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MAPPING THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS WHO ARE PARENTS OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

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OBJECTIVE

Academic librarians at three public universities in the Southern United States who are all parents of school-aged children have experienced changes in their work, parenting, and the balance between them during the lockdowns, quarantines, and school and university closures necessitated by the current pandemic. While many librarians have been affected by these conditions, there are variations in the support and guidance provided by institutions depending on their own internal policies, and the impact of policies implemented at the local, state, and Federal government levels. The intent of this initial research is to examine these policies and discuss their potential impacts.

METHODS

To begin, we selected a purposive sample of 11 public, SACS-accredited universities from the 11 states in the Southeastern U.S.

We compiled university policies related to the Federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and, where available, other institutional support and guidance made available to librarians and other university faculty and staff. Since leave policies have been updated and changed since FFCRA provisions ended on December 31, 2020, we compared archived policies with policies in effect in 2021. We reviewed the text of these policies to determine how FFCRA was applied, and whether any other provisions were made for working parents after FFCRA ended.

In order to see how these policies were implemented and applied in practice, we surveyed librarians at the institutions we chose.



H.R.6201

About H.R.6201
Families First Coronavirus Response Act

- FFCRA—the Federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act—mandated emergency paid sick leave and extended FMLA leave for employees of many organizations, including universities.
- Division C: The Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion (EFMLEA) Act applies to people who, among other things, are:
 - unable to work (or telework) due to a need for leave to care for the son or daughter under 18 years of age of such employee if the school or place of care has been closed, or the child care provider of such son or daughter is unavailable, due to a public health emergency.
- Division E: The Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSL) Act applies to people who, among other things, are:
 - Caring for an individual who is subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19
 - Caring for a child if the child's school or place of care has been closed, or the child care provider of such son or daughter is unavailable, due to COVID-19 precautions.
- Many working parents were eligible for up to 80 hours of EPSL leave paid at two-thirds their normal rate of pay, followed by 12 weeks of EFMLEA leave paid at two-thirds their normal rate of pay if their child(ren)'s school or child care provider closed due to COVID-19 precautions.
- Mandated leave under FFCRA ended December 31, 2020, but:
 - The FFCRA tax credit had been extended through March 31, 2021 to qualifying employers that voluntarily chose to continue to provide Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSL) or Emergency Paid Family Leave (EPFL).
 - The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), signed into law on March 11, 2021, has now extended the tax credits for FFCRA from April 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021.

New Message

To: Cc Bcc

Subject:

Dear colleague,

Do you or someone else serving in your library within the area of health sciences have children under their care and would you or they be able to reply to five questions on this topic?

It will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete the questions. There are no risks, benefits, or compensation for participating in this study. For questions about the study, you may contact the team at auten2@unc.edu and for information regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 352-392-0433 and reference IRB Study number (IRB20210703).

- Describe the impact of telework arrangements on your ability to conduct your job duties.
 - Have some areas of your work been more impacted than other areas (e.g., research, teaching, professional service, professional development)?
 - Do you think this will impact your retention or promotion?
- Describe the impact of telework arrangements on your ability to care for your family.
 - Did time-based work commitments impact your ability to care for your family?
 - Have the boundaries between work and family life been impacted by working from home and remote school, if applicable?
- Do you think the application of your university's policies is consistent with the way they are written?
- What age(s) child(ren) are you responsible for caring for?
- Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the impact of telework and leave policies at your university during the pandemic?

IRB Study number (IRB20210703)

We appreciate your time and consideration,
Academic Members

B I U A Tt [Rich Text Editor] SEND

RESULTS

To determine what policies have been in place related to COVID-19 and leave for parents who are impacted by school and child care closures, we searched the websites of the selected institutions for information related to FFCRA, EPFL, EFMLEA and any similar leave offered by the institution. [Table of Policies Link](#)

As of May 2021, we have received responses from seven states. Themes have been drawn from the open-ended answers we have received so far, and are included in a table, and several relevant quotes have been broken out to authentically express the experiences of the people we interviewed. [Responses Link](#)

TABLE OF POLICIES

| INSTITUTION | FFCRA WEBPAGE | EXTENSION OF EPFL/EFMLEA OR OTHER PROGRAM AFTER 12/31/2020 | EFMLEA OR OTHER LEAVE IF SCHOOLS ARE TEMPORARILY CLOSED DUE TO OUTBREAK | EFMLEA OR OTHER LEAVE IF SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED LONG TERM DUE TO LOCAL ORDERS OR SCHOOL BOARD/ADMINISTRATION DECISION | EFMLEA OR OTHER LEAVE IF PARENT CHOOSES TO KEEP CHILD OUT OF SCHOOL |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA | YES | YES, 2021 COVID leave | YES | YES | NO |
| UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA | YES | PARTIALLY, extension of EPFL but not of EFMLEA | YES | YES | NO |
| AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY / MEDICAL COLLEGE OF GEORGIA | NO, current information does not reference eligibility for extended FMLA | NO, flex schedule or unpaid work only | YES, 2020 | YES, 2020 | NO |
| UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY | YES | NO, schedule or unpaid leave only | YES, 2020 only | YES, 2020 only | NO |
| LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY HEALTH - NEW ORLEANS | YES | YES, until 3/31/2021 | YES, until 3/31/2021 | YES, until 3/31/2021 | NO |
| UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI MEDICAL CENTER | YES | NO | YES, 2020 only | YES, 2020 only | NO |
| EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY | YES | YES, up to 80 hours of paid administrative leave | YES, through 6/30/2021 | YES, 2020 only | NO |
| UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA | NO, leave information in addendum on leave policy document | NO | YES, 2020 only | YES, 2020 only | NO |
| UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER | YES | YES, up to 64 hours of emergency paid sick leave | YES, 2020 only | YES, 2020 only | NO |
| UT HEALTH SAN ANTONIO | NO, leave information in addendum on leave policy document | YES, up to 80 hours of paid administrative leave related | YES, through 6/31/2021 | YES, 2020 only | NO |
| VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY | YES, with extant information including example flex schedules and other leave options | YES, Public Health Emergency Leave (PHLE) under leave tab | YES | YES | NO |

Click on the corner triangle in the cell to explore the suggested external link

| CHILD SCHOOL GRADE CATEGORIES | NUMBER OF CHILDREN | CHILD SCHOOL GRADE CATEGORIES | NUMBER OF CHILDREN |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Pre-K | 3 | Middle (6-8) | 3 |
| Elementary (K-5) | 9 | High (9-12) | 2 |

DISCUSSION

Data collection is ongoing for this study, since we hope to receive responses from all eleven states that were included in the policy analysis. Based on the responses we have received at this time, there have been positive and negative impacts resulting from the leave policies, and the remote and flexible work arrangements, that were implemented in response to the pandemic.

Many participants observed a breakdown of boundaries between work and family time, and that there were frequent interruptions to their work. However, most participants were not concerned that their promotion or tenure would be impacted, due to extensions and other flexible policies implemented by their institutions. Participants also indicated that flexible leave policies are well received and appreciated, and have made it possible for them to learn new skills and remain productive.

Reply

To: Cc Bcc

Subject:

1) Describe the impact of telework arrangements on your ability to conduct your job duties.

- Workplace flexibility
- Technology constraints
- Negative Impact: Teaching
- Negative Impact: Research
- Positive Impact: Professional Development
- Supportive administration
- Negative Impact: Physical workspace
- Negative Impact: Productivity
- Increase in productivity over time

1A) Have some areas of your work been more impacted than other areas (e.g., research, teaching, professional service, professional development)?

- Positive Impact: Increased connections with users
- Positive Impact: Professional Development
- Increase in search requests
- Increased stress levels
- Need to learn new technology
- Positive Impact: Administrative support
- Negative Impact: Professional Service
- Negative Impact: Professional Development

1B) Do you think this will impact your retention or promotion?

- Negative Impact: Research
- Tenure and Promotion Flexibility

2) Describe the impact of telework arrangements on your ability to care for your family.

- Negative Impact: Children's schooling
- Increased financial stress
- Child care Challenges: Cost
- Child care Challenges: Availability
- Emotional toll on children
- Positive Impact: More family time together

2A) Did time-based work commitments impact your ability to care for your family?

- Positive Impact: More family time together
- Negative Impact: Parental Guilt
- Negative Impact: Scheduling challenges around schooling
- Negative Impact: Frequent interruptions

2B) Have the boundaries between work and family life been impacted by working from home and remote school, if applicable?

- Negative Impact: Work/life balance and boundaries
- Negative Impact: Challenges scheduling
- Negative Impact: Increased working hours
- Negative Impact: Increased stress level
- Positive Impact: More family time together
- Young children not understanding boundaries
- Increased workplace flexibility
- Truncated working hours

B I U A Tt [Rich Text Editor] SEND

QUESTION 1 QUOTE 1:

"My research interests have had to take a backseat to the more pressing research of the [blank] faculty...because of the larger number of requests for literature searches that I've been receiving since the pandemic began."

QUESTION 1 QUOTE 2:

"I felt like there were more webinars being offered, and I tried to take advantage of this and attend more webinars than usual."

QUESTION 2 QUOTE 1:

"In that sense, I felt like it was a gift to work from home and spend more time together."

QUESTION 2 QUOTE 2:

"I feel like the boundaries are even more blurred. I felt like I needed to respond to emails at all hours."

There is variability in the ages of children the respondents are responsible for caring for. Most children of participants in the study were in elementary school, and several participants mentioned that older children were able to work more autonomously.