

What happens to the sense of community and social support in the post-pandemic world of work?

Abstract

- This study examines how the adjustments made to the working arrangements and workplace communication during and after the COVID-19 pandemic have affected employees' sense of social community and social support at work.
- The study is based on a longitudinal dataset including of 544 participants with 4352 observations collected during eight time points in 2019–2022.
- The data is analyzed with liner multilevel hybrid regression model.
- The results show that although the remote workers, especially those working high-intensity remote work i.e. three days a week or more remotely, experience lower social community and support, frequent social media communication (both work- and nonwork-related) can mitigate some of these effects.

Intro

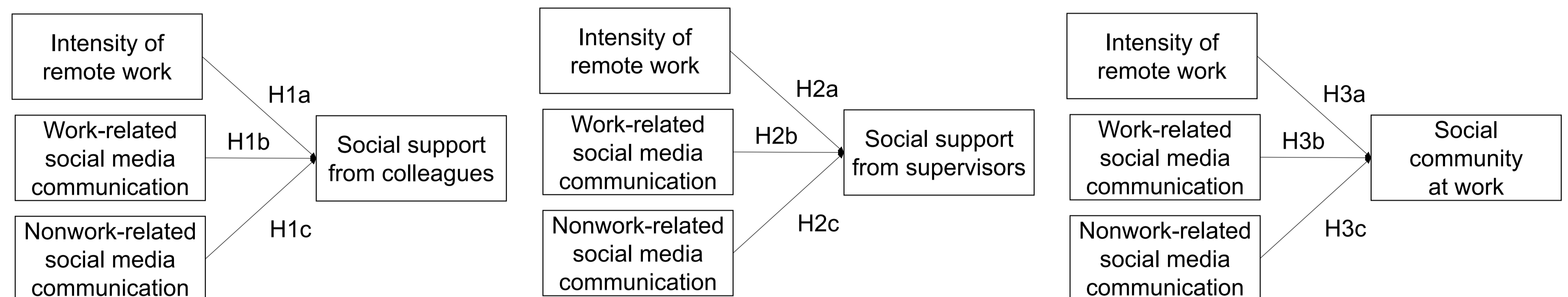
Aims:

- How employees adjusted work configurations and online communication during and after pandemic?
- How these adjustments have affected their sense of community at work and perceived support from supervisors and colleagues?

Definitions:

- Low-intensity remote: employees work most of their salaried time (3-5 days from the week) in an employer-provided office and 1–2 days from the week in remote settings.
- High-intensity remote work: employees work most of the work time in remote conditions such as working from home.

Hypotheses



Methods

- Longitudinal eight-wave *Social Media at Work in Finland Survey* has been collected among Finnish employees working in various occupational fields every half a year since March–April 2019 and 650 (41.62% female, *Age* = 46.07, *SD* = 10.60) participants responded to all eight surveys and the final sample was 544 respondents after excluding unemployed, retired, nonactive and entrepreneurs
- Multilevel fixed effects (within-person) regression was used for the analysis

Results

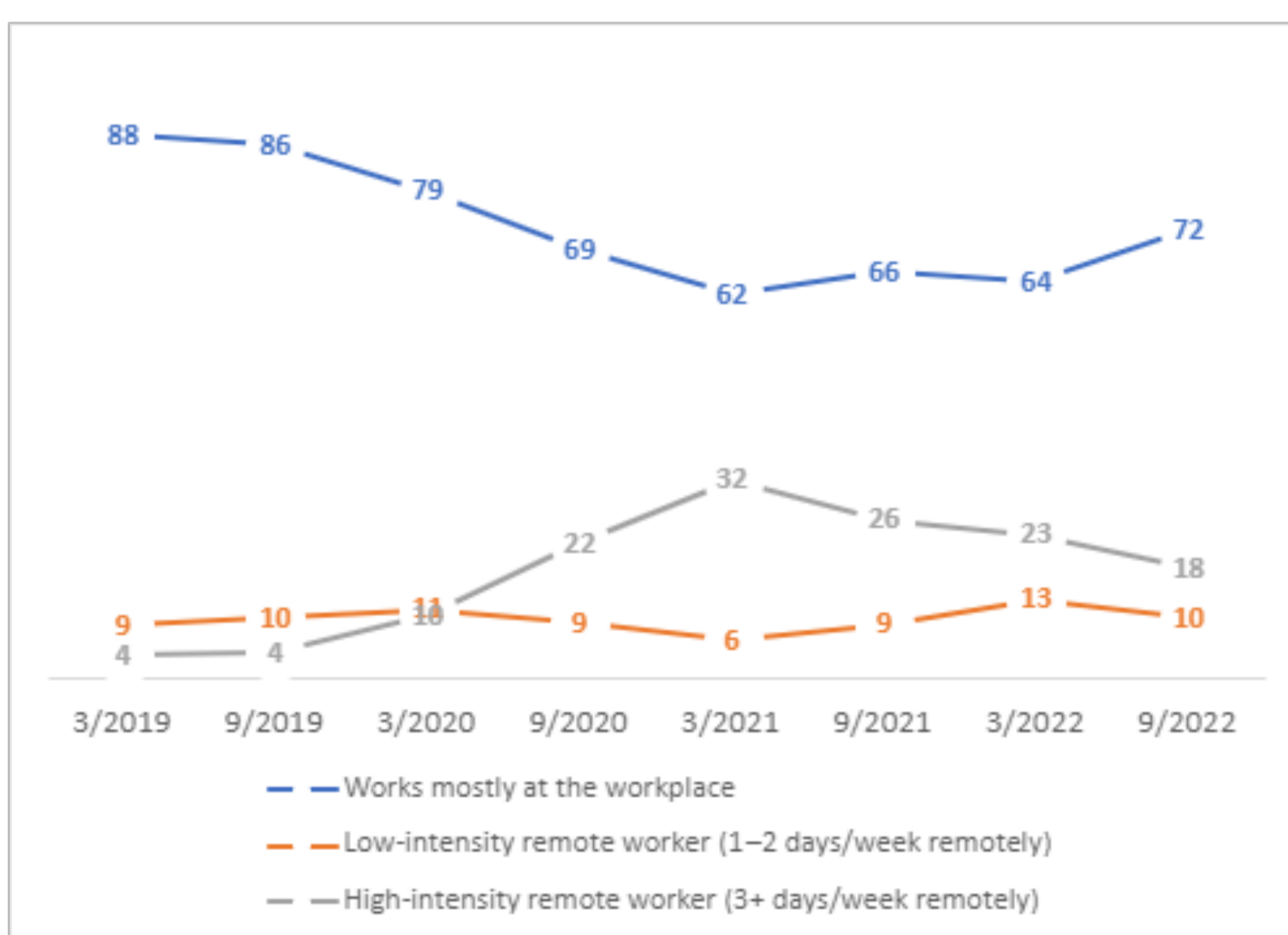


Fig I. Share of low- and high intensity remote workers among the sample of workers during 2019–2022 (percentages). Note. analytical weights were used.

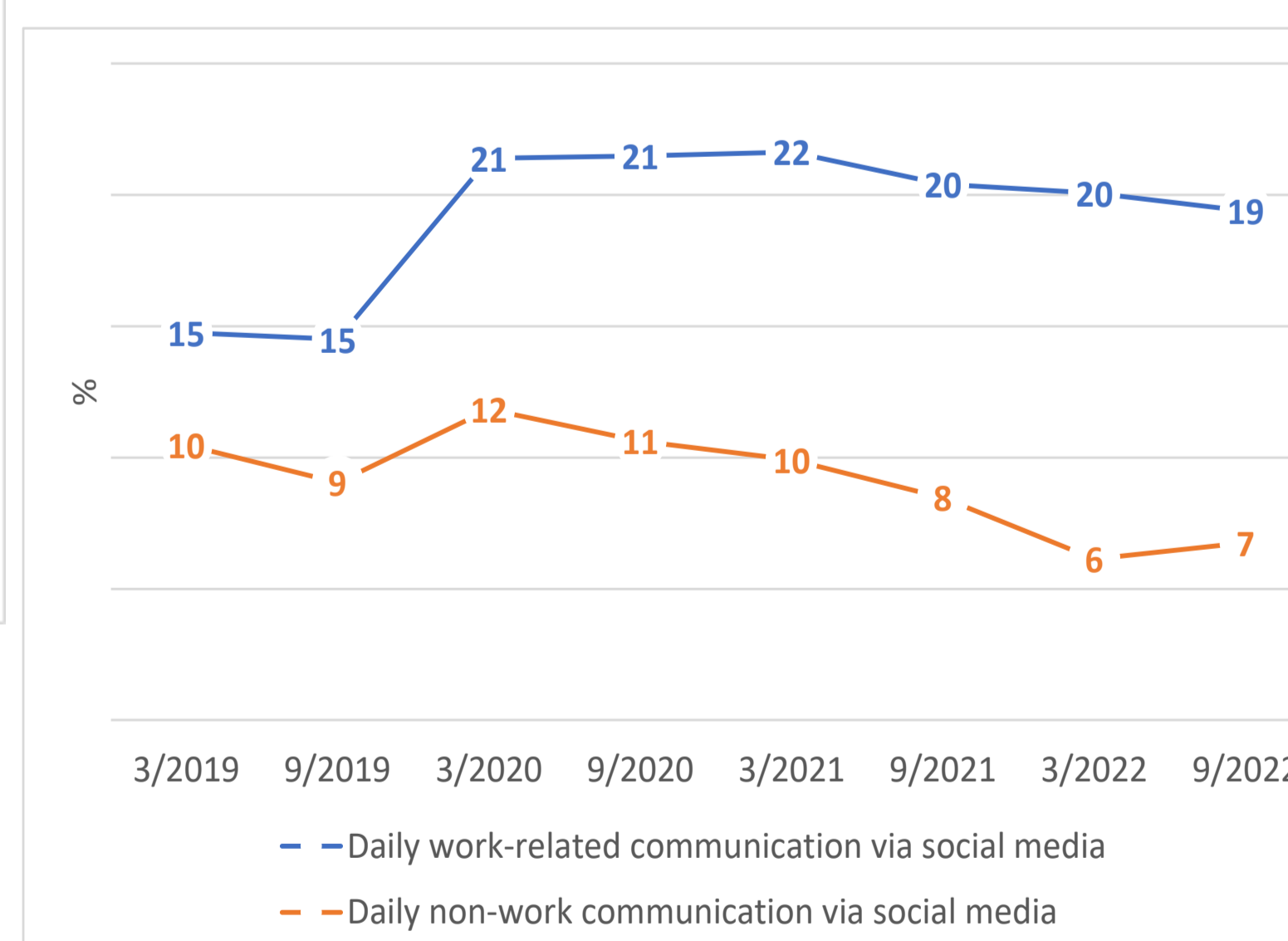


Fig II. Daily work and non-work-related communication with colleagues and work community

Table I. Hybrid model showing within-person and between-person effects on perceived social community and support from colleagues and supervisor

	Social community at work				Support from colleagues				Support from supervisor			
	B	SE (B)	Z	p	B	SE (B)	Z	p	B	SE (B)	Z	p
Within-person effects												
Low-intensity remote work	-0.03	0.01	-2.39	0.017	-0.03	0.01	-2.36	0.018	0.01	0.02	0.29	0.770
High-intensity remote work	-0.05	0.01	-4.03	0.000	-0.06	0.02	-3.71	0.000	0.01	0.02	0.31	0.756
Work-related some comm.	0.03	0.02	1.54	0.123	0.04	0.02	2.33	0.020	0.02	0.02	1.07	0.284
Non-work-related some comm.	0.03	0.02	1.87	0.062	0.07	0.02	3.81	0.000	0.03	0.02	1.83	0.067
Between-person effects												
Low-intensity remote work	0.00	0.03	-0.05	0.958	0.00	0.05	-0.06	0.953	0.06	0.05	1.39	0.163
High-intensity remote work	-0.09	0.04	-2.44	0.015	-0.10	0.05	-2.07	0.039	-0.05	0.05	-0.93	0.351
Work-related some comms.	0.02	0.04	0.40	0.688	0.08	0.05	1.49	0.137	0.05	0.06	0.79	0.431
Nonwork-related some comms.	0.16	0.04	4.15	0.000	0.18	0.05	3.39	0.001	0.08	0.06	1.40	0.160
Controls												
Female	-0.02	0.03	-0.64	0.523	0.02	0.03	0.71	0.475	-0.01	0.04	-0.33	0.741
Age	0.01	0.03	0.37	0.714	-0.07	0.03	-2.40	0.016	-0.09	0.04	-2.29	0.022
MA degree or higher	0.05	0.03	1.67	0.096	0.02	0.03	0.55	0.583	0.05	0.04	1.34	0.181
White-collar office worker	-0.02	0.03	-0.69	0.492	0.04	0.04	1.02	0.309	-0.01	0.04	-0.21	0.830
Supervisor	-0.02	0.03	-0.58	0.564	-0.07	0.04	-2.02	0.044	0.00	0.04	0.08	0.938
Bf: openness	0.03	0.03	1.20	0.231	0.03	0.04	0.96	0.335	0.05	0.04	1.33	0.183
Bf: conscientiousness	0.04	0.03	1.33	0.182	0.01	0.04	0.29	0.770	-0.04	0.04	-0.87	0.385
Bf: extroversion	0.06	0.03	2.10	0.036	0.05	0.03	1.33	0.184	0.05	0.04	1.29	0.196
Bf: agreeableness	0.14	0.03	4.50	0.000	0.13	0.03	4.17	0.000	0.19	0.04	4.75	0.000
Bf: neuroticism	-0.11	0.03	-3.87	0.000	-0.01	0.03	-0.23	0.822	-0.01	0.04	-0.13	0.900

Note. All independent measures are standardized in models. All models include in total 4,275 observations from 544 participants.

Discussion

- Increased intensity and remote work are associated with decreased SOC and social support from colleagues and on average, remote workers experience decreased SOC at work and less social support from colleagues than others which is important to consider in novel working and communication practices
- The results provide fresh understanding on the evolution and effects of remote work configurations and employees' use of social media for professional and personal communication, in post-pandemic era.
- The results offer valuable insights also for workplaces, highlighting the importance of establishment and maintenance of social communities and enabling forums for social support from colleagues and supervisors in remote work configurations.