

1 **Title: Workers' Perspectives on the Effects of Telework during Pandemic on their Well-**  
2 **Being : a Qualitative Study in Canada**

3 **BACKGROUND:** The COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented health emergency across  
4 the world. Public health measures aimed at slowing the spread of the virus impose measures  
5 concerning physical distancing that citizens must observe. Thousands of workers quickly found  
6 themselves having to telework, with no preparation by their organizations. The literature reports  
7 the positive effects of teleworking on certain indicators of well-being, as well as best teleworking  
8 practices in a normal context. The urgent and unplanned nature of the switch to teleworking in a  
9 crisis may have changed the relationship between teleworking and well-being.

10 **OBJECTIVE:** This study aimed to explore workers' perspectives on teleworking in the context  
11 of the COVID-19 pandemic, regarding its effects on their well-being.

12 **METHODS:** Following a descriptive interpretive research design, we collected qualitative data  
13 from 15 teleworkers via focus groups and individual interviews. Two researchers used a thematic  
14 analysis strategy to analyze the data.

15 **RESULTS:** Data analysis led to identifying 16 factors that participants cited as influencing the  
16 well-being of teleworkers. These form eight categories: delays related to uncertainty, manager  
17 practices, organizational practices, social interactions, job characteristics, teleworking space,  
18 personal realities and personal practices. The results show the influence of interactions between  
19 work demands, control and social support on the well-being of workers.

20 **CONCLUSIONS:** Because of its many advantages, organizations and their workers will  
21 increasingly engage in telework. The influences of telework on people's well-being call for

22 implementing concrete “best practices” that are applicable and that consider workers'  
23 perspectives.

24 Keywords: COVID-19, work, telecommuting, health, qualitative research

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## 26 **1. Introduction**

27 On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic a  
28 global health emergency. To prevent the spread of the virus by ensuring physical distancing,  
29 telework quickly became a health measure that several companies around the world undertook.  
30 At the start of the pandemic, many individuals had to continue their professional activities from  
31 home, without their organizations preparing them. Workers had to adapt to new working methods  
32 or even accept new mandates [1]. In Canada, in June 2020, 39% of Canadian workers teleworked,  
33 compared to only 17% before the pandemic [2]. In the United States, 71% of people teleworked  
34 all or most of the time during the pandemic [3], while 43% of British workers did so [4].

35 The COVID-19 pandemic imposes its share of negative consequences on individuals and  
36 their well-being [5] due to continued exposure to stress, loss and change. In Canada, the  
37 proportion of people reporting good mental health in 2020 had decreased by 13% from the  
38 previous year [6], while a quarter of workers in the United States reported a decrease in their  
39 level of job satisfaction [3]. Other data suggest that Canadians living with significant financial  
40 repercussions from the pandemic have twice the rate of poor mental health and are at greater risk  
41 of developing uncertainties about their future employment [7]. However, the possibility of  
42 teleworking during the pandemic reduces the likelihood of experiencing a work stoppage or  
43 layoff, decreasing uncertainty regarding employment and income [8].

44 Teleworking is not a new way of delivering work, and the literature includes publications on  
45 the influence it can have on the well-being of individuals. Authors suggest various definitions of  
46 well-being at work, but many agree on the multidimensional aspect of well-being, including  
47 mental (e.g. cognition, affect), social (e.g. sense of belonging) and physical dimensions (e.g.

48 lifestyle, physiological disorders) [9, 10]. Teleworking has particular benefits for individuals'  
49 well-being, such as increased flexibility of working hours [1, 11, 12] and a reduction in time  
50 constraints [11, 13]. Most studies also indicate that the increase of autonomy with teleworking is  
51 beneficial [1, 11, 13, 14]. Finally, the reduction of expense and stress of travelling are positive  
52 aspects of telework for well-being [11, 12]. On the other hand, teleworking can also harm well-  
53 being, in particular by causing hyperconnectivity—that is, the inability of people to disengage  
54 from tasks outside of working hours [11, 15]. Other authors reveal that teleworking involves less  
55 communication with colleagues and employers [16], which can cause isolation [1, 17] and a  
56 decrease in social support [13, 14]. In addition, teleworking can also cause conflicts between  
57 personal and professional life [18, 19], confusing life roles and harming well-being [11, 18].  
58 Finally, the physical telework spaces may not be ergonomically sound, affecting the teleworkers'  
59 physical well-being [12, 20, 21].

60 In the context of a pandemic, the shift toward teleworking was largely involuntary and  
61 unplanned [22]. Indeed, this change in delivering work took place in a climate of crisis,  
62 uncertainty and stress [23, 24]. The anxiety engendered by this context of crisis would reduce the  
63 worker's levels of productivity and life satisfaction [25]. This context may also have changed the  
64 relationship between teleworking and individuals' well-being [26] when workers had no choice;  
65 not everyone has the same capacity to adapt well [1]. This capacity to adapt would also depend  
66 on the level of organizational preparation and previous experience of teleworking[27]. The  
67 confinement caused a greater alteration in well-being among teleworkers than among those who  
68 had the possibility of working face-to-face [28]. The conditions of carrying out telework  
69 represent one of the factors that most influences adaptation in the pandemic context [23]. The  
70 sudden change in working methods has also created the need for technological learning, [29],  
71 which significantly influences the adaptation to telework [23]. For most workers, alternating

72 between teleworking and working at organizational locations was not an option [1]. For this  
73 reason, the pandemic has likely generated a feeling of social isolation that teleworkers can  
74 experience while being home most of the time [22, 30-34] as well as a decrease in organisational  
75 commitment [30]. Besides, Carillo et al. (2021) [23] indicate that professional isolation is the  
76 factor that most influences adaptation to telework in the context of a pandemic as well as being  
77 associated with job satisfaction [35]. As teleworking takes place every day, the sedentary lifestyle  
78 of workers is increasing, which can be detrimental to their well-being [24, 36, 37]. On the other  
79 hand, with childcare services and schools closed for part of the pandemic, workers have had to  
80 combine teleworking and childcare [22]. This situation may have accentuated the deterioration of  
81 the balance between professional and personal life, adding to the issue of adaptation [1, 32, 33,  
82 38, 39]. In addition, teleworking in a pandemic situation could increase the number of working  
83 hours and the feeling of inability to disconnect, which is associated to professional stress [40, 41].

84 To promote adaptation in the context of teleworking during the pandemic and help in  
85 maintaining well-being, some authors raise favoured practices. First, they particularly encourage  
86 all forms of support from the organization [24, 42], the manager [24, 43, 44] and colleagues [22,  
87 42]. Facilitating networking among colleagues also needs to be promoted [24]. Some studies also  
88 recommend training for employees, such as cybersecurity training [45], ergonomic training [39]  
89 or training in managing the boundary between personal and professional life [24]. Given the rapid  
90 shift to a virtual working environment, good technical support is also desirable [24, 29]. On the  
91 organizational level, building a teleworking policy [11, 44] and establishing an action plan to  
92 oversee this mode of work delivery [22] are advisable. As teleworkers are at greater risk of a  
93 sedentary lifestyle, authors strongly encourage regular physical activity [46]. Spending all the  
94 time at home, the individual's teleworking environment should be suitable and adequately

95 equipped [39, 46]. In addition, using a specific and isolated place reduces distractions, which  
96 having the whole family at home can make more frequent [47, 48]. Moreover, avoiding working  
97 outside working hours can prevent work-family conflicts [49]. Finally, the literature recommends  
98 the teleworker create a routine to follow during workdays [38, 46]. Although these  
99 recommendations offer avenues for solutions to promote the well-being of workers in the context  
100 of teleworking during the pandemic, a lot come from literature reviews, experts or surveys, and  
101 rarely from a qualitative design. However, qualitative studies allow space for discussion,  
102 generative in-depth analyses of the perspective of the people mainly concerned, namely, the  
103 workers. Rather than analyzing the measurement of variables, qualitative analysis aims to  
104 understand and interpret practices and experiences through intellectual work to bring out the  
105 meaning of the elements mentioned [50]. Thus, documentation on workers' perspectives on their  
106 experience of teleworking in the context of a pandemic is sparse.

107         The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the way we work, in addition to influencing  
108 the well-being of individuals. Since health emergency measures made it impossible to work at the  
109 sites of organizations, many people had to turn to telework to continue their professional  
110 activities. This working method generates its share of benefits and challenges for workers and  
111 their well-being. Although authors document the influences of teleworking on people's well-  
112 being [e.g., 51, 52, 53], the pandemic has changed the context in which it takes place. Thus, it is  
113 important to document how they have experienced the situation to date, to build the future  
114 situation. To ensure that teleworking practices arising from the pandemic experience respect  
115 workers' rights and do not affect their well-being negatively, consulting them to understand their  
116 realities and needs is important. Documenting the perspectives of workers with the experience of  
117 teleworking during the pandemic is essential to fine-tuning existing recommendations and

118 generating new ones. This increases the chances of adopting these practices and contributing to  
119 the well-being of workers. By acknowledging the lack of literature on the subject, this study  
120 aimed to contribute toward filling the gap by exploring workers' perspectives on teleworking in  
121 the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, regarding the effects on their well-being. The pursuit of  
122 this objective will address the following research question: "What factors related to the  
123 experience of teleworking during the pandemic influence individuals' well-being?"

## 124 **2. Theoretical framework**

125 The model by Karasek and Theorell (1990) [54] predicts that job strain is the result of  
126 interactions between the degree of job control, job demands and social support that individuals  
127 experience in the course of their work [54]. The literature recognizes that teleworking alters the  
128 levels of control, demand and support due to several factors (i.e. isolation, fewer time constraints,  
129 more flexible work schedules, hyperconnectivity, role conflicts) that make this model relevant for  
130 this study. Moreover, this model has already been used in the context of telework [55].

131 While professional demands refer to certain quantitative factors (e.g. amount of work,  
132 time constraints, complexity of the task, emotional demands), control at work comprises two  
133 elements: skill discretion and decision authority. Skill discretion corresponds to the opportunities  
134 a worker has to develop and use his or her skills, while decision authority refers to the leeway a  
135 worker has in the way he or she does the job [54]. To adapt this model to the reality of today's  
136 workers, this study follows the examples of Duxbury and Halinski (2014) [55] and Kelly and  
137 Moen (2007) [56], who reconceptualize and reoperationalize demands and control to reflect  
138 workers' contemporary realities. Therefore, the concept of control becomes redefined, to include  
139 control of one's schedule, since this factor would favour workers' well-being [56], while the

140 concept of demand will include family demands, to be more holistic [55]. Social support is the set  
141 of social interactions in the workplace with colleagues and superiors [54].

142 Specifically, Karasek and Theorell (1990) [54] model first theorizes the *strain hypothesis*,  
143 according to which many demands and little control over them, as well as little social support,  
144 would lead to strain at work [57]. Consequently, the tension at work would lead to poor  
145 psychological and physiological well-being [57]. This model also coins the *buffer hypothesis*,  
146 which postulates that high levels of social support and control over work would mitigate the  
147 negative effects of very demanding work [57]. The last theory this model raises is that of active  
148 learning, which hypothesizes that with high levels of demand, social support and control of work,  
149 the demands act as a source of challenge and regeneration, rather than as a source of strain [57].

### 150 **3. Methods**

#### 151 **3.1 Design**

152 This study followed an interpretive descriptive research design [58], consisting of  
153 describing phenomena from the perspectives of the individuals concerned, consistent with the  
154 objective of the study [58]. We also selected this qualitative design since, by documenting the  
155 perspectives of those affected and considering human subjectivity, it provides a detailed  
156 description of the phenomenon in its natural context [59-61].

#### 157 **3.2 Participants**

158 Criteria for participating in the study included 1) being 18 years of age or over, 2) having  
159 teleworked during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 3) being able to speak and understand French.  
160 The researchers used a purposive sampling method and selected participants based on a  
161 maximum variation sampling strategy [62]. Recruiters ensured diversity in terms of gender, age



162 and type of job, through advertisements in the research team members' networks, on social media  
163 and by soliciting partner organizations, resulting in 15 participants being recruited between  
164 February 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 22<sup>nd</sup> of the year 2021. At that time, pandemic-related telework was in  
165 progress for about one year.

### 166 **3.3 Procedure**

167 Participants first had to complete a two-part web questionnaire consisting of a consent  
168 form and socio-demographic information (e.g. type of employment, type of dwelling, marital  
169 status). Second, the first three authors conducted focus groups to document the experiences of  
170 teleworking in a pandemic context and their effects on workers' well-being. One of the authors  
171 led the conversation while the other two took notes. A pretested interview guide consisted of six  
172 themes: 1) Introduction (e.g. summarize in one sentence your teleworking experience since the  
173 start of the pandemic); 2) Teleworking conditions (e.g. what conditions have been helpful for  
174 your teleworking experience in recent months?); 3) Individual and organizational practices (e.g.  
175 what ways of working have helped you feel good at work?); 4) Good moves and facilitators (e.g.  
176 if you think back to your teleworking experience over the past few months, tell us what worked  
177 well and how it impacted your well-being); 5) Challenges and obstacles (e.g. think back to your  
178 teleworking experience over the past few months; tell us what went less well and how it impacted  
179 your well-being); 6) Improvements (e.g. if another pandemic arose, how could the teleworking  
180 experience improve to promote workers' well-being?). According to Gallagher (2014) [58], the  
181 ideal number of participants in a focus group is 5 to 12 participants, allowing everyone to speak  
182 while having a wider variety of topics. The present study respected this recommendation. The  
183 first group included seven people, and five were in the second group. The average duration of the  
184 focus groups was of 108 minutes. Due to scheduling conflicts, three participants had individual

185 videoconference interviews, lasting an average duration of 47 minutes. Regarding the number of  
186 groups required to reach content saturation, Guest and Namey [63] indicate that operating two or  
187 three focus groups will capture at least 80% of the topics. In doing so, the number of groups and  
188 participants was determined during the study, according to the achievement of saturation.  
189 According on literature on qualitative research, saturation may occur within the first twelve  
190 participants[63]. Thus, we collected data with 15 participants during two focus groups (n = 12)  
191 and three individual interviews (n = 3).

### 192 **3.4 Analyses**

193         Once transcribed recordings became verbatim transcripts, we used a thematic analysis  
194 strategy [50] to analyze the data, using the software QDA miner 6.0. This process of generating  
195 themes from the data that meet the research objective includes following five systematic steps  
196 that reflect an inductive posture [50]: 1) repeated reading of the data corpus to give an impression  
197 of immersion, 2) first coding of the elements of meaning identified, 3) attribution of meaningful  
198 labels to coded elements of meaning, 4) synthesis and assembly of codes in a structure with  
199 categories and/or themes and 5) moving back and forth between the data corpus and the general  
200 structure to ensure the interpretation of the selected elements.

201         Two analysts independently analyzed each interview. After each analysis, the two  
202 analysts met to discuss, compare and integrate their coding, to generate a common version that  
203 ensures inter-judge agreement and better validity [64]. Then, a third person reviewed the coding  
204 of each interview to give feedback. Between the analyses of the interviews, the researchers built a  
205 topic tree from the codes. Each interview was analyzed and coded from the topic tree the  
206 previous interview had produced. This procedure ensured the accuracy of the analyses since they

207 were reworked and revised multiple times by different people until reaching a product  
208 representing the data as faithfully as possible.

### 209 **3.5 Ethical statement**

210 The research ethics board of the *[removed for review process]*.

## 211 **4. Results**

### 212 **4.1 Description of participants**

213 Of the 15 participants in this study, 10 (67%) were women. The individuals were between  
214 25 and 62 years old ( $M = 41$ ;  $SD = 11$ ) at the time of their participation, and they were working  
215 between 32 and 45 hours per week. Participants held jobs in different sectors (e.g. sales manager,  
216 professor-researcher, environmental inspector), and 87% mostly teleworked. Of the 15  
217 participants, 13 said they wanted to mostly telework in the future. Table 1 presents the  
218 descriptive characteristics of the sample.

219 *Insert Table 1 here*

### 220 **4.2 Teleworking experience during the pandemic and its effects on well-being**

221 Analysis of the data we collected revealed 16 factors related to the experience of  
222 teleworking in a pandemic context that would affect well-being. These factors gather into eight  
223 categories related to the individual, the organization or the interaction between these two, as  
224 exposed in Figure 1. These factors illustrate aspects of teleworking in a pandemic context that the  
225 participants particularly mentioned as having an influence on workers' well-being. Depending on  
226 the context and the period since the beginning of teleworking during the pandemic, the identified  
227 factors may have positively or negatively influenced workers' well-being.

228 *Insert Figure 1 here*

229 In the next paragraphs, we present the 8 categories (in bold subheadings) and 16 factors (in  
230 italics) arising from the experience of teleworking during the pandemic, relating to its effects on  
231 workers.

### 232 **Delays related to uncertainty**

233 Due to the abrupt change in working methods and the lack of precedent for the pandemic,  
234 workers had to wait a certain period for their organization to be ready to face this new reality; there  
235 was a period of uncertainty. Participants mentioned that this delay related to uncertainty mainly  
236 had negative influences on their well-being because it led to a climate of insecurity that caused  
237 stress. The workers found themselves faced with the unknown, without reference points, and this  
238 was difficult for many. The *first form of delay took hold before clear guidelines* on how to operate  
239 in this new way of working came from the organization:

240 “At first, it wasn't really clear, but I think it wasn't clear to them [the managers]  
241 either. So, they can't give us directions if they wait for directions [...]. We  
242 asked questions, then we didn't really know what was coming. We didn't know  
243 how long it was going to take and all that.”<sup>1</sup> [P06]<sup>2</sup>

244 Several participants perceived this delay as “a loss of bearings” [P01]. The *second form of delay*  
245 *occurred before having support programs*, especially for access to office equipment. Thus,  
246 participants had "the impression of being left to themselves" [P07]. This delay may have caused  
247 workers stress, as one participant reported:

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<sup>1</sup> Verbatim extracts from the participants' interviews exemplify the factors. The extracts are a free translation from the original French transcripts.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers (1 to 15) in the brackets refer to the participant's number.

248 “Before things were clearer in terms of assistance programs [...], it took a good  
249 two months before we got organized [...]. That was a stressful part, unsettling.”  
250 [P03]

### 251 **Manager practices**

252 Despite the delays related to the uncertainty that prevailed at the beginning of the  
253 pandemic, most workers quickly felt the human qualities and attentive gestures of their managers,  
254 which lessened the negative effects on their well-being. Manager practices—namely, supervisor's  
255 management behaviours—stand out as another category of factors that affected the well-being of  
256 teleworkers. Teleworkers have reported *individual consideration practices* as favouring their  
257 well-being. These practices refer particularly to managers showing concern for their employees'  
258 well-being, as well as openness:

259 “[...] we have three partners, three managers, three ladies who manage the  
260 company, and they really have a real concern to make sure that it works well, to  
261 be transparent but also to see how things are going, how [they can] help so that  
262 [employees can] adapt as best possible.” [P05]

263 The *daily videoconference meetings* the manager organized to communicate with the employees  
264 represent another management practice favourable to the well-being the participants reported:

265 “Then, my boss also decided to do more daily sessions on how things are with  
266 the whole team. [...] see how it's going, to have a little moment during the day  
267 to discuss our plans for the day and then how it's going. [...] I really enjoyed  
268 these small daily periods like this.” [P04]

269 Participants also reported that these daily meetings influenced their well-being, making it  
270 possible to observe “where we are in our situation and what options are available to us.” [P05]

### 271 **Organizational practices**

272 Another category of factors that participants identified as influencing well-being relates to  
273 organizational practices—that is to say, the measures the organization, for whom individuals  
274 work, put in place. Our results suggest that practices were planned, but that the actual logistic had  
275 not been thoroughly worked out. The presence of a *teleworking policy* in the organization would  
276 positively promote the well-being of teleworkers:

277 “We already had a teleworking policy that was in effect [...], so there were  
278 already things in place. Everything was already ready, the infrastructure,  
279 everything was already ready. So, for that, it was good.” [P10]

280 Among organizational practices, the availability of *remote computer access* also reportedly  
281 positively influences well-being:

282 “On the other hand, luckily I had all my remote access with my computer to be  
283 able to work remotely [...]. We were overwhelmed by customers, I had to  
284 gather my troops, reassure them, encourage them to come and work. So, we had  
285 to be present for the team, without being there physically [.]” [P09]

286 Although the organizational practices to be followed were theoretically established, their  
287 actualization in the daily life of the workers was not without pitfalls, which had negative effects  
288 for the teleworkers. Indeed, some individuals initially did not have remote access, which they  
289 reported negatively impacted their well-being, implying that the organization was “really not  
290 organized.” [P11]

## 291 **Social interactions**

292 Participants reported changes in their social interactions relating to their experience of  
293 teleworking during the pandemic. Many mentioned experiencing a lack of social interaction that  
294 is harmful to well-being, but they found means to compensate. Indeed, since they worked  
295 remotely, exchanges between workers did not occur face to face, which changed communicating  
296 with others. *Virtual meetings* – as compared to face-to-face meetings - were a factor that  
297 participants frequently reported as negatively influencing their well-being:

298 “[...] the screen is okay, but seriously, both as a team and with the clients, to  
299 have the presence in real life [...] was the element that I missed the most, that I  
300 still miss the most and which has affected me the most [...] in the last few  
301 months.” [P05]

302 Even though the interactions had to be done virtually, which was difficult for many workers,  
303 individuals mentioned *informal synchronous interactions* with both colleagues and employers as  
304 having a positive influence on their well-being, acting as a compensation means, at least in part:

305 “My manager organizes, once every two weeks or so, a virtual lunch where  
306 there is no expectation to talk about work or anything. It's just ... we chat  
307 informally. So that, I would say, is something that helps me stay engaged,  
308 motivated [at my work].” [P08]

## 309 **Job characteristics**

310 Participants reported some characteristics of their job that had positive (i.e., schedule  
311 flexibility) of mitigate (i.e., workload) effects on their well-being. One of the characteristics of  
312 work that participants mentioned as greatly influencing the well-being of workers is *schedule*

313 *flexibility*. Flexible working hours were seen as helpful for well-being, since workers were able  
314 to work at times that were optimal for them and better able to juggle personal and work roles:

315 “ [...] currently working from home I appreciate that, it's really practical to be able to  
316 manage your schedule as you can, as you want. If there's something going on with the  
317 kids, you're available [...]” [P10]

318 Indeed, workers had the prospect of this factor giving them more freedom to perform  
319 other activities or to take breaks— for example, to exercise:

320 “[...] I would say that being able to work when I really want to is pleasant,  
321 because if ever in the afternoon I feel like going for an hour's walk, coming  
322 back and working in the evening to recover that hour [...], it's a freedom that I  
323 find really pleasant [...].” [P01]

324 In addition, this factor has become a source of motivation:

325 “[...] That was the part that I found the most interesting, I could really manage  
326 my schedule. I'm the type [of person] who wakes up very early, so I do a few  
327 hours in the morning [...] so the modifiable schedule was a way of motivating  
328 me [...].” [P02].

329 *Workload* is also a work characteristic that participants mentioned as an influence on  
330 their well-being. Some noticed an increase in their workload, especially at the start of  
331 the pandemic, which was seen as detrimental to well-being:

332 “[...] so, I don't know if this is an impression or if it has really increased.  
333 Anyway, I have the impression that my task has increased [...]. The hour or the



334 hour and a half in the car when you decompress, when you think of something  
335 else [...] I no longer have that decanting time [so I work instead].” [P05]

336 On the contrary, depending on the economic sector and on the readiness of  
337 organizations to move their operations to virtual mode, other participants rather felt a  
338 decrease in their workload, which allowed them to “breathe a little.” [P06]

### 339 **Teleworking space**

340 The telework space refers to the physical environment in which individuals work, also  
341 likely to influence their well-being. Participants shared that having a dedicated area was helpful,  
342 but the lack of ergonomics of their equipment negatively influenced their well-being. First, the  
343 possibility of *dedicating an areato* teleworking was an aspect that participants mentioned many  
344 times as favourable to their well-being:

345 “[...] I now have a desk, which isn't really an office, but anyway I have a fixed  
346 space that's dedicated to that, [to work], so it's easier; then I think the  
347 environment is very favourable, very necessary, to have a good job.” [P13]

348 Reserving the area for teleworking also allowed some participants to have “*a quiet corner*” [P11]  
349 without disturbance. Then, they mentioned the availability and adaptation of *equipment and*  
350 *technological infrastructure* as promoting workers’ well-being:

351 “When the pandemic broke out, I realized that I had a computer that was up to  
352 date, that was hyper functional, that access was fine, and I was really happy to  
353 have this working tool that was really efficient, because if it hadn't been the  
354 case, I think it would have been very, very laborious.” [P09]

355 Participants reported that the quality of the equipment and the workstation also influenced well-  
356 being, although some reported “back problems,” [P07] “fatigue” [P01] and “migraines” [P12]  
357 because of non-adapted equipment.

### 358 **Personal realities**

359 Personal realities influenced workers’ adaptation to telework, especially family roles and  
360 ability to disconnect. Among personal realities influencing teleworker well-being, participants  
361 mentioned *family roles*:

362 “What was difficult was the presence of the children. You work when they  
363 sleep, so you don't sleep, you're tired, it's like a spinning wheel.” [P12].

364 Participants had to deal with “the adaptation of trying to share [the role of employee with] the  
365 role of parent,” [P01] which affected their well-being. The *ability to disconnect* outside of  
366 working hours was also a factor they reported as influencing their well-being:

367 “We take [up] bad habits. For lunch, we prepare a quick meal and then eat in  
368 front of our screen while working. So, it's the separation [...]. When you are at  
369 the office, you have a cut[-off]. Going home, you're no longer at work, whereas  
370 in teleworking, this cut-off [...] is less easy to make.” [P15]

### 371 **Personal work practices**

372 Finally, participants repeatedly mentioned personal practices—that is to say, the working  
373 methods that teleworkers borrowed or developed—as positively influencing their well-being,  
374 notably by increasing motivation and adequately manage schedule. One such work practice  
375 includes *methods of motivation* at work:

376 “I too tend to work when I feel more motivated, or I will do tasks for which I  
377 feel motivated today. [...] Me, what re-engages me I would say in my work, it is  
378 the Zoom [meetings]. [...] So, when I have [lack of] motivation, I try to call  
379 small Zooms [with colleagues]. In any case, it helps me” [P03].

380 Another such practice aims to use *methods to manage one's work schedule*:

381 “Starting early, [because] in the afternoon, I may be less brain active, I am less  
382 ‘on.’ [...] I will take the opportunity to do household chores and then all that,  
383 which will allow me to have time with the children also in the evening.” [P13]

384 People choose the times of the day when they work, according to their needs, which promotes  
385 their well-being.

## 386 **5. Discussion and recommendations**

387 This study aimed to explore workers’ perspectives on teleworking in the context of the  
388 COVID-19 pandemic, regarding effects on their well-being. Analysis of data we collected from  
389 15 teleworkers revealed 16 factors relating to telework in the pandemic context, which we  
390 grouped into eight categories. The factors we identified were those workers found as influencing  
391 their well-being, either positively or negatively. The results of this study contribute to the  
392 advancement of knowledge on theoretical and practical standpoints. From a theoretical  
393 standpoint, this study helps to increase knowledge of demand-control-support interactions in the  
394 contemporary situation of teleworking during the pandemic. This study also highlights the  
395 important influence of the individual, organizational and social dimensions of the environment on  
396 workers’ well-being. On a practical level, this study makes it possible to generate avenues for  
397 concrete recommendations that organizations and workers may put in place to optimize well-

398 being in the context of teleworking. Since these recommendations come from the reality of  
399 workers, they complement those that come from expert opinions or literature reviews.

## 400 **5.1 The influence of demands, control and support on workers' well-being**

401 Consistent with the results of the telework study by Duxbury and Halinski (2014) [55],  
402 the high-level demands in our results mainly concern the interaction of work with the family  
403 domain. Workers perceived these demands as negative influences on their well-being. Indeed,  
404 they mentioned the difficulty of disconnecting causing longer working days, as well as increased  
405 family responsibilities as unfavourable for their well-being. Indeed, the situation experienced  
406 during the pandemic with schools or daycares closed, home schooling, and mandatory  
407 teleworking for several members of a household was unprecedented and strained people's coping  
408 skills, adding to their demands. While research prior to the pandemic period suggested that  
409 teleworking may increase people's ability to balance work and family roles by the flexibility it  
410 provides [65-67], this did not appear to be the case during the particular context of the pandemic.  
411 However, our findings agree with the study of Kelly and Moen (2007) [56] that increased work  
412 control—that is, the possibility to manage schedule that teleworking offers—appeared to have a  
413 particularly positive influence on workers' well-being, and may have compensated – at least  
414 partly – the negative effects of the high-level demands. This form of autonomy has allowed  
415 workers to develop methods or strategies for adapting the work to their needs, giving themselves  
416 leeway to carry out the work while preserving their well-being. In addition, the virtual nature of  
417 meetings with colleagues and superiors caused a lack of social interaction that they saw as very  
418 harmful to their well-being. Nonetheless, daily informal synchronous meetings that partially  
419 filled this gap appeared to be a contributing factor in their well-being. This is consistent with the  
420 influence of social support on well-being in Karasek and Theorell model (1990) [54]. Nearly all

421 of the participants wish to continue teleworking in the future, so we may assume that this is a  
422 working modality that they value and perceive favourably. Thus, combining increased work  
423 control with some social support appears to mitigate the adverse welfare effects of high-level  
424 demands, even in the particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our results thus suggest that  
425 the use of the Karasek and Theorell model (1990) [54] is relevant for studying worker's well-  
426 being despite the context. Indeed, the concepts of the model apply well in the context of  
427 teleworking during the pandemic, even with a work reality that has not been studied much so far  
428 (e.g., virtual social contacts, isolation at home with family, abrupt changes in work tasks).

## 429 **5.2 Well-being of teleworkers: an important influence of the environment**

430 The results of this study support the important influence of the environment on the well-  
431 being of teleworkers. Indeed, 16 factors, including individual, organizational and social  
432 environmental factors during the pandemic, highlight teleworking's influence on well-being.

433 First, on an individual level, the physical work environment seems to be a factor that  
434 influences the well-being of teleworkers. Dedicating an area to teleworking is desirable, allowing  
435 the worker to isolate from the disturbances of the household and perform tasks by concentrating  
436 and, thus, feeling good. Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt (2021) [68] corroborate this result, reporting the  
437 difficulty of working when there are distractions in the house that can interfere with  
438 concentration. Having access to a teleworking room can also decrease the occurrence of work-life  
439 interference associated with physical and mental health issues [69]. The results of this study also  
440 highlight other factors of the individual worker's environment, including the quality of  
441 equipment and technological infrastructure, that workers report as influencing their well-being.  
442 Some participants also mentioned having experienced physical occupational injuries, such as  
443 back pain, due to their work equipment. Scientific literature supports this point; numerous studies

444 suggest that workers tend to settle on unsuitable workstations, resulting in non-neutral postures  
445 associated with increased risk of musculoskeletal injuries [20, 70]. Many participants in this  
446 study reported that installing suitable and ergonomic office equipment markedly improved their  
447 well-being while working in greater comfort and better situated. Some studies, including Lopez-  
448 Leon and Forero's (2020) [46], also support the need for suitable ergonomic equipment for  
449 teleworking.

450         At the organizational level, a few environmental factors seem particularly influential, such  
451 as the daily meetings the organization sets up. These frequent meetings better informed  
452 teleworkers about the evolution of the pandemic situation and its impacts on the organization.  
453 The uncertain context of the pandemic and the abrupt change in working patterns make having  
454 this kind of information particularly important. In the same sense, authors report that daily  
455 teleworking meetings were very useful in facilitating work monitoring, clarifying and  
456 coordinating the roles and responsibilities of workers and ensuring better group cohesion [71].  
457 Also, in relation to the organizational environment, workers reported that the support the  
458 organization offered (e.g. technological support) was difficult to obtain at the start of the  
459 pandemic, apparently influencing their well-being negatively. In fact, some did not have  
460 immediate access to support and felt left on their own during this stressful time. This study  
461 underlines the importance of formalizing the procedures and access to equipment in order to  
462 better frame the functioning of telework in a pandemic and thus avoid the stress linked to the  
463 climate of uncertainty. To improve these environmental factors linked with the organization, pre-  
464 established teleworking policies (including a structured plan for implementing these policies) can  
465 prove useful, since they allow teleworkers to have a clear and supportive structure from the start,

466 in addition to getting help quickly. Moreover, certain studies concerning teleworking include this  
467 recommendation [23, 43].

468 Finally, on the social level, the results of this study show that teleworkers felt the need for  
469 social interactions that the technological environment did not fully satisfy. Although it was  
470 possible to communicate with their colleagues virtually, many participants reported experiencing  
471 a glaring lack of face-to-face social interactions that negatively influenced their well-being.  
472 Numerous studies also report this telework challenge, such as that of Greer and Payne (2014)  
473 [18]. Indeed, telework transformed communications by making workers feel more formal and  
474 distant, possibly reducing their sense of belonging and causing social isolation [72, 73].  
475 However, informal synchronous meetings that workers or employers organized helped to  
476 improve their well-being, providing workers with support. According to Tremblay and Demers  
477 (2020) [22], these communications are essential for maintaining team cohesion and corporate  
478 culture.

479 These results are consistent with theoretical models in occupational health that recognize  
480 the link between the environment and well-being [e.g. 74, 75-77]. They also agree with the model  
481 according to which labour resources at the individual, group, leader and organization levels  
482 influence the well-being of the worker, the IGLO model [78].

## 483 **5.2 Recommendations from the experience of teleworkers**

484 The results of this study recommend best practices relating to teleworking to reduce its  
485 negative influences on workers' well-being. Table 2 summarizes these practices that come from  
486 the experience of teleworkers. First, organizations should establish clear teleworking policies to  
487 avoid uncertainty among workers and include a structured plan for implementing these policies.

488 These policies would also help in framing work demands, so the workload and hours of work are  
489 optimal. Then, for those for whom it is a possibility, we recommend that workers organize their  
490 home to dedicate a room to teleworking, with ergonomic equipment. Finally, the last  
491 recommendation supports the need to ensure several forms of support from the organization,  
492 employer and colleagues. To support teleworkers, organizations can equip them with ergonomic  
493 office equipment and appropriate technological infrastructure, while employers can schedule  
494 daily meetings to ensure follow-up and communication with their employees. Colleagues can  
495 work together to help each other and provide another form of social support, through informal  
496 synchronous meetings or exchanges. The best practices that emerge from this study come from  
497 teleworkers' experience, increasing their likelihood of implementation. Consistent with our  
498 results, the recommendations mainly concern the environment, whether they relate to the  
499 organization (e.g. policies), individual (e.g. teleworking space) or even colleagues (e.g. support)..

500 *Insert Table 2 here*

501 These recommendations complement those already available in the scientific literature,  
502 making it possible to generate a knowledge base to guide future teleworking practices. However,  
503 it is important to consider that the challenges of adapting to telework may vary among  
504 individuals. Thus, employers need to be aware of the challenges and needs of individuals and  
505 take an individualized approach to supporting each of their workers when it is possible.  
506 Researchers highlighted this idea of the importance for employers to be sensitive to the specific  
507 characteristics of their employees [79], to consider the different realities [80] and unique needs of  
508 workers [81]. Research conducted during the pandemic demonstrated that a one-size-fits-all  
509 approach would not be optimal to promote the well-being of workers; an equitable approach that  
510 considers individual realities and needs would be preferred [82, 83]. A concrete means to



511 implement such an approach would be to involve teleworkers in decisions [67] and to encourage  
512 their initiatives [83] towards the application of these recommendations, which may enhance their  
513 control over the situation and favor their well-being as suggested by the model of Karasek and  
514 Theorell (1990).

### 515 **5.3 Strengths and limitations**

516         The main strength of this study is its analysis of workers' perspectives; most studies on the  
517 subject comprise literature reviews or expert opinions. Using focus groups gave workers the  
518 chance to discuss and exchange views on various topics that helped them better understand their  
519 experience of teleworking during the pandemic. Another strength of this study is the qualitative  
520 design. The pandemic is a unique situation that includes features that may not be detectable in a  
521 quantitative design. The constitution of the sample appears to be a limitation of this study; the  
522 jobs of more than half of the participants are in the private sector; very few are in the community  
523 and parapublic sector, where the reality may not be the same. Also, the cross-sectional nature of  
524 this study made it difficult to capture the evolution and adaptation during the 12 months of  
525 teleworking experienced by the participants. Indeed, they reported different factors that may have  
526 changed over time. However, it was difficult to assess the chronological evolution of these  
527 factors in the focus group. This information should be considered when interpreting and using the  
528 results of this study. Finally, interpreting the data requires noting that this study engaged only  
529 French-speaking Canadians, calling for use of judgment since the results may not necessarily  
530 transfer intact to another population.

### 531 **6. Conclusion**

532         This study aimed to explore workers' perspectives on teleworking in the context of the  
533 COVID-19 pandemic, regarding its effects on their well-being. The results highlighted 16 factors

534 that specifically influence workers' well-being. Consistent with the theoretical model, the levels  
535 of demands, control and social support are among those influences. In particular, the importance  
536 of considering the environment, in its individual, organizational and social aspects, emerged to  
537 promote the well-being of teleworkers. This study enables recommending best teleworking  
538 practices to workers and their organizations, to improve their well-being. For the future, more  
539 than half of the participants in this study wish to continue primarily teleworking, supporting the  
540 importance of investigating this mode of work delivery to better understand its effects. Further  
541 studies could advance knowledge of telework, which will inevitably become an increasing part of  
542 tomorrow's reality. Future research could use a quantitative design to examine the relationships  
543 between the different factors and well-being.

#### 544 **Acknowledgments**

545 The authors thank all study participants for their time and investment.

#### 546 **Fundings**

547 This work was supported by a research grant from the *[removed for review process]*.

#### 548 **Conflicts of interest**

549 None of the authors has any conflict of interest to declare.

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#### **Références**

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