

Weathering the Storm: The Effects of Working from Home and Income Loss on Family Relationships During COVID-19

Jeremy Lim & Poh Lin Tan, National University of Singapore, jeremylimwz@u.nus.edu, spptplj@nus.edu.sg

Research Questions

- Does working from home spark or resolve work-life conflicts?
- Does working from home promote family intimacy or tension?
- Does income loss stress family relationships?

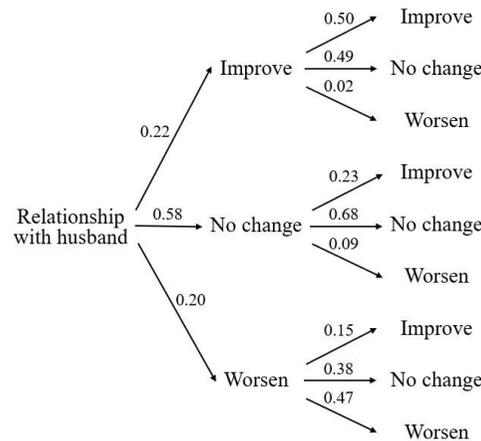
Background

- Work and family are interconnected (Kanter 1977)
- Working from home collapses boundaries between home and work (Halford 2006)
- Stress depends on subjective views of job security (Sverke & Hellgren 2002)
- Men and women react to economic strain differently (Falconier and Epstein 2011)
- “Family resilience” is important to withstand and rebound from crisis (Walsh 2020)
- Family relationships may benefit from a slower pace of life (Zvonkovic et al. 2013)

Data

- 341 heterosexual married couples with children aged below 18 in Singapore
- 3 survey waves before, during, and after the COVID-19 lockdown

Results



Multinomial logit regressions: Change in wife's relationships

	(1)		(2)	
	Wife's relationship with husband	Wife's relationship with children	Wife's relationship with husband	Wife's relationship with children
Wife working from home	1.202** (0.560)	0.242 (0.411)	-0.335 (0.491)	-0.204 (0.363)
Husband working from home	0.124 (0.509)	0.587* (0.323)	0.045 (0.467)	-0.401 (0.374)
Wife had income loss	-0.354 (0.618)	0.839 (0.511)	1.023 (0.854)	1.682*** (0.591)
Husband had income loss	0.326 (0.515)	-0.268 (0.417)	-0.162 (0.610)	0.024 (0.407)
	N:	341	341	
	Pseudo-R ² :	.13	.11	

Estimates are adjusted for sample weights. * p < .10. ** p < .05. *** p < .01.

Full paper: <https://bit.ly/3klj2sP>

- Married women's spousal relationships worsened if they were working from home but improved if husbands were working from home.
- Neither parent's work from home status was significantly associated with changes in mother-child relationships.
- Women's income loss was associated with improved mother-child relationships.
- Maternal relationships with young children were more sensitive to mothers working from home, while relationships with older children were more sensitive to income loss.

Discussion

- The findings point to longstanding tensions between work and family life, with a substantial gender gap in the allocation of household chores.
- Wives who work from home may struggle to manage the conflicting demands of employment and household chores.
- Wives' perceptions of spousal relationships improve when husbands work from home, suggesting that flexible work arrangements should be targeted at husbands.
- Worsened mother-child relationships with school-age children call into question the impact of school closures during lockdown.