

Telework and Home-Based Employment in Canadian Communities

Introduction

it is estimated that between 600,000 and two million Canadians – up to one-quarter of the working population – do some or all of their paid labour at home. While the growing trend reflected by these estimates is having a considerable impact on Canadian society, the planning and design of residential communities have not for the most part recognized it. The separation of home and work activities may be outdated for an increasing number of Canadian households, and residential planning which assumes that separation needs to be reconsidered. A study was conducted by CMHC to investigate the impact of telework and home-based employment on the use of the home and neighbourhood, and the implications for the planning and design of homes and communities.

**A large
number of
Canadians
work at
home**

The Centre for Future Studies in Housing and Living Environments

The objective of the Centre for Future Studies in Housing and Living Environments is to develop a broad based understanding of the issues that will affect future housing and living conditions. The research priorities for the Centre are:

- the implications for housing of changes in demographic, social, and economic factors;
- the future relationship between housing and social policy;
- changing urban and rural conditions; and
- the impact of new technologies on housing and living environments.

The Centre's work focuses on anticipating and exploring factors and trends that will affect housing and its environments over the next decade. By raising awareness of these issues, the Centre for Future Studies contributes to the development of policy at international, national, provincial and local levels.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre *Le télétravail et le travail à domicile dans les collectivités canadiennes.*

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Findings

Methodology

The study included a mail-out survey that obtained detailed information on home-based workers, their households, their work profile, homes and communities, transportation patterns, and use of telecommunications. The Canada-wide response rate was 31%.

Demographics

Of those surveyed, close to half (48%) described themselves as self-employed consultants or home-based business operators, and one-third (31%) described themselves as public sector, Crown corporation or private sector teleworkers. While the sample did not include supplementers (i.e., employees who bring work home on an occasional basis), 13% of the respondents described themselves as moonlighters, occasional homeworkers or "other." Finally, 8% were independent contractors who work on contract to one company. Fifty-five percent of the sample were female.

Satisfaction with Work at Home Arrangement

Generally there was a high level of satisfaction with working at home. When at-home workers had concerns, these were mainly related to their inability to disconnect work from home, and their sense of isolation. Some main reasons for starting to work from home included issues related to quality of life: convenience, flexible hours, control over work, cost considerations, and control over work environment. Other reasons were to be able to work while raising children and the inability to find a satisfactory salaried position.

Implications for the Housing Industry

Home Work Requires New Housing Design Solutions

While respondents were very satisfied overall with working at home, a large number faced some problems. Many complained of small storage and work spaces. Home workers are interested in housing design solutions which would allow them to better combine work and family activities under the same roof.

Home Work Generates Renovation Activity

The majority of respondents want or have already completed physical changes to their homes to make them more suitable for home work. Many have renovated rooms, added new lighting and electrical circuitry, or erected new walls.

Home Work Can Be an Important Factor in Decisions to Move and Buy a New Home

Few respondents have moved as a result of working at home, but a significant percentage have thought of moving because they needed more space, wanted more separation between home and work activities or because their home did not match their business image. Most would-be movers would want a larger home with a more appropriate layout and would want to move within the same city or the same neighbourhood. While some would consider moving out of the city, almost as many would want to move closer to the city centre.

Implications for Community Planning

Home Work Has Not Led to Dramatic Changes on How At-Home Workers Use Their Neighbourhoods

Home-based workers in this sample have not begun to use their neighbourhoods differently since working at home, and they have not begun to interact more with their neighbours; however, they generally feel that working at home enhances the security of their home and neighbourhood. As well, the community has become a great source of friendship and support for some home-based workers.

Home Work Creates Opportunities to Connect Homes and Neighbourhoods to Information Networks

Home and neighbourhood planning may have to consider incorporating high-tech communication capabilities as future design features. Almost all of the respondents in the survey use a computer to conduct their work at home, one-third have a FAX modem and one-quarter use electronic mail and Internet regularly. Also, one-quarter of the sample expressed interest in either working from a neighbourhood telework centre (a centre with a number of work spaces shared by a group of unrelated businesses and located in a convenient location in a neighbourhood) or a satellite office (a secondary company office located close to employees' homes).

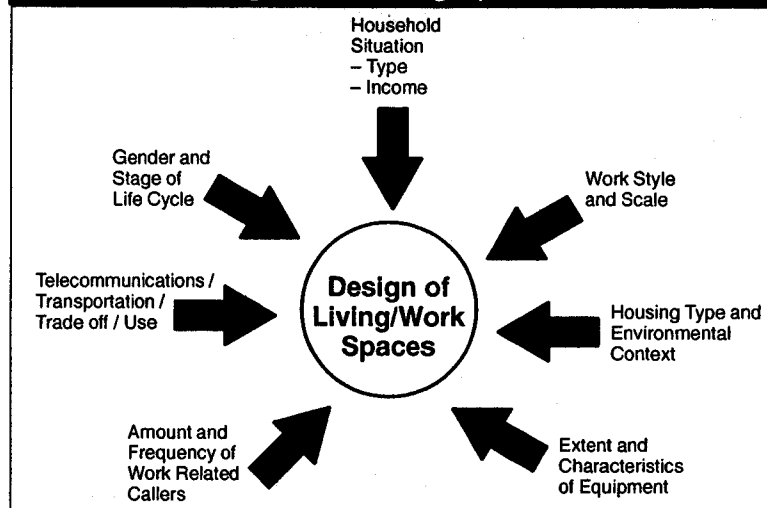
Future neighbourhoods may be marketed specifically to home-based workers. Their appeal could be based on traditional neighbourhood design combined with pre-wired broadband communication capabilities (i.e., transfer of voice, video, text and data) connecting residences, schools and businesses to an Internet site and community electronic bulletin board.

Planning and Design Considerations

As presently planned, most homes need to be adapted for home work. The research on work environments has primarily been carried out in exclusively commercial offices. Little is known about the environmental aspects of using the home as a workplace. As indicated in Figure 1, the most appropriate design solutions for particular home workers depend mainly on their work, household structure, housing situation, and financial capabilities.

**Design
solutions
for home-
based
work must
consider a
variety
of criteria
to be
successful**

Figure 1: Considerations in Designing Homes with Combined Living and Working Spaces



Home-based workers in this sample generally feel that the municipal regulations governing their occupations are too restrictive. These regulations do not reflect the nature of most of the work now done at home. These activities are largely non-toxic and non-hazardous, and rarely have a major negative impact on the functioning of neighbourhoods.

Conclusion

New work options, and the telecommunications technologies to support them, will allow more choices in ways of living and working, resulting in changes in how and where people live. The housing sector has just begun to assess what it might mean for more Canadians to be working from home. This survey suggests that workers are satisfied with working at home, but that modifications to their homes and communities are required to accommodate domestic and work activities.

This research highlight summarizes some of the findings in *Planning for Telework and Home-Based Employment: A Canadian Survey on Integrating Work into Residential Environments*. To obtain a free copy of the summary report or to order the main document, call the Canadian Housing Information Centre, (613) 748-2367. For further information, contact Mr. Denys Chamberland, Centre for Future Studies, CMHC, (613) 748-2812.

CMHC carries out and finances a broad range of research on the social, economic and technical aspects of housing. This CMHC Research and Development Highlights issue is one of a series intended to inform you briefly of the nature and scope of these activities.

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