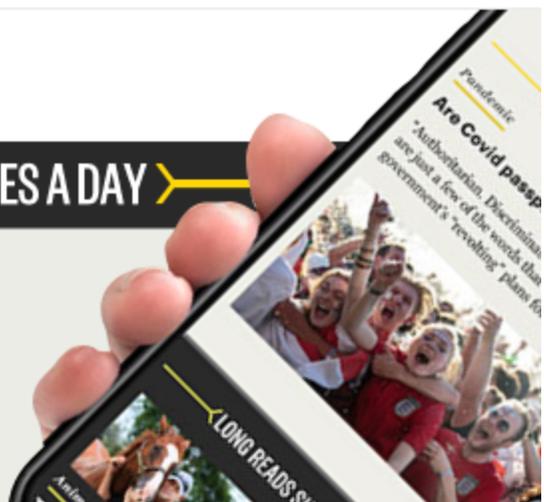




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Working from home can turbocharge women's pensions... but the bad news? It could also damage career prospects

- Insurer Aviva warns shift to flexible working could hinder women's careers
- Women may be less likely to return to offices meaning men have more visibility
- But working from home could allow women to switch from part-time to full-time
- Making leap to full-time could boost working mother's pension by some £30,500

By [HELENA KELLY FOR THE DAILY MAIL](#)

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Over the past five years, mother-of-two Jessica Thorpe has become a master of flexible working from home.

She often won't begin her working day until her two young children, Frank, four, and Stella, 18 months, are tucked up in bed at night and cannot distract her.

To ensure she clocks up full-time hours, she also works in between the nursery runs, even answering emails in paediatric waiting rooms.



WFM revolution: Pension experts believe working from home could allow more women to switch from part-time to full-time

And the Zoom boom means Jessica, 40, who works in the events industry, can attend regular online meetings with her team in London from the comfort of her Sheffield home.

But while often chaotic and exhausting, this flexible working pattern has allowed her to continue to earn a sizable income and build up her pension pot.

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Now experts believe Jessica's way of life may be the key to closing the gender pension gap that has long left women poorer than men in retirement.

Last week, insurance giant Aviva warned that the shift to flexible working during the pandemic could hinder women's careers.

Danny Harmer, chief people officer for Aviva, said this was because women might be less likely than men to return to the office.

This could mean men have more 'visibility' with their superiors and stand a better chance of being promoted.

Yet pension experts say the exact opposite could be true, as working from home could allow more women to switch from part-time to full-time.

According to investment firm Interactive Investor, making the leap to full-time hours could boost a working mother's pension pot by an average of £30,500.

Jessica says: 'I think the idea that you have to be working in an office between 9am and 5pm every day is now dead.'

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'It's very easy for mums to be answering emails while out and about and hitting their deadlines at night once their children are in bed.

'I have been on a flexible working pattern for more than five years and that allows me to clock-up full-time hours - but sometimes at weekends or in the evening.

'I'm very conscious of my savings and it's good to know I am still adding to my pension pot even while raising very young children.'



Shortfall: Research found women expected an average income of £33,980 in retirement, yet those aged 55-plus have an average of just £70,052 saved in pensions

Interactive Investor estimates that a full-time working mother's pension pot amounts to £153,562, on average. But a mother who works part-time has a typical pension pot of £123,061 - a difference of £30,501.

The investment platform estimates that around 300,000 mothers who have one or more children of primary school age and are currently working part-time would be able to access full-time jobs if their employers offered flexible working hours.

Becky O'Connor, head of pensions and savings at Interactive Investor, says: 'The reason many mothers don't work full-time is that working life often demands hours are fulfilled at certain times of day.'

As a result, millions of women have lost valuable career progress, pay and pensions over the years. Many feel they have to give up work altogether, a pattern that has damaging social and financial consequences.

'Flexibility by default could be a silver lining of this awful time for these mothers, as it has opened employers' eyes to the potential of a working-from-home revolution, allowing people to take on more hours and still meet their children's needs.'

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Another study released this week by investment firm Fidelity found that just 22 per cent of women feel on track to afford a comfortable retirement.

The research also revealed that women expected an average income of £33,980 in retirement, yet women aged 55 and over have an average of just £70,052 saved up in their pension pots.

Former pensions minister Baroness Ros Altmann welcomes the move to flexible working, adding that it will 'alleviate' some of the pension discrepancies between men and women.

She says: 'The more women can combine their caring duties with their careers, the better. It is certainly a good thing if workplaces make it easier for women to continue working full-time hours while balancing their other responsibilities.'

'For far too long women have had to take on the bulk of caring responsibilities — at their own cost.'

She adds: 'But this will only alleviate the problem — it is not a solution. Lots of women are still unable to commit to full-time hours even when flexible working is an option.'

The Government has been increasingly under pressure to legislate to allow more employees to work from home if they want.

In 2019, it committed to a consultation on making it the default position unless employers had a good reason.

Data from the Office for National Statistics shows that a mother is more likely to be working part-time rather than full-time until her youngest child is 11.

This means mothers often miss out on a decade of full-time work.

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