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Where did workers perform their jobs in the early 21st century?

This article examines where workers perform their jobs and how their work locations have changed in recent years. It uses American Time Use Survey data to explore where, when, and for how long people worked, focusing on those employed in management, professional, and related occupations.

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In recent years, technological advances have provided some workers with more workplace flexibilities. Advances in information and communication technology allow people to reach their colleagues and clients by phone, email, or text from nearly anywhere, at all hours of the day. The development and expansion of secure computer networks, cloud computing, and wireless connections provide additional flexibility in where and when work can be done.

Taking advantage of these changes, many employers have implemented policies that allow their employees to work from home or other locations beyond their traditional workplaces, at least occasionally. Earlier research has shown that workers in management, professional, and related (MPR) occupations[1]—a broad occupational category including managers, financial analysts, engineers, computer programmers, lawyers, and others—are among those whose jobs can be performed in a variety of locations.[2] Workers in these occupations accounted for 41 percent of the workforce in 2013–17. Workers in other occupations, such as builders, servers, cleaners, and assembly-line workers, often are required to work at a specific location.

In this article, I use the latest American Time Use Survey (ATUS) data to compare the work locations of MPR and non-MPR workers. I also use these data in a comparison with an earlier period, to determine whether these work locations have changed over time. Next, I examine data for 2013–17, showing when and for how long people employed in MPR occupations worked at different locations. Finally, I examine whether work locations varied among specific MPR occupations.

About the data

The ATUS is a telephone-based survey that has been conducted nearly daily since its inception in 2003. During the survey, interviewers complete a time diary by asking respondents to report what they were doing from 4 a.m. on the day before the interview until 4 a.m. on the day of the interview. For most activities, including work, interviewers also ask respondents where and with whom they spent their time.

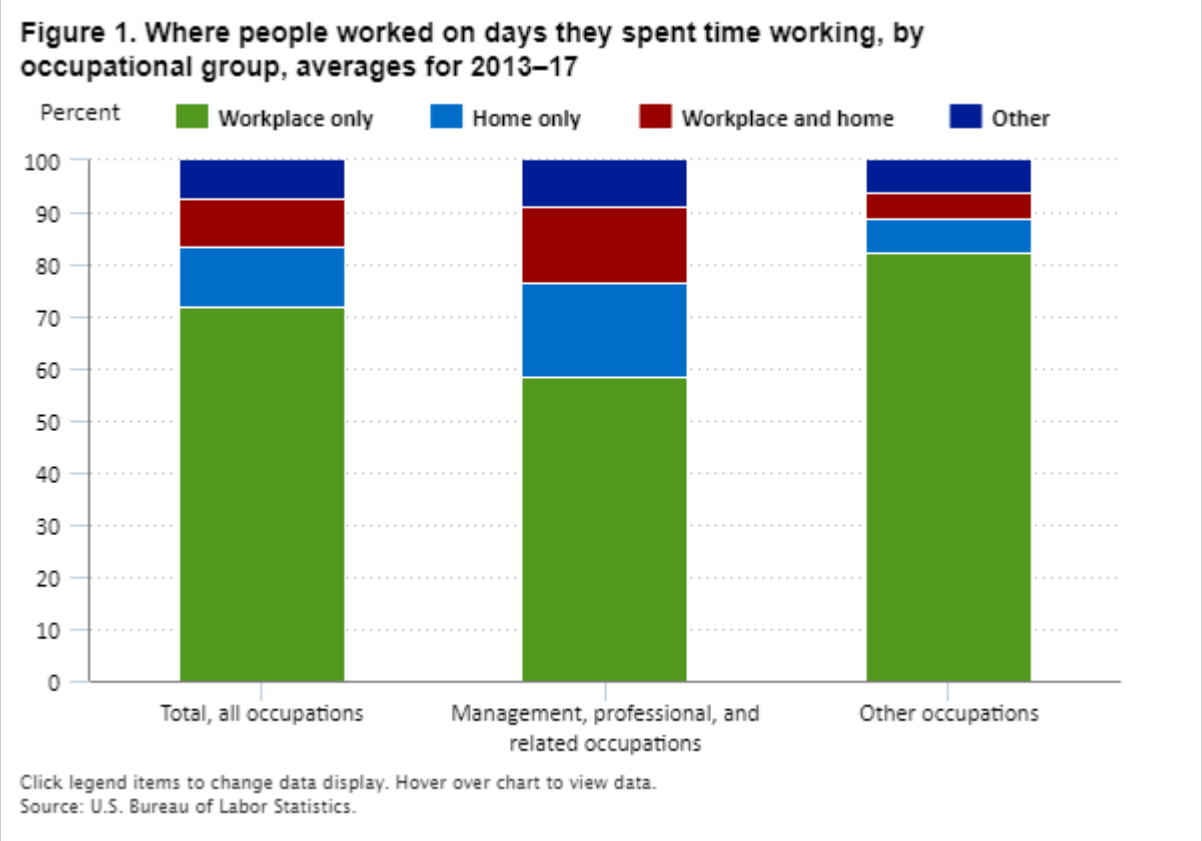
Although the 1-day diaries provide information about whether, where, and for how long people worked, they do not specify whether workers were performing scheduled work. Observed work durations in the 1-day diaries range from 1 minute to more than 12 hours, so the ATUS captures work activities such as making a quick phone call or checking a work email account on a day off, and working long, scheduled work shifts.

ATUS data include information about whether people were working at their workplace, home, or another location. In the ATUS, one's workplace is a flexible term that refers to a place, other than one's home, where one usually works.[3] In addition to asking the diary questions, the survey asks questions used to determine the labor force status of each respondent and the occupation of those who are employed.[4]

In this analysis, I focus on the worktime and percentage of employed people who worked on a given day. People are counted as working if their time diary includes worktime of 1 minute or more. For people with more than one job, I count only work associated with their main job.[5] Additionally, I combine data collected during 2013–17, and nearly all data referenced in the analysis are for that period. In a few instances, I include data from other years, noting this in the text.

Where did people employed in management, professional, and related occupations work?

On days they spent time working, 72 percent of employed people, including a majority of those in MPR occupations, performed all of their work at their workplace. As shown in figure 1, the work-location patterns of people employed in MPR occupations differed substantially from those of people employed in other occupations.[6] Fifty-nine percent of workers in MPR occupations worked exclusively at their workplace on days they spent time working, compared with 82 percent of those in other occupations.



Those employed in MPR occupations were about 3 times more likely than people in other occupations to work at home on days they worked. This was true irrespective of whether these workers performed all of their work at home (18 percent compared with 6 percent) or spent time working both at their workplace and at home (14 percent compared with 5 percent).

Did the work locations of people employed in management, professional, and related occupations change between 2003–07 and 2013–17?

Table 1 shows the average hours per day that people employed in MPR and other occupations worked at home, at their workplace, and at other locations in 2003–07 and 2013–17. These estimates are averages of work hours on all 7 days of the week and for all workers. Included are hours for workers employed full and part time, both for those on the job and for those on leave from their jobs. The estimates reflect all of the time people spent performing work for their main jobs, including work done on scheduled workdays and work done on days people were not scheduled to work.

Table 1. Average hours per day employed people spent working, by occupational group and location, 2003–07 and 2013–17

Occupational group and location	Average hours per day spent working, 2003–07			Average hours per day spent working, 2013–17			Change in average hours per day spent working, 2003–07 to 2013–17		
	All days	Weekdays	Weekend days	All days	Weekdays	Weekend days	All days	Weekdays	Weekend days
Management, professional, and related occupations									
Total, all locations	5.30	6.85	1.37	5.23	6.81	1.28	-0.06	-0.03	-0.09
Workplace	4.55	6.01	0.85	4.23	5.62	0.74	-0.32	-0.39	-0.10
Home	0.56	0.62	0.42	0.77	0.91	0.43	0.21	0.29	0.01
Other	0.19	0.22	0.10	0.23	0.28	0.10	0.05	0.06	0.00
Other occupations									
Total, all locations	4.90	6.08	1.94	4.97	6.12	2.08	0.07	0.04	0.14
Workplace	4.57	5.68	1.77	4.53	5.60	1.86	-0.04	-0.08	0.08
Home	0.20	0.24	0.11	0.26	0.31	0.13	0.06	0.07	0.02
Other	0.13	0.16	0.06	0.18	0.22	0.09	0.05	0.06	0.03

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The data show that, in 2013–17, MPR workers spent more time working at home and less time working at their workplaces than they did in 2003–07. The time MPR workers spent working at home rose by an average of 13 minutes per day overall and 17 minutes per weekday, but it remained essentially unchanged on weekend days. From 2003–07 to 2013–17, the average time MPR workers spent working at their workplaces declined by 19 minutes per day. This change was most pronounced on weekdays, with an average decline of 23 minutes per weekday. The time MPR workers spent working at locations other than their home and workplace (such as a restaurant, a store, or someone else's home) and the time they spent working overall were essentially unchanged. By contrast, workers in other occupations in 2013–17 continued to work approximately the same amount of time overall, at their workplace, at home, and at other locations as they did in 2003–07.

Table 2 shows the average percentage of employed people who spent time working on a given day in 2003–07 and 2013–17, with the data broken down by occupational group, location, and day of week. Comparing the two periods suggests little change overall in the percentage of MPR workers who spent time working on a given day. However, the share of MPR workers who worked solely at their workplace on a given day declined by about 5 percentage points, from 46 percent in 2003–07 to 41 percent in 2013–17, with the decrease being most pronounced on weekdays. Over the same period, the percentage of MPR workers who worked only at home on a given day increased by 3 percentage points, from 10 percent to 13 percent, with the biggest change occurring on weekdays. There was essentially no change in the percentage of MPR workers who spent time working both at their workplace and at home on a given day, and in the percentage of MPR workers who spent time working at other locations or combinations of locations.

Table 2. Percentage of employed people who spent time working on a given day, by occupational group and location, averages for 2003–07 and 2013–17

Occupational group and location	Percentage working, 2003–07			Percentage working, 2013–17			Change in percentage working, 2003–07 to 2013–17 (percentage points)		
	All days	Weekdays	Weekend days	All days	Weekdays	Weekend days	All days	Weekdays	Weekend days
Management, professional, and related occupations									
Total, all locations	71.0	86.1	32.6	69.8	85.2	31.2	-1.1	-0.9	-1.3
Workplace only	45.6	59.2	11.1	40.8	53.6	8.8	-4.8	-5.5	-2.3
Home only	10.2	8.0	16.0	12.7	11.1	16.9	2.5	3.1	0.9
Workplace and home	9.6	12.6	1.8	10.1	13.4	1.7	0.5	0.8	-0.1
Other	5.6	6.4	3.6	6.2	7.1	3.8	0.6	0.7	0.2
Other occupations									
Total, all locations	65.2	78.8	31.0	65.0	78.0	32.6	-0.2	-0.9	1.5
Workplace only	54.8	67.1	23.9	53.5	65.1	24.6	-1.3	-2.0	0.6
Home only	3.6	3.4	4.3	4.1	3.9	4.5	0.5	0.5	0.2
Workplace and home	3.3	4.2	0.8	3.3	4.2	1.1	0.1	0.0	0.3
Other	3.5	4.1	2.0	4.0	4.7	2.4	0.5	0.6	0.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

People employed in other occupations were just as likely to work on a given day in 2013–17 as they were in 2003–07. Also, there was essentially no change in these workers' likelihood of performing their work at their home only, at both their workplace and home, or at other locations or combinations of places on a given day. Between the two periods, there was a slight, 1-percentage-point decline in the workers' likelihood of working only at their workplaces on a given day. Because people employed in other occupations mainly performed their work at their workplaces—and, on average, this did not change between 2003–07 and 2013–17—the remainder of this article focuses on MPR workers, examining when and for how long they worked at various locations.

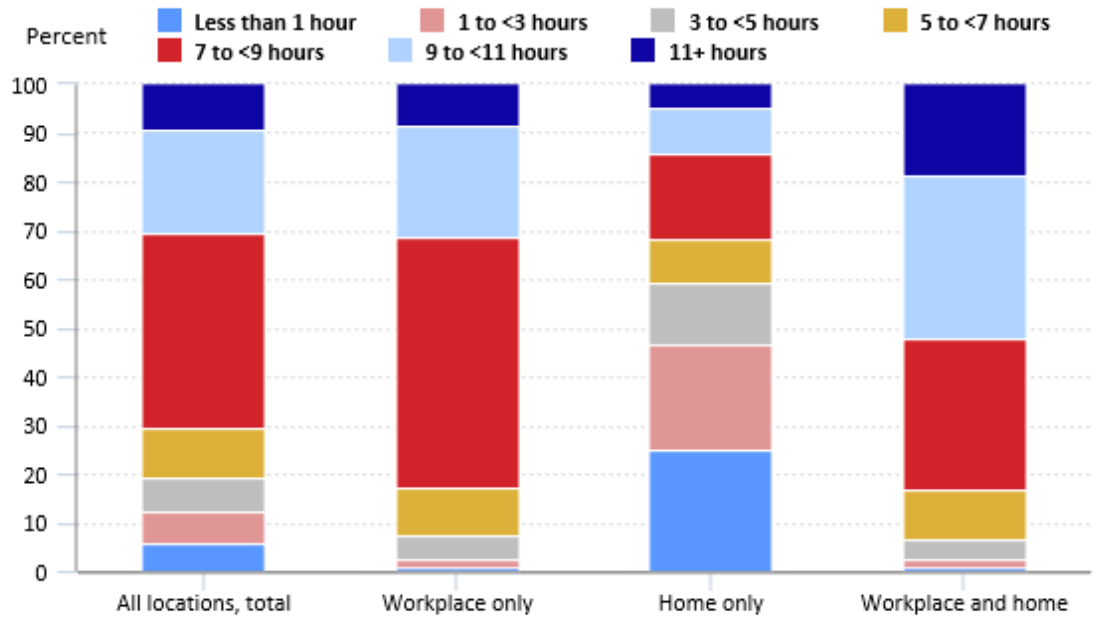
How did the work hours of people employed in management, professional, and related occupations vary by location?

Overall, in 2013–17, MPR workers averaged 7 hours 30 minutes of worktime on days they spent time working. However, work durations varied somewhat by work location. On average, MPR workers who spent time working both at their workplace and at home on a given day worked for 9 hours, and those who worked exclusively at their workplace did so for 8 hours 17 minutes. Those who worked only at home spent about half as much time working, averaging 4 hours 23 minutes.

Of those MPR workers who worked only at their workplace on days they spent time working, 83 percent worked 7 hours or more. (See figure 2.) The result is the same for MPR workers who worked both at their workplace and at home. However, those who spent time working both at their workplace and at home were much more likely to work

9 hours or more per day. Just over half of these workers worked 9 hours or more per day, compared with about one-third of those who worked only at their workplace.

Figure 2. How long workers in management, professional, and related occupations worked on days they spent time working, by location, averages for 2013–17



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Note: "Workplace and home" includes some time spent working at other locations, in addition to one's workplace and home.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

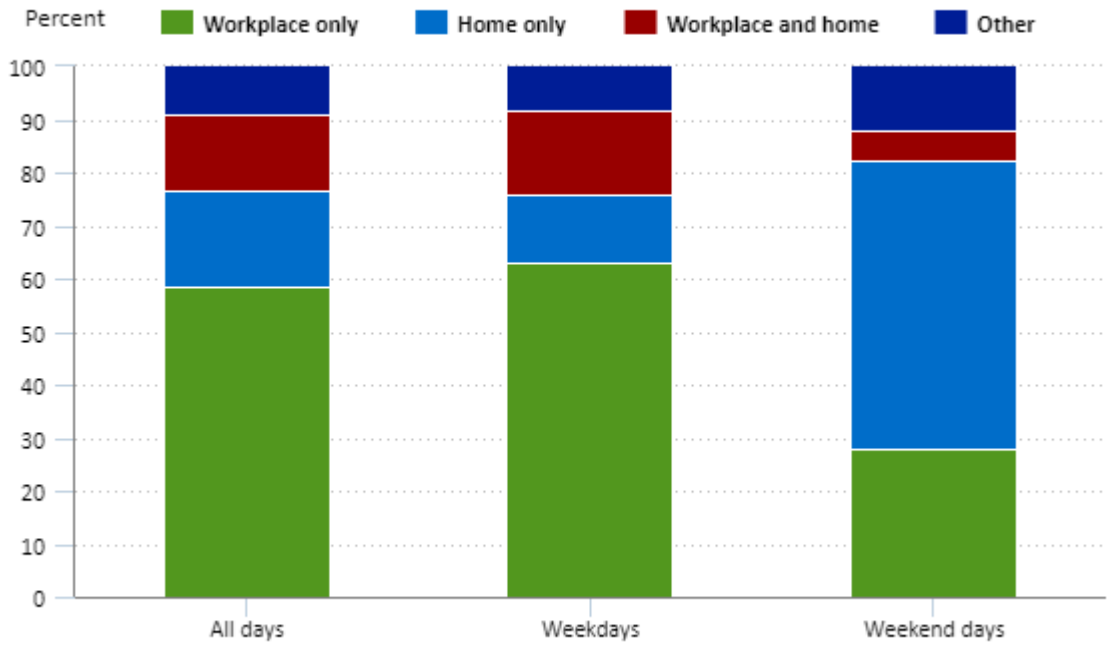
The work durations of MPR workers who performed work only at home on days they spent time working contrast greatly with the durations of those who spent time working at their workplace. Those working only at home were far more likely to work for short durations, with nearly half working less than 3 hours. Only about one-third of the workers who worked solely at home on days they spent time working did so for 7 hours or more.

Recall that these estimates show average worktimes for all days of the week on which people spent time working, including days on which they were not scheduled to work but did work anyway. The ATUS data do not include information about whether people were scheduled to work on the days on which they spent time working, although scheduling may be an important factor in why people worked where they did. For example, estimates for time spent working at home may include a greater proportion of unscheduled work than the other work-location estimates. Indeed, the reasons why people work at home likely influence their hours. For example, while some people have regularly scheduled days on which they work from home, others do so to catch up on work or to accommodate their needs for flexibility, such as to attend a medical appointment or a parent–teacher conference.

Did people employed in management, professional, and related occupations perform their work at different locations on weekdays and weekend days?

MPR workers were far more likely to work on weekdays than on weekend days in 2013–17. On average, 85 percent of those employed in MPR occupations worked on a given weekday, compared with 31 percent who spent time working on a given weekend day. (See table 2.) As shown in figure 3, MPR workers varied their work location depending on the day of week. On weekdays, MPR workers were more likely to work at their workplaces, and on weekend days they were more likely to work at home.

Figure 3. Where workers in management, professional, and related occupations worked on days they spent time working, by day of week, averages for 2013–17



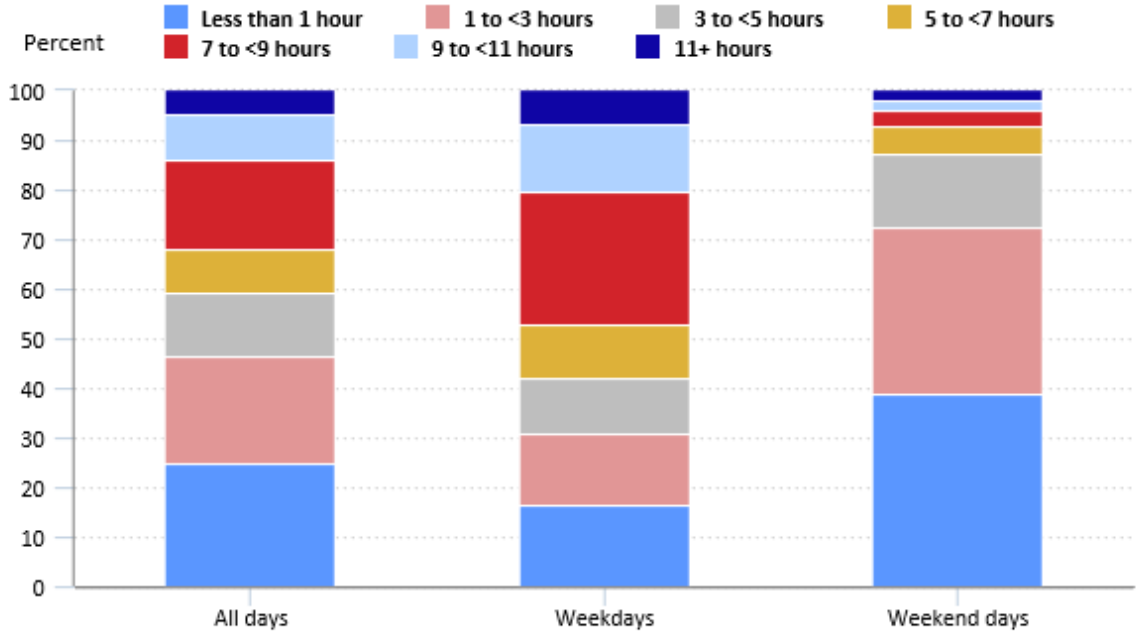
Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Among MPR workers who spent time working on weekdays, 63 percent worked solely at their workplace, and another 16 percent spent time working both at their workplace and at home. Thirteen percent of those employed in MPR occupations performed all of their work at home.

MPR workers who spent time working on weekend days were much less likely to do so at their workplace. About one-third performed weekend work at their workplace: 28 percent worked only at their workplace and 6 percent spent time working both at their workplace and at home. Home was the preferred location for weekend work, with more than half (54 percent) of those who spent time working on weekend days doing so solely from their homes.

MPR workers who worked only at home on weekdays did so for an average of 5 hours 41 minutes. They worked less than half as much time—2 hours 15 minutes—on weekend days on which they worked solely at home. As shown in figure 4, on weekdays, nearly one-half (47 percent) of those working only at home worked 7 hours or more. On weekend days, just 7 percent of those working only at home worked 7 hours or more. Most MPR workers who spent time working on weekend days did so only at home, and nearly three-quarters of them worked less than 3 hours.

Figure 4. How long workers in management, professional, and related occupations worked on days they spent time working only at home, by day of week, averages for 2013–17

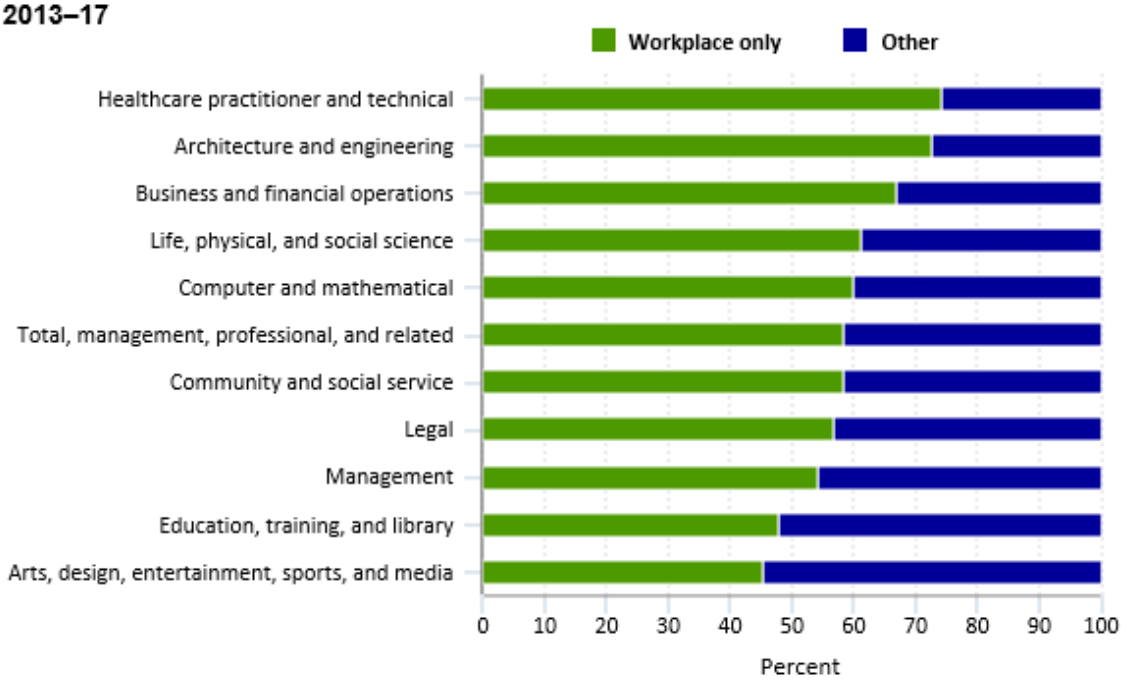


Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

How did work location vary among management, professional, and related occupations?

As shown in figure 5, work locations varied somewhat among MPR occupations. People employed in healthcare practitioner and technical occupations were among the most likely to work only at their workplace on days they spent time working. Seventy-four percent of workers in this occupational group—which includes people employed as physicians, nurses, therapists, veterinarians, and others whose jobs focus on patient care—worked solely at their workplace on days they spent time working. Workers in architecture and engineering occupations also were among those who were most likely to work solely at their workplace on days they spent time working. By contrast, people employed in arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations and in education, training, and library occupations were the least likely to work only at their workplace on days they spent time working.

Figure 5. Where workers in management, professional, and related occupations worked on days they spent time working, by occupational group, averages for 2013–17



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Conclusions

In 2013–17, employed people spent most of their work hours at their workplaces. This was true for people employed in MPR occupations and those employed in other occupations. However, the ATUS data also show that people employed in MPR occupations averaged more time working at home than did workers employed in other occupations, and their hours at home have changed somewhat over time. On average, MPR workers spent less time working at their workplaces and more time working at their homes in 2013–17 than in 2003–07. This change in work location occurred mainly on weekdays.

The analysis that focused on MPR workers in 2013–17 showed that their average worktime per day varied by work location. Those who worked only at home did so for the shortest average duration, and those who worked both at their workplace and at home did so for the longest average duration. These results reflect that people work at different locations for a variety of reasons, such as to accommodate appointments or other commitments, and to catch up on work.

MPR workers were less likely to work at their workplaces and more likely to perform work at their homes on weekend days than on weekdays. Additionally, on average, MPR workers who spent time working at home on weekend days did so for a shorter duration than those who spent time working at home on weekdays.

In the analysis of specific MPR occupations, workers employed in arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations and in education, training, and library occupations were found to be among those least likely to

perform their work only at their workplace on days they spent time working. By contrast, workers employed in healthcare practitioner and technical occupations were among those most likely to work only at their workplaces.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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NOTES

1 Management, professional, and related occupations include people with occupations described as management; business and financial operations; computer and mathematical; architecture and engineering; life, physical, and social sciences; community and social services; legal; education, training, and library; arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media; healthcare; and technical. For more information, see the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Occupational Classification System codes at https://www.bls.gov/tus/census10ocodes.pdf.

2 Rachel Krantz-Kent, "Where people worked, 2003 to 2007," *Issues in Labor Statistics*, June 2009, https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/archive/where-people-worked-2003-to-2007.pdf.

3 The term workplace refers to any place where people usually work, including factories, hospitals, schools, workshops, restaurants, and other locations. For example, an accountant's workplace may be an office building and a sales clerk's workplace may be a store.

4 For more information about the ATUS, see "American Time Use Survey: overview," *Handbook of methods* (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), https://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/atus/home.htm.

5 "Main job" refers to the job where a worker usually works the most hours.

6 The category of "other occupations" includes occupations described as service; sales and office; natural resources, construction, and maintenance; and production, transportation, and material moving. For more information, see the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Occupational Classification System codes at https://www.bls.gov/tus/census10ocodes.pdf.

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