



Actual Condition Survey on Needs and Other Issues of Persons with Disabilities Concerning Teleworking

(Research Report No. 171) Summary

[Key words]

Telework Home employment Telecommuting Remote working Off-site work
ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Diverse work styles Efforts to communicate Commuting difficulties
Reasonable accommodation Employment of persons with disabilities

[Abstract]

Telework (work from home) using ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has been pointed out for its usefulness in the employment of persons with disabilities. This research study clarified the needs of persons with disabilities with regard to telework through a questionnaire survey that included those who are not working or seeking employment, as well as interviews with persons with disabilities who have experienced telework and human resource staff and others at companies where employees with disabilities telework, to understand the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in telework and how to deal with them from various perspectives. As a result, it became clear that persons with disabilities have certain needs for telework, and that employers and persons with disabilities are making various efforts and accommodations with respect to communication methods and labor management in implementing telework.

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2 Research Period

FY2021 - FY2022

3 Composition of the Research Report

Chapter1 Background and Issues

Chapter2 Survey of Persons with Disabilities

Chapter3 Company Interviews

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4 Background and Purposes of the Research

Initiatives are being implemented to further promote telework utilizing ICT in the employment of persons with disabilities, from the perspective of promoting diverse work styles and securing employment opportunities. Since 2020, the number of persons with disabilities working telecommuting increased dramatically, partly due to the need to prevent COVID-19. In this context, the usefulness of telework for persons with disabilities has often been pointed out, but few have clarified the needs of persons with disabilities for telework, and the actual and overall situation of persons with disabilities who wish to telework has not been clarified.

This survey was conducted to clarify the needs of persons with disabilities with regard to telework through a questionnaire survey that included people who are not working or seeking employment, and to interview both persons with disabilities who have experienced telework and human resources staff of companies where employees with disabilities are teleworking, to gain a multifaceted understanding of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in teleworking and how to deal with them.

5 Method

(1) Questionnaire Survey of Persons with Disabilities

A survey on telework was conducted on 2,000 persons with disabilities. The survey was conducted via the Internet among members of a web-based research company's monitors. The survey was conducted in October 2021.

(2) Interview Survey of Persons with Disabilities

We conducted an interview survey of persons with disabilities who telework. Among the respondents to the above questionnaire for persons with disabilities, 10 persons with physical disabilities who agreed to cooperate with the interview survey conducted an online interview.

In addition, the web research firm did not conduct interviews with persons with mental disabilities, as the firm wanted to avoid the burden of online interviews with persons with mental disabilities. Therefore, the persons with mental disabilities (including

persons with developmental disabilities) were not interviewed. The survey was conducted as an additional questionnaire to augment the results of the interview. The survey was to be conducted in November 2021.

(3) Company Interview Survey

A company interview survey was conducted with human resources staff and others at six companies where persons with disabilities work as teleworkers. The survey subjects were determined by making requests to companies that publicly announced that their employees with disabilities were working in telework. The survey period was from April to May 2022.

6 Summarized Results of the Study

(1) Questionnaire Survey of Persons with Disabilities

A total of 2,000 persons with disabilities responded to the survey, 1,000 of whom were "employed" and 1,000 of whom were "not employed." Those with disabilities who answered "employed" included those who "have telework experience at their current employer" and those who had no such experience. Those who were "not employed" included "those who wanted to work but were not looking for a job." Both the "employed" and "not employed" respondents indicated that they "have a desire to telework" and that they "do not desire to telework," and the survey also asked them to provide reasons for their desire.

The following section presents some of the most distinctive results of the survey.

A Teleworking needs, etc. of those who are "employed"

Characteristics of those who "have telework experience at their current workplace"

The most common positive aspect of experiencing telework was "reducing commuting burdens" (Figure 1).

The most common accommodation from company that respondents felt was necessary after experiencing telework was "communication on the job adapted to the characteristics of disabilities" (Figure 2).

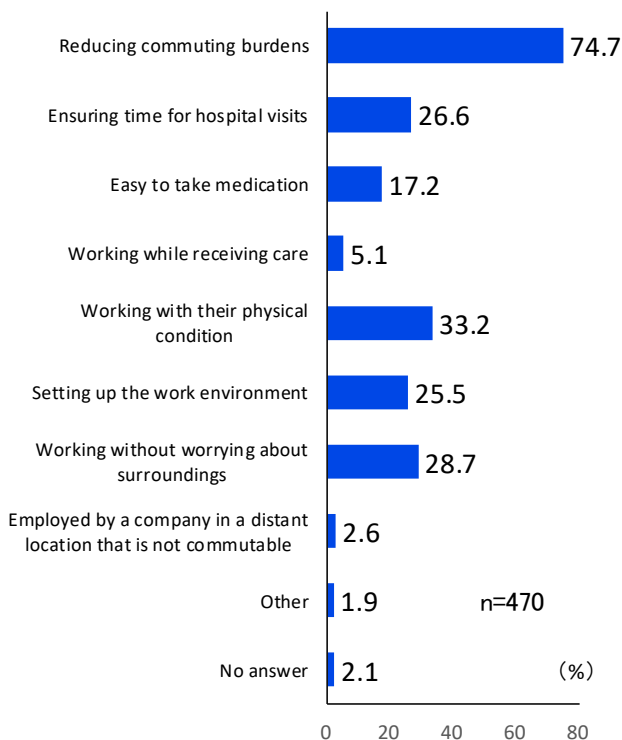


Figure 1: Good aspects of the teleworking experience (multiple responses), according to those who are "employed."

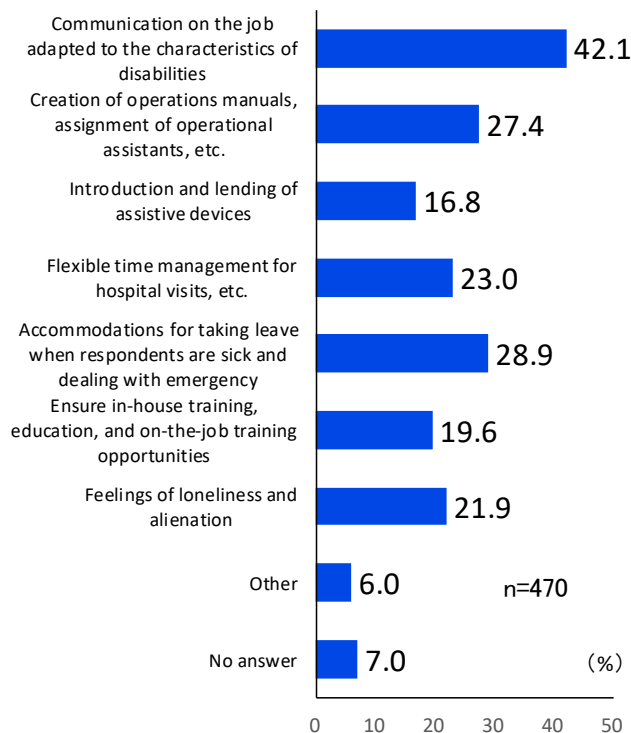


Figure 2: Workplace accommodations that "employed" respondents found necessary after experiencing telework (multiple responses)

B Characteristics about employment experience and job search activities of those who are "not employed"

a. Characteristics about employment experience and job search activities

The most common reason given by the respondents who "want to work but are not looking for a job" for not looking for a job was "they need to focus on medical treatment," followed by "they are unable to commute due to their disabilities," "they are not able to go to job search support providers or interviews due to disability," and "no desired workplace within commuting distance" (Figure 3).

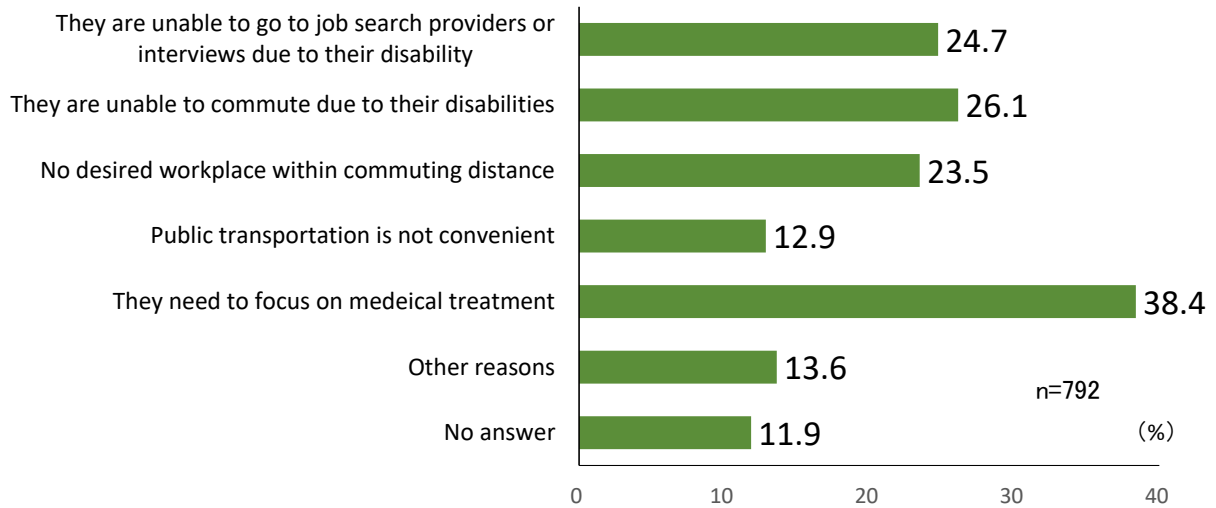


Figure 3: Reasons for not looking for a job asked of those "not employed" (multiple responses)

b. Characteristics of those who "have the desire to telework"

The most common reason for wanting to telework was "ability to work according to your physical condition" (Figure 4). Regarding accommodation from company that they think are necessary when teleworking, the most common accommodation was "taking leave when not feeling well and dealing with emergencies" (Figure 5).

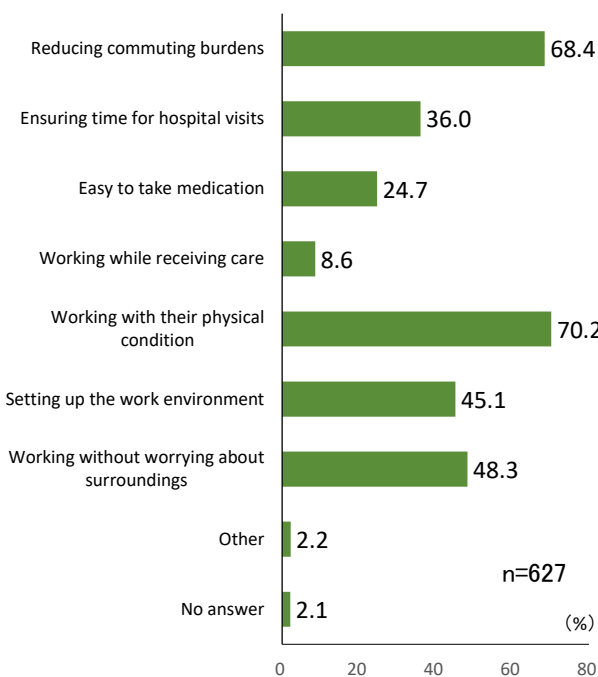


Figure 4: Reasons for wanting to telework asked of those who are "not employed" (multiple responses)

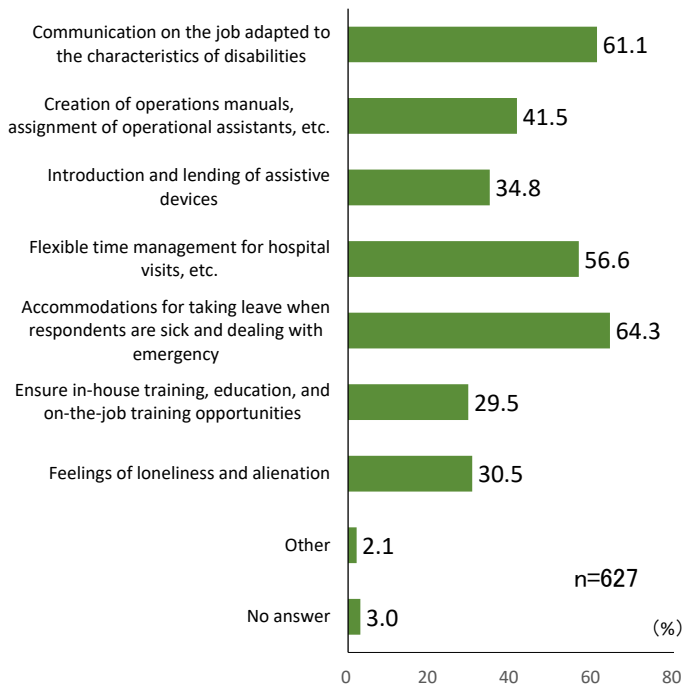


Figure 5: Accommodations from companies that "not employed" respondents think are necessary when teleworking (multiple responses)

C Reasons for not wishing to telework for those who do not wish to telework

a. Those who are "employed"

The most common reason given for not wanting to telework was that "the work is not suitable for telework" (Figure 6, left).

b. Those who are "not employed"

The most common reasons for not wishing to telework were "lack of skills to telework" and "home environment is not suitable".(Figure 6, right)

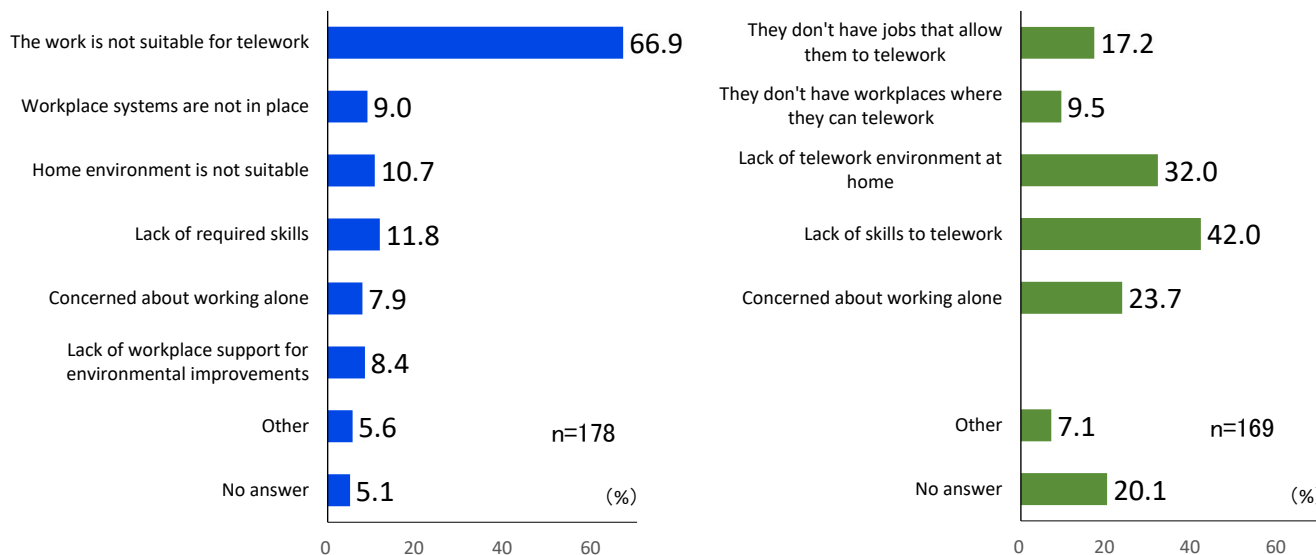


Figure 6: Reasons for not wishing to telework (multiple responses)

(2) Interviews with Persons with Disabilities

The advantages of teleworking were mentioned, including freedom from the burden of commuting and the resulting time spent commuting that can be used for other things. When we delved further into these advantages, most of the items pointed out for teleworking were things that apply to everyone but are especially critical for persons with disabilities, as the burden of commuting can be more severe depending on the disability status, and the time spent commuting is also related to disability, such as for receiving medical treatment and social services.

In contrast, problems with teleworking were mentioned, such as communication issues with superiors and coworkers, and difficulty in creating a sense of unity in the company. Although these issues are not directly related to disability, some disability types have their own unique ways of communicating, and therefore, it may be necessary to take disability into account when resolving these issues.

In an additional questionnaire survey of persons with mental disabilities (including those with developmental disabilities) who have teleworked, the most common responses to the question about accommodations they currently receive from their companies (multiple responses) were: "accommodations for taking leave when they are sick or in an emergency," "accommodations for work-related communication with supervisors and colleagues that match the characteristics of their disabilities," and "flexible time management for hospital visits, medication, breaks, etc." were the most common responses.

(3) Company Interviews

The types of disabilities of teleworkers at the interviewed companies included physical disabilities, mental disabilities, and developmental disabilities. The jobs that persons with disabilities were responsible for included such diverse tasks as data entry,

programming, graphic design, market research.

When we asked the interviewed companies what prompted them to introduce telework, we found that in addition to the information provided by a consulting firm for the employment of persons with disabilities, initiatives by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and local governments also had an impact.

As for the efforts and accommodations made by companies to employ teleworkers with disabilities, a variety of tools were used for communication, including e-mail, chat rooms, web conferencing systems, and cell phones.

Cooperation with outside organizations was also confirmed, with particular emphasis on cooperation with support providers in the areas where employees with disabilities live. It was observed that employees who live far away from their supervisors and human resources staff find it difficult to follow up with the help of local support providers. A variety of efforts were put into how to divide tasks and foster a sense of unity in the company, and a system was adopted to keep employees motivated.

(4) Discussion

A Mobility difficulty and telework needs

One of the purposes of this survey was to identify the needs of persons with disabilities for telework, including those who are not working or seeking employment.

The results of the disability survey suggested that among the "not employed" persons with disabilities, there is a certain percentage of persons with disabilities who are unable to conduct job search activities because of difficulties in commuting to work or to supporting organizations.

The second most common reason (multiple responses) for those "not employed" who "have the desire to telework" to telework was to "reducing commuting burden" (68.4%). It was found that a certain number of persons with disabilities have mobility difficulties, which is the reason why they want to telework.

It is expected that the existence of teleworking as a work option will contribute to securing opportunities for persons with disabilities who have mobility difficulties.

B Comparison of survey results

a. Advantages of teleworking

From the perspective of persons with disabilities, the most common response to a question asking those with telework experience what they liked about their telework experience (multiple responses) was "reducing commuting burden." The second most common response was that "they work according to their physical condition." On the other hand, from the company's perspective, some companies pointed out that they could get more potential employees.

b. Challenges of telework

• Home environment

Those with no teleworking experience expressed concerns about their home environment. However, the company interview survey revealed that issues with the home environment were not a factor that would immediately cause them to give up teleworking employment.

• Communication and unity of the company

A number of communication-related issues were also pointed out as challenges for teleworkers. Some persons with disabilities have difficulty with communication tools used frequently in telework, such as web conferencing systems. The method and frequency of communication should be selected according to the characteristics of individual persons with disabilities.

In addition, as a challenge to teleworking, some respondents pointed out that it was difficult to have a sense of unity in the company when conducting the interview and survey of persons with disabilities. Company interviews have confirmed the

initiatives taken by companies to foster a sense of unity in the company while taking advantage of teleworking's ability to focus on work by avoiding the communication that occurs when employees come to the office.

c. Future outlook

In our survey of persons with disabilities, we asked those "employed who have telework experience at their current employer and have the desire to telework" what type of work they prefer, and "a combination of telework and attendance" was the most frequently selected option. In the interview and survey of persons with disabilities, many respondents indicated that they would like to work both telework and commute to work in the future. The reason for this was a desire to make the most of the advantages of both teleworking and commuting to the office.

On the other hand, in the company interview survey, it appeared that not a few companies do not see telework as the only way to employ persons with disabilities. These companies were likely to hire through telework when they were successful in matching the work with persons with disabilities who would be responsible for it.

(5) Significance and Limitations of this Research Study and Future Challenges

A Significance of this research study

In this research study, three surveys were conducted: a questionnaire survey of persons with disabilities, an interview survey of persons with disabilities, and a company interview survey. With these results, we believe that we have succeeded to a certain extent in identifying the needs of persons with disabilities for telework and the actual status of telework employment by persons with disabilities.

As for the first significance, the survey of persons with disabilities was conducted by targeting the members of monitors owned by a web research company, which successfully obtained responses from those who were "not employed" and were not looking for a job. Another advantage of using a web-based survey company was that we were able to secure a certain number of respondents who met the criteria: employed or not employed and having teleworking experience or not.

As a second significance, we conducted interviews with both persons with disabilities who work in telework and companies that employ persons with disabilities in telework and succeeded in collecting a variety of case examples. In particular, it was significant in the context of accumulating telework case examples that we were able to hear about the initiatives of small companies with approximately 20 employees.

As a third significance, the results of the three surveys were compared with each other to show the similarities and differences in teleworking as viewed from the perspective of persons with disabilities and from the perspective of companies. The fact that we were able to identify the gap between the perceptions of persons with disabilities and companies can be regarded as a milestone in this research study, which attempts to view teleworking by persons with disabilities from multiple perspectives.

B Limitations of this research study and future challenges

Limitations also exist in this research study.

First, it is necessary to bear in mind that bias exists among the subjects of disability surveys

Second, the research study did not sufficiently deepen the consideration of accommodations and issues focused on the type of disability.

Third, interviews of persons with disabilities and company interviews could not be conducted with the same companies and were limited to comparisons of cases developed in separate workplaces.

Even after pointing out the existence of many limitations and challenges, we believe that this research study had a certain significance. Between 2021 and 2022, when this research study was conducted, the situation surrounding telework for persons with disabilities changed rapidly, from the aspect of requests as a countermeasure against COVID-19 infection to the evolution

of communication tools and the encouragement of public institutions such as local governments. Despite these limitations, it was meaningful to be able to clarify, at this juncture, what persons with disabilities expect from telework, the background behind the utilization of telework by companies to employ persons with disabilities, and the initiatives of companies and persons with disabilities to address the issues surrounding telework.