

***Employment Trajectories in the Pandemic: A Longitudinal
Look at Work Status, Working Conditions, Finances, and
Mental Health with the RAND American Life Panel***

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October 30th, 2020



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The Novel Coronavirus and Our Focus: The Mediating Effect of Working Conditions

- This pandemic has had enormous and varied impacts on every aspect of our lives (e.g., this conference)
- Our focus: employment and working conditions
 - This talk: telecommuting, but ongoing work on schedule flexibility, sick pay, etc.
 - Draw on the ongoing RAND American Life Panel for longitudinal analyses
- Jobs aren't designed for a pandemic but impacts intrinsically vary:
 - Some have little flexibility besides PPE (e.g., ER doctors, flight attendants)
 - Others can adapt over the short and long term (e.g., professors teaching via Zoom)
 - What's the subsequent variation in work status/arrangements, financial security, and mental distress?

RAND's American Life Panel

- Modular internet panel
 - Nationally representative of adult US population since 2006
- Researchers (anyone!) can target modules:
 - By characteristics as of most recent interview (e.g., employed)
 - By having completed any set of 550+ prior modules

RAND's American Life Panel

- Our surveys target those employed in February 2020, most of whom completed 2018 American Working Conditions Survey. We elicit:
 - Employment (transitions, hours, productivity, earnings, occupation, flexibility)
 - Income sources
 - Financial security
 - Psychological well-being
 - Household/child-care characteristics
- Major advantage: continuing longitudinal information on workers both before and during the pandemic, including working conditions (e.g., telecommuting availability, flexible schedule)

Three Surveys of February 2020 Workers

May

- Nationally-representative module (N=2,052)
- Wide variety of topics: health care utilization, mental health, financial well-being, media consumption, schooling
- Our study: focus on **1,277** respondents who were working in February

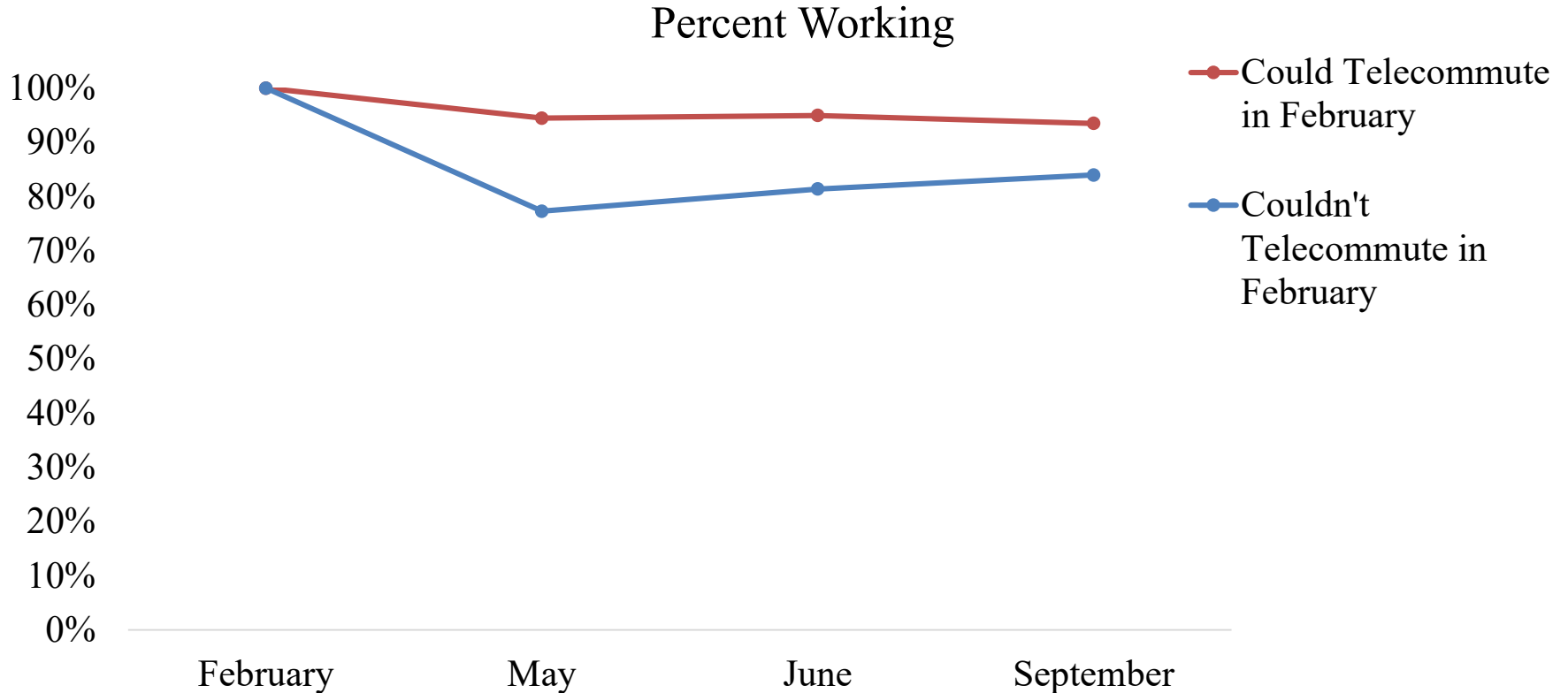
June

- Invited February workers who responded in May, focusing on their labor market, mental health, and financial well-being outcomes (**89% response rate, N=1,137**)

September

- Invited February workers who responded in May, with same module as June's (**86% response rate, N=1,095**)

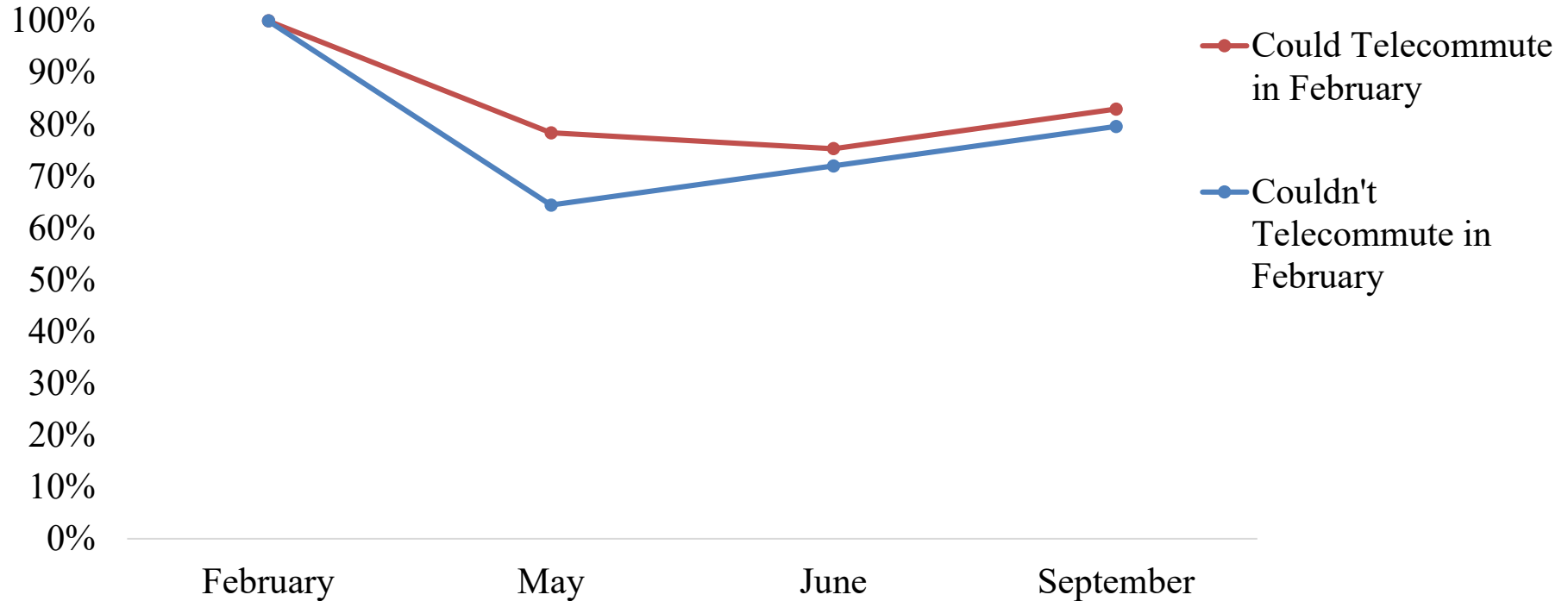
If You Could Telecommute in February, You're More Likely to Keep Your Job in May



Note: American Life Panel calculations, weighted with September interview weights. Sample limited to respondents who participated in May, June, and September waves and who were working in February.

Even if You Kept Your Job, You Worked Fewer Hours

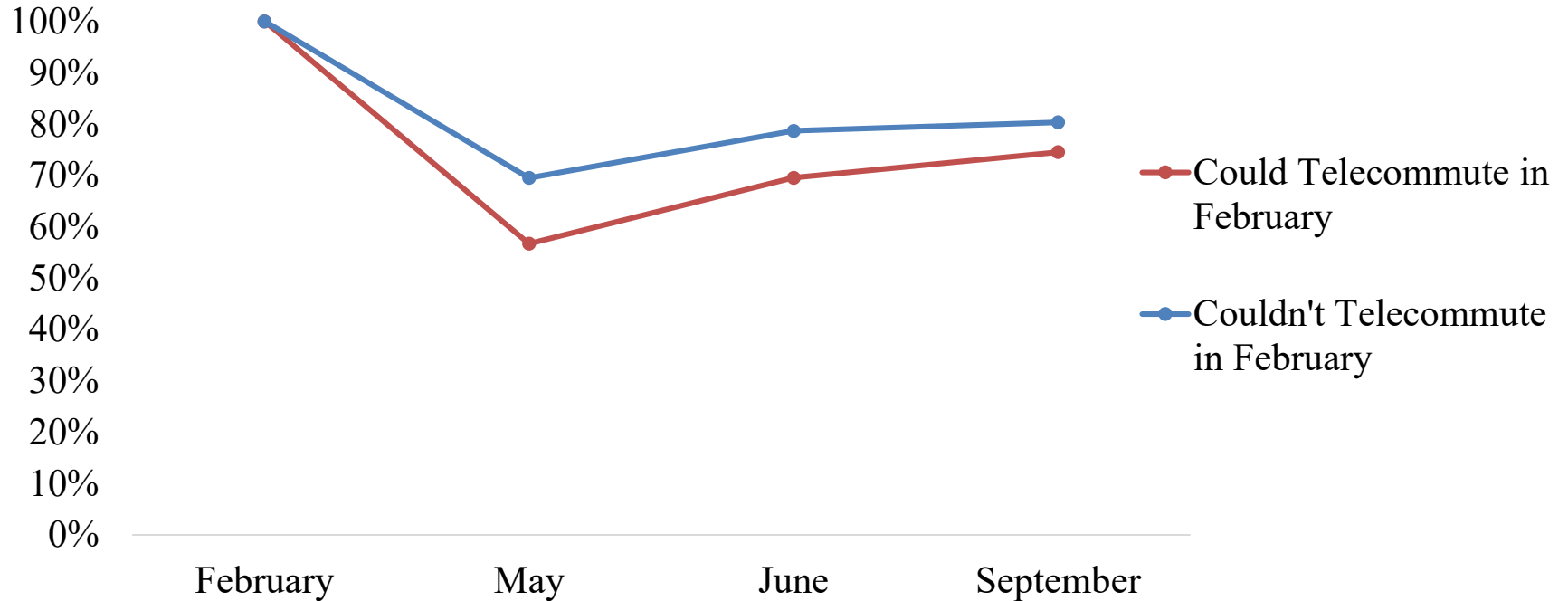
Percent Working At Least As Many Hours As In February



Note: American Life Panel calculations, weighted with September interview weights. Sample limited to respondents who participated in May, June, and September waves, and were employed in each wave and in February.

Even if You Kept Your Job, You're Likely Less Productive, Especially Telecommuters

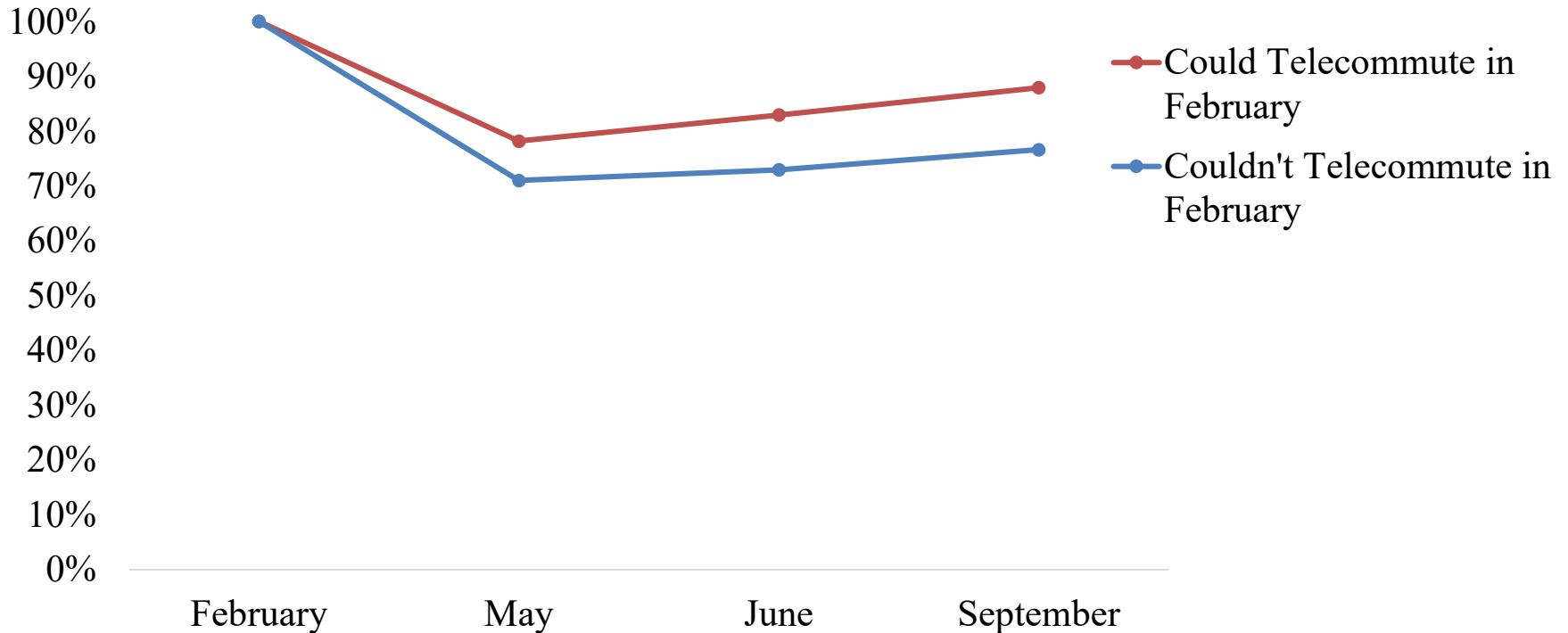
Percent of Workers At Least As Productive As In February



Note: American Life Panel calculations, weighted with September interview weights. Sample limited to respondents who participated in May, June, and September waves, and were employed in each wave and in February.

But Earnings for Telecommuters Recovered Faster

Percent of Workers Earning At Least As Much As In February

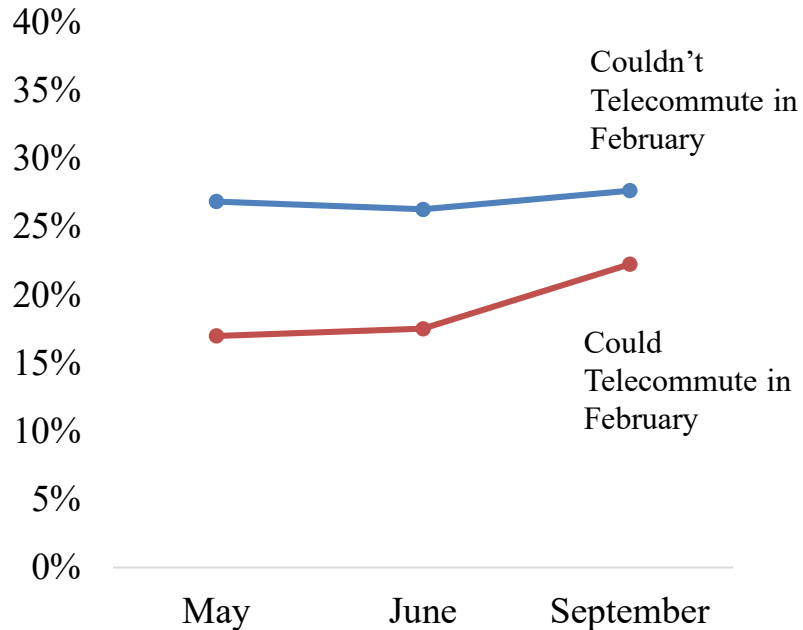


Note: American Life Panel calculations, weighted with September interview weights. Sample limited to respondents who participated in May, June, and September waves, and were employed in each wave and in February.

Financial Difficulty Higher for Those Who Couldn't Telecommute...

Percent with Difficulty Covering Expenses

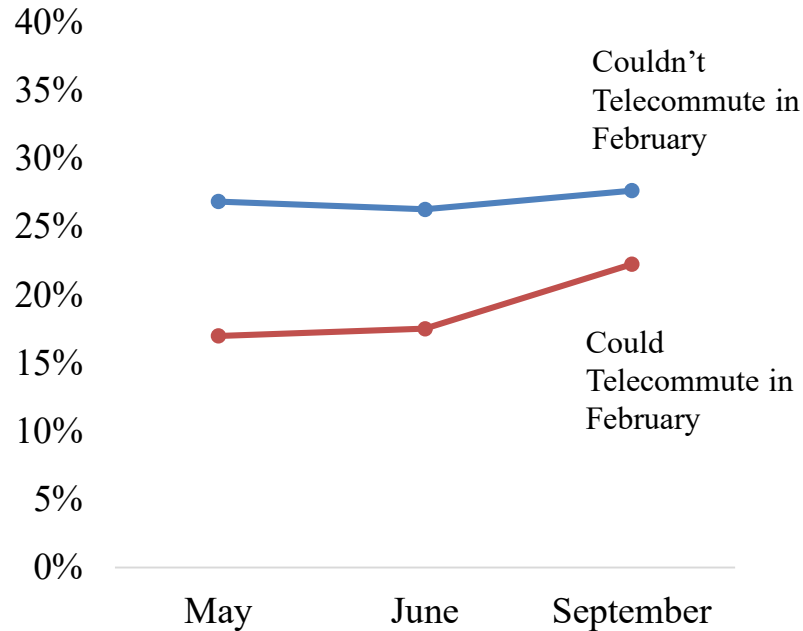
Among Those Still Working in Each Wave



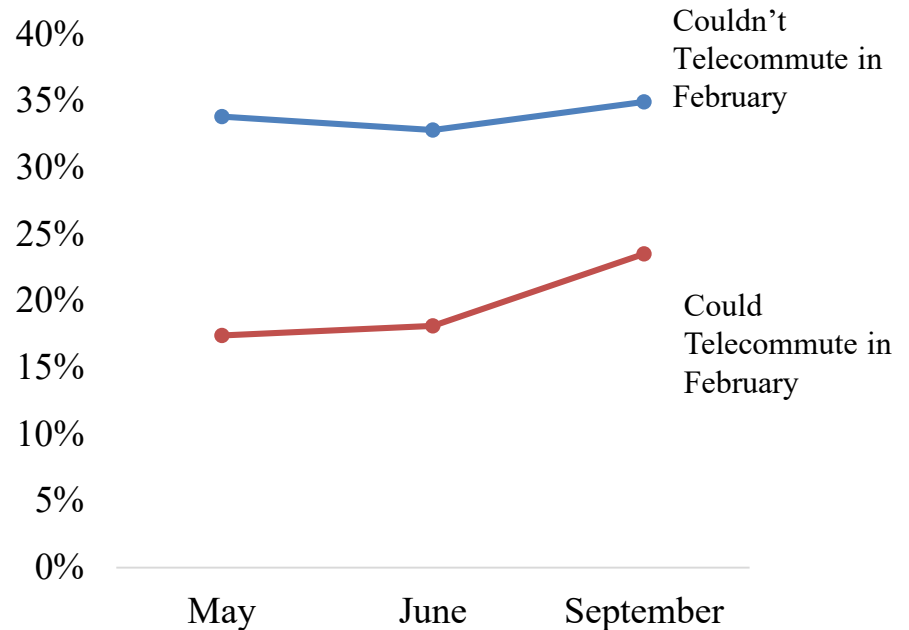
Financial Difficulty Higher for Those Who Couldn't Telecommute...Especially if you Factor in Job Loss

Percent with Difficulty Covering Expenses

Among Those Still Working in Each Wave

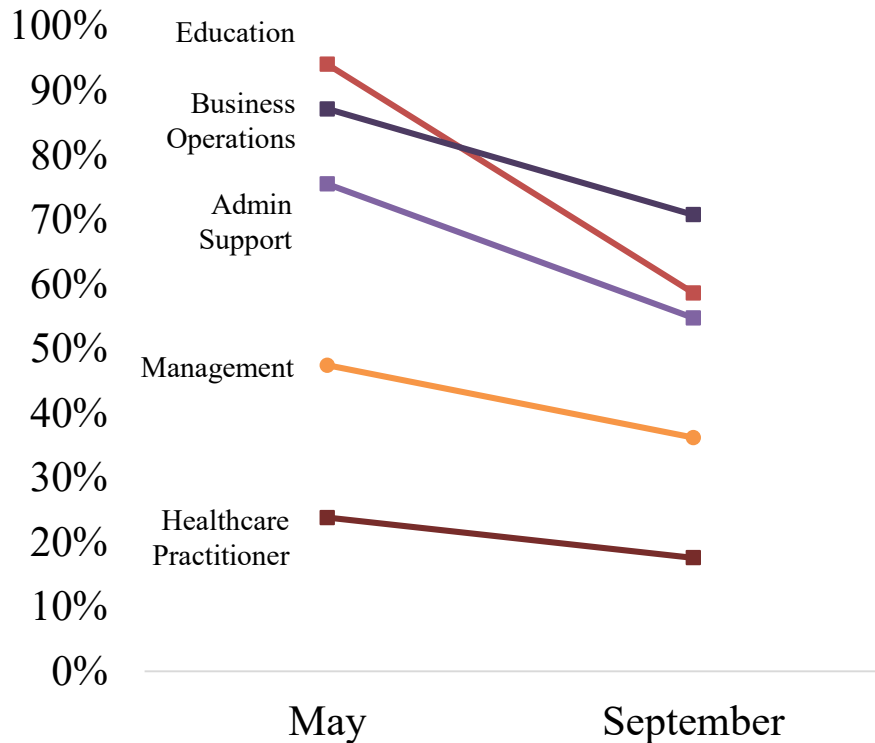


Among All Respondents



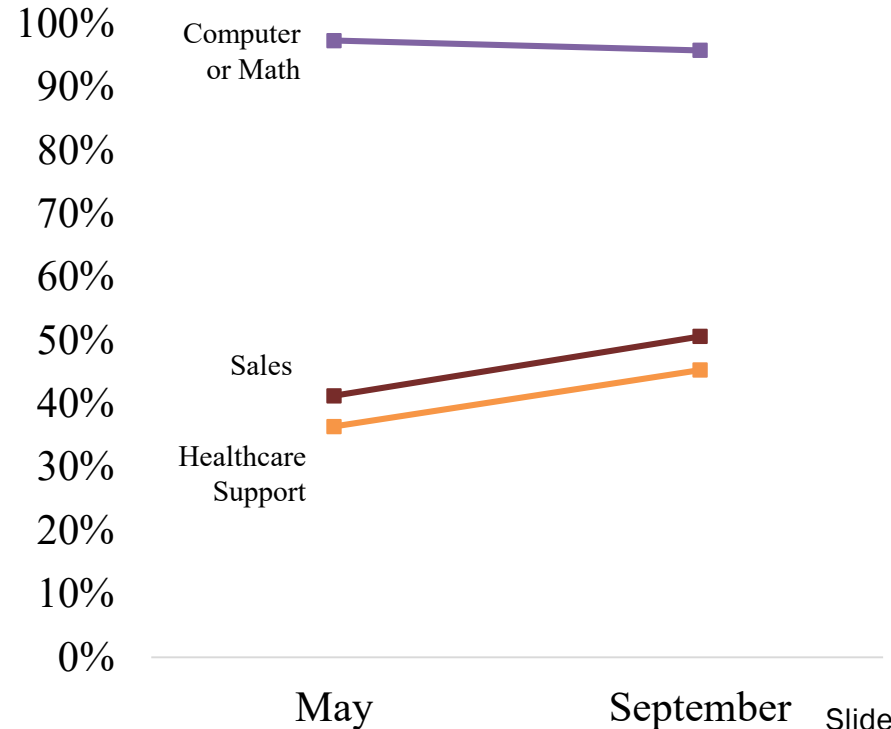
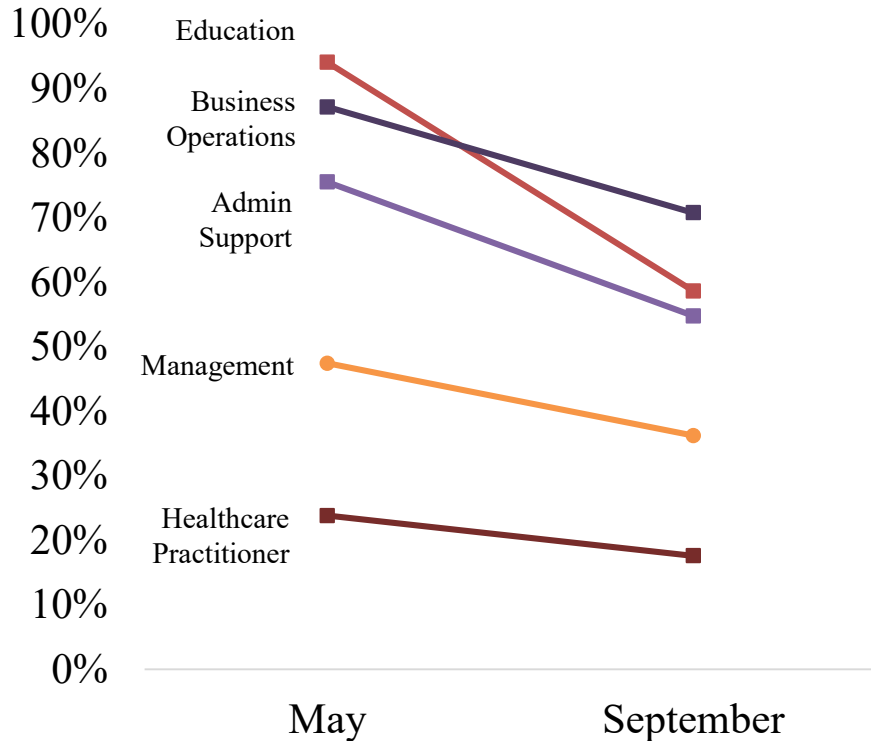
But Telecommuting Is Declining For Some Occupations Since May...

Fraction Telecommuting at All, by Occupation



But Telecommuting Is Declining For Some Occupations Since May...While For Others It Is Flat or Increasing

Fraction Telecommuting at All, by Occupation



What We're Seeing

- Prior ability to telecommute predicts:
 - Continued employment
 - Earnings conditional on employment
 - Financial security
 - *Not* productivity
- But telecommuting options are shifting

Steps Forward

- Occupations matter
 - Not shown: major occupation group fixed effects account for nearly half of the prior-telecommuting-driven difference in drop in May employment
 - Heterogeneity in telecommuting trends amidst the pandemic
- More sophisticated analyses in progress
 - We have more detail on pre-pandemic and mid-pandemic working conditions (e.g., schedule flexibility; hostility of workplace) that may account for some of these occupational differences
- For outcomes/mediating factors:
 - Detailed financial security questions and program participation
 - Measures of psychological distress (K6 sequence)



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