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Matt R. Huml
University of Cincinnati

Elizabeth A. Taylor
Temple University

Eric M. Martin
Boise State University

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Matt R. Huml*
University of Cincinnati
humlmt@uc.edu

Elizabeth A. Taylor
Temple University

Eric M. Martin
Boise State University

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of required remote work on work-family spillover within U.S. college sport. Particularly, we examined the changes in work-family spillover (positive and negative), job commitment, and workaholism as employee's work environment changed from traditional work expectations to work-from-home, and if these changes were at least partially due to parental responsibilities. Data were collected from full-time, NCAA athletic department employees ($n = 1,139$) in November 2019 and again in May 2020 following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and after the transition to remote work. Results showed sport employees found a number of benefits associated with working remotely, including a significant decrease in negative work-family spillover. However, employees with children-at-home reported higher levels of negative family-work spillover after going to remote work than others. Workaholism was also higher after the move to remote work. Both theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

The global workforce has undergone rapid changes as the percentage of dual-earning households more than doubled between 1960 and 2000 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Although these changes are positive in many ways, they have led to some familial challenges related to balancing work and home responsibilities. Organizations have started to address these employee concerns by offering more opportunities for remote work. Remote work alleviates some of the employee's concerns by creating on-demand availability for their family needs while simultaneously allowing them to continue achieving their work responsibilities (Grant et al., 2013). Remote work also has benefits for the organization, as employees have shown to work harder while at home, this environment eliminates non-work office distractions, and employee intentions to stay with their current employer increase (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Remote work provides several benefits, but also has drawbacks, such as employee isolation and difficulty of disconnecting from work due to technology (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

Remote work has been viewed as a net-positive for both the organization and their employees. However, there are some industries that have been slow to adopt the possibility of remote work. Some industries, such as the medical and early childcare fields, view it as a logistical impossibility to implement for their workforce. Other industries view it as a cultural incompatibility. One of these industries that has viewed the shift counter to the existing culture has been the sport industry. Employees within the sport industry often work long hours, incur significant travel for their job, and are required to work nontraditional hours (i.e., weekends; Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2014; Huml et al., 2021). There also is a culture within certain sport industry sectors pushing the limit of acceptable work hours and embracing the characteristics of negative work outcomes including workaholism and burnout (Carson et al., 2019; Lee & Chelladurai, 2018; Lopez et al., 2020; Reiner et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2019). Every year, several coaches and administrators will espouse the importance of continuously committing more time and resources to their job as a necessity for having a successful program (e.g., Huml et al., 2019; Pifer & Huml, 2020; Scott, 2022 August 19). Some sport industry sectors have ingrained workplace culture requiring "face time", where administrators judge your organizational worth based on being physically present in the office. This creates pressure on employees to meet those demands as a prerequisite for maintaining their employment or being eligible for promotions (Weight et al., 2021). These challenges have created an environment where college athletics is less willing to embrace many of the adaptive workstyle options offered in other vocational outlets as a benefit to employee well-being and productivity (Moen, 2018).

Although the sport industry has been resistant to allowing their employees to conduct remote work, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the adaptation to remote work a requirement. Certain athletic departments were ill-equipped with the move and needed external support to streamline processes across employees within their department (“Ohio University signs with Teamwork”, 2020). The pandemic has caused several national governments to implement work-from-home and restricted travel mandates as a means of minimizing the virus spread and managing the pressure created on public health systems (Baert et al., 2020). Indeed, the pandemic impacted the sport industry, with sporting events being suspended or canceled worldwide in 2020 and employees being required to work-from-home as a means of social distancing.

The combination of the (1) onset of the pandemic and (2) the previous resistance to remote work by the sport industry provide a unique opportunity to study the effect of remote work on work-family spillover in athletic department employees. Previous scholars examining the effect of remote work within career fields have examined the voluntary option of working-from-home, but these past studies have often characterized the benefit of remote work from only a portion of the population, specifically those with the most to benefit or those feeling societal pressure to accept remote work (Ely & Padavic, 2020). The context of the COVID-19 pandemic made remote work a requirement for employees, thus producing a context to investigate all employees performing remote work instead of select employees choosing to work from home for various, personal reasons.

The change to remote work blended, if not altogether eliminated, employees’ work and home life boundaries. This work transition was further complicated for those who have children, especially if these workers were now responsible for children during work hours and time typically spent in other’s care (e.g., childcare and primary schooling; Schieman et al., 2021). The cultural expectations within the sport industry may mean that employees would be either resistant to remote working, even within the circumstances of the pandemic, or especially ill-equipped to transition to remote work. Therefore, the previous findings of benefits for remote work may be stunted for athletic department employees based on the (1) forced acceptance of remote work and (2) cultural expectations within the industry that are more resistant to remote work than other industries.

As such, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of required remote work on work-family spillover within U.S. college sport. Particularly, we examined the changes in work-family spillover, job commitment, and workaholism as employee’s work environment changed from traditional work expectations to required work-from-home, and if these changes were due, at least in part, to parental responsibilities. The NCAA canceled championship events across 31 sports, leading to a decrease in formal work events for athletic department employees. Indeed, the combination of both remote work and lessened athletic events could function as a beneficiary for reducing both negative work-family spillover and employee workaholism. The onset of the pandemic and separation from their work location could also create an environment that increases an employee’s job commitment. To examine these possibilities, we surveyed full-time, college athletic department employees in November 2019 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and again in May 2020 following the onset of the pandemic and the suspension of all NCAA athletic participation. We were able to examine college sport employee perceptions because of a previously scheduled data collection in Fall 2019, therefore allowing us to disburse a similar survey in late Spring 2020.

Theoretical Framework

Direct Impact

Work-Family Spillover

The competing demands between work and family responsibilities is not a new concept, as the give-and-take between work and family roles was conceived by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). Work-family conflict was originally defined as, “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressure from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). This mutual incompatibility is created from the finite resource of time. Even though past research has typically focused on negative consequences stemming from balancing work and family responsibilities (Wayne et al., 2017), there are also positive outcomes that stem from these competing roles. To encompass this more comprehensive nature of both positive and negative overflow from work and family life, researchers conceptualized work-family spillover, “where behavior or experiences at work carry over into family life, which then influences family and general life outcomes” (Stevanovic & Rupert, 2009, p. 63).

This carryover from work-to-family (and vice versa) shows the delicate relationship between both domains. Past studies have often reported that negative responses in one environment, such as increased stress at work, leads to similar negative consequences at home (Kossek et al., 2020). There is limited research on the positive spillover that could occur between the domains, such as the possible family benefits achieved through greater workplace flexibility. The blurring of roles between work and family has been associated with work-family conflict, even as work flexibility increases and employees with greater permeability saw an increase in negative spillovers (Hyland & Protas, 2017). There has been a call to investigate high-pressure career outlets to better understand work-family spillover and work-related outcomes (Allen et al., 2014; Eddleston & Mulki, 2017), as careers with heightened pressure on employees may be more likely to allow work to permeate into designated family time and function as a disruption. The context of COVID-19 provides an opportune setting for examining both (1) how the sudden change to remote work contrasts compared to work industry norms, and (2) the permeability between work and family and their impact on work-family spillover with comparisons to pre-pandemic levels.

With work-family boundaries being blurred like never before, we believe the required acceptance of employees completing their work remotely (testing the possibility of future workplace flexibility after the pandemic has subsided) and extreme work expectations being reduced (stemming from the lack of sporting events) will decrease the negative work-family/family-work spillover that has previously been found but not create a change in positive work-family/family-work spillover. This is because remote work is (1) potentially limiting the most difficult components of the college sport work industry through required remote work (elimination of travel, presenteeism, greater control of schedule) and greater participation in family activities but (2) the context of work and family occurring in the same physical space makes it more difficult to spill over positive characteristics from both realms. For example, sport employees have discussed how their constant work (longer hours, bringing work home) can create negative spillover with their family (Taylor et al., 2019). There also could be a limited effect on positive spillover, as the greater separation of the two domains (less work, less sporting events, priorities being shifted to family over work) would reduce the opportunities for positive factors spilling from one domain to the other. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H₁: The change to remote work for athletic department employees will:

A: Significantly decrease their negative work-family spillover.

B: Significantly decrease their negative family-work spillover.

C: No statistical change to positive work-family spillover.

D: No statistical change to positive family-work spillover.

Interaction of Children at Home

Remote work is not a new concept within the workforce, but the onset of the pandemic has created the growth of research on the influence of having children at home, especially young children, when working remotely. Parents with younger children, if given an opportunity by their organization, may be less likely to choose remote work because working at home can create a greater demand to fulfill familial needs, such as prepping meals, implementing conflict resolution, helping them engage with online learning, while also having to complete work-related tasks (Xiao et al., 2021). Because of this incongruity of work and home responsibilities, parents with younger children may purposely seek out in-person work as a means of temporary relief from parental responsibilities and opportunities to fulfill other needs, such as interacting with other adults. Not surprisingly, as a result of the pandemic, parents with younger children saw a decrease in work productivity and engagement during remote work (Galanti et al., 2021). Remote work may seem like a temporary work environment brought on by the pandemic, but early workforce trends have shown more companies are embracing required remote work for their workforce as a means of reducing costs, such as office space (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2021) and might be a permanent feature of future work environments.

The required shift during the COVID 19 pandemic of working and parenting in the same physical place provides a distinct context for assessing the work-life interface. Previous research has examined the interaction of remote work and young children within the context of conflict. For example, Allen and colleagues (2016) found that remote workers with younger children at home indicated higher family-work conflict, and these workers indicated that family conflict was creating detrimental effects on the employee's work experiences. In addition to the concept of family conflict for those with children, a more applicable work-life interface concept could be work-family/family-work (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), especially as the barriers between work and home became nearly non-existent following work from

home requirements. The context of close and simultaneous interaction of work and parenting occurring during the pandemic creates a more direct examination of family and work having to co-habitat for the employee. Therefore, the following hypotheses were established:

H₂: The presence of children at home (CAH) will moderate the relationship between remote work and work-family/family-work spillover:

A: CAH will weaken the relationship between remote work and negative family-work spillover. Employees with children at home will have a significant increase in negative family-work spillover compared to other employees.

B: CAH will strengthen the relationship between remote work and positive family-work spillover. Employees with children at home will have a significant reduction in positive family-work spillover compared to other employees.

Job Commitment

Career commitment or “one’s attitude towards one’s vocation, including a profession” (Blau, 1988, p. 295), focuses on the employee’s dedication to their career field (i.e., sport) instead of a specific job within their vocation (i.e., sports information director). Job commitment, or job involvement, is a related, but unique concept that focuses on one’s commitment to a specific role within an organization. Job commitment has been defined as “the strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular job” (Millward & Hopkins, 1998, p. 1535). It has been connected to a number of work-related outcomes, such as turnover intentions (Blau, 1988), motivation to improve one’s work through learning and work satisfaction (Cunningham et al., 2005).

Although a greater concentration of research has focused on career commitment, organizational and job commitment deserve further examination (Zhu et al., 2020), especially in a longitudinal manner. One promising area to examine job commitment is changes within one’s current workplace. For example, receiving adequate job resources, autonomy, and work-life balance all have been found to increase career commitment (Ocampo et al., 2018). These findings could have a stronger relationship with job commitment as these improvements are primarily at the job, not career-level. A call has been made for more research into the relationship between job commitment and work-related attitudes (Zhu et al., 2020), as previous studies have investigated these relationships within the traditional, static work setting. Therefore, further examining these relationships after a transition to remote work would help progress our understanding of job commitment antecedents and during moments of transition.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most athletic departments instituted furloughs and job cuts (Anderson, 2020), which could impact one’s commitment to their job. College athletics maintains a culture of dedication and (over) involvement from their employees (Weight et al., 2021). When faced with the prospect of losing their job, employees may elevate their perceived job commitment to show loyalty to their employer. Researchers have hypothesized a positive relationship between economic factors and job-related commitment (Behery et al., 2016). Based on both (1) possible future workplace flexibility provided by employers to employees following proof-of-concept stemming from the pandemic changes, and (2) potential concerns about job instability, we propose the following hypothesis based on workplace environment changes stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic:

H₃: The change to remote work for athletic department employees will significantly increase their job commitment.

Workaholism

Another concept that could be significantly influenced by the transition to remote work and reduction in formal sporting events is workaholism. Workaholism is defined as “work[ing] harder than their job prescriptions require and they put much more effort into their jobs than is expected by the people with whom or for whom they work, and in doing so they neglect their life outside their job” (Schaufeli et al., 2008, p. 175). As expected, workaholism has been linked to a number of negative consequences, such as reduced mental health, increased work-family conflict, and difficulty leaving work in the office (Balducci et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2019). Although typically viewed in a negative perspective, workaholism has also been linked to limited number of positive outcomes, including increased job satisfaction (Ng et al., 2007). Within the context of the current study, workaholics are faced with the unique situation of their work place also being their home. Indeed, the pandemic is barring workaholics access to their physical work space, necessitating a blending of home and work. A workaholic can feel guilt or anxiety when they leave their workplace and can no longer perform work responsibilities (Ng et al., 2007). The current context creates a unique

situation where an employee can't leave their workplace because their work and home environment are one in the same. This creates a situation where work commitment can go unchecked from potential barriers of physically leaving work or commute time (Bélanger, 1999). Further, even when away from the office, workaholics might extract satisfaction from their work (or overwork), creating a situation of workaholism actually increasing during a pandemic. This lack of boundaries between work and non-work may exacerbate their workaholism. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₄: The change to remote work for athletic department employees will significantly increase their workaholism.

Method

Participants

The participants of the study were 1,139 intercollegiate athletic department employees who completed both a pre- and post-onset of COVID-19 survey. About half of the sample (53.2%) self-identified as male. Though majority of athletic directors and head coaches are men, this gender breakdown matches previous literature on college sport employees (see Huml et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2019; Weight et al., 2021). A majority of the participants were married (48.9%), with 33.8% self-identifying as single, 14.5% as in a relationship, and less than 3% as widowed or divorced; almost two-thirds (63.6%) had no children. The largest portion of the respondents (88.5%) self-identified as White, with less than 4% self-identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino/a, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Biracial, or other. This racial make-up mirrors that reported in the latest edition of The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) College Sport Racial and Gender Report Card (Lapchick, 2021) and recent work from Weight and colleagues (2021). Participants worked in all areas of the athletic department, including: academic advising, event management, marketing, and ticket sales, coaching support staff (e.g., strength and conditioning, athletic training), coaching (head and assistant), and senior administrator (i.e., assistant/associate athletic director). See Table 1 for full demographic information.

-- Insert Table 1 here --

Procedure

We created an online survey using Qualtrics survey platform that was distributed to participants via email. We harvested email addresses from NCAA Division I, II, and III university's athletic department online staff directories that listed employees' position title and email address. Emails for the first data collection were sent in November 2019. Following the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, we e-mailed those who completed the first survey with a similar instrument in May 2020. A follow-up email was sent one week after each initial email was distributed. Means and standard deviations for all measures were compared between early and late responders to ensure no response bias; no differences were found. Surveys disseminated at the first data collection (i.e., November 2019) asked participants to report on a number of typical workplace behaviors (i.e., pre-COVID-19; e.g., positive/negative work-family spillover, job commitment, and employer prestige), while surveys sent in May 2020 asked participants to reflect on their "current" situation (i.e., post-onset of COVID-19, work-from-home). During the first data collection, 44,182 emails were distributed and 4,522 useable (i.e., completed) surveys were returned, giving a response rate of 10.2%, which is consistent to previous research on college sport employees (Graham et al., 2019; Huml et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2006). During the second data collection, 4,522 emails were distributed and 1,139 (i.e., completed) surveys were returned, giving a response rate of 25.2%.

Measures

To measure positive/negative spillover from between work to family the positive and negative work to family and family to work spillover scale (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000) was utilized. This scale is comprised of four subscales: positive (and negative) work to family spillover and positive (and negative) family to work spillover and uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* to *all the time*. These scales have previously been established as reliable (Cronbach Alpha scores ranging from .70 to .82) and valid based on test-retest examinations (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Average variance extracted (AVE) scores for the two groups in our study ranged from .835 (pre) to .855 (post-onset) for negative work to family spillover and .709 (pre) to .680 (post-onset) for positive work to family spillover.

Job commitment was measured with an altered version of the Career Commitment Scale (CCS; Blau 1985, 1988). The CCS measures “one’s attitude toward one’s profession or vocation” (Blau, 1988, p. 289). The scale was altered to assess employee attitudes about their specific job, as opposed to their profession or industry. A sample question from the updated scale is: “If I had all of the money I needed without working, I would probably still continue to work at [my current institution].” Research has supported past construct reliability scores at .83 or greater (Blau, 1988) and convergent and discriminant validity in multiple studies (Blau, 1985, 1988). AVE scores for the two groups in our study ranged from .815 (pre) to .828 (post-onset).

The Dutch Work Addiction Scale (DUWAS-10) was used to assess the participant’s workaholism (Schaufeli et al., 2009). The authors’ defined workaholism as, “the tendency to work excessively hard (the behavioral dimension) and being obsessed with work (the cognitive dimension), which manifests itself in working compulsively” (Schaufeli et al., 2009, p. 322). The scale consists of two sub-constructs: (a) working excessively (i.e., I spend more time working than socializing with friends, on hobbies, or on leisure time), and (b) working compulsively (i.e., I feel obliged to work hard, even when it’s not enjoyable). This is a frequently used instrument within workaholism research and has been supported for validity and reliability (Schaufeli et al., 2009). AVE scores for the two groups in our study ranged from .583 in pre-onset and .579 in post-onset.

The participants were also asked an open-ended question at the end of the survey: “Is there any other information related to your work experience that has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic that you would like to share?” Thirty-nine percent of survey respondents ($n = 449$) offered additional insight into their experience during COVID-19. This mixed methods approach allowed us to combine the clarity of qualitative research with the nuance of quantitative methodology (Wheeldon, 2010).

Analysis

Quantitative

Paired samples t-tests were used to assess the effect of changes to remote work as it related to negative and positive work-family/family-work spillover pre- and post-onset of COVID-19 (hypothesis 1), job commitment (hypothesis 3), and workaholism (hypothesis 4). Hypothesis 2 was analyzed using moderated multiple regression analysis. This allowed us to assess whether the relationship between (a) work-family/family-work spillover and (b) the change to remote work was moderated by presence of children at the participant’s home. IBM’s Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0 was used to complete both the paired samples t-test and moderated multiple regression. Prior to beginning any analysis, we calculated Cronbach’s alpha and bivariate correlations across each of the scaled measures. All scaled measures in the proposed model reached satisfactory reliability levels as suggested by their Cronbach’s alpha (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). See Table 2 for Cronbach’s alpha scores and bivariate correlations. Each of the individual items within the constructs were directionally as expected.

-- Insert Table 2 here --

Qualitative

Two researchers completed an independent coding of open-ended, qualitative responses provided by the participants ($n = 449$). Based on similar reasoning proposed on the relationship between remote work and (a) work-family/family-work spillover, (b) job commitment, and (c) workaholism, in addition to our moderating variable of (d) children at home, we took a deductive a priori approach to coding our results (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). After each researcher completed their coding analysis, a review was completed and axial themes were either agreed-upon or discarded from analysis. Similar methods were used in Wells et al., (2021) when coding open ended survey questions results. See Table 3 for the first-order codes and axial themes. Following consensus from the two researchers, inter-rater reliability was calculated using Krippendorff’s alpha ($\alpha = .83$), which is above the recommended threshold (Krippendorff, 2004). The quotations included within the results are representative of the selective coding process to create each of the axial themes within the effect of remote work.

-- Insert Table 3 here --

Results

Hypothesis 1: Paired Samples T-Tests

The results of hypothesis 1 found athletic department employees reported significantly lower levels of negative work-family spillover post-onset of COVID-19 ($M = 2.52, SD = .80$) when compared to pre-COVID-19 ($M = 2.97, SD = .83$), $t(1138) = 19.30, p < .001$, therefore confirming hypothesis 1a. The relationship between pre- and post-onset of COVID-19 levels of negative family-work spillover was non-significant, leading us to reject hypothesis 1b. Additionally, results showed significantly higher levels of positive work-family spillover post-onset of COVID-19 ($M = 2.94, SD = .86$) when compared with pre-COVID-19 ($M = 2.74, SD = .83$), $t(1138) = -8.13, p < .001$, therefore rejecting hypothesis 1c. Finally, the relationship between positive family-work spillover was non-significant, confirming hypothesis 1d. See Table 4 for additional statistics.

-- Insert Table 4 here --

Hypothesis 2: Moderated Multiple Regression Analysis

A moderated multiple regression analysis was used to examine the interaction of parenting with young children at home regarding the relationship between working remotely and work-family and family-work spillover. Hypothesis 2a focused on negative family-work spillover; results found that both variables (pre-COVID scores and children) have a significant, unique contribution on the model (pre-COVID scores $\beta = .48, p < .001$; children $\beta = .16, p < .001$), illustrating that those individuals with higher pre-COVID scores and children scored higher on the post-COVID measure. Additionally, the interaction term for this model was statistically significant ($F = 147.553(3), p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .28$). These results imply that for every one-point increase on the pre-COVID negative family-work spillover composite score, those with children increased .184 points higher than those without children on their post-COVID negative family-work spillover composite score. This significant interaction confirms hypothesis 2a. Hypothesis 2b assumed positive family-work spillover would be a significant moderator between remote work and children at home. Although pre-COVID scores were a statistically significant contributor to the model ($\beta = .61, p < .001$), the interaction term was not statistically significant, therefore rejecting hypothesis 2b. See Table 5 for additional details on our moderated regression analysis and full results.

-- Insert Table 5 here --

Hypothesis 3 and 4: Job Commitment and Workaholism

Results for job commitment found no significant differences between job commitment levels for pre- and post-onset of COVID-19, ($M = 3.46, SD = .80; M = 3.44, SD = .80$), $t(1139) = 1.00, p = .32$, respectively. These results do not support hypothesis 3. Athletic department employees reported significantly higher levels of workaholism post-COVID ($M = 3.21, SD = .55$) as compared to pre-COVID ($M = 3.11, SD = .58$), $t(1138) = -5.76, p < .01$. These findings confirmed hypothesis 4.

Qualitative Findings

Benefits of Remote Work

The participants had a variety of responses related to their transition to remote work. Many respondents viewed the transition as positive compared to their previous work experience. Individuals who cited this transition as positive also viewed remote work as the solution to them finding their best version of work-life balance in years and improved wellness, including better sleep (e.g., “I can sleep in rather than getting up at 5 a.m. every day, which makes all the difference!”) and the alleviation of physical, mental, emotional, and psychological burdens created by their job (e.g., “Honestly, for my physical and mental health, COVID-19 has been the best thing to happen in a while. I don't feel like I am constantly overwhelmed by coaches and administrators always wanting something from me.”; “My stress levels have gone down considerably since I started working from home as I no longer have to deal with a workplace situation that I find frequently stress-inducing.”), re-discovering leisure activities (e.g., “Working from home has finally given me time to explore personal projects and hobbies again.”), and spending more time with family (e.g., “I've realized that sports is not as important for me to be a part of as is my family life.”).

Long-Term Disruption

For many of the respondents, the freedom provided by remote work had them questioning the validity of past work norms and discussing the need for the sport industry to change. An SID/Athletics Communications professional indicated a realization of how work norms might not be necessary and indicated “with the exception of having access to historical documents, records, photos, etc., we could probably do this job remotely 80-90% of the time, with the remainder consisting of games and other events.” Similarly, another participant indicated that the pandemic,

has given me time to reflect and realize how negative, dishonest and controlling my work environment is. I didn't realize how unhappy I was and how much I felt like working 12-16 hours a day was draining me. I can now work 8-10 hours from home (only M-F) and spend time doing things I enjoy and am surrounded by people (family) that care about me.

For one individual, they pondered the utility of future work in their department and indicated the pandemic “Has opened the dialogue of ‘do we really need to meet in person?’ Can we do things a different way and still achieve the same or better results?”

In addition to the benefits respondents saw personally, they also indicated there were several benefits that were primarily seen at the organizational level. For example, respondents talked about remote work providing them a chance to become more efficient (e.g., “Forced the “streamlining” of day-to-day operations. Will ultimately make the operation more efficient.”), give time to long-neglected projects (e.g., “It's caused us to rethink our communication and player development and given us time for long-term projects.”), and catch up on mandatory training.

Negatives of Remote Work

Not all respondents indicated that the switch to remote work was positive, as several respondents indicated negative outcomes related to the changes coming from the pandemic that included a lack of connection to others, disorganization from the rapid changes, and a lack of recognition for increased efforts. Several participants indicated the loss of connection with athletes (e.g., “I find less joy in it because I don't get to work in person with my athletes.”) and colleagues (e.g., “There aren't normal, casual interactions with coworkers and others around that I've now realized help provide moments of stress relief during the workday.”) that could not be replaced by the digital substitutions.

Other employees were going through the challenges of adapting to a rapid change in workplace norms and work expectations in the face of a pandemic. Some believed their athletic department was struggling to adjust (e.g., “Disorganization has immensely increased.”) and feeling unrecognized for hard work during a difficult time (e.g., “It's been harder, more work, more pressure/stress, and receive little to no recognition for the extra we are expected to put in.”). For example:

The biggest thing that has changed is the constant need and want for digital content from our coaching staffs while having to be intensely monitoring new compliance requirements daily. There is little regard for work/life balance and the line between family and work has become extremely blurred.

Remote Work with Children

Another theme focused on the challenges of remote work with children at home. A number of respondents expressed the difficulties of working remotely and parenting simultaneously as this both increased their own responsibilities (e.g., “My work day is full of work now other than breaks to help my own kids with their tasks and school work.”), stress (e.g., “Having school age children and teaching them while working has significantly increased my stress level.”), and just a general difficulty associated with the dual roles (e.g., “Having to complete my work in the same environment as my three kids has almost eaten me alive.”).

Other participants expressed a desire to get “back to normal”, as this would provide them some respite from the constant of being around children. One participant noted “Working from home is impossible with two small children. I get one day a week when my wife is not working that I can escape the house and get my own work done. I can't wait to return to normal.” Another participant indicated a desire to return to their old schedule, even if it was problematic in some ways because of the newfound stress of working at home with their children and said “Get me back to the crazy 5a-7p days that I'm used to. I have far greater respect and admiration for my wife and for teachers.”

Increased Workloads

A concerning theme was respondents speaking of increased expected workloads accompanying their move to remote work. Employees spoke about athletic department administrators burdening them with extra, unnecessary work as a means of looking busy, a traditional norm within college athletics. One participant indicated frustration that workload was increasing during the pandemic and indicated that they were “being asked to produce content, more than I would normally be asked to over the summer, because my supervisor wants to remain relevant and appear productive despite the fact that collegiate sports are the least of most people's worries,” while another participant said their workload “has easily doubled and half of it is uncalled for.” In addition to the increased workload, several participants noted that their current environment was advocating for unhealthy work conditions including workaholism. For example, one athletic department employee noted:

COVID-19 has allowed athletic administrators and the University to take advantage of the situation asking full-time employees to do more with less help by saying, ‘We're the lucky ones [we have jobs].’

Indicating that administrators were taking advantage of the already high workloads of employees during these challenging times.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of required remote work on employee spillover experiences within U.S. college sport. Specifically, we examined the changes in work-family spillover (both positive and negative), job commitment, and workaholism as employee's work environment changed from traditional in-person to required work-from-home, and if these changes were due, at least in part, to parental responsibilities. We chose the context of U.S. college sport for our study, as the sport industry has been identified as a system with rigid workplace norms that often creates conflict between work and family (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Lee & Chelladurai, 2018). The disruption caused by COVID-19 required athletic departments to rapidly transition their workforce from in-person to a remote setting. Research on remote work shows many positive benefits for employers and employees alike with few drawbacks (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Grant et al., 2013; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). That said, most remote work is chosen by select employees who are already in a position to capitalize on its strengths, meaning there is limited application across an entire workforce. Quantitative and qualitative findings from this study also help advance our understanding of remote work's effect on parents with children at home, the effect on workaholism when barriers are removed between work and home, and changes to job commitment when employees are physically separated from their employer.

Theoretical Contributions

Our first hypothesis focused on the effect of remote work and work-family/family work spillover. Our negative spillover results show the change to remote work significantly decreased participant's negative work-family spillover, but there was no statistically significant change to negative family-work spillover. These findings were also apparent in our qualitative results, especially for those within children at home. Participants found several benefits from the opportunity to work remotely. This shift provided some individuals a chance to “catch their breath” from non-stop work while organizations were adjusting to employees working from home. The transition to remote work improved mental and emotional health, as certain colleagues could no longer create or participate in a toxic work environment for them. Noteworthy, some participants discussed the possibility of long-term, positive industry disruption. The hope for these individuals was that college athletics would keep all or portions of remote work as part of the workplace norms after the pandemic is over. Indeed, remote work eliminated some of their negative working conditions and they wanted to maintain these benefits that were only realized when they were forced to evaluate the status quo of their work culture. There are concerns about remote work not building positive work culture (Raghuram, 2021), but our findings may indicate that employees can avoid established negative work cultures by working from home. Another positive noted by employees was the move to remote work benefited not only them personally but also the organization, as athletic departments had to rapidly streamline and improve lines of communication that had long been ignored, therefore creating an opportunity for employees to work more efficiently. This efficiency also allowed employees to catch up on important training that had been de-emphasized due to lack of time. These findings provide support that remote work is beneficial for both employees and employers.

These findings are noteworthy for a couple reasons. First, the reduction in negative work-family spillover provides further evidence to the benefit of remote work for employees, specifically in how it can help create a buffer for employees that insulates negative work behaviors affecting their family domain (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). This finding is especially striking considering the backdrop of the change to remote work being the onset of a pandemic, as employees still found benefits through a reduction of negative spillover. This may show that transitioning to remote work will be impactful for employees regardless of their life phase (e.g., single, married, aging parents at home, etc.). It also showed potential long-term benefits for the employer and industry. The transition to remote work helped remove physical supports that were maintaining poor work culture within their athletic department. It allowed employees to set their own schedule and complete their work on a more efficient timeline. This move to remote work may have provided administrators with a (forced) perspective of employees still performing at a high-level without the elevated pressure on them that was established before the pandemic (e.g., presenteeism). Indeed, certain employees mentioned they completed certain work-related tasks at home that they struggled to complete previously while in the office. For these reasons, many employees were hoping that athletic administrators would maintain the new status quo that was benefiting both employee and employer. Alternatively, the lack of significance in positive family-work spillover could mean there is limited, positive impact within the context of the pandemic for this domain. Specifically, the lack of separation time between employee and family during the transition to remote work might have removed the possibility of positive spillover from family to work.

Our second hypothesis was that the presence of children-at-home would moderate the relationship of work-family/family-work spillover when working remotely. We believed the presence of children-at-home would weaken the relationship between remote work and negative family-work spillover. Our results found that employees with children-at-home continued to report higher levels of negative family-work spillover after transitioning to remote work. We also believed children-at-home would strengthen the relationship between remote work and positive family-work spillover, but the results did not support this part of the hypothesis. The increased negative family-work spillover from participants with children at home was also a theme in our qualitative findings. Some of the parents felt overwhelmed with balancing both roles while also adjusting to performing both roles in the same physical space at the same time. Their work responsibilities may have lessened due to the pandemic, but they felt busier than ever before, as now their family domain was requiring greater attention and they were forced to absorb any job-related slack created by the pandemic. Participants spoke about their eagerness of the “return to normal” where they could go back to the office and re-separate their domains for set periods of time.

Our findings provide support that remote work has a greater number of drawbacks for those with children-at-home than other employees who do not. The greater dependence of young children likely creates more in-home responsibilities for these employees, therefore increasing the possibility of the family domain spilling over into the work domain in a negative manner. The right environment at home and support within the home is likely necessary for remote work for parents with younger children to resemble the benefits received by other employees. This finding does not dismiss the benefits of remote work for parents with children but does open the possibility of a hybrid work environment or greater employee support to help those employees with extra home responsibilities flourish within their work role.

The pandemic likely magnified these differences with children being at home for greater periods of time, but the findings still provide theoretical insight. Particularly, the lack of effective childcare during the pandemic, especially during the first 6-12 months, could have magnified these negative results for employees with younger children. These findings are still generalizable outside of the pandemic, as employees will still have children at home during pre-school-age years, periods of sickness, scheduled breaks from school, and during the summer months. When childcare systems can provide more consistent coverage for young parents, this population will likely reap the same remote work benefits as other employee groups. Although not a recommendation for going beyond traditional working hours, having opportunities to temporarily leave their familial responsibilities and physically going into the office would be advantageous for employees with younger children.

In addition to the challenges that were seen from those with children, and contrary to the quantitative results from the study, a number of participants also indicated there were significant drawbacks from the required move to remote work related to connectedness, most notably with respect to connections with athletes and colleagues. The lack of physical connection is an obvious weakness of remote work that is not easily replicated even with digital communication. To counter these disconnects, organizations can seek out ways to have employees work within a hybrid model, where some days are spent in the office and others are done remotely. Others struggled with the

adjustment to remote work, such as feeling inefficient or having bad communication within their working groups. This may have improved over time as organizations (and employees) adjusted to the need for remote work and highlights the importance of proper training and prioritizing communication in these remote teams. Regardless, these results indicate there were challenges involved in the immediate shift required from the COVID pandemic for many others that were unrelated to children at home.

A third study goal was to investigate how job commitment changed from pre- to post-onset of the pandemic. Job commitment has been theoretically linked with increasing during a time of economic upheaval (Behery et al., 2016). Job commitment has also increased during a time of improved resources, such as increased work-life balance (Zhu et al., 2020). Our study does not support these arguments, as results showed no statistically significant difference from pre- to post-onset of COVID related to job commitment. It was noteworthy that little direct connection to job commitment was qualitatively mentioned by participants. It is possible, at the time of this data collection, these individuals were dealing with the shock of the pandemic and were trying to adjust to their new reality instead of thinking about starting a new job that would lead to increased uncertainty. Another possibility is that job commitment did not increase but employees were committed in different ways. For example, employees may have valued their job more for providing financial security or committed to their job as a distraction from the pandemic.

The lack of change in job commitment could be due to a number of complicated, and opposing, factors. Specifically, employees might feel increased perceptions of job commitment because they were grateful to have employment during a time of large economic upheaval. Simultaneously, employees might have experienced some decrease in job commitment because of decreasing job involvement based on suspension of athletic activities and a lack of physical connection to coworkers and job-related tasks. These contrasting feelings may have balanced each other when employees were considering their job commitment and help to partially explain the consistent scores in the constructs. Another possibility could be that employees prefer tangible job resources versus the intangible ability to work-from-home. The lack of significant differences is noteworthy though as it suggests employees being required to perform remote work didn't have a significant, negative effect to their job commitment. Therefore, employers can offer a more flexible work schedule with lessened concerns that remote work will decrease their employee's commitment to their job. This is especially noteworthy in an industry that is known for having a culture of presenteeism, and judging commitment based on time spent at work (Weight et al., 2021).

Our final hypothesis postulated that workaholism would increase following the move to remote work. Results confirmed this hypothesis, with employees reporting higher levels of workaholism in the post-test data collection. The qualitative results also mentioned experiencing greater workloads and an environment that advocated for workaholism tendencies. Participant responses did support our assumption that employees were struggling to "disconnect" from work when they were performing all their work responsibilities within their home. One unexpected trend that arose from the qualitative data was that employees in certain areas of the athletic department felt overworked. Specifically, those working within digital/social media felt significant pressure from administrators to increase their content to maintain engagement, even though there was a lack of sporting events and limited ways to connect with fans. This increased demand from supervisors was not met with additional resources and some employees felt obligated to give more time to their work than even pre-pandemic.

These findings provide further support about the need of barriers between work and home, whether physical or digital, to help safeguard employees from falling deeper into workaholic traits. In these circumstances, with decreased or eliminated physical boundaries between home and work, employees may find it difficult to stop performing work and transition to family or leisure time. Workaholics can thrive on work and struggle when required to transition to other activities. The loss of this natural, physical barrier might have pushed these individuals to further struggle disconnecting from their job. The push for extreme work commitment can create workaholic tendencies in employees or even push them to seek out job/career opportunities in response. This finding could be meaningful for organizations trying to pivot into new areas of business, such as the experiences of those working within several domains (including digital business or social media), as these supervisors may ask their employees to over-contribute to help their organization without thinking about the detrimental effects to the employee. The move to remote work creates a possible environment for allowing work to be more accessible and enabled within the home, which, if not monitored, might lead to negative consequences for employees prone to workaholism.

Practical Implications

There are also managerial implications from these results. First, our findings provide support for sport managers wanting to maintain or offer remote work opportunities for their employees. The participants in this study reported a number of benefits related to their employers providing ample opportunity to work-from-home as a response to the pandemic. Even when the pandemic subsides and employees return to their traditional workspaces, the benefits outlined in this study (e.g., decrease in negative work-family spillover and increase in positive work-family spillover) will still be achievable. The findings show it could be especially important to permanently maintain a work-from-home option (even part time) for employees. Employees have often spoken about the challenges of adequately addressing their work and family roles while working in the sport industry (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Graham & Dixon, 2014; Lee & Chelladurai, 2018). Findings from this study show that work-from-home can provide some relief of better work-life balance for employees. Although it may not be realistic, nor desirable for their employee, to only work-from-home, an option to have a hybrid model consisting of some days at the office and some days at home may be ideal for the majority of the workforce. Athletic departments could create a model whereby employees are able to come into the office “late” or work from home on days after they work a night competition or work-from-home on a Monday after a weekend of travel. This would allow for more flexibility and time with family after potentially missing that family time due to weekend travel.

Managers and organizations may want to explore ways to help employees “unplug” from their work when they are also working from home. This may mean creating a mandatory log-off time from e-mail and other work tasks for a period time. This would create a “cool down” for employees and assist them in transitioning from work to other activities. Although it may not be feasible to have a set time for all employees in the organization, it could be determined by individual or units of employees within the organization. This recommendation would help employees with children-at-home and stem workaholic concerns. It could also help employees strive for greater efficiency during the day, making it a potential benefit for all parties. Employees could also take the initiative and schedule separation times when working from home. Schedule times for walks, working on home-related tasks, or other leisure activities can benefit the employees’ health and take advantage of the benefits provided by remote work.

Limitations & Future Recommendations

These results suggest that even though employees were not physically in the office, they were still just as committed to their organization, and the perceived need for “face time” may not actually be necessary for success. A future study will want to isolate these factors to better identify the effect on job commitment and explore employee preferences in benefit type. Our study collected data from participants in the months before and after the discovery and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This limits our findings to capturing perceptions once before and after the introduction of the pandemic, therefore limiting the generalizability of our findings. Increased data points both before and after the impact of COVID-19 would provide a more concise examination of the influence on employee and employer behavior within sport. We controlled for children-at-home when assessing the participant’s remote work experiences. Because of pandemic complications and participants having multiple children across different ages, we decided not to look deeper into the effect of children’s age. A future study looking into children’s age, or a dichotomous breakdown of younger/older children, could be especially impactful on understanding remote work following our study’s findings.

This study focused solely on the effect of college sport employees, limiting its application to other sport business outlets. Further examination within other sport career outlets would allow researchers to better understand if the experiences discussed in this study are consistent across sport settings. Moreover, despite the fact that our sample is representative of the larger college sport population in terms of racial/ethnic diversity (or lack thereof), it is critical that future research addresses how additional demographic factors impact employee experiences by being purposeful in their recruitment and inquiry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching implications on employee behaviors related to changing work-family dynamics and the lack of a traditional, in-person work environment. These results progress our understanding of work-family spillover, job commitment, and workaholicism. Our findings provide insight into those working within demanding career outlets who experience a sudden change to their work expectations and the associated changes to their work-related behaviors.

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Table 1
Demographics

Category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	606	53.2
Female	533	46.8
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	4	0.4
Asian	12	1.1
Black/African American	40	3.5
Hispanic/Latino/a/x	31	2.7
White	1008	88.5
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4	0.4
Biracial	30	2.6
Other	5	0.4
Relationship Status		
Single	385	33.8
Married	557	48.9
Divorced	28	2.5
Widowed	3	0.3
Long-term relationship	165	14.5
Number of Children		
None	723	63.5
Currently Expecting	10	0.9
1	109	6.9
2	184	16.2
3	72	6.3
4	23	2
5 or more	15	1.4

Table 2

Construct Cronbach's Alpha Score and Bivariate Correlations

	Pre- COVID- 19	Post- onset of COVID- 19	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Negative WF	.86	.87	-	.42**	-.30**	-.33**	.31**	-.42**
2. Negative FW	.76	.81		-	-.006	-.22**	.04	-.18**
3. Positive WF	.75	.76			-	.35**	-.06*	.37**
4. Positive FW	.75	.74				-	-.13**	.25**
5. Work addiction	.89	.90					-	.44**
6. Job Commitment	.85	.96						-

Note. Correlations are presented for Pre-COVID-19 data. WF = work to family. FW = family to work. * = $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Table 3

Coding Scheme

Example First-Order Code	Axial Theme
Positive Experiences	Benefits of Remote Work
Work-Life Balance	
Improved "Wellness"	
Increased Leisure/Family Time	
Questioning Previous Industry Norms	Long-Term Disruption
Organizational Level Benefits	Negatives of Remote Work
Negative Experiences	
Lack of Connection	
Rapid Change/Disorganization	
Lack of Recognition for increased efforts	Remote Work w/ Kids
Difficulty of Remote Work with Kids	
Ready to Get Back to Normal	
Increased Workloads	Workaholism
Environment Advocating for Workaholism	

Table 4

Paired-samples t-tests for Pre- and Post-onset of COVID-19 on Work-Family/Family-Work Spillover

Variable	M	SD
Negative WF spillover – pretest	2.97	.83
Negative WF spillover – posttest	2.52	.80
	t(1138) = 19.30, p < .001	
Negative FW spillover – pretest	1.99	.56
Negative FW spillover – posttest	2.00	.65
	t(1138) = -.84, p = .40	
Positive WF spillover – pretest	2.74	.83
Positive WF spillover – posttest	2.94	.86
	t(1138) = -8.13, p < .001	
Positive FW spillover – pretest	3.75	.83
Positive FW spillover – posttest	3.73	.86
	t(1138) = 1.09, p = .28	

Note. WF = work-family. FW = family-work.

Table 5

Moderated Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	B	95% CI	β	t	p
Negative FW Post-COVID					
Model 1					
Negative FW Pre-COVID	.56	[.51, .62]	.48	18.90	< .001
Children	.21	[.14, .28]	.16	6.13	< .001
					Adjusted R ² = .27, p < .001
Model 2					
Negative FW Pre-COVID	.30	[.12, .48]	.25	3.26	.001
Children	-.16	[-.40, .09]	-.12	-1.27	.20
Interaction	.18	[.07, .30]	.386	3.08	.002
					Adjusted R ² = .31; R ² change = .01, p = .002
					Adjusted R ² = .27; R ² change = .002, p = .084
Positive FW Post-COVID					
Model 1					
Positive FW Pre-COVID	.59	[.54, .63]	.61	25.77	< .001
Children	-.04	[-.11, .04]	-.02	-.94	.35
					Adjusted R ² = .37, p < .001
Model 2					
Positive FW Pre-COVID	.52	[.39, .66]	.54	7.67	< .001
Children	-.21	[-.56, .15]	-.12	-1.35	.28
Interaction	.05	[-.05, .14]	.12	.95	.34
					Adjusted R ² = .37; R ² change = .001, p = .34

Note. WF = work-family. FW = family-work.