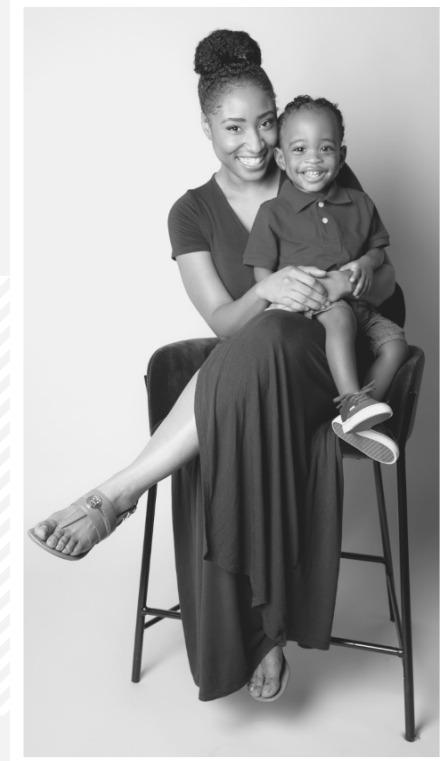


FEBRUARY 2021

EMPLOYEE VOICES: MOMS OF COLOR

Findings from WerkLabs' 1:1 interviews with moms of color on the topic of work & life experiences amidst COVID-19 implications, heightened racial strife, and calls for action in the US.



INTRODUCTION

It is widely known and accepted that due to childcare shortages, virtual schooling, and work-from-home mandates, moms are being disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In particular, with events in 2020 and 2021 highlighting racial injustice in the US, WerkLabs set out to better understand the unique experiences felt by working moms of color during this extremely difficult, burdensome time.

The aim of this WerkLabs research report is to shine a light on and thoughtfully analyze the sentiments we hear moms of color express regarding work and home life stressors, factors, and experiences.

This report can stand alone or be viewed as a supplemental guide for WerkLabs' Moms of Color, February 2021 Report.

“

As a mom of color I feel like there's an expectation that we have to be strong... that we have to be resilient. And, while I agree with that to an extent, it's exhausting being resilient all the time."

Our Process

We interviewed moms of color using an open-ended semi-structured approach, meaning that while the interviews covered intended topic areas, the conversations were intentionally broad so that the moms could discuss what matters most to them. Interviews were conducted until clear themes began to repeat across interviewees (a point of saturation).

Our Findings

From our 1:1 interviews, we see 8 key themes arise regarding how moms of color are experiencing their workplaces. These themes are broken out in the following report.



WORK SCHEDULE & FLEXIBILITY

A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

Despite an undeniable need, the majority of moms lack flexibility and autonomy over their schedules. Back-to-back meetings, constant video calls, and mandatory online hours has made striking balance impossible. Exacerbating frustrations is the feeling that most meetings could be emails and most video calls, at the very minimum, could be over the phone.

Having to Ask for Flexibility

A majority of moms have to initiate conversations on flexibility or risk not having those conversations altogether. Unfortunately, these conversations are not always met with openness, with moms of color feeling that advocating for flexibility is perceived as being “demanding and pushy.”



They [employer] haven't come to the realization of how tough it is to work with kids...not everything needs to be a meeting...lots need to be emails. It's really hard to manage being a full-time mom and full-time employee."

Self-enforcing Boundaries

With work and home life blending together, moms attempt to establish boundaries in an effort to retain some sense of pre-pandemic normalcy. Some report keeping email and IM apps off their phones, to prevent off-hours work.

WORKLOAD

MORE WORK WITH LESS TIME

Many organizations are demanding more from its employees, since they are working from home. For moms, this ask comes across as particularly tone-deaf. Yet, the heightened threat of job cuts has moms fearful, preventing them from reaching out to express concern.



Quarantine hit and all of sudden they thought 'You have more time on your hands, let's make sure that you are achieving 85% utilization [instead of 75%, pre-pandemic].' I felt like 'Who are you talking to? Have you spoken to any of the working parents here?' We now not only have to work, doing our day jobs, we are also doing our parent duties at the same time.

Additional Homework

Workload at home has increased due to childcare shortages and virtual learning. Despite feeling supported by spouses/partners, moms say that certain household responsibilities seem to just fall on the women. They also note, with fondness, that throughout the workday, kids just seem to gravitate more towards mom than dad.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

SOME ARE TRYING. SOME ARE NOT

Some acknowledge that their organization is operating with empathy, driving important conversation on parenting and diversity. However, many feel like their organization is simply checking boxes- sending out the emails and resources needed to "cover their bases." As a result, moms report feeling isolated and confused.

“
So I feel like this is another way for them [organization] to test to you to see if you can withstand...it's another way they can test your resiliency....can you handle it?...what's your breaking point?...what's your threshold?"

A Culture of 'Being Tested'

To moms of color, the lack of organizational support coupled with a heavier workload feels like their organization is trying to establish a breaking point or grounds for dismissal or being passed up for a promotion in the future.

Checking the Boxes

While moms appreciate links to childcare "tips & tricks," without a culture of empathy or having flexibility, these resources have no effect. Many moms also note that the act of creating ERGs is encouraging; however, a lack of clarity has them eager to see how their organizations will invest in and integrate the groups.

LEADERSHIP

THE NEED TO ENGAGE

Moms of color acknowledge that it may be inherently difficult for leadership to understand the unique stressors and needs they are facing. Nonetheless, they expect both their direct managers and organizational leaders to make an effort to try.

Communications

To moms, it feels as though in an effort to not "say the wrong thing," organizations are refraining from saying anything at all. If something is said, it is often canned- coming across as insincere and lacking emotion.

Middle Management

At the onset of the pandemic, some express having been encouraged by leaderships' supportive messaging. However, this support does not seem to trickle down to managers and co-workers, resulting in frustration.

“
I feel like they mean well, but they are tone-deaf in their delivery. It comes off as insincere, rather than that they actually care."

CHILDCARE

NAVIGATING OPTIONS

In an ideal world, nearly all moms would like to care for their children in the safety of their own home. However, demands at work are forcing parents' hands. Many moms feel as though they have no choice but to send their kids back to daycare to manage their workload.

Flexibility for Partners

Several moms mention that working from home with kids would be more feasible if their spouses/partners received flexibility at work. However, most acknowledge that their partners are either (a) not given the option of flexibility or (b) are given the option, but not encouraged to use it.

Mom Guilt

Moms who have sent their kids back to daycare express guilt that doing so may not be the safest option. Yet, moms whose kids are at home express guilt too, noting the lack of socialization they are receiving. What is more, moms express guilt for wanting to work rather than take a career pause to care for kids.



We had reservations about sending our children back, but we felt like we didn't have an option. We could not effectively do our jobs and meet the demands of our work if we kept our children at home. So our children are currently going to daycare part time."

HEALTH & WELLBEING

FEELING EXHAUSTION & WORRY

Moms have reached the point of complete physical and emotional exhaustion. Physically, moms lack sleep, having to work late into the night. A lack of organizational empathy towards moms and people of color also weighs heavily. What's more, previous forms of self care are often not feasible, due to businesses being shut down or a lack of time.



I AM ON THE VERGE OF MENTAL EXHAUSTION. Physical exhaustion. AND I am almost ready to give up."

The Weight of Current Events

Moms of color, especially black moms, not only bear the weight of childcare shortages, but also the weight of recent events highlighting racial inequities. The surge of BLM into Corporate America is encouraging to all. However, individual experiences at work vary, with co-workers and managers playing a key role in offering support.

Concern for Kids

Moms are pre-occupied by not just the physical welfare of their kids, but the impact on growth and development. They express concern surrounding the lack of structure and acknowledge that outbursts in behavior are likely due to current circumstances, yet these outbursts still pose issues for parents while working from home.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT

THE IMPACT OF WORKING FROM HOME

On one hand, moms express gratitude for being able to work from home- the ability to take adequate safety precautions and spend additional time with their children. However, they also perceive a threat to job security and career advancement, due to working from home. Moms report that they often have to log off earlier than their non-parent/male co-workers, and it is during this off-hour work, that critical decision making occurs.

The Initial Hope

Many report that they were somewhat excited by work-from-home mandates. For once it would be both men and women working remotely. They would not have to justify that working-from-home could be feasible, instead all employees began on an even-playing field. However, it quickly became apparent that a heavier workload at home would prevent such an even playing field from occurring in actuality.

Pressing Pause & Settling

On career advancement, moms overwhelmingly express the sentiment of "well at least I have a job." By taking or keeping jobs that they feel overly qualified for moms of color feel as though the pandemic is making career advancement even more of an uphill battle.

I took the first job that came long, not knowing what else I could find. I didn't believe my opportunities were strong, especially being the only person of color that was let go...I just didn't feel confident that I could get anything better."

RETENTION

HOW COVID-19 HAS BEEN INFORMATIVE

The majority express that, ideally, they would not be working for their current organization. However, considering the economy and the need to retain benefits, most moms are not seriously entertaining the idea leaving immediately. Much frustration surrounds this sentiment of "feeling trapped." Still, they express that the pandemic has been an informative experience, highlighting what they want in a future company.

Flexible Work

Many express wanting to continue working remote in the future, even when employees start returning to the office. Having more flexible hours throughout the day and minimal commute time are also highly desired in a new job. Moms feel that the pandemic has highlighted not only the need for flexibility, but also the ability to be productive and effective while remote.

I want to work where I can be remote... I don't want to do the all-day 8-5...This has shown me the balance of family and work. I want to work from home so that I can be more available."