuum on which teleworkers can be located. At the one end, we have those trying to be flexible in relation to work, which includes taking on all the telework that is available. This often means making alternative arrangements for family/social life (or restricting family life). At the other end, we have those for whom domestic labour, childcare and 'social time' are relatively fixed: which means trying to control the work coming in (e.g. by turning it down, farming it out, refusing to work at certain times etc.). If anything, both the interviewees and other telework literature suggest that the majority are nearer the former pole. That is to say, they cater more to the paid work, and then sometimes feel a little guilty about whether they are neglecting their family.

#### **4.2.7 Patterns of Work**

Apart from this general continuum, the details of work patterns vary according to a number of dimensions. No particular pattern is suitable for everyone. This is important to bear in mind since it means that in terms of guide-lines for teleworkers, it is not appropriate to lay rigid rules down for everyone.

First, there are variations in the degree to which teleworkers prefer to stick to fixed timetables, allotting times in the week for work, chores etc., or reserving 'sacred' times for family (e.g. weekends). This rigidity is not only caused by how constrained teleworkers feel through the various external demands

exerted on them. It is also influenced by the degree to which they feel they need fixed times to reinforce self-discipline. Some suspect that if they were to be too flexible, the work, chores or whatever would not get done, or that social life would be squeezed out. On the other hand, others can cope with a great deal of flexibility, with changing patterns of work each week, as and when the need arises. There are also variations as to whether teleworkers are flexible about time during the week, or time during the day: i.e. once the schedule for a day is decided in the morning, they stick to it.

A related, but slightly different, dimension is the intensity with which work is completed. Some like to clear all the work as soon as it comes in, or at least to complete the more demanding types of work (e.g. such as book indexing which requires sustained periods of concentration). This is not just in response to the pressure of employers or clients. The teleworkers do not like work, or major pieces of work, 'hanging over them', and so clear the work away in order to have periods of free time with peace of mind afterwards. This may entail bouts of both long periods of work and more intense work. Such a strategy appeared to be more common when the work was intrinsically interesting for the person concerned (e.g. Desk Top Publishing).

Others prefer to pace the work more evenly, so that they do not feel under self-induced pressure. This approach may also involve, as with Jean, the strategy of semi-reserving periods of free time (e.g. weekends), but being willing to work at those times to ease the pressure and stop the work becoming too intense during the week. (From the case studies, one common way of controlling such pressures is to promise delivery dates a few days after the point when teleworkers anticipate the work can be done).

Next, there are the different strategies of tackling one job at a time or several simultaneously. This option in part depends on the nature of the work. For instance, enquiries sometimes have to be handled as and when they arrive. But, given a free hand, both strategies were followed: for some the variation helped to overcome the boredom induced by work, while others preferred to concentrate on one thing - especially a complex task.

Taking breaks from work was, again, an issue that was partly influenced by the nature of the work itself. When concentration was required, as in the book indexing where Jean considers the whole manuscript, it is inefficient to take too long a break. So, she preferred to work fairly intensively. But where the work was more monotonous, as in some of the typing work, regular breaks were not only more practical, but often more desirable on the part of the teleworkers. The second constraint is the pressure to complete work, related to how much Work is taken on. Some, at times, felt that they could hardly afford to take a break.

Within these constraints there were again different choices. One theme which did emerge was that when family members were not around to provide interruptions, it was far easier to slip into the habit of foregoing breaks than for office based workers. As Chris noted:

*'In the office, people do pop in or you stop for a cup of coffee, and because here I've got no-one to talk to, I tend not to stop. I have to make myself stop and have a break from the computer every now and again.'*

Julie echoed these sentiments, observing that it was especially easy to persist when the work was enjoyable. In fact, she had suffered with a clot in her leg from sitting in the same position for too long.

Finally, there are the longer periods of leave, including holidays. Since leave is not paid for the self-employed, this group of teleworkers appeared to be particularly prone to not taking much time off from

work. They were fairly conscious that they were losing money. In the case studies, where holidays were taken, they were often of shorter duration to fit in with the flows of telework.

## 4.3 Space Management

This section examines the types of spatial problems which emerge for different types of telework, involving different equipment and different housing configurations. Then it looks at the modifications teleworkers have made in an attempt to overcome these difficulties.

### 4.3.1 The Context: the Housing Stock

Telework often needs less space than other manufacturing homework so some issues, such as conflicts over space, may not be so acute as for traditional homeworkers. From the case studies, examples of teleworking equipment requiring space include not only personal computers and printers, but other equipment such as answering machines, faxes, modems, photocopying facilities and transcribing machines. Also, space was required for reference manuals and stationery. Other researchers have also pointed to the desirability of having numerous electrical sockets and perhaps the option of localised heating (instead of using the central heating).

For some types of teleworker, especially the self-employed, there are extra needs, such as having a suitable place for visitors to be received which might in turn lead to considerations of parking places, and a location for the residence which is easy to find [1].

Various commentators have argued that, while it may have advantages over some continental housing, most British housing is not ideally suited to telework since there is no separate area available for telework. On the whole, British homes are tightly planned for space [2]. This was also the experience of IBM in the UK, whose staff have noted that, in general, public and private housing both assume a separation of home from work in their design [3]. In fact, current innovations in building design stress compactness and ease of upkeep for households - of young mobile individuals and couples, and of the elderly. This actually accentuates the trend toward smaller housing [4].

The fact that in 1984 a conference on the theme of housing and homework took place - from which many of the above comments arose - is itself a sign of interest in telework among housing industry circles. However, there was still some pessimism about the chances of change in housing design. Builders argue that they needed to see more demand before they changed their designs. In other words, the initial impetus for change was not going to lead by this quarter.

Discussions at the conference included an analysis of the degree to which different types of housing were suitable for homework - many of the points applying also to telework [5]. Detached and semi-detached were best since they were usually not over-occupied, were open to extension and to the conversion of the garage into a workspace. Terraced and town (e.g. Georgian) houses had more restraints on expansion, especially where roof space for storage (including domestic items displaced by telework equipment) could not be used, and any garage space was in a remote unit. Small 'starter homes' and other recent housing where extendability has been ignored in design, and especially flats, present the least suitable housing. These are densely occupied and tightly planned, with minimal scope for expansion.

Lastly, there has been some discussion of how one might approach some of the space problems through innovation in furniture design. Some telework managers have felt that the office furniture associated with telework is often unattractive and impractical in the home setting [6]. Another approach is to point out that conventional furniture is often space-consuming [7]. New designs might not only try to counter this tendency, but also include more fold-away furniture (folding beds, discreet wardrobes) and even workstations where equipment could be tucked away after use [8].

### 4.3.2 Spillover between Work and Family Space

Most recommendations concerning telework suggest that a separate, dedicated space be reserved in the house for the home office. A separate room is often cited as being optimum, and for at least one interviewee, Chris, it was required in her contract as part of the Civil Service terms and conditions for teleworking. But not all employers take this line. For example, Hampshire Council only required a separate, secure space, which might be in the corner of a room.

In practice, a major survey of all types of homework indicated that only one third of homeworkers had a separate room [9]. In contrast, in a small survey of teleworkers, over half had one [10]. However, it is worth noting that even amongst homeworkers in general, males are more likely to have separate space. Surveys of teleworkers will often include not only more males but more professionals with higher incomes and larger houses. So both income and gender are factors which could explain the differences between homework and telework findings. Many clerical teleworkers are liable to be female, and feminist writers have long commented on the fact that women are less able to appropriate space generally. Therefore, we might expect at least half if not more Of this clerical labourforce will not be able to achieve a separate office room.

In fact, the case studies suggest a yet more complicated picture. At one end of the scale we find the completely dedicated rooms (of which there were few examples). Then there are semi-dedicated ones, which were used also for storage/drying room, the occasional guest, and occasional other use (e.g. hobbies). Finally, there are rooms where telework took place alongside other regular activities: e.g. in the dining room or kitchen.

### 4.3.3 Maintaining a Psychological Boundary

A variety of reasons have been given for maintaining a spatial boundary between work and home. One key argument is that the separate space can act as a psychological boundary to prevent work and social life interfering with one another. Indeed, both previous research and this study have found teleworkers repeatedly referring to the 'disadvantage' that they cannot stop thinking about work [11]. For example, Ken, whose long hours of work contributed to his splitting up with his wife, commented:

*'Being surrounded by your work invites you to become a workaholic.'*

For some, knowing the work is in the house is the problem and where it is located makes little difference. But for others, not being able to see it can help. So Ken now refuses to let any work spill over from the office area.

Meanwhile, for Chris it is important that she can shut the door on the work when she has finished for the

day:

*'That part of the partitioning between when I'm working and when I'm not. I like to be able to keep the work out of the way when I'm sitting watching telly.'*

The process also works in the other direction, with a number of interviewees mentioning that it was easier to slip into thinking about such things as chores and the children while working at home. For Jenny, sitting within sight of the kitchen and living room, tendency appeared more acute. However, she did not regard this as a serious problem since her typing was fairly automatic work requiring little concentration. The implication might be that this particular issue was more of a problem, interfering with work, where the nature of the work required substantial concentration.

But even here it is important to add the qualification that concentration levels depend not just on the work per se but on the approach of the worker concerned. For example, as part of his 'quality service' Ken interpreted the content of what he typed, picking up typing errors and proof reading in terms of pointing out inconsistencies in manuscripts to their authors.

Finally, one advantage of a discreet space, and even more of a separate room, is that it enables teleworkers to more easily create the image and trappings of an office which for some is more conducive to working. So, Julie's separate room allows her to have a modern decor and functional furniture to put her in the right frame of mind. Even when a separate room is not possible, others created small office-looking enclaves, often facing away from the more domestic furnishings in the same room. Such arrangements serve not only to psychologically gear teleworkers for their work, but they also provide symbolic messages to others that this is 'real' work, and that the teleworker is 'at work' when in this area.

#### **4.3.4 Distractions**

Other distractions from work arise when the teleworker can easily see beyond the workplace to the activities of other family members. The teleworker can also be seen by them which raises the issue of disturbance through interruptions discussed earlier. Hence, while a separate room would have been the ideal, Jenny tried at least to move her work space corner out of direct line of sight of the TV and of those watching it.

Yet, the issue of visibility is a little more complex and not all teleworkers wish to create such barriers. Indeed, Rank Xerox staff, with considerable experience in this field, found that the dynamics of particular families

influence the extent to which teleworkers want to separate home and work [12]. And surveys of teleworkers have shown mixed views on the desirability of separating workspace in the home [13].

Some of the reasons for ambivalence became clearer in the case studies. For example, Jackie started off working in a dark attic - with almost a Dickensian atmosphere which reinforced a sense of isolation. So when she had the chance, she partitioned off part of the living room for work once the house extension had been built. At least then she could see out over the garden. Later, when her retired husband became ill, she wanted to be able to see him while she worked and so moved into a section of the new enlarged living room. Since they do not talk much, interruptions are not a problem, but it is important for her that he is visibly present.



For Sheila, working in the kitchen was sufficiently distanced so as not to hear the themes on TV for example, but she could then work knowing her family were nearby and that she was fulfilling her role as a mother and wife by being available to them. Besides, she had actually missed the background noise from the office when she first started teleworking, and this was a replacement. Lastly, Julie, although favouring a separate room for a variety of reasons, missed the early days of teleworking when she shared a workroom with her husband whose hobby was constructing models. Although working in silence, she valued the feeling of his presence' and the sense that they were together.

Clearly, teleworkers have to find their own balance concerning the degree to which they want to separate work from family, and what forms of boundary they wish to erect. Given the multiple issues at play, there are sometimes no straightforward solutions, with any decision being a trade-off.

### **4.3.5 Clearing Away**

The literature on manufacturing homework has drawn attention to the problems of stopping and starting work to clear away and to set up again where there is no dedicated space reserved for the work [14]. This issue was also noted in the study of Wisconsin clerical workers [15]. Clearing up was not too much of a problem given the particular circumstances of the interviewees for this report - although some of them knew of teleworkers who still worked on the kitchen table! Looked at as an intrusion of telework into family life, a number of studies cited homeworkers complaining about the mess created by the work when there was no separate space for it. The resentment of husbands at the mess has also been mentioned [16].

Apart from the issues of time, effort and the disruption to work involved in clearing away, there is also the psychological function of tidying up to mark the end of the workday. This can enable teleworkers to put work out of their mind, and, in some cases, to help overcome the tendency to overwork. Several interviewees put covers on machines and tidied up to varying degrees, sometimes as a continuation of habits from office working days. Clearing up also helped them to make a fresh start in the morning. But even for those who valued the habit, it was sometimes easy to just walk away with a minimum of clearing up, more so if working in a separate room where they could often just shut the door behind them.

The other motivation for clearing away is where visitors come during the day- whether as clients or for social calls. Where work is not in a discreet area, teleworkers such as Jenny felt that it had to be tidied up, although this did not take long for some screen-based work where there is a minimum of paper to file away. Others, such as Jean, were not so bothered to conceal their work or equipment when people visited.

### **4.3.6 Equipment**

Another piece of advice which often emerges from telework guide-lines is that equipment should be dedicated to the work, sometimes for security reasons. As with the arguments about a dedicated space, one rationale is also to create a psychological boundary between home and work activities. But, there are also practical considerations. Julie originally kept domestic correspondence and accounts in the same filing cabinet as work material, but has now moved to keeping them out of the room altogether. This was because she was frustrated at having to go through the domestic material whenever she was looking for work related papers.

Yet, for most interviewees, equipment and storage was also used for non-work purposes - i.e. the

boundaries were less rigid. For example, several conducted all their voluntary activities using PC's and stored their domestic accounts and other papers in the work filing cabinets. And previous research has indicated that families can perceive that one actual advantage is, precisely, that equipment can be used for other purposes [17]. Certainly some of the interviewees for this research had also bought games for the children to use occasionally and wanted the PC to eventually be used for teaching computer literacy. Hence, there is the question here of whether, if security permits, employers of teleworkers should acknowledge this reality, maybe even suggesting that this is yet another benefit of telework.

Of course, particular problems do emerge with the presence of young children, and even where computer games were played, the use of the machine was always regulated. One problem with equipment was often not so much training the teleworker's own children not to touch the machines, but training visiting children to leave the computer alone. This is especially significant given that mothers with young children are often in contact with other mothers with young children.

Although the interviewees for this study did not report a problem, there is some potential for family conflict over the use of equipment - mainly the telephone. And if not creating actual conflicts, phones can present particular problems. For example, if Chris is on-line to a distant mainframe all day, people cannot phone with enquiries on the business line which she uses, and so they have to use her residential number. The problem is that while the business line is in the 'office', the residential line is in the hall, and so wakes the baby up when it rings. Keeping phones free also acts as a constraint on other equipment - e.g. Ros was wary of tying up a private line with a fax machine (given problems of unreliability with some fax/phone switches). So she and others will only use a fax to send messages or receive prearranged ones - which reduces the functionality of the equipment.

Lastly, we have to consider the interaction of space and equipment considerations. For several, space was the main constraint on purchasing further equipment such as fax machines. In fact, Ken had only been able to acquire more equipment when he moved to office premises.

#### 4.3.7 Space for Visitors

One specific spatial dimension of teleworking which has often been mentioned is designating an area as a 'public place' within the home where visitors can be received [18]. A place to show clients can be particularly significant for the self-employed wanting to create a professional appearance. Ros mentioned the importance of overcoming the perception that teleworkers are amateurs. Jean had the most limitations in this respect, with visitors being restricted to her cramped bedroom, which is packed full of equipment. While clearly a disadvantage, she looked on the positive side:

*'People who come in are not coming into a proper office. But then that helps sometimes. Some people will feel more at ease, because a proper office may feel too professional.'*

In fact, most of the teleworkers interviewed used their lounge as the reception area, if only with new clients. Ken noted some of the drawbacks of this:

*'It got awkward sometimes when clients came to the door and you asked them up. There was one stage when the wife was ill, she wasn't very well in bed, and you can't leave someone on the doorstep when tile)' call. And that was a little bit awkward, when you're inviting them into your home and you've got someone not very well in bed.'*

And, of course, the public area has to be kept tidy, or cleaned up if someone is coming - which involves extra domestic work. In fact, Ken thought that it was actually an advantage to have visiting clients in that it forced him to keep his lounge tidy - although some of the burden of this seemed to have fallen on his former wife.

The willingness of teleworkers and their family to have parts of their home made into a semi-public area is in part influenced by previous experiences. For example, it was easy in Jean's case since her father had always been self-employed, and Ros' husband had worked from home for some years so there was some familiarity with the idea of visiting clients. But not all families may find this so easy. Even where it was acceptable, a visitor's intrusion was usually strictly regulated, with the visitor being confined to only certain rooms, and being expected to stay for only a short period of time.

#### **4.3.8 Other Problems of the Home as a Workplace**

Aside from all these particular issues concerning space, some analysts have drawn attention to the fact that telework contrasts with 'our contemporary Western concept of the home' as a private place separate from work: where families have come to value being accessible to one another and relaxing after finishing work [19]. The very presence of someone carrying out paid work within the home may infringe these values, changing the domestic atmosphere - which may be unacceptable to some people.

Conflicts over the appropriation of space can also be a problem. This has only been touched upon in the telework literature, but certainly the traditional homework literature refers to the husbands of some homeworkers resenting the space taken up [20]. The only example of such conflict from the case studies was where Jenny's husband would not let her convert the garage into an office because he wanted it for the car.

The issue of getting away from the same four walls is another problem mentioned in the telework literature review. One continental survey noted that teleworkers spend less free time in the home, especially where space was very limited, as in apartments [21]. Some interviewees had reservations about leaving in case the phone rang offering work. But, most arranged to get away from the home at some time during the week, either for chores, social visits, voluntary work or just going out for walks during the breaks.

#### **4.3.9 The Case of both Partners being at Home**

Finally in this section on space and homework, we have the special case where both partners are at home. In fact, this is not so common, as one major survey points out [22]. Especially for self-employed husbands, wives may find working from home useful to fit in with their partners' irregular hours (and supplement their irregular income). In this study, the fact that one interviewee's husband already worked from home made her initially receptive to the idea of joining him. Some commentators have wondered whether both partners being at home creates a problem of seeing too much of each other or, in the eyes of females, that males at home were 'underfoot' and 'in the way' [23]. This view received some support from a survey of teleworkers who definitely did not want their partners to also be at home [24]. This was not a problem for the interviewees in this report, but the point still needs to be borne in mind.

### 4.3.10 Change over time: Housing, Workspace and the Life-cycle

The degree to which the entry of space-consuming equipment into the home feels like an imposition is influenced by the earlier experience of the teleworker. Certainly many computer programmers will often have PCs and related equipment already, But even amongst clerical teleworkers, interviewees such as Jean had been accustomed to having space taken up by a computer in her bedroom - as her hobby,

Future housing plans can also have a bearing on receptivity to teleworking. For example, Chris and her husband were already planning to move out of London to a new home. So they could easily set aside the spare room for telework from the start. On the other hand, Jenny resisted improving the storage capacity of her loft space at this point in time precisely because she hoped to move again in the future:

*'In this particular area, converting it would not put much value on the house. I would rather wait and move to a slightly different area.'*

In sum, spatial strategies need to be understood within people's longer term interests and family plans. This also includes how telework is itself evaluated as part of a longer career progression. For example, one study noted a difference in orientations between teleworkers. Some make little change to the space in their homes (perhaps seeing telework as a passing phase). Others make conversions, or plan for a bigger house precisely because they were planning a career in homeworking [25].

## 4.4 Familial Support

This section firstly examines the role of other family members, especially spouses, in relation to a teleworker's initial decision to work from home and their continuing experience of that work. We then move on to the question of the types of support which have been provided, or found missing, from partners, other household members, relatives and friends - especially as regards domestic duties of various kinds.

### 4.4.1 Family Life-Cycle and Interest in Telework

Clearly, there are a whole range of changes in people's working circumstances which effect their interest in telework at different points in their life. This is apart from any questions as to whether teleworking suits their personalities. Changes in the career prospects, with a plateauing of opportunities certainly influenced the decision of Jean and Jackie to switch from full-time on-site work. Ros moved because of the ever-mounting pressures in her office job and Ken's teleworking as a response to being made redundant. But also important is the employment circumstances of the teleworker's partner. Jackie acknowledged that it was easier for her to risk setting up on her own while her husband was still fully employed. She was secure by the time he retired a few years later.

It is also worth bearing in mind the influence of especially the male partners' unemployment on wives' work. The evidence shows that wives often leave full-time and part-time work under these circumstances [1]. The implications for telework of this development are mixed. Some reasons for leaving may make teleworking attractive (e.g. to be at home to psychologically support husbands). Others mitigate against telework (e.g. the fact that the earnings from telework may affect the state benefits received by the

family).

Another set of factors, also especially important for women, relate to changes in domestic labour demands over the life-cycle. There is far less labour demanded of older women, especially when children have left home. This effect of life-cycles on domestic labour have been previously underestimated in feminist discussion where it is often assumed that women have a fairly constant burden throughout their lives [2]. Certainly, some of the interviewees for this report were expecting to change their work patterns once they had more time as the children became older. Chris hoped to increase the proportion of office based time, and Jenny hoped to move to working from home instead of at home.

As the children get older, teleworking may be the next step up from not working. It may even act as a stepping stone for women to re-enter the full-time on-site labourforce at a later date [3]. For others who already telework when the children are young, the next step maybe to reduce or to move out of teleworking altogether. This latter strategy would fit in with a finding from the homework literature. A number of women in one study said that they only worked at home because of the children, but would prefer to move back to on-site work when the children were older [4].

Lastly, we need to think of later stages in the life-cycle, where the 'dependents' which influence people's interest in telework are not children but older people in need of care. This may refer to elderly parents, or to the care of partners who, partly through age, may be experiencing ill health. This has been noted in other studies [5] and certainly in this research, Jackie felt that telework was vital for looking after her ailing husband.

#### **4.4.2 Partners and the Initial Decision to take up Telework**

The homeworking literature highlights the influence of the husbands' views on wives working decisions. For instance, this source indicates that a number of husbands found it important for their own identity that they went out to work while their wives did not. Or they wanted their wives to be at home when they returned. Or the husbands felt that it was important for their children that their wives stayed at home [6]. These same types of influences way well apply for some clerical teleworkers, even though they were not important for the interviewees in this report. But, husbands' preferences are also important in that implicit 'deals' have sometimes been struck. Here, wives agreed to work at home if husbands would help out more with aspects such as childcare in order to facilitate that homework. Some writers have called such a deal a 'hidden contract' in marriage [7]. As is clear later in this report, some husbands can be very enthusiastic about their wives' telework when they appreciate that they may benefit from it for instance, in their own work.

Family and networks of friends also play a role in actually finding out about the option of working from home. Word-of-mouth, or 'grapevine recruitment' [8], has been shown to be important for traditional homeworkers. It was sometimes significant for the self-employed in acquiring their early clients when first setting up. For example, in Ken's case the idea of typing at home came from his wife who was a nursing tutor. His first chance came when her colleague needed some research to be typed, and later Ken received further work from other contacts made through her work. Others also mentioned generating work from networks of contact made through their own previous office based employment.

### 4.4.3 Partners' Changing Evaluations over Time

Apart from the partners' perceptions of and support for telework at the outset, there is the question of that support over time. This includes the possibility that they might change evaluations following the actual experience of telework. Female homeworkers have noted changes when their husbands realised the time work takes up in practice and the inconvenience it might cause. In the case of the Wisconsin clerical teleworkers, this led to resentment and even demands that the work be completed before the husband comes home [9].

Telework can also be more than an irritation, as was the case with Ken who simply worked all hours to earn the income to which he aspired.

*'My wife then was very much under Pressure since she was a full-time nursing tutor and trying to do a diploma and run a home. I also was under Pressure. And we then had no social life or time for each other at all, and we drifted apart. And that's how the marriage broke up.'*

The other dimension where the perception of the partner is important is not so much whether telework is a good or bad thing, but whether it is significant. In other words, it is important whether or not it is considered as being a 'real' job, or for 'pin money' and 'only a hobby' [10]. The status of homework, how it is valued, has important implications for how teleworkers feel about their experience, and their satisfaction with what they are doing. This is vital if they are to continue. Certainly, a number of interviewees indicated that it was important for them that the work was valued. They tried in a variety of ways, such as by stressing professionalism, to convey the impression that their's was 'real work.'

### 4.4.4 The Balance of Domestic Labour

Beyond the issue of whether or not partners favour and morally support teleworking, their support in other terms can be very significant in determining the experience of that telework. The general homework literature (as well as that on part-time and shift work) indicates one key theme. This is that the husbands' help with childcare and their help with, or indeed expectations of, other domestic labour is often vital in determining whether women can take on employment or self-employment [11]. Of course, not all teleworkers have partners, but even then we need to look at the support of other family members. For instance, Jean, still lives at home with parents. But partly because of her disability, her mother still does most of the housework, which gives Jean considerable flexibility in her work.

The family and work literature suggests that there is a more equal division of domestic labour when wives are in full-time on-site employment compared to being part-time or being housebound [12]. While by no means true of all families, husbands seem more liable to take on more of the chores. Whereas their expectations are that if their wives are at home there should be a change to more traditional roles of women performing most of the housework. This raises the question of whether those wives, and maybe also husbands, moving from the office to the home would be expected to do more of the chores, by virtue of being at home - even if they do the same or more hours of paid work than they had previously. One important factor here would appear to be whether telework is seen by partners as being 'real work', with the appreciation that being at home does not always mean being available for domestic labour.

Existing research suggests that the pattern for women teleworkers is to some extent similar to other

homeworkers. For example, one US survey of clerical homeworkers found that they received less help with the housework chores than office counterparts [13]. The more qualitative study of clerical workers in Wisconsin noted only a limited change in the division of labour when women became teleworkers and many husbands did not help at all with the housework [14].

Of course, the other side of this issue, as has been noted by a number of analysts, is that women themselves often feel obliged to do more when at home. For example, in the case studies, Dawn decided to take over her husband's mundane chores simply because she was 'around'. In this instance, she saw an advantage in freeing his weekends from such chores so that they could spend more leisure time together. Whereas, for Jenny, the demands of the work meant that she often had to ask her husband to help:

*'But I think that I feel guilty about it. That's what I find hard. Because I'm at home and I feel that I ought to be doing it.'*

One problem which has also been noted is that it can be difficult for women to re-assign some domestic labour because of emotional attachments to some chores [15]. Or they think it is not appropriate for their husbands to do the work because it is emasculating [16].

The situation for male teleworkers, although not liable to be in great numbers in clerical work, is not quite the same. We know from the literature on unemployed husbands that the picture can be complex with some men taking on a few more chores when at home - but others do not. In the case studies, before Ros moved to working at home, her husband had been home based for a number of years. However, she had still done most of the housework even when holding down a full-time office job. On the other hand, when Ken became self-employed, he took on more jobs around the house (e.g. ironing, preparing the vegetables for dinner). Yet, it is clear that his wife still 'ran' most of the house, and a majority of the housework.

However, a simple count of the number of tasks done or the time involved obscures another dimension of domestic labour - the organisational side. Reflecting a more general observation about the role of male partners [17], many of the women teleworkers both in this study and others have said that their husbands 'help out'. This sometimes means catering for themselves (rather than having their wife provide for them), or doing something when their wives made a request. But it was also quite clear that the wives organised, and often supervised the work [18]. Hence, Jenny left notes like:

*'Can you do this, make the supper, and you make it this way. Then can you get the kids ready etc'*

Others mentioned that their husbands will help out as long as they are told what to do. But this means that there is still the burden of planning and checking. Some women reported how they simultaneously work and make plans for the home, breaking from work occasionally to arrange the labour of others. At a minimum, this requires telework which does not entail great concentration. Even then, some reported that they found the combination of work and organising the home to be one of the most stressful aspects of telework.

#### **4.4.5 Children's Help with Chores**

Apart from partners, the degree to which children help with chores is very much related to the age of the child. Young children can offer only limited help. In fact, the most useful contribution they can make is often self-help (i.e. doing something for themselves rather than requiring the labour of others). Apart from

that, it is often easier for the parent to do the chore rather than negotiate, supervise and help the child to do it [19]. The case studies indicate that with more than one child in the home, the older one can often cater for the younger one to some extent.

With older, school age children, looking after their own rooms or area is one usual way in which they can reduce work for (teleworking) parents. As with husbands, it seems that while teenage children can 'help out' with chores like shopping and ironing (or take over if parents are away), the main responsibility for organising tends to remain with mother.

#### 4.4.6 Standards of Domestic Labour

One dimension, already noted, is that by virtue of being at home, the total amount of chores can increase because of the feeling on the part of women that they ought to do more because they are simply 'around'. The interviewees for this report were aware of this and tried to resist that tendency. Some even managed to reduce the workload not by shifting it to partners, but by simply doing less. In other words, there was a policy of being willing to drop household standards when under pressure which has also been noted in the literature on dual-career families [20]. For example, Ros noted how housework was squeezed out:

*'I now do less chores than when I went out to work. I know that sounds crazy but if I have work to do, I feel that's got a higher priority. And I find that because I have not got a set pattern to the day, where I have to get up at a certain time, leave the house at a certain time and come back at a certain time, so the work bit was compartmentalised and the other time around it I was free to do chores - that doesn't happen. Because I do work all odd hours, there seems to be no time to do the chores!'*

In part, 'dropping standards' of domestic labour depends on the priorities of teleworkers, and it has been noted that some women find this difficult to achieve. But this coping strategy also depends on the response of the family, and on their expectations. Some of the homework literature indicates cases where husbands complained if the home became less tidy. The response of most of the interviewees for this report was that families were often not so houseproud. As Chris noted:

*'He's not bothered whether I do it or I don't do it - as long as he doesn't have to do it.'*

#### 4.4.7 Timing of Chores

To some degree, most interviewees fitted in 'little chores' with telework. For Ken, doing the ironing or peeling the potatoes counted as a break from typing after a few hours. This was necessary to avoid 'going crackers' and to break the monotony. Others would fit in something while work was held up because the micro was printing. Or some would fit in a job in the coffee break - although there is always the danger here of never having a complete 'break' from all kinds of work.

Most could fit in chores such as bringing the washing in when it rained, or putting pre-prepared meals into the oven. In fact, such items benefited from telework, since the women had previously often had to start cooking only after they had returned from the office. Or if they had turned the washing machine on before leaving for work, the clothes used to be creased from sitting in the machine all day.

But not all domestic chores are accommodated in this way. For example, for Chris, jobs such as the



vacuuming and dusting have their fixed time. In this case, they were usually completed while the children were with the childminder while telework was done in the evening. The rationale in this particular case was that:

*'Because I'm too exhausted to do the housework in the evening. Its' easier to sit at the desk.*

Over and above this, Chris also feared that if she was haphazard about the chores, she would end up doing many things without finishing any. But others were more flexible, simply slotting in chores according to a less fixed pattern, responding to the amount of work which they had. This means that the house can be kept tidier at some times of the year or month than at others. If any pattern is predominant, it appears to be that many chores are shifted to the weekend, as is the case with women in full-time office employment [21].

However, some chores were harder to 'time-shift' than others - the main one in the category being meal preparation - which has a high priority among household tasks. Except in exceptional circumstances, work had to be orientated around meals, which in turn was orientated around the schedules of the rest of the family.

#### **4.4.8 Other Domestic Responsibilities**

Lastly, although not strictly speaking a 'chore' there are other family responsibilities which require effort, or at least presence. For example, when Ken was married, he 'had to do the social bit' when his wife's relatives first arrived. But then the 'deal' with his wife was that he could return to his work after a short time. Analysts point to wives' support for their husbands' career, including such matters as entertaining, or at least receiving, work-related guests. This provides another example of responsibilities which may conflict with time for telework.

#### **4.4.9 Childcare Provision**

'Childcare' is a much used term when talking about women and employment in general, as well as for telework. Obviously, this consists of a number of dimensions in its own right. Simply monitoring children so that nothing untoward happens involves the minimum of effort, and is probably the level of childcare which can more easily be combined with telework. It is also most likely the stage when children are a little older and can generate their own activities, for the most part acting independently. At the next level we have the parental role of 'occupying' the child, ranging from creating a stimulating environment to arranging for the TV (and increasingly Video) to baby-sit. This requires more effort to set up, but there are gaps when work can be fitted in.

The final level entails creating a stimulating environment through on-going interaction, involving talking and listening to children, playing games together etc. - which precludes simultaneous work. In the case of Dawn, this also meant trying to tire her child so that he would sleep later while she worked. (Worrying that he would not do so proved to be particularly stressful). Because of the more demanding forms of childcare, evidence from a US survey shows that clerical homeworkers ultimately use as much outside childcare provision as office based workers [22].

Lastly, there are also the particular events such as children being sick or unhappy or demanding the

attention of an adult - which can be completely time consuming. For example, there was a period of 3 weeks when the baby would not be parted from Chris, so she had to have her at home instead of at the childminder's. This instance reminds us that arranging for outside provision alone is not enough, but that teleworkers need flexibility to cope personally with some aspects of childcare.

Given that state supported nursery and playgroup provision is not so available in the UK as in many other Continental countries, arranging for outside childcare can be both difficult and costly. In some cases, as with Chris, it was also difficult to find a childminder in her local area. Then, there is the extra labour involved in delivering and picking up the children, especially for those mothers without a car. Certainly, Jenny found her husband's shift work to be very beneficial in this respect, because he could often pick up the children whereas he could not have managed this with a 9-5 job.

Different problems emerge with not-so-young children: the over-5s. Despite the image of homeworkers as being predominantly women with children under 5, as many mothers look for either part-time or home-based work at a different turning point in their life - when children start to go to school [23]. The key problem here is that of school holidays, but there are also problems with children having time off school because of sickness, or coming home earlier than the child might have done with a minder (e.g. 3pm). It can be hard to find childminders for the older age group and certainly nurseries tend not to take older children. One way to help alleviate this difficulty, as practised by some departments of Hampshire County Council, was to have very flexible telework contacts for the year, so that more intense work could be undertaken in term time and less in holidays.

And then there is perhaps the worst case of having two or more children whose ages are not far apart - as is common and was the case with two of the case studies. When one is over 5 and one under, the two children have different schedules, often requiring them to be delivered to and picked up from different places. This problem certainly prevented Chris from increasing the amount of telework she could handle at the moment.

#### **4.4.10 The Support of Partners with Childcare**

Perhaps more so than with chores, the family and work literature has stressed the importance of the availability of the spouse for childcare. In some cases, full or part-time employment is ruled out for women precisely because husbands cannot be available to look after children [24]. But sometimes telework can also become very difficult without the support of partners. And that support depends not just on willingness to help but, as noted in the introduction, the nature of the partner's job. Shift work, a job which involves working late into the evening or entails time-consuming commuting all influence the availability of partners.

Apart from actually looking after children in the home, that support involves delivering and collecting children, or, if peace is required for concentration, taking the children out. For example, Jenny's husband who would take the children off sometimes to have a cup of coffee with his mother who lived 30 minutes drive away.

#### 4.4.11 The Support of Friends and Relatives with Childcare

Such support was only relevant where there were friends living locally. In a number of cases, teleworkers did not have contacts partly because of not being office based. Or else their contacts worked office hours. Sometimes friends could be of help for small matters such as picking children up from a nursery. For instance, when Jenny had to go somewhere and she knew that she might not be back in time. But, on the whole, there were some reservations about exploiting friends:

*'If I'm desperate, I have got friends I could ask. But I don't like to. You know its' imposing. I'm earning money while they're looking after my children.'*

Relatives were more liable to be important - especially mothers or mothers-in-law. But once again, this depends on availability. Partly that is a matter of location, but also whether they are free to help. For example, Chris's mother cannot help much at the moment because she works full-time. But when she retires soon, Chris and her husband plan to have more long weekends stopping with Chris' parents so that her mother can look after the children on Friday and Monday while Chris increases the number of days spent in the office in London. Once again, this example underlies another dimension of how the changing family circumstances of teleworkers can have a bearing on their work options.

#### 4.4.12 Family Help with the Actual Telework

The fact that both partners and children may actually assist with work done at home is a theme which is discussed in relation to homeworking, but not in the telework literature [25].

One main form of help is 'fort-holding' when the teleworker is not around. It is not very difficult for partners or children to take the odd message with varying degrees of reliability [26]. But some go beyond this. While trying to locate teleworkers, one husband clearly filtered enquiries, deciding what she would and would not be interested in doing. In this case, he vetoed her being interviewed for this report! Or Sheila commented about her husband:

*'He's the one who is always saying "Yes" if someone phones up asking if I can do something!'*

But support can also extend to acting as a receptionist for visitors, proof-reading, delivering material - and generally getting to know clients. While such support has been forthcoming among the case studies, other writers have noted the assumption, and sometimes point of conflict, where male teleworkers simply expect their wives to act as secretaries [27].

#### 4.4.13 Family Benefits from Telework

The reverse side of this situation occurs when the nature of the telework has direct benefits for other members of the family over and above bringing in an income. Several writers have noted the case of wives working at home for their self-employed husbands [28].

The benefits of this were clearly indicated in the case of Ros. Since she had been home to answer the phone and receive calls for her self-employed husband, his custom had increased. Another advantage for him is that she now produces his leaflets, to avoid having to pay for an outsider to do the work. In fact,

her husband expected her to do even more to help him since she was at home, but Ros has had to say that she is too busy sometimes. For instance, she does his accounts, which are currently overdue because she is still too busy typing her own work from students.

## 4.5 Isolation

One other major theme picked out in the telework literature is the problem of isolation [1]. This last section examines the problem and teleworker strategies to cope with it where necessary.

### 4.5.1 Previous Experience of work

Although a sense of isolation is one of the more common drawbacks that have been cited in the teleworker literature, feelings depend in part on a number of factors including the teleworkers preceding experiences. For example, to be unemployed, or to be a full-time housewife can lead to a considerable sense of isolation. To move to teleworking might actually generate more social contact if someone has this background. Most teleworkers, though, have already experienced on-site work. This is also true of clerical workers. In this case, we need to ask about the nature of previous office work and in what ways teleworkers find that this contrasts to working at home. For example, Chris described how, in some senses, telework was less pressurised and it was pleasant to get away from the office bustle:

*'In fact, it's quite refreshing - when you've worked in a busy office and been bombarded with questions and queries, every minute of the day for years.'*

Jean, who used to work in an administrative capacity in a rehabilitation centre, echoed these sentiments.

*'Before, because my work was so people concentrated, apart from the staff it was the general public, all hours of the day, so I found that when I came home I didn't actually want to see anybody, I was sick of people. I needed a bit of peace and quiet. So (with telework) I expected my life to become a bit more social.'*

In other words, for some people, the extent to which the previous job was people-orientated can be too great, the balance wrong. In Jean's case, she actually became less isolated in her free 'social' time.

### 4.5.2 Isolation as a Problem

Clearly, there are other factors which affect when isolation is an issue and when it is not. In the above example, Jean was not very socially orientated in the first place, liking her own company. This is an instance where a certain 'personality type' prefers the solitude of telework. But it is also important to consider the influence of the teleworker's current circumstances, especially when both they and employers are considering their suitability for working at home. For instance, there is the question of whether other family members are around. For Sheila, the schedules of her husband and older children meant that they were passing through the house all day and so there was no opportunity to feel isolated. Similarly, those with thriving contacts with neighbours and friends, or who have other social outlets (e.g. through leisure) seem to feel less isolated. Whereas Chris, who had just moved to a new neighbourhood, was still keen to develop new contacts.

Another factor is whether telework is part of a longer 'career' path through different types of work. Thus, teleworkers might know that any sense of isolation is going to be an issue only for a set period and hence they only have to cope with it for a limited time. For example, Chris knew that as her children became older and family circumstances changed, she could move back to going into the office more frequently.

With these reservations, some of the interviewees for this report did, as in other research, note the dangers of sometimes becoming lonely and very bored. They missed the social contact of the workplace at times.

### 4.5.3 Ambivalence to Isolation

However, there was also some ambivalence among interviewees about that 'isolation.' After all, many felt it was easier to complete the work at home precisely because there are no distractions from other people at work wanting a chat. And people like Ken, who were self-employed, were aware that each sheet he typed was earning money, so he had mixed feelings about devoting time to social activities. This also made him reluctant to take days off. And because Chris did not want to revert to the old pattern of neighbours dropping in, she did not encourage social contact when moving to a new neighbourhood.

This ambivalence about isolation was also reflected in feelings about space. Although Jenny wanted a separate room, she was also aware that working in the dining room means that she is not excluded from activities:

*And I listen to conversations as well. My husband and a friend were here once, and they were talking, and there was I typing - "I've just got to get this finished" - and I could hear them and would occasionally say "That's not right" interrupting their conversation and typing at the same time.'*

One important strategy for those who wanted contact but not 'interruption' at the wrong time was attempting to make social contact more predictable. This might involve letting friends know that they are really working and not available at all times, encouraging friends to phone and ask when the teleworker might be free and generally planning socialising to fit into work schedules.

### 4.5.4 Forms of Isolation

Apart from noting general comments that teleworkers make about isolation or lack of social contact, it is also important to be aware of some specific forms which isolation may take. For example, from one study of homeworkers, it became clear that a particular event, such as a death in the family, might raise the issue of isolation when it was not normally of concern. For one such teleworker with this traumatic experience, being located in an office with others to talk to might well have aided taking that person's mind off their bereavement [2].

Another dimension comes from the reduced commuting through teleworking. Although many people do not like commuting, it has been acknowledged that it can be convenient to meet others or to take part in town centre leisure events when already in the vicinity because of work. One study of telework noted a decline in those activities which teleworkers used to do when in town. Their activity space (and contacts) shrank once they had to make a special effort [3].

Finally, simply talking about work as a topic of conversation is itself part of socialising. This is to some extent possible with telework, in the sense that some interviewees talked about clients to their partners, and sometimes discussed the work they were doing. But that is not the same as talking about what 'happened at work,' about the gossip, about what others are doing. Clearly, these topics can sometimes be adequately replaced by other stories relating to the teleworker's social activities. Some interviewees could talk about their children, about school etc. But the feminist literature on housewives has noted that they miss talking about such a central focus in life as work.

#### 4.5.5 Social Contacts via Homework

One recommendation which generally emerges from the telework literature is that, if possible there should be visits to a workplace on a regular basis. Part of the rationale for this relates to the work being done more efficiently through some face-to-face contact with colleagues. But part is also as a means to overcome isolation. Certainly, one survey of teleworkers found that a high percentage of women especially favoured a mix of home and on-site work [4]. In fact, part of the reason why women often returned to the labourforce when children were older is the desire for adult comradeship. Some noted that without this form of contact they 'started talking like the kids' [5]

For some employed interviewees, such as Dawn, the twice weekly visits to the office meant that she had no sense of isolation. Even Chris' occasional visit to her organisation once every few weeks was useful in this respect. The visits enabled her to get to know the (ever-changing) new staff with whom she had to deal with over the phone, and with whom she could then talk in a more personal way. Some of the self-employed also managed to arrange one or two days in an office to break up the week, usually working on a contract which did not effect their self-employed status.

For those more totally home-based, there was much more limited contact with supervisors or clients. This pattern was noted also in the Wisconsin study [6], although in the case of the Enfield project in the UK, supervisors visit 3 times a week, partly to provide personal contact [7]. It might have been anticipated that the self-employed had more opportunities for socialising with the clients or their representatives who delivered the work. However the interviewees for this study usually kept their contact very brief and 'business-like', with perhaps some introductory 'polite conversation'. This was part of the 'professional' image that these teleworkers were trying to convey. If they had to visit an office site as part of the requirements of the work, to collect material or discuss a matter, contact may extend to a cup of coffee, but that was the limit.

While the phone can provide another means of contact, both to friends and to office based staff, most self-employed kept their phone calls during the day brief because of the cost which they were incurring. As Ros commented:

*'I have to stop myself from using the phone too much, because I find that its' a temptation when you're working on your own to ring up someone -and you can get a pretty hefty phone bill.'*

In contrast, as an employee, Chris' business line was paid for by her employer. So when Chris phoned the office about work matters, she was also more willing to chat socially to staff. In fact, she felt that her employing organisation should do more to encourage such contact in general. She also chatted regularly over the E-Mail facility:

*'You have to be a bit careful to delete the messages. You never know who might check up. Although the only people who are liable to do that are us (clerical workers).'*

In fact, a number of companies have provided E-Mail facilities partly in the home in the hope that it will help ameliorate some of the isolation. This is also part of Hampshire's thinking with its Hantsline service.

#### **4.5.6 Contact with other Teleworkers**

A feature noted in the case of homeworkers in general is that they usually have little contact with other homeworkers [8]. In fact, not being able to talk about the experience of homework with like-minded others can add to the sense that what homeworkers do is not 'real' work [9]. On the whole, the same experiences would appear to be true for self-employed clerical teleworkers - although there are exceptions. Once again, the Enfield council project has occasional group training sessions and other meetings of its homeworkers to establish some contact [10].

One example of a teleworkers initiative to overcome isolation problems in particular is the organisation 'Ownbase', through which some interviewees were contacted for this report. Apart from the national organisation and its newsletter (geared to self-employed rather than employees), there are local groups which arrange both discussions and social events. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of talking to people in a similar situation, who were sensitive to the issues around telework. Or at least it would be comforting to know that they are available to talk to if contact was ever needed. Even those who had not heard of Ownbase showed an interest and asked for more details when the topic was raised in discussion. Chris, who had heard of the group, had tried to find a local branch (despite having employee status):

*'I think it', essential to make contacts like this, because with moving to a new area as well, I don 't know anyone around here. And with working, I don't have time to go out and socialise so much.'*

Even when some were too busy to have much time for Ownbase contacts at present, they envisaged that they might become more involved when their circumstances changed.

#### **4.5.7 Other Social Contacts**

Contact with neighbours can touch upon the ambivalences about isolation which were discussed above. For instance, after her negative experiences of trying to telework in a very 'sociable' block of flats, when Chris moved to a new neighbourhood, she did not want them to get into the habit of dropping round:

*'The neighbours here probably think I am anti-social. In the middle of summer I sit inside all day.'*

The problem is sometimes the fear that socialising with neighbours becomes unpredictable. Ken was wary of getting too close precisely because his neighbours might suddenly want to chat all day when he needed to return to his work. Of course, there may be disadvantages of shunning contact: while Chris felt that as she found a little more free time, she might tentatively get closer to neighbours, the fact that she has built up barriers may make future socialising difficult.

The other outlet was usually some form of (more predictable) social or voluntary work - which several undertook knowing that it had the benefit of getting them out of the house. For instance, Ken described his 'free' time:

*'I ran a variety group and a nurses' choir I think I'd have cracked up if I hadn't taken that break and done something entirely different'*

Meanwhile, Jenny took on the role of secretary to the local Chamber of Commerce, providing useful contact with traders in the town. Jackie became treasurer of the local riding school. And both Jean and Ros became involved in different ways with the organisation of Ownbase.

One qualification here is that such activities were only possible when there were no children or older children. With very young children, Chris felt that she could not take on any such activities, with the extra cost of childminders which was incurred.



## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 General Points

There is one immediate application of the material in this report. The observations contained here could be utilised in formulating detailed guide-lines concerning telework aimed at employers, employees and those considering self-employed status. Various analysts and bodies have already proposed recommendations - such as in the booklet produced by Hampshire County Council by its personnel management department. But to date, much of this in-house material has only very broadly stated recommendations. For example, it has included asking both managers and employees to consider whether telework would be suitable to their home environment. Stated in such general terms, it is not clear what counts as 'suitable,' and what circumstances might come under umbrella terms such as 'family responsibilities'. Yet, the full implications of terms such as 'childcare' and 'isolation', which are frequently referred to in the telework literature, can be explored in far more detail. Such guide-lines, with examples and perhaps anecdotes, would give all concerned a much better basis from which to evaluate in advance whether telework is appropriate for particular people.

One particular finding of relevance here is that it is not always possible or desirable to produce too tight a set of recommendations - (e.g. that a separate room for telework is a prerequisite). Ultimately, situations and preferences vary between families. Instead, what is required is a check-list of issues, with perhaps pointers as to what a majority have found most advantageous in terms of arrangements. But, this would also allow for individual variation. This would be the basis for managers and staff to discuss the details of potential homeworking arrangements, or for independent bodies, such as Government employment agencies to advise the would-be self-employed. Such guide-lines would also extend beyond the initial decision as to whether to adopt telework. They would enable teleworkers to anticipate issues which may arise (e.g. with a later change in family circumstances) and provide ideas for coping with these experiences.

Where organisations pay for the installation of equipment or communications lines, the employer might well prefer teleworkers to work from home for a minimum period of time. Apart from requiring this in any negotiations, managers might be better able to anticipate the future telework preferences of their particular staff from some of the themes discussed here. In other words, the findings might well be relevant to manpower planning and prediction.

Finally, the findings can contribute to managerial concerns such as the pros and cons of different modes of supervision. It can facilitate reflection on the actual design of equipment with built-in monitoring facilities and the training of teleworker managers - in the latter case, by suggesting the type of situation which may arise and how best they might advise and assist their workforce.

### 5.2 Management of Self-Discipline

One key implication from this section relates to the issue of supervision. Management resistance to telework has to date often been related to fears about their ability to introduce new modes of supervision

when teleworkers are not visible in the office. With some types of clerical work, it is in principle feasible to provide very detailed monitoring through the actual equipment used - e.g. the keystrokes - just as in the office. But here we have the dilemma. A greater sense of autonomy, the feeling of being free from detailed and constant monitoring, was an important benefit for many teleworkers. It was part of the attraction of this mode of employment. Admittedly, some social critics have seen supervision by results in a negative light, with employers engineering 'voluntary compliance rather than exercising direct control' [1]. But, it is still important that workers often prefer this approach.

Arguably, if the quantity and quality of output is ultimately what is valued, then there is a case to be made for not monitoring some types of teleworkers minutely, even when it is possible to do so. Monitoring may have a negative effect on satisfaction (extending 'surveillance' into the private sphere of the home) resulting in a possible dropout from telework. While different workers and types of work may need to be evaluated separately, it may be important to consider using equipment which does not contain monitoring facilities. Alternatives include equipment where such facilities can be turned off, or where there is some arrangement for initially monitoring new recruits but where this monitoring tapers off at a later stage. For some types of work, frequent visits on site may satisfy the need for both supervision and for the employees' social contact.

### 5.3 Time Management

Potential teleworkers, especially women, need to be made aware that more planning and organisation is involved in telework than in office-based work. Over and above the efforts required for co-ordinating the work amongst dispersed staff, this report makes it clear that a degree of extra decision-making regarding domestic life is engendered simply by the proximity of home and work. As regards the minutiae of how time is organised, this in part depends on the nature of the telework - e.g. whether workers have to be available at certain times or within certain time ranges. But where there is a degree of teleworker choice, there is no one best pattern of time management. It is best for teleworkers to discover the details of what arrangements (e.g. when to work, when to take breaks, when to do chores) suit their preferences and family circumstances.

Of course, this still leaves a role for guidance in terms of managers pointing to the type of timetables which different people have adopted in the past, and the types of problems with which they have had to cope. For example, they might draw attention to cases when time for leisure (or children or partners) becomes unintentionally squeezed out by work and other commitments. Such matters should be thought through in advance if possible, so that potential teleworkers know what to expect and what decisions they need to make at the outset.

One major burden on teleworkers is unpredictability. The more complex organising work and social life becomes, the more desirable is the ability to make those aspects predictable. To some extent, this runs contrary to one motivation for introducing telework - the desirability of firms to increase their flexibility, which means having a labourforce on tap whenever needed. But even in these circumstances, if teleworker discontent and dropout is to be avoided, then employers need to consider ways and means to cater for the needs of their workforce.

This may mean such strategies as identifying which employees have more scope for work at short notice, because of their circumstances, with perhaps premium pricing for short notice work if payment is by results. Or there may be scope for setting up arrangements whereby employees (or a group of self-

employed teleworkers operating in conjunction) can cover short notice fluctuations amongst themselves (as in full-time employment where employees exchange shifts informally). This may mean the managers have to put teleworkers in contact with one another, or initiate schemes whereby they can distribute work between each other. It may also mean that a priority is given, depending on the nature of the work, to informing teleworkers as far in advance as possible about impending workloads. At the moment, some interviewees still received material 'out of the blue' when it was known by clients for some time that this work was in the pipeline.

A final issue in this section relates to contactability. The experience of many teleworkers appears to be that, by virtue of being at home, they are contactable at a far greater range of times than office based employees -sometimes 24 hours per day. Some teleworkers are concerned about this, others are not so worried. Either way, it can be seen as part of the 'deal' of telework. But it would appear that rules concerning contactability are often not formulated in advance, when it may well be advisable to negotiate and clarify these from the outset. If not, the tendency to be always seen as 'available' to employers or clients may create bad feeling about an intrusion into family life. This has led to teleworker strategies such as refusal to answer the phone, or answer it after a time, or sabotaging communications (e.g. pulling the phone plug out).

There has to be some kind of balance, depending on the nature of the work, between the two aspects. First, there is the need of the teleworker for peace from outside disturbances (not just for family reasons - also to actually complete work which might require some concentration). Second, there is the need for employers or clients to make contact - with various degrees of urgency (i.e. some messages can be easily left, some require instant feedback). This might mean answerphones, E-Mail or fax. Apart from rules about contact, storage media for (especially non-urgent) messages would appear to be an important means of meeting employer/client and employee/ self-employed needs. For on-line telework, it may also be possible for teleworkers to supply some indication of when they will be less busy or 'freer' for direct communication (e.g. with the equivalent of a daily timetable). It might also be worthwhile looking at ways to indicate the urgency of calls -whether by showing some kind of code or, with the development of intelligent networks, showing the source of the call. All these approaches would allow teleworkers to prioritise contact in the same way that many now juggle with prioritising different types of work.

## 5.4 Space Management

From a variety of discussions, it appears to be still the case that images of home-offices of the future show limited imagination. Be it in companies' displays at exhibitions, artists impressions or promotional photographs, the home office often consists of just a set of equipment and makes unwarranted assumptions about the type of spacious homes in which people live. In some respects, the images look the same. In contrast, this report would certainly support one aspect of the Kinsman findings. What is striking when visiting people's homes is the variety of arrangements which people choose (or to which they are forced to adapt). This was also noted in the Enfield project, where equipment was set up in conservatories, attics and under stairs [2]!

Part of this variation is due to different housing types. But in addition, the research indicates that teleworkers also make different choices about how they spatially manage the boundaries between home and work. Strategies include maintaining separate rooms, separate spaces, multi-purpose rooms or leaving open doors so the family is not entirely shut out.

The choice of decor also varies, emphasising 'modernistic' or 'homely' connotations, making the office stand out in an impressive way to signify a workplace to others, or blending it in with domestic surroundings. Furthermore the discussions of telework in the home suggest that we need to think beyond what people do now to such aspects as general furniture and interior design which make better use of space or allow multifunctions.

Given all these factors, it may be useful for firms or agencies interested in telework to promote more variety in their images of the home office. This might include portraying teleworkers operating in multi-purpose rooms using varying amounts of equipment. Some images might entail an organisation of space and design which emphasise the 'office', while others emphasise the 'homely'. Such a variety would do justice to the diversity which exists and would show that people can choose to experience the presence of work in the home in different ways. This is in contrast to the current limited range of idealised images such as that of the teleworker (dressed for work) located in a very office-like dedicated room.

When we turn to policy, separate rooms for telework have often been advised. Admittedly the dedicated room has much to recommend it in the balance of pros and cons. But this would be very limiting if made too strong a criterion for allowing employees to telework. A great many of those potentially interested would not be able to meet such a precondition.

Besides, depending on family dynamics and circumstances, some people could not only cope with working in a room also used for other purposes but would prefer to do so. Therefore, while strongly recommending separate rooms and stating the benefits, it may be wise to have some flexibility on this issue and not make such a spatial arrangement an absolute condition for telework. The same may apply to rules that equipment (e.g. micros, storage facilities) must be dedicated for telework usage. For some people, one of the benefits of telework is the use for equipment for other purposes. Again, this depends in part on the nature of the telework and equipment (e.g. security considerations). But, it may be worthwhile to avoid setting too strong a rule about using equipment only for work.

A number of the interviewees in this report were already encountering limits to the proliferation of telework related equipment: storage and shelving, the workdesk(s), micro, laser printer, modem, fax, maybe photocopier, transcription equipment. They were simply running out of, or had run out of, room. Analysts now speak of different products and services on the market competing for buyer's disposable income, and for their time (e.g. for which different media and leisure activities compete). In the case of telework we have an instance of products competing for space! So if, in the future there is the hope of introducing further work-related products, it would be best not to plan in terms of more stand-alone products constructed according to current physical proportions. Instead, it might be useful to move in the direction of either smaller or combined units (the fax/photocopier/laser printer combination; or the fax/micro/printer etc.).

Lastly, in this section, it would appear that it is not possible to derive a strong policy on 'clearing away' or 'tidying up' work. Some teleworkers pack away to varying extents to mark the end of the day. Others simply prefer to walk away and leave it, which is made all the easier if it is contained in a separate space. This occurs especially if (a) they want to drop everything suddenly to be with family and (b) if they never know whether they have quite finished work for the day - and might always return to it if there is nothing better to occupy them.

## 5.5 Familial Support

Ultimately, the type of issues that arise here must be left for teleworkers to resolve within their families and wider social circles. But, they can be sensitised to some of the range of problems which they might well encounter. For example, attention could be drawn to the dilemmas of finding a balance between work, partners, children and wider social circles when the boundaries become blurred. Some of the dilemmas were raised, for example, in the section on teleworkers' visibility and availability for other family members. This research upholds the recommendation to enlist the partners' support - but at a number of levels. The first is 'understanding' the teleworkers situation as outlined in this report, given possible expectations of the partner as to the social time to be spent with them (or on them) if the teleworker is at home. Such expectations constitute a significant demand on the teleworker.

Then there is a more general 'moral support.' This includes both encouraging the teleworker when under pressure, as well as evaluating the telework positively given that telework is often not seen as 'real' work. Here, the employers or clients may be able to help in some ways by their clear recognition and messages to all concerned that telework is 'real work'. More practically, partners can play a significant role in relation to domestic labour and especially childcare. This aspect must be high on the agenda for discussion. Telework does not mean simply that the people concerned, especially women, are by virtue of being at home as free to contribute as much domestic labour and childcare as if they were not working.

Still on the topic of chores, once again it appears that there is no single pattern as to when housework is fitted in with paid work. Preparatory discussions with teleworkers can alert them to the different tendencies at work. For example, one topic could be the notion teleworkers may feel that they ought to have higher standards of tidiness through being at home (which may lead to self-induced time pressures) compared to the reality that chores are often squeezed out by other demands. At least anticipation may avoid indecision and malaise, as might a discussion of which chores it is easiest to time-shift and which are relatively fixed. Teleworkers can then, from the start, draw upon other people's experience in thinking about the schedules which would most suit them.

Childcare is the one clear area which has implications for managerial policy. Child sickness or other unexpected demands, even when there is outside provision for children in the form of childminders or nurseries, can result in teleworking parents, especially mothers, facing short term restrictions on the time they have available for paid labour. Therefore, if flexibility is a way to sell the idea of teleworking to the workforce, then the work must be flexible in practice. The report shows that the supervision demands of firms, or the amount of work they expect teleworkers to accept can offer teleworkers little flexibility in reality. The presence of children requires a contract with provision for unforeseen time off. Another option is to formulate contracts allowing for different workloads, or patterns of work, over the course of the year (to take account of school holidays).

Lastly, these are other possible roles for the employer if telework takes place within a limited geographical area, (e.g. based in a small town where material for work can easily be delivered from the central firm) and if the teleworkers concerned are numerous enough. In such circumstances, the employer may find it useful and justified to help in terms of collecting a list of contacts and addresses in relation to nurseries, playgroups childminders etc. - based on the past experiences of its staff.

## 5.6 Isolation

One common recommendation is that teleworkers spend some time in the office at regular intervals - be it once or twice a week, or less regularly. As an ideal, this argument is supported by other research on teleworker preferences and is reinforced in this study. Some, especially those with young children, may want a certain amount of office-based work, but less frequently than every week. And as with previous findings, there is more than one pattern. A number of teleworkers hate commuting, relishing the quiet of the home. Others face mobility problems, so that they would rarely wish to visit a workplace. But it is important that such an important option be built into telework schemes both for work efficiency (eg to keep in touch with developments and office organisation) and for face-to-face social contact

Another role for the employing organisation is to supply a means for teleworkers to contact each other. Such contact need not be compulsory, and any network of contacts may not be used much by some people. But, the option can be a veritable 'lifeline', especially if these networks can provide a means of contact outside office hours. Admittedly, not everyone is interested in such contact. Indeed, some would find it hard to find the time to get in touch with other teleworkers. But the usefulness of being able to talk to someone in the same position, who is sensitive to the demands on teleworkers, has been repeatedly expressed.

On the one hand, arrangements for contact can be quite elaborate systems, as with some E-Mail facilities. At the other extreme, the employer can simply supply names and phone numbers, or initiate contact through introducing teleworkers at social events or organising some kind of circular for such staff [3]. The Rank Xerox Network is an example of good practice, and also shows that such arrangements can be achieved for the self-employed as well as for employees. Organisations like Ownbase already exist, but there is still scope for networks based around a tighter shared interest (e.g. for teleworkers performing very similar kinds of work).

Finally, one means of social contact is via work. So it is helpful to allow some informal, social elements in communication between the teleworker and employer - be it phone calls or E-Mail - and not require all contact to be of a formal nature. If the employer is achieving savings by telework, or retaining skilled labour, then it should be possible to allow a certain amount of chatting via a communications medium.

## 6. Footnotes

### 3.1 Telework and Family Life

- [1] Haddon (1988)
- [2] Huws et al. (1990), pp.58-9
- [3] Christensen (1988), p.6.
- [4] Christensen (1988), p.7.
- [5] Gerson and Kraut (1988), p.57.
- [6] Rothman and Marks (1987), pp.471-3.
- [7] Gowler and Legge (1978).
- [8] Gerson (1987), p.274.
- [9] Postgate (1984), p.13.
- [10] Kraut (1988), pp.44-6.
- [11] Kraut (1988), pp.44-6.
- [12] Harkim (1987), pp.58-9.
- [13] Gowler and Legge (1982), p.144.
- [14] Cooke (1987), p.371.
- [15] Bulos (1989), p.13.

### 3.2 Clerical Information Intensive Work

- [1] Gerson and Kraut (1988), p.51.
- [2] Gerson and Kraut (1988), p.53.
- [3] Costello (1988).
- [4] Crapieau and Marot (1983), pp.240-3.
- [5] Wajcman (1988).
- [6] Kohler (1987), p.396.
- [7] Weijers (1987), p.416.
- [8] Crapieau and Marot (1983), p.93.
- [9] Kohler (1987), p.396.
- [10] Elling (1985), p.240.
- [11] Communication from Paul Jackson, Wolfson College, Cambridge, based on his current doctoral study of telework.
- [12] Industrial Relations Review and Report (1988), pp.5-6 on Hampshire; Dennison (1990a) pp.12-13 on Enfield.
- [13] Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.10.
- [14] Kraut (1988), Huws (1988).
- [15] Kraut (1988), p.34.
- [16] Kraut (1988), p.32; Donnison (1984), p.2/3.
- [17] Elling (1985), p.243.
- [18] Boris (1988), p.17.
- [19] Cragg & Dawson (1981), p.10.
- [20] Donnison (1984), p.4

### 3.3 The Research for this Report

- [1] Christensen (1988), p.6; Allen (1983), p.654; Huws et al. (1990), p.58.
- [2] Christensen (1988), pp.7-8.

- [3] Wiejers (1987), p.419.
- [4] Kraut (1988).

### **4.1 Management of Self-Discipline**

- [1] Craig and Dawson (1981), p.24.
- [2] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), p.34 and p.39.
- [3] Kohler (1987), p.397.
- [4] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), p.28, 32 and 33; Costello (1988), pp.142-3.
- [5] Gerson and Kraut (1988), p.57.
- [6] Huws et al. (1990), pp.60-1.
- [7] Gerson and Kraut (1988), p.57.
- [8] Rothman and Marks (1987), p.74.
- [9] Craig and Dawson (1981), p.8.
- [10] Costello (1988), p.137.
- [11] Olsen (1988), p.132.
- [12] Costello (1988), p.139.
- [13] Gerson and Kraut (1988), p.60.
- [14] Costello (1988), p.138.
- [15] Costello (1988), p.137.
- [16] Kohler (1987), p.407; Huws et al. (1990), p.66.
- [17] Kinsman (1987), p.84.
- [18] Craig and Dawson (1981), p.14.
- [19] Costello (1988), p.139.

### **4.2 Time Management**

- [1] Olson (1988), p.132.
- [2] Costello (1988), p.137.
- [3] Costello (1988), pp.142-3.
- [4] Finch (1983), pp.24-26.
- [5] Hakim (1987), p.64.
- [6] Kinsman (1987), p.86.
- [7] Rapaport and Rapaport (1976), p.302, 306.
- [8] Moen and Demster-McClain (1987), p.579.

### **4.3 Space Management**

- [1] Saxon (1984), p.4.
- [2] Saxon (1984), p.3.
- [3] Saxon (1984), p.8.
- [4] Wallis (1984), p.5 & 9.
- [5] Bulos (1989), p.2.
- [6] Saxon (1984), pp.3-6.
- [7] Wallis (1984), p.5.
- [8] Saxon (1984), p.7; Design (1987), pp.34-5.
- [9] Saxon (1984), p.8.
- [10] Hakim (1987), p.127.
- [11] Kohler (1987), p.400.
- [12] Kohler (1987), p.398; Kinsman (1987), p.84.
- [13] Planning for Homework Conference (1984), p.11.



- [14] Kohler (1987), p.401.
- [15] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), p.40.
- [16] Costello (1988), p.137.
- [17] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), p.43.
- [18] Postgate, p.14.
- [19] Bulos (1989), p.12; Kohler (1987), p.402.
- [20] Kohler (1987), p.399.
- [21] Kohler (1987), p.401.
- [22] Hakim (1987), pp.58-9.
- [23] Thomson (1985), p.23.
- [24] Kohler (1987), p.410.
- [25] Bulos (1989), p.12.

#### **4.4 Familial Support**

- [1] Morris (1988), p.383-4; p.389.
- [2] Pahl (1984), p.273.
- [3] Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.7.
- [4] Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.7.
- [5] Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.8.
- [6] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), pp.41/2; Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.7.
- [7] Gowler and Legge (1978).
- [8] Morris (1988), p.397.
- [9] Costello (1988), p.140.
- [10] Thomson (1985), p.85; Costello (1988), p.137-8; Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.24 & 31.
- [11] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), p.44; Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.14.
- [12] Pahl (1984), p.273.
- [13] Gerson and Kraut (1988), p.61; Kohler (1987), p.407.
- [14] Costello (1988), pp.138-9. Such studies are often more critical than the Kinsman account - Kinsman (1987), p.91.
- [15] Rapaport and Rapaport (1976), pp.305-6
- [16] Hertz (1987), p.417.
- [17] Gowler and Legge (1982), p.147.
- [18] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), p.45.
- [19] White and Brinkerhoff, p.209.
- [20] Gowler and Legge (1982), p.149.
- [21] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), p.40.
- [22] Gerson and Kraut (1988), p.60.
- [23] Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.6.
- [24] Presser (1986), p.562.
- [25] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), pp.44-5; Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.13.
- [26] Kinsman (1987), p.90.
- [27] Dover (1984), p.183.
- [28] Haklim (1987), p.64; Wajcman (1988), p.441.

#### **4.5 Isolation**

- [1] Huws et al. (1990), p.62; Kinsman (1987), p.80.
- [2] Postgate (1984), p.29.
- [3] Kohler (1987), p.402.

- [4] Kohler (1987), p.409.
- [5] Costello (1988), p.137.
- [6] Costello (1988), p.136.
- [7] Dennison (1990b), p.11.
- [8] Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.24.
- [9] Cragg and Dawson (1981), p.25.
- [10] Dennison (1990b), p.12.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations/Appendix**

- [1] Allen and Wolkowitz (1986), p.34.
- [2] Dennison (1990b), p.11.
- [3] Huws et al. (1990), p.66.
- [4] Huws et al (1990), pp.70-6.
- [5] Kinsman (1987), p.100.
- [6] Kinsman (1987), p.105.
- [7] Costello (1988), p.135.
- [8] Kinsman (1987), p.98.

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## **Appendix: Taxonomy**

This appendix contains a taxonomy derived from the findings of this report. It examines how different types of work and of worker's circumstances relate to their suitability and adaptability to telework and likely interest in working from home.

### **A. 1. Nature of Telework**

There have been various attempts to define the characteristics of work which might be most amenable to telework. The consultancy firm Empirica summarises these well [4], and also quotes an early 6-element taxonomy of those factors which are more conducive to telework. This list, derived from Olsen's work and outlined below, forms the basis of recommendations in most of the American literature. It would therefore appear useful to evaluate some of the characteristics often cited in the light of the findings of this research:

#### **Minimal physical requirements**

The first argument is that ideally telework should require the least space for equipment and storage. However, this report shows that such a factor interacts with family circumstances. Some teleworkers can command sufficient 'disposable space' (an analogy with 'disposable income') within their home to contain a significant amount of equipment. Obviously, if there is a minimum of equipment and storage involved, the option of telework will be open to a greater number of people.

#### **Individuals control their own pace of work**

This refers to project-orientated tasks with long term completion dates where the teleworker has some flexibility in the disposition of working hours. Even Olson noted the exception of data entry work, and it is clear from the research that other types of clerical work may have short turn around times which implies limited teleworker flexibility (e.g. processing insurance forms or typing a letter overnight). Telecoms intensive work can be longer- or shorter-term in this respect. Enquiry answering or telemarketing staff may be required to meet quotas, or to work for periods where they have some choice about the actual start and finishing times. Alternatively, times may be stipulated in advance or subject to the demands from the parent organisation. In which case, the teleworkers will have relatively less flexibility and will have an experience more akin to a 9-5 job or shift work. Hence, clerical telework is feasible when this criteria of individual control is not met. But, such control is for many people liable to increase satisfaction, and is often one of the benefits of telework.

#### **Defined deliverables**

The criterion here is that output be in the form of well-defined deliverables. This is considered to be of advantage for managers, but it is worth noting that it is also desirable for many teleworkers so that they can plan their work. In other words, the work can be more predictable. On the whole, the research for this report would suggest that this has its merits in regards clerical work. But where trust has been built up, some clerical teleworkers have managed less defined tasks, simply trying to get through as much ongoing routine work as they can during their hours of work.

## **The need for concentration**

Here, the suggestion is that telework was particularly suited to work requiring concentration. Again, data entry has been cited as the exception and rightly so. From this study, there appears to be no particular reason why low concentration clerical tasks should not be equally suitable for telework! If there are family demands leading to considerable interruptions, then work requiring concentration is actually unsuitable.

## **Defined milestones**

Breaking down a long-term project into manageable portions to make it more easy to monitor. This depends very much on whether the task is long term in the first place. Furthermore, the self-employed often cope with a variety of tasks from multiple sources: For example, they may type long manuscripts in between more urgent work, with the final deadline for the manuscript being the only one. This suggests that milestones may not always be so necessary.

## **Low Need for Communication**

This research broadly supports the view that work is more suitable for telework if it requires less face to face communication with colleagues. However, one caveat remains about the nature of communication. A task such as arranging meetings between several people is more easily carried out in the office. On the other hand, one-to-one enquiries of a technical nature can be easily handled via a telecoms link to someone's home, as was demonstrated in the case of Chris.

There have been numerous attempts to list which jobs are most suitable for telework, but the headings are of limited use. Partly, it depends on how jobs with particular titles are arranged and experienced in practice. The tasks undertaken by the interviewees in this report included basic copy typing and more demanding text entry (typing on forms or in structured ways, or audio typing). They also include various secretarial tasks (e.g. taking and passing on messages, arranging meetings) and miscellaneous administrative tasks such as sorting and transferring information into alternative layouts. The other tasks were book-indexing, desk top publishing, bookkeeping, database administration and handling enquiries related to databases.

## **A.2. Family Circumstances**

Since the majority of clerical teleworkers are liable to be women, reflecting female predominance in clerical work as a whole, the following simplified typology refers mainly to women's circumstances.

### **No Partner, No Child (or other dependants)**

For the young and single with no dependants, various analysts have suggested that telework is a less interesting option because it provides few social contacts [5]. The data indicating who takes up homework would appear to support this view. However, when older and with established social contacts, telework can suit some people's preference for working alone or for independence. There is often limited domestic labour, which therefore tends to pose far less problems at this stage.

### **Partner, No Child (or other dependants)**

This situation is more likely to attract interest in telework also depending on the partner's employment circumstances (see below). The absence of children eases many of the scheduling problems and there are usually less chores to be completed in childless homes.

### **Partner, Child Under Five**

This is one of the more common situations which give rise to an interest in telework. But it is also one where there is the greatest domestic pressure on the teleworker to meet all demands, arrange childcare and meet conflicting schedules. Because of this, it may well be the circumstances with the greatest drop out from telework, although there is virtually no data on this facet. The conditions of work need to be at their most flexible from the point of view of the teleworker [6].

### **Partner, Child Over Five**

This is likely to be the other most common background of teleworkers, where there is a little less pressure, especially as children become older and more independent. There may be new time demands from children, but there is more scope for negotiation within the family. The presence of children both under and over 5 can create acute childcare and scheduling problems, since this may well require different arrangements to be made for each child.

## **A.3. Previous Work Experience**

The teleworker's previous work experience is a significant factor at a number of levels. In brief, this includes:

### **The experience of work in general**

(We might also consider the experience of higher education as facilitating general self-discipline - given that some female secretarial staff are also graduates). In practice, most homeworkers in general, and most clerical workers, have previously worked on-site and therefore have at least some practice at coping with work pressures.

### **The experience of relevant work**

This means previous familiarity with the elements of the particular type of work in which teleworkers are engaged - e.g. the deadlines associated with different types of work. With such experience, there are few major surprises. The teleworkers know the broad demands and routines. Such familiarity can also aid self-evaluation (i.e. a sense of when the teleworkers have reached 'good' standards). Most clerical workers have such 'relevant' experience. But, some schemes aimed at recruiting 'housebound women with children' have taken on completely fresh sub-contractors with no such experience - e.g. in processing insurance claims [7].

### **The experience with relevant employees/clients**

This means previous work for the particular employers or clients with whom the teleworkers are now dealing. In the case studies several of the self-employed took on work from ex-employers or ex-clients from their previous employment. The result is a familiarity with particular routines and expectations. Such familiarity allows a more comfortable transition to telework. Employers initiating schemes often do



so to retain existing skilled workers, and so once again the transition is relatively smooth. This familiarity is important both for the work itself (e.g. knowing whom to contact at the office when necessary), and for social contact to overcome isolation. There is a question of whether familiarity also helps longer term teleworkers feel more loyalty to the firm. Several US schemes stress the importance of teleworking staff knowing the particular corporate culture. Clearly, this is more difficult if staff are recruited from outside specifically for teleworking jobs (e.g. to act as a buffer labour force for peak demands).

## **A.4. Partner's Employment**

### **Normal Hours, Work Site based**

This would seem to provide neither any particular drawback or advantage which might have a bearing on interest in telework.

### **Irregular Hours, Work Site based**

Irregular hours can make telework attractive to fit in more with the partners schedules and so spend more leisure time together. Sometimes such irregular hours can also work to the teleworker's advantage where the partner can sometimes be available to 'cover' tasks such as childcare or picking up children in the morning or afternoon.

### **Normal or Irregular Hours, working from home**

Again, telework can allow more contact between couples if partners are intermittently passing through the home. And it can certainly work to the partner's advantage where teleworker can also act in a secretarial capacity by virtue of being more available to pass on messages (eg bookings for work).

### **Normal or Irregular Hours, at home**

Much the same argument applies as above, although both can more easily help with messages. It's worth noting, though, that both partners being at home does not suit everyone - that can provide too much contact for some people who would want to have a more independent social life, spending time away from their partner sometimes [8].

### **Unemployed**

As noted earlier, this can have mixed consequences. Where any paid employment might effect benefit payments, then there is a disincentive to take on telework. On the other hand, many women especially do leave on-site work when their partners become unemployed. For some, telework might be an attractive compromise between being at home and working.

### **Retired**

For some, telework may be a particularly attractive option at the partner's retirement, in order to provide some company during the day-time.