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"Home" The New Workplace For Gen Z And Implications For Social Work Practice

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I. Who Is Gen Z

Gen Z is recognised as a distinct generational group shaped by rapid technological change, global events and shifting social conditions. Most scholars define Gen Z as individuals born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s, although the exact years vary across studies. As identified by the Pew Research Centre, the year 1997 was the starting year for Gen Z, when this cohort grew up while being surrounded by digital technology (Dimock, 2019). Unlike Millennials, Gen Z have had regular access to social media and even instant access to information, which has significantly shaped their identity, way of communication and social interactions. Generational identity often forms through shared historical, cultural and social experiences (Turner 2015).

Parry and Urwin (2011) highlight "social proximity" to major events as an important factor in defining generations. For Gen Z, these influences include global crises, widespread digital exposure, economic instability, and shifting social norms (Harari et al., 2023). Turner (2015) describes Gen Z as 'digital natives' who have been surrounded by technology since childhood. The Pew Research Center reflecting political, economic, and technological changes that marked the shift from Millennials to Gen Z (Dimock, 2019). Unlike earlier generations, such as Baby Boomers, defined by demographic trends, Gen Z is closely linked to digital culture and global connectivity. Mahapatra et al. (2022) call Gen Z an 'emerging phenomenon' and note their values, behaviours, and aspirations are still evolving. However, early research indicates that Gen Z shows high digital skills, strong social awareness, and changing expectations from institutions, employers, and society (Rachmad, 2025).

II. Technology Savy

A major characteristic of Gen Z is their status as digital natives. Prensky's idea of 'digital nativity' describes those who grow up with constant access to digital technologies, which perfectly fits Gen Z (Turner, 2015; Coklar & Tatli, 2021). From a young age, they have used smartphones, tablets, social media, and the internet, making digital interaction a key part of their daily lives. The internet has become a defining feature of modern society, affecting communication, business, and social relationships (Flyverborn et al., 2019). For Gen Z, this digital landscape is their only reality; they have not experienced a world without the internet, making digital tools vital for their social, educational, and professional lives (Dangmei & Singh, 2016). Their communication style is often informal, fast-paced, and emoji-based, reflecting the influence of online platforms (George, 2024).

III. Inclusion In Diversity

Another important aspect of Gen Z is their exposure to diversity and multiculturalism. Gen Z is the most diverse generation, with a growing number of biracial, multiracial, and LGBTQ+ individuals (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021). Growing up in culturally diverse urban areas has expanded their perspectives and encouraged greater acceptance of differences. The reduction of stigma around sexual orientation and gender identity has allowed Gen Z to express themselves more openly. This has led to more flexible understandings of identity and challenges to traditional social norms. Consequently, Gen Z values inclusivity, representation, and authenticity both online and offline. This generation is seen as the most ethnically diverse and tends to be open-minded about issues related to race, gender, and identity (George, 2024; Mohr & Mohr, 2017). They also emphasise teamwork,

social responsibility and contributing positively to society. Wandhe (2020) further highlights that Gen Z prioritises diversity, inclusion, and social justice. These values shape the interaction with grands, institutions and media. They prefer content and organisations that reflect real-world diversity rather than stereotypes, reinforcing the importance of representation in contemporary culture.

Financially aware

Gen Z youth have witnessed job loss, income instability, and financial stress at home. These experiences have heightened their awareness of economic realities and the need for financial responsibility. Rising income inequality and a shrinking middle class have led Gen Z to take a cautious approach to money, savings, and career planning. Economic uncertainty has influenced their values, prioritizing financial security, adaptability, and flexible job options. This heightened economic awareness sets them apart from earlier generations who experienced more stable financial conditions during their formative years. Gen Z prefers work-life balance and tends to reject hustle culture; this trend is referred to as 'quiet quitting' (George, 2024).

Perceptions of crises and safety

Global conflicts and crises have also shaped Gen Z's worldview. Many members of this generation grew up amid global unrest, which has helped them see the world as unpredictable and increased their global awareness (Harari et al., 2023; Sangwa, 2025). The pandemic of COVID-19 particularly had a big impact on Gen Z. During the pandemic, discussions on Twitter (now 'X') portrayed Gen Z as digitally active, socially engaged, and responsive to public health messages (Freeman et al., 2023). Social media became a crucial platform for expressing opinions, sharing information, and coping with pandemic-related challenges.

Social Life

Turner (2015) connects Adler's idea of 'social interest' to Gen Z's focus on connection and helping others. Social interest refers to the natural human desire to contribute to the well-being of others. For Gen, this is often expressed through digital platforms rather than face-to-face interaction. As a study by Tyson et al. (2021), social media enables Gen Z to participate in civic discussions, support social causes and mobilise around issues such as climate change, mental health and social justice. Online spaces can encourage public opinion formation and civic engagement. Gen Z's comfort with digital communication makes them effective at using these platforms for collective action. However, their heavy reliance on digital interaction raises concerns about the depth and quality of their social relationships (Kick et al., 2015). While technology provides chances for connection, it can also affect emotional growth and interpersonal skills, highlighting the complex relationship between Gen Z and the digital world.

New work culture

Gen Z's values differ from those of previous generations in several ways. Wandhe (2023) points out that authenticity, sustainability, flexibility, and work-life balance are important to this group. They seek meaningful work that aligns with their personal values and offers chances for growth instead of rigid organisational structures. Gen Z is also known for its entrepreneurial spirit and innovative mindset (Hidayat, 2024). Their early exposure to digital tools has made them comfortable with creating content, starting online businesses, and expressing themselves. They value personalised experiences, instant access to information and a collaborative environment. In the educational and workplace settings, Gen Z prefer autonomy, flexibility, transparency with meaningful engagement (Dangmei & Singh, 2016; Mohr & Mohr, 2017). They favour learning environments that are interactive, technology-driven and connected to real-world challenges. They are still developing as a generational cohort, but as per initial trends, they have a strong preference for social responsibility, ethical practices and community involvement. These values also influence their consumer behaviour, career choices and political attitudes.

The quiet revolution: when "going to work" means staying home

For many Gen Z workers, "workplace" has stopped being a building with desktops and chairs but started being a set of logins. The laptop opens on a bed, a dining table, or a shared room. Colleagues appear as rectangles on a screen, and breaks happen beside the kitchen sink. Work ends not with a commute but with the same wall in front of the same chair.

This shift not only indicates a change in location. It also means a change in rhythm, identity, relationships, supervision, conflict, support, and stress. It also changes who gets access to opportunity and who silently falls behind. In an era that is sculptured by platform economies, normalisation of remote work during the pandemic, and rising cost of living, the Gen Z often look at home-based work as a default setting and not a perk.

At the same time, Gen Z is not a single story. Some experience remote work as a form of freedom, a relief from exhausting commutes, and an opportunity to live in lower-cost locations. Others experience it as

isolation, blurred boundaries, and invisible disadvantage when promotions and mentorship gravitate toward those who are "seen" more often. For social work, this landscape creates new practice demands: we are no longer supporting people only in workplaces and only in homes, but in the growing overlap where home has absorbed work.

Why home-work appeals to Gen Z

Several forces make home feel like the "new office" for many Gen Z workers:

a) Cost and survival math- Housing costs, transportation costs, and the general expense of urban life make remote work feel like a more practical adaptation. Even when salaries rise modestly, the monthly arithmetic of rent, fuel, and food can push people toward home-based work or shared living arrangements.

b) Digital comfort and platform-native habits- Gen Z has grown up with online meets, social connection through apps, and learning through screens. It very much natural for them to "work through a device/screen". Skills like using digital platforms, creating content, and managing an online presence often help improve job opportunities in modern sectors.

c) Safety, psychological Well-being- Home-based work is also seen to reduce exposure to harassment, commuting risks, chronic illness, or social anxiety by the cohort. For neurodivergent individuals and those with disabilities, remote work can be enabling when designed well.

d) Flexibility as a basic value, not a perk- Gen Z often treat flexibility as a baseline expectation. Today, many evaluate organisations not merely by the pay, but by whether the work model respects mental health and personal life. These motivations matter for social work because they reveal that home-based work is not merely a "trend", but it is often a response to structural pressures, lifestyle expectations, and new meanings of dignity and control.

The hidden costs

What changes when work moves into the home? If home becomes the new workplace, then it must carry a new weight. While some impacts are visible, others show up quietly in relationships, mood, and long-term well-being.

a) Blurred boundaries and "always-on" fatigue- When work is no longer confined to a four-walled building, someplace away from your home, boundaries become psychological instead of physical. Many young workers report-

- difficulty "switching off" guilt when resting because work is always nearby, longer working hours because start and end times dissolve.
- constant checking of messages due to fear of missing out or appearing unresponsive/offline.

This can, in turn, lead to burnout that might look mild on the surface, but slowly drains energy: not a dramatic collapse, but a chronic depletion.

Isolation and mentorship gap- In a typical office setup, informal learning often happens through observation, spontaneous conversations, and teamwork. Remote work can reduce these "micro-mentorship" opportunities, leading to Gen Z workers feeling: professionally alone, unsure of norms and expectations, unable to get feedback, hesitant to ask questions (because it feels like interrupting), less sponsored, and less advocated for. The World Economic Forum explains, "While acquiring digital skills has made younger generations more employable, the lack of face-to-face interaction in the workplace has also had an impact, not only in terms of mental well-being but also in terms of the potential for longer-term development." (Forum, 2020). "Isolation, loss of productivity, and longer-term disengagement can be consequences of home-work." (Montañez, 2024).

Research by McKinsey & Company points out that workers are vulnerable to burnout and isolation, with 81% fearing loneliness in long-term remote jobs and a quarter worrying about in-person interaction (Hatami, 2022).

This also has equity implications- those with strong networks at home or college may cope, while first-generation professionals or workers from marginalised backgrounds may suffer (Various, 2021).

b) Home as contested space- Not all individuals have the privilege of a quiet and peaceful home. "In many countries, congested living conditions, care-giving roles, home conflicts, the absence or instability of the internet connection and office setup, and gendered expectations, particularly among young generations of womxn, to manage home and office responsibilities, can mean the intensified experience of inequality in the home-based work setting. Home can thus mean "work while managing everything else," and "work while very stressed and underperforming."

c) Mental health stressors unique to digital work: Remote work can intensify-

- social comparison (especially via polished online personas)
- performance anxiety due to constant monitoring
- loneliness, especially for workers living away from peers
- disrupted sleep, because late-night work becomes routine

While Gen Z is often more open about mental health, but this openness does not automatically translate into access to support or reduction of stigma in organizational cultures.

d) Identity and meaning- work without a "place": A workplace is used to provide identity markers: a building, a space for teams to collaborate, a routine, and, in some cases, even a sense of belonging. When work is no longer confined to this "place", some workers feel less connected, anchored and unsure whether they "belong" to the organization, and emotionally detached, which can lead to attrition. This matters because many social work interventions rely on stable relational environments. Remote work can weaken relational glue.

Implications for Social Work Practice

For social work, the shift from home to workplace creates new entry points and responsibilities across micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

A. Micro practice: working with individuals and families**:** Social workers supporting young adults who work from home may need to assess issues that previously belonged mostly to their organizational life.

- Holistic assessment: work-life balance
  - This practice can include structured conversations around daily routine and hours, setting clear boundaries around rest, sleep, screen time, and emotional spillover into family relationships.
  - Emphasising practical boundary tools: designated workspace corners, time-blocking, calendar detox days, fun-Fridays, phone-free breaks, or short transition rituals like walking after work, and journaling to recreate the psychological commute.
- Mental health support
  - Common themes include anxiety, loneliness, fatigue, and low motivation.
  - Social workers can normalise experiences without trivialising them, teach coping strategies that suit screen-heavy life, identify risk signs (withdrawal, substance use, self-harm ideation) early, and link clients to accessible services (tele-counselling, peer support groups)
- Family systems and role negotiation
  - In a joint-family setup, conflicts can arise around privacy, noise, expectations, and "being at home means being available." Social work skills in mediation and family counselling become directly relevant in negotiating household roles, making families aware of work demands, and building respectful home-work agreements.
- Safeguarding concerns
  - Home is not safe for all, where some feel unsafe due to violence, harassment, or controlling and toxic relationships. Remote work can increase exposure and reduce escape time. Social workers must be alert to domestic violence indicators, digital surveillance by family or partners, financial control issues, safety planning, and referral pathways.

B. Mezzo practice: communities, institutions, and workplaces: Remote work brings social work closer to organizational wellbeing and community supports.

- Workplace social work and employee wellbeing ecosystems
  - Organizations that employ large numbers of young remote workers increasingly need mental health literacy programs, peer-support structures, onboarding and mentorship systems, means to address harassment and discrimination online, and crisis response protocols.
  - Social workers can help design and run these systems, ensuring they are not mere "wellness posters" but functional support mechanisms.
- Building community alternatives to the office: If work no longer provides social contact, communities can. Social workers and NGOs can support:
  - co-working community hubs for youth (especially those without home space)
  - youth clubs, skill circles, and peer networks
  - digital communities with guided facilitation (not just chat groups). These become social infrastructure: places where belonging is rebuilt.
- Digital inclusion as a practice concern: Remote work assumes devices, connectivity, and digital literacy.
  - Social work at the community level can support- access to devices and affordable internet, training in digital skills and cyber safety, special attention to rural youth, low-income urban youth, and persons with disabilities.

C. Macro practice: policy, labour rights, and social protection: The home-as-workplace trend raises big questions about rights, fairness, and regulation.

- The right to disconnect- When work enters the home, the workday can quietly expand. Social work advocacy can support policies that set clear limits on after-hours communication, fair overtime practices, and accountability for unreasonable workloads
- Occupational health and safety for remote workers- Ergonomic injury, eye strain, and chronic stress are real occupational health concerns. Social workers can advocate for: employer responsibility for basic remote-work support, mental health protections as part of workplace safety, grievance mechanisms that work for remote employees

- Equity and anti-discrimination in remote settings- Remote work can hide discrimination (who gets feedback, who gets credit, who is promoted). Social work can contribute to: equity audits, inclusive digital culture guidelines, safe reporting systems for remote harassment
- Social security for gig and platform work- A portion of Gen Z works from home, not as employees but as freelancers, creators, gig workers, or platform-based contractors. This raises issues around: income volatility, lack of health insurance and pensions, algorithmic control and unfair deactivation, exploitation through unpaid "trial tasks" or delayed payment. Macro-oriented social work can support stronger social protection frameworks and accessible legal aid pathways.

Practice principles for social workers in the home-work era

Some guiding principles that fit this moment:

- Treat digital life as real life- Online spaces are not "less real", they are where identity, stress, conflict, and belonging now occur.
- Assess environment, not only symptoms- Anxiety and burnout often have roots in workload, isolation, home conflict, and insecurity.
- Build boundaries- Helping clients create healthy boundaries is now a core life-skill intervention.
- Strengthen mentorship and peer ties- Isolation is both a mental health issue and a career equity issue.
- Prioritising safety, privacy- Remote work can expose clients to domestic violence and surveillance.
- Advocate for fairness in new labour forms- Social work's traditional commitment to dignity and protection must extend to remote and gig workers.

IV. Conclusion: A New Home, A New Workplace, A New Responsibility

As work shifts into the home, the meaning of home itself changes. It is no longer a space for rest and personal life, but also absorbs ambition, pressure, deadlines, financial dependence, and, at times, vulnerability. For Generation Z, this shift signifies more than just convenience or flexibility; it embodies a profound rethinking of adulthood, labour, and personal identity. This change has significant consequences for social work practices. As the lines between personal and professional lives blur, social workers are required to navigate a mixed reality where work-related stress, family issues, mental health, and rights converge within home environments. Traditional methods such as counselling, community engagement, policy advocacy, and rights-focused interventions remain crucial, but they must now be utilised within this changing landscape. The workplace hasn't vanished; it has merely shifted, and practices need to evolve in response. Generation Z is not turning away from work or physical workplaces; they are challenging deep-rooted beliefs about how work ought to operate. By 2030, remote work may no longer be seen as an alternative—it may simply be the norm (Institute, 2022).

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