The Impact of COVID-19 on Work and Marriage

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic changed much, especially our work lives and relationships. More individuals had to work from home (Vyas, 2022), many were laid off (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020), and the number of work hours changed for many (McDowell et al., 2020). The pandemic was also associated with increased marital problems and decreased marital happiness (Wagner, Choi, & Cohen, 2020). Personal happiness also declined greatly during the pandemic, while negative affectivity increased (Helliwell et al., 2021). The aim of this present study was to examine the lasting impact that the pandemic had on work, marriage, and happiness by comparing levels of these variables from 2018 and 2022. The hypothesis was that these aforementioned trends in work hours, work status, marital happiness, and personal happiness would be lasting.

Dataset

This data was downloaded from the General Social Survey (GSS) website. Only survey responses from 2018 and 2022 were utilized, with a total of almost 5,900 responses: 2,348 from 2018 and 3544 from 2022. Below are the variables extracted from the GSS.

DEMOGRAPHICS: Age; Sex; Race; Marital status; Divorce status; Number of children

WORK: Labor force status for self and spouse; Hours normally worked per week of self and spouse; Self-employment status of self and spouse; Work from home status

HAPPINESS: Personal happiness; Marital happiness

Analyses compared the 2018 and 2022 levels of the work, marriage, and happiness variables as appropriate for their variable type.

Results

DEMOGRAPHICS: The mode age for participants in this sample was 39. The sample was about 54% female and 45% male. About 71% of the participants were white, about 16% were black, and about 11% reported another ethnicity. The mode number of children for both years was zero. In both years, the percent of participants who were married was about 42% and the percent of participants who had never been divorced was about 74%.

WORK: The mode labor force status for both years, both for self and spouse, was "Working full time". An ANOVA revealed a significant effect of year on self labor force status, $F(10,5881) = 6.79$, $p<.001$. A Tukey's HSD test revealed significant ($p < .01$) differences between "Other-In school", "Other-Keeping house", "Retired-Keeping house", "Unemployed- Keeping house", "Retired-Other", "Working full time-Other", and "Working part time-Other". The ANOVA for spousal labor force status was also significant, $F(11,5880) = 2.29$, $p<.01$ A Tukey's HSD test revealed significant ($p<.01$) differences between "working full time" and "retired" by year. The relationship between year and hours worked per week, both for self and spouse, was not significant. as was the relationship between year and self-employment status for self and for spouse. There was a statistically significant increase in amount of time spent working from home by year, $t(3114)= -4.4$, $p<.001$. Those in 2018 ($M=4.3$, $SD=1.29$) worked from home less than those in 2022 ($M=4.55$, $SD=1.34$).

HAPPINESS: On a scale of 1-3, ("Not too happy" to "Very happy"), people in 2018 ($M=2.15$, $SD=0.65$) were happier than those in 2022 ($M=1.99$, $SD=0.67$). This decrease was statistically significant, $t(5138.36)=9.23$, $p < .001$. On the same scale, marriages were happier in 2018 ($M=2.61$, $SD=0.55$) than they were in 2022 ($M=2.55$, $SD=0.59$), and this was also significant, $t(2229)=2.45$, $p=.014$. Personal and marital happiness were significantly correlated, X^2 $(4, N = 5892)= 632.68$, $p<.001$.

YEAR*SEX INTERACTION: The ANOVA for hours worked per week by year and sex was not significant, as was the ANOVA for amount of time working from home by year and sex.
The only significant effect in the ANOVA for self-employment status by year and sex was the relationship between sex and self-employment status, $F(1,5645) = 52.3$, $p<.001$, with more women being self-employed.

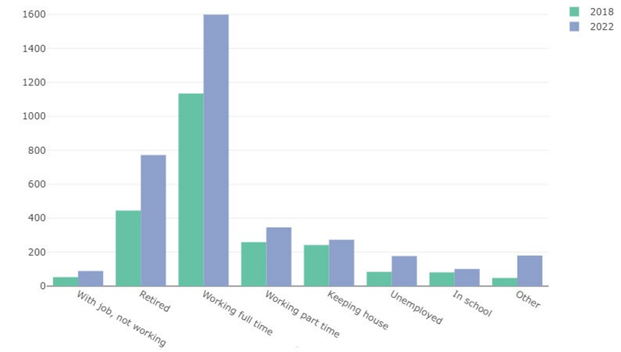
Conclusion

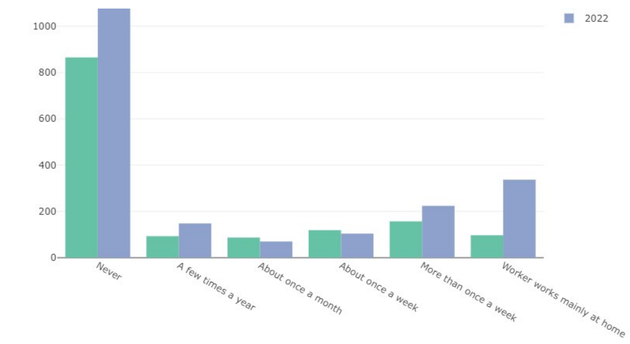
Ultimately, this archival investigation aligned in some ways with precedent research and was misaligned in others. This large population pool had diverse demographics, contributing to its validity. It was true that work was disrupted in that labor force status was significantly changed, but the number of hours worked did not change and neither did self-employment status. The increase in work from home hours did align with expected trends. Additionally, the significant changes in both personal and marital happiness were in line with expected trends and the concepts did turn out to be strongly intertwined with one another. It would be beneficial to replicate these analyses with future survey results to see how lasting these trends are, as many locations still faced the effects of the pandemic in 2022. It would also be beneficial to see if any factors besides COVID are culpable for these statistics.

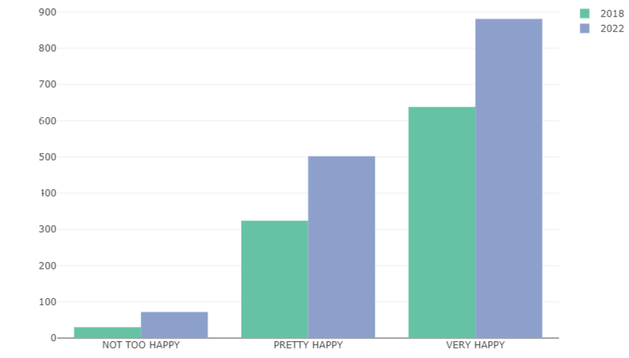
Questions? Contact Emma at emma.power1@msubillings.edu

Graphs

In descending order:
Work status (by year); Work from home status (by year); Marital happiness (by year)







References

https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/variables/vfilter

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