

The Impacts of Working from Home on Parenting and Parent's Mental Health during COVID-19



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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.

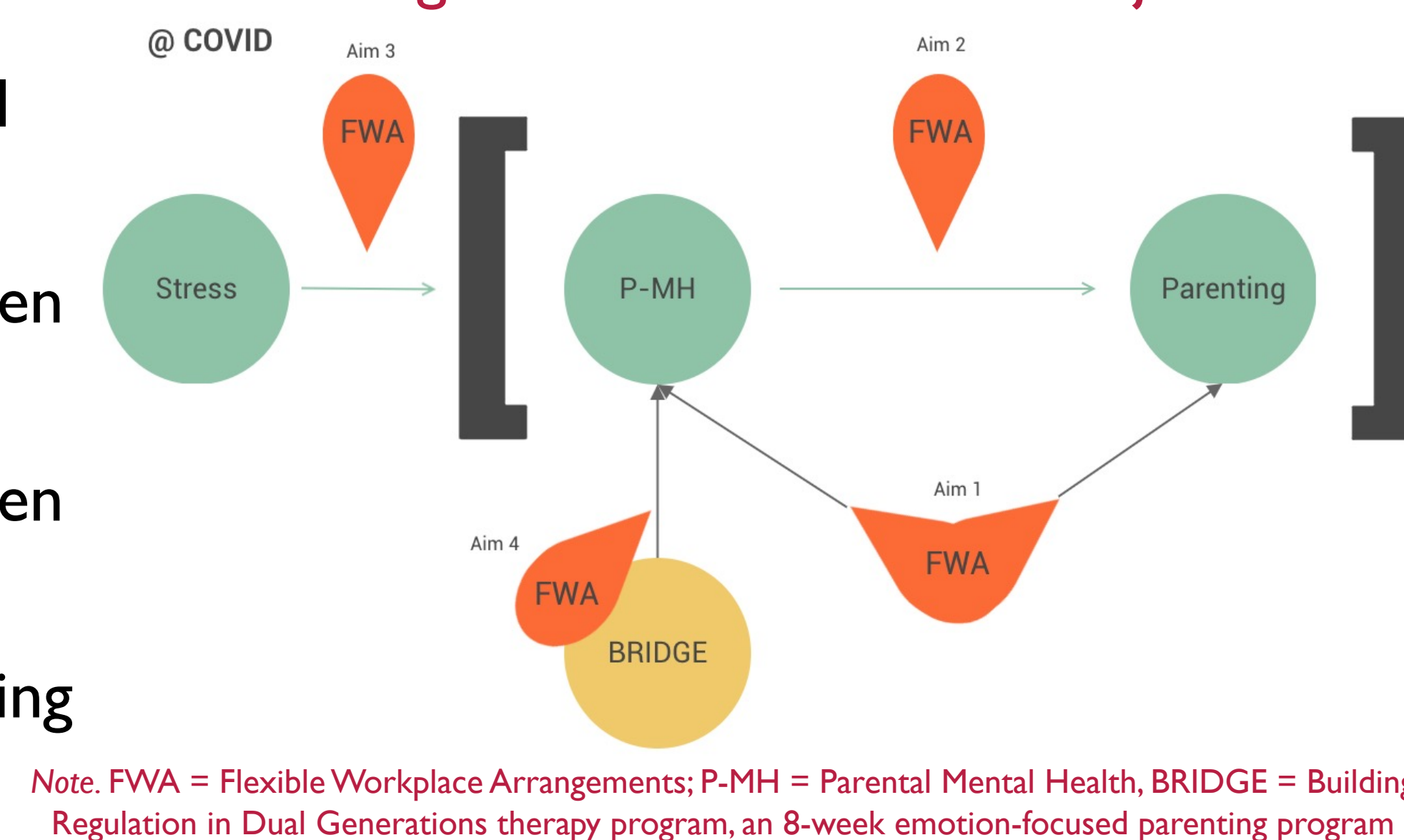
This study addresses the literature gap by providing preliminary insights on the relationships between **FWA** and **parental mental health (MH)** and **parenting** during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 mental health;
- 4) The **interaction effects** of **FWA** and parenting **intervention** on parents' MH and parenting.

Figure 1. Four Research Objectives



Note. FWA = Flexible Workplace Arrangements; P-MH = Parental Mental Health; BRIDGE = Building Regulation in Dual Generations therapy program, an 8-week emotion-focused parenting program

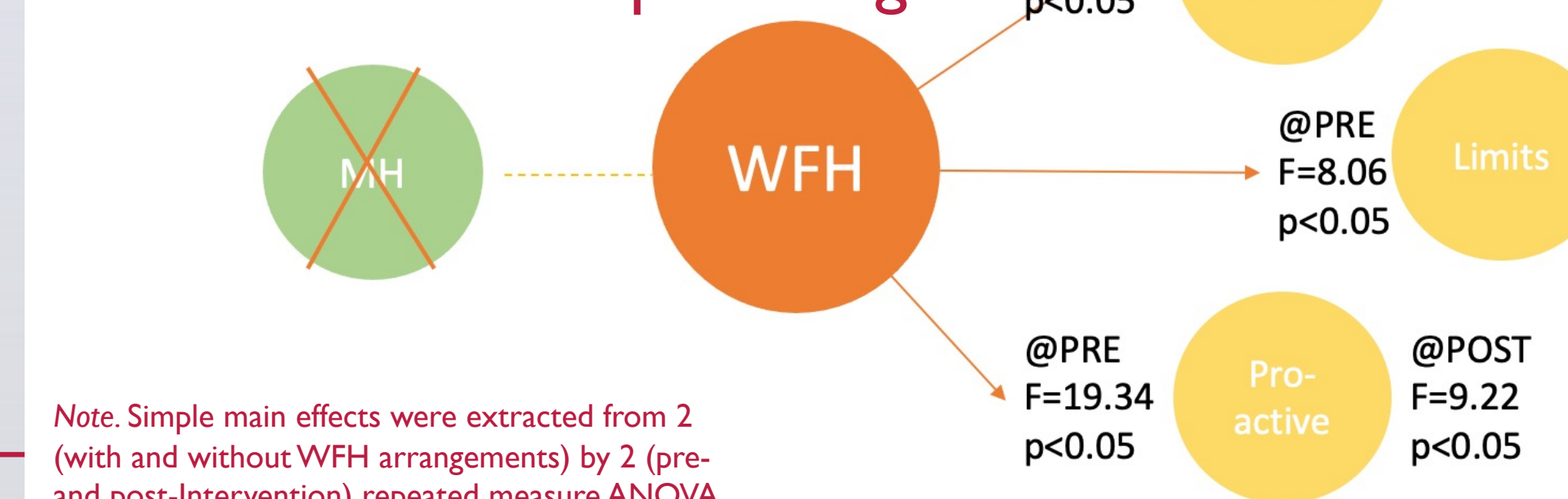
ANOVA Result

- **MH:** No significant **association** was observed in any MH measures.
- **Parenting:** Significant **negative correlation** was found between WFH arrangement and reported level of **mindfulness** on MP as well as **setting limits** and **proactive** subcomponents of parenting behavior on PARYC.
- **No** interaction effect was observed between WFH and Intervention.

Table 1. Correlations Observed in ANOVA Analysis between Working from Home and Parenting Behavior

| Observed Correlation with WFH | (-) Setting limits @Pre-intervention | (-) Proactive @Pre-intervention | (-) Mindfulness @Post-intervention | (-) Proactive @Post-intervention |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| WFH parents reported: | Lower tendency in setting limits (F=8.06, p<0.05) | Lower engagement in proactive parenting (F=19.34, p<0.05) | Lower level of mindfulness (F=24.16, p<0.05) | Lower engagement in proactive parenting (F=9.22, p<0.05) |

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



Note. Simple main effects were extracted from 2 (with and without WFH arrangements) by 2 (pre- and post-intervention) repeated measure ANOVA

Discussion

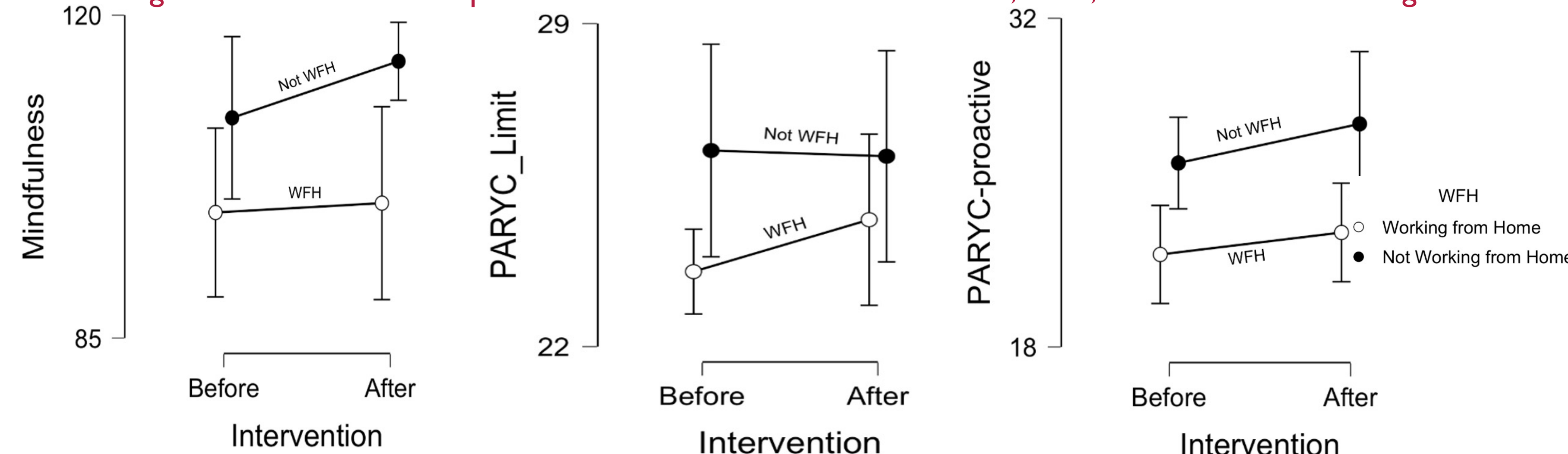
- Parents with **WFH** arrangements showed **significantly lower** engagement in **proactive** parenting (mean difference=4.63, d=1.31, p_{bonf}<0.05) before intervention as well as lower level of reported overall **mindfulness** (mean difference=15.38, d=1.44, p_{bonf}<0.01) and lower engagement in **proactive** parenting (mean difference=3.90, d=1.11, p_{bonf}<0.05) after intervention when compared with parents who did not WFH.
- **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 (Westrupp 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 cautions as WFH was the only measure of FWA as well as the small and focused sample pool.

Method & Procedure

- **Eligibility:** above average stress level on Parental Stress Index (PSI), with at least one 2-4 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 (BRIDGE).
- **FWA** was measured by asking parents if they had any FWAs. 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 Subscale.
- **Parenting behavior** was measured by Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire (MP), Parenting Young Children Questionnaire (PARYC), and Parental Spanking.

2 x 2 Repeated Measure ANOVA (WFH x Intervention)

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



Note. (a) Negative correlation was observed in reported overall mindfulness after intervention when compared with non-WFH parents (mean difference = 15.38, d=1.44, p_{bonf}<0.01).

Note. (b) Negative correlation was observed in the limit subcomponent of PARYC scale among WFH parents before intervention (F=8.06, p<0.05)

Note. (c) Negative correlation was observed in the proactive subcomponent of PARYC scale among WFH parents both before and after intervention when compared with non-WFH parents (mean difference = 4.63, d=1.31, p_{bonf}<0.05 and mean difference=3.90, d=1.11, p_{bonf}<0.05 respectively).

Conclusion

- This study provided preliminary evidence for the **negative correlation** between **WFH** and **parenting behavior** (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 generalized report of 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.