

Work-Life Balance, Well-Being, and Productivity with Remote Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Japan

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Abstract

The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic required many people to work remotely. Using the *Survey on Changes in Attitudes and Behaviors Resulting from the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, conducted by the Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan, we examine the impact of the pandemic on work-life conditions in Japan, such as subjective work productivity, subjective well-being, and the division of housework between spouses, during the first two years of the pandemic. Compared to pre-pandemic levels, married men and women with children report that they have increased their share of housework and childcare and the time spent on housework and childcare as well as time spent with their family members. They also report a decline in subjective job productivity.

Married men who work remotely report that compared to pre-pandemic times, they assume a greater share of housework and spend more time doing it, and they also share more time with their family than those who do not work remotely. Moreover, they report a greater level of life satisfaction than that of non-remote workers. Regarding subjective work productivity, married men who work remotely report lower productivity than those who do not work remotely. Therefore, the increase in participation in household activities by married men working remotely may have come at the cost of reduced subjective work productivity.

By contrast, married women with children who work remotely report that compared to pre-pandemic times, they bear a greater share of housework and childcare than those who do not work remotely. However, their time spent on housework, childcare, and with their family are not significantly different from those who do not work remotely. The life-satisfaction level of married women with children is not significantly different from those who do not work remotely. Regarding subjective work productivity, married women with children in regular employment who work remotely report higher productivity since the pandemic, whereas those in nonregular employment report lower productivity. For men and women, compared to pre-pandemic levels, various well-being measures (including life, job, and health satisfaction; ease of childcare; social ties; and life enjoyment) dropped significantly by May 2020, when the first survey was conducted soon after the pandemic had begun, but gradually returned to pre-pandemic levels in October 2021, when the fourth and most recent survey was conducted. However, three of the six well-being measures (namely, job satisfaction, social ties, and life enjoyment) had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels by October 2021. Unmarried men lagged behind married men in their levels of well-being in October 2021, particularly in terms of social ties and life enjoyment.