

Study published on the well-being of small business workers during COVID-19

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As the pandemic was starting to take hold, researchers from the Center for Health, Work & Environment (CHWE) at the Colorado School of Public Health (ColoradoSPH) performed a study to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of workers in Colorado. The team evaluated changes to employees' work and home life resulting from COVID-19 and individual perceptions of workplace safety and health

climates. These climates reflect employee perceptions of how committed their employer is to their safety and health. They are commonly used as an indicator of organizational safety and health cultures.

This study, published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, examined whether safety and health climates were related to [employee](#) well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic in a sample of small businesses. CHWE has become an expert in the field of small business safety and [health research](#) based on its Small + Safe + Well (SSWell) study, a four-year, Total Worker Health intervention. The research group distributed a COVID-specific employee survey to the existing employer group of SSWell organizations and received responses from 491 employees from 30 small businesses across Colorado.

"When the pandemic hit last spring, we knew that work changed significantly. We wanted to understand how the small businesses in our SSWell study were responding to the pandemic and how this was related to their employees' health," said Dr. Natalie Schwatka, one of the lead researchers and assistant professor at the ColoradoSPH.

"We learned that when employees perceived strong health and safety climates, they also reported better well-being," says Dr. Carol Brown, lead researcher and deputy director of CHWE. Employee perceptions of safety and health climates were significantly, positively related to their self-reported well-being during the first wave of COVID-19, even when there were changes to childcare, the ability to work, and limited social contacts.

"Safety and health climates may influence employee well-being even when other disruptions occur, suggesting that during emergencies, [small businesses](#) with strong climates may be better prepared to maintain employee well-being," according to Dr. Schwatka.

The team hopes the results of the survey will encourage organizations to approach emergency preparedness as a health and safety issue.

"Businesses cannot always predict when an emergency is going to happen, but they can create a working environment that supports their employees' [health](#), [safety](#), and well-being" says Dr. Schwatka. "In doing so, they have laid a foundation for how to successfully respond to an emergency."

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