

# When Does Workplace Flexibility Help? Formal Care, Gender Norms, and Work–Care Trade-offs

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## Abstract

We provide causal evidence on whether working from home (WFH) enables workers to balance employment and eldercare, and how formal care infrastructure and gender norms shape this relationship. Exploiting Japan’s COVID-19-induced remote work expansion, we find striking heterogeneity: WFH increases caregiving among part-time workers with positive health effects, but among full-time employees, only women increase caregiving — and their health deteriorates. Greater formal care availability and progressive gender norms substantially attenuate these effects. Realizing the work-care balance benefits of workplace flexibility requires complementary investments in care infrastructure and progress toward gender equality.

**Keywords:** working from home, informal caregiving, work-care balance, gender norms, long-term care, double burden, difference-in-differences (DID)

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