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

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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)

Results

![Diagram showing the relationship between working from home, income loss, and family relationships.]

- 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.

Data

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

Multinomial logit regressions: Change in wife’s relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Wife’s relationship with husband</th>
<th>(2) Wife’s relationship with children</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wife working from home</td>
<td>Worsen: 1.202** (0.560) Improve: 0.242 (0.411)</td>
<td>Worsen: -0.335 (0.363) Improve: -0.204 (0.383)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Husband working from home</td>
<td>Worsen: 0.124 (0.509) Improve: 0.587* (0.323)</td>
<td>Worsen: 0.045 (0.374) Improve: -0.401 (0.346)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wife had income loss</td>
<td>Worsen: -0.354 (0.618) Improve: 0.839 (0.511)</td>
<td>Worsen: 1.023 (0.854) Improve: 1.682*** (0.591)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Husband had income loss</td>
<td>Worsen: 0.326 (0.515) Improve: -0.268 (0.417)</td>
<td>Worsen: -0.162 (0.610) Improve: 0.024 (0.407)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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N: 341
Pseudo-R²: .13

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

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