

Women 'put careers on hold' to home school during UK Covid-19 lockdown ^[1]

New research from UCL reveals impact of coronavirus pandemic on parenting, work and finances across four generations

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Women spent more than twice as much time as men on their children's home schooling and development during the UK's coronavirus lockdown, according to the first academic study to measure how parents responded while schools and nurseries were closed to most families.

The surveys conducted by researchers at University College London (UCL) found that women across several age groups bore the brunt of childcare and home schooling, while those with primary school-aged children "were considerably more likely" to have given up working than fathers with children of the same age.

"As the coronavirus pandemic closed schools and nurseries across the UK, it was mothers, especially those of young children, who were most likely to have stopped work, and to have stepped in to provide educational support for their children," the researchers at UCL's Centre for Longitudinal Studies said.

Among parents of primary school-aged children, mothers spent on average five hours each day on home schooling, while fathers spent just two hours each day. Women were also spending more than three hours a day on developmental activities – such as doing puzzles, reading or playing games – compared with just under two hours a day for fathers.

Emla Fitzsimons, co-author of the research and a professor at UCL's Institute of Education, said: "Many mothers who have put their careers on hold to provide educational support for their children will need to adjust again once schools reopen and the furlough scheme tapers off.

"And with educational inequalities between advantaged and disadvantaged children potentially growing during this period, policymakers and practitioners will have to be vigilant to ensure that those who have suffered the most learning losses are well supported when schools return."

The parents who were most likely to spend the longest amounts of time on home schooling were those with higher levels of education and those who stopped working. Some 63% of graduate parents said they were home schooling their primary school-age children, compared to 49% of parents with lower levels of education.

Parents who continued to work through the lockdown spent 1.2 fewer hours on home schooling per day compared to parents who were not working.

The researchers also found that the average hours in paid work across all age groups decreased by around 40%, including those who had stopped working completely and those who had reduced working hours. For those aged 30, average hours worked dropped from 34 to 22.

Across all groups, nearly 30% reported being financially worse off since the start of the pandemic. However, the short-term financial effects were not uniform: the financial position of some people improved because of forced lower spending on costs such as childcare and commuting.

More than 60% of men aged 19 stopped working completely during the lockdown, compared with 33% of those aged 30. But there was a split between those who said they had become worse off and those who hadn't, because many were students who moved back in with their parents, potentially cutting their rent and other bills.

The research contacted more than 18,000 people who have taken part in UCL's longitudinal studies since their childhood, to analyse the impact on work, finances and parenting among the four generations born in 1958, 1970, 1989-90, and 2000-02.

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