



\*\* This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/remote-work-mental-health>

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## **Mental health becomes focus for post-pandemic workers**

K-State's Johannes says social connection is key whether working remote or in office

*By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Face it: Even the best of jobs can be stressful sometimes.

And in a post-pandemic world, many people who are now in fully-remote jobs, or part-time remote jobs, can sometimes feel the crunch, as well.

Elaine Johannes, the Kansas Health Foundation's Distinguished Professor of Community Health and a state specialist with K-State Research and Extension, cites a 2024 report from [Lyra Health](#) concluding that people in remote work situations are facing a post-pandemic surge in serious and complex mental health conditions.

"When stress in the workplace is not managed well, it can lead to anxiety and then to feeling depressed," Johannes said. "I'm not a clinician, but the worker who feels disconnected to their workplace may feel a lack of satisfaction."

"So, we have some issues that we need to address for workforce health."

The Lyra Health study reported that work is a top social determinant of mental health. And, while access to mental health care is generally improving, employers and employees have divergent perspectives on mental health needs for remote workers.

"There are some unique stressors of people who are in hybrid work environments, meaning they can work from home but are still tethered to a physical place," Johannes said. "They may have certain days in a physical office, and certain days when they work away (from that physical office). This sort of work arrangement is also called telework."

"Their stressors are a little different from the person who is 100% remote, and who can work anywhere in the world and is not expected to be close to a physical workplace."

Johannes said Lyra's research indicates that people who are 100% remote do seem to be more healthy.

“They have to be nimble and organized to meet the remote demands, but their mental health may be a little better because their personalities and their way of doing work seems to align well with remote work and they don’t expect to have a social network at work. Their social relationships aren’t as connected to the workplace,” she said.

Instead, Johannes said, fully-remote workers find their work-life balance by forming other social networks, such as sports teams, clubs and other groups.

“I think the hybrid worker, or teleworker, who needs to be close to the office, has a greater challenge,” Johannes said. “Moving back and forth to an office, physically or technologically, is a stressor that can also affect family dynamics. It can be difficult.”

Two factors can help fully remote workers shape social connection, according to Johannes:

- **Belonging.** She calls this a “fundamental human need,” or the feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places and individual and collective experiences.
- **Social connection,** which relates to the size and diversity of one’s social network and roles; the functions these relationships serve; and their positive or negative qualities.

Johannes said, in situations where both options are available, each individual should make a conscious choice regarding working part-time remote (called teleworking) or fully remote. She says:

- Consider hybrid, telework if you want to build relationships with your colleagues and live in the same area your employer is located.
- Consider 100% remote work if you want to work independently away from your colleagues, live anywhere you want, or if you don’t seek social relationships with co-workers.

A longer interview with Johannes on the effects of teleworking and fully-remote work is available on the [weekly radio podcast, Sound Living](#), available from K-State Research and Extension.

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**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this story  
Lyra Health, <https://www.lyrahealth.com>

Sound Living, <https://soundlivingksu.libsyn.com>

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