

# Study finds COVID-19 hindering US academic productivity of faculty with young children

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The academic productivity of higher education faculty in the United States in the science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM) fields with very young children suffered as a result of the stay-at-home orders during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new study by researchers at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, the University of Florida College of Medicine, and the University of Michigan School of Medicine.

Titled, "Academic Productivity Differences by Gender and Child Age in STEMM Faculty during the COVID-19 Pandemic," the study is published in the *Journal of Women's Health*. It is thought to be one of the first to quantify academic [productivity](#) during the [pandemic](#).

Surveying 284 male and female [faculty members](#) with a median age of 42 at various institutions across the country, the study compared the two months prior to the pandemic, mid-January to mid-March, to the first two months of the pandemic, mid-March to mid-May, said Becca Krukowski, Ph.D., an associate professor at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in the Department of Preventive Medicine and first author. Faculty members were asked to self-report productivity for the two time periods across a number of categories including first/corresponding author and co-author manuscript submissions, peer review assignments, grant applications, and attendance at funding panel meetings, all of which are markers of academic productivity and are

metrics for promotion and tenure.

There were no significant differences in numbers of hours worked per week by gender, 45.8 for males and 43.1 for females, during the time periods. However, during the first two months of the pandemic, faculty with children age 5 and younger reported working significantly fewer hours weekly, 33.7. Whereas, faculty with children age 6 and older or with no children living at home reported increased [work hours](#) during the pandemic, according to the study.

"Usually parents of young children have all of their supports lined up—day care or a babysitter, as well as additional support from relatives, including parents who are older. That hasn't been the case during the pandemic," Dr. Krukowski said.

"The pandemic is having an impact on faculty productivity and the largest impact appears to be on faculty with small children; this potentially has implications for tenure and promotion," she said. "It may be compounded by other pandemic-related impacts on research, such as having to close down a lab or having to change the way that research is done to keep participants and staff safe."

Because faculty raises, promotions, and tenure are tied to productivity, the pandemic may have lasting effects on academic careers. It is important for institutions to be aware of these long-term effects when evaluating faculty, she said.

"I think that this is going to be a difficult situation, particularly for [faculty](#) who are pre-tenure, because tenure extensions aren't necessarily the best answer for everyone, since that means that raises are delayed," Dr. Krukowski said. "And we don't know how long the pandemic will last, and so it is not clear how long to delay these processes."

The study also points to the possibility that the pandemic has the potential to increase gender inequities already evident in the STEMM fields, since females perform the majority of the caregiving for the youngest [children](#).

Provided by University of Tennessee Health Science Center

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