

Coming Together or Growing Apart: Voices from the Pandemic Workplace

By Rachel Anderson and Jax Heil

June 2023



Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic confronted American workplaces with a host of health, human resource, and logistical challenges. In response to the virus, Congress passed new laws that sought to preserve its citizens' health and financial security as well as measures to protect the financial stability of business and nonprofit organizations. However, even with these measurements in place, employers still struggled to balance public health, worker well-being, and organizational survival.

In partnership with DataWise Consulting (formerly Calvin University Center for Social Research), the Center for Public Justice sought out employer and employee accounts about work during COVID-19. The research team developed a qualitative methodology focused on income-constrained workers in West Michigan – those who earn too much to be considered poor, but don't have enough income to cover all of their major expenses. Employers whose workforce includes income-constrained workers were also asked for their input. The methodology made space for comments on the relationship between faith and work during the pandemic. Employer interviews were conducted with organizations with historic or current ties to a faith tradition. Interviewees were invited but not required to speak about faith in their pandemic-accounts.

The research found that both categories of employers and employees were sympathetic toward employers' handling of pandemic-related challenges. Both groups thought employers were nimble and well-intentioned in their approach, which often involved securing a combination of public and private resources. However, many employees expressed caution about requesting public benefits, fearing they might run afoul of complex program rules. Although many employees expressed empathy about their employers' attempts to manage the COVID-19 situation, several of the same employees also revealed that employers' paid time off policies were insufficient and implemented with double standards.

Moreover, the research found that employers' awareness of employees' family responsibilities varied depending on different factors—long standing gender biases and structures of business sectors being two of them. Finally, CPJ and DataWise found that employees saw mental health as salient in their work experience during the pandemic, a theme that didn't surface in any of the employer interviews.

Moving forward, employers strike a balance in workplace culture: between a “can do” ethos and a culture where workers have adequate time for rest, recovery from illness and injury, and family life. Finally, employers and employees alike must also meet the adaptive leadership challenge of the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the workplace.

Introduction

The scale of the COVID-19 pandemic has been such that it has touched nearly every home and workplace. In 2020, with support of the Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community, the Center for Public Justice (CPJ) and its research partner, DataWise Consulting (formerly Calvin University Center for Social Research), sought insight on the impact of the pandemic on work, particularly the conditions and circumstances of low-wage work in one focus region: West Michigan. In response to the highly transmissible virus, many schools shifted to virtual learning, communities endured brief shutdown orders, and mask-wearing requirements were implemented in many spaces. Public officials sought to strike a difficult balance between sustaining both the economy and community health. Congress quickly passed new laws funding enhanced unemployment insurance, forgivable loans for small businesses, and emergency paid sick and family leave.

The wave of new requirements and health uncertainties that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic presented a challenge to many business owners. Those who were experts in their craft or line of business faced choices that would affect the health and financial security of their workforce. Did public policy interventions help employers manage their workplaces effectively? How did the unprecedented circumstances around COVID-19 affect employers' attitudes toward their own employees' needs, particularly relating to family obligations and health?

Prior to the pandemic, many American households faced family economic stress on a regular basis. In particular, those engaged in low and moderate wage work may find themselves hovering between poverty and self-sufficiency—earning a steady income but also frequently struggling to meet the actual costs of housing, child care, food, health care, and transportation.

How did COVID-19 interventions, along with the stress of the pandemic itself, affect low-wage workers, particularly with respect to health, economic security, and family?

Methodology

In order to generate an account of the changes in work in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, CPJ and DataWise developed a qualitative research methodology focused on employer and employee's own account of their pandemic experience and choices.

The research model, as originally conceived, proposed separate employer and employee focus groups and sought to draw from a pool of faith-shaped employers in a specific region of the United States: West Michigan. West Michigan is a region with a diverse faith community and a business community containing many firms with historic faith ties. The research design proceeded on the hypothesis that incorporating employers' faith-identities might result in a different response than an interview based only on interviewees' identities as business owners, enabling interviews to tap into cultural or values-driven accounts of work. Faith history or identity varied widely within the sample and was offered as an open-ended category in interviews.

West Michigan's economy, which is widely understood as thriving, includes many jobs whose wages do not meet a regionally-adjusted self-sufficiency standard. An analysis of household income data by the United Way of West Michigan concluded that 25% of the households in West Michigan's largest county are in the category of employed and income-constrained. These households earn too much to be considered poor but lack sufficient income to meet all major expenses or face a major financial setback.¹ The research model sought to hear, specifically, from this group of workers as well as from employers whose workforce includes those in the income-constrained category and, then, to compare the experiences and attitudes of employers and employees.

The social distancing and social isolation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic led CPJ and DataWise researchers to modify the research design in several ways. Focus groups, which ideally would have been held in person and in communal spaces such as houses of worship or over shared meals, proved too difficult to execute. Instead, researchers developed a sample of individual interviewees via snowball sampling.

The employer sample was built through a combination of participant and community organization recommendations and cold-contact to potential participants via LinkedIn. 12 one-hour interviews of company leaders were conducted, out of 47 directly invited in total. Most, but not all, employers interviewed were associated with a faith-shaped for-profit firm. All of the remaining employers were from faith-shaped non-profits. The employee sample was created by conducting outreach through a Grand Rapids-based community organization with a history of work for affordable housing, racial equity, and community power.

The employee sample did not include any employees from the employer firms that were previously interviewed. Nine one-hour interviews of employees were conducted by Zoom along with one interview with a pastor whose congregation includes both employers and employees who fit the project's criteria. Most employees interviewed had some family responsibilities; these responsibilities varied widely and included parenting young children, parenting middle grade and high school-age children, care for non-resident children, and care for parents and grandparents. Eight of nine employee interviews were conducted with women.

Notable Findings: Employer Perspectives

Employers utilized both public and private policies to accommodate worker-caregivers during the pandemic.

The pandemic prompted a series of interruptions to typical patterns of work and family caregiving. Many schools and child care providers closed for periods of time; some shifted to virtual settings that required children to be under the physical care of their family or another responsible adult. Finally, the COVID-19 infection itself necessitated, at times, periods of quarantine and recovery for workers and those in their care.

Our study was designed to investigate employer responses to worker-caregivers during the pandemic. One set of responses consisted of implementation of new company-wide policies to accommodate pandemic-disruptions. There were also several public policies available to employers.

Among the 11 employers interviewed, the following private (workplace-specific) accommodations were mentioned:

- Temporary reduced work hours (7)
- Employer guaranteeing continuous salary during shutdowns (2)

The following public policies were utilized:

- Unemployment (6)
- Michigan WorkShare program (4)

Additionally, employers offered expanded paid time off (5) and family leave (3), often termed “FMLA” by employers in reference to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act requiring employers of a certain size to provide 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected time off for certain medical and caregiving events.²

For some employers, navigating new public policies required knowledge and skill outside of their typical conduct of business. A pastor with whom we spoke observed about a small business owner in his community: “the stress that he was under, how part of the stress [was] the four employees he had, feeling bad about not being able to give them work, and his own trying to navigate the federal and state money and unemployment and all that kind of stuff.” As the pastor noted, some business owners go into business to do what they love, not to deal with the kind of administrative work that seemed to expand during the pandemic.

Exposure to employees with family responsibilities may have had an effect on employer policy during the pandemic.

Employers varied widely with respect to how many public and private worker accommodation policies they pursued. Most used only one or two accommodations. But there were three employers who utilized many of the policies available.

The three employers who mentioned having significant numbers of employees with families also reported using the widest variety of accommodation policies during the pandemic.

The employers interviewed represent a wide range of degrees of exposure to employees with families and perceptions of caregiving responsibilities and challenges. Several employers were aware of the parents in their workforce:

“We do have quite a few families where one of their parents lives on site and kids go to school.” (agricultural company)

“We have quite a few employees who are single moms... A lot of them don’t have a great support system.” (housecleaning company)

But several businesses felt their workforce lacked significant family obligations.

“We were actually surprised at how few of our employees had kids.” (manufacturing firm)

“Trucking by nature has a lot of variety in the schedule. You can be at your last stop, and it may take two hours to unload and there’s nothing you can do. If you’re responsible for picking up the kids at daycare at 3 p.m., you are screwed. As much as I hate to admit it, most of our folks have set up their lives in a way that they are not the primary responsible person for things... It’s just sometimes you hit Chicago traffic, and you just do.”

Employers consider workplace culture to have had a significant role in workplace operations prior to and during the pandemic.

Seven of 12 interviewees mentioned workplace or company culture without any prompting from the interviewer, while others alluded to similar concepts. Workplace culture was sometimes connected to practices of flexibility. Employers understood themselves as responsible for cultivating a shared identity and building confidence that everyone will be treated fairly over the long haul even as they exercised discretion in individual circumstances.

One employer identified a pre-existing workplace culture of “just getting it done” as a source of resistance to pandemic-oriented restrictions on the part of their employees:

“What I heard a lot of struggle with was around the requirements for being safe... some of our folks, it just flew in the face of their American pride. wearing a mask or having to call in sick when you’re sick... [O]ur most egregious offenders were our older guys who grew up just getting the job done. [They don’t] try to stay home when they’re sick or wear a mask.”

In some cases, workplace culture drew from the company or leaders’ faith identity.

“Our vision of work is a relational one. We’re a decentralized culture, we take care of people, we have relationships. We’re a company based on biblical principles. Love is a business word. That’s how we roll.”

Some employers felt that the pandemic and the political environment introduced new tensions into workplace culture.

Another employer felt that pandemic restrictions diminished the relational workplace culture the company previously enjoyed. That employer mentioned glass windows that were installed for safety reasons as an example: "...that made relationships much more difficult for the culture like ours versus a culture that was more relational."

Differing responses to the pandemic also affected workplace culture. Referring to politics, masks, vaccines, an employer observed:

"I can't remember a time when our team had so many things trying to pull us apart as a team, and we certainly weren't unique. Churches, schools, they all had it. It was tearing teams apart at the core... I don't think I was smart enough to see it right away."

Employers typically preferred flexibility over policy both before and during the pandemic.

Employers interviewed generally perceived themselves as agile problem solvers with unique business models, specialized workforces, and constantly evolving economic environments. They tend to avoid establishing company policies that might constrain their ability to adapt to circumstances. They tend also to object to public policies that constrain operations and capacity to adapt. As one employer noted, "it's my policy to not have too much policy."

Notable Findings: Employee Perspectives

Employers used a wide range of public and private benefits to manage closures and illness related to COVID-19.

Employee and employer interviews tell a similar story with respect to resourcing time off in order to manage COVID-19. Both explained that a mix of programs and benefits were used. Most employees understood, in general terms, the public and private programs that were operating but were not always certain of precisely how much pay and benefits they had received.

Among the sources of paid time for COVID-19 infection or COVID-19-related needs cited by employees: saved vacation days, existing paid time off benefits, emergency family and medical leave, and short-term disability.

The employees of workplaces that underwent temporary closures or drop in workflow due to COVID-19 had a variety of experiences: receiving full pay during shut-down through the employer's receipt of a Paycheck Protection Program loan, unemployment insurance, decline in hours and pay. No employee mentioned using Michigan's Work-Share program, which would have allowed employers to supplement reduced employee hours with a modified unemployment benefit.

Employees appreciated the health-related resources offered by employers during COVID-19.

Additionally, employees appreciated the health-related resources employers provided during COVID-19. One provided workers with rides to a vaccination site. Another partnered with a community health center to get vaccines for all workers. Another worker appreciated that his worksite had an on-call medical team that he could consult when he had COVID-19 or COVID-like symptoms. It was especially important to the worker that the service was available after-hours and got him in contact with a doctor or nurse. "I could tell they (the medical provider) had empathy for me and my situation," he said.

Grief and anxiety were the most commonly mentioned worker experiences relative to family and COVID-19.

Several employees shared experiences of grief, loss, and anxiety in their interviews. Four of nine interviewees lost family members to COVID-19 or were dealing with other deaths within their family systems. One woman described the shock of losing her father and then stepmother to COVID-19 in the early weeks of the pandemic. Her father thought he'd had a stroke and was admitted to the hospital in March of 2020 and subsequently died. She described the experience this way:

"You know in the movies when you see the person and they get the car to the hospital and they're running through the hallways to get to their loved one; that's the way my life played out." [Her father was admitted to the hospital with what he thought was a stroke, followed by her stepmother.] "Needless to say, my dad never came home... I lost both of them (father and stepmother) in a matter of days. We never got to have the funeral."

Another interviewee has been called upon to help her teenage grandson cope with the loss of his father to COVID-19. She relates the grandson and daughter's experience:

"The last time they seen him, he looked perfectly healthy to them. Then they went through two weeks of not seeing him (while he was quarantined at the hospital), and then he was dead. It was such a shock for them."

Several people talked about the difficulty of navigating when and whether to see their loved ones, often fearing they would transmit COVID-19. An employee whose job required contact with the public explained:

"for a while, I didn't go visit my mom because she's in her 60s, and she was afraid that she would get it and pass away... I was working with the public every day ... I was scared I might give it to her and be the reason."

Three interviewees whose jobs were not amenable to remote work expressed an ongoing sense of anxiety about their own safety in the workplace. Two of these three interviewees had also lost relatives to COVID-19 during the pandemic, an experience that may have heightened their own anxiety. A fast-food worker explained, "you got afraid every time somebody coughed under their mask." A nursing home employee described it this way: "With this being something new and people were dying, it was just scary." One of the interviewees who had lost a family member to COVID-19 found that anxiety about her own health began to pervade her experience of work, to the extent that it was diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She experienced a panic attack at work in response to an interaction with an unmasked co-worker that, she felt, could have exposed her to COVID-19.

A pastor reflecting on his community felt that a recent TIME magazine article explained what he saw: rounds of anxiety that brought, initially, jolts of energy and attention, but then led to deep exhaustion and "psychological fatigue."³ This condition was also expressed by a working mother who was responsible for both an elderly mother and caring for a son with disabilities during the pandemic: "You wake up every day and something is different."

Employees expressed empathy for the choices their employers made relative to COVID-19 but also had concerns about cultures in which they worked.

When asked to describe their work experience, many interviewees adopted a positive attitude toward work and considerable empathy for the difficulties and uncertainties that employers' faced during the pandemic.

"I really like my job - not just to keep me busy and provide income for our family but, you know, you provide a service for people so that they don't have to."

"I think under the circumstances, not only [my employer], but a lot of agencies and businesses did well, because they had no idea what to do, and they did what they could."

"I felt like [my employer] did try, the management tried."

Another interviewee described her employers as "honest and have a lot of integrity," "reasonable and practical when it comes to trying to come up with solutions," and behaving ethically rather than "taking shortcuts" or doing things that are financially "beneficial but not beneficial for the staff." The employee suffered from COVID-19 early in the pandemic and was sympathetic to the fact that there were few systems in place at that point. Her employers allowed her to use vacation pay which she described as, "the best choice they could make." She went on to say that the employer was good at keeping in touch with new laws, a task she recognized as challenging: "that's really hard to keep up with, especially in our work because things are changing all the time."

Despite the inclination to view employers in a sympathetic light, several of the interviewees who expressed positivity also sensed blind spots and inconsistencies in their workplace. The same employee who felt her employers were honest, ethical, and had integrity also disclosed that the organization's paid time off and attendance policies contributed to her failure to take time off from work for the sake of her health and well-being. The firm provided no paid time off during the first year of employment, then five paid days off in years two to five of employment. This policy along with a point system that penalized taking time off for appointments such as preventative care and treatment led to a situation in which the employee felt she could not or should not take time off work.

One interviewee noted that those in management positions regularly left or took time off because their kids were sick but that others penalized for making the same decisions. Another interviewee felt that her workplace handled the pandemic well at first (“in the beginning, they were awesome... they understood people got kids, school is shut down, people are stressed out.”), but then began to prioritize reopening the workplace over employee safety. (“I just felt so unsupported... there were countless emails that went out to everybody, like ‘Oh, we got to get back to normal.’”)

Many employees expressed highly scrupulous and cautious attitudes about receiving public benefits.

In response to the COVID-19 emergency, the federal government enacted policies intended to aid workers experiencing illness, emergency caregiving needs, or sudden loss of work. Worker- interviewees expressed a highly cautious attitude toward these benefits and toward government-provided benefits in general. They understood themselves as scrupulous and ethical and feared they might, inadvertently, receive a benefit to which they were not entitled.

“I get really stressed when it comes to legalities like filing for unemployment... I’m terrified of scamming the government for some reason.”

“[I] didn’t try to do the whole unemployment thing because I just didn’t quite understand it... So, just not understanding it and being afraid. [I] didn’t want to get in trouble by doing something I wasn’t supposed to do.”

One employee who did secure unemployment also expressed anxiety about it: “I’ve never been on unemployment but once for a week. What am I gonna do? A lot of scary things were going through my head.”

The complexity of systems like unemployment seemed to contribute to workers’ reluctance to seek help. At least in one case, employer attitudes may have reinforced that reluctance. One firm told their employees about the availability of federal emergency medical and family leave to enable people in quarantine to secure some pay. But the employer warned, “that money is going to run out.” The employers urged workers to be serious about safety, otherwise, “people are going to be off and not getting paid.”

Notably, a few interviewees expressed concern that other workers were not exercising the same scruples around benefit usage and safety precautions. One wondered if other workers were using the emergency, COVID-19 related family and medical leave for non-COVID-19 illnesses. Another admitted that, at times, she had “a little bit of resentment and bitterness” toward workers who used public benefits because they could have prevented whatever circumstances had caused their need.” But she also noted that she is beginning to rethink this attitude. Not everything can be prevented, she observed. “I think this (COVID-19) is a good wake-up call for me to have more grace.”

Employees provided advice for employers.

Finally, we asked employees to reflect overall on their COVID-experience and offer advice for their places of work. Their considered answers were consonant with experiences of grief, anxiety, and pressure in the workplace that they shared in their interviews.

Several employees recommended more sick and family leave days. One described a mindset and culture of “I can’t miss work” that preexisted the COVID-19 pandemic. This employee felt that there had been an atmosphere of shame around calling in sick, taking a day off, or securing preventative care. The employee, who expressed a great deal of respect for her employer, was now realizing that this atmosphere had not been helpful “when it comes to having the mindset of taking care of your body.” The employee recommended greater support for time off and for interventions that would preserve worker wellness.

One recommended that employers give more attention to workers’ experience of grieving loved ones who had died. Another highlighted the emergence of long-COVID and the potential need to care for oneself or a family member. This person felt that the possibility of some people having a long journey to recovery should be considered in employers’ future plans.

Overall, these recommendations were summed up in a desire for employers to acknowledge employees’ humanity: “kids get sick, people get sick, family members die, things happen.”

Discussion

How did employer and employee experiences from the pandemic compare? Did employers and employees hold shared perceptions about what happened during the pandemic? Did employers and employees take the same lessons from the experience? The comparison of employer and employee interview themes gave rise to the following broad conclusions, which should give rise to future study and reflection.

1. Employers and employees shared similar views about employers' responses to pandemic-induced workplace challenges.

Employers and employees alike felt that employers' responses to the pandemic were nimble and well-intentioned. Both mentioned that workplaces used a combination of public and private benefits to help workers receive pay during the 2020 shut-down or during individual workers' bouts with COVID-19. Several employers, but no employees, were aware of more innovative programs such as Michigan's Work Share program. Tangible health-related support provided by employers such as access to vaccines or having health care providers on call were noticed and valued by employees.

Employee interviews surfaced a theme that was not expressed in any employer interviews: many workers felt a high level of caution with respect to public benefits. Many see themselves, principally, as workers rather than benefit recipients and fear making a mistake when navigating complex systems such as unemployment insurance. Employers may be able to play an important role in helping workers navigate benefits systems if and when they are needed. One employer interviewee did make such an investment in helping employees secure support. Another interviewee is affiliated with The Source, an organization that provides vulnerable workers with case management and support navigating public and private support systems.

2. Employers and employees agreed about the value of workplace culture but employees' reflections named tensions and double standards in workplace culture.

Workplace culture was very salient to both employers and employees. Seven of the 12 employer interviewees mentioned workplace or company culture without any prompting from the interviewer. Several interviewees also alluded to similar concepts such as culture-building, offering special dispensations for exceptional situations.

Likewise, many employees' first responses to queries about their work and family experience in the pandemic conveyed empathy and understanding relative to their place of work. Employees felt that employers were doing their best.

One employer and one employee referenced workplace cultures that discouraged taking time off, when needed, but reached different conclusions about such a culture. (These two respondents were not referring to the same workplace). The employer described their company as having a "can do" workplace, resulting in employee refusal to take paid time off even when it's available. The employer felt such a culture had enabled worker resistance to COVID-19 safety measures such as mask-wearing and taking time off when sick. The employee also described her workplace as having a mindset and culture of "I can't miss work." Although she deeply valued the people in her workplace, she came to view this culture as a barrier to her health. She acknowledged that her refusal to take days off led her to become unaware of her body's overuse, resulting in risk of injury on the job.

Employee responses about workplace cultures also signal an emergent tension around workplace flexibility. Two employees described cultural double standards in their workplace around handling personal and household matters. They observed managers and business owners taking time off for children's illness or to manage home repairs but recognized that they and other workers would be penalized for doing the same.

3. Employer awareness of and accommodations of employee family responsibilities varied, potentially due to business specialization.

Employee responses reflected a wide range of awareness of employees with families. The structure of the economy, of business sectors, and longstanding gender and age biases meant some employers are far more exposed to workers with family responsibilities than others. Truck driving and manufacturing, for example, remain populated primarily by men with limited family obligations while housecleaning, retail, social services, and office work had more people with families. The variation in workforce affects employers' perceptions of the value and relevance of both workplace and public policies aimed at family support, a finding that suggests that business specialization may be a barrier to widespread awareness of and support interventions related to employees' family responsibilities.

4. The mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were more salient to employees than employers.

Many of the employees interviewed shared experiences of grief, anxiety, and stress – conditions either brought about or uncovered by the COVID-19 pandemic. None of the employer interviews mentioned these themes, suggesting a potential blind spot for workplaces. Employees spoke about the ongoing process of grieving for loved ones who had died of COVID-19 or had died of other causes during the pandemic. Others experienced the death of co-workers due to COVID-19. Two employees mentioned the fact that workers with special needs – from mental health services to recovery groups – had gone without these services for at least several months. In some cases, this could result in relapses and distress that could require additional intervention and support. Employees hoped that their employers would respond to their basic needs for rest and wellness. “I wish we had more time to take a personal day and just be able to listen to our body” and simply to rest if they recognize themselves to be stressed. Another worker emphasized the need for peer support and therapy. This interviewee was very sympathetic to employers. “They probably could not have seen ahead of time that better support for family members and friends of people that end up (COVID-19) positive or end up passing away,” she said. But she named the need, now, for “leaders to be more open and honest about the situations that affect other people’s lives.”

Recommendations

1. Both public and private resources can aid workplace and worker resilience during an emergency such as the pandemic.

Employers may be able to boost their nimbleness in utilizing public and private benefits by helping their workforce secure benefits, when appropriate, and overcome fear related to complex administrative systems. It's important to note that, as expressed during employee interviews, many workers felt a high level of caution about public benefits. The employers did not mention this situation, which must be addressed to ensure that public and private resources are utilized freely and efficiently.

Particularly faith-driven and faith-motivated employers should prioritize their employees' health and well-being. Taking this holistic view, employers should make it as easy for employees to access public and private support as possible.

One interviewee, Graciela Mata, CEO of Lindo Mexico, a restaurant in Grand Rapids, modeled a holistic response to employee needs. In response to the common employee experience of reluctance to seek outside assistance, Mata was committed to helping her workers access a range of public and private support - from unemployment compensation to emergency groceries and helping parents find safe places for their children when schools were closed.

2. Workplaces may promote employee longevity by balancing a "can do" culture with one that values periods of rest and wellness.

The pandemic revealed some of the unintended consequences of workplace cultures that promote constant work: refusal to take safety precautions, working while sick or injured. By balancing a 'can do' ethos with one that also values periods of rest and recovery, employers may be able to help protect their workforce over the long run.

Employees see that workplace culture is both a product of informal patterns of work as well as workplace policies. Shifts in both could help establish a culture of longevity in which workers can rest and take steps to protect their health through preventative or responsive health care.

As part of work culture, employers value flexibility over set policies to adapt to different circumstances. Some employees felt, however, that this flexibility was only offered to business owners and managers. Employee perceptions of work culture must be taken into consideration by employers. Policies that offer flexibility must be extended to all employees.

3. Pandemic-responsive workplaces will be attentive to some of the long-term mental and physical consequences of COVID-19.

From caring for family members with long-COVID to the massive loss of life experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, many impacts of the pandemic will last long after the pandemic is officially over. Employers and workers alike should continue remembering the human dimension of the COVID-19 pandemic and raising awareness of the stories of grief, anxiety, and stress that surfaced.

A long healing period following the pandemic will require workplaces to play an active role in public healing and recovery. For employers to support their employees throughout this process, they need to develop work practices that include lamenting together, respecting others' grief, and creating rituals that bring the community together.

Acknowledgments

This research was developed with support from Ascend at the Aspen Institute, through the Center for Public Justice's partnership in the Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community.

About the Center for Public Justice

The Center for Public Justice is an independent, nonpartisan organization devoted to policy research and civic education. Working outside the familiar categories of right and left, conservative and liberal, we seek to help citizens and public officeholders respond to God's call to do justice. Our mission is to equip citizens, develop leaders, and shape policy in pursuit of our purpose to serve God, advance justice, and transform public life. Families Valued is a program of the Center for Public Justice that advances workplace and public policies that honor God's call to both work and family life.

About DataWise Consulting

DataWise Consulting is a social-science data collection, management, and analysis firm based in Grand Rapids, Michigan. DataWise previously operated as the Center for Social Research (CSR) at Calvin University. Neil Carlson, Ph.D. and Jax Heil served as principal DataWise researchers on this project.

Contact Us

Center for Public Justice
1305 Leslie Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22301
202-695-2667
www.cpjustice.org

Endnotes

¹ Heart of West Michigan United Way. "ALICE - Making Ends Meet – Heart of West Michigan United Way," n.d. <https://www.hwmuw.org/making-ends-meet>.

² FMLA is a longstanding policy not to be confused with the paid expanded family and medical leave created as a temporary pandemic response in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act."

³Brad Stulburg, "Why You Feel So Tired All of the Time and What You Can Do About It," TIME Magazine, September 2021. <https://time.com/6099133/why-you-feel-tired-all-the-time/>