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UNIVERSITY PARK, PA (November 20, 2007) – Telecommuting has mostly positive consequences for employees and employers, resulting in higher morale and job satisfaction and lower employee stress and turnover, according to research by a professor and Ph.D. candidate at Penn State's Smeal College of Business.

Ravi Gajendran, a doctoral student in the Department of Management and Organization, and David Harrison, Smeal Professor of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management, examined 20 years of research on flexible work arrangements, including 46 studies of telecommuting involving 12,833 employees. Their results are reported in the current issue of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, published by the American Psychological Association.

"Our results show that telecommuting has an overall beneficial effect because the arrangement provides employees with more control over how they do their work," Gajendran said. "Autonomy is a major factor in worker satisfaction and this rings true in our analysis. We found that telecommuters reported more job satisfaction, less motivation to leave the company, less stress, improved work-family balance, and higher performance ratings by supervisors."

An estimated 45 million Americans telecommuted in 2006, up from 41 million in 2003, according to the magazine *WorldatWork*. The researchers defined telecommuting as "an alternative work arrangement in which employees perform tasks elsewhere that are normally done in a primary or central workplace, for at least some portion of their work schedule, using electronic media to interact with others inside and outside the organization."

Gajendran and Harrison found that telecommuting has more positive than negative effects on employees and employers. "A work-at-home option gives telecommuters more freedom in their work arrangement and removes workers from direct, face-to-face supervision," Gajendran said. In addition, the employees in their study reported that telecommuting was beneficial for managing the often conflicting demands of work and family.

Contrary to popular belief that face time at the office is essential for good work relationships, said Gajendran, telecommuters' relationship with their managers and coworkers did not suffer from telecommuting with one exception. Employees who worked away from their offices for three or more days a week reported worsening of their relationships with coworkers. However, managers who oversaw telecommuters reported that the telecommuters' performance was not negatively affected by working from home. And those who telecommuted reported that they did not believe their careers were likely to suffer from telecommuting.

The typical telecommuter examined in the analysis was a manager or a professional from the information technology or sales and marketing department of a firm. The average age of a telecommuter was 39; men and women were equally represented.

Women telecommuters may derive even greater benefits from telecommuting. The authors found that study samples with greater proportions of women found they received higher performance ratings from their supervisors and that their career prospects improved, rather than worsened.

"Telecommuting has a clear upside: small but favorable effects on perceived autonomy, work-family conflict, job satisfaction, performance, turnover intent and stress," the authors write. "Contrary to expectations in both academic and practitioner literatures, telecommuting has no straightforward, damaging effects on the quality of workplace relationships or perceived career prospects."

"The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown about Telecommuting: Meta-Analysis of Psychological Mediators and Individual Consequences" is available online at www.apa.org/journals/releases/apl9261524.pdf.

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