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WORKING AT HOME:
FINDINGS FROM THE 2001 CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY

Home-based work is often thought of as a way to meet both employers' and employees' needs for flexibility. However, home-based work also blurs the distinction between and permeates the boundaries of work and family life. The goal of the analysis is to begin to understand whether home-based work might fit family needs at certain life-course stages or whether it more often represents "spillover" that can be detrimental to family life.

In this paper we first examine the distinct demographic, family, and labor force characteristics of those who do some of their work at home, all of their work at home, or who do not work any hours at home. Second, we examine the reasons reported for working at home, including work "spillover" and family caregiving responsibilities, of workers who do some or all of their paid work at home.

This analysis uses data from the May 2001 Current Population Survey (CPS) work-schedule supplement, which was conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Data collected in the May 2001 supplement of the CPS were based on a sample size of approximately 50,000 households.

The first part of this analysis will look at all employed people age 18 and older working in their primary job in nonagricultural industries. Home-based workers are defined broadly as people who report working at home on their primary job at least once a week. These workers are further divided by those who report doing all of their work at home, some of their work at home,

or none of their work at home. We use a multinomial logistic regression model to contrast workers who do some or all of their work with those in standard arrangements where all paid work is done outside the home. The independent measures in the model include: age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, marital status, presence of children, age of youngest child, class of worker, full- and part-time status of worker, industrial sector, and occupational group. Review of the literature indicates that home-based workers are more likely than traditional, onsite workers to be self employed, to work nonstandard hours, to work in service industries and occupations, to earn less, to be white, and to be women. Therefore, given previous research, we expect to find differences between home-based workers and traditional, onsite workers. In addition, we also expect to find distinct differences among the population that works at home by whether they do some or all of their work at home.

The second part of the paper will focus only on home-based workers (including both those who do some and all of their work at home). The purpose of this analysis is to examine the reasons why these people choose to work at home. The main reasons for working at home include “to finish or catch up on work,” “business is conducted from home,” “nature of the job,” “coordinate personal or family needs,” “reduce commuting time and expenses,” “participate in pollution program,” and “other.” This part of the paper examines the demographic, family, and labor force correlates of each of the reasons for working at home.

Understanding the differences among home-based workers is an important first step to anticipating future trends in this mode of work—trends that will help both employers and policymakers make well informed choices about how best to create and maintain successful family-friendly work environments.