The Experiences of Healthcare Workers and Lawyers Engaging in Remote Work

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, working professionals have engaged in remote work. This form of work involves working outside of the employer's premises with the support of information and communication technologies; employees can work at multiple locations and use a variety of technologies (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the prevalence of remote work experienced growth, and the global workforce has seen profound changes as a result. This study explores the overall changes operating on both the institutional scale, focusing on the experiences of healthcare workers and lawyers. Historically, these two fields have been resistant to change and have long relied on a culture of work that prioritizes long 'visible' work hours (Spicer, 2020; Faguy, 2020; Rabinowitz, 2021; Hartsfield et al., 2020). While there is generally a lack of research on remote work due to its recent adoption, there is even less research on the experiences of doctors and lawyers. In analyzing the research that has been done, this study has found considerable similarities in how healthcare and law professionals would describe their experiences with remote work. There were similarities in how professionals described their productivity, flexibility, work/life balance, and collaboration. Research on each profession failed to account for, namely, a recognition of intersectional experiences. The existing power structures, combined with a resistance to change in these fields, have upheld radicalized and gendered exclusion and thus, prevented experiences from being focused on in research (Riveria, 2012; Bhatt, 2013; Melaku, 2019; Seron et al., 2016). In bringing the similarities between the two professions and the absence of intersectional accounts to light, this study provides implications for policies and protocols within professions and future

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

research.

- How has remote work affected the work experiences of professionals in the healthcare and law profession?
- How do the changes, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the work-from-home order present in the law profession compare to the changes present in the healthcare profession?

METHODOLOGY

Data for this research study were drawn from various sources, namely, professional associations, blogs and surveys, newspapers, and scholarly journal articles. These records on the healthcare and law professions

Thematic Code Counts

	Work Satisfaction Productivity		Protocol Changes	Training	Health and Wellness	Collaboration	Flexibility	Work/Life Balance	Age	
Healthcare	12		11 1	1 1	1 11	1 1	1	9	7	2
	0	Health and Wellness	Flexibility	Productivity	Age	Collaboration	Training	Work/Life Balance	Gender	
Law	26		14 1.	2 1:	2	8	8	7	7	5

were found through professional databases and, subsequently, through the citations of relevant articles. Research on the healthcare industry included (11) blog posts, (5) newspaper articles, (4) surveys/reports, and (5) journal articles. In contrast, research on the law industry included (3) newspaper articles, (9) posts from professional associations, (1) survey, and (5) journal articles. The blog posts and posts from professional associations were generated by the profession whereas, secondary sources carried out the latter forms of research. The data was analyzed through an inductive reasoning approach; I collected the data and analyzed the data with an open mind to see what themes emerge. I found the key themes after engaging in thematic coding analysis. I coded the data with a series of descriptive codes and finally used the descriptive codes to arrive at broader value codes. The prevalence of each code is exemplified in the tables above.

RESULTS

In comparing the published content on the experiences of professionals engaging in remote work in the healthcare industry and the law industry, a variety of themes, common to both have been found:

- Productivity: Professionals report being less productive in both fields due to an inadequate workspace; a lack of resources; and other household responsibilities, namely childcare
- Flexibility: The majority of professionals describe flexibility as one of the best qualities of working from home. They can set their schedules and adjust them to the changing demands of the
- Work/Life Balance: Medical professionals and law professionals report increased difficulty balancing familial obligations and work responsibilities. While professionals can set their hours to account for this imbalance, they report increased pressure to be available 24/7.
- Collaboration: Professionals report that technology can recreate the collaborative atmosphere of in-

person workspaces to a limited extent. However, most professionals in both medicine and law express a desire to return to in-person work because they miss the interactions they had with their colleagues. These interactions were effective in maintaining positive relationships and high morale within the workplace (Meinhardt & Staehr, 2020; Pelo, 2020; Tong, 2018; Gilmartin, 2020; Roberts, 2020; Vente, 2020; McKeen, 2021; Singh, 2020; Hartfield, 2020; Cohen, 2020; Wakely, 2020; Faguy, 2020; Adams, 2020; CMA Joule Staff, 2021; Sayers, 2020; Downdall, 2020; Burkholder-James, 2021; Brown, 2021; Freeland, 2020; Balakrishan, 2020).

In addition to reporting similar themes, these distinct fields, each tied to a distinct social institution, hold differences in how research has accounted for their respective professionals' experiences.

- Willingness to Change: The data on the experiences of law professionals focuses on the profession's historical resistance to change and how this resistance has been confronted during the pandemic. Many have been willing to adopt significant changes such as downsizing office spaces, using online collaborative platforms, and finally, adjusting long-standing work culture. Professionals have revealed the need to update work arrangements and reexamine a culture that prioritizes productivity over professionals' well-
- Work Satisfaction and Mental Health: The data on the medical field primarily describes how the pandemic has affected the health of medical professionals. The data reveals that medical professionals have described feeling isolated and lonely while working from home without access to their colleagues to get a second opinion or to converse with; they now conduct online consultations through which there is an absence of such. Medical professionals have also reported feeling increasingly stressed while working from home, resulting from the isolation described above or difficulty managing familial responsibilities and work responsibilities (Meinhardt & Staehr, 2020; Tong, 2018; Rabinowitz, 2021; Titus, 2021; Vente, 2020; Gilmartin, 2020; Singh, 2020; Hartfield, 2020; CMA Health Summit, 2019; CMA Joule Staff, 2021; Alexander, 2020; Faguy, 2020; Roberts, 2020; Faguy, 2020; Downdall, 2020; Brown, 2021).

DISCUSSION

Upon analyzing the current research and engaging in a comparative analysis of the experiences of healthcare and law professionals, it is evident that the pandemic has resulted in an overall negative experience for professionals. While professionals have enjoyed a higher degree of flexibility in scheduling their workdays, they have also reported declines in productivity and work/life balance (Meinhardt & Staehr, 2020; Pelo, 2020; Tong, 2018; Gilmartin, 2020; Roberts, 2020; Vente, 2020; McKeen, 2021; Singh, 2020; Hartfield, 2020; Cohen, 2020; Wakely, 2020; Faguy, 2020; Adams, 2020; CMA Joule Staff, 2021; Sayers, 2020; Downdall, 2020; Burkholder-James, 2021; Brown, 2021; Freeland, 2020; Balakrishan, 2020). Additionally, they have found collaboration over online mediums increasingly challenging to navigate and prefer in-person collaboration techniques. These similar experiences, as recorded by the current research, provide helpful feedback for those in a leadership role in each profession. In considering these experiences, they can tailor their remote work protocol to correct the deficiencies in productivity, work/life balance, and collaboration.

The current research suggests the pandemic, as an unprecedented social phenomenon, has managed to transcend the division between the social institutions of healthcare and the law. The pandemic has mostly spurred similar sentiments amongst professionals in both industries; feelings of hopefulness for a return to normalcy coupled with feelings of isolation. The professions' reports on remote work experiences differ in two areas, in the law profession's discussion on the willingness to change and in the healthcare profession's discussion on work satisfaction and mental health. These professions, each with their distinct social responsibilities and roles, have historically been static in their organization and performance (Spicer, 2020) yet, this pandemic has forced these professions to acknowledge and support the role that social environments, in a physical and mental sense play in the employee experience. Profession-specific research fails to account for the intersectional differences within professionals' experiences, namely, gendered and racial differences. Researchers briefly touch upon gendered differences amongst law professionals engaging in remote work while discussing their difficulty balancing familial commitments and work responsibilities. Their analysis of the work/life balance provides a surface-level

discussion of gender inequality in the home. They present various first-hand accounts of women in law who describe how they do the majority of housework and childcare activities and find themselves struggling to maintain their productivity. However, despite the law maintain their productivity. However, despite the law profession's attempt at discussing the gendered implications of remote work, both professions fail to analyze the women's experiences through a feminist lens. Similarly, research on the two professions does not account for racial differences; each profession is treated uniformly without discussing how remote work has disparate impacts on people of colour.

A discussion on law and healthcare professionals' gendered and racialized experiences while working from home would provide a much-needed perspective to the research that characterizes these two fields. These fields, primarily controlled by Caucasian, cisgender, heterosexual men, lack insight into this steadily growing sector of workers. Remote work has led to similar profound changes in these two fields that have historically been resistant to change. How people of colour have experienced these changes should be analyzed.

"Healthcare and law professionals have enjoyed a higher degree of flexibility in scheduling their work days yet, they have also reported declines in productivity, work/life balance, and collaboration."

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