

# Out of office: New Baylor study examines relationship between stress and remote work

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Sara Perry, Ph.D., assistant professor of management, Baylor University, Hankamer School of Business. Credit: Baylor Marketing & Communications

Many U.S. employees believe working from home—or at least away from the office—can bring freedom and stress-free job satisfaction. A

new Baylor University study says, "Not so fast."

The study, published recently in the *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, examines the impact of remote [work](#) on employee well-being and offers several strategies to help managers provide remote-work opportunities that are valuable to the employee and the company.

"Any organization, regardless of the extent to which people work remotely, needs to consider well-being of their employees as they implement more flexible working practices," the researchers wrote.

A total of 403 working adults were surveyed for the two studies that made up the research, said lead author Sara Perry, Ph.D., assistant professor of management in Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business. The research team measured each employee's [autonomy](#) (the level of a worker's independence), strain (defined in this study as exhaustion, disengagement and dissatisfaction) and [emotional stability](#).

Emotional stability, Perry explained, "captures how even keeled someone is or, on the opposite end, how malleable their emotions are. An example would be if something stressful happens at work, a person who is high on emotional stability would take it in stride, remain positive and figure out how to address it. A person low on emotional stability might get frustrated and discouraged, expending energy with those emotions instead of on the issue at hand."

The research found that:

- Autonomy is critical to protecting remote employees' well-being and helping them avoid strain.
- Employees reporting high levels of autonomy and emotional stability appear to be the most able to thrive in remote-work

positions.

- Employees reporting high levels of job autonomy with lower levels of emotional stability appear to be more susceptible to strain.

Perry said the study contradicts past research that says autonomy is a universal need that everyone possesses. Per this research, those who are lower in emotional stability may not need or want as much autonomy in their work.

"This lower need for autonomy may explain why less emotionally stable employees don't do as well when working remotely, even when they have autonomy," researchers wrote.

In addition to their findings, the researchers offered several recommendations for managers who design or oversee remote-work arrangements.

The research team advised managers to consider their employees' behavior when deciding who will work remotely.

"I would suggest managers look at [employee](#) behaviors, rather than for personality traits, per se," Perry said. "For example, if someone does not handle stress well in the office, they are not likely to handle it well at home either. If someone gets overwhelmed easily, or reacts in big ways to requests or issues in the office, they are likely less well positioned to work remotely and handle that responsibility and stress."

Based on this study, individuals with high emotional stability and high levels of autonomy are better suited for remote work, but such candidates might not always be available.

"If less emotionally stable individuals must work remotely, managers

should take care to provide more resources, other than autonomy, including support to help foster strong relationships with coworkers and avoid strain," they wrote.

Managers might also consider providing proper training and equipment for remote work, including proper separation of work and family spaces, clear procedural and performance expectations and regular contact (virtual or face-to-face) with coworkers and [managers](#).

**More information:** Sara Jansen Perry et al. Stress in remote work: two studies testing the Demand-Control-Person model, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/1359432X.2018.1487402](#)

Provided by Baylor University

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