

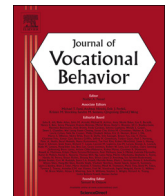


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## Journal of Vocational Behavior

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## Editorial

## Editor in Chief's Introduction to Essays on the Impact of COVID-19 on Work and Workers



On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared that COVID-19 was a global pandemic, indicating significant global spread of an infectious disease (World Health Organization, 2020). At that point, there were 118,000 confirmed cases of the coronavirus in 110 countries. China had been the first country with a widespread outbreak in January, and South Korea, Iran and Italy following in February with their own outbreaks. Soon, the virus was in all continents and over 177 countries, and as of this writing, the United States has the highest number of confirmed cases and, sadly, the most deaths. The virus was extremely contagious and led to death in the most vulnerable, particularly those older than 60 and those with underlying conditions. The most critical cases led to an overwhelming number being admitted into the intensive care units of hospitals, leading to a concern that the virus would overwhelm local health care systems. Today, in early May 2020, there have been nearly 250,000 deaths worldwide, with over 3,500,000 confirmed cases (Hopkins, 2020). The human toll is staggering, and experts are predicting a second wave in summer or fall.

As the deaths rose from the virus that had no known treatment or vaccine countries shut their borders, banned travel to other countries and began to issue orders for their citizens to stay at home, with no gatherings of more than 10 individuals. Schools and universities closed their physical locations and moved education online. Sporting events were canceled, airlines cut flights, tourism evaporated, restaurants, movie theaters and bars closed, theater productions canceled, manufacturing facilities, services, and retail stores closed. In some businesses and industries, employees have been able to work remotely from home, but in others, workers have been laid off, furloughed, or had their hours cut. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that there was a 4.5% reduction in hours in the first quarter of 2020, and 10.5% reduction is expected in the second quarter (ILO, 2020a). The latter is equivalent to 305 million jobs (ILO, 2020a).

Globally, over 430 million enterprises are at risk of disruption, with about half of those in the wholesale and retail trades (ILO, 2020a). Much focus in the press has been on the impact in Europe and North America, but the effect on developing countries is even more critical. An example of the latter is the Bangladeshi ready-made-garment sector (Leitheiser et al., 2020), a global industry that depends on a supply chain of raw material from a few countries and produces those garments for retail stores throughout North America and Europe. But, in January 2020, raw material from China was delayed by the shutdown in China, creating delays and work stoppages in Bangladesh. By the time Bangladeshi factories had the material to make garments, in March, retailers in Europe and North America began to cancel orders or put them on hold, canceling or delaying payment. Factories shut down and workers were laid off without pay. Nearly a million people lost their jobs. Overall, since February 2020, the factories in Bangladesh have lost nearly 3 billion dollars in revenue. And, the retail stores that would have sold the garments have also closed. This demonstrates the ripple effect of the disruption of one industry that affects multiple countries and sets of workers, because consider that, in turn, there will be less raw material needed from China, and fewer workers needed there. One need only multiply this example by hundreds to consider the global impact of COVID-19 across the world of work.

The ILO (2020b) notes that it is difficult to collect employment statistics from different countries, so a total global unemployment rate is unavailable at this time. However, they predict significant increase in unemployment, and the number of individuals filing for unemployment benefits in the United States may be an indicator of the magnitude of those unemployed. In the United States, over 30 million filed for unemployment between March 11 and April 30 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), effectively this is an unemployment rate of 18%. By contrast, in February 2020, the US unemployment rate was 3.5% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

Clearly, COVID-19 has had an enormous disruption on work and workers, most critically for those who have lost their employment. But, even for those continuing to work, there have been disruptions in where people work, with whom they work, what they do, and how much they earn. And, as of this writing, it is also a time of great uncertainty, as countries are slowly trying to ease restrictions to allow people to go back to work— in a “new normal”, without the ability to predict if they can prevent further infectious “spikes”. The anxieties about not knowing what is coming, when it will end, or what work will entail led us to develop this

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set of essays about future research on COVID-19 and its impact on work and workers.

These essays began with an idea by Associate Editor Jos Akkermans, who noted to me that the global pandemic was creating a set of career shocks for workers. He suggested writing an essay for the *Journal*. The *Journal of Vocational Behavior* has not traditionally published essays, but these are such unusual times, and COVID-19 is so relevant to our collective research on work that I thought it was a good idea. I issued an invitation to the Associate Editors to submit a brief (3000 word) essay on the implications of COVID-19 on work and/or workers with an emphasis on research in the area. At the same time, a group of international scholars was coming together to consider the effects of COVID-19 on unemployment in several countries, and I invited that group to contribute an essay, as well (Blustein et al., 2020).

The following are a set of nine thoughtful set of papers on how the COVID-19 could (and perhaps will) affect vocational behavior; they all provide suggestions for future research. Akkermans, Richardson, and Kraimer (2020) explore how the pandemic may be a career shock for many, but also how that may not necessarily be a negative experience. Blustein et al. (2020) focus on global unemployment, also acknowledging the privileged status they have as professors studying these phenomena. Cho examines the effect of the pandemic on micro-boundaries (across domains) as well as across national (macro) boundaries (Cho, 2020). Guan, Deng, and Zhou (2020) drawing from cultural psychology, discuss how cultural orientations shape an individual's response to COVID-19, but also how a national cultural perspective influences collective actions. Kantamneni (2020) emphasized the effects on marginalized populations in the United States, as well as the very real effects of racism for Asians and Asian-Americans in the US. Kramer and Kramer (2020) discuss the impact of the pandemic in the perceptions of various occupations, whether perceptions of "good" and "bad" jobs will change and whether working remotely will permanently change where people will want to work. Restubog, Ocampo, and Wang (2020) also focused on individual's responses to the global crisis, concentrating on emotional regulation as a challenge, with suggestions for better managing the stress surrounding the anxiety of uncertainty. Rudolph and Zacher (2020) cautioned against using a generational lens in research, advocating for a lifespan developmental approach. Spurk and Straub (2020) also review issues related to unemployment, but focus on the impact of COVID-19 specifically on "gig" or flexible work arrangements.

I am grateful for the contributions of these groups of scholars, and proud of their ability to write these. They were able to write constructive essays in a short time frame when they were, themselves, dealing with disruptions at work. Some were home-schooling children, some were worried about an absent partner or a vulnerable loved one, some were struggling with the challenges that Restubog et al. (2020) outlined. I hope the thoughts, suggestions, and recommendations in these essays will help to stimulate productive thought on the effect of COVID-19 on work and workers. And, while, I hope this research spurs to better understand the effects of such shocks on work, I really hope we do not have to cope with such a shock again.

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