

Differences in Workplace Power Between Men and Women in Different Office Models Under COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Today people are still working under the influence of COVID-19, and some industries have adopted or continue to adopt telework. And there are still some universities or faculties in China that are implementing telework. This paper is, therefore, dedicated to studying the impact of telework in the workplace power of male and female staff in Chinese universities under COVID-19. This paper uses the quantitative methodology, obtaining data by filling out questionnaires for 100 university staff in different office modes. Then, three control groups were set up and the data were analysed by SPSS on six dimensions, such as workplace gender equality, workplace emotions, etc. to verify whether H0 and H1 were valid. Ultimately, the paper accepts H0 and rejects H1, concluding that telework has a greater negative impact (showing significance in more than three dimensions) on the overall workplace power of female university employees than that of their male counterparts.

Keywords: COVID-19, Workplace power, Telework, Gender equality, University staff

1. INTRODUCTION

Although telework was already used around the world before 2020, after the new pandemic outbreak, it was quickly put into use on a larger scale in some industries in China. For example, some Chinese universities implemented telework, with faculty members using online lectures and school administrators handling their daily work online. Even in 2021, a small number of universities still use this mode of teleworking for some majors. Therefore, this paper focuses on the impact of telework on the power of Chinese university staff in the workplace. However, there has not been much research on the link between telework and male and female workplace power in China. Thus, this paper investigates whether teleworking impacts the workplace power of both genders in Chinese universities and assesses the workplace power of both genders during working hours in different working modes in different dimensions. Control groups were set up to compare traditional and telework modes; the workplace power of men in the two modes; and the workplace power of women in the two modes, to identify and analyse the discrepancies between them. Further, some recommendations are given based on the findings of the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Sullivan and Lewis, telework has changed the nature of people's jobs and has increased the demand for flexibility between work and home [9]. Women who can manage to work remotely outside of the office can have more control over their time to balance family and work [2]. However, in Haddon and Silverstone's study, teleworking encompassed both paid work at work and family responsibilities, which in effect was a pattern of chronic exploitation of women [4]. And Thébaud et al. found that while both genders were required to take on family responsibilities, men were more likely to choose to ignore it and leave this responsibility to their female counterparts [11]. In terms of childcare, telework may also increase women's unpaid domestic work [1], thereby reducing their presence in the workplace. However, according to Chung et al., fathers spent more time with their children when working from home compared to before the pandemic [2]. In addition, previous research has mentioned that female employees report that they are more comfortable with a job that offers flexibility in terms of the workplace than a traditional office and telework happens to be one of them [3].

In addition, women's power in the workplace is very delicate under the traditional office model. For example, women are still the main targets of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace, and the underlying reason for this is not sexual desire, but rather a desire to control and dominate [6]. However, in the case of telework, women are free to choose their office location, time, and enjoy a higher degree of control [10]. However, 57% of mothers are again under childcare pressure and need to divert their energy to care for children whose mental health is deteriorating due to COVID-19 [7]. This tends to reduce their competitiveness for paid work indirectly. Furthermore, no evidence has been found for the time being that teleworking can address women's weaknesses in workplace power (e.g., work tasks). Furthermore, according to Ragins and Winkel, women are more likely than men to encounter emotional minefields at work [8]. When women express feminine emotions in the workplace, they may limit their power development; by contrast, masculine emotions reflect interpersonal power emotions, making them more prone to gain power through emotions [8].

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

In this paper, a questionnaire was used to survey and collect information from 100 university staff in China, 65 male and 35 female via various online platforms such as WeChat and email over one week. Of these, 50 staff are still using the traditional office model. The remaining 50 came from the telework mode, which they are still using for some reason. Therefore, a quantitative analysis methodology was used for this research. And the questionnaire was measured using the Likert 5-point scale [5]. Where 1 is completely disagrees/ satisfied and 5 is completely agrees/ satisfied. Then, the Paired T-test and Independent T-test analysis in SPSS was used to test whether there was a significant difference between the control groups on one variable. By setting up three control groups for the Paired T-test and Independent T-test, the comparison revealed differences between male and female university staff in six dimensions of work-family balance, gender equality in the workplace, job satisfaction, workplace benefits and power, workplace emotions and perceptions of long-term development at work under different patterns of work. This approach was effectively used to understand and analyse the perspectives and changes among the various control groups.

Because of the interest in the impact that distinct office models have on the university-industry in the wider context of COVID-19. Therefore, in this paper, a Paired T-test was conducted between the traditional versus telework modes in the hope of identifying the superior option through the variability of the experimental data. In the Independent T-test for males and females, the six dimensions in the tables are the

dependent variables; the independent variables are office mode, traditional office and telework. This is because the paper was curious about the differences between the genders in the work patterns and wanted to find out if any new effects would emerge.

The following six dimensions all represent to some extent different aspects of workplace power. The questionnaire includes questions such as "Telework/ traditional working has increased your career advantages" in the job satisfaction dimension. Second, in the work-life balance dimension, the questionnaire includes questions such as "Telework/ traditional working blur the boundaries between your life and work." In the third dimension, workplace benefits and power, the questionnaire asked "Telework/ traditional working affect women's maternity leave length" and "Telework/ traditional working affect women's power in the workplace". In addition, the dimension of gender equality in the workplace includes questions like "Telework/ traditional work is beneficial for reducing gender discrimination in the workplace". Lastly, only one question was posed in the dimension of long-term development in the workplace: "Telework is good for long-term health in all aspects of the workplace".

In addition, this questionnaire has three descriptive questions: "How does teleworking blur the boundaries between your life and work?", "What kind of gender discrimination have you experienced in the workplace?" and "What do you think are the causes of gender inequality in the workplace?". These were used to assist in explaining the current situation and the future. These served to assist in the interpretation of the current situation and the exploration of the future. It allowed the study to dig deeper and more rigorously into the participants' insights, supporting the quantitative analysis so that the questionnaire data could be organized systematically. Moreover, in the spirit of exploring the changing power of women in the workplace under different working patterns, this paper will analyse the data and descriptive questions more from the perspective of women at work.

Therefore, based on the above, this paper sets H0: The negative impact of telework on the overall workplace power of female university employees is greater (significant in more than three dimensions) than that of their male counterparts. H1: The negative impact of telework on the overall workplace power of female university employees is less than that of their male counterparts.

4. FINDING

4.1 Paired T-Test

Table 1. Paired T-test (traditional working versus telework)

Paired t test					
Items	Paired (M±SD)		Mean difference (Paired1-Paired2)	t	p
	Paired1	Paired2			
Traditional mode job satisfaction Paired telework job satisfaction	3.84±0.63	2.58±1.23	1.26	6.899	0.000**
Traditional mode work-life balance Paired telework work-life balance	2.45±0.75	2.78±0.77	-0.33	-2.415	0.020*
Traditional mode workplace benefits and power Paired telework workplace benefits and power	2.75±0.50	2.69±0.71	0.06	0.479	0.634
Traditional mode gender equality at work Paired telework gender equality at work	2.79±0.69	2.89±0.67	-0.10	-0.882	0.382
Traditional mode workplace emotions Paired telework workplace emotions	3.24±0.46	2.90±0.62	0.34	3.969	0.000**
Traditional mode long-term career development Paired telework long-term career development	3.60±1.03	2.66±1.21	0.94	5.175	0.000**
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01					

As can be seen from the table above, when the Paired T-test was used to investigate the differences in the experimental data, a total of 6 sets of paired data were found, of which 4 sets showed differences ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the specific analysis revealed the following.

Firstly, a 0.01 level of significance ($t = 6.899$, $p = 0.000$) was observed between traditional and telework job satisfaction-related questions. As well as specific comparative differences the mean of traditional office job satisfaction-related questions (3.84) would be significantly higher than that of telework (2.58). Secondly, a 0.05 level of significance ($t = -2.415$, $p = 0.020$) was observed between traditional office work-life balance and telework work-life balance. And the specific comparison differences show that the mean of traditional office work-life balance (2.45) would be noticeably lower than the mean of telework work-life

balance (2.78). Thirdly, a 0.01 significance level ($t = 3.969$, $p = 0.000$) was observed between traditional and telework workplace emotions. The mean of traditional office workplace emotions (3.24) was higher than telework (2.90). Finally, there was a 0.01 level of significance between traditional versus teleworking workplace long-term development ($t = 5.175$, $p = 0.000$), while the mean of traditional office workplace long-term development was 3.60, which was obviously higher than the mean of teleworking workplace long-term development (2.66).

Thus, four of the six sets of paired data showed significant differences out of all paired data sets. Thus, we that the telework pattern in the context of the university workplace is at a disadvantage compared to the traditional pattern.

4.2. Independent T-Test

Table 2. Independent T-test (traditional working female versus telework female)

Independent t test				
	Female working patterns (Mean±Std. Deviation)		t	p
	Traditional mode (n=16)	Telework mode (n=19)		
Job satisfaction	3.79±0.79	2.91±1.27	2.500	0.018*
Work-life balance	2.25±0.55	2.56±0.79	-1.323	0.195
workplace benefits and power	2.75±0.57	2.26±0.50	2.701	0.011*
Gender equality at work	2.47±0.53	2.76±0.67	-1.414	0.167
Workplace emotions	3.21±0.40	2.68±0.64	2.935	0.006**
Long-term career development	4.25±0.77	2.47±1.26	5.095	0.000**

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

From the above table, independent T-tests were used to examine the differences between the two working modes of women on six dimensions of job satisfaction, work-life balance, etc. It can be easily seen that the two dimensions of work-family balance and gender equality at work are not significant ($p>0.05$), which means that there is no difference in the work-life balance and gender equality at work between the different female working styles. However, the other four dimensions of job satisfaction, workplace benefits and power, workplace emotions, and workplace long-term development were found to be significant ($p<0.05$), implying that there were significant differences in these four dimensions between the different female office styles.

Firstly, the female mode of working is significant at the 0.05 level ($t=2.500$, $p=0.018$) for the job satisfaction dimension. The mean for traditional office work (3.79) is significantly higher than the mean for telework (2.91). Secondly, women's workplace practices have a 0.05 level of significance ($t=2.701$, $p=0.011$) concerning workplace welfare and power, and the difference in comparison shows that the mean for traditional work

(2.75) is much higher than the mean for telework (2.26). Thirdly, women's work style has a 0.01 level of significance on workplace emotions ($t=2.935$, $p=0.006$), and the mean for traditional work (3.21) is considerably higher than the mean for telework (2.68). Lastly, women's working style has a 0.01 level of significance for long-term development at work ($t=5.095$, $p=0.000$), and the difference, in contrast, shows that the mean for traditional working (4.25) is greater than the mean for telework (2.47).

Therefore, there is no significant difference in the two dimensions of work-life balance and gender equality at work among the female sample in different office models. In addition, the female samples under different office modes show significant differences in the four dimensions of satisfaction, workplace welfare and power, workplace emotion, and long-term career development. Therefore, H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected. At the level of $P=0.05$, telework has a greater negative impact on the workplace power of female employees than their male counterparts.

Table 3. Independent T-test (traditional working male versus telework male)

Independent t test				
	Male working patterns (Mean±Std. Deviation)		t	p
	Traditional mode (n=34)	Telework mode (n=31)		
Job satisfaction	3.86±0.56	2.38±1.19	6.372	0.000**
Work-life balance	2.54±0.82	2.91±0.74	-1.921	0.059
workplace benefits and power	2.75±0.47	2.96±0.70	-1.420	0.160
Gender equality at work	2.94±0.72	2.97±0.67	-0.154	0.878
Workplace emotions	3.25±0.49	3.03±0.58	1.654	0.103

Independent t test				
	Male working patterns (Mean±Std. Deviation)		t	p
	Traditional mode (n=34)	Telework mode (n=31)		
Long-term career development	3.29±1.00	2.77±1.18	1.926	0.059
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01				

This table examines the differences in the six dimensions of job satisfaction, work-life balance, etc. between men in different office models using independent sample t-tests. The five dimensions of work-life balance, workplace welfare and power, workplace gender equality, workplace emotions, and workplace long-term development were not found to be significant ($p>0.05$) for the male sample across office styles. This means that there is no difference in the consistency of these five dimensions across the male working pattern. In addition, the male working pattern showed a significant difference ($p<0.05$) for job satisfaction.

Therefore, male workers with different working patterns differ only for the dimension of job satisfaction. From the analysis, the male working patterns show a 0.01 level of significance ($t=6.372$, $p=0.000$) for satisfaction-related questions. It is clear that the mean for men of traditional office (3.86) is higher than the mean for men of telework (2.38).

Thus, the five dimensions of work-life balance, workplace welfare and power, workplace gender equality, workplace emotions, and workplace long-term development do not show significant differences between the male working mode samples, in contrast, the male working mode sample only shows significant differences in one dimension of job satisfaction.

5. DISCUSSION

As can be seen from the data in the three tables above, although female staff in universities do not show a significant difference in the dimension of gender equality at work, they are at a disadvantage compared to males in universities in both traditional and telework mode. In addition, the last question of the questionnaire, "What do you think are the reasons for gender inequality at work?" 56 people gave short answers. The traditional Chinese belief that men are the mainstay of the workplace (stereotypes are also classified as such), the problem of women's fertility, and biological differences between men and women were the top three most frequently mentioned ideas.

Only eight people felt that the difference in treatment in the workplace was due to the inequality of power between men and women. It is worth noting that both men and women tend to think that telework is more

conducive to gender equality at work, although the overall trend of telework is less favourable to them than traditional work. And in the question "What kind of gender discrimination have you experienced in the workplace?" 23 women and 9 men responded to this question, 15 of whom were from the traditional office group. In addition, four women and one man did not want to reveal more details, and the most frequent answers were words, glances and even behaviour that crossed the line, marriage and childbirth being a barrier to interviews and promotions; and unreasonable demands from leaders.

When asked the question "How does telework blur the boundaries between your life and work?" Most of the participants indicated that this was mainly due to the increased working hours and the inability to switch between work and life emotionally promptly. The data in the table proves that women do not perform as well as men in terms of emotion management and expression regardless of the mode of work. Further, telework worsens women's performance in this dimension, the workplace emotions. Hence, although telework may improve gender equality at work, it is not conducive to the overall workplace power of female university employees.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper investigates whether the power of Chinese university staff in the workplace is affected by telework and analyses the questionnaire to conclude that telework is more detrimental to workplace power than traditional work. In this context, the power of female university staff at work is more negatively affected than that of their male counterparts. But by combining the research and theories of academics, university staff can also help women improve their situation and gain the same power as men in the workplace through mutual understanding and empathy and integrating their professional strengths to educate the next generation.

However, due to the small sample of respondents involved in this paper, this may have impacted. Therefore, this paper is more of an exploratory article. Nevertheless, future research can build on the ideas presented in this article in greater depth. And future research could also go beyond the scope covered in this paper and examine the relationship between factors of

diversity management, such as gender, and workplace power in different industries.

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