

August 2020

# Parenting and Covid-19 – Research evidence

## I. Summary

This research sets out the experiences of parents at the height of lockdown. It comprises analysis of data from a survey of 1,424 parents of under-11s conducted in mid-April, and qualitative data from weekly diaries shared with Fawcett by 70 to 100 women each week.

Existing research shows that the overall unpaid childcare load on parents has significantly increased during the coronavirus crisis - with existing disparities between mothers and fathers increasing. From the data we have, mothers appear to be more likely to have lost work than fathers, and are more likely to have their time interrupted. Our research adds to this, finding that:

### ***On the perceived distribution of work:***

- Mothers in couples were over one-and-a-half times more likely than fathers to say that they were doing the majority of childcare during school and nurseries closures.
- This disparity rises between parents who worked outside the home, suggesting that 'key worker' status does not alleviate women's childcare workload.
- These inequalities also hold for other domestic work, with three quarters of mothers in couple parents and nine out of 10 single mothers, compared with half of couple fathers, agreeing that they were doing the majority of tasks.

### ***On the practicalities of lockdown***

- Four in 10 parents in lower income households were concerned about their children not having appropriate IT, compared with three of those in 10 wealthier households.
- A third of low-income mothers said they did not have someone outside the household they could rely on for support during the outbreak, compared with a quarter of women overall and 18% of men.
- 61.6% of single mothers in our sample said they had struggled to go to the shops due to their children being at home, compared with 39.1% of couple fathers.

### ***On mental health and finances***

- Anxiety levels are greater among mothers in our sample, with 44% compared with 33% of fathers reporting high anxiety.
- 60% of single parents were worried for their child's mental health during lockdown.
- There is a gender difference in whether parents felt they were likely to struggle to make ends meet in the next three months, with 48% of mothers and 38% of fathers agreeing, compared with 27% of non-parents.
- Single mothers were slightly more likely to agree, at 54% compared with 46% of couple mothers.

We explore some of the implications of these findings for Government policy, including support for mothers to remain in work, changes to lockdown policy, and support for parents' financial wellbeing and mental health.

## 2. Introduction

### **Who took on childcare and home-schooling work?**

We know that women, in normal times, spend far more time doing childcare work than men. The UK Time Use Survey shows that mothers with children aged 16 or under spent on average 118 minutes per day doing childcare work, compared with 67 for fathers.<sup>1</sup> Consequently a third of mothers compared to a quarter of fathers report always feeling rushed, and mothers' time is more fragmented. Prior to the outbreak, research identified that women who worked from home tended to do more childcare, while men tended to do more overtime.<sup>2</sup>

During the pandemic, using a different methodology, Cambridge academics found that mothers working from home were spending over 3.5 hours on childcare, compared with around 2.5 hours for men; while parents of both genders were spending around 2 hours on home-schooling, with women doing a little more.<sup>3</sup> Overall this results in a 1.5-hour difference, suggesting a widening gap.<sup>4</sup>

IFS analysis of parents' time use, conducted a little later into lockdown, looked at outcomes including fragmentation of time, for mixed-sex couple parents. They found significant time pressures on parents overall, with childcare duration doubling compared with 2014/15. They identified that mothers were 1.5 times more likely to have lost or quit work since lockdown began, and were doing two hours more childcare (and two hours less paid work) than fathers on average. Importantly, their time is more interrupted – they were combining paid work with other activities half the time, compared with a third for fathers.<sup>5</sup> The overall picture of women's, as opposed to mothers', employment differs however, with the latest ONS data for March to May 2020 showing no overall change in employment.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dunatchik, Mayer, and Speight (2019) *Parents and time pressure: evidence from time use diaries*, NatCen <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1827637/Time-pressure-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Heejung Chung (2020) 'Return of the 1950s housewife? How to stop coronavirus lockdown reinforcing sexist gender roles' <https://theconversation.com/return-of-the-1950s-housewife-how-to-stop-coronavirus-lockdown-reinforcing-sexist-gender-roles-134851>

<sup>3</sup> Adams-Prassl, A et. al. (2020), 'Inequality in the impact of the Coronavirus shock: Evidence from Real Time Surveys' *Cambridge Working Papers in Economics* <http://www.econ.cam.ac.uk/research/cwpe-abstracts?cwpe=2032>

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Hupkau and Barbara Petrongolo (2020), 'Work, care and gender during the Covid-19 crisis A CEP Covid-19 analysis, Paper No. 002' <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-002.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Alison Andrew et. al. (2020) 'How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown?' *IFS Briefing Note BN290* <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14860>

<sup>6</sup> ONS (2020) *Employment in the UK* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/july2020>

ONS time use analysis draws different conclusions, finding a narrowing in the overall unpaid work gap (for all men and women) from 1hr 50 minutes to 1 hour 7 minutes per day; and men significantly increasing their childcare work but still doing 15 minutes less per day than women (although with a much wider gap, of over an hour, for parents of younger children). They also find that shielding and distancing reduced unpaid childcare provided by those over 60 by 90%, suggesting that parents are receiving less support from grandparents and other relatives during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

### **How do different parents feel about home schooling?**

Sutton Trust polling has identified that working class parents, in the C2DE social classification groups, are less confident teaching their children from home than middle class parents (in the ABC1 group).<sup>8</sup> They find a similar class gradient in the amount of remote schooling occurring, amount of homework submitted, and parents' satisfaction with education provided.<sup>9</sup>

Research by IFS has found similar disproportionate impacts, with higher income parents reporting better access to online classes than lower income ones.<sup>10</sup>

### **What are the risks posed to parents in the future?**

Resolution Foundation analysis of a range of survey data, and based on job occupations and sectors, suggests that women are more likely to work in sectors which have been shut down with 23% of women and 16% of men in the workforce in this group.<sup>11</sup> IFS analysis finds a similar effect.<sup>12</sup> Work conducted by economists at Cambridge, drawing on waves of surveys conducted during the crisis, suggests a significant gender differential in the impact of the pandemic lockdown measures, with women 5% points more likely to lose their jobs than men.<sup>13</sup>

Among parents, women are at greatest risk of job loss, so the impact the lockdown period has on gendered caring duties, and their effect on employment inequality, is a major

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<sup>7</sup> ONS (2020), *Coronavirus and how people spent their time under lockdown: 28 March to 26 April 2020* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/satelliteaccounts/bulletins/coronavirusandhowpeoplespenttheirtimeunderrestrictions/28marchto26april2020#the-gap-in-unpaid-work-between-men-and-women>

<sup>8</sup> Schools Week (2020). 'Coronavirus: Working-class parents are less confident home-schooling, survey finds' <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/coronavirus-working-class-parents-are-less-confident-home-schooling-survey-finds/>

<sup>9</sup> Carl Cullinane and Rebecca Montacute (2020) *COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief 1: School Shutdown* <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Impact-Brief-School-Shutdown.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Alison Andrew et. al. (2020), 'Learning during the lockdown: Real-time data on children's experiences during home learning' *IFS Briefing Note BN288* [https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/Edited\\_Final-BN288%20Learning%20during%20the%20lockdown.pdf](https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/Edited_Final-BN288%20Learning%20during%20the%20lockdown.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Gustafson and McCurdy, *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Robert Joyce and Xiaowei Xu (2020) 'Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed?' *IFS Briefing note* <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>

<sup>13</sup> Adams-Prassl et. al. (2020) 'Inequality in the impact of the coronavirus shock: evidence from real time surveys', *Cambridge-INET Working Paper Series N: 2020/18* <https://www.inet.econ.cam.ac.uk/working-paper-pdfs/wp2018.pdf>

concern. In terms of particular groups of parents, in the US data suggests that single parents are half as likely to be able to work remotely ('telework') as couple parents.<sup>14</sup>

The OECD has raised the prospect that current shifts toward online schooling could herald long-lasting changes in the way children are educated.<sup>15</sup> The trends set in place now could have ramifications beyond the pandemic and lockdown period.<sup>16</sup> Depending on how care work is distributed, not all of these trends will be negative for all people – if an increased openness to flexible remote work is an outcome, this may benefit some parents.<sup>17</sup>

### **Support with childcare**

While schools have begun to reopen, there is a significant risk that many private, voluntary and independent childcare providers will go out of business during the lockdown. A survey at the beginning of lockdown by the childcare.co.uk online magazine suggested that up to 10,000 providers may close, losing 150,000 places.<sup>18</sup> Surveys by the Early Years Alliance found in April that 25% of providers across types believed it was likely they would close within a year, and 69% said in May that they were running at a loss, with settings falling between the gaps of support provided by Government.<sup>19</sup>

A lack of clarity about different forms of Government funding, with an eventual reduction on initially promised support, has also contributed to the uncertainty many providers face. This lack of sufficiency of childcare poses a significant risk to mothers' employment in particular.

## **3. How do parents perceive the distribution of childcare?**

In light of the findings cited above about the actual hours of childcare that parents perceive themselves as having done, our research explored parents' perceptions of the relative childcare load. As Figure 1 shows, among mothers in couple families with children under 11, 74% agreed that they were doing the majority of work to look after their children during lockdown. 45% of fathers in such households also agreed, meaning mothers are one-and-a-half times more likely to say they were shouldering the majority of childcare responsibilities.

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<sup>14</sup> Titan Alon et. al (2020) 'The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on gender equality', *CEPR Covid Economics: Vetted and Real-Time Papers* <https://voxeu.org/article/impact-coronavirus-pandemic-gender-equality>

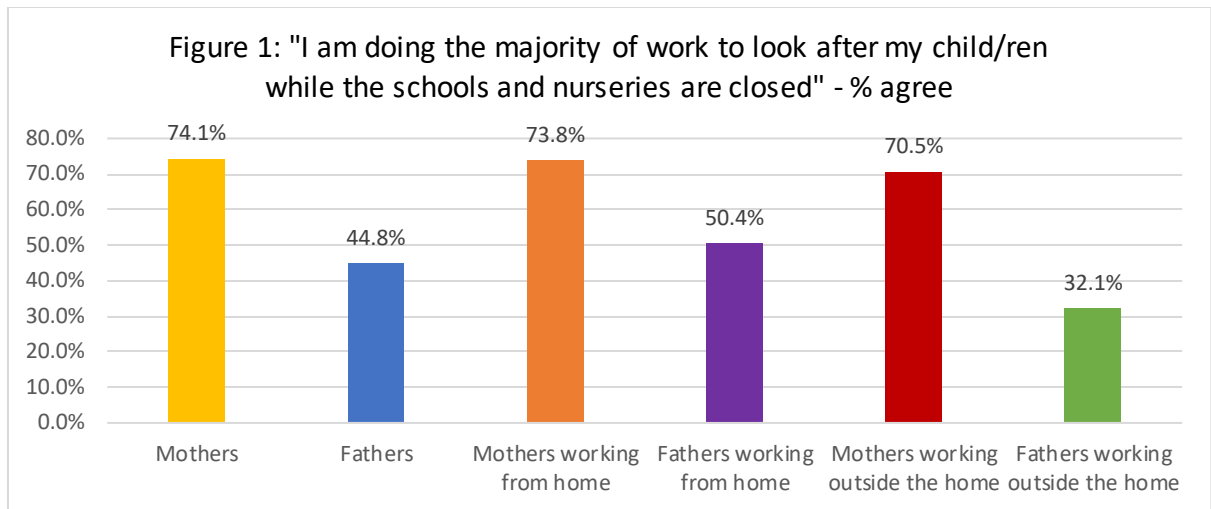
<sup>15</sup> OECD (2020) 'A helping hand: Education responding to the coronavirus pandemic' <https://oecdeditoday.com/education-responding-coronavirus-pandemic/>

<sup>16</sup> Alon, *Ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Claudia Goldin (2010), "How to achieve gender equality", *The Milken Institute Review*

<sup>18</sup> Women's Budget Group (2020) 'Easing Lockdown: Potential problems for women' <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Easing-lockdown-.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Early Years Alliance (2020) *The Forgotten Sector: The financial impact of coronavirus on early years providers in England* [https://www.evalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_forgotten\\_sector\\_early\\_years\\_alliance\\_25june\\_2020.pdf](https://www.evalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_forgotten_sector_early_years_alliance_25june_2020.pdf)



*Differences reported in text are statistically significant, however, not all differences between subgroups shown in the table are statistically significant. N = 1,158 parents with under-11s, living with a partner.*

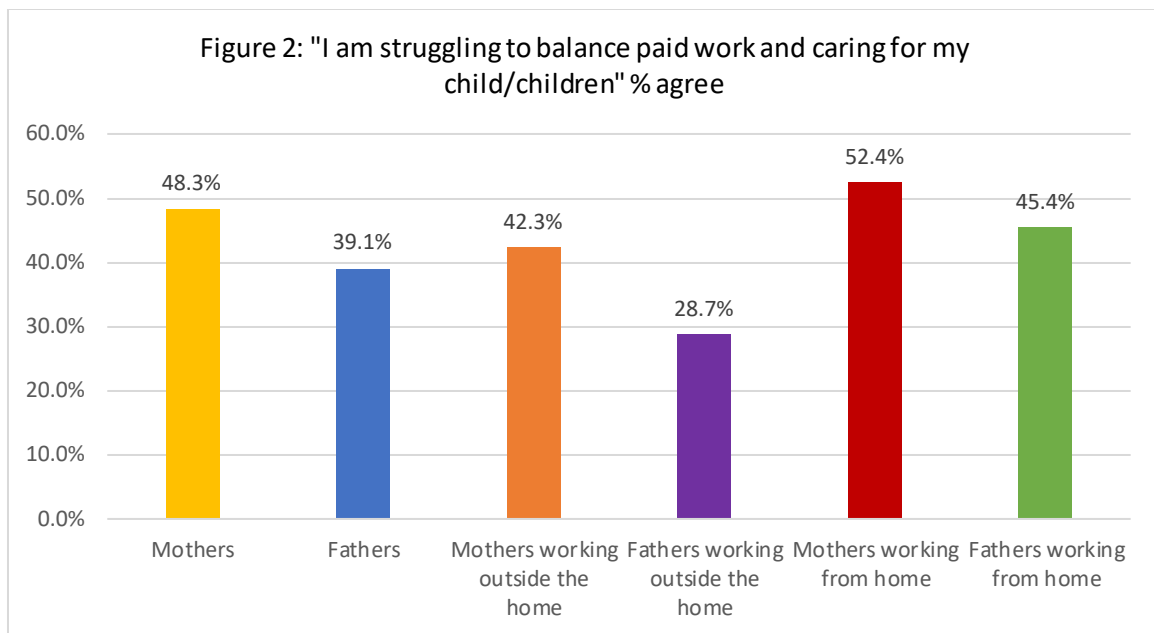
Broken down by location of work, the results are further revealing. For parents who worked from home, a similar proportion report doing the majority of childcare. But among parents who said that they were mainly working outside the home, 32.1% of fathers compared with 70.5% of mothers agreed that they were doing the majority of childcare. This reflects our previously reported findings from this survey about the anxiety and pressure felt by women working outside the home.<sup>20</sup>

Looking at single parents,<sup>21</sup> 83.6% of single mothers said they were doing the majority of childcare, compared to 66.1% of single fathers. Reasons for this are unclear, but may partly reflect custody arrangements, or the differential presence of other individuals in the home.

Mothers were more likely to say that they were struggling to balance paid work and childcare. 48.3% of mothers in couples agree with this statement, compared with 39.1% of fathers. In line with perceptions of who is doing the majority of work, as figure 2 shows, this is falling unequally on mothers particularly when they are working out of the home. This suggests that working outside the home did not reduce the load for mothers in couple families in the way that it did for fathers.

<sup>20</sup> Fawcett Society (2020), <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/parents-struggling-and-women-keyworkers-are-anxious>

<sup>21</sup> Identified as people with children under 11 in the household, but who do not live with a partner



Differences reported in text are statistically significant, however, not all differences between subgroups shown in the table are statistically significant. N = 1,158 parents with under-11s, living with a partner.

However, in raw terms more mothers working from home said they were struggling. Our qualitative research also reflected how this happens, with mothers describing 'fractured time', an issue that was also identified by the IFS and in other NatCen research<sup>22</sup>:

*I sit opposite [my son] at the dining table while I'm working. My husband works in the study... So home schooling really falls to me. We have recently agreed that I can use the study sometimes if I've got meetings.*

*As I write this week's diary entry my 8 year old daughter is sitting opposite slowly and methodically eating a bowl of ice cream and I realise that I can't work or write or concentrate when she is in the room... I try not to feel resentful that I'm also trying to educate, entertain and care for our child. [My husband] doesn't have a choice, it's just the way it is and he does try to give me breaks but after 9 weeks of being both bad at my job and parenting the same time it all came to a head.*

Disabled mothers were just as likely to say that they were struggling to balance childcare, with 53.1% agreeing, and that they were doing the majority of childcare (74.9%). Much of the discussion around the impact of lockdown has revolved around social care, but this is an important reminder that disabled women play multiple roles in society and face a range of additional pressures due to the pandemic.

Of course, not all households experienced unequal sharing of care. Some mothers reported a more equitable situation, which reflects evidence from the data of men on average taking a greater (although not on average equal) amount of childcare work, compared to before the crisis:

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

*I am definitely putting in significantly more working hours than my husband... He is picking up more of the childcare and home schooling.”*

*My husband and I are sharing everything equally. We are both working approx 5 hours a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon with an overlap over lunch while the children watch a film. Whoever isn't working takes responsibility for home-schooling and fitting in the odd bit of housework and vice versa.”*

Looking at wider demands on parents' time beyond childcare, 53.1% of mothers said they were struggling to cope with all the different demands on their time compared with 41.2% of fathers. This reflects views on who is doing the majority of household tasks, such as cleaning, cooking, and washing. 76.6% of mothers in couple parents, compared with 47.8% of fathers in couple parents, agreed that they were doing the majority of tasks – and women in couple parent households were twice as likely to strongly agree (42.6% compared with 19.2%), and almost four times less likely to disagree (5.8% of mothers compared with 22.7% of fathers). Single mothers were, understandably, even more likely to agree, with 88.1% agreeing that they were doing the majority of domestic work.

Our diary research showed a familiar theme which highlights an additional level of strain on mothers, which is that of the 'mental load'. Women described partners who may do household work, but do not take on the responsibility for managing or organising it:

*Feels like most of it is falling on me. My husband tries but is reactive rather than proactive. He does housework but only when asked. He does reading with the kids but only when told to.*

*Me and my husband are both involved with the domestic load, but I definitely do more of it. I'm sure he'd do more if I asked him...but why do I need to ask him?!*

## 4. Home schooling

We did not find a significant gender difference as to whether parents think their children were getting a good education while they were being home-schooled. 23.5% of parents overall disagreed with the statement “my children are getting a good education [while they are home-schooled]”, indicating they think their children were not receiving a good education.

31.9% of parents overall said that their children did not have access to equipment that they needed, such as a computer or printer, during the outbreak. There is an income gradient to this, with 39% of parents with a household income of less than £20,000 agreeing, compared with 28% of those with an income of over £40,000.

Mothers were slightly more concerned about their children's mental health than fathers, although levels overall were high. 55.1% of mothers overall agreed that they were worried, compared with 48.2% of fathers. Single mothers were most concerned, with 60% worried about their children's mental health.



Our qualitative diary research reveals some greater depth in the experiences of home-schooling, as well as where the burden of this work has fallen. Mothers described their work being seen as more flexible and therefore bearing more of the responsibility for home-schooling.

*My husband... is the higher earner and the perception is that my work can be more flexible so I shoulder the homeschooling... I would have appreciated more of an equal split in the homeschooling responsibility. I prepare all meals... and I do all the bedtime (bath, story etc) routine.*

Some described being furloughed and therefore taking on a full-time domestic role, often without an equal increase in support from a male partner.

*My husband is working. I have been furloughed so it makes sense that I am homeschooling. However if I hadn't been furloughed (which was the case at the beginning) the home schooling would have still fallen to me... I am still doing all the washing and cooking that I normally would do with a part time job and the extra hours he gains from working from home every day haven't translated into any more domestic work, except gardening.*

*The domestic load is mostly mine now. My husband is working from home, so he has taken to using that as an excuse to not do any of the cooking, cleaning, and very little of the home learning help for our two children. By the end of the day I'm even more exhausted than I am after working outside the home.*

For one of the single mothers responding to our diaries, separate living arrangements, permitted during lockdown, didn't seem to result in equal sharing of home-schooling when the children were living with their father.

*The children have been spending alternate weeks with me and their dad. He does no home schooling with them. I am doing all of the home schooling while the children are with me. I'm also doing most of the domestic chores as well as working from home.*

Parents have reported different experiences of home-schooling. While some describe good practice by schools which has supported them, others have had less positive experiences.

*Home schooling has fallen to me... My children's primary school have been told not to set any work by the headteacher; and he is actively stopping teachers from making contact or proposing lessons to the children... The school's rationale is that they don't want children to have an unfair advantage by not being able to access work set, and that they will catch up when the kids go back to school. So i am trying to fill in all these roles; run the kitchen, organise shopping and household chores, and home school from an entirely blank canvas.*

## 5. Working from home

We asked how parents felt working from home impacted on the work they do. A slightly larger proportion of parents in couple households said they were spending more time working (37.6%) than the proportion who said they were spending less time working (31.1%), with no significant difference between mothers and fathers. Parents were similarly split on whether they were being more or less productive, with 34.6% saying they were being more productive but 30.8% saying they were being less. However, most parents felt it



was more difficult to focus on work, with 55.5% saying it was more or much more difficult and only 13.5% saying it was less difficult.

## 6. Financial and mental wellbeing

We found that 47.3% of mothers and 40.5% of fathers said they expected to be in more debt after the coronavirus pandemic, which was evenly spread across income levels, and compares with just 25% among non-parents. We found a similar pattern in whether parents felt they were likely to struggle to make ends meet in the next three months, with 48% of mothers and 37.7% of fathers agreeing, compared with 27% of non-parents.

Single mothers were more likely to say they expect to find it difficult to make ends meet, with 54.4% of single mothers agreeing compared with 46.2% of couple mothers agreeing, and 44.9% of single mothers saying their household has nearly run out of money compared with 33.2% of mothers and 30.6% of fathers in couple households.

Anxiety levels were greater among mothers in our sample. 44.2% of mothers compared with 33.3% of fathers reported anxiety at 7 or above on a 0-10 scale, both of which are far greater than usual levels of anxiety.<sup>23</sup> This compares with 27% of men and 36% of women overall. For mothers working outside the home anxiety levels were even higher, at 47.4% compared with 42% for mothers working from home, while there is no difference based on work location for fathers.

This reflects the experiences in our research diaries. One single mother described how the pandemic accentuated existing challenges.

*I'm worried that I have enough energy and capacity to be able to give my children what they need on many levels - emotionally, psychologically, mentally, physically, spiritually - it's totally overwhelming. Even if I have the capacity, will I have the energy and time?... I'm working at least 12hr days with no time for myself. I'm concerned about my health as I'm so worn out all the time. Before the outbreak I was concerned about how I was going to cope if I could cope then it became 100 times more challenging.*

Our research suggests that parents, and in particular mothers, have less support from others in their community. 29.4% of mothers and 24.9% of fathers disagreed with the statement "There are people outside my household who I can rely on for help during the Coronavirus outbreak", compared with 25.6% of women and 18.1% of men in our overall sample. This is particularly true of mothers with household income below £20,000, 32.1% of whom disagreed compared with 25.6% of lower income fathers.

## 7. The practicalities of lockdown

News reports have discussed the difficulty that lockdown rules about shopping alone have on single parents, who have been stigmatised for taking children shopping with them. We

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<sup>23</sup> ONS (2019), *Measuring National Wellbeing: Domains and measures*  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/measuringnationalwellbeingdomainsandmeasures>

asked parents whether they had struggled to go to the shops or do other tasks due to their children being at home. 61.6% of single mothers agreed, compared with 49.5% of mothers in couple families and 39.1% of fathers.

This was reflected in some of the experiences of our diarists:

*It seems there has been little to no consideration for single parent families parenting 24/7 when it comes to accessing food and pharmaceuticals as well as childcare to take a much needed break... It's so stressful having to drag young children around a supermarket or pharmacy when they cannot manage to follow the safety guidelines. My Five year old recently kissed the doors of the ice cream freezer whilst my teething toddler knows the shopping trolley handle. All parents accompanied with young children, the elderly and physically frail should be fast tracked to the front of shopping queues...*

*We so far seem to be pretty stuck on the basics. Worrying about finding food and whether we will run out. Taking three children round a supermarket when they touch everything, run around, put their fingers up their noses, it's very stressful!*

Lockdown presents real challenges in terms of childcare. We asked parents whether they had to ask people outside their usual household, other than schools or formal childcare, to look after their children during lockdown. In total, 23.7% of parents agreed that they had done this, with no significant difference by gender or family type.

## 8. Recommendations

### **Parenting work and paid work**

Mothers are bearing a disproportionate load in terms of childcare and domestic responsibilities. This inequality is not likely to be reduced in the medium term, as the limited re-opening of schools, and potential for childcare setting closures, mean that the care infrastructure which enables many women to work will remain reduced.<sup>24</sup> In the short-term, mothers need the full support of Government policy to ensure that this does not evolve into a two-tier employment system which results in women losing work or dropping out of the paid labour market.

That will require **greater flexibility of the 'furlough' scheme than is currently in place,**<sup>25</sup> in order to cover not only part-time working but shorter periods, for the scheme to continue to be open to new workers, and for Government to **consider improvements to parental working rights.**

The potential impacts on maternal employment also makes a strong case for a **rescue package for childcare providers, and investment in childcare infrastructure.** Both the Early Years Alliance and Sutton Trust have outlined what this may look like in the short

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<sup>24</sup> Mike Brewer et. al. (2016) 'Does more free childcare help parents work more?' *IFS Working Paper W16/22*  
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8728>

<sup>25</sup> Shoosmiths (2020) 'More changes to the furlough scheme announced'  
<https://www.shoosmiths.co.uk/insights/articles/covid19/more-changes-to-the-furlough-scheme-announced>

term, with the latter estimating a £88m cost of much-needed emergency measures to get funding into the sector.<sup>26</sup> Women's Budget Group research also shows that investment a care-led recovery to Coronavirus comprising of significant investment in social and childcare would create millions of 'green jobs' to the benefit of the economy, gender equality and the environment.<sup>27</sup>

In the longer term, this inequality makes the case for **reforms to the UK's system of paid parental leave**, which at present functions as a form of low-paid transferable maternity leave, not a standalone entitlement for fathers, and as a result has strikingly low take-up rates of around 1%.<sup>28</sup> Evidence from Sweden suggests that increases in fathers' parental leave take-up impact the division of household and childcare labour,<sup>29</sup> and nations which reserve periods of leave to fathers tend to have far higher take-up rates.<sup>30</sup>

### ***The practicalities of lockdown***

Our research suggests that the practical difficulties of lockdown, from shopping, to home schooling, to community support – have differential and gendered impacts. The high proportion of single mothers reporting issues shopping during lockdown suggest that **Government guidance in such times needs to be more accommodating to all family types**, while differences in access to community support during lockdown by gender suggest that the focus of mutual aid and local authority support needs to take gender into account. With a picture of continuing, rolling lockdowns in parts of the country a likely prospect, this finding will continue to be relevant in months to come.

Low-income parents are somewhat more likely to raise concerns around their children's access to sufficient technology to engage with school work during periods of home tutoring. Coupled with likely differential harmful impacts of missing school by income, this raises significant social equity and mobility concerns. **Government provision of technology to low-income households during lockdown must be more widespread than the limited support that has been offered.**

### ***Financial wellbeing and mental health***

Some of the starkest differences in our survey were in the rates of high anxiety among mothers compared with fathers, although both represent significant spikes compared to normal data. **The recovery from the pandemic will not only need to address economic harm, but the damage done to the population's mental health, and particularly to women's and mothers' mental health.** Other research has

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<sup>26</sup> Sutton Trust (2020) *Covid-19 Impacts: Early Years* <http://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/coronavirus-impacts-early-years>

<sup>27</sup> Women's Budget Group (2020) *Gender and the 'Green New Deal'* <https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/uk-policy-briefings/gender-and-the-green-new-deal/>

<sup>28</sup> Holly Birkett and Sarah Forbes (2018) *Shared Parental Leave: Why is take-up so low and what can be done?* University of Birmingham briefing <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/business/research/wirc/spl-policy-brief.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Anna-Lena Almqvist and Ann-Zofie Duvander (2014) 'Changes in gender equality? Swedish fathers' parental leave, division of childcare and housework' *Journal of Family Studies* 20(1)

<sup>30</sup> Various authors, (2016) 'International Review on Leave Policies', Leave Network <http://www.leavenetwork.org/>

demonstrated the risks to younger women.<sup>31</sup> Given the existing disparities in access to mental health services experienced on an intersectional basis by, for example, women of colour,<sup>32</sup> the design and funding of such help will need to be structured accordingly.

Parents, and disproportionately mothers, also indicated far greater concern over their future finances than other individuals in our survey data. A clear route to dampening the impact of the crisis on parents' incomes, and to injecting demand into an economy on the mend, would be to **increase rates of Child Benefit to £50 per child, per week**, which has the advantages of high take-up and impacts on child poverty.<sup>33</sup> Other changes to the benefit system would also alleviate pressure on parents, such as ending the two-child limit, which also disproportionately impacts BAME families, ending the benefit cap, and shifting Universal Credit advance payments to grants rather than loans. For parents who are renting, returning the Local Housing Allowance to median rents would offer more secure support for those costs.

## 9. Methodology

Our research is drawn from data collected by Survation on behalf of the Fawcett Society via online panel, with fieldwork conducted 15 – 21 April 2020. Invitations to complete surveys were sent out to members of online panels. Differential response rates from different demographic groups were taken into account.

The overall nationally representative element of the survey, from which our comparison sample was drawn had a sample size of 1,783. Data were weighted to the profile of all adults in the UK aged 18+. Data were weighted by age, sex, region, household income, education and 2019 general election vote. Targets for the weighted data were derived from Office for National Statistics Data and the results of the 2019 UK general election.

Our parents sample was gathered using a filtered booster sample drawn from online panels. The sample comprised 1,424 parents with at least one child aged 11 or under, to assess the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on parents of primary-school aged children. The authors of this report then weighted the data to the current Labour Force Survey on age, gender, region, and education for each population, and conducted analysis.

For the majority of questions included in the survey, respondents were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale: 'Strongly agree,' 'Somewhat agree,' 'Neither agree nor disagree,' 'Somewhat disagree,' or 'Strongly disagree.' Throughout this briefing, responses strongly agree and somewhat agree were combined for parsimony in reporting results.

Only results that are statistically significant are highlighted in the text throughout this report. Because only a sample of the full population was interviewed, all results are subject

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<sup>31</sup> Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk/National Centre for Social Research (2020), *Often overlooked: Young women, poverty and self-harm* <https://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Often-Overlooked-Young-women-poverty-and-self-harm-2.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Fawcett Society (2018) *Invisible Women* <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/invisible-women> ;

<sup>33</sup> Rosa Morris, Michael Orton, and Kate Summers (2020) 'Social security responses to Covid-19: The case for £50 Child Benefit, per child per week' *Discover Society* <https://discoversociety.org/2020/04/15/social-security-responses-to-covid-19-the-case-for-50-child-benefit-per-child-per-week/>

to margin of error, meaning that not all differences are statistically significant. For example, in a question where 50% (the worst-case scenario as far as margin of error is concerned) gave a particular answer, with a sample of 1783 it is 95% certain that the 'true' value will fall within the range of 2.3% from the sample result. Subsamples from the cross-breaks will be subject to higher margin of error, conclusions drawn from crossbreaks with very small subsamples should be treated with caution.

We also report on some of the qualitative research diaries shared by between 70 and 100 women each week with the Fawcett Society, following an open call for responses. Responses have been collected since the middle of April.

## About us

**The Fawcett Society** is the UK's leading membership charity campaigning for gender equality and women's rights at work, at home and in public life. Our vision is a society in which women and girls in all their diversity are equal and truly free to fulfil their potential creating a stronger, happier, better future for us all.

**The Women's Budget Group (WBG)** is an independent network of leading academic researchers, policy experts and campaigners that analyses economic policy for its impact on women and men and promotes alternatives for a gender equal economy. Our work on Covid-19 can be accessed at: <https://wbg.org.uk/topics/covid-19/>

**Queen Mary University of London** is a research-intensive university that connects minds worldwide. A member of the prestigious Russell Group, we work across the humanities and social sciences, medicine and dentistry, and science and engineering, with inspirational teaching directly informed by our world-leading research.

In the most recent Research Excellence Framework we were ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the country for the proportion of research outputs that were world-leading or internationally excellent. We have over 25,000 students and offer more than 240-degree programmes. Our reputation for excellent teaching was rewarded with silver in the most recent Teaching Excellence Framework.

Queen Mary has a proud and distinctive history built on four historic institutions stretching back to 1785 and beyond. Common to each of these institutions – the London Hospital Medical College, St Bartholomew's Medical College, Westfield College and Queen Mary College – was the vision to provide hope and opportunity for the less privileged or otherwise under-represented.

Today, Queen Mary University of London remains true to that belief in opening the doors of opportunity for anyone with the potential to succeed and helping to build a future we can all be proud of.

The **London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)** studies the social sciences in their broadest sense, with an academic profile spanning a wide range of disciplines, from economics, politics and law, to sociology, information systems and accounting and finance.

The School has an outstanding reputation for academic excellence and is one of the most international universities in the world. Its study of social, economic and political problems focuses on the different perspectives and experiences of most countries. From its foundation LSE has aimed to be a laboratory of the social sciences, a place where ideas are developed, analysed, evaluated and disseminated around the globe.