

LOSS OF REMOTE WORK AS PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT VIOLATION:
IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKING MOTHERS,
EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES AND RETENTION

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ABSTRACT

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work became commonplace for many knowledge workers who were previously office-based. In 2021 and beyond, many organizations have expected that their employees return to onsite work; much has been unknown, however, about employee attitudes toward loss of remote work during such a transition. Using the frameworks of social exchange theory, conservation of resources, and organizational support, this research seeks to understand how employee attitudes toward remote work may impact perceptions of psychological contract breach in required return to onsite work.

Although initial hypotheses were not supported, exploratory analyses supported a serial mediation model in which psychological contract breach, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment serially mediate the positive relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent. Positive attitudes of working mothers toward remote work were also explored, with consideration of how remote work may help in the balance of conflicting home and work demands. Findings support the unique and valuable role that remote work choice may play for working mothers as well as illuminating their potential reactions to loss of remote work. Findings have implications for organizations seeking to meet employee needs and retain workers, particularly working mothers, when considering work location requirements.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, whose belief in me helped me believe in myself too.

And to Sutton, my constant source of support, patience, and encouragement.

Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has been called “the great work-from-home experiment,” (Kramer & Kramer, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, a very small proportion of the workforce completed their work remotely, with just 5% of paid work hours completed at home (Barrero et al., 2021). The novel coronavirus pandemic caused large swaths of knowledge workers, previously office-based, to transition suddenly to remote work primarily completed at home (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Among employees whose work can be done from home, the proportion working remotely or teleworking more than quadrupled since 2010 (Bloom, 2020; Parker et al., 2020), and the average number of paid hours worked from home jumped from 5% to 50% in 2020 (Barrero et al., 2021).

Despite the dramatic change in the structure of work in recent years, much has remained unknown about the challenges and benefits of working from home, shifting employee attitudes toward remote work, and unique telework factors impacting women and caregivers. As organizations seek to understand the unique return-to-site transition, existing research on remote work, gender, workplace benefits, and implicit promises made by organizations can help to guide decision-makers.

Previous research has identified that remote work may play a positive role in job attitudes, work-family conflict, and decisions to stay with an organization, with mechanisms including decreased work exhaustion and greater autonomy (Golden, 2006; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). As the prevalence of remote work has grown, researchers have begun to explore how the transition to telework during early 2020 may have influenced worker attitudes toward their employers (e.g., Gong & Sims, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Significant gaps remain, however, in collective understanding of how transitions back to onsite work following loosened

COVID-related restrictions, and especially those mandatory transitions back to in-person work, might impact workers.

With so many workers experiencing significant remote work for the first time in 2020, attitudes toward telework have likely developed and solidified; even so, research on telework remains behind, failing to reflect changing sentiments caused by sudden transitions in the past three years (Howe et al., 2020). As employee attitudes have changed and the working world faces a significant transition point in considering how to navigate work location choices post-COVID, gaps remain in our understanding of potential impacts. For example, it is currently unknown whether workers may perceive required return to site as the removal of a valued resource or simply a return to normalcy. In the context of the ongoing exchange of resources between employer and employee, it is unclear whether flexibility and telework options are seen as employee benefits that may “tip the scale,” encouraging workers to stay in their current organizations and perform well. Further gaps exist in potential implications for caregivers, who have experienced great challenges during COVID-19 and who may have firmly held attitudes toward remote work. If organizations wish to prevent rising attrition, negative employee attitudes, and greater challenges for caregivers, these gaps in understanding must be addressed.

This research therefore aims to explore how preference for remote work relates to worker attitudes among those who have been required to return to office or onsite work. Using the framework of social exchange theory, it explores the possibility that employees may perceive removal of remote work options as a psychological contract breach, a broken promise by organizations who created implicit understandings that they would continue to exchange this potentially valued resource for employee performance, commitment, and retention. This study seeks to understand whether preference for remote work influences perceptions of psychological

contract breach in the loss of remote work, upsetting the balance of mutual resources provided by employer and employee. This research can then increase our understanding of negative outcomes including decreased commitment and increasing turnover intentions.

This study also seeks to fill gaps in the fledgling literature about the impact of remote work on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, specifically in terms of retaining mothers and other caregivers. While previous research points to gendered preference for remote work (e.g., Mokhtarian et al., 1998), much is still unknown about the preference for remote or onsite work by caregivers. Using the same social exchange framework, this study therefore explores whether greater preference for remote work among mothers may lead to greater attrition of those mothers from organizations experiencing a required return to onsite work. If mothers more strongly prefer remote work, they may be more likely to perceive the expected transition to onsite work as a broken promise, leading to more severe negative reactions. Understanding the differential impact of required return to site is vital not only for overall employee attitudes and retention, but also for ensuring mothers do not have to leave a workforce that is often unaccommodating of caregiving responsibilities.

As organizations choose how best to transition post-COVID, more research is needed to better understand potential impacts of the return to onsite work, particularly for turnover risk and workplace inequality (Maurer, 2021; Lord, 2020). At the time of this transition, this research can begin to fill gaps in understanding, helping to guide organizations and provide employees what they value most from work. Using previous research in the fields of remote work, caregiving, and employee attitudes, this study can build upon existing knowledge, creating a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of remote work on employees everywhere.

Attitudes Toward Remote Work

For the purpose of this study, the terms telework and remote work will be used interchangeably, as is customary in previous research in the field. Remote or telework includes work completed via communication technology outside of the primary or central workplace (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). While public health interventions and state-wide policies pushed organizations to send their workers away from typical workplaces in 2020, employer attitudes have historically varied widely in perceptions of remote work. While some recognize the changing nature of work and potential benefits of telework, many employers have historically hesitated to allow full-time or even part-time work from home.

Even as some employers hesitate to provide remote work options, increasing globalization and technical advancement make telework increasingly efficient (Forgács, 2010). Many employers see potential benefits of increased telework in the form of reduced real estate costs and lesser ecological footprint (Lord, 2020). In a remote work meta-analysis, Martin and MacDonell (2012) found that remote work participation demonstrates small but positive relationships with beneficial employee outcomes including perceived productivity, retention, organizational commitment, and performance across the organization. Remote work options are seen as a benefit or perk of employment by many skilled applicants, and filling remote positions may be simpler for organizations than filling onsite roles, especially for roles requiring specialized knowledge (Clancy, 2020; Shelburne et al., 2022). Organizations and executives have also shared positive sentiment about the shift to remote work despite challenges related to the pandemic, with one estimate stating that 83% found their shift to remote work successful (Caglar et al., 2021).

Employers' increasing willingness to provide telework options may also be a response to growth in the popularity of remote work among workers. Despite the sudden transition and complications created by COVID-19, employee responses to remote work have been overwhelmingly positive. By one estimate, 59% of U.S. workers who worked from home during the pandemic would prefer to continue remote work after the pandemic subsides (Brenan, 2020). Even during times of enforced remote work in the early part of the pandemic, sentiment toward remote work itself was primarily positive (Zhang et al., 2021), and as public health interventions are lifted, workers are increasingly working remotely due to choice or preference rather than requirement (Parker et al., 2022). Previous research in the realm of remote work has noted largely positive outcomes for teleworkers, from positive affective well-being to increased job performance and creativity (Anderson et al., 2014; Vega et al., 2014). Employees who voluntarily utilize telework report more efficient performance, better concentration, fewer distractions, increased work-life balance, greater autonomy, and lower stress (Virtanen, 2020; Brenan, 2020). Flexibility in the form of remote work choice decreases employees' work-family conflict and subsequent turnover intention (Porter & Ayman, 2015). Organizations permitting telework have lower voluntary turnover than those without remote work options, and employees working remotely report greater job performance, higher intent to stay, and better balance of work with dependent care responsibilities (Choi, 2020; Major et al., 2008). Telework can be particularly helpful as a form of idiosyncratic deal, or adapted work arrangement created to address individual employee needs (Hornung et al., 2009).

Despite demonstrated positive effects, particularly for employees who voluntarily choose telework, the choice to permit remote work is most often made by supervisors or the organization broadly rather than by individual employees themselves (Kaduk et al., 2019; Hill, 2021).

Concerns about loss of control over employee activities and missed collaboration opportunities have stopped companies from implementing widespread remote work in the past (Allen et al., 2015). Other organizations have avoided telework due to concerns about corporate culture, communication difficulties, or employee motivation while working from home (Forgács, 2010). Managers and executives may also recognize that remote work is not a blanket solution to employee problems such as stress, work-family conflict, and communication challenges (Greer & Payne, 2014). Even as remote work may be viewed as a source of flexibility by some, others may experience challenges caused by it; involuntary remote work in particular can increase work-family conflict, stress, burnout, and turnover intentions (Kaduk et al., 2018).

Another large obstacle to remote work is approval of individual managers; factors such as trust in employees, willingness to delegate power, and concerns about communication may cause managers to resist allowing long-term remote work (Kaplan et al., 2018; Peters & Den Dulk, 2003). Managers may feel disconnected from subordinates that work remotely, and teleworkers may feel socially isolated, leading to concerns that they will not be considered fairly for promotions or other opportunities (Golden et al., 2008; Mayurama & Tietze, 2012). As the pandemic has subsided in some locations and others learn to live with an ever-present COVID-19, these same concerns—loss of control, connection, and communication—may motivate organizations to bring employees back for onsite work.

While research on remote work has grown in past decades, the onset of widespread telework during the COVID-19 pandemic has created the opportunity for even greater exploration into employee experiences of remote work. Most office-type work has historically revolved around an in-person structure, making telework a common experience for only a small subset of employees prior to 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic created a paradigm shift, a novel

and disruptive event that shifted assumptions about work; by giving more employees than ever before the chance to experience remote work, attitudes toward telework have undoubtedly changed (Howe et al., 2020; Min et al., 2021). Prior research has shown that workers that have never experienced telework tend to underestimate positive and overestimate negative experiences they might have while working remotely (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). With more employees recently experiencing telework, many will have new or changing attitudes and perceptions toward remote work. Understanding the implications of these changing attitudes is vital for organizations who hope to attract high performers and retain employees in years to come.

Return to Site and “The Great Resignation”

As safety standards and understanding of COVID-19 evolve, organizations will continue to weigh the potential costs and benefits of remote work. Many organizational leaders, accustomed to and familiar with the benefits of onsite work, have advocated for transitions back to office and a perceived return to normalcy. As of early 2022, an estimated 67% of remote and hybrid workers had plans to return to onsite work, often due to organizational requirements (Qualtrics, 2022). Throughout the past two years, the transition back to onsite work has proven a key inflection point in the careers of many. In what has been referred to as “The Great Resignation,” employees across the labor market have expressed greater intent to leave their jobs and have had increasing opportunities to be selective about the characteristics of their careers—including work location choice (Anderson & Klotz, 2021).

Human resources professionals and news sources alike have speculated about growing choice in the job market, employee reflections about long-term career and life decisions during a period of great health risk, childcare costs, and desire for meaningful, flexible work as potential drivers of increasing attrition (Patton, 2021). Organizations losing large numbers of employees

experienced growing costs including training, recruiting, hiring replacements, loss of key knowledge, and more (Tziner & Birati, 1996). In attempting to understand and prevent increases in costly attrition, organizations must continue to evaluate the needs and wants of their employees, particularly during key transition periods (Marsden, 2016).

Remote Work and Perceived Organizational Support

While multiple internal and external factors will inevitably impact employees' turnover decisions, organizations certainly have influence on the attitudes of their workers, making long-term retention possible. One critical component of workers' commitment to stay at their current organization is perceived organizational support, or POS. Perceived organizational support encompasses employee attitudes on the extent to which their employer values their contributions and cares for their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Research on POS began with the observation that commitment in both directions was necessary for a healthy work dynamic—not only from employee to organization, but also from organization back to employee. According to organizational support theory, employees seek to meet needs of esteem, affiliation, and approval at work, assessing whether the inputs of their work are met with appropriate support from their organizations in response (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Antecedents of POS found across prior research include perceived supervisor support, and to a lesser extent, team and coworker support (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Additional predictors include justice perceptions, value and belief congruence with the organization, leader consideration, or the extent to which leaders show concern for employee well-being and demonstrate support, and fulfillment of perceived organizational obligations in the form of psychological contracts (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades et al., 2002). Psychological contracts reflect understandings of mutual obligation between organization and employee as part of an

ongoing, social exchange relationship. The perception that these obligations or promises have been kept is vital to POS, while psychological contract breach has been shown to negatively impact POS. Job security, flexible work schedules, family supportive company practices, enriching job characteristics, and greater autonomy at work have also been shown to contribute to greater perceptions of organizational support, especially when seen as outcomes of voluntary choice by the organization rather than circumstances outside the organization's control (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades et al., 2002).

Greater perceived organizational support is associated with higher job satisfaction, in-role and extra-role job performance, and affective organizational commitment, or emotional attachment to one's company (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Employees who perceive support from their organizations can be expected to care about the organization's welfare in return, rewarding the company for their support due to a reciprocity norm (Rhoades, 2002). Affective commitment caused by greater POS has been shown to decrease turnover intent, making organizational support a key intervention point for companies concerned about potential increases in attrition (Maertz et al., 2007). Greater POS among employees also predicts a social exchange relationship rather than economic exchange between employee and employer (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Social exchange relationships emphasize trust, long-term investment, and mutual obligation, while purely economic exchanges focus on a short-term, clearly specified exchange of resources alone (Colquitt et al., 2014).

As workplace structures have begun to change and competition for skilled workers remains high, employees expect organizational support to be conveyed in many forms, including in gestures of respect and resource provision (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). Modern workplace rewards, including flexibility and benefits, reflect organizational sensitivity and leader

concern, or the ways in which an organization and its leaders are aware of and sensitive to the contributions of an increasingly diverse workforce (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). Employees may perceive remote work as a valuable, modern reward and source of flexibility that their organization provides due to trust in and commitment to their employees. By providing workers with resources such as flexible work arrangements and remote work choice, employers may promote perceptions of support, creating an ongoing positive relationship with employees (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Social Exchange Theory

The employer-employee relationship and methods of retention can be further understood in the framework of social exchange theory (SET). According to social exchange theory, relationships are based on an ongoing cost-benefit analysis between each party, with repeated exchanges of money, goods, services, information, status, or commitment (Homans, 1958; Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). The origins of SET can be traced back as far as the 1920s, when social psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists observed that a series of interactions tended to engender obligations between two parties (Emerson, 1976; Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). Within social exchange theory, interactions are understood to be dependent upon the actions of the other party, with the potential to develop high-quality relationships from ongoing, beneficial exchanges. These relationships can evolve over time into mutual commitments governed by implicit rules and norms such as reciprocity, or repayment in kind, as well as formal negotiated guidelines (Gouldner, 1960; Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). In a social exchange relationship, mutual investment is shaped by the reciprocity norm, with both parties contributing resources and receiving resources in return in order to maintain mutual benefit (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005).

Social exchange theory is a helpful framework for understanding the ongoing interactions between employer and employee. Relationships between organizations and their employees take one of two forms: transactional, short-term economic relationships or ongoing, norms-based social exchange relationships (Homans, 1958). The ideal relationship between workers and their organization is one of mutual investment, with both parties understanding reciprocal obligation and social exchange associated (Tsui et al., 1997). Organizations and employees make ongoing exchanges of resources including money, support, performance, and commitment; these exchange experiences lead to expectations about the relationship and future exchanges (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). Over time, social exchange relationships between organizations and employees develop an implicit reciprocity norm, or unwritten expectation that resources provided by one party will be met with resources from the other (Molm, 2003).

This reciprocity norm can be seen in response to perceived organizational support; when organizations provide beneficial resources to employees, POS grows, and so too does employees' felt obligation to reciprocate. Workers who feel their organization cares for them will typically demonstrate greater commitment and job performance in return (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Kurtessis et al., 2015). Similarly, employees who continuously perform well, provide value, and demonstrate commitment expect ongoing support and resources to be provided by their organizations (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). If organizations wish to maintain performance and prevent withdrawal among employees, they must ensure that workers perceive the organization as a source of support, resources, mutual investment, and fair ongoing exchange. To promote perceptions of benefit, employers must maintain the reciprocity norm, ensuring ongoing benefits for employees who continue to prove their loyalty and performance to the organization.

Reciprocity Norm

Within the context of a social exchange relationship, employees come to expect reciprocity, or resources given by the organization in exchange for the performance and commitment workers provide (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Past experiences influence expectations of reciprocity and understanding of what exchanges the relationship entails (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations began permitting or even requiring remote work; experiences of remote work have likely influenced employee attitudes about teleworking (Fazio & Zana, 1981). Having experienced remote work, employees may now understand its benefits and expect opportunities to work remotely as valued resources their organizations provide as part of the ongoing social exchange.

Expectations of reciprocity may also be influenced by employees' perceptions of their own inputs to the mutual exchange in the recent past; workers who have continued to prove their performance during the pandemic may see remote work option as a resource they have earned. According to one large-scale study, 90% of organizations surveyed during the pandemic reported similar or greater worker productivity during remote work periods compared with years prior to COVID-19 (Ketenci, 2021). For the many employees who have continued to input high-value resources such as increasing performance, time, and productivity into the social exchange relationship, removal of resources like remote work could be seen as incompatible with the reciprocity norm and the social exchange relationship itself (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

In the context of the modern workplace, organizations which provide remote work choice may be perceived as providing greater support and beneficial resources to employees. Particularly for those workers who developed positive attitudes toward remote work during the pandemic, telework may have value as part of the ongoing exchange of resources between

organization and employee. As part of the exchange governed by reciprocity norms, remote work option may be a key component in maintaining equitable, fair exchange between employer and employee. Removing this resource during or after the COVID pandemic could disrupt the balance in the social exchange relationship; if employees have continued to perform well during the pandemic, they may question why valuable resources have been taken from them.

Psychological Contract

The reciprocity norm in social exchange relationships, including between organization and employee, can be further explored in the framework of psychological contracts. First applied to the workplace context by Argyris in 1960, psychological contracts reflect individual beliefs about the implicit rules governing the continuous exchange between employer and employee. Repeated interactions and the ongoing relationship between organization and workers create expectations about the implicit guidelines of these exchanges, including the norm of reciprocity (Rousseau, 1989). As employment relationships are created and maintained between organizations and individuals, each brings expectations of mutual obligations and promises beyond the explicit requirements outlined in formal employment contracts (Argyris, 1960; Anderson & Schalk, 1998).

Most researchers assert that psychological contracts can be interpreted as a portion of the social exchange theory; through repeated interactions and mutual investment, social exchange relationships come to develop implied rules of operation (Dulac et al., 2008). Others describe psychological contracts from an integrated point of view, combining social exchange theory with conservation of resources theory (e.g., Restubog et al., 2017; Deng et al., 2018). The primary assertion of conservation of resources theory is that humans are motivated to acquire and protect resources, particularly those of value to the individual (Halbesleben et al., 2014). According to

this line of research, psychological contract breach serves as a perceived or actual loss of resources that may lead to employee withdrawal, harming the social exchange relationship (Kiazad et al., 2015).

Aselage and Eisenberger (2003) argue that psychological contracts can be best understood by integrating organizational support and social exchange perspectives. According to this integrated perspective, perceived organizational support is tied to employee perceptions that the organization has met obligations, or fulfills the psychological contract (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). Employees reciprocate when they perceive organizational support due to the psychological contract; the reciprocity norm in the ongoing social exchange encourages employees to provide resources like performance in exchange for POS.

Remote work choice can be understood using a combination of the above frameworks: as a valued resource provided by employers in the social exchange between organization and employee, remote work choice may be governed by the reciprocity norm or psychological contract (Lucero & Allen, 1994). By providing remote work options, organizations may demonstrate support, provide a valued resource which employees may be motivated to keep, and maintain the ongoing mutual investment of a social exchange (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). In exchange for their performance, commitment, and time, employees expect that organizations will compensate and care for them through resource provision that may include remote work (Levinson et al., 1962).

In navigating the decision of whether to transition back to onsite work, organizations should consider the ways in which the transition may change perceptions of organizational support and ultimately the social exchange relationship. Some employees may perceive remote work as a valued resource provided in exchange for their performance, making it a key

component in the social exchange relationship and a vital indicator of organizational support. Remote work choice may be perceived by some as a resource promised in a psychological contract, an implicit agreement between employee and organization that each will provide needed resources to the other.

Remote Work Transition as Psychological Contract Breach

For those employees who experienced remote work during COVID-19 and found it a valuable resource, remote work choice may serve as a vital portion of the psychological contract governing the ongoing exchange between organization and employee. As employees may feel they have proven performance while working remotely, removal of remote work as a resource may be perceived as a psychological contract breach or broken reciprocity norm (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). After successfully navigating remote work during COVID-19, employees realize that their organizations are capable of allowing remote work. Workers may recognize that barriers to remote work previously cited by organizations are no longer present—many technical limitations, communication difficulties, and skill gaps were addressed early in the pandemic, making remote work increasingly possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a paradigm shift in employees' perceptions of work; the perceived necessity of in-person work has changed in many fields, causing employees to increasingly recognize remote work choice as a reasonable and valuable resource their organizations can continue to provide. Organizations that remove this option, therefore, may be seen as unwilling rather than incapable of providing a resource that employees now perceive as fair and valuable. By forcing a universal return to office for employees, organizations may inadvertently communicate a lack of trust, decrease in respect, or lower commitment to their employees' needs, creating an imbalance in contributions between employee and organization. In

the context of the social exchange relationship, employees may feel they have proven their commitment to the company and upheld their portion; in removing valued resources, the organization may be perceived as withdrawing support, breaching a psychological contract, or breaking the reciprocity norm (Kurtessis et al., 2015).

Outcomes of Contract Breach. If employees perceive loss of remote work option as a breach of psychological contract or broken reciprocity norm, they will likely experience negative reactions toward the breach as well as toward the organization overall. Psychological contract breach has been shown to cause psychological contract violation, or feelings of frustration, betrayal, and negative affect following a perceived broken promise (Dulac et al., 2008). Psychological contract breach and violation are also related to decreased POS; by taking away valued resources and breaking implicit promises, organizations could decrease the perception that they value, appreciate, and respect employees and their contributions (Kurtessis et al., 2015).

Perceived organizational support is vital to the development and maintenance of affective commitment, or employee loyalty to the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Employees who perceive loss of remote work choice as a broken promise or deprivation of a valued resource will likely perceive the organization as less supportive of their needs. By decreasing resources provided to the employee and breaking implicit promises, organizations may be perceived as caring less about their employees, in turn causing those employees to feel lesser loyalty or emotional attachment to their organization (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). As an indicator that employees perceive fairness in the social exchange relationship, perceived organizational support is key in the maintenance of the ongoing relationship and provision of employee resources like loyalty (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

If employees perceive the social exchange relationship as effectively broken and negatively react to a psychological contract breach, they can also be expected to experience decreased affective organizational commitment. Affective commitment, as defined by Meyer and Allen (1991), describes an employee's emotional attachment and identification with an organization. As one of three types of organizational commitment posited by Meyer and Allen, affective commitment is arguably the most important form of commitment due to its strong relationships with outcomes such as withdrawal cognition, attendance, in-role and extra-role performance, stress, turnover intent, and actual turnover behavior (Meyer et al., 2002). Prior research has indicated that decreased perceptions of organizational support lead to lower affective commitment to the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017). As employees perceive the organization as less supportive and the psychological contract as broken, they may feel less loyalty or emotional attachment to the organization, leading to increased turnover intent as they seek supportive organizations willing to provide valued resources. (Maertz et al., 2007).

In removing remote work choice, organizations may be creating a chain reaction, a broken psychological contract which leads to negative attitudes toward the organization and ultimately higher turnover for those employees who most value remote work. As a measure of the reaction to psychological contract breach rather than the perception of breach itself, psychological contract violation may play an important role in the relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent due to its more direct relationship with other attitudes such as POS and affective commitment. This relationship takes the form of a partial serial mediation; the relationship between remote work preference and turnover intentions could be partially explained by psychological contract violation leading to decreased POS, lower affective commitment, and greater turnover intent.

Hypothesis 1. There will be a positive relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent.

Hypothesis 2. The relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent will be serially mediated by psychological contract violation, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment (figure 1).

Differential Impact

By taking a blanket approach and removing remote work options for all employees, organizations may decrease perceptions of support and break the implicit contract; for those employees who most value remote work, the impact of this transition to onsite work may be larger (Mitchell et al., 2012). Employees undoubtedly have developed different attitudes toward remote work during the pandemic; for some, telework choice may be extremely valuable as a source of needed flexibility that enhances their careers. As companies consider how best to transition their workforce post-COVID, they should consider employee characteristics and differing needs when determining how best to provide support and avoid attrition (Rousseau et al., 2006). Understanding and providing resources that support individual needs will strengthen the social exchange relationship between organization and employee, reinforcing the obligation to reciprocate with performance and commitment (Gouldner, 1960).

Working Mothers

Among those for whom remote work may have particular value are working parents, and especially working mothers. Mothers face unique pressures at work due to conflicting home and career demands, gender stereotypes and societal expectations, and the historical exclusion of mothers from the workplace (Heilman, 2012). Working mothers are expected to work as though they do not have childcare responsibilities while also parenting as though they do not have

career-related responsibilities (Heilman, 2012). Lack of employer-provided caregiving benefits, limited government support, and cultural norms for parents can make motherhood especially difficult for those who choose to or need to work (Collins, 2019). The choice to work is in itself a unique pressure for mothers: women historically face much greater pressure to choose between career and family, while men are not expected to choose only one (Genz, 2010).

Women who resist the pressure to choose between work and family face conflicting demands and intense time pressures. Even as women's participation in the workforce has grown through past decades, mothers have continued to complete a disproportionate amount of housework and childcare (Beghini et al., 2019; Chesley & Flood, 2017; Kamo, 1998; Evertsson & Neramo, 2007). These gender norms have been reinforced by external factors such as state policies favoring traditional work/family arrangements (Crompton, 1999; Lewis, 2001), high childcare expenses (Wrohlich, 2011), devaluation of traditionally female professions (England, 2010), persistent wage gaps (Kochhar et al., 2020; Matteazzi & Scherer, 2020), and normative beliefs about motherhood (McDonald et al., 2014). Among families in which both mother and father work full-time, mothers report spending more time on childcare than fathers, even when mothers have greater incomes than fathers (Pew Research Center, 2015; Schneider, 2011; Bittman et al., 2003).

Differential experiences at home can also impact women's success and progress at work. Traditional work systems such as 40-hour workweeks, structured daytime working hours, and even physical work environments have largely been crafted around a theoretical "ideal worker" who is stereotypically a heterosexual man and can rely on a spouse to complete all domestic labor, allowing him to focus almost solely on career (Acker, 1990). As more women participate in the workforce and work to climb organizational ladders, these structures continue to be

obstacles in the path of gender equality in the workplace. Men continue to make up the vast majority of business leaders; as of 2022, just 33 S&P 500 companies were led by women CEOs, and women made up less than one-third of senior management in U.S. organizations (Catalyst, 2022).

Women are also more likely to leave the labor force completely due to conflicting home and work demands. Among working-age people, married women are least likely to participate in the workforce while married men are most likely to be working (BLS, 2021). Mothers with young children are especially likely to withdraw from the workforce, whereas men's labor force participation does not significantly differ as a function of dependents. Once they leave the workforce, many mothers struggle to reenter, creating an environment where mothers are forced to choose long-term between family and career (Weisshaar, 2018).

Previous research has shown caregiving and work-family conflict to be leading causes of women's departure from the workforce in early to mid career, decreasing representation among senior management levels (Miles, 2013; Cabrera, 2009; Henderson, 2005). When forced to choose between prioritizing work or family, many women feel societal pressures to choose family, while men are not forced to make the same type of either-or choice (Miles, 2013). The balance of work and family can be made more challenging by the structured timing and location of work, which may interfere with parents' ability to spend time with children, accommodate family schedules, and tend to home care responsibilities (Lord, 2020).

Working Mothers' Remote Work Preference. Remote work may play a unique role in facilitating the balance of work and family for employed mothers. Past research has found that women on average have a greater preference for remote work than their male colleagues; women were also more likely to cite family responsibilities and stress reduction as primary reasons for

wanting remote work (Mokhtarian et al., 1998; Agovino, 2022). Mothers may also place greater value on telework options due to expectations that they advance career goals while simultaneously prioritizing family needs (Weisshaar, 2018).

The flexibility provided by remote work can help to lessen historical gender inequality in the structure of work and home responsibilities (Acker, 1990; Lord, 2020). Remote work options may be of greater importance to mothers who experience high demands of housework and childcare; by providing flexibility in location as well as eliminating commute times, organizations can help mothers to handle time pressures from home and work. Because women complete a disproportionate amount of childcare and housework, time gained by working remotely may be especially helpful as women seek to balance work and family (Beghini et al., 2019). While the gap in home responsibilities may slowly close with large-scale interventions, organizations can play an immediate role in providing women the flexibility they need to prevent these home demands from detracting from career goals.

As mothers navigate conflicting demands from work and home responsibilities, remote work may have the potential to help decrease career disadvantages by providing flexibility to be both: mother and worker. Onsite work with designated hours, long commutes, and time away from families can be particularly challenging for working mothers who feel pressure to balance work and family responsibilities throughout the day (Lord, 2020). Previous research has indicated that home-based workers experience lower work-family conflict, and remote work options may allow mothers to continue career pursuits while handling home tasks like after-school pickup, meal preparation, and caring for sick children (Sakamoto & Spinks, 2008; Dooley, 1996). By eliminating commutes, time pressures may decrease, leaving time for home

and family responsibilities before and after the workday as well as during breaks (Peters & van der Lippe, 2007; Aksoy et al., 2023).

If organizations hope to retain and attract mothers post-COVID, consideration of the differential costs and benefits of telework is necessary; according to one study, mothers with remote work options were 32% less likely to leave their jobs than mothers who were not permitted to work remotely (Van Bommel, 2021). Given uniquely conflicting demands of work and home, remote work choice may serve as an extraordinarily valuable resource for working mothers, causing them to have greater preference for remote work compared with other employees who do not face the same pressures to prioritize both work and home.

Hypothesis 3. Mothers will report greater remote work preference compared with fathers, women without children, and men without children.

Social Exchange: Valued Resources

For working mothers, telework choice may prove to be an extra valuable resource, providing flexibility while decreasing pressure to choose between work and home. In the integrated views of social exchange, organizational support, and conservation of resources theories, remote work choice can be seen as a resource provided in the social exchange that mothers may be highly motivated to protect (Kiazad et al., 2014). Remote work options may be perceived as a vital indicator of organizational support and respect for the unique needs of working mothers (Gouldner, 1960). In providing this highly valued resource, organizations may be more likely to preserve a strong social exchange relationship; working mothers in turn may fulfill the reciprocity norm, providing strong performance and commitment in exchange for this continued support (Restubog et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2012; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

As organizations navigate a post-COVID transition, they should assess how the resource of telework may be valued differently by certain groups, including caregivers. If they hope to maintain representation of women and working mothers in their organizations and prevent attrition, they should consider individual needs and understand how providing flexibility may promote perceptions of support and mutual investment (Rousseau et al., 2006).

Broken Reciprocity and Contract Breach. As part of the continuous exchange of resources between organization and employee, remote work choice may be considered a necessary portion of the social exchange relationship, particularly for mothers who have begun to rely on the flexibility it provides. By removing remote work options for employees, the organization may be perceived as breaking the norm of reciprocity; working mothers may feel that they have proven loyalty and performance during the challenge of COVID-19, upholding their obligations (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). By breaking this reciprocity norm, organizations may ostracize working mothers, who may view the removal of valued remote work choice as a broken promise to provide resources as part of the social exchange. In this way, mothers too might perceive the loss of remote work as a psychological contract breach.

With remote work holding additional value for working mothers, negative reactions to this contract breach are expected. Psychological contract violation, or negative affective responses to the breach of psychological contract, may arise. Among working mothers, however, reactions to the loss of remote work may be even stronger due to greater valuation of remote work as a resource (Mitchell et al., 2012). If remote work proves to have greater importance for working mothers, removal of telework options may be especially damaging to perceived organizational support. As an indicator of the organization's fulfillment of the social exchange, and as a signal that organizations support working mothers, perceived organizational support is

key to the maintenance of affective commitment (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). With decreasing POS due to broken psychological contract, mothers can be expected to report lower affective commitment, ultimately leading to greater turnover intent (Dulac et al., 2008; Kurtessis et al., 2015; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Maertz et al., 2007). In this way, motherhood status can predict turnover intent in organizations removing telework choice; mothers can be expected to report higher intent to leave the organization due to greater remote work preference leading to psychological contract violation, lower perceived organizational support, and lower affective commitment. As each of these attitudes are interrelated, a partial serial mediation model best describes this relationship (Hayes, 2017; figure 2).

Hypothesis 4. Working mothers will report greater turnover intent than working fathers and workers without children.

Hypothesis 5. The motherhood status-turnover intent relationship will be serially mediated by remote work preference, psychological contract violation, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment (Figure 2).

METHOD

Participants

To understand the attitudes of workers experiencing a return to onsite work, this study focused primarily on employees who experienced remote work for a meaningful amount of time in the past three years and who have since been required to return to onsite work. Although this narrowed the potential sample significantly, a large proportion of knowledge workers experienced this transition in 2021 and 2022. As of August 2021, an estimated 66% of surveyed organizations that switched to remote work during the pandemic had announced that offices would wait to reopen until early 2022, and twice as many Fortune 100 companies (34%) returned to office in 2022 as did in 2021 (Baker & Zuech, 2021; O'Loughlin, 2023). While proportions of remote workers remain high compared to pre-COVID, the number of teleworkers in 2022 was less than half of the proportion working remotely in May 2021, reinforcing that many had experienced the transition from remote work back to office work. Throughout 2020 and 2021, many traditionally office-based workers experienced remote work for the first time. Armed with firsthand remote work experience, workers have undoubtedly developed attitudes toward remote work and reactions to the expectation that they return to onsite work during or after the pandemic, making 2022 an ideal time to assess attitudes toward this transition.

Following the guidance of Fritz and Mackinnon (2007) on required sample sizes for detecting mediation effects, this study initially targeted 400 participants with at least 100 participants from each group: working mothers, working fathers, women without children in the home, and men without children in the home. While larger sample sizes are often needed for multiple mediation, historically strong effect sizes among psychological contract violation,

perceived organizational support, affective commitment, and turnover intentions made a targeted minimum sample of 400 possible.

Participants in this study were U.S.-based workers who had experienced remote work and since transitioned back to onsite work. To capture attitudes about loss of remote work, subjects were limited to those who had worked remotely for their current employer for at least three months in the past two years and who had since been required to return to onsite work for at least 50% of their working hours. Due to the relevance of childcare demands for this study, only those working 20 hours per week or more at their primary job were included in the study. Participants were screened for remote work experience, the expectation that they returned to onsite work for at least half of working hours, and parenthood status to ensure adequate representation of parents and non-parents; to qualify as a working parent, subjects must have had one or more children under the age of 18 living in their home with them.

Subjects were obtained via snowball sampling in order to capture responses from workers both with and without children who have experienced remote work and return to onsite work across multiple industries. Recruitment messages were shared via social media, email, working parents' support groups, organizational contacts, and working MBA students in order to capture a wider assortment of workers.

Sample

Over the course of 9 months of snowball sampling in 2022, a total of 2662 potential participants attempted to take the survey; after screening based on the above requirements, 1200 participants completed the survey. Of these 1200, 67 participants were excluded for failing attention checks and 63 were excluded for spending less than four minutes completing the survey. This resulted in a final sample of qualifying responses of 1070. 56.1% of participants

were women, while 43.6% were men; both snowball sampling and gender differences in willingness to participate may have influenced this over-representation of women (Groves et al., 1992). Among the qualifying sample were 451 working mothers, 149 women without children, 377 working fathers, and 89 men without children. An additional 4 respondents selected “prefer not to answer” when asked their gender and were excluded from gender and parent-type analyses. While the proportion of working parents is high, targeted sampling of working parents through support groups may partially explain their disproportionate representation.

Among qualifying participants, 68.9% were white, 15.4% Black or African American, 8.5% Asian American, 6.9% Hispanic or Latino, and 1.3% were other. Participants could select one or multiple races and/or ethnicities. While this sample mirrors overall representation in the U.S. labor force relatively well, some over-sampling of Black participants and under-sampling of Hispanic/Latino participants occurred, likely due to both snowball sampling and screening requirements. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hispanic and Latino workers have been disproportionately represented among “essential workers” in fields that cannot participate in remote work, likely leading to lower representation in a sample requiring remote work experience (Schnake-Mahl et al., 2021).

Participants were also asked to report household income; among qualifying participants, 4% reported a household income less than \$20,000, 2.5% reported income of \$20,000-\$34,999, 4.4% reported income of \$35,000-\$49,999, 19.2% reported income of \$50,000-\$74,999, 22.4% reported income of \$75,000-\$99,999, 21.4% reported income of \$100,000-\$124,999, 19.4% reported income of \$125,000-\$149,999, and 10.3% reported income over \$150,000.

While participants were screened for the requirement that they had been required to return to onsite work at least 50% of their work time, they were also asked how much of their

work time they were working onsite at the time of the study. Among qualifying participants, 10.5% were working onsite 0-24% of their work time, 45.2% were onsite 25-49% of their work time, 25.1% were onsite 50-74% of their work time, and 19.3% were onsite 75-100% of their work time. Over half of participants who had been required to return to onsite work at least for at least 50% of work hours were no longer working in-person at least half-time at the time they took the survey, despite a requirement that they remain employed by the same employer that required the return to site. This unexpected finding indicates that, even among organizations requiring a return to onsite work, many may have adjusted expectations or compromised with employees and no longer require in-person work to be 50% or greater after the initial transition back.

Procedure

Following completion of consent form, subjects answered a one-time online survey containing the scales below (Appendix A). This study utilized a cross-sectional approach to avoid context effects such as new organizational announcements that may otherwise happen between survey completions in a longitudinal study. To limit demand effects in this cross-sectional survey, remote work and psychological contract scales were presented last.

Recruitment messages stated that the purpose of the survey is to better understand employee attitudes toward work during the pandemic without specifically mentioning psychological contract breach or attitudes toward loss of remote work. The survey took approximately ten minutes and included multiple attention checks to detect careless responding. Participants who incorrectly answered any attention check were excluded from analysis.

Measures

Remote Work Preference. Temporal preference for remote work was asked using the item “In a typical 5-day workweek, how many days would you prefer to work remotely?” with answers from 0-5 days remotely. Attitudinal preference for onsite work was captured using an adapted form of Nicholas and Guzman’s Attitudes toward Teleworking scale ($\alpha=.90$), with items including “In-person is my preferred method of work,” “The opportunity to work onsite is important to me,” and “I prefer organizations that offer in-person work.” Participants indicated agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Self-Rated Performance. Because the social exchange relationship between organization and employee relies upon perceived contributions from both, participants rated their own performance throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Self-rated performance was assessed using Williams and Anderson’s (1991) in-role performance scale adapted to reflect previous rather than current performance ($\alpha=.91$). Subjects were asked to assess their own performance during the COVID-19 pandemic by indicating their agreement with questions like “I have met formal performance requirements of the job,” and “I adequately completed assigned duties.” Participants indicated agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Perceived Organizational Support. Subjects were asked about their perceptions that their organization actively supports them using Eisenberger and colleagues’ 2001 POS scale ($\alpha=.83$). Items include “My organization takes pride in my accomplishments,” and “My organization strongly considers my goals and values.” Participants indicated agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Social Exchange Relationship. The extent to which participants view their relationship with their organization as part of a social exchange was assessed using Colquitt and colleagues' 2014 measure of social exchange relationships ($\alpha=.91$). Participants were asked to indicate whether the terms provided accurately describe their relationship with their organization. The primary prompt is "My relationship with my organization is characterized by:" and items include "Mutual obligation," "Mutual trust," "Mutual commitment," and "Mutual significance." Participants indicated agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Psychological Contract Breach. Perceived breach of psychological contract by the employer was asked using a version of Robinson and Morrison's (2000) scale ($\alpha=.97$), adapted to address remote work specifically. Items include "I feel that my employer has come through in fulfilling the promises made to me [about remote work]," (reverse coded) and "My employer has broken many of its promises to me [about remote work] even though I've upheld my side of the deal." Subjects indicated agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Psychological Contract Violation. Affective responses to psychological contract breach were asked using a version of Robinson and Morrison's (2000) contract violation scale ($\alpha=.96$), adapted to address psychological contracts with the organization rather than with one supervisor. Items include "I feel a great deal of anger toward my organization," and "I feel betrayed by my organization." Subjects indicated agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Organizational Commitment. Affective commitment, or positive emotional attachment to the organization, was the primary focus of commitment items due to its greater predictive

power for attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (McGee & Ford, 1987). Allen and Meyer's (1990) measure of affective commitment was presented ($\alpha=.87$); participants rated agreement from 0-5 on measures such as "I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization," [reverse coded] and "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me."

Turnover Intent. Intentions to leave the organization were asked using Seashore et al.'s (1982) turnover intent scale ($\alpha=.95$). Example items include "I often question whether to stay at my current job," and "I am looking for a change from my current job." Subjects indicated agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Personal and Family Demographics. Participants were asked demographics including gender and race/ethnicity as well as other family characteristics such as household income, number of children living in the home, and marital status. While participant screening questions were asked first, other demographics were asked near the end of the survey to avoid undue influence or priming of subjects.

Analyses

Relationships between remote work preference, mediators, and turnover intentions were first calculated using Pearson correlations. Preferences for remote work and differences in turnover intent by parenthood status and gender (i.e., mothers, fathers, men and women without children in the home) were then analyzed using ANOVA with post-hoc, Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons with Bonferroni correction. Direct and indirect effects of remote work preference and motherhood status on turnover intent were calculated in regression-based serial mediation analyses for each of the two models using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (model 6 with three and four mediators respectively; Hayes, 2017). To assess for significance of indirect effects, a bootstrapping technique was utilized to calculate 95% confidence intervals. For the

motherhood status-turnover intent serial mediation model, motherhood status was grouped into mothers and non-mothers (including fathers and participants without children), with 1 indicating a mother and 0 indicating a non-mother.

RESULTS

Preliminary Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between each of the study's variables are presented in Table 1 (Appendix B).

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicts that there will be a positive relationship between remote work preference and turnover intentions. As predicted, temporal remote work preference, or a preference for a greater number of days working remotely each week, was positively correlated with turnover intent ($r(1068) = .22, p < .001$). When preference for onsite work was measured attitudinally, there was a negative relationship with turnover intent ($r(1068) = -.29, p < .001$), further supporting hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent will be serially mediated by psychological contract violation, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment (figure 1). Direct and indirect effects of both temporal remote work preference and attitudinal onsite work preference were calculated in a regression-based serial mediation. There was no significant indirect effect of remote work preference on turnover intent through psychological contract violation, POS, and affective commitment ($b = -.001, t = .90, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.003, .001]$, figure 3; Appendix C), failing to support hypothesis 2. An alternative indirect effect, however, was statistically significant, indicating that affective commitment mediates the relationship between temporal remote work preference and turnover intent ($b = -.01, t = -2.85, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.02, -.005]$). There was also a direct effect of remote work preference on turnover intent ($b = .16, t = 9.22, p < .001$), indicating a partial mediation through affective commitment.

Similarly, there was no significant indirect effect of attitudinal onsite work preference on turnover intent through psychological contract violation, POS, and affective commitment ($b = -.001, t = .81, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.01, .002]$; figure 4), also failing to support hypothesis 2. An alternative indirect effect, however, was statistically significant, indicating that perceived organizational support and affective commitment partially mediate the relationship between attitudinal onsite work preference and turnover intent ($b = .005, t = 2.09, 95\% \text{ CI} [.001, .01]$). There was a direct effect of onsite work preference on turnover intent ($b = -.28, t = -11.08, p < .001$), indicating only partial mediation through POS and affective commitment.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that mothers would report greater preference for remote work compared with fathers, women without children, and men without children. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in preference for days working remotely between at least two groups ($F(4, 1065) = 13.79, p < .001$). Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons showed that the mean value of temporal remote work preference was significantly greater for women with children ($M = 2.95, SD = 1.32$) compared with men without children ($M = 2.48, SD = 1.61; p = .03; d = .32$), women without children ($M = 2.33, SD = 1.56; p < .001; d = .43$) and men with children ($M = 2.28, SD = 1.32; p < .001; d = .51$), supporting hypothesis 3.

When tested with attitudinal preference for onsite work, a similar pattern emerged; a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in attitudinal preference for onsite work between at least two of the groups ($F(4, 1065) = 30.73, p < .001$). Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons showed that the mean value of onsite work preference was significantly lower for women with children ($M = 3.07, SD = .98$) compared with men without children ($M = 3.65, SD = .97; p < .001; d = .59$), women without children ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.13; p < .001; d = .34$), and men with children ($M = 3.75, SD = .67; p < .001; d = .81$), also supporting hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 predicts that mothers would report greater turnover intent than fathers, women without children, and men without children. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a significant difference in turnover intent between at least two of the groups ($F(4, 1065) = 8.90, p < .001$). Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons found that women with children reported significantly greater turnover intent ($M = 2.49, SD = .85$) only when compared with men with children ($M = 2.15, SD = .71; p < .001; d = .43$) but not when compared with men without children ($M = 2.30, SD = 1.11; p = .38, d = .19$) nor women without children ($M = 2.54, SD = 1.31; p = .99, d = .05$), partially supporting hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 predicts that the motherhood status-turnover relationship will be serially mediated by remote work preference, psychological contract violation, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment. There was no significant indirect effect of motherhood status on turnover intent through temporal remote work preference, psychological contract violation, POS, and affective commitment ($b = 0, t = -.67, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.001, .002]$; figure 5, Appendix C), failing to support hypothesis 5. An alternative indirect effect, in which motherhood status predicts turnover intent as serially mediated by remote work preference and affective commitment, was significant ($b = -.002, t = -2.2, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.004, -.001]$), indicating that remote work preference and affective commitment serially mediate the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intent. There was no direct effect of motherhood status on turnover intent, indicating a full mediation ($b = .04, t = 1.69, p = .09$).

When tested using attitudinal preference for onsite work, there was similarly no significant indirect effect of motherhood status on turnover intent through in onsite work preference, psychological contract violation, POS, and affective commitment ($b = .0003, t = .75, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.0004, .0012]$; figure 6), also failing to support hypothesis 5. An alternative indirect

effect, however, in which motherhood status predicts turnover intent as serially mediated by attitudinal onsite work preference, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment, was significant ($b = -.001, t = 2.00, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.003, -.0003]$). There was no direct effect of motherhood status on turnover intent ($b = .05, t = 1.57, p = .41$), indicating full mediation.

Exploratory Results

Given the lack of support for the hypothesized serial mediation models, additional exploratory analyses were conducted following the initial analysis. While the initial model hypothesized that psychological contract violation, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment would serially mediate the relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent, no relationship was found between remote work preference and psychological contract violation. The initial choice to use psychological contract violation rather than psychological contract breach in the model was due to the belief that the reactionary component of psychological contract breach, rather than perception of breach itself, would more strongly predict POS, AC, and ultimately turnover intent. Upon reevaluation of the psychological contract violation scale, however, it became clear that the terminology used in the PCV scale to describe attitudes toward the organization (e.g., “betrayed,” “anger,” “violated”) may have been too emotionally charged for most participants. The item was difficult to endorse (mean of 1.83 and standard deviation of .75 on a 1-5 Likert-type scale); most participants did not indicate agreement with the strongly negative terms used in the PCV scale. As an alternative to the PCV scale, psychological contract breach (PCB) could be used in the first model instead. The PCB scale (modified for this study) directly addresses the remote work transition, making it a more proximal indicator of reactions toward the return-to-site transition.

Exploratory Remote Work Preference-Turnover Intent Model

As such, an alternative, exploratory model can be used to test a similar idea as in hypothesis 2; this alternative model suggests the relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent will be serially mediated by psychological contract breach, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment. Direct and indirect effects of both temporal remote work preference and attitudinal onsite work preference were again calculated in a regression-based serial mediation (Hayes, 2017). There was a significant indirect effect of remote work preference on turnover intent through psychological contract breach, POS, and affective commitment ($b = .005, t = 2.29, 95\% \text{ CI } [.001, .009]$). There was also a direct effect of remote work preference on turnover intent ($b = .15, t = 8.29, p < .001$), indicating a partial serial mediation through PCB, POS, and AC (figure 7, Appendix C).

The new exploratory model was also tested using attitudinal preference for remote work. There was a significant indirect effect of onsite work preference on turnover intent through psychological contract breach, POS, and affective commitment ($b = -.01, t = -3.26, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.019, -.006]$). There was also a direct effect of attitudinal onsite work preference on turnover intent ($b = -.30, t = -10.91, p < .001$), indicating a partial serial mediation through PCB, POS, and AC (figure 8).

Participants Working Onsite At Least 50%. Given the unexpected finding that more than half of qualifying participants were no longer working onsite more than 50% of their work time, the exploratory model was also tested using a sample of only those workers who were still working in-person at least half-time when they completed the survey. In this sample, there was a significant indirect effect of remote work preference on turnover intent through psychological contract breach, POS, and affective commitment ($b = -.01, t = 1.76, 95\% \text{ CI } [.001, .016]$), further

supporting the new model. There was again a direct effect of remote work preference on turnover intent ($b = .17, t = 6.14, p < .001$), indicating a partial serial mediation through PCB, POS, and AC (figure 9, Appendix C).

The same sample was used to test the above model using attitudinal in-person work preference. There was a significant indirect effect of onsite work preference on turnover intent through PCB, POS, and AC ($b = -.02, t = -2.39, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.032, -.004]$). There was also a direct effect of attitudinal in-person work preference on turnover intent ($b = -.23, t(469) = 6.43, p < .001$), further supporting a partial serial mediation (figure 10).

Participants Working Onsite Less Than 50%. The same model was tested among participants who had been required to return to onsite work at least for 50% of their work time but who were working in person less than 50% at the time of survey completion. Using this sample, a small but significant indirect effect was found of remote work preference on turnover intent as serially mediated by PCB, POS, and AC ($b = .001, t = 1.75, 95\% \text{ CI } [.0002, .0032]$). There was a significant direct effect of remote work preference on turnover intent ($b = .07, t = 3.43, p < .001$), indicating a partial serial mediation (figure 11, Appendix C).

When tested using attitudinal preference for onsite work, a similar pattern emerged for participants currently working in person less than 50% of their work hours. There was a significant indirect effect of onsite work preference on turnover intent serially mediated by PCB, POS, and AC ($b = 0.01, t = 2.36, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.010, -.002]$). There was also a direct effect of onsite work preference on turnover intent ($b = -.09, t = -2.46, p = .01$), indicating a partial serial mediation (figure 12).

Exploratory Motherhood-Turnover Intent Model

Given the above support for an exploratory model in which psychological contract breach, POS, and affective commitment serially mediate the relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent, an exploratory model using PCB in place of PCV can also be used to test similar ideas as those in hypothesis 5. This new model predicts that remote work preference, psychological contract breach, POS, and affective commitment will serially mediate the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intent. Using the entire sample of qualifying participants, the new model was tested for serial mediation. There was no significant indirect effect of motherhood status on turnover intent through temporal remote work preference, psychological contract breach, POS, and affective commitment ($b = .002$, $t = 1.57$, 95% CI [- .0003, .0054]). Although motherhood status predicted remote work preference, remote work preference did not predict psychological contract breach in this exploratory model ($b = .03$, $t = 1.87$, $p = .06$; figure 13, Appendix C), a finding consistent with the initial model.

When tested using attitudinal in-person work preference, however, there was a significant indirect effect of motherhood status on turnover intent through onsite work preference, psychological contract breach, POS, and affective commitment ($b = .005$, $t = 2.57$, 95% CI [.002, .010]). There was also a positive direct effect of motherhood status on turnover intent ($b = .18$, $t = 4.00$, $p < .001$), indicating a partial serial mediation (figure 14).

The same model was tested using only those participants who continue to work onsite for at least 50% of their working hours; while reducing the sample in this way decreases power to identify serial mediation effects, the increased effect sizes in the previous exploratory model point to a need to test the new model using this focused sample. When tested with this sample of workers still working in-person at least 50% of their work time, there was a significant indirect

effect of motherhood status on turnover intent serially mediated by remote work preference, PCB, POS, and affective commitment ($b = .007, t = 1.78, 95\% \text{ CI } [.001, .017]$). There was also a direct effect of motherhood status on turnover intent ($b = .46, t = 5.48, p < .001$), indicating a partial serial mediation (figure 15, Appendix C).

When tested using attitudinal preference for onsite work and only those participants working in person at least 50% of their work hours, there was a significant indirect effect of motherhood status on turnover intent through onsite work preference, PCB, POS, and AC ($b = .02, t = 2.67, 95\% \text{ CI } [.008, .039]$). There was a direct effect of motherhood status on turnover intent ($b = .42, t = 4.86, p < .001$), indicating a partial serial mediation (figure 16).

Role of Affective Commitment

Although affective commitment mediated the remote work-turnover intent relationship as hypothesized, the unexpected positive relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment calls for further investigation. In exploring potential third variables for the remote work preference-turnover intent relationship, current proportion of time worked onsite was considered. Despite the requirement that participants continue to work for the same employer that expected them to return to site more than 50% of their work time, over half were no longer working in-person more than 50% at the time of the survey, seemingly indicating that a number of employers had shifted their return-to-site expectations after the initial decision.

When comparing affective commitment by in-person work proportion, a one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a significant difference among at least two groups ($F(3, 1066) = 41.48, p < .001$). Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons showed that affective commitment was significantly different for each group compared to all others. Notably, participants working in-person 50-74% of work hours reported greatest affective commitment ($M = 3.81, SD = .77$)

compared with those working in-person <24% ($M = 3.19$, $SD = .61$; $p < .001$; $d = .89$), those working in person 25-49% ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .38$; $p < .001$; $d = .58$), and those working in-person 75-100% of work hours ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .77$; $p = .001$; $d = .23$).

A separate one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in remote work preference by onsite work percentage ($F(3, 1066) = 25.48$, $p < .001$). Post hoc comparisons showed that participants working onsite 50-74% of work hours reported greatest preference for days worked remotely ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.30$) compared with those working in-person <24% ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.59$; $p < .001$; $d = .48$), those working in person 25-49% of work hours ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.27$; $p < .001$; $d = .58$), and those working in-person 75-100% of work hours ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.55$; $p < .001$; $d = .71$). Another one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference in attitudinal preference for onsite work by onsite work percentage ($F(3, 1066) = 32.58$, $p < .001$). Post hoc comparisons showed that onsite work preference was lowest for those working onsite 50-74% of work hours ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.09$) compared with those working in-person <24% ($M = 3.68$, $SD = .98$; $p < .001$; $d = .70$), those working in-person 25-49% ($M = 3.59$, $SD = .61$; $p < .001$; $d = .72$), and those working in-person 75-100% of work hours ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.21$; $p < .001$; $d = .40$).

Given the unexpected finding that the 50-74% in-person group showed both greatest remote work preference and greatest affective commitment, in-person work percentage was tested as a potential moderator of the relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment. In-person work percentage significantly moderated this relationship ($b = -.15$, $p = .001$), such that the relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment was opposite for those working in-person 75-100% of work time (Figure 17). There was no

significant moderating effect of in-person work percentage on the relationship between onsite preference and affective commitment, however ($b = -.13, p = .06$).

The relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment was then retested for each group separately. When examined for those working in-person less than 24% of work hours, there was a positive relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment ($r = .25, p = .01$). However, there was no relationship between attitudinal in-person work preference and affective commitment ($r = .10, p = .28$). For those working in-person 25-49% of work hours, there was a positive relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment ($r = .13, p = .004$) and a negative relationship between in-person work preference and affective commitment ($r = -.10, p = .03$). For those working in-person 50-74%, there was no correlation between remote work preference and affective commitment ($r = .06, p = .31$) nor between in-person preference and affective commitment ($r = -.05, p = .39$). Finally, for those working in-person more than 75% of work hours, there was no relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment ($r = -.11, p = .12$) nor between in-person preference and affective commitment ($r = .03, p = .72$), indicating that the positive relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment exists only for participants who are now working in-person less than 50%.

DISCUSSION

Remote work became increasingly common throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and with it came questions about employee attitudes toward remote work, differential impact of work location on marginalized groups, and implications for employee behaviors including turnover. Faced with expectations of a return to onsite work following the loosening of pandemic-related restrictions, workers may have shifted perceptions of their organizations based on attitudes toward these organizational expectations. Given the potential impact on worker attitudes, costly turnover, and challenges for working mothers, a historically marginalized group, this study aimed to identify attitudinal outcomes for employees facing this return-to-onsite work transition.

Initial results of this study point to some of the many ways in which the return to onsite work transition may be impacting workers and organizations alike. Among this sample of workers who had been expected to return to onsite work, preference for a greater number of days worked remotely positively predicted turnover intent; similarly, greater preference for onsite work was negatively related to turnover intentions. Despite the complexity of turnover decisions, this significant relationship points to the saliency of work location for many workers who have now experienced remote work and prefer it.

In further examining the relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent, a serial mediation analysis was conducted. The hypothesized model, in which psychological contract violation, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment serially mediated turnover intent, was not supported in this study. The first portion of the hypothesized mediation, in which remote work preference predicts psychological contract violation among workers who have been expected to return to onsite work, was not supported. Although preference for remote work positively predicts intentions to leave the organization

requiring the transition, this relationship cannot be explained by negative affective responses to a perceived contract violation.

Upon examination of the psychological contract violation and psychological contract breach scales used in this study (Appendix A), it becomes apparent why psychological contract violation did not play a mediating role in these attitudes; with language like “betrayed”, “angry”, “violated”, and “frustrated”, the PCV scale may have simply been too emotionally charged to accurately describe what participants felt toward their employers following the return-to-site transition. This can be seen in the low mean for psychological contract violation across all groups, at just 1.83 on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The PCB scale, on the other hand, directly addresses perceptions of the organization’s decisions about remote work (e.g., “Almost all of the promises about remote work made by my organization have been kept.”), making it a more proximal indicator of reactions to the return-to-site transition. This too can be seen in its greater mean of 2.35 on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

While the constructs of psychological contract breach and psychological contract violation are interrelated, it was the more proximal factor of breach that played an important role in explaining why those who prefer remote work have a greater desire to leave their organizations when required to return to onsite work. Upon revising the serial mediation model to include psychological contract breach rather than psychological contract violation, a significant mediation effect was found, indicating that psychological contract breach, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment serially mediate the relationship between preference for days worked remotely and turnover intent.

Participants with greater preference for remote work did perceive loss of remote work as a psychological contract breach, but that breach did not lead to dramatic negative feelings toward

the organization in the form of psychological contract violation. Despite this, work location-related PCB negatively predicted perceived organizational support, indicating that workers who value remote work perceive broken promises about remote work to be signals of decreased support from their employers, leading to decreased commitment. The discrepancy in mediation findings using PCB and PCV may therefore indicate that strong negative reactions to psychological contract breach are not necessary to lead to important organizational outcomes such as affective commitment and turnover intent; the perception of broken promises alone may be an important factor in employees' overall evaluations of their employers, even in cases where they do not harbor strong negative affect toward the breach.

The finding that over half of those who had been required to return to site were no longer working onsite more than 50% of work hours may also play a role in explaining why PCB mediates the remote work preference-turnover intent relationship. While all participants experienced a required return to site for at least 50% of their work hours, this group seemingly experienced a shift in expectations following the initial transition. If this shift to less in-person work after the initial transition was due to employers listening to and compromising with employees, potential negative reactions to the return-to-site-related breach may have been mitigated.

So too might practical and external factors explain the difference in findings using PCV versus PCB in the serial mediation model. At the time of data collection, a competitive labor market meant abundant available positions and increased choice for workers as unemployment remained low and job creation continued to increase (BLS, 2022). In market conditions that favored workers, employees who prefer remote work may have evaluated external alternatives as more favorable (i.e., offering remote work). If their current organization has not met perceived

obligations or promises about remote work, employees who value remote work may feel unsupported and choose to consider these alternatives even if they do not harbor strong negative feelings of violation or betrayal toward the organization.

Following the replacement of psychological contract breach in place of violation, a serial mediation was found for both temporal remote work preference and attitudinal onsite work preference. Remote work preference positively predicts psychological contract breach, just as in-person work preference negatively predicts PCB. The similar findings for both work location preference measures indicates that whether measured temporally (preferred days worked remote) or attitudinally (positive feelings toward onsite work), greater preference for remote work was associated with greater perceptions of the organization having broken their promises about remote work. For those workers who most value remote work, the provision of the valuable resource of remote work seemingly came to represent a portion of the ongoing social exchange between employer and employee. After their organizations removed this valuable resource, workers who prefer remote work perceived the exchange as unequal and their organizations as less supportive. This was associated with decreased affective commitment— employees who felt their employer did not uphold their promises and support them withdrew their commitment to their organizations, ultimately leading to greater intent to leave the organization altogether.

Along with the finding of supported serial mediation using psychological contract breach, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment, another result emerged that was not hypothesized and seems nearly counterintuitive to other findings in this research. Despite its role in mediating the positive relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent as hypothesized, affective commitment was also positively related to remote work preference and negatively related to in-person work preference, albeit weakly. While participants who valued

remote work perceived its loss as psychological contract breach, these same participants remained emotionally committed and loyal to their organizations. Upon further exploration, it was revealed that onsite work percentage moderates the relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment—remote work preference positively predicts affective commitment only for participants who were working in-person for less than 50% of their work time. Based on this moderation finding, it is likely that the greater affective commitment for those preferring remote work indicates more about the current allowances for remote work than about the original return-to-site transition. If organizations adjusted expectations, allowing for greater remote work following the initial transition, employees may perceive them as more understanding and willing to compromise, leading to greater affective commitment while still recalling the initial loss of remote work as a broken promise.

In addition to the role of current in-person work percentage, screening requirements may have played a role in the unexpected positive relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment. To qualify for this study, participants were required to be employed by the same company in which they had experienced the return-to-site transition at the time they completed the survey. Utilizing a snowball sampling approach, this study assessed participants across multiple organizations and industries; as such, there may have been significant lags between the return to site announcement and the time at which the participant completed the survey. During the time between return-to-site and completion of the survey, potential participants with the greatest remote work preference, lowest affective commitment, and greatest turnover intent may have already left their organizations, causing them to be disqualified from this study. Despite this potential for range restriction, the new, exploratory serial mediation model was supported, indicating that even if those with the most extreme attitudes have already

left their organizations, some remaining employees still prefer remote work, perceive its loss as psychological contract breach, and develop negative attitudes toward their organizations when they can no longer work remotely.

While potentially limited by timing and range restriction, the original return-to-onsite expectation may still be understood as psychological contract breach for those who prefer remote work, ultimately impacting POS, affective commitment, and turnover intent. Although some organizations have altered their expectations about in-person work following the initial transition, the expectation of a return-to-site may still have served as an inflection point at which time employees reconsidered the status of their social exchange with the organization. Past research has demonstrated the role of “shocks” in employee turnover decisions; in these models, a salient precipitating event or “shock” may cause workers to evaluate their employment relationship and, if lacking, ultimately leave the organization (Holtom et al., 2005; Hom et al., 2017). In the case of return-to-site, the loss of remote work may serve as a shock or precipitating event to workers for whom it has the most value, leading to a reevaluation of the exchange between employer and employees.

In this way, return to onsite work or loss of remote work may lead to greater turnover intent through the evaluation of the employment relationship, even in cases where the organization adjusts remote work expectations and begins to allow for greater remote work again. This can be seen in the post hoc analyses of serial mediation among employees continuing to work in-person more than 50% and among those now working in-person less than 50%; although a serial mediation was found in both groups, greater effect sizes in the group continuing to work in-person more than 50% point to the lasting effects of employers expecting a return to site with continued onsite work.

Motherhood and Remote Work

With potential implications for working parents, and especially working mothers, it is vital to understand differences in remote work preference and turnover intent among parents and non-parents experiencing this return-to-onsite transition. As hypothesized, working mothers were found to have a greater preference for remote work, both in preference for more days working remotely per week and in more negative attitudes toward onsite work. This result mirrors past findings which indicate a greater preference for remote work among women (e.g., Mokhtarian et al., 1998), often due to family responsibilities and desire for stress reduction. Given the gendered structure of home responsibilities, particularly for workers with children, remote work may prove beneficial to women who experience conflicting demands from home and work. In working remotely, mothers have experienced reduction or removal of commute times, structured work location requirements, and time away from home and family; likely having experienced decreased work-family conflict, mothers have come to prefer remote work more strongly than fathers and workers without children (Sakamoto & Spinks, 2008).

Given the sample of workers experiencing return to onsite work, it is therefore unsurprising that mothers reported greater turnover intent than fathers. With greater value placed on remote work, working mothers have greater intent to leave their current organization or even the workforce in order to maintain the flexibility and support they had while working remotely. Upon experiencing the return-to-site transition, both mothers and fathers have had to weigh the impact of their work location on caregiving and home responsibilities. Facing disproportionate and gendered caregiving demands, it is primarily mothers who may feel forced to leave their organizations upon losing remote work options and related flexibility.

To better understand the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intentions in this sample of workers facing a return-to-site transition, a serial mediation analysis was run to test whether the relationship was serially mediated by remote work preference, psychological contract violation, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment. While motherhood status predicted remote work preference, the full serial mediation model through remote work preference, PCV, POS, and AC was not supported, again due to the lack of relationship between remote work preference and psychological contract violation. Even among working mothers, who perceived telework as more valuable on average, preference for remote work did not predict salient negative reactions to a broken promise in the form of PCV. As in the first model, an exploratory analysis was run using psychological contract breach in place of contract violation due to direct references to remote work in the PCB scale and emotionally-charged negative language (e.g., “betrayed”, “anger”) present in the PCV scale.

When retested using PCB in place of PCV, the findings were mixed; in the first model, remote work preference, PCB, POS, and AC did not serially mediate the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intent due to the lack of relationship between temporal remote work preference and PCB. However, when retested using a sample of only those participants who continue to work in-person more than 50%, the serial mediation was supported. The presence of a significant serial mediation among those who continue to work in-person at least 50% indicates the important role that ongoing remote work may play in employee attitudes, particularly for working mothers. For those working mothers who experienced the required return-to-site followed by adjustments in remote work expectations by their organizations, the adjustment may serve as an indication of compromise and support from their organizations, leading to decreased perceptions of psychological contract breach. For those working mothers

that experienced a required return-to-site and who must continue that onsite work at least 50%, the implications for caregiving, flexibility, and home responsibilities may be greater and the breach more salient.

The motherhood status-turnover intent serial mediation model was also supported when using attitudinal onsite work preference in place of temporal remote work preference. Although preference for a greater number of days worked remotely does not predict psychological contract breach in the full sample within the second exploratory model, negative attitudes toward onsite work do predict PCB in the model. This may further reinforce the importance of mothers' positive attitudes toward remote work; while preferences about days worked remotely predict important attitudes when not considering the role of motherhood, it is negative attitudes toward onsite work that play a more important role in predicting attitudes when considered in combination with the unique characteristics and demands of motherhood. The discrepancy in findings using temporal and attitudinal measures may point to the specific challenges of the traditional onsite workplace that negatively impact mothers, including historically gendered structure and lack of flexibility. It is logical, therefore, that mothers' more negative attitudes toward in-person work predicts perceptions of broken promises by their organizations requiring a return to onsite work.

Using attitudinal preference for onsite work as the primary measure of remote work preference for mothers, the second exploratory serial mediation model is supported. When experiencing a loss of remote work, mothers report more negative attitudes toward onsite work, leading to perceptions of psychological contract breach, decreased perceptions of organizational support, decreased affective commitment, and ultimately greater turnover intent. Unique expectations that mothers be both ideal workers and ideal parents simultaneously may cause the

loss of remote work to impact them more dramatically, leading to more negative attitudes and increased turnover.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study hold notable implications for research in the fields of remote work, psychological contract breach, social exchange, and more. For example, the significance of the exploratory model including psychological contract breach points to the ways in which flexible benefits can become employee expectations of their organizations over time. Even in cases where a resource is initially provided in reaction to an external event like COVID-19, employees may perceive the provision of that resource as a promised portion of the ongoing social exchange. This change in expectations may lead to discrepancies in the perceived obligations of employers and employees; further research is needed to determine how changing benefits and adding new resources may broadly impact the social exchange. This research also points to the ways that psychological contract violation may play a lesser role than contract breach in predicting important outcomes; as labor markets and turnover decisions evolve, strong negative attitudes like betrayal or violation may not be necessary for turnover intent to increase. Future research should continue to examine practical reasons for exiting an organization as well as potential bidirectional relationships between affective commitment and turnover intent in these cases.

So too does this research reinforce the role of social exchange in turnover decisions; when employees perceive organizations as breaking their promises, they may see their exchange as permanently altered or even broken, even when expectations are later adapted. Continued research will be necessary to fully understand the impact of removing and later reinstating a resource on perceptions of organizational support. Similarly, the unexpected finding of a positive

relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment may have implications for the role of affective commitment in turnover decisions, especially in situations where employer expectations change.

With its greater focus on timely issues of remote work and employee turnover, this research may have even greater implications for practical application in organizations. Despite its mixed findings, this study may help to guide companies and employees experiencing return-to-onsite work transitions or determining whether to require a return to in-person work. Although remote work preference did not lead to salient negative affective reactions among those experiencing return-to-site, it did predict employee perceptions of broken promises by the organization, leading to decreased perceptions of support, decreased commitment, and greater intent to leave the organization. If companies hope to retain employees that have now experienced remote work, they must fully understand their employees' perceptions of remote work as a portion of the social exchange between employer and employee. Although public information is limited, it is quite likely that those organizations requiring return-to-site have already begun to lose their employees who most value remote work. For those who have not made the transition, this research may serve as a note of caution about return-to-onsite expectations.

Even among organizations who have already required a return to in-person work, continued efforts toward compromise, employee listening, and expectation adjustment may help to salvage the social exchange relationship and employee's positive attitudes toward the organization; this can be seen in the positive relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment for those workers who are no longer working more than 50% in person. As a potential idiosyncratic deal, employees may perceive increased work location choice

following the initial return-to-site as a valuable indicator of support and leader sensitivity, recovering some affective commitment. In cases where organizations see negative reactions to a return-to-site expectation, it may prove beneficial to adjust expectations, communicate honestly, and allow employees as much choice as possible in their work locations in order to preserve positive attitudes toward the organization and prevent turnover.

Although adjusting onsite work requirements after an initial return-to-site may be beneficial for employees' affective commitment, it should be treated as only a partial fix to the problem of psychological contract breach. While employees may feel positively about their organizations' compromises about remote work, the initial decision to require a return to onsite work has lingering implications. Even among those no longer working in person more than 50%, participants still felt their employers had broken promises about remote work, leading to greater turnover intent through decreased POS and AC. This remaining effect indicates that while compromising about remote work after the initial transition may be beneficial, it is the first transition back to onsite work which may have served as the more salient event or "shock" which caused employees to evaluate their relationship with the company.

Work location choice is in no way a perfect solution to retaining employees, however; although it is valuable to a subset of employees, it may come with organizational challenges including real estate and tax implications, communication adjustments, and onboarding changes. While remote work is not a perfect solution, organizations deciding whether to pursue a return-to-site transition should be aware of potential outcomes, including the loss of employees who prefer remote work.

As organizations increasingly prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion and publicize efforts to do so, understanding the impact of organization-wide decisions on working mothers

and other marginalized groups will be necessary. In increasing consideration of inequitable outcomes, this research might cause some companies to pause and consider their return-to-office decision. To retain those employees who most value remote work, organizations could consider not only providing work location flexibility, whether as a blanket policy or idiosyncratic deal, but also adapt organizational messaging about remote work and the impact of any work location transitions on employees.

Given the greater preference for remote work among working mothers, organizations should pay special attention to the impacts of work location and potential return-to-office transitions on those with caregiving responsibilities, particularly mothers who may be disproportionately impacted. If remote work options are a valued resource, removal of these options may cause even greater loss of working-age women from the workforce as well as greater numbers of costly job changes. With short-term costs including knowledge loss, recruiting, onboarding, and more, organizations would benefit from understanding and preventing this attrition. As companies increasingly prioritize diverse representation among leadership, further attention to the impact on the pipeline of future women executives will be necessary as well. Remote work is highly valued by women with children, and creating a working world that welcomes mothers might mean creating more flexibility of work location when possible.

In considering the importance of psychological contract breach and violation in the supported serial mediation model, it becomes apparent that strongly negative reactions are not necessary for perceptions of broken promise to impact perceived support, feelings of commitment, and intent to leave the organization. With greater preference for remote work, working mothers are more likely to perceive required return to onsite work as a broken promise.

Even in cases where that does not lead to psychological contract violation, its effects on the employee and the organization are significant. For organizations that have already required a return to onsite work, turnover may have increased and representation of mothers and women leaders decreased. This can already be seen in the increasing turnover of women in senior roles in late 2022; in their “Women in the Workplace” report, Lean In and McKinsey & Co. noted a growing gap in turnover between women and men in senior or executive roles (2022). According to their findings, women reported greater desire for flexibility, well-being, equity, and inclusion and left their organizations when their needs were not met. As a source of flexibility, remote work choice may play an important role in preserving the well-being and inclusion of women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities. If expectations of return to office lead to greater turnover among mothers, a pipeline of future female leaders will continue to leave their organizations, causing further reinforcement of gender inequality. While remote work is not a universal solution to job stress, work-family conflict, and inequality, its role in improving these outcomes should not be ignored.

In examining the practical implications of this research, one recommendation becomes clear: providing employees with choice of work location can help to preserve the social exchange, communicate support to employees, and retain those who most value remote work. For mothers especially, the choice to work remotely can decrease pressures to choose between work and family. By providing this valuable resource and reacting to employee needs with sensitivity and flexibility, employers can continue to demonstrate care for their workers, benefiting the greatest number possible.

Limitations and Future Research

The study of remote work during and after the COVID-19 pandemic remains a fledgling field, and this research should be interpreted through the lens of a newer field with certain limitations. Given the use of snowball sampling to obtain a cross-section of workers experiencing the return-to-site transition, it can be expected that the sample is not representative of the overall population of workers experiencing that transition, even in the U.S. alone. This can be seen in the oversampling of working parents compared to their peers without children and in the overrepresentation of households making at least \$50,000 per year (92.7%) in this sample compared with the U.S. overall (63.9%). Remote work options tend to be more available in higher-income jobs clustered in certain industries; this research may not generalize, therefore, to all industries, settings, and job types (Hardy, 2022). Generalizability of this research may also be impacted by range restriction of some attitudes due to requirements that participants have continued working for the same organizations that required them to return to onsite work.

Caution should also be used in interpreting these results given the unique COVID-19-related circumstances impacting organizations and employees in the past three years. While the return to onsite work served as an important inflection point at which to assess employee attitudes, the onset of the pandemic, shift to remote work, and return to site have all been less than typical occurrences for workers and organizations. Due to these unique circumstances, results of this study may not generalize to settings or times in which COVID has not been a significant influence.

The use of social media and email for recruiting may also mean that certain workers, including those closer to retirement, those with limited technical experience, and those who are less connected to job and parent support networks may be underrepresented in the sample. The

demographics of workers experiencing return-to-site transitions in the U.S. remains uncertain as these transitions continue throughout 2022 and beyond, making identification of a representative sample challenging. Despite this limitation, snowball sampling still presents the greatest opportunity for reaching such a specific sample as workers experiencing the return-to-site transition. By utilizing multiple sources of social media, email campaigns, support groups, and more, this study was able to assess employee attitudes across a variety of companies, industries, regions, and demographic groups.

As a cross-sectional study, the results herein should be interpreted with caution; in a field as new as remote work, particularly remote work during COVID-19, more studies are needed to determine the lasting impacts of telework and return to onsite work. For example, while this research points to a relationship between remote work preference and turnover intentions through PCB, POS, and AC, more research is needed to determine whether this could also be explained by common factors such as onboarding experiences, person-organization fit, employee age, and industry type. It may be that those employees who most prefer remote work also are more likely to leave an organization because they are less embedded in and connected to the organization, are in more mobile portions of their career, or work in competitive industries that more easily can facilitate remote work, like technology or financial services. Similarly, more research is needed to determine the role of practical rather than emotional considerations in the decision to leave an organization; by assessing across multiple points in time, future research can help to answer the question of whether practical reasons for leaving an organization (e.g., spousal relocation, commute, caregiving responsibilities, family needs) may have carryover effects on perceptions of and commitment to the organization as well. While future research may seek to better understand attitudes toward remote work and organizations at multiple time points

throughout a return-to-site transition, this research can serve as a key starting point in understanding the cumulative experiences of employees across multiple organizations experiencing return-to-site in the past year, a task that would be much more difficult in a longitudinal or organization-specific study.

This study utilized entirely self-report measures and therefore may be subject to biases including the common method bias (Podsakoff, 2003), potentially inflating relationships between variables. While self-report may be susceptible to common method bias, it is these same self-report, individual perceptions of remote work preference, psychological contract breach, organizational support, and affective commitment that present the greatest opportunity for predicting individual attitudes and behavior, making them the best fit for this type of research (Chan, 2009). Results may also have been influenced by social desirability bias or demand characteristics felt by respondents. As conversations about remote work abound among organizations, media, and social contacts, respondents may have felt influenced to answer in a certain manner based on expectations from coworkers, friends, and influential figures in their communities. Although efforts were made to eliminate demand characteristics and limit socially desirable responding (e.g., purposefully vague recruitment messages, remote work preference and psychological contract breach asked last, asking about both preference for remote and onsite work, etc.), these biases may play some role in the results seen here, both in relationships found and in those not supported.

Of course, this research begets more questions than answers. As we continue to transition to a world in which COVID-19 is ever-present in many places and public health standards evolve, remote work may serve as both aid and obstacle in the careers of many. Understanding the full implications of remote work, both in pandemic times and otherwise, will require much

more research. Future research should consider not only the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of remote work and work location transitions, but it should also continue to explore differential impacts on and benefits for marginalized groups including disabled workers, minority workers, women, caregivers, LGBTQ+ workers, and other who may feel pressures like identity disclosure, emotional labor, family-work conflict, and more in the traditional workplace.

As this study has only just begun to illuminate the perceptions and attitudes of those who experienced remote work during COVID-19, much more research will be needed to fully understand the impacts of the pandemic on work structures and expectations, employee values, and social relationships. If remote work has the potential to be used as a valuable benefit and source of flexibility, organizations must also recognize its possible harms; to do so will require further research on remote work as it applies to career progression, executive expectations, organizational goals, supervisor support, employee connectedness, and much more.

Conclusion

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, a paradigm shift occurred in expectations about work and especially work location. As organizations navigate the ever-changing world of work, understanding the unique needs of employees and the implications of organization-wide transitions becomes increasingly important. For those employees who value remote work, the return-to-site requirement serves as a psychological contract breach, leading to decreased perceptions of support, lesser affective commitment, and greater intent to leave that organization. If organizations hope to retain employees that prefer remote work, they will undoubtedly have to consider the costs and benefits of a return to onsite work, including turnover.

So too should organizations consider the differential impacts of work location and other traditional work structures on historically marginalized groups. For working mothers, choosing

to work remotely may mean they no longer have to make the choice between work and family; by providing flexibility and reducing time pressures, remote work has the opportunity to be an immediate, albeit only partial, solution to the long-term problem of gender and caregiver inequality in the workplace, potentially reducing attrition in the process. While attitudes about remote work will continue to differ, this research points to the ways that individual preferences play a role in determining employee attitudes and behaviors during key transition points. Where possible, organizations should embrace opportunities to provide choice, autonomy, and support to employees; in return, employees may be more likely to remain, preserving the social exchange relationship and the organization itself.

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APPENDIX A. MEASURES

Temporal Remote Work Preference (Developed for this study)

1. Imagine a time in which COVID-19 is no longer a health or safety concern. How many days would you prefer to work remotely to do your best work?

Attitudinal Remote Work Preference (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009)

1. In-person work is my preferred method of work.
2. The opportunity to work onsite is important to me.
3. I prefer organizations that offer in-person work.
4. In-person work improves my job satisfaction.

Self-Rated Performance (Williams & Anderson, 1991)

Please think back to your job performance during the time period of the COVID-19 pandemic, then indicate below your agreement with the following statements about your performance during that time.

1. I adequately completed assigned duties.
2. I fulfilled responsibilities specified in job description.
3. I performed tasks expected of me.
4. I met formal performance requirements of the job.
5. I engaged in activities that directly affect my performance evaluation.
6. I neglected aspects of the job I am obligated to perform.
7. I failed to perform essential duties.

Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 2001)

1. My organization takes pride in my accomplishments.
2. My organization strongly considers my goals and values.

3. My organization really cares about my well-being.
4. My organization values my contributions to its well-being.
5. My organization shows little concern for me. [R]
6. My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.

Social Exchange Relationship (Colquitt et al., 2014)

Below are several terms that can be used to describe a work relationship. For each, please indicate whether that term accurately describes your relationship with your organization.

My relationship with my organization is characterized by:

1. Mutual obligation
2. Mutual trust
3. Mutual commitment
4. Mutual significance

Psychological Contract Breach (Robinson & Morrison, 2000; adapted for remote work)

1. I feel that my employer has come through in fulfilling the promises made to me [about remote work]. [R]
2. My employer has broken many of its promises to me about remote work even though I've upheld my side of the deal.
3. I have not received everything promised to me in exchange for my contributions.
4. Almost all of the promises about remote work made by my organization have been kept. [R]
5. So far my organization has done an excellent job of fulfilling its promises about remote work. [R]

Psychological Contract Violation (Robinson & Morrison, 2000)

1. I feel a great deal of anger toward my organization.
2. I feel betrayed by my organization.
3. I feel that my organization has violated the contract between us.
4. I feel extremely frustrated by how I have been treated by my organization.

Affective Commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990)

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
2. I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it.
3. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
4. I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one. [R]
5. I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization. [R]
6. I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization. [R]
7. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
8. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization. [R]

Turnover Intentions (Seashore et al., 1982)

1. I often question whether to stay at my current job.
2. I am looking for a change from my current job.
3. I often think about quitting.
4. I will probably look for a new job in the next year.

APPENDIX B. TABLES

Table 1.

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|---|
| 1. Remote Work Preference | 2.58 | 1.42 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Onsite Work Preference | 3.41 | .96 | -.55** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 3. PCB | 2.35 | .80 | .08** | -.13** | 1 | | | | | | |
| 4. PCV | 1.83 | .75 | -.03 | -.03 | .53** | 1 | | | | | |
| 5. POS | 3.74 | .70 | 0 | -.04 | -.56** | -.57** | 1 | | | | |
| 6. Affective Commitment | 3.55 | .58 | .10** | -.10** | -.37** | -.51** | .58** | 1 | | | |
| 7. Social Exchange | 3.89 | .73 | .03 | -.05 | -.49** | -.52** | .64** | .48** | 1 | | |
| 8. Turnover Intent | 2.36 | .92 | .22** | -.29** | .23** | .42** | -.20** | -.30** | -.16** | 1 | |
| 9. Self-Rated Job Performance | 3.9 | .87 | 0 | -.07* | -.45** | -.17** | .41** | .13** | .32** | .18** | 1 |

Table 1. Correlations for all participants. All items were on agreement scales of 1-5.

**Correlation is significant at the $p < .001$ level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the $p < .05$ level (2-tailed)

Table 2.

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|---|
| 1. Remote Work Preference | 2.17 | 1.55 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Onsite Work Preference | 3.42 | 1.21 | -.75** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 3. PCB | 2.18 | .88 | .12 | -.19** | 1 | | | | | | |
| 4. PCV | 1.80 | .99 | .11 | -.10 | .60** | 1 | | | | | |
| 5. POS | 3.91 | .85 | -.17* | .09 | -.61** | -.69** | 1 | | | | |
| 6. Affective Commitment | 3.63 | .77 | -.11 | .03 | -.59** | -.62** | .71** | 1 | | | |
| 7. Social Exchange | 3.91 | .92 | -.01 | -.01 | -.55** | -.69** | .76** | .70** | 1 | | |
| 8. Turnover Intent | 2.75 | 1.20 | .32** | -.26** | .56** | .64** | -.57** | -.61** | -.49** | 1 | |
| 9. Self-Rated Job Performance | 4.54 | .55 | -.21** | .18* | -.05 | -.02 | .10 | -.03 | -.06 | -.10 | 1 |

Table 2. Correlations for participants working more than 75% in-person only. All items were on agreement scales of 1-5.

**Correlation is significant at the $p < .001$ level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the $p < .05$ level (2-tailed)

Table 3.

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Remote Work Preference | 2.68 | 1.37 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Onsite Work Preference | 3.40 | .89 | -.49** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 3. PCB | 2.28 | .77 | .06 | -.11** | 1 | | | | | | |
| 4. PCV | 1.84 | .68 | -.09* | .01 | .50** | 1 | | | | | |
| 5. POS | 3.70 | .66 | .09* | -.10** | -.53** | -.51** | 1 | | | | |
| 6. Affective Commitment | 3.53 | .53 | .20** | -.16** | -.28** | -.46** | .51** | 1 | | | |
| 7. Social Exchange | 3.88 | .68 | .04 | -.07* | -.47** | -.43** | .59** | .38** | 1 | | |
| 8. Turnover Intent | 2.27 | .82 | .23** | -.31** | .13** | .32** | -.08* | .16** | -.01 | 1 | |
| 9. Self-Rated Job Performance | 3.75 | .87 | .11** | -.13** | -.52** | -.22** | .47** | .15** | .43** | .17** | 1 |

Table 3. Correlations for participants working less than 75% in-person only. All items were on agreement scales of 1-5.

**Correlation is significant at the $p < .001$ level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the $p < .05$ level (2-tailed)

Table 4.

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Remote Work Preference | 2.95 | 1.32 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Onsite Work Preference | 3.07 | .98 | -.58** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 3. PCB | 2.45 | .71 | -.03 | .13** | 1 | | | | | | |
| 4. PCV | 1.77 | .66 | -.06 | .13** | .53** | 1 | | | | | |
| 5. POS | 3.81 | .70 | .13** | -.29** | -.56** | -.59** | 1 | | | | |
| 6. Affective Commitment | 3.69 | .52 | .13** | -.30** | -.45** | -.53** | .65** | 1 | | | |
| 7. Social Exchange | 3.96 | .69 | .21** | -.34** | -.50** | -.55** | .65** | .57** | 1 | | |
| 8. Turnover Intent | 2.49 | .85 | .31** | -.41** | .04 | .29** | -.03 | -.12* | .05 | 1 | |
| 9. Self-Rated Job Performance | 3.81 | .85 | .14** | -.27** | -.51** | -.20** | .48** | .27** | .43** | .31** | 1 |

Table 4. Correlations for mothers only. All items were on agreement scales of 1-5.

**Correlation is significant at the $p < .001$ level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the $p < .05$ level (2-tailed)

Table 5.

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|---|
| 1. Remote Work Preference | 2.32 | 1.42 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Onsite Work Preference | 3.66 | .86 | -.48** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 3. PCB | 2.27 | .84 | .11** | -.26** | 1 | | | | | | |
| 4. PCV | 1.88 | .80 | .01 | -.18** | .53** | 1 | | | | | |
| 5. POS | 3.69 | .70 | -.11** | .20** | -.57** | -.55** | 1 | | | | |
| 6. Affective Commitment | 3.45 | .60 | .03 | .14** | -.37** | -.49** | .53** | 1 | | | |
| 7. Social Exchange | 3.84 | .76 | -.11** | .21** | -.50** | -.49** | .62** | .42** | 1 | | |
| 8. Turnover Intent | 2.27 | .96 | .12** | -.16** | .29** | .49** | -.32** | -.44** | -.29** | 1 | |
| 9. Self-Rated Job Performance | 3.96 | .89 | -.05 | .04 | -.42** | -.15** | .38** | .07 | .27** | .12** | 1 |

Table 5. Correlations for non-mothers (including men without children, women without children, and men with children) only. All items were on agreement scales of 1-5.

**Correlation is significant at the $p < .001$ level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the $p < .05$ level (2-tailed)

APPENDIX C. FIGURES

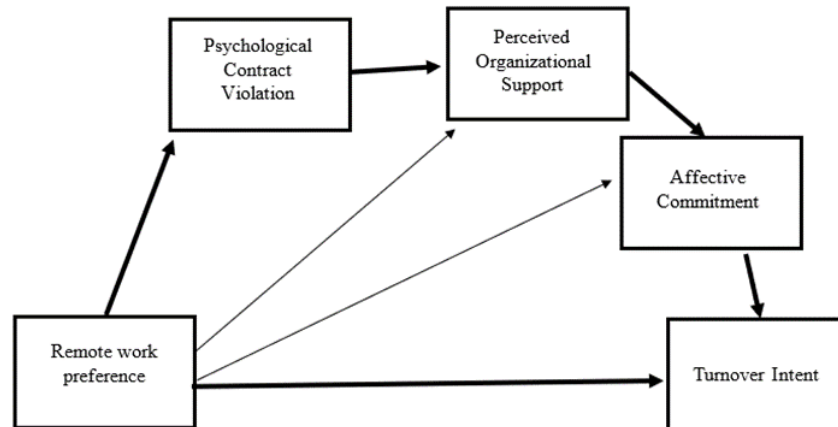


Figure 1. The positive relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent will be serially mediated by the interrelated constructs of psychological contract violation, POS, and affective commitment.

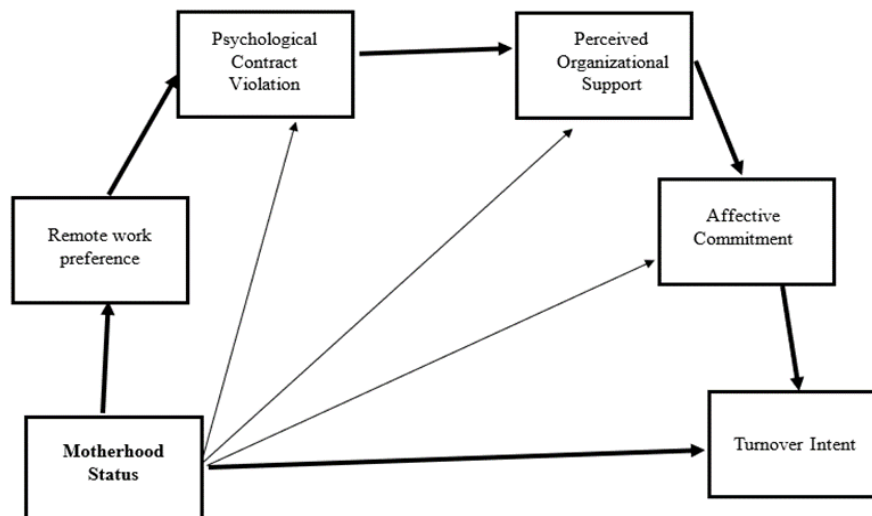


Figure 2. Higher turnover intent for working mothers can be explained by the interrelated variables of remote work preference, psychological contract violation, POS, and affective commitment.

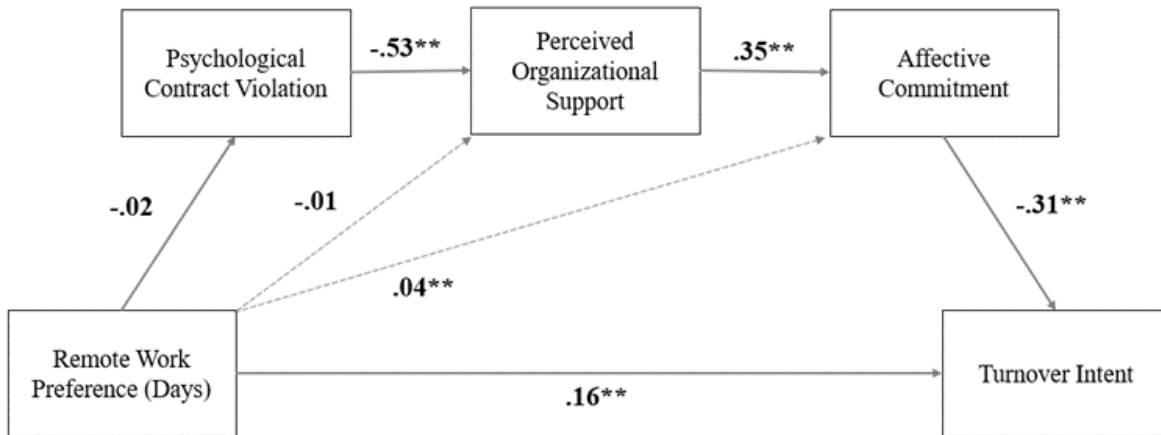


Figure 3. Affective commitment partially mediates the relationship between preference for greater days worked remotely and intentions to leave the organization.

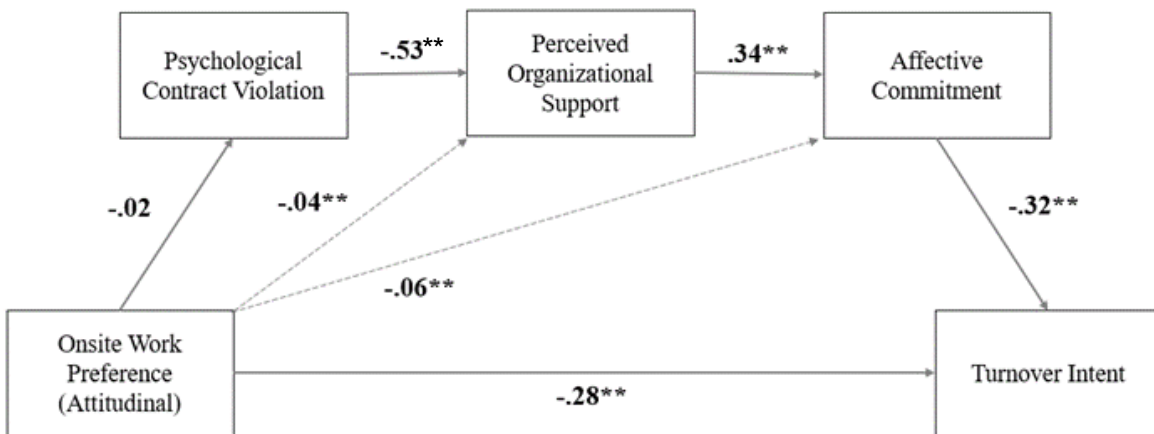


Figure 4. Perceived organizational support and affective commitment partially and serially mediate the relationship between attitudinal preference for onsite work and intentions to leave the organization.

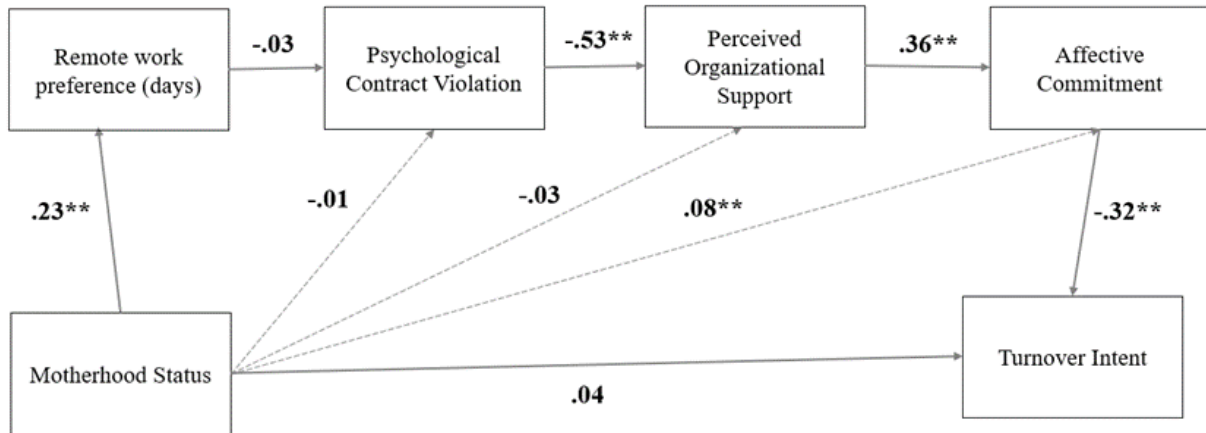


Figure 5. Only temporal remote work preference and affective commitment serially mediate the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intent.

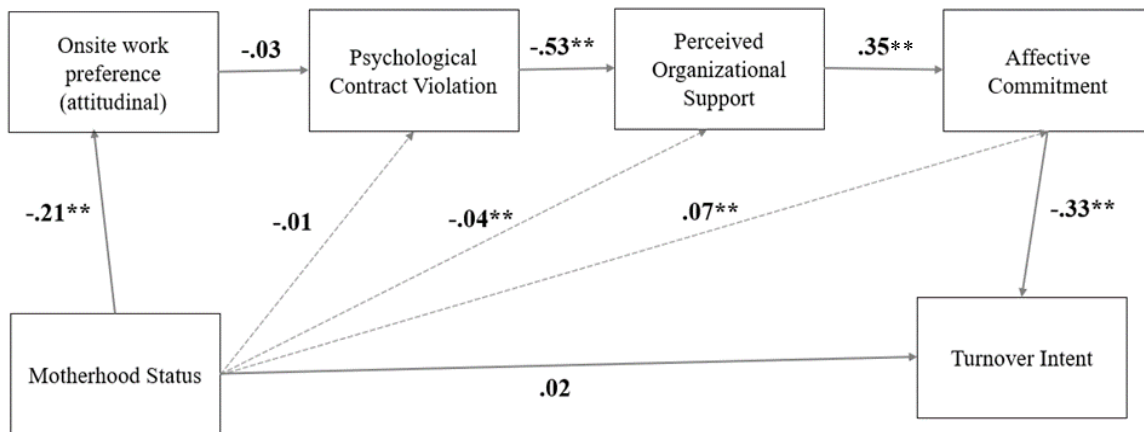


Figure 6. Attitudinal preference for onsite work, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment serially mediate the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intent.

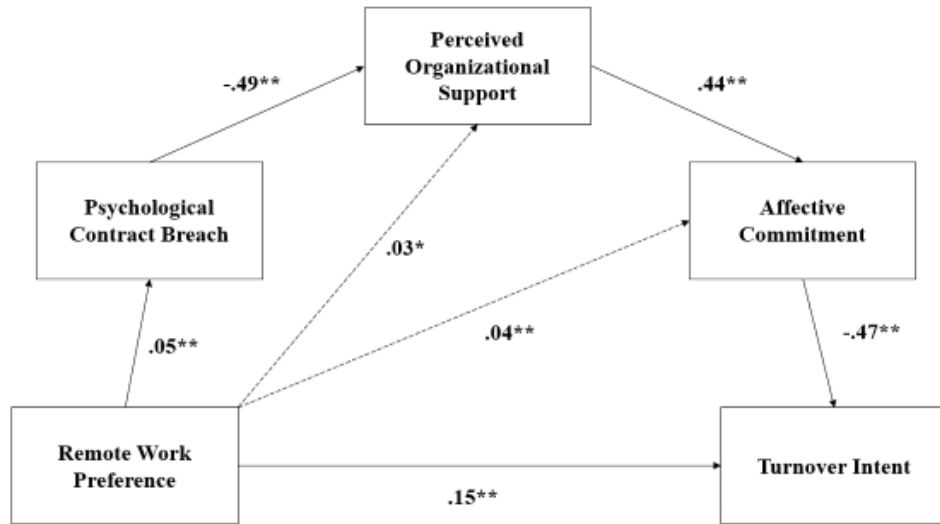


Figure 7. Psychological contract breach, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment serially mediate the relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent.

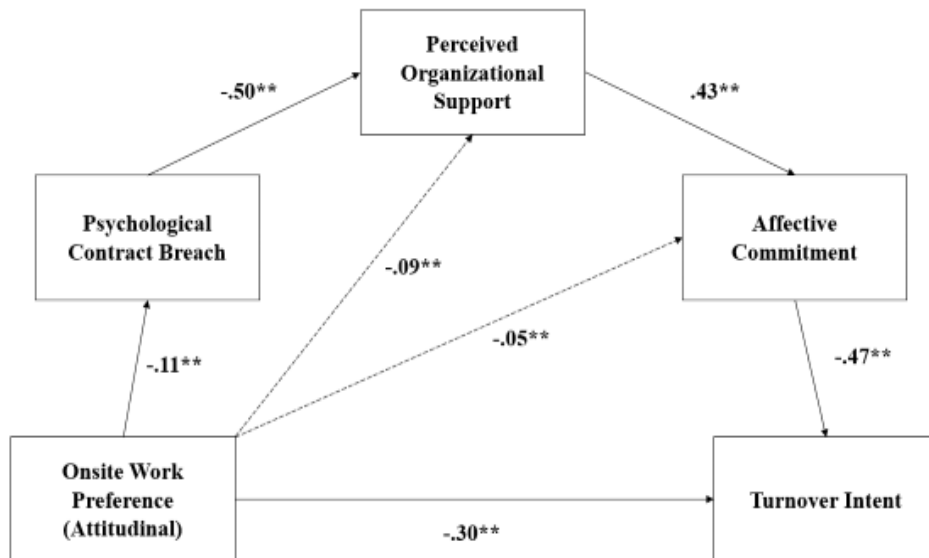


Figure 8. PCB, POS, and AC serially mediate the relationship between attitudinal preference for onsite work and turnover intent.

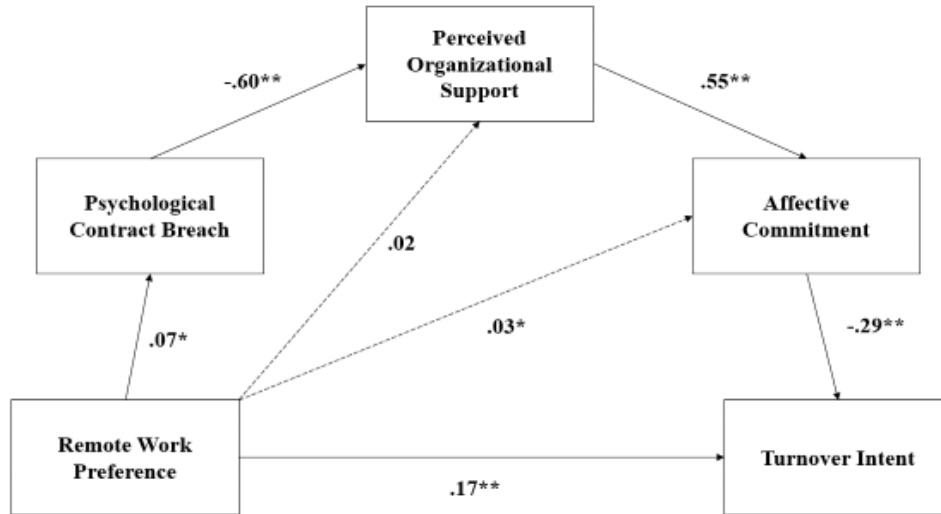


Figure 9. When tested using only participants who work in-person at least 50%, a similar pattern emerges: PCB, POS, and AC serially mediate the relationship between remote work preference and turnover intent.

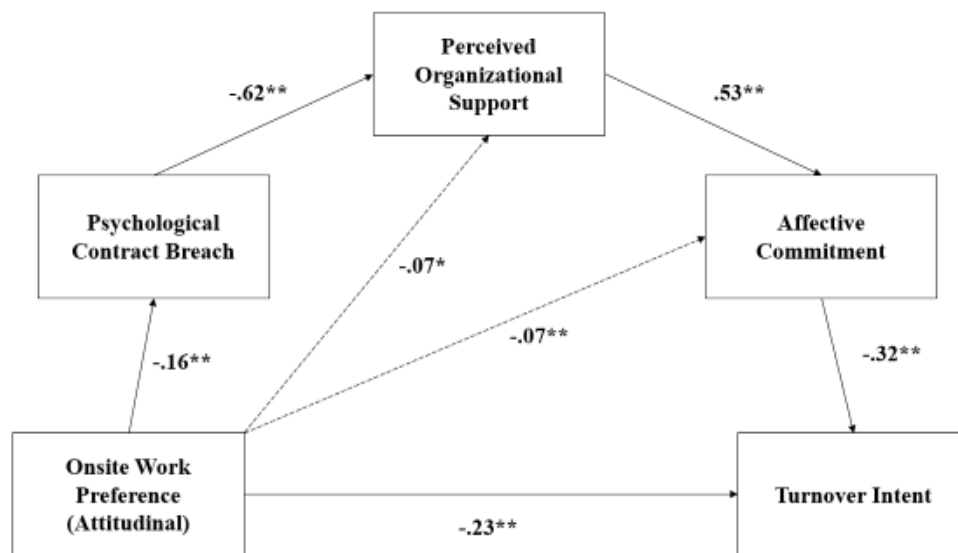


Figure 10. When tested using only participants who continue to work in-person at least 50% of working hours, PCB, POS, and AC serially mediate the relationship between onsite work preference and turnover intent.

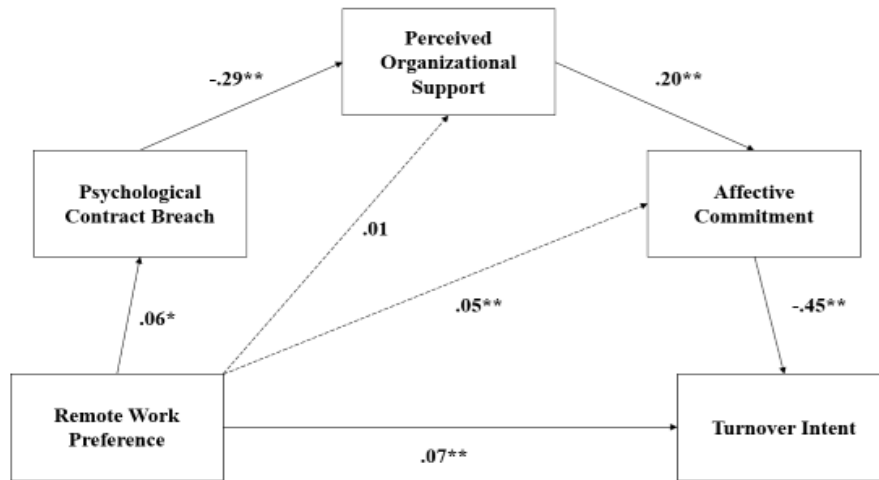


Figure 11. When tested using only participants who are no longer working in person 50% or more, the serial mediation model was still supported, albeit with smaller effect sizes.

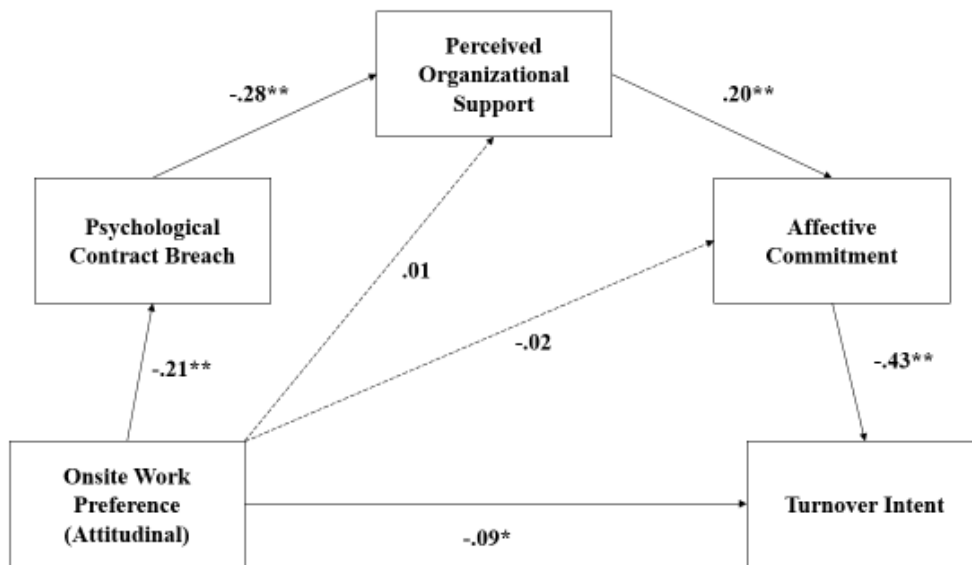


Figure 12. When tested using only participants who are no longer working in person 50% or more of their working hours, the serial mediation model was still supported with smaller effect sizes.

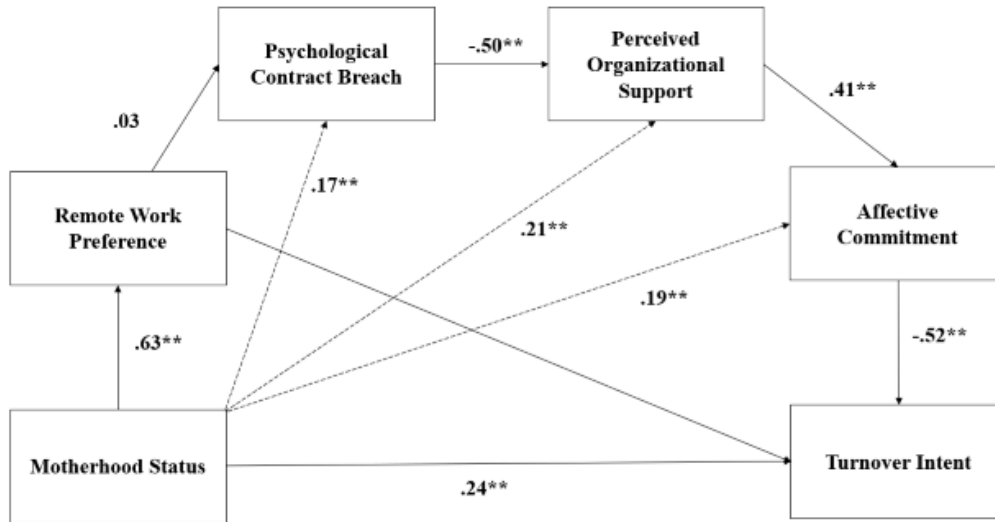


Figure 13. When tested using the entire qualifying sample, remote work preference, PCB, POS, and AC did not serially mediate the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intent.

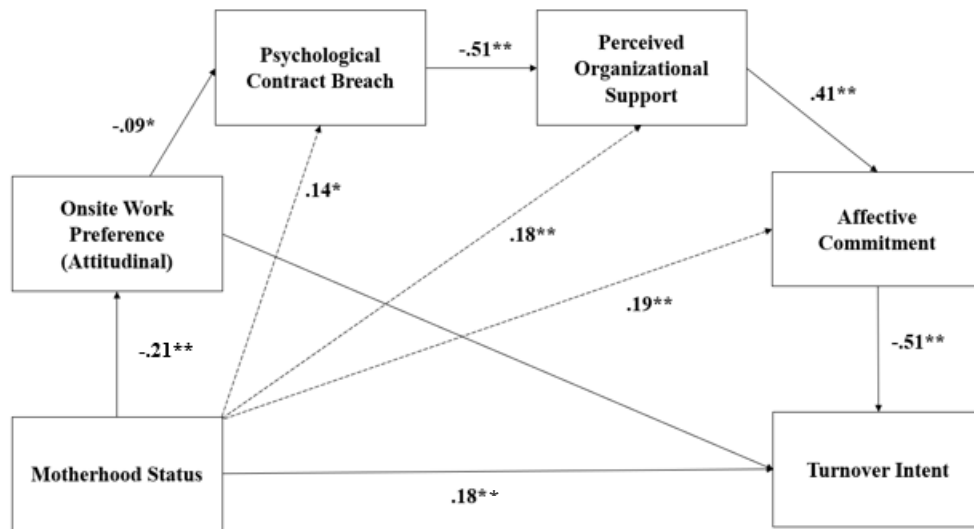


Figure 14. When tested using the entire qualifying sample, onsite work preference, PCB, POS, and AC serially mediate the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intent.

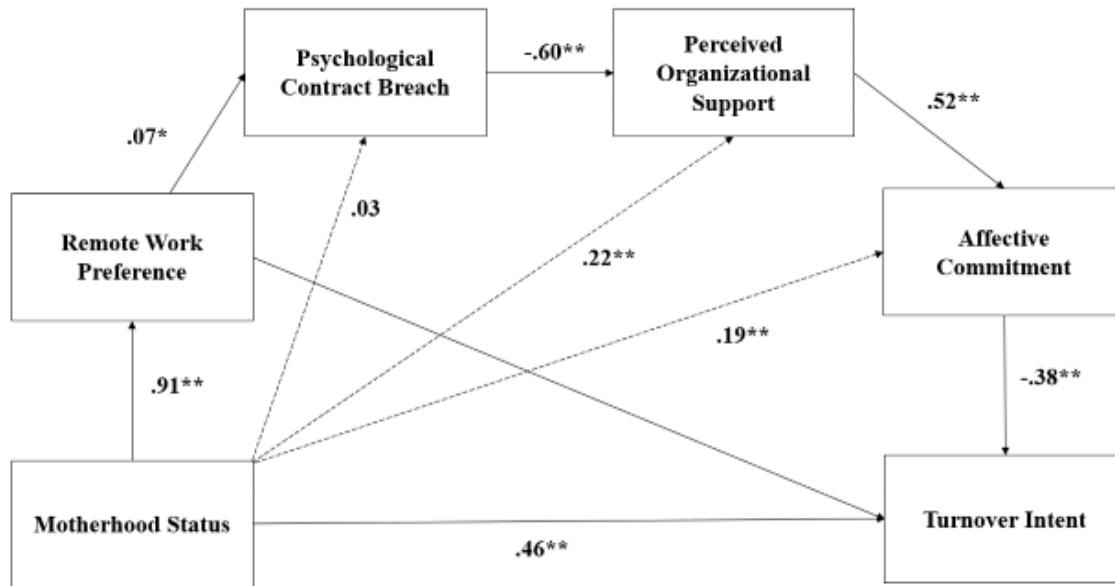


Figure 15. When tested for participants continuing to work in-person more than 50%, remote work preference, PCB, POS, and AC serially mediate the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intent.

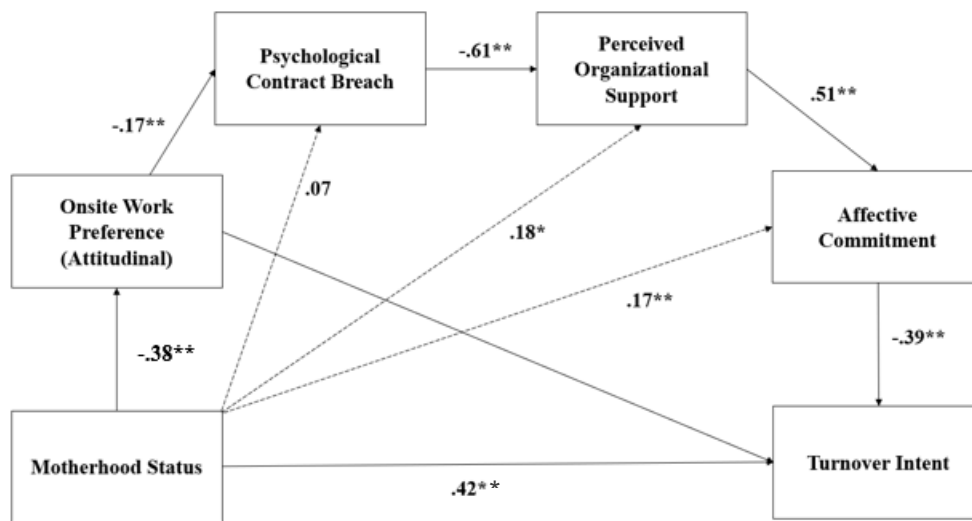


Figure 16. When tested using a sample of participants who are still working onsite at least 50% of their work hours, onsite work preference, PCB, POS, and AC serially mediate the relationship between motherhood status and turnover intent.

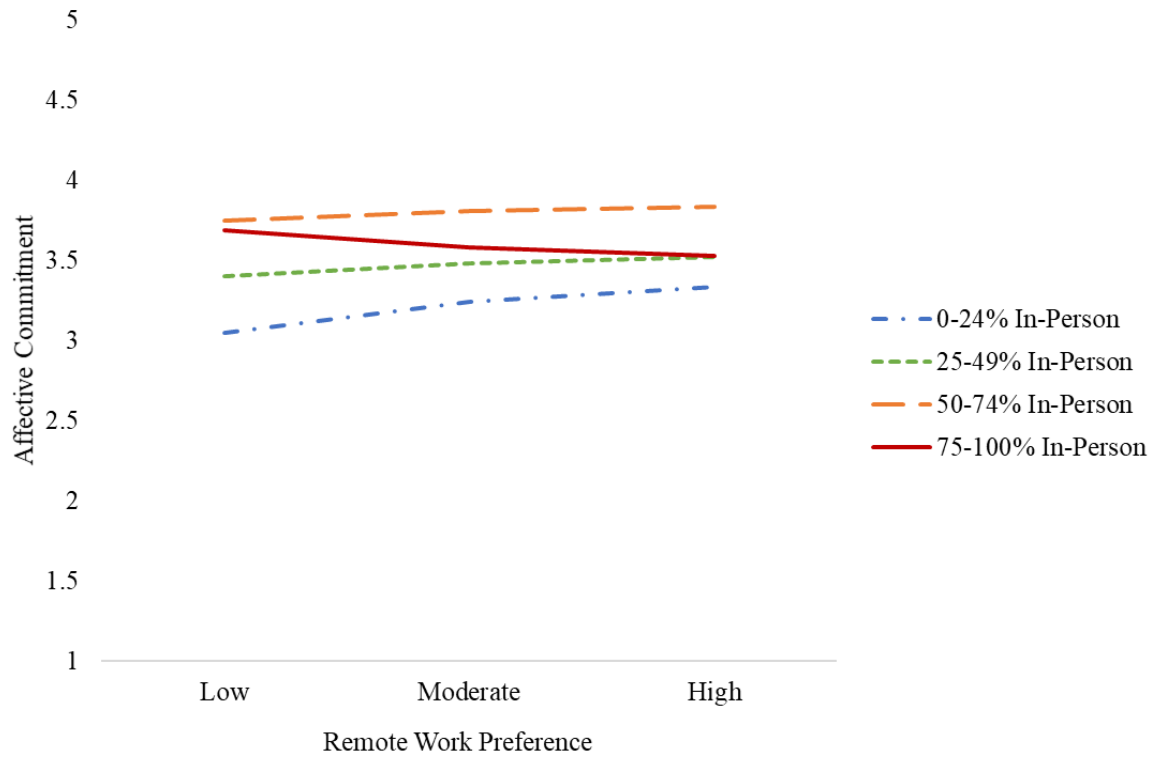


Figure 17. In-person work percentage moderates the relationship between remote work preference and affective commitment such that the relationship is negative for participants working in person more than 75% of their work time. Moderate remote work preference reflects the mean, while low and high refer to 1 standard deviation below and 1 standard deviation above the mean, respectively.