Introduction

Little research has examined the impacts of Flexible Workplace Arrangements (FWA) on working parents during the pandemic considering robust evidence for the established association between parents’ mental health, parenting and child development. This study addresses the literature gap by providing preliminary insights on the relationships between FWA and parental mental health (MH) and parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Current Study

Four Objectives:
1) The relationship between FWA and Parental MH and parenting behaviors;
2) The impacts of FWA on the association between Parental MH and parenting;
3) The impacts of FWA on the association between stress and Parental MH and parenting;
4) The interaction effects of FWA and parenting intervention on parents’ MH and parenting.

Method & Procedure

• Eligibility: average stress level on Parental Stress Index (PSI), with at least one 4-2-year-old child.
• Data collection: 17 eligible parents were asked to complete a 30-minute online survey before and after participating in an 8-week emotion-focused parenting intervention (Bridging). FWA was measured by asking parents if they had any FWA, 9 parents reported working from home (WFH) were compared with 8 parents who were not WFH in ANOVA analysis.
• Parental MH was measured with Patient Health Questionnaire – 9, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 2, and PROMIS Anger Scale.
• Parenting behavior was measured by Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire (MP), Parenting young Children Questionnaire (PARYC) and Parental Spanking.

2 x 2 Repeated Measure ANOVA (FWH x Intervention)

ANOVA Result

Analysis of the relationships between FWA and parenting behaviors.

Discussion

• Parents with FWA arrangements showed significantly lower engagement in proactive parenting (parenting mean difference = 4.63, d = 1.31, p < 0.05) before intervention as well as lower level of overall mindfulness (parenting mean difference = 13.38, d = 1.44, p < 0.001) and lower engagement in proactive parenting (parenting mean difference = 3.90, d = 1.11, p < 0.05) after intervention when compared with parents who did not FWA.
• Large effect sizes suggest a possibility for correlations.
• Consistent with prior parenting studies:
  • Parents with distress reported less positive expressiveness and responsiveness to their children (Westrup et al., 2020; McPherson et al., 2008).
  • Challenge in setting boundaries between work and childcare may be an explanation for less mindful and attentive parenting among those who were experiencing workplace alteration during the pandemic.
  • We cannot reject the possibility of the association between FWA and parents’ MH due to the exploratory nature of this study.
  • Results should be interpreted with a caution as WFH was the only measure of FWA as well as the small and focused sample pool.

Conclusion

• This study provided preliminary evidence for the negative correlation between FWA and parenting behaviors (specifically in the mindfulness, setting limits, and proactive components) but not for parental MH among parents with elevated stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.
• Findings require further confirmation and examination on the impacts of FWA on parents’ MH parenting, as well as child development considering the established impacts of parental MH in previous research. Targeted recruitment of parents with FWA may be necessary for a generalization of the reported FWA’s impacts.
• Attention required to follow up on the impacts of FWA among working parents to find out possible solutions that allow easy transformation between traditional and remote workplace considering the rising prevalence of FWA around the globe.


Figure 1. Four Research Objectives

Figure 2. Summary of the simple main effects observed between WFH and parenting

Figure 3. Result of 2x2 Repeated Measure ANOVA on Mindfulness, Limit, and Proactive Parenting

ANOVa Table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Correlation with FWA</th>
<th>(−) Setting limits @ Pre-intervention</th>
<th>(−) Proactive @ Pre-intervention</th>
<th>(−) Mindfulness @ Post-intervention</th>
<th>(−) Proactive @ Post-intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WFH parents reported:</td>
<td>Lower tendency in setting limits</td>
<td>Lower engagement in proactive parenting</td>
<td>Lower level of mindfulness</td>
<td>Lower engagement in proactive parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F=8.06, p&lt;0.05)</td>
<td>(F=19.34, p&lt;0.05)</td>
<td>(F=24.16, p&lt;0.05)</td>
<td>(F=9.22, p&lt;0.05)</td>
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