

Mapping Workplace Loneliness in Remote Working Environments: Cross-Sector Evidence, Antecedents, and Organizational Implications

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Remote Work;
Workplace
Loneliness;
Employee Well-
Being; Social
Isolation; Cross-
Sector Analysis;

Background: The proliferation of remote work has transformed organizational interaction dynamics and heightened concerns regarding employees' social connectedness. However, the effects of remote work on workplace loneliness vary across organizational sectors and remain insufficiently understood. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of remote work on workplace loneliness and identify contextual risk factors influencing this relationship.

Method: This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach by analyzing peer-reviewed empirical studies retrieved from a major academic database. The selected articles were screened and evaluated based on predefined inclusion criteria, and the findings were synthesized to identify patterns and contextual factors associated with workplace loneliness in remote work settings.

Results: The findings demonstrate that remote work produces dual effects. On one hand, flexibility and autonomy enhance employees' perceived control and short-term well-being. On the other hand, prolonged reductions in informal social interactions weaken employees' sense of belonging and intensify feelings of loneliness. Sectoral differences indicate that knowledge-intensive, creative, and public service sectors are more vulnerable to relational disconnection, whereas effective communication protocols and organizational support mechanisms reduce the risk of social isolation. Furthermore, individual, occupational, and institutional factors collectively shape these outcomes.

Conclusion: This study concludes that workplace loneliness in remote work environments is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by the interaction of personal, job-related, and organizational factors. By integrating fragmented evidence across sectors into a comprehensive analytical framework, the study highlights the importance of relational resources and provides practical implications for designing socially sustainable and psychologically supportive remote work arrangements.

Received: 10/29/2025

Revised: 1/22/2026

Accepted: 1/28/2026

How to cite this article:

Ivadianty, H.A.N., Utam, H.N., Ruhana, I. (2026). Mapping Workplace Loneliness in Remote Working Environments: Cross-Sector Evidence, Antecedents, and Organizational Implications. *Sharia Economic and Management Business Journal (SEMBJ)*, 7(1), 459-475. <https://doi.org/10.62159/sembj.v7i1.2524>

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of remote work has fundamentally reshaped contemporary employment structures, offering organizations new possibilities for flexibility, efficiency, and global talent acquisition (Bauer et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2025). The evolution of modern work frameworks has accelerated significantly over the past 10 years, especially in the wake of global upheavals linked to digitization and post-pandemic labor system reorganization. Organizations globally have progressively adopted flexible arrangements, including remote and hybrid work, to improve productivity, employee autonomy, and work-life integration (Almazrouei et al., 2025). Although these models offer potential efficiency gains and enhanced well-being, growing evidence suggests that their psychological and relationship effects are complex and often contradictory. Flexible work arrangements can enhance motivation and satisfaction, yet may also lead to social isolation, loneliness, and diminished organizational attachment (Petitta & Ghezzi, 2025). These tensions underscore the need for a comprehensive empirical investigation of the interplay between workplace structures and socio-psychological factors in shaping employee outcomes.

Beyond its operational advantages, remote work has become a defining feature of post-pandemic employment across many sectors (Kothawala et al., 2025; McCollum, 2025). While remote working arrangements gained unprecedented momentum during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, Research continues to uncover complex psychological and social implications for employees (Faile et al., 2025). Among these, workplace loneliness, defined as a subjective feeling of social disconnection within professional contexts, has emerged as a critical yet insufficiently examined phenomenon of remote work (Wahyuni & Muafi, 2021). As digital communication replaces traditional face-to-face interaction, concerns have grown about how remote work may amplify feelings of isolation, reduce workplace belonging, and alter the dynamics of employee well-being and performance (Ferrara et al., 2022).

Remote work and flexible arrangements have been extensively advocated as strategies to enhance work-life balance and organizational efficacy. Empirical data indicate that flexible working arrangements substantially enhance motivation, commitment, and job satisfaction by improving the perceived balance between personal and professional duties (Edeh et al., 2025; Ghonim et al., 2025). Likewise, hybrid models have been linked to decreased burnout and stress, as well as improved health and productivity outcomes, indicating that flexibility serves as a strategic human resource tool for maintaining staff engagement (Eng et al., 2025). Nonetheless, these advantages are not evenly allocated among employees or situations. Research indicates that remote work often conflates professional and personal spheres, leading to longer working hours and an increased risk of burnout due to reduced role separation (Grønstad et al., 2025; Kabir et al., 2025; Kalmanovich-Cohen & Stanton, 2025). The divergent results underscore that flexibility by itself does not ensure well-being and must be supplemented by sufficient organizational support systems.

A significant difficulty in modern job design is workplace loneliness and social isolation. Research on remote work patterns indicates that employees who work remotely three or more days per week are considerably more likely to experience loneliness than those who do not work remotely at all (He et al., 2026; Korkmaz et al., 2025). Prolonged telework exposure has been associated with anxiety, sadness, diminished job satisfaction, and productivity declines due to inadequate emotional or technical support (Ren et al., 2025). These findings align with systematic evaluations suggesting that loneliness in digital workplaces is a complex phenomenon shaped by technology-mediated communication, diminished informal interactions, and transformed social dynamics among coworkers (Baruah, 2025). Loneliness is not merely a function of physical separation; it reflects perceived inadequacies in significant social connections. This indicates that organizational settings should be assessed not only in structural aspects but also in relational and psychological dimensions.

Workplace loneliness has emerged as a critical psychosocial risk factor that undermines employees' well-being and work performance (McCarthy et al., 2026a). Loneliness is associated with lower job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, poorer mental health, and diminished occupational functioning (Ayala et al., 2025). These findings suggest that loneliness at work is not merely an individual experience but also a strategic concern for organizations that rely on sustained employee engagement and performance (Bryan et al., 2023). The ramifications of workplace loneliness extend beyond individual well-being and affect corporate effectiveness. Loneliness correlates with knowledge-hiding behaviors and declining collaborative dynamics among knowledge workers, suggesting that relationship impairments may obstruct knowledge exchange and creative processes (Bashir & Saleem, 2024).

Moreover, empirical studies of remote work environments reveal increasing mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, highlighting the necessity for employers to recognize psychosocial factors influencing satisfaction and productivity outcomes (Korkmaz et al., 2025; Leong et al., 2025). Research on flexible work environments indicates that loneliness influences workplace arrangements, thereby affecting overall well-being, underscoring the need to incorporate psychological and structural variables into organizational frameworks. These data indicate that workplace loneliness is a significant risk factor for both individuals and organizations, necessitating comprehensive academic investigation.

Workplace loneliness is not only emotionally aversive but also consequential for behavior and performance. Quantitative evidence links loneliness at work with reduced performance, lower engagement, higher emotional exhaustion, and impaired occupational functioning (Matthews et al., 2019). More recent evidence further suggests that workplace loneliness may trigger maladaptive coping behaviors, such as workplace cheating, partly via heightened emotional exhaustion, underscoring its ethical and behavioral implications (Yan et al., 2025). Studies on job crafting and work redesign also indicate that lonely employees may disengage from proactive behaviors that typically help them optimize their jobs, thereby reinforcing a negative spiral of disconnection and strain (Jin & Ikeda, 2025). The antecedents of workplace loneliness in digital and remote contexts appear to be multifaceted (Walz et al., 2024). High job demands, blurred work–home boundaries, limited opportunities for informal social interaction, and inadequate supervisory support have all been identified as factors that heighten loneliness among remote workers (Figueiredo et al., 2025). Telework can make it more difficult to build interpersonal trust and a sense of belonging, particularly when organizational cultures and leadership practices do not actively foster connection in virtual environments (Satomura et al., 2025). Mixed empirical findings regarding the protective role of job control and flexibility suggest that autonomy alone may be insufficient to prevent loneliness when employees' social and relational needs remain unmet (McCarthy et al., 2026b).

The idea holds that employees form opinions about the extent to which their organization appreciates their contributions and prioritizes their well-being. These perceptions markedly affect behavioral and performance outcomes (Schiemer et al., 2025). Perceived organizational support promotes recognition, socioemotional satisfaction, and commitment, which, in turn, encourage reciprocation through increased effort and loyalty. Systematic reviews demonstrate that favorable connections between organizational support and performance outcomes are evident across many empirical contexts, affirming the importance of supportive environments in influencing employee productivity (Rasool et al., 2025; Zeb et al., 2025). Furthermore, empirical studies indicate that perceived organizational support directly affects employee performance and operates through mediating factors such as engagement and proactive work behavior (Karim et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025). These findings bolster the theoretical premise that supportive organizational environments serve as strategic assets that can alleviate psychosocial difficulties linked to contemporary work structures.

In addition to direct performance consequences, organizational support serves both a moderating and mediating function in wider psychological processes. Research indicates that support systems improve employee engagement by reinforcing the connection between well-being and work commitment (Hamel & Bela, 2025; Li et al., 2025). Further Research substantiates that perceived organizational support, social support, and organizational commitment collectively influence employee performance outcomes, demonstrating the interdependent relationship between relational and institutional variables (Alimbekov et al., 2025; Ergun et al., 2025). Organizational support moderates the impact of stress, workload, and work–life balance on productivity, suggesting that supportive environments might enhance good conditions or mitigate negative pressures (Kamboj & A, 2025). From a strategic standpoint, these findings highlight the need to establish institutional systems that foster trust, acknowledgment, and emotional comfort, especially in remote or hybrid settings where social cues are less perceptible.

The relationship among flexible work arrangements, loneliness, and organizational support is a vital field of investigation in modern organizational behavior Research. Although flexible arrangements offer clear benefits in terms of liberty and enjoyment, they may unintentionally diminish spontaneous interactions and impair interpersonal connections. Research on cooperation indicates that while distant technologies can enhance network reach and international alliances, they may concurrently limit the depth of engagement and intellectual effect due to fewer informal exchanges (Rezaei, 2025). These

findings emphasize that productivity and innovation are influenced not only by connection but also by the quality of contact. Consequently, understanding how organizational support might mitigate relational deficiencies in digital workplaces is becoming increasingly pertinent for both theoretical advancement and management application.

Although there is considerable Research on flexible work, loneliness, and organizational support individually, there is a scarcity of integrated empirical frameworks that investigate their combined consequences (McCarthy et al., 2026a; Oh et al., 2025). Current Research frequently emphasizes either structural flexibility or psychological consequences, neglecting to investigate their interdependencies within organizational contexts adequately (de Janasz et al., 2025). Cultural and sectoral variations are also inadequately examined, especially in developing and transitional economies where institutional norms and technology infrastructures markedly diverge from those in Western contexts. Addressing this deficiency is crucial for enhancing theoretical generalizability and generating context-specific managerial solutions. This study aims to enhance the literature by analyzing the interconnections between flexible work arrangements, workplace loneliness, and perceived organizational support within a cohesive analytical framework, thereby advancing existing theoretical and empirical understanding of employee well-being and performance dynamics.

Although there is increasing Research on remote work and employee well-being, the current literature remains disjointed in its conceptual emphasis and empirical breadth. Numerous studies examine flexible working arrangements mainly in terms of productivity, work–life balance, or technical efficiency, frequently neglecting their profound emotional implications, especially workplace loneliness. In contrast, studies on loneliness often treat it as a personal psychological phenomenon, failing to adequately contextualize it within the evolving organizational frameworks of telework, hybrid work, and distributed teams. Moreover, current systematic and narrative evaluations generally either assess loneliness comprehensively across office environments or examine remote work outcomes without distinguishing loneliness as a separate, multifaceted construct. This division constrains theoretical integration and obscures the distinct ways in which organizational sectors, job demands, and institutional support mechanisms influence loneliness across various work contexts.

This study makes multiple contributions that set it apart from prior Research on remote work and workplace loneliness. It frames workplace loneliness not just as a secondary psychological effect but as a primary analytical concept analyzed within the structural framework of remote work settings. The study integrates concepts from organizational behavior, occupational psychology, and human resource management to present a comprehensive approach linking psychological experiences with institutional and sectoral characteristics. This Research employs a cross-sectoral synthesis, distinguishing it from other evaluations that focus on individual sectors or specific occupational groups, thereby facilitating the comparative discovery of patterns, vulnerabilities, and protective mechanisms across various organizational contexts. The study explicitly integrates theoretical interpretation using frameworks such as the Job Demands–Resources viewpoint and social relational needs, offering an integrative explanatory lens rather than merely a descriptive aggregation of facts. This review methodically categorizes antecedents, contextual factors, and sector-specific responses, creating a structured conceptual map that elucidates the interplay between the advantages of flexibility and the relational dangers in remote work environments. These contributions enhance existing scholarship by redirecting the analytical focus to a context-sensitive, theory-informed understanding of loneliness in digital work environments, thereby providing conceptual and practical benefits for researchers and organizational leaders.

METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesize empirical evidence on how remote work influences workplace loneliness across organizational sectors. The method is designed to ensure transparency, replicability, and interpretive rigor through a structured multistage screening and synthesis process. The review follows three core stages: identification, inclusion and exclusion, and full text review. Identification specifies the database, search strings, and time window used to assemble the initial corpus. Inclusion and exclusion outline predefined eligibility rules and sequential screening procedures (Cresswell et al., 2020). Full-text-reviewed records determine final inclusion and guide structured data extraction, focusing on context, measures, antecedents, shaping factors, challenges, and opportunities related to workplace loneliness in remote work settings.

Identification

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using the Scopus database, which is known for its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals across the social sciences, management, psychology, public health, and information systems. A Boolean search strategy was developed to capture core concepts related to workplace loneliness and remote working across sectors. The search string combined keywords related to loneliness, remote work arrangements, causal or outcome relationships, and sectoral or industry contexts (Page et al., 2021).

The final search string applied was ("loneliness" OR "workplace loneliness" OR "occupational loneliness" OR "social isolation" OR "psychological isolation") AND ("remote work" OR "remote working" OR "telework" OR "teleworking" OR "telecommuting" OR "virtual work" OR "distributed work" OR "hybrid work" OR "work from home" OR "WFH") AND ("risk factor" OR "antecedent" OR "predictor" OR "determinant" OR "consequence" OR "outcome" OR "impact" OR "effect" OR "direction" OR "causal") AND ("industry" OR "sector" OR "industry-specific" OR "sector-specific" OR "manufacturing" OR "healthcare" OR "education" OR "technology" OR "public sector" OR "service sector" OR "nonprofit" OR "retail"). The search was limited to publications from 2015 to 2025 to reflect the growing institutionalization of remote work and the acceleration of digital work practices. This identification stage yielded 3,956 records that met the preliminary relevance criteria.

Inclusion & Exclusion

The screening process followed a sequential filtering procedure. First, records were restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published within the defined time window, reducing the dataset from 3,956 to 3,801 studies. Second, subject-area filtering was applied to Business, Management, and Accounting, yielding 1,001 articles. Third, document type screening retained only empirical Research articles, reducing the sample to 735 studies. Subsequently, keyword-based screening was conducted using terms related to loneliness, remote work, social isolation, workplace context, work-from-home, and turnover intention. This step reduced the pool to 118 articles. Finally, full-text assessment and methodological quality appraisal were conducted to ensure conceptual relevance and empirical rigor, resulting in the retention of 12 studies for synthesis.

Research in the SCOPUS database using keywords related to "loneliness", "remote working", "social isolation", "workplace context", and "work from home". The screening process followed a sequential filtering procedure. First, records were restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published within the defined time window, reducing the dataset from 3,956 to 3,801 studies. Second, subject-area filtering was applied to Business, Management, and Accounting, yielding 1,001 articles. Third, document type screening retained only empirical Research articles, reducing the sample to 735 studies. Subsequently, keyword-based screening was conducted using terms related to loneliness, remote work, social isolation, workplace context, and work-from-home. This step reduced the pool to 118 articles. Finally, full-text assessment and methodological quality appraisal were conducted to ensure conceptual relevance and empirical rigor, resulting in the retention of 12 studies for synthesis.

Full-text Reviewed

The procedure was carried out rigorously and in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines to ensure that the collected data were relevant, accurate, and of high quality, thereby establishing a robust foundation for data analysis and synthesis in this systematic literature review. Following retrieval, all eligible studies addressing remote working and workplace loneliness were consolidated into an analytical database. The multistage screening process reflects the rigor of the systematic review protocol and ensures a focused synthesis aligned with the central Research questions.

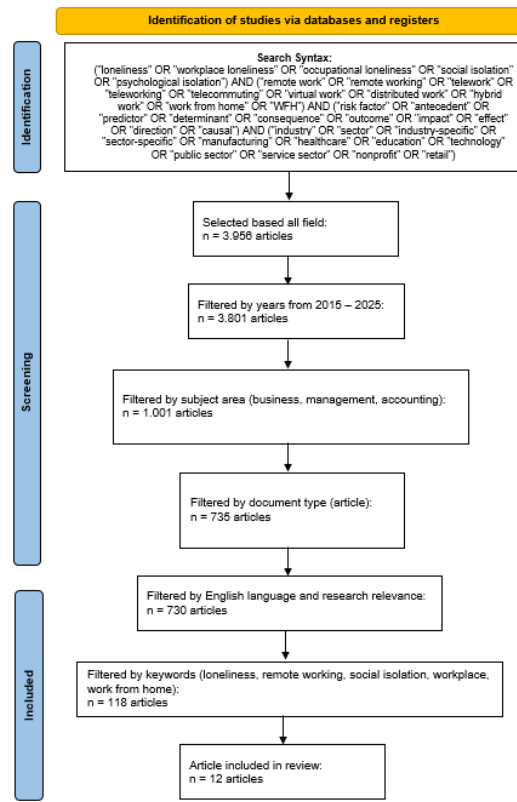


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Figure 1 presents the systematic review process, detailing the progression from initial identification to final inclusion. Records were first retrieved from the Scopus database and then sequentially screened based on publication type, subject area, document type, and keyword relevance. The final stage involved full-text assessment and methodological quality appraisal, resulting in a focused set of studies for synthesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section synthesizes findings from the systematic literature review to address the three Research questions and clarify the relationship between remote working and workplace loneliness.

Table 1. List and Synthesis of Articles

No.	Author and Year	Research Method	Research Focus
1	Sundermeyer, 2025	Longitudinal Panel Data (HILDA Survey); event-study regression with two-way fixed effects	Remote work initially boosts job satisfaction via flexibility. However, over time, reduced social support and rising loneliness erode these gains, revealing a JD-R model trade-off in which short-term resources give way to long-term detriments.
2	Mandal et al. 2025	Quantitative Survey; PLS-SEM	Examines how remote work culture induces social isolation, monotony, stress, and loneliness, and how these psychosocial outcomes shape attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control toward revenge travel.
3	Gubernurator et al. 2025	Two-wave quantitative survey; PLS-SEM, multi-group analysis, moderation analysis	Examines whether well-being-oriented HRM (WBHRM) mitigates or exacerbates employee well-being outcomes in telework vs. non-telework contexts, with social isolation as an indicator of relational well-being.

4	Costa et al. 2023	Quantitative Survey; PLS SEM	Remote work–related social isolation weakens the link between innovative work behaviour and creative performance, underscoring loneliness as a key psychosocial risk.
5	Busch et al. 2023	Qualitative Multi-method Diary Study with Inductive Thematic Analysis	The study shows that social robots are perceived as an acceptable technological solution to mitigate workplace loneliness arising from reduced social interaction in remote and hybrid work settings, supporting prior literature that identifies social isolation as a key psychosocial risk of remote work.
6	Kossen and Berg 2022	Quantitative (Online Survey)	Examines how an increased extent of WFH affects social isolation, professional isolation, and organizational identification
7	Günther et al. 2022	Quantitative (Longitudinal Survey)	The study examines how telework-oriented HRM and leadership, separately, shape remote employees' well-being during COVID-19, focusing on social isolation and psychological strain as distinct pathways.
8	Sutarto et al. (2022).	Quantitative (Cross-Sectional Survey)	Examines how socio-demographic factors and WFH challenges Influence job satisfaction and work performance during enforced remote work; explores job satisfaction as a mediator; highlights social isolation as a proxy for workplace loneliness.
9	Mahomed et al. 2024	Quantitative Survey; Pearson's correlation, moderated hierarchical regression	Exploring employee well-being during COVID-19 remote work in South Africa using the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model; examining job demands (work-home conflict, social isolation) and job resources (job autonomy, effective communication, social support) as predictors and moderators of employee well-being.
10	Nguyen et al. (2017).	Quantitative Survey; PLS SEM	Investigating how remote working during COVID-19 social isolation contributes to burnout and inter-role conflicts, leading to reduced job performance and heightened feelings of workplace loneliness among bankers with children.
11	Gao and Sai et al. 2022	Qualitative (Autoethnographic Personal Reflection)	Examines how remote work and enforced virtual workspace intensify loneliness and isolation for single women living alone.
12	Hislop et al. 2021	Qualitative (Semi-Structured Interviews)	Examines how self-employedself-employed homeworkers use mobile ICTs to manage work/non-work boundaries and how this affects their experiences of social and professional isolation. Highlights paradoxical effects: ICTs reduce isolation by enabling mobility, but also increase "perpetual contact," making it harder to disconnect.

In line with prior Research emphasizing contextual sensitivity in remote work arrangements, the synthesis further reveals that experiences of loneliness are not evenly distributed across organizational sectors. Differences in job demands, collaborative intensity, and sectoral culture shape how remote working is enacted and experienced, resulting in varying degrees of social isolation and emotional fatigue

(Günther et al., 2022; Mahomed et al., 2025). Together, these findings contribute to a more integrative and contextually grounded understanding of remote working and workplace loneliness across organizational settings (Mandal et al., 2025).

Shaping Factors

Shaping factors are the contextual conditions that explain why remote work influences workplace loneliness differently across organizational sectors. Across the reviewed literature, four recurring dimensions emerge: organizational support, job demands, social needs, and sectoral culture. Strong organizational support has been shown to buffer loneliness even in remote contexts, particularly in public administration and healthcare, where transparent communication and fairness signals help stabilize organizational identification (Mahomed et al., 2025).

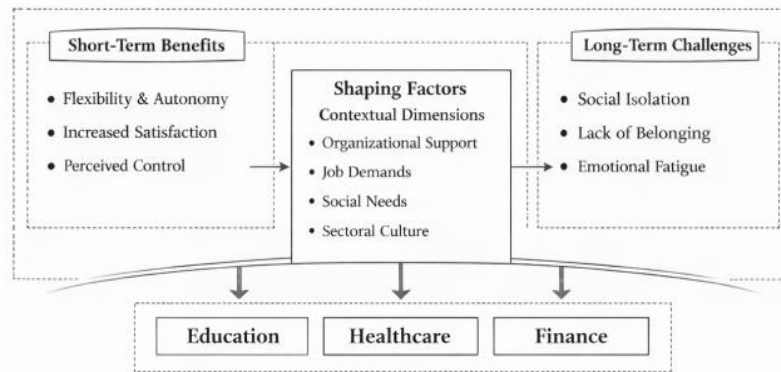


Figure 2. The Influence of Remote Working on Loneliness

Different Sectors

The reviewed studies were compared across organizational sectors to identify how remote work shapes workplace loneliness under different contextual conditions. This analysis highlights sector-specific configurations of job demands, job resources, and work practices that influence whether remote working mitigates or intensifies experiences of social isolation. The following sections summarize the key sectoral patterns identified in the literature.

Table 2. Sectoral Differences in Remote Work, Loneliness Risk, and Shaping Factors

No.	Sectors	Remote Work Feasibility	Loneliness Risk	Shaping Factors
1	Knowledge-Intensive (Tech, consulting, R&D)	High feasibility; tasks are digital, project-based, and easily managed online	Moderate to high risk	Depends on digital tools, online teamwork culture, and whether managers create social connection opportunities
2	Education & Research	Moderate feasibility; online teaching and collaboration are possible, but less rich socially.	High risk	Relies on group identity, peer collaboration, and interactive platforms; without these, isolation grows
3	Telecommunications	Moderate to high feasibility; many roles can be remote, except for field technicians	Moderate to low risk	Shaped by teamwork culture, customer-facing demands, and whether organizations provide strong virtual support
4	Creative Industries (design, media, arts)	Moderate high feasibility; creative tasks can be	High risk	Relies on spontaneous idea-sharing, peer inspiration, and

		remote, but collaboration is key		collaborative culture; remote work reduces these
5	Public/ Government Services	Moderate feasibility; admin tasks can be remote, but service delivery often requires presence	Moderate to high risk	Influenced by hierarchical structures, limited digital innovation, and weak informal support systems
6	Finance/ Banking	Moderate high feasibility; analytical and transactional work fits remote models	Moderate to high risk	Shaped by a performance-driven culture, digital systems, and whether managers maintain team cohesion remotely
7	Manufacturing & Production	Low feasibility; production requires physical presence; only admin/design roles can be remote	Moderate to high risk	Driven by strong on-site teamwork norms, remote workers lack belonging and recognition
8	Healthcare	Low to moderate feasibility; administrative roles are feasible, direct care is not	High risk	Shaped by collective identity, emotional demands, and reliance on peer bonding for resilience
9	Logistics, Transport, & Traffic	Low to moderate feasibility; most roles require physical presence; remote feasible only for planning/admin.	Moderate to high risk (for remote feasible staff)	Influenced by operational teamwork culture, coordination demands, and limited social contact for remote staff

The reviewed literature reveals a nuanced landscape shaped by sectoral characteristics, work modalities, and organizational responses. Rather than presenting a uniform experience, workplace loneliness in remote settings manifests differently across sectors, influenced by distinct task structures, cultural norms, and resource configurations. The following synthesis outlines how these sectoral contexts condition both the emergence of loneliness and the potential for its mitigation.

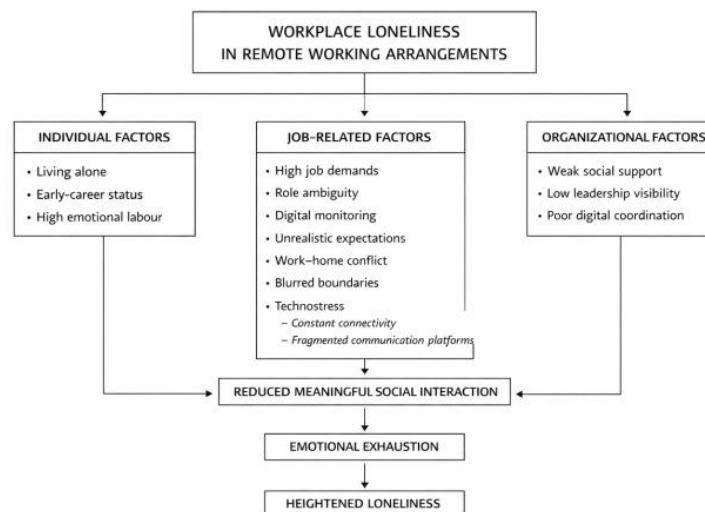


Figure 3. Workplace Loneliness in Remote Working Arrangements

Figure 3 visually synthesises the findings of the reviewed literature by illustrating how workplace loneliness in remote work arrangements arises from the interaction among individual, job-related, and organisational risk factors. High job demands consistently emerge as a central contributor, particularly when accompanied by role ambiguity, intensified digital monitoring, and unrealistic performance expectations.

Remote Working on Workplace Loneliness Across Different Organizational Sectors, and What Factors Shape this Relationship

The literature shows that remote working is neither inherently beneficial nor detrimental; its psychosocial effects depend on time, organizational context, and sector. Interpreted through the Job Demands–Resources framework and social needs theory, the findings suggest that resources such as flexibility, autonomy, and organizational support may initially reduce loneliness. In contrast, prolonged reductions in social interaction can weaken social connectedness over time (Hislop et al., 2015; Kossen & Berg, 2022). In line with prior Research emphasizing contextual sensitivity in remote work arrangements, the synthesis further reveals that experiences of loneliness are not evenly distributed across organizational sectors. Differences in job demands, collaborative intensity, and sectoral culture shape how remote working is enacted and experienced, resulting in varying degrees of social isolation and emotional fatigue (Günther et al., 2022; Mahomed et al., 2025). Together, these findings contribute to a more integrative and contextually grounded understanding of remote working and workplace loneliness across organizational settings (Mandal et al., 2025).

Across organizational sectors, remote work exerts a dual, time-contingent Influence on workplace loneliness. In the short term, flexibility and autonomy function as job resources that support satisfaction and perceived control. However, prolonged reductions in informal interaction and spontaneous communication weaken social support and belonging, thereby increasing loneliness over time (Sundermeyer, 2025). This pattern is particularly evident in sectors where collaboration, collective identity, and knowledge exchange are central to work processes, such as knowledge-intensive industries, education, and finance. The findings further indicate that the magnitude of loneliness associated with remote working varies considerably across organizational contexts. While some sectors experience pronounced increases in isolation due to fragmented workflows and reduced face-to-face interaction, others demonstrate greater resilience when supported by organizational practices such as HRM support, leadership visibility, and structured communication routines.

The reviewed literature consistently identifies four core shaping factors: organizational support, job demands, social needs, and sectoral culture, which jointly explain why remote working produces uneven psychosocial outcomes. Strong organizational support, including visible leadership, transparent communication, and fair HRM practices, functions as a critical resource that buffers loneliness in remote contexts, particularly in sectors such as public administration and healthcare, where organizational identification remains salient despite reduced physical proximity (Mahomed et al., 2025). In contrast, when high job demands coincide with limited organizational and social resources, the initial benefits of flexibility and autonomy diminish, giving way to social isolation, reduced belonging, and emotional fatigue. Consistent with the Job Demands–Resources framework, this pattern is especially pronounced in education and finance, where role overload, compliance pressures, and solitary work arrangements intensify burnout and workplace loneliness over time (Hislop et al., 2015; Kossen & Berg, 2022). From a psychological perspective, the need to belong further clarifies how prolonged remote working disrupts informal interactions and spontaneous social exchanges that ordinarily sustain social connections. These dynamics are particularly evident in sectors characterized by strong collective identities, such as healthcare and education, where reduced face-to-face interaction heightens emotional strain and loneliness. Conversely, sectors such as finance and telecommunications demonstrate that the long-term challenges associated with remote working can be mitigated when structured workflows, role clarity, and predictable digital systems are in place, thereby reducing ambiguity and technostress (Gao & Sai, 2020; Günther et al., 2022; Mandal et al., 2025).

Sector-Specific Challenges and Opportunities Related to Workplace Loneliness Have Been Identified in Remote Working Environments

The reviewed studies demonstrate that the Influence of remote working on workplace loneliness is highly contingent on the configuration of job demands, job resources, and social structures embedded

within each work context across sectors. While remote work commonly enhances autonomy and flexibility, these benefits are often offset by technostress, role ambiguity, and reduced informal interaction when organizational boundaries, communication norms, and support mechanisms are poorly defined. Sectors characterized by high cognitive demands, intense digital connectivity, or strong collective identities, such as knowledge-intensive industries, education, healthcare, and finance, appear particularly vulnerable to loneliness when social needs and work–home boundaries are inadequately managed.

In knowledge-intensive sectors such as technology, consulting, and Research and development, technostress, fragmented project structures, and reduced spontaneous interaction emerge as dominant challenges that intensify professional isolation (Mandal et al., 2025). At the same time, high task autonomy, structured digital knowledge sharing, and communities of practice provide opportunities to sustain organizational identification when supported by visible leadership. In education and Research, prolonged remote arrangements erode campus-based interaction and collegial exchange, increasing loneliness, particularly among academics working alone (Hislop et al., 2015; Kossen & Berg, 2022). Peer mentoring and faculty communities, however, function as effective social scaffolding that mitigates isolation. Telecommunications and ICT-intensive sectors face challenges related to perpetual connectivity, role ambiguity, and tool proliferation, which heighten strain and loneliness. These risks are reduced when organizations implement role clarity, consolidated platforms, and humane communication routines (Günther et al., 2022).

Creative industries are especially vulnerable to loneliness, as social isolation and work-from-home conflict directly undermine the translation of innovative work behavior into creative output. Deliberate creative rituals, hybrid studios, and engineered interaction restore relational texture and collaborative engagement. In public sector organizations, reduced visibility and informal inclusion within bureaucratic structures intensify isolation, whereas transparent communication, fairness signals, and organizational support stabilize identification (Fatima et al., 2022). In finance and banking, role overload, compliance pressure, and inter-role conflict heighten burnout and loneliness, particularly among employees with caregiving responsibilities. Explicit role definitions, flexible scheduling, and collaborative case reviews mitigate these effects (Sundermeyer, 2025). Manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare sectors face limited remote work feasibility, creating onsite remote divides that isolate planners, coordinators, and telehealth teams. Equity-focused communication, rotating visibility, and peer support practices reduce professional isolation and sustain resilience (Fatima et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2021).

Risk Factors Contribute to Workplace Loneliness in Remote Work Settings

These conditions increase cognitive and emotional strain while simultaneously reducing opportunities for meaningful social interaction (Mahomed et al., 2025; Mandal et al., 2025). Work–home conflict and blurred boundaries further exacerbate loneliness, especially among employees with caregiving responsibilities or limited physical separation between work and non-work domains (Kossen & Berg, 2022; Sundermeyer, 2025). Technostress is another prominent risk factor, arising from constant connectivity, fragmented communication platforms, and expectations of continuous availability. Excessive reliance on digital tools can weaken perceptions of social support and contribute to emotional exhaustion, thereby intensifying feelings of isolation in remote work contexts (Gao & Sai, 2020; Günther et al., 2022). These job-related pressures are often compounded by individual circumstances, shaping differential vulnerability to loneliness. At the individual level, characteristics such as living alone, early career status, and high emotional labour increase susceptibility to loneliness by limiting informal interactions, access to mentoring, and opportunities for social integration (Hislop et al., 2015; Mahomed et al., 2025).

Organizational factors further shape the experience of workplace loneliness in remote working arrangements. Weak social support structures, low leadership visibility, and poorly coordinated digital infrastructures reduce relational contact and effective communication. At the same time, perceived inequities between remote and on-site employees, particularly within hybrid arrangements, contribute to feelings of exclusion and invisibility (Nguyen, 2021; Mandal et al., 2025). Together, these organizational conditions amplify existing job-related and individual risk factors, converging to reduce meaningful social interaction, increase emotional exhaustion, and ultimately reinforce workplace loneliness (Gubernator et al., 2025; Sundermeyer, 2025).

The literature demonstrates that workplace loneliness in remote working arrangements is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by the interaction of individual, job-related, and organizational risk factors. High job demands, technostress, and blurred work–home boundaries place significant emotional and cognitive strain on remote workers, while individual characteristics such as living arrangements, career stage, and emotional labour influence susceptibility to loneliness. Organizational conditions, including weak social support, limited leadership visibility, and poor digital coordination, further intensify these risks. Collectively, these factors reduce opportunities for meaningful social interaction and contribute to emotional exhaustion, reinforcing feelings of isolation in remote work contexts. Addressing workplace loneliness, therefore, requires a holistic approach that simultaneously targets job design, organizational practices, and individual support mechanisms to foster social connection and employee well-being in remote work environments.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive review consolidates current empirical evidence on the relationship between remote work arrangements and workplace loneliness across several organizational sectors. The results indicate that remote work has a multifaceted, context-dependent impact on employees' relational experiences. Flexible work arrangements offer autonomy, temporal control, and reduced commuting demands, potentially increasing happiness and perceived job resources. However, they also transform interpersonal dynamics by restricting spontaneous interactions, undermining social bonds, and altering collaborative practices. These structural changes increase susceptibility to workplace loneliness, especially when relational resources such as organizational support, leadership visibility, and communication quality are inadequate. Thus, remote work should not be viewed as intrinsically advantageous or disadvantageous; instead, its psychosocial effects depend on how businesses structure, oversee, and facilitate distributed work settings. The analysis further indicates significant diversity among organizational sectors. Knowledge-intensive industries and creative sectors are more susceptible to loneliness due to diminished informal knowledge sharing and collaborative engagement. In contrast, industries with structured workflows or robust virtual infrastructures exhibit greater resilience when communication protocols are explicitly established. Public administration and healthcare settings demonstrate how collective identity and emotional labor amplify relational requirements. In contrast, manufacturing and logistics reveal differences between remote-capable and on-site positions that may contribute to felt exclusion. These sectoral disparities highlight that workplace loneliness arises from the interplay of job demands, relationship expectations, and institutional environment, rather than merely from physical distance.

The literature consistently identifies multiple interacting risk factors that influence loneliness outcomes in remote work settings, in addition to sectoral differences. Personal attributes, such as career phase, living circumstances, and social orientation, interact with job-related stressors, including technostress, workload intensity, and indistinct work-home boundaries. Organizational factors, specifically leadership accessibility, social support systems, and digital coordination practices, function as essential moderators that either alleviate or exacerbate sensations of isolation. These findings substantiate theoretical interpretations based on the Job Demands–Resources framework, highlighting the need to deliberately foster relationship resources to mitigate psychological demands arising from digital work environments. This study enhances the literature by synthesizing disparate research streams into a unified analytical framework that establishes workplace loneliness as a pivotal concept in remote work studies. This review enhances understanding of remote work as a multifaceted organizational phenomenon by synthesizing cross-sectoral information and interpreting findings through relational and resource-based perspectives that include both structural and psychosocial elements. The study thereby expands current understanding from mere descriptive analysis to a contextual, theoretically informed synthesis.

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