Research finds female employees hardest hit by pandemic and working from home

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- *An international research review containing contributions from UCL School of Management academic explores implications of COVID-19 on the workplace*
- *Research highlights that the global pandemic and work- from-home model has increased social pressures on employed women to a greater extent than their male counterparts*

London, 17 December 2020 – A review of research in organizational and workplace psychology conducted by an international team of academics has revealed the implications of working-from-home for women has been more disruptive. The review paper, entitled **COVID-19 and the Workplace: Implications, Issues, and Insights for Future Research and Action** and originally published in *American Psychologist*, features urgent insight from UCL School of Management Professor, Sunny Lee into the sex- and gender-related implications of changes in work practices that have taken place over the course of 2020.

The review of research indicates the impact of the pandemic differs by demographic characteristics, such as gender. The paper reveals two key implications on the workplace; the first that work-from- home models will increase and continue post-pandemic and the second that although men are more likely to face direct health threats from COVID-19, women are more likely to be affected by the adverse social and economic costs.

Working from home is here to stay

The authors of the paper believe that face-to-face working *will* reemerge post-pandemic but will most likely return in a hybrid form which mixes face-to-face work with virtual work. Prior research has suggested that hybrid forms of working such as this are effective in increasing employees' productivity, satisfaction, and psychological wellbeing.[1] And even with the option to work on an entirely remote basis, employees may choose to come to office regularly given humans' strong social motives to connect with others.

Although working-from-home has turned out to increase productivity for some workers, it does also come with downsides. For example, research shows some workers are being burned out as they have to juggle caring for their children or other family members while working from home, whilst some employees feel distress and loneliness as they struggle with blurring work/non-work boundaries and miss out on social opportunities.

Given that working-from-home is likely to increase in the years which follow the COVID-19 pandemic, the negative consequences of such models will continue unless addressed. The review paper found gender and sex to be an influential moderating factor.

WFH more disruptive for women than men

Prior research has shown that in households where two partners are employed, women typically engage in household tasks more than men. And during national lockdowns and the closure of schools, the burden of household tasks tends to increase for couples with children as they become compelled to assist with children's virtual learning.

Therefore, although working-from-home may increase overall productivity among employees, work may be substantially more disrupted for women, particularly those who have children. Indeed, a recent research (Feng & Savani, 2020) study showed that during the pandemic, among couples who are both employed, women's productivity was more disrupted and women felt more dissatisfied with their job. Additionally, the research showed due to their empathy and communal orientation, women, compared to men, may feel more isolated and stressed by working from home. A recent survey on 996 U.K. healthcare workers found that more females are experiencing emotional distress amid the pandemic (IPPR, 2020).

Sunny Lee, one of the paper's authors and an Associate Professor of Organizational Behaviour at the UCL School of Management, said: "The research has shown that the work-from-home model has been a

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success for many companies forced to close their offices during the pandemic. However, we can see on a day to day basis the pressure this is putting on women to find a balance in their productivity and home life and this something organisations need to be sensitive to if this model is here to stay.

“Interestingly, one of the emerging trends we observed was the success of female leaders in handling this crisis, with leaders such as Jacinda Arden, Angela Merkel and Tsa Ing-Wen able to flourish in these uncertain environments. Going into 2021 organisations need to be aware of creating the right environment, one which is sensitive to the needs of both men and women, so that everyone’s skills are able to flourish during times of uncertainty.”

Notes to Editors

Kniffin, KM; Narayanan, J; Anseel, F; Antonakis, J; Ashford, SP; Bakker, AB; Bamberger, P; Bapuji, H; Bhave, DP; Choi, VK; Creary, SJ;Demerouti, E; Flynn, FJ; Gelfand, MJ; Greer, LL; Johns, G; Kesebir, S; Klein, PG; Lee, SY; Ozcelik, H; Petriglieri, JL; Rothbard, NP;Rudolph, CW; Shaw, JD; Sirola, N; Wanberg, CR; Whillans, A; Wilmot, MP; Vugt, MV; (2020) “COVID-19 and the workplace: Implications, issues, and insights for future research and action” was published in **American Psychologist** on the 4th of July 2020.

The paper is available here: https://psyarxiv.com/gkwme/

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[1] Golden, T. D., & Veiga, J. F. 2005. The impact of extent of telecommuting on job satisfaction: Resolving inconsistent findings. ***Journal of management***, 31(2): 301-318.

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