

# The Rise of the Remote Partner

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## Abstract

*Recent years have seen a significant shift in gender roles among well-educated and high-earning couples, particularly in Western societies, as more women pursue careers outside the home while their male partners often assume household responsibilities. This trend, often termed the rise of the "remote husband," reflects evolving work dynamics and gender roles facilitated by the increase in remote work opportunities. However, the term "Remote Partner" may be more encompassing, as it acknowledges the contributions of both partners in a modern relationship. This shift marks a departure from the traditional male breadwinner-female homemaker model, fostering a more egalitarian approach where both partners actively engage in their careers in varying capacities.*

*The rise of remote work has significantly impacted gender dynamics, offering increased flexibility in career decisions and responsibilities. Men continue to dominate fields such as technology and engineering, while women increasingly enter traditionally male-dominated professions like law and medicine. Despite existing disparities in remote work opportunities—where men often enjoy more flexibility—this new paradigm has facilitated women's career advancement. Consequently, couples are navigating challenges associated with remote work, including balancing travel and location decisions, managing loneliness and isolation, and maintaining work-life balance. These dynamics necessitate substantial compromises and adjustments as partners strive to sustain companionship and support while pursuing their professional goals.*

*Ultimately, this evolving landscape underscores the importance of partnership and mutual support in modern relationships, as both partners work collaboratively to achieve their personal and professional aspirations.*

## Introduction

*"The great marriages are partnerships. It can't be a great marriage without being a partnership" – Helen Mirren*

In recent years, a notable trend has emerged among well-educated and high-earning couples, particularly in Western societies. A growing number of women are leaving home each morning to pursue their careers in offices, classrooms, or hospitals, while their husbands remain at home. This phenomenon, often referred to as the rise of the "remote husband," reflects significant shifts in work dynamics, gender roles, and the impact of remote work on modern relationships. However, I believe that a better term is 'Remote Partner' rather than just 'Remote Husband', as it can apply to either party in a working couple. On reflection it would be appropriate to refer to all participants in a modern-day marriage as 'partners' rather than as the stereotypical 'husband' 'wife' or even 'spouse' as in the words of Helen Mirren 'great marriages are partnerships'

## The New Gender Dynamics in the Workforce

The traditional model of male breadwinner and female homemaker is being reshaped. However, rather than a nostalgic return to the 1950s, this trend represents a new age of partnership where both partners are actively involved in their careers, albeit in different ways.

Men and women still specialise in different kinds of work. Jobs in industries like computer science and engineering are disproportionately performed by men. Teaching and nursing jobs are dominated by women. Professions like law and medicine may still employ more men than women, but the scales are tipping: more women than men are enrolled in law schools and medical schools. As such, among young couples, she is probably more likely to be going to be a lawyer or a doctor than he is.

**Example:** Consider a couple where the wife is a dedicated nurse, committed to her hospital shifts, while the husband is a software developer who can work remotely. As she leaves for her demanding job, he manages his tasks from their home office, demonstrating a partnership that balances work and domestic responsibilities differently than in past decades.

Even before this role reversal became acceptable, way back in 1990s, I was a *Chartered Accountant* with a thriving accounting firm and got married to an *Air Hostess* who loved her job. As such, we built our home on the same premises as my office and thereby I became the 'house husband'. This role reversal allowed both 'partners' to thrive professionally, socially and economically.

Remote partnership where the husband goes away, and the wife stays at home has been common throughout history. Such an arrangement was considered 'normal' in my family when I was growing up. In 1953 when my dad had a lucrative job in *Aramco*, Saudi Arabia, he married my mother who was a trained schoolteacher, their marriage of the 1950's was a partnership in which by mutual agreement he worked in Saudi while she stayed on in South India and continued teaching in my native village, ultimately becoming Headmistress of the local village school. That partnership changed when we shifted to the central Indian city of Nagpur in 1965, Then she gave up her career and focused on bringing up her six Children.

However, unlike the 1950s, when women predominantly stayed at home and took on roles that involved cooking, cleaning, and childcare, today's remote stay-at-home husbands are often engaged in careers with non-traditional hours, such as freelance work, consulting, entrepreneurship, or roles in technology and engineering.

**Example:** A software developer may work from home, collaborating with teams across the globe via video conferencing, while his wife, a doctor, works long shifts at a local hospital. This dynamic allows them to share responsibilities in ways that suit their professional commitments. The remote husband may take on more household responsibilities, but they are also balancing their own careers that allow for flexibility and home-based work.

## The Impact of Remote Work on Evolving Gender Role

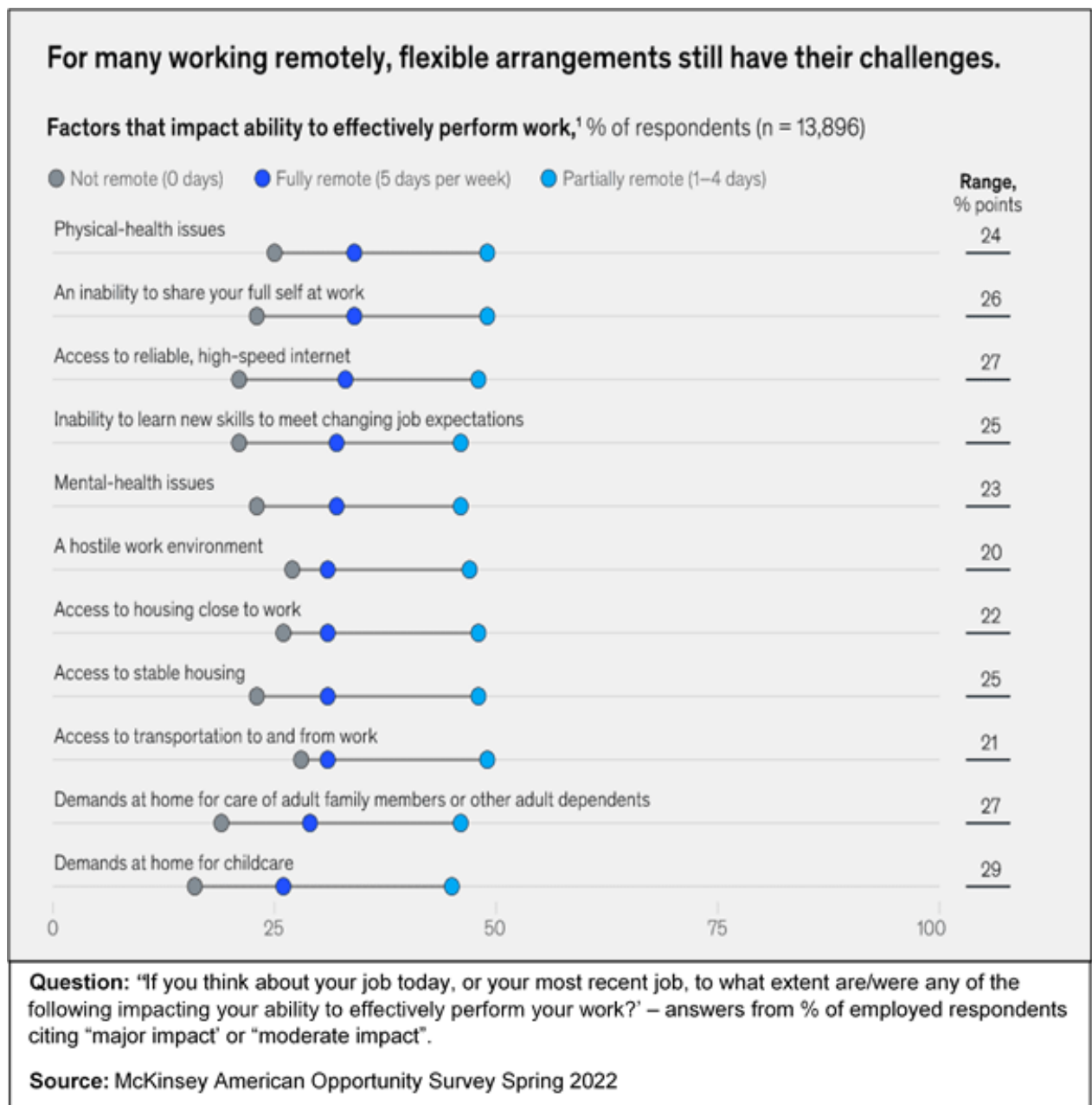
*"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."* — Helen Keller

The rise of remote work has particularly benefited men in fields that are more conducive to flexible work arrangements. Industries such as technology, engineering, and business have reported higher levels of remote work flexibility.

According to a McKinsey survey, *38% of working men* have the option to work remotely full-time, compared to *30% of working women*. Roughly *50% of women* report being unable to work remotely at all, while only *39% of men* express the same limitation (see Table Below). These statistics highlight an ongoing disparity in remote work opportunities between genders, with men more likely to benefit from flexible arrangements that allow them to work from home (Nawrat, 2022).

However, it’s important to remember that change takes time and the stereotypical gender roles are rapidly evolving towards equal remote working opportunities. In the year 2004 as CFO in a company, I hired a brilliant *CMA Management Accountant* to assist me. Her husband was a *Chef in a Five Star Hotel*. It became clear to the couple over time that the female accountant was earning more than the Chef (albeit in a Five Star hotel). The couple made an economically wise decision to let the CMA earn the big bucks while the Chef became the house husband on weekdays. On weekends there was a role reversal, and the Chef earned high penalty rates now working for the same Five Star Hotel part time.

So, as you can see from the above example, that evolving gender roles are changing stereotypes. While this may not be true across the board, one can see how wise economic decision making is changing stereotypical gender roles around the world. I know of a qualified Actuary of Indian origin living in the USA whose American Husband (also a highly qualified tech expert) has chosen to be the house husband in an economically thriving partnership.



## Gender-Specific Career Trends

*“Great partnerships thrive because the people need each other.” Courtney A. Kemp*

Despite the progress towards gender equality in the workplace, men and women still tend to specialize in different fields. Certain industries remain male-dominated, such as technology, engineering, and computer science, while fields like teaching and nursing are predominantly female. Some current enrolment trends are:

**Law and Medicine:** Across the western world and in many countries in Asia and Africa (that give equal opportunity for women to go to university), more women than men are currently enrolling in law and medical schools, indicating a shift in traditional career paths. A minority of medical professionals may be able to work remotely, by taking telehealth jobs, but the vast majority have to treat their patients in person. Lawyers may be tied to a specific state or area by their licence and speciality.

**Technology:** Approximately 50% of individuals working in computer or mathematical fields report working remotely full-time, showcasing the flexibility of tech jobs. The industries which reported the highest level of remote-work flexibility are coding and technology, architecture, engineering and business jobs. About half of people working in computer or mathematical jobs work remotely full-time.

This may sound like yet another way in which women have ended up with the short end of the stick. But that view is myopic as change takes time and the roles are evolving with time. Couples compromise in all kinds of ways for their lives to work together. If she is offered a big promotion, conditional on moving to Chicago, she may have to turn it down if his job is tied to New York. The geographical liberation of either partner makes it possible for the other to ascend the corporate ladder. Many women pick areas because it is convenient for her job—and for access to their children’s grandparents, who are regularly called upon to entertain the little ones.

In fact, *Prof Claudia Goldin*, a Nobel laureate, has written about how remote work may be a boon for women. Over the past 200 years women’s participation in the labour force has been highest when it has been possible to perform paid work from home. She has also found that gender wage gaps are tightest in fields where flexible working is the norm. But it is not only flexibility in the work that women do that may be to their advantage (Goldin, 1992).

## Compromises Required in Navigating Career Decisions as a Couple

*“Compromise now, because you’ll have to later, anyway.” Ayn Rand*

The dynamics of remote work can influence major career decisions for couples. Compromises are required to take advantage of the increased flexibility afforded by remote work.

The rise of remote work has transformed the dynamics of couples, introducing both opportunities and challenges. Below, we explore various social tensions that can arise when couples work remotely, including issues of loneliness, companionship, work-life balance, and more.

Couples often need to **compromise** when one or both partners pursue remote work opportunities. Here are two examples:

**Balancing Work and Travel:** One partner wants to take advantage of remote work to travel frequently, while the other prefers a more stable home life. As a compromise they agree to take extended work-from-anywhere trips a few times a year while keeping a home base.

**Choosing a Living Location:** One partner's remote job allows them to live anywhere, but the other has a job that requires them to be in a specific location. As a compromise they choose a location where the remote partner can still work effectively while also meeting the needs of the other partner's job.

## Social Tensions in Couples Working Remotely

*"You don't develop courage by being happy in your relationships every day. You develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity," – Greek philosopher Epicurus*

The biggest social tensions are *loneliness* and *isolation*. Working from home can lead to feelings of loneliness, especially if one partner is primarily at home while the other is at an office or on the go, and maybe perhaps having to work extended periods overseas. This is particularly the case for the partner who may be more socially active. This can create emotional distance between partners.

**Example:** Consider a couple where one partner, Alex, works remotely in a tech job while the other, Jane, commutes daily to a busy marketing firm. Alex may feel isolated during the day, missing casual interactions and socializing with colleagues. In contrast, Jane comes home with stories and experiences from a bustling work environment, which can lead to a disconnect in their daily experiences.

Another significant social tension is the lack of *companionship* and *support*. While remote work offers the chance for couples to spend more time together, it can also blur the lines between personal and professional life, leading to stress and a lack of companionship.

**Example:** Josua and Ana both work from home in high-stress jobs. Although they share a home office, they often find themselves absorbed in their work and less engaged with each other. Their conversations become limited to work-related topics, and they struggle to carve out quality time for personal interactions, leading to feelings of companionship strain.

The difficulty in having a *Work-Life Balance* is another social tension. Remote work can make it challenging to separate work from personal life, leading to longer hours, increased stress, and reduced quality time together.

**Example:** Kumari, a freelance graphic designer, often finds herself working late into the night to meet deadlines. Her partner, Chandra, who is also working remotely, feels neglected as their evenings are consumed by work rather than quality time together. This imbalance can create tension and resentment within the relationship.

Another cause of tension is different *Work styles* and *Schedules*, Couples may have different work styles, productivity patterns, and schedules, which can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings.

**Example:** Emily is an early riser who prefers to start work at 6 AM, while her partner, Jake, is a night owl who works better in the evenings. Their conflicting schedules can lead to frustration, as Emily may feel she is starting her workday alone, while Jake may feel pressured to adjust his routine. Making compromises and taking decisions which go against the societal stereotypical gender roles can cause numerous difficulties. The economic benefits in the present and a brighter future that beckons should make it all worthwhile as I can attest from personal experience.

*"Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down." – Oprah Winfrey*

## Summary

In recent years, a significant shift in gender roles has emerged among well-educated and high-earning couples, particularly in Western societies, where more women are pursuing careers outside the home while their male partners often take on responsibilities within the household. This trend, often referred to as the rise of the “remote husband,” suggests a transformation in traditional work dynamics, as roles within partnerships become more flexible and shared. However, the term “Remote Partner” may be more fitting, as it encapsulates both partners’ evolving roles in a modern relationship. This shift reflects a departure from the traditional male breadwinner-female homemaker model, promoting a more egalitarian approach where both partners actively engage in their careers, albeit in different capacities.

The rise of remote work has drastically altered the landscape of gender dynamics within relationships, allowing for greater flexibility in career choices and responsibilities. While men still dominate fields such as technology and engineering, women are increasingly enrolling in traditionally male-dominated professions like law and medicine. Despite ongoing disparities in remote work opportunities—where men have more options for flexible arrangements—this new paradigm has opened doors for women’s career advancement. Couples are now facing unique challenges as they navigate the complexities of remote work, such as balancing travel and location decisions, managing feelings of loneliness and isolation, and addressing work-life balance issues. These dynamics require significant compromises and adjustments as partners strive to maintain companionship and support while pursuing their professional ambitions.

*I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things.” — Mother Teresa*

## References

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