



COVID-19, Academic Caretakers, and Mental Health

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Introduction

Many studies in recent years have shown how COVID-19 has affected the mental health of academics and academic caretakers. Not only did the mental health of academic women decline because of the burden of caretaking along with research, teaching, etc., but the lack of support, isolation, and the blurring between work and home life during the pandemic affected the mental health of academic caretakers as well (Bender, et. al, 2020; Boamah, et. al 2022; Franca, et. al, 2022; Mollet & Wolf-Wendel, 2022; Marshal & Hoskin, 2022).

At UD

In a study interviewing 19 UD faculty from various departments, many trends similar to existing data were noted. Many interviewees reported the same feelings of stress from full-time caretaking in addition to teaching, research, etc. In addition, many cited a feeling of isolation and disconnect due to the lack of in-person support, which contributed to their declining mental health. Financial stress and stress about job security were also commonly cited. Yet, while declining mental health was a theme for nearly all respondents, many of them noted that various communities they were a part of played a huge role in supporting them throughout COVID-19.

"I spent the Covid-years during and after lock down on my driveway, trying to write, be productive while watching my kids play and listening to audio books."

"The stress was too much with the layoffs etc. to write. I just froze because I always wondered if I was the next one, and I have kids and our family need my salary."

"It was so draining that now I don't have any reserves left. If that makes sense... I have no savings account, you know, like it's gone, and I blew through it."

"I lost passion for subject matter because it was so stressful and not really supported. There is a covert pressure from tenure to please, do more, respond."