

Study: COVID tech took a toll on work-from-home moms

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It's no secret that being a work-from-home mom during the dawn of the COVID-19 pandemic was a drag. And those tech tools—video meetings and texting—designed to make remote work easier? They just added to

the stress and exacerbated the mental health toll on burnt out moms trying to hold everything together.

That's one major takeaway from a study published this week in the journal *Communication Reports*. Researchers surveyed 540 adults in May 2020 who had worked for up to 10 weeks remotely, and found that stress levels among women with children skyrocketed—likely because blurred work-life balance boundaries meant they took on the brunt of juggling homeschooling and [household chores](#) alongside professional duties.

The results also reveal that video chats and texts tended to stress out remote workers, regardless of parental status and other factors including age, race, and education. Why? Researchers hypothesize that the extra visual cues needed to get points across via a video screen and expectations of immediacy when replying to texts contributed to fatigue. For working mothers, these two communication methods were especially burdensome because they hindered the ability to multitask.

The findings raise questions about the future of [remote work](#) and ways to preserve employees' [mental health](#), said lead researcher and UNLV communication studies professor Natalie Pennington.

"We did find [stress levels](#) progressively increased for women with more children, which really points to the juggling act—you're trying to keep track of multiple kids and the job," she said. "The answer to alleviating stress might be supporting the use of asynchronous communication, like email, compared to synchronous forms, like video chats and texting, to create the flexibility needed to better balance work and home. When real-time communication is needed, [phone calls](#) may be better suited to allow for multi-tasking."

The study was conducted in collaboration with Michigan State University associate professor Amanda Holmstrom and University of

Kansas professor Jeff Hall.

More information: Natalie Pennington et al, The Toll of Technology while Working from Home during COVID-19, *Communication Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/08934215.2021.1993947](https://doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2021.1993947)

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