

WHEN | WOMEN'S
HIGHER
EDUCATION
NETWORK



Sharing the Caring

UK Higher Education Professional Services parents, work and family life during 2020 lockdown

Welcome



Ivana Vasic Chalmers
Head of Research



This report summarises the findings of a survey of over 1,000 parents working in Professional Services in Higher Education [HE] during UK's first COVID-19 lockdown and school closures, between March and June 2020.

Data on ways in which unpaid labour is divided between co-parenting couples is scarcely available, yet we know it influences career progression significantly. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a unique opportunity for WHEN to look at how parents felt about the division of home and caring responsibilities, and the impact on their careers, whilst working from home during lockdown. We focused on professional services staff because they have been largely ignored in sector studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time, yet represent a significant proportion of the workforce. Women in Professional Services roles make up one third of the entire sector.

We are immensely grateful for the time taken by our respondents to share their experiences – I was personally struck by how many of us shared the same concerns, struggles and feelings about the challenge of balancing children and career in our kitchens and living rooms, around the clock, and the personal sacrifice it required. We hope this report sheds a new light on UK HE, and helps us all to create solutions to improve the lives of working parents and advance towards a more gender equal world.

Best wishes, Ivana

Executive summary

Key learnings

- Self-identifying women (mums) in dual career households continued to be predominantly responsible for childcare, household chores and duties for caring outside the home based on their self-reported perceptions of effort in the home. The pandemic exacerbated this, generated a substantial increase in responsibility and created significant challenges in their ability to do their jobs.
- Self-identifying men (dads) increased their childcare and caring outside the home efforts but domestic tasks remained predominantly in the remit of women. During the pandemic it is these tasks that both increased, and were not possible to outsource. This demonstrates that unpaid labour in homes of professional services parents in the UK HE sector is still disproportionately a woman's domain – as has been recognised in global research on the subject.
- Traditional gender roles were still evident in the division of duties. It was predominantly women that self-reported organising the family's time and activities, school work and household chores, and that were physically and emotionally more accessible for their children and extended family.
- Women described their partners as taking on activities that had less of a 'mental' and 'emotional' load, such as play or cooking meals, and that they were more likely to have separate, quieter working spaces.

Executive summary

Key learnings

- There has been a tremendous effect on wellbeing, sense of confidence and ability to work. In line with global findings about women being more likely to lose or leave their jobs due to the challenges arising from the pandemic, this raises an important concern regarding female economic disempowerment in the near to long term future.
- Although there was an even split between those who saw lockdown as having a positive impact on their family life, and those who did not, mums and dads shared the same concerns:
 - Stress, feelings of inadequacy and guilt, and negative impact on mental health
 - Lack of social connectedness
 - Loss of time to be on one's own, to rest, exercise and focus on career stretching tasks
 - Concerns over children's isolation and educational progress
- Mums and dads were overwhelmingly concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their careers in the next six to twenty four months. They were concerned about job performance, career progress and reputation, loss of development opportunities and perceived a lack of involvement in decision making at work.

Executive summary

Ideas for action in Higher Education Institutions

Our survey revealed just how valuable the working environment can be in helping staff to be effective and productive at times of immense stress and change. We have learned that HEIs can benefit immensely by providing support to their staff by:

- Educating themselves about their workforce, understanding the circumstances and impacts on working parents and using this to inform policy, decision making and create effective support interventions.
- Encourage all staff to work flexibly, and provide guidance on how best to do so.
- Ensure leaders and managers have open and honest conversations with their staff about workloads, objectives and expectations, and make changes to promotions and appraisal processes to broaden success criteria, focus on output and reconsider deadlines.
- Be more creative about professional development and career growth opportunities, making sure these do not disappear, and that all members of staff are included.
- Provide and promote wellbeing resources, and communicate about and normalise parental struggles, preferably through senior advocates who can frame issues with compassion.

More on page 31

Recommendations

Ideas for action for individuals

Whilst we recognise that individual circumstances can vary greatly, the learnings from the mums and dads in our sizeable sample raise a few potentially helpful suggestions for any future lockdown scenario. At the core of this is opening up, being honest and having good conversations.

- **At work** – talk with your line manager, colleagues, sponsor/mentor about your circumstances, challenges and concerns. Seek support on how to be proactive and honest about your availability and capacity. Take time to recognise and celebrate progress, even if these are small steps. Seek out and put time aside to engage with work-provided support systems (counselling, chaplaincy, colleague groups, etc.).
- **At home** - talk with your partner about the division of household, caring and childcare duties. Take steps in the areas where you feel there would be most beneficial impact, before it needs to happen. Carve out quiet, dedicated working and recovery time for each of you.

More on page 32

01 **Hidden Figures**

About our survey sample

A complementary picture of the HE sector

Addressing the data gap

There is no sector-wide data set on the number of UK Higher Education [HE] staff that are parents and carers.

Yet, the increase in caring and domestic responsibilities during the COVID-19 lockdown emerged in a number of studies as having a significant negative impact on career prospects. In academia, research output by female academics was reported as having a drastic fall.

Yet, little data was made available about the impact on colleagues who do not undertake research or teach.

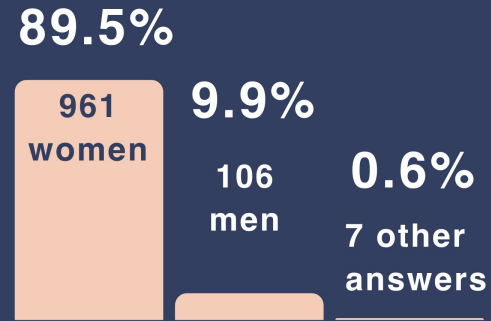
WHEN sought this opportunity to provide a complementary picture of experiences of Professional Services parents, who are seemingly routinely omitted from studies about our sector.

We were overwhelmed to receive over 1,000 responses to our survey*.

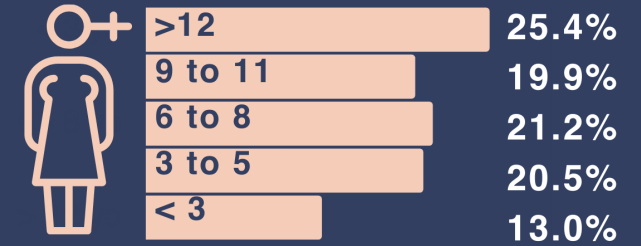
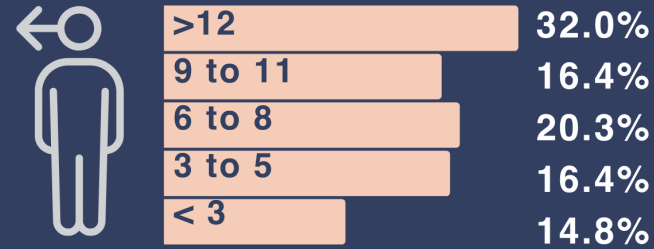
*Full figures provided on The Sample page.

The sample

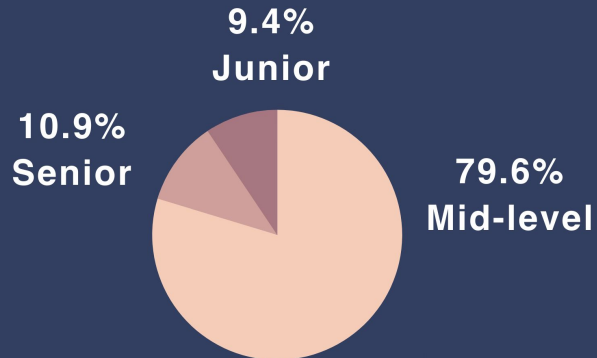
Gender



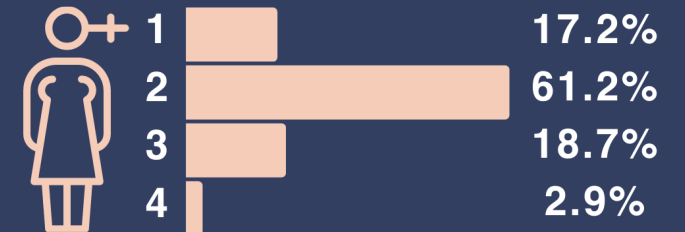
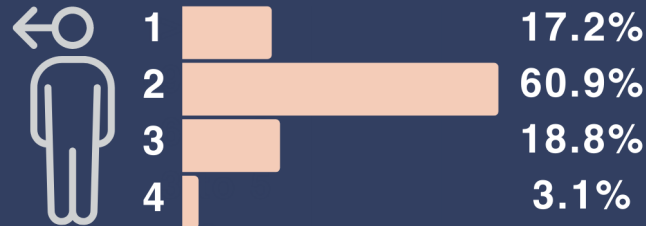
Children's age



Career stage



Number of children in household



Note: The survey did not collect data about sexual orientation, ethnicity of participants nor their partners, and makes no presumptions about these elements in the reporting. Therefore, we refer to mums (those self identifying as women) and their partners or dads (those self-identifying as men) and their partners, and use these complementary data to draw comparisons. It is regrettable that the responses from transgender, non-binary and non-conforming respondents were far too small to meaningfully include in our analysis.

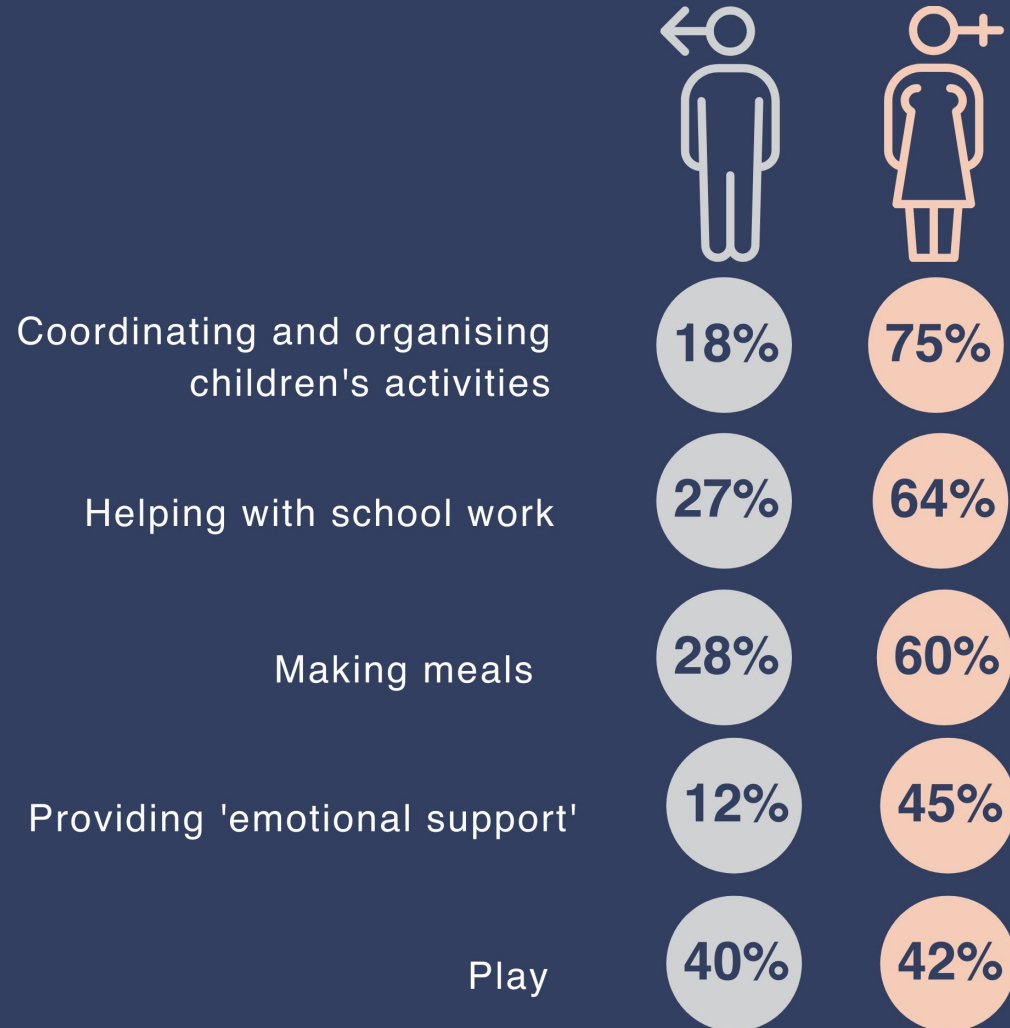
02 **Sharing the caring**

Highlights about sharing childcare duties during lockdown school closures

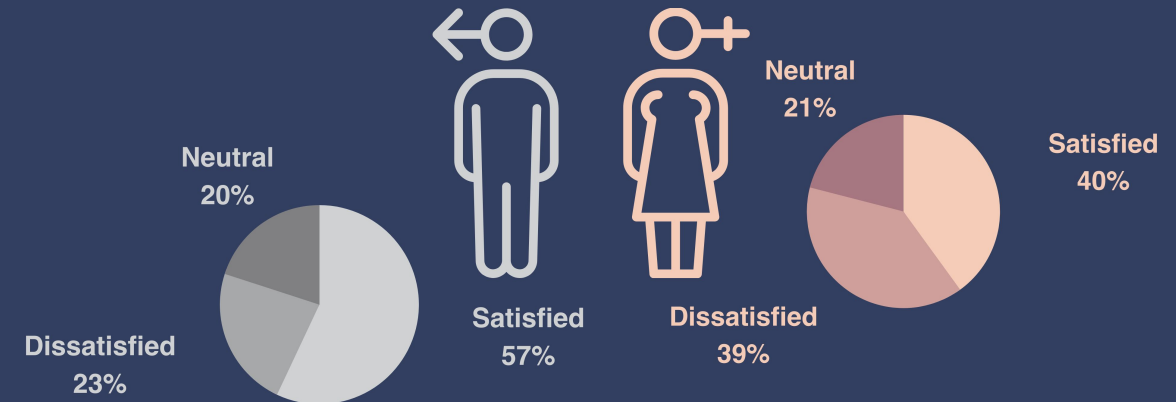
Sharing the caring: key findings

- Mums self reported **owning more duties** related to childcare than their partners.
- While both mums and dads reported an increase in responsibility for childcare, mums **continued to own most of the unpaid childcare** during lockdown. The responsibility for emotional support and school work was the most notable increase for mums and dads.
- Mums who expressed most dissatisfaction were those who reported taking on **disproportionately more childcare duties than their partners**. The split between satisfied and dissatisfied mums was fairly even, and those who expressed satisfaction with the division of labour reported their partners as helping more during lockdown.
- Mums at-home working stations were much more frequently in common family spaces, leading to **more interruption and stress**. Mums self-reported working near or across their children in lounges and kitchens, whilst their partners had segregated and quieter spaces – not necessarily because the partner required it for work purposes.
- Mums predominantly took on childcare duties which they described involved a **‘mental load’ [organising activities, school work, planning meals]**. They reported their partners frequently got the ‘fun’ activities like playing.

During lockdown, mums continued to be responsible for most of the childcare duties.



Mums reported being less satisfied overall and more dissatisfied with the division of childcare duties during lockdown.



*% representative of number of respondents in each gender category that selected 'exclusively me' or 'mostly me' when asked who was responsible for each childcare activity

Open text responses

“There is no discussion but rather an assumption that I will do everything domestic and to do with the children.”

“I feel that I end up doing all the 'boring' tasks and my partner does the 'fun' activities.”

“I've worked on the kitchen table ... moved all my work for meal times ... moved round the house for zoom meetings - partner has worked in dining room and thus has a quiet, uninterrupted working space.”



“It’s as it should be, we each play an equal role in caring for and supporting our children.”

Researcher reflection



“What strikes me is that even ‘satisfied’ mums tend to take on the majority of care which perhaps reflects perceptions of gender justice and what is considered fair. What really struck me, however, was that lockdown has made the distribution of care more visible (at home and in public?) and in this context women aspire to greater sharing of childcare - shown by greater satisfaction where this has happened. Increased visibility and potentially sharing of care will hopefully be a longer-term positive shift.”

Clare Matysova
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, LSHTM

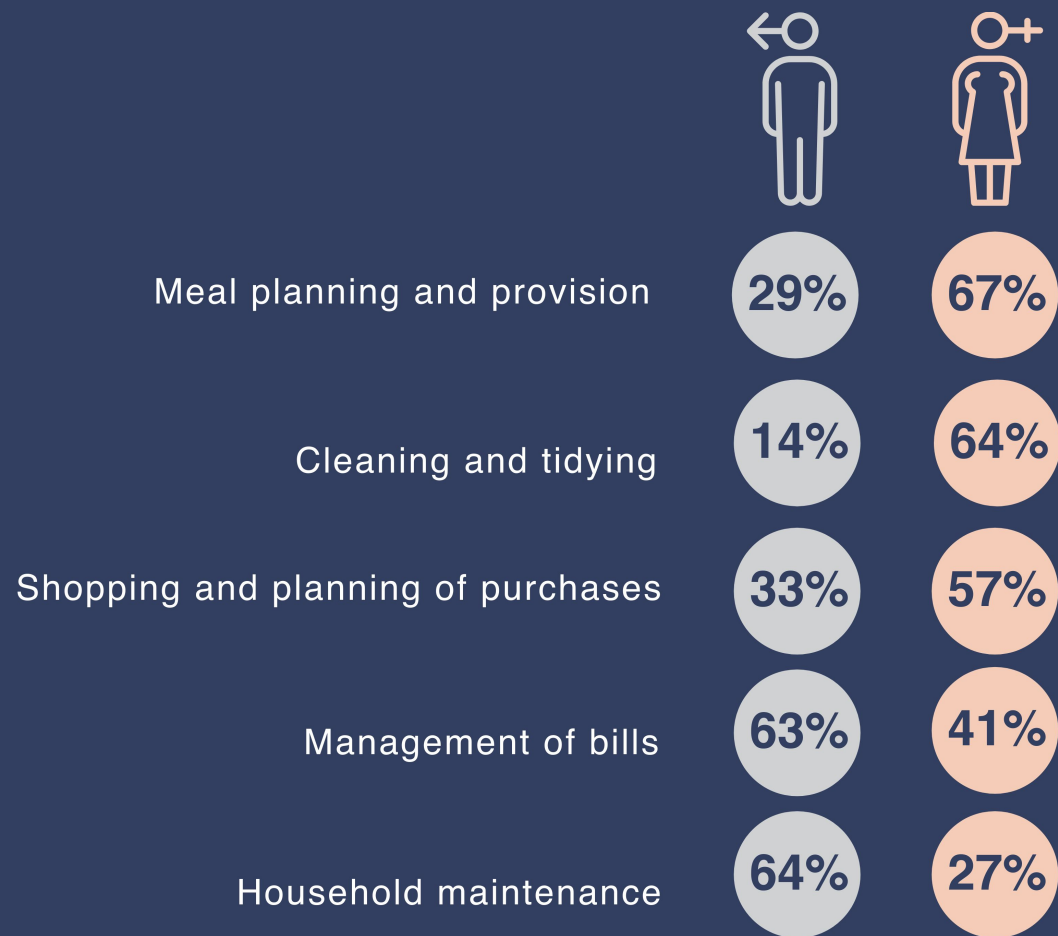
03 **Dividing the domestics**

Highlights about sharing of household tasks during lockdown

Dividing the domestics: key findings

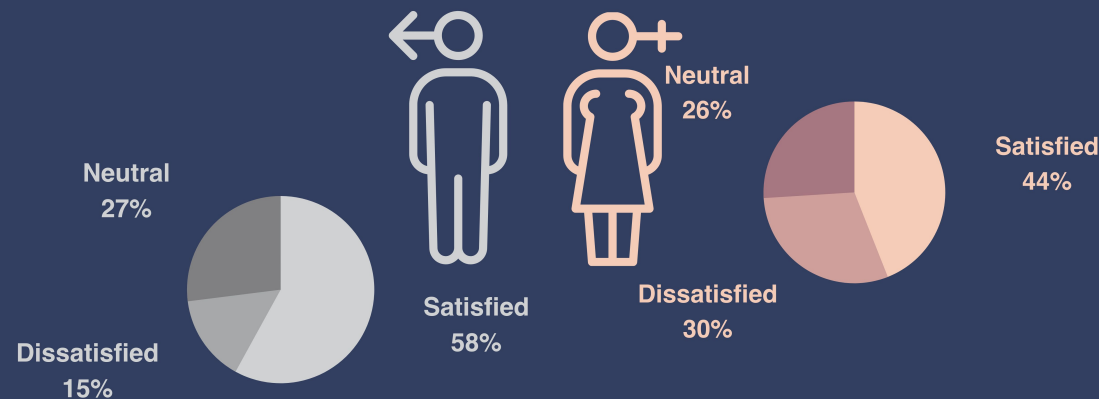
- Mums continued to **own almost all** domestic duties during lockdown.
- Dads **did not increase** their participation in household chores during lockdown. Dads self-reported that they took on primary responsibility for far fewer household activities, and their help in domestic tasks did not increase during lockdown despite the inability to outsource these task.
- There was evidence of **traditional gendered division of household labour**:
 - Mums continued to own shopping, planning of purchases, making meals, cleaning and tidying duties. Dads self-reported far less ownership of these tasks too.
 - Dads continued to own household maintenance and management of bills. Mums self-reported their partners tended to have primary responsibility for these tasks.
- Mums expressed **greater dissatisfaction** in how domestic tasks were shared. Those more satisfied expressed that duties were more equally shared with their partners prior to lockdown.

Mums were predominantly responsible for household chores, even though these increased in volume and help couldn't be outsourced.



Mum respondents were more dissatisfied with the division of household duties with their partners than the dad respondents in the survey.

Compared to mums, dads also expressed greater satisfaction.



*% representative of number of respondents in each gender category that selected 'exclusively me' or 'mostly me' when asked who was responsible for each household chores

Open text responses

"I don't feel my partner has adjusted their ways of working to accommodate the new circumstances and despite discussion/ agreement on how to proceed in our new way of working [they] still look to me to drive household tasks, childcare, schoolwork."

"We had a cleaner before lockdown. Since lockdown I have been doing all the cleaning. I would have preferred this to be more split as I had little time left after work to play with our child."



"I wasn't given an option, it was just assumed this is the way it would be."

Researcher reflection



"I was surprised by the number of times the word *guilt* emerged in the open text responses. The majority of the respondents evoking *feeling guilty* were women. Is guilt a predominantly female sentiment? Do women feel guiltier than men? I wonder if the constant pressure placed on mothers and the ever imposing ghost of *The Feminine Mystique* – Betty Friedan's 1963 book describing the belief that women are solely fulfilled being housewives and mothers – is still informing our expectations of self and thus driving the feelings of inadequacy and guilt? Unfortunately the data analysed in this survey seems to indicate that much of the domestic sphere is still expected to be predominantly feminine, with men really only taking on chores related to household maintenance and financial management. In that sense, we haven't come that far from the reality described in Friedan's book."

Dr Ana Faro, WHEN Research Group lead
Athena SWAN Project Manager, Institute of Neurology, University College London

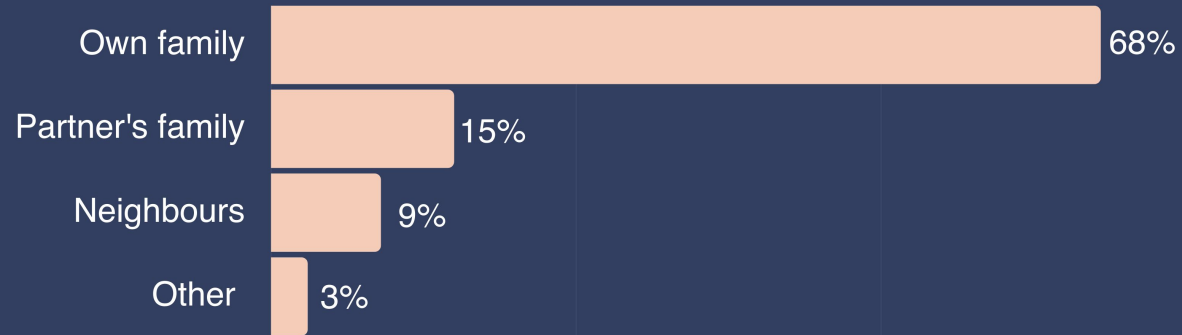
04 Caring outside the home

Highlights about caring for others during the lockdown

Caring outside the home: key findings

- **27%** of respondents had **additional caring duties** during lockdown, on top of taking care of their children and households. This included helping their own and partner's families, neighbours, and community and charity causes (representative of 25% women, 2% men of the entire sample).
- Respondents had **twice as many additional caring duties** during lockdown than prior.
- Mums' efforts **significantly increased** and for many, these duties came about because of lockdown. This is in addition to an increase in childcare and domestic tasks.
- Participants were happy to help their elderly parents, and **did not expect partners to be equal in these efforts**. Interestingly, normalised analysis showed that a higher proportion of mums in the sample assisted with caring duties for their partner's family members than the dads in the sample (15% vs 4%).
- The **emotional burden** of caring fell predominantly to mums.

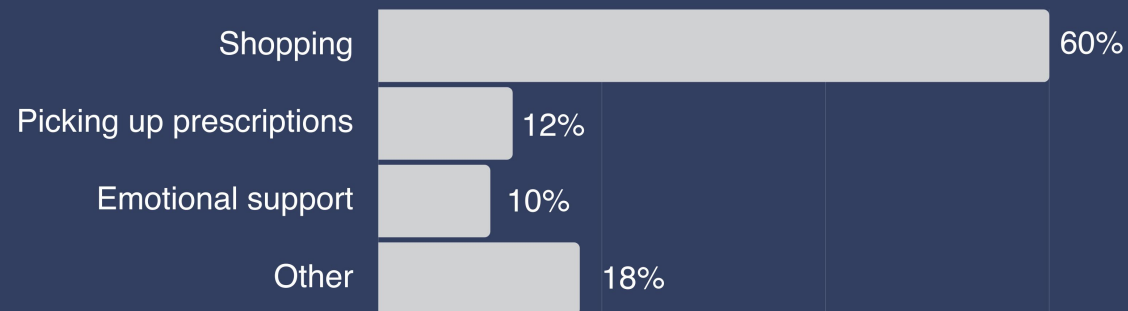
Looking after elderly parents was a priority.



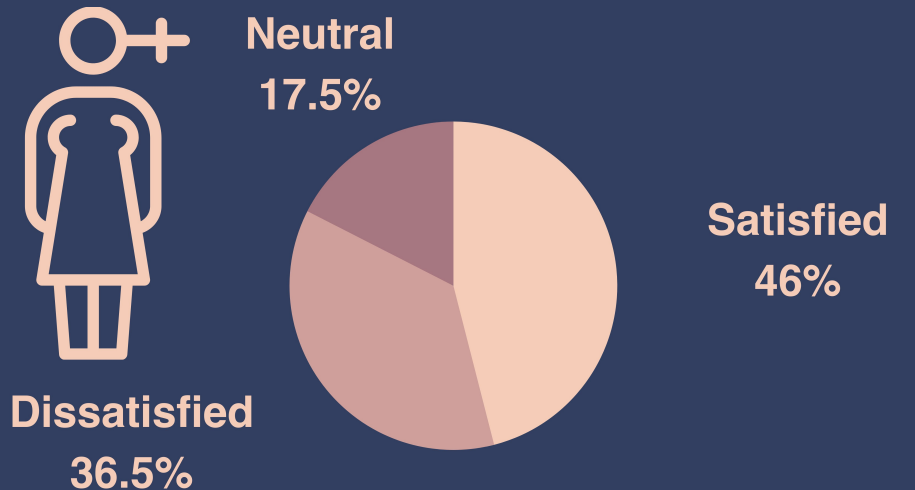
Most reported satisfaction with the split of additional caring duties.

However a significant number of mums were dissatisfied given their other duties at home.

The care involved a range of tasks, but support with shopping was the biggest.



*% representative of the number of respondents in the sub-sample that completed the 'additional caring' section



* The sample of dads with additional caring duties was too small to include. See our previous highlights for additional impact on working mothers during lockdown and school closures.

Open text responses

“I'm happy to do this for my parents, they've provided loads of support, including childcare, over the years. I wouldn't want to have to ask anyone else to do this.”

“Societal expectation [is that] that women will be there for everyone's extra needs in the extended family.”

“The relative in question is my husband's mother and he offered little in the way of emotional support to her including little treats/surprises to brighten her day. Despite prompting he just doesn't think this way, it was easier to do it myself than get annoyed with him!”



“My partner supports his mum and I support mine.”

Researcher reflection



“I was struck by the fact that caring outside the home was the one area of respondents' lives where there was the least expectation of support or contribution from a partner. Overwhelmingly, respondents wanted to take responsibility for the care of their own parents. This desire was often expressed as a sense of repaying a debt for previous assistance parents had given with young children.

While it was also heart-warming to read so many stories of individuals supporting their neighbours, this was, of course, another practical and emotional burden to manage. Such stories highlight the vital importance of recognising that time spent at work is only one compartment of our lives. For universities to be truly inclusive, this must be considered and accounted for.”

Dr Jenna Townend, WHEN Research Group lead
Academic and OD Projects Lead and REF B12 (Engineering) Project Manager, Loughborough University

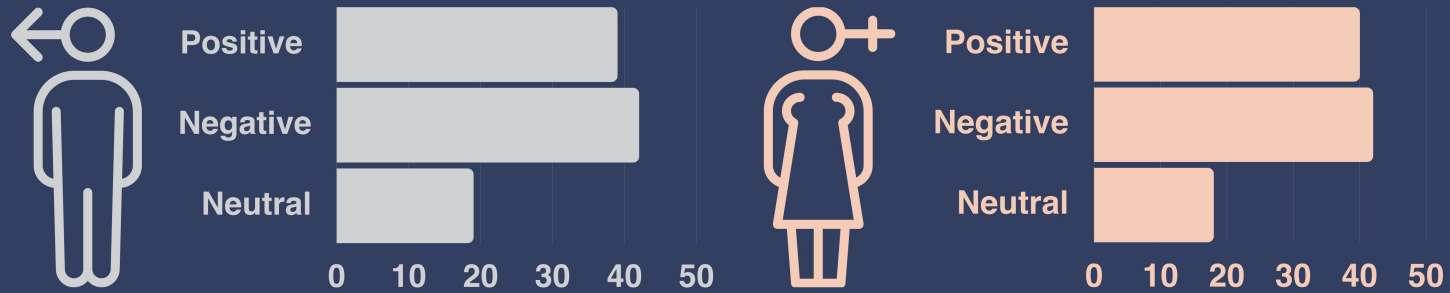
05 Personal and family life

Highlights about the impact on family life during lockdown

Personal and family life: key findings

- Mums and dads reported **equally positive and negative impacts** on their family lives during lockdown.
- Both mums and dads expressed a lot of **concern for personal and family wellbeing** as a result of the pandemic and lockdown:
 - Feelings of stress, inadequacy and guilt
 - A sense of loss time to be on one's own
 - A loss of social connection
 - Lack of time for exercise and de-stress
 - Concerns over children's education and isolation from other children

Mums and dads were evenly divided between those who felt positively and those who felt negatively about the impact of lockdown on their family life.



There was overwhelming agreement about the common challenges; lack of time and negative impact on wellbeing.

“I feel that my ability to care for my daughter effectively is suffering, I worry about her social needs a lot as I need to work, which leaves her alone a lot of the time. I have not been spending much time (or no time) on myself, taking breaks or looking at ways of managing my own feelings, just pushing myself through each day.”

“I am a more tense, emotional and irritable mother and partner, and a less productive employee. This is a hard thing to accept.”

“My commute used to be my time alone to relax with a podcast or book - I rarely get any time alone at home, and this impacts on overall wellbeing.”

“My personal fitness [has been] neglected due to workload in the evenings (to make up for lost time doing home schooling).”

“No personal time. At all. We are on an endless loop of work, school, food, clean, sleep. Rinse and repeat.”

“[I miss] "meaningful contact with family and friends - Zoom isn't an adequate substitute.”

06 Career impact and outlook

Highlights about the impact on career and outlook for the future

Career impact and outlook: key findings

- An overwhelming majority of mums and dads felt the pandemic lockdown has **negatively impacted their careers** over the next six months to two years (>80%).
- **58%** of mums and dads were pessimistic about the impact of the pandemic. Most pessimism related to concerns over 'getting a pay rise' and 'getting a promotion'.
- Mums and dads expressed the impact of additional childcare duties as having a **negative impact on their job performance**. Those with more children were even more concerned about meeting 'own aspirations' at work.
- Mums felt lockdown duties limited their ability to network, attend online events or professional development and created a **sense of disconnectedness from colleagues and decision making**. Mums reported that working from home during lockdown meant constant distractions and inability to focus, creating a loss of confidence, concerns over their professional reputation and increased stress.
- Mums and dads felt the pandemic created **health and wellbeing concerns**.

Open text responses

“I feel less connected to the wider department and University and so feel as though I am being left out of larger decisions.”

“I can't always maintain same output as rest of the team that don't have childcare or any caring responsibilities - therefore lost opportunity to be involved in interesting projects/tasks which could have furthered my career potential.”

“[I am].. unable to apply for a role that required full time commitment that I cannot take at the moment due to childcare changes during the pandemic.”

“I cannot participate in job shadowing, unable to commit to joining working groups, etc, due to childcare taking over my day.”



“[This has affected] my confidence and professional reputation, people punch down when they are stressed, everyone is stressed and I sit at the bottom.”

Researcher reflection



“It was interesting to see that the issues we have been trying to address before the pandemic have not changed. The pandemic only grows those issues. Technology has been around for a long time but never used to the full extent. Suddenly we are all able to attend conferences across the globe, something that was seen as lack of opportunity in the past. Nevertheless, those events are still seen as lack of opportunities due to the ongoing childcare responsibilities. Organisations have not done anything for their employees to feel included and they translate ‘flexible working’ as ‘it’s ok you do not need to attend all meetings’.”

Dr Ismini Vasileiou, Associate Head for Teaching and Learning,
Associate Professor and Subject Lead in Information Systems, De Montfort University

07 **Discussion and recommendations**

Ideas for action

Discussion

- Bringing together the data from the self-identifying women (mums) and self-identifying men (dads) in our survey, we learn that the **unpaid labour of childcare, household and caring continues to be predominantly in the domain of women**. This is the picture the world over, including in our sector, and has been exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent nationwide lockdown and school closures between March and June 2020.
- It is very hopeful that our data also shows **self-identifying men (dads) and parenting partners of mums responded supportively with childcare duties**. However, despite the inability to outsource help with domestic tasks and them increasing due to more time/people at home, **women continue to be primarily responsible for the upkeep of the household**.
- For those in our study, the **unpaid labour burden significantly affected the ability to do one's job**. Participants in our survey were also overwhelmingly concerned about the negative impact of the pandemic on their careers in the next six to twenty four months.
- The **negative impact to wellbeing** has been well documented as an overarching symptom of the first lockdown, and is not unique to our sector. The unpaid labour burden has created additional pressures and **concerns over how further localised lockdowns may affect childcare, household and caring infrastructure and support networks** for working mums and dads.

Recommendations

Ideas for action in Higher Education Institutions

- **Collect data** on parents and carers in your organisations – use this to inform policy, decision making and create effective support interventions. **Encourage men** with caring responsibilities to work flexibly.
- **Educate your managers and leadership** on how COVID-19 impacts different groups of staff.
- Create **clear guidance** on effective working from home arrangements. This should include how to maintain wellbeing, how to re-prioritise workloads, how to communicate with colleagues and continue to be part of decision making.
- Ask **line-managers to maintain an open dialogue** with their staff, provide the opportunity to request help, re-prioritise workloads or re-think professional development and career growth opportunities. Do not exclude those with caring responsibilities in order to ‘help’.
- Consider short- and medium- term **changes to promotion and appraisal processes** to account for impact on objectives and likely wellbeing issues. Re-consider deadlines, broaden success criteria and focus on output as opposed to ‘working hours’.
- Openly **communicate about wellbeing resources** in your organisation, encourage honest sharing of challenges and foster a community of support. Seek **senior ambassadorship** as advocates to normalise parental struggles and to **prioritise compassion** as a value.

Recommendations

Ideas for action for individuals

Whilst we recognise that individual circumstances can vary greatly, the learnings from the mums and dads in our sizeable sample raise a few potentially helpful suggestions for any future lockdown scenario:

- **At work**

- Talk with your line manager about your circumstances, challenges and concerns. If they are not equipped to do so, consider sharing these concerns with a colleague in your team or an ally/ sponsor/ mentor who might be – but do seek support.
- Be proactive and honest about your availability and whether deadlines are realistic.
- Keep a task list of all you are doing weekly, then reflect on it monthly. Seeing progress and accomplishment can prove a great motivator when you're feeling less confident.
- Engage with work-provided support systems (counselling, chaplaincy, colleague groups, etc.)

- **At home**

- Talk with your partner about the division of household, caring and childcare duties. Take steps in the areas where you feel there would be most beneficial impact, before it needs to happen. Alternate mornings and afternoons, take turns with children, chores and other duties, and ensure a chunk of daily quiet, protected working time for each in a dedicated work zone with limited interruptions.
- Prioritise your mental and physical wellbeing, and allow yourself to take care of yourself.

'Sharing the Caring' Research Team

- Principal investigator Ivana Vasic, WHEN Head of Research
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- Survey design Ivana Vasic, Clare Matysova, Suzie Bullock, Dr Ismini Vasileiou
- Survey insights Dr Ana de Sousa e Faro, Clare Matysova, Ivana Vasic,
Dr Jenna Townend, Dr Evangeline Tsao, Dr Ismini Vasileiou
- Review and
recommendations Dr Emily Porth, Adele MacKinlay, Dr Ismini Vasileiou, Dr Jenna Townend, Deborah Sloan,
Dr Homeria Shayesteh, Mahjabeen Miah, Dr Evangeline Tsao, Ivana Vasic
- Report writing, design
and production Ivana Vasic, Dr Ana de Sousa e Faro

About WHEN – the Women’s Higher Education Network

WHEN values are INCLUSION, RESPECT, COLLABORATION AND ACTION. We aim to unite women to harness wisdom and experiences by facilitating opportunities to enable meaningful connections for all who identify as women, and help progress gender parity in UK Higher Education. We want our members to connect, be part of the conversation, undertake professional development opportunities through our courses, attend our conference and be inspired, be mentored and mentor others, read and write for The Edit, all whilst being their true selves. Over the past year, WHEN has significantly grown its network and membership and if you are interested in becoming a member please visit <https://www.whenequality.org/network>.

WHEN always welcomes volunteers, and we have a number of teams actively driving our activities: Development, Communications and Engagement, Research, Partnerships, Operations (including Events) and Membership. If you are interested in joining one of WHEN’s teams, please contact team@whenequality.org.

About the WHEN Research Group

The WHEN Research Group was established in February 2020, and this survey was our first project. The group’s intention is to align with WHEN aims of supporting gender parity through targeted research that brings insight and value. We believe that there is a lot of research out there, and we do not wish to simply add to the reading list – what we want to do is effect change. There is a core value of activism to our activity, and we want our research to be accompanied with do-able solutions and recommendations.

Research projects are dependent on strategic drivers, member needs and volunteer interests, strengths, capabilities and passions. We operate on a rolling project basis; concurrently working as small teams on two to three key projects at a time. Commitment is dependent on capacity, and a core value of our group is to ‘lift each other up’. This means that the work of group members (a collection of very able, passionate but busy self-identifying women in Higher Education professional services, teaching and research) should not be burden or obstacle to career progression but help to enhance it, provide opportunities for expanding knowledge and stimulating the change we seek.

If you are interested in joining the Research Group, please email research@whenequality.org.

If not now, WHEN?