

York University

**IMPACTS OF COVID-19
ON THE WORKING
ARRANGEMENTS OF
FACULTY AND STAFF**

Short Report - Highlights

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Acknowledgements:

This report is based on findings from a survey conducted at York University in August/September 2020. The original survey was designed and led by Professor Emeritus David Peetz and Professor Emeritus Glenda Strachan at Griffith University in Australia, then adapted slightly for the Canadian context, and administered at a total of seven universities in Australia and seven universities in Canada. The local research at York was led by Assistant Professor Kelly Pike, School of Human Resource Management, on behalf of the Global Labour Research Centre. Quantitative data analysis is being led by Assistant Professor James Chowhan, School of Human Resource Management. This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University’s Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

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This report represents the views of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of York University.

More information about the “COVID-19 Home-working by university staff survey” is available on the [project home page](#).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents descriptive findings based on data that were collected as part of the COVID Homeworking for University Staff Survey (CHUSS) project. The CHUSS is an international research collaboration (including researchers at 14 universities – seven in Australia and seven in Canada) looking into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the working arrangements of faculty and staff at universities, and it is led by Dr. David Peetz at Griffith University, Australia. This report mainly focuses on cross-sectional survey data collected at York University (n=1,292) in August and September of 2020. The survey was sent to all York faculty and staff using email distribution lists. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and as such this implies the potential for non-response bias with the implication that caution would be required when interpreting the results.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, workplaces in Canada and around the world have needed to close facilities due to emergency government requirements, and as such workers began to engage in homeworking activities. For some workers, this was a seamless transition, while for others, the transition was not so easy. This study seeks to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work factors of interest (i.e. preferred arrangement of work; how work arrangements changed; personal experiences and satisfaction; and work expectations, work-space, and work environment) across individual characteristics (including job role, gender, age, Indigenous, visible minority, immigrant status, activity limitation, and care responsibilities) for faculty and other staff (i.e. librarian or archivist; administrative, professional, technical and general staff; and senior university management) at York University.

The findings for York University indicate that most respondents reported increases in working from home (96.6%) compared to before the pandemic (6.7%) and for many the new arrangement was a preferred working arrangement post-pandemic (44.1%). Working at home seemed to create some challenges as 45% reported an increase in work interfering with personal life, while 39% reported an increase in personal life interfering with work. These challenges may have been mitigated in that 57% agreed that their workload was manageable; 52% agreed that the university provided adequate support to enable work at home, and 70% agreed with the statement “it is clear what is expected of me in my job”. Nonetheless, 70% reported an increase in stress, and 40% a decrease in job satisfaction (with 71% reporting an increase in worry, and 45% a decrease in happiness). Concerns with career progress, quality of work and productivity were also reported (in particular for faculty and especially in the domain of research).

It is important to note that while the cross-tabulations in this report enable rich comparisons across many characteristics of interest, more nuanced and enriching analyses were generally not possible because of sample size and confidentiality concerns. Further, future analyses will explore in a multivariate framework the role of individual characteristics on some of the work factors of interest. Finally, the results in this report are based on a survey that used voluntary participation, and as such non-sampling errors (e.g. coverage and nonresponse) may impact the quality of the results; especially if different sub-groups of the population are systematically underrepresented in the sample.

INTRODUCTION

The data presented in this report was collected as part of the COVID-19 Homeworking for University Staff Survey (CHUSS) project. CHUSS is an international research collaboration looking into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the working arrangements of faculty and staff at universities in Canada and Australia.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, workplaces in Canada and around the world have needed to close facilities due to emergency government requirements, and as such workers began to engage in homeworking activities. This study seeks to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on working arrangements of academic and administrative/professional staff at several universities in Canada including York University. This study makes a substantive contribution to knowledge by capturing the state of working arrangements during a key period within the pandemic, when perceptions are still fresh in people's minds and before re-entry phases create new and different environments. This report focuses on the survey data collected at York University (n=1,292).

METHODS

This report is based on a cross-sectional survey of York University faculty and staff as a part of larger project being conducted across 14 universities in Australia and Canada. The survey entitled "Impact of COVID-19 work at home on York University staff" was collected in August and September of 2020. The survey was sent to all faculty and all staff using email distribution lists; thus, both academic and other university staff received email notifications regarding the survey. A follow up reminder email was sent about two weeks after the first invitation to participate in the survey. Staff were asked to complete an online survey taking approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the survey at any time. A total of n=1,292 faculty and staff participated in the survey. Based on data available at the York University Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (OIPA) webpage, the total all staff count is approximately N=6,798 (with 55.7% female and 44.2% male), and this implies a 19% response rate (i.e. $1292/6798=0.19$). In addition to the confidentiality protocol taken during the collection of the data (e.g. secure data management and anonymization of the data records), in this report, care has been taken to ensure individual information and responses are not revealed through the reporting of the findings.

For this report, cross-tabulations are the main analyses that are used to develop estimates that enable a comparison of outcomes across individual characteristics and work factors. With regard to individual characteristics the full report focuses on the following: job role, gender, age, Indigenous, visible minority, immigrant status, activity limitation, and care responsibilities, while this current short report focuses on job role and gender. The work factors of interest are

the following: preferred arrangement of work; how work arrangements changed; personal experiences and satisfaction; and work expectations, work-space, and work environment.

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

As noted above, there are several individual characteristics that were collected from the participants. This short report focuses on job role and gender. The individual characteristics of age, Indigenous, visible minority, immigrant status, activity limitation, and care responsibilities are available in the full report. The overall sample descriptive statistics for these variables are presented in Table 1 below. For job role, participants were asked: “What is your job role at the university?” They could identify four main categories: faculty; librarian or archivist; administrative, professional, technical and general staff (including trades, caretaking and hospitality); and senior university management (Dean or AVP and above). For this report, a job role binary variable was created with 1=faculty and 0=otherwise. For gender, the question, “what is your gender?” was asked, and three categories were collected (male, female, and non-binary / fluid / other, please specify). All three of these categories were used in the report.

WORK FACTORS

The work factor characteristics of interest for this report can be grouped in to four main categories: (1) preferred arrangement of work, (2) how work arrangements changed, (3) personal experiences/satisfaction, and (4) work expectations, work-space, and work environment. For brevity, in this short report, a selection of work factor characteristics are presented to provide an essence of the results that are available in the full report. Details on questions and coding are available in the full report.

REPORT TABLES

For this short report, descriptive statistics are the main results that are presented. Compared to the main report, abridged tables for some concepts of interest have been included. Table 1 presents univariate frequency estimates for the individual characteristics that this report focuses on: job role, gender, age, Indigenous, visible minority, immigrant status, activity limitation, and care responsibilities. Tables 2 to 5 present the bi-variate cross-tabulations for the work factor variables by each of the individual characteristics. Thus, these tables enable comparisons of work factors across the individual characteristics, such that any differences in outcomes for the work factors across individual characteristics can be assessed.

Regarding the precision of the results reported in the tables below, some points should be considered. Sampling error and sampling variance can impact the precision and reliability of the estimates included in this report; for example, when sample sizes are lower in bivariate analyses this implies relatively lower precision. The estimates based on small sample sizes should be interpreted with caution.

TABLE 1: SAMPLE STATISTICS OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Table 1: Sample descriptive statistics (n=1292)

Individual Characteristics	Percent
Job Role	
Other Staff	69.3
Faculty	30.8
Gender	
Male	27.8
Female	71.6
Non-Binary/Fluid/Other	0.5
Age group	
Aged 51-70	40.5
Aged 50 and less	59.5
Indigenous/Non-Indigenous	
Non-Indigenous	97.8
Indigenous	2.2
Visible minority	
Non-Visible Minority	84.3
Visible Minority	15.7
Place of birth	
Born in Canada	63.6
Born Elsewhere	36.4
Activity Limitations	
No Activity Limitations	84.1
Activity Limitations	16.0
Caring responsibilities (children or others)	
No Care Responsibilities	44.1
Care for Children Only	21.4
Care for non-Children Only	23.1
Care for Children and Other	11.4

TABLE 2: PREFERRED ARRANGEMENT OF WORK

Table2: Work Arrangements Before, During, and After COVID-19

Work arrangements:	Job Role		Gender		
	Other Staff	Faculty	Male	Female	Non-Binary/ Fluid/Other
Work from home BEFORE COVID-19					
Never work from home	95.3	47.7	75.3	82.6	85.7
About half and half	3.4	34.9	16.9	11.6	14.3
Always work from home	1.4	17.4	7.9	5.8	0.0
Total (n)	890	396	356	921	7
Work from home DURING COVID-19					
Never work from home	2.4	0.8	2.8	1.5	0.0
About half and half	2.0	0.5	3.1	1.0	0.0
Always work from home	95.6	98.7	94.1	97.5	100.0
Total (n)	890	392	357	916	7
Preferred arrangement AFTER COVID-19					
Never work from home	14.5	23.8	23.5	14.7	57.1
About half and half	37.2	41.5	37.0	39.3	28.6
Always work from home	48.3	34.7	39.5	46.0	14.3
Total (n)	888	395	357	917	7

TABLE 3: HOW WORK ARRANGEMENTS CHANGED

Table 3: Do you consider that the following things associated with your work increased, decreased or remained the same as a result of the changes associated with moving from pre-COVID-19 to COVID-19 working arrangements?

Work arrangements:	Job Role		Gender		
	Other Staff	Faculty	Male	Female	Non-Binary/ Fluid/Other
Paid work hours					
Decreased	3.2	10.9	7.5	4.5	33.3
Stayed the same	82.7	74.3	82.3	80.0	50.0
Increased	14.2	14.9	10.3	15.6	16.7
Total (n)	727	303	282	739	6
Hours actually spent on work					
Decreased	11.6	13.1	15.5	10.7	14.3
Stayed the same	28.0	12.9	23.5	23.2	14.3
Increased	60.5	74.0	61.0	66.1	71.4
Total (n)	830	373	341	852	7
The clarity of what was expected of you					
Decreased	26.5	50.3	37.5	31.8	85.7
Stayed the same	57.4	34.8	47.9	52.0	14.3
Increased	16.1	14.9	14.6	16.3	0.0
Total (n)	827	362	336	843	7
Personal daily productivity					
Decreased	20.5	58.8	41.2	28.5	71.4
Stayed the same	25.1	20.2	25.3	23.2	14.3
Increased	54.4	21.0	33.5	48.3	14.3
Total (n)	833	371	340	855	7
Quality of your work					
Decreased	9.2	34.1	21.8	14.7	71.4
Stayed the same	50.5	51.3	50.9	50.7	28.6
Increased	40.4	14.5	27.4	34.6	0.0
Total (n)	830	372	340	852	7

TABLE 4: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND SATISFACTION

Table 4: Do you consider that the following things associated with your personal feelings or well being increased, decreased or remained the same as a result of the changes associated with moving from pre-COVID-19 to COVID-19 working arrangements?

Work arrangements:	Job Role		Gender		
	Other Staff	Faculty	Male	Female	Non-Binary/ Fluid/Other
Your job satisfaction					
Decreased	31.0	60.2	45.1	38.1	57.1
Stayed the same	38.4	29.3	33.2	36.6	42.9
Increased	30.6	10.6	21.7	25.3	0.0
Total (n)	828	369	337	850	7
The stress you experience					
Decreased	22.6	5.0	14.8	18.2	0.0
Stayed the same	15.6	6.9	14.8	12.1	14.3
Increased	61.8	88.1	70.5	69.7	85.7
Total (n)	813	360	332	832	7
How much work interferes with your personal life					
Decreased	19.2	6.7	16.2	14.8	0.0
Stayed the same	42.1	34.2	37.2	40.7	42.9
Increased	38.8	59.0	46.6	44.5	57.1
Total (n)	820	371	339	843	7
How much your personal life interferes with your work					
Decreased	12.6	3.8	10.7	9.5	0.0
Stayed the same	56.0	41.3	50.0	52.2	14.3
Increased	31.4	55.0	39.4	38.3	85.7
Total (n)	807	373	338	833	7

TABLE 5: WORK EXPECTATIONS, WORK-SPACE, AND WORK ENVIRONMENT

Table 5: Working arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic

Work arrangements:	Job Role		Gender		
	Other Staff	Faculty	Male	Female	Non-Binary/ Fluid/Other
It is clear what is expected of me in my job					
Disagree	16.0	32.5	22.9	20.0	71.4
Neither agree or disagree	7.0	14.3	9.5	9.2	0.0
Agree	77.0	53.2	67.7	70.8	28.6
Total (n)	830	372	337	855	7
The university provided adequate support to enable me to work at home					
Disagree	25.5	42.6	31.4	30.3	42.9
Neither agree or disagree	14.9	21.4	21.5	15.0	57.1
Agree	59.6	36.0	47.1	54.8	0.0
Total (n)	819	364	331	843	7
My workload is manageable					
Disagree	21.4	40.5	27.6	27.3	28.6
Neither agree or disagree	13.0	22.8	18.1	15.1	28.6
Agree	65.6	36.7	54.3	57.7	42.9
Total (n)	829	373	337	855	7
I am satisfied that my workload is fair					
Disagree	25.9	42.6	29.4	31.7	28.6
Neither agree or disagree	19.7	24.4	24.6	19.7	14.3
Agree	54.4	33.1	46.0	48.6	57.1
Total (n)	829	369	337	852	7
During my non-work hours, I do not think about work at all					
Disagree	66.7	88.0	78.2	71.5	100.0
Neither agree or disagree	6.4	4.0	4.7	6.1	0.0
Agree	27.0	8.0	17.1	22.5	0.0
Total (n)	834	374	340	859	7

CONCLUSION

The findings from the York University portion of the CHUSS project illustrate that university workers experienced an assortment of outcomes that were associated with adapting to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, this report focused on how work factors of interest (i.e. preferred arrangement of work; how work arrangements changed; personal experiences and satisfaction; and work expectations, work-space, and work environment) varied across individual characteristics, including: job role, gender, age, Indigenous, visible minority, immigrant status, activity limitation, and care responsibilities.

In summary, most respondents from both the faculty and other staff (i.e. librarian or archivist; administrative, professional, technical and general staff; and senior university management), reported increases in working from home (96.6%) compared to before the pandemic (6.7%) and for many the new arrangement was a preferred working arrangement post-pandemic (44.1%). While the number of paid work hours did not increase substantively for most respondents (14.3%), over half indicated an increase in their actual time spent working (64.8%). Compared to other staff, faculty generally reported relatively higher concerns with job expectations, university support, and manageable workload. Further, these patterns continued for job satisfaction and workload satisfaction outcomes with faculty reporting lower satisfaction levels. Further, work-life balance and work strain levels were also generally higher for faculty compared to other staff. Finally, these concerns with satisfaction and stress seem to have had an impact on work productivity and quality with relatively higher levels of decreases being reported by faculty compared to other staff.

It is important to note that while these patterns exist for job role, they are also present to varying degrees across other individual characteristics such as: gender, age, Indigenous, visible minority, immigrant status, activity limitation, and care responsibilities. The cross-tabulations used as the main analyses in the full report provide an opportunity for these types of rich comparisons; however, it should be noted that only multi-variate analyses can separate out the significant role of individual characteristics with regard to outcomes of interest. Future research will use multivariate modelling to explore the role of individual characteristics on some of the work factors of interest, such as preferred arrangement of work, how work arrangements changed, personal experiences and satisfaction, and work environment.

Overall, these tables suggest that individual characteristics could be linked to differential outcomes, and as such some workers may be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. As work arrangements under COVID19 conditions persist, these disruptions in work and life can become more acute, and as such it will be important for university administrators to maintain an active dialogue to enable an understanding with regard to how these concerns are progressing and whether issues are being effectively addressed.

