

The 'impossible' juggle: Parents spent 14 hours a week on home learning ^[1]

Author: Baker, Jordan

Source: The Sydney Herald

Format: Article

Publication Date: 13 Oct 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online

EXCERPTS

Working parents have devoted the equivalent of two working days a week to helping their child with remote learning during lockdown, and almost nine out of 10 have found the experience stressful.

As schools prepare to reopen, parents say the stress of caring for children around the clock over 14 weeks of isolation has gone beyond the work-school juggle, and involved everything from helping their children grapple with big emotions to keeping up with their appetites.

Researchers at Macquarie University asked 200 parents from more than 140 Australian schools to tally how much time they spent with one of their children during remote learning as part of a study of "the most significant educational event in the past decade".

They found respondents spent 10.7 hours per week home-schooling that child, and one or more other adults spent an average of 3.4 hours with the same child. The tally did not count the time they spent helping their other children.

"That 14.1 hours of time that was added to parents' and carers' workload is a huge drain from national productivity," said one of researchers, Professor Matt Bower.

Some 84 per cent of respondents agreed that schooling at home was stressful for them, and 79 per cent said it was difficult for their child. The younger the child, the more stress their parents experienced and the less their parents felt the student learned.

The work-school juggle was the greatest source of stress for parents (34 per cent), but that was followed by the pressures of social isolation (27 per cent) and their child's lack of engagement and motivation to do their lessons (19 per cent).

Children spent an average of 4.3 hours a day on schooling activities, with an average of 43 minutes of that on live calls – such as Zoom – with their teachers, although there was significant variation, with 12 per cent having no live interaction at all.

The executive director of family advocacy group The Parenthood, Georgie Dent, said working parents of school-aged children had been asked to do "the impossible", and there would be no "freedom day" for them until their children were safely back at school.

"It's not just the actual schooling but all the additional domestic work that goes with having kids at home 24/7," she said. "Every meal, every snack, the physical space, as well as time, and that's not going to change until kids go back to school."

Parents have also been tending to the emotional needs of their children. "Every parent I've spoken to during lockdown, at different points there's been one child that's had a difficult time. Managing that is incredibly difficult – it's draining, it's emotionally charged," said Ms Dent.

"When you've got this relentless cycle, without the break of school and sport, it's a huge burden on parents and children. Every working parent I know is exhausted. I'm supposed to feel elated [by the lifting of restrictions] but I feel tired."

Dee Mills, who has sons in kindergarten and year 3 at Maroubra Bay Public School, said she worried less about her boys' academic development during this year's lockdown than she did last year, when she began schooling them at 7am so she could do her own work from 11am.

"I did as little as I could, I knew I could not sustain this for months," said Ms Mills, who runs her own business. "For my kindy [child], we had to do a bit of back up. But we're busy, we've got work to do."

The more difficult task has been managing the boys' noise and needs as they bounce around the house playing with Nerf guns while she is trying to work. "They're not allowed to put on screens until 3pm," said Ms Mills. "Until that time, there's lots of yelling – 'you're too noisy, go outside and play'. It's still having to direct that play."

She also admits that occasionally she has been so consumed by work that she's forgotten to feed them.

"I was actually in a Zoom meeting, [and] the boys stuck a note through the office door, saying 'when lunch?'"

The respondents to the Macquarie University study also said there had been silver linings to lockdown; some families have enjoyed the flexibility, the family bonding, and the lack of travel time.

Ms Mills found that too. "They play awesomely together. My eight- now nine-year-old can make his own breakfast, he can fry eggs," she said. "There's been a lot more learning how to live closely together; they would not have had that before."

The next phase of Macquarie University's study will involve the experiences of teachers and students. Researchers are still interested in feedback from parents.

Region: Australia and New Zealand [2]

Tags: parental involvement [3]

COVID-19 [4]

gender [5]

mother's labour force participation [6]

Source URL (modified on 13 Oct 2021): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/10/%E2%80%98impossible%E2%80%99-juggle-parents-spent-14-hours-week-home-learning>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/10/%E2%80%98impossible%E2%80%99-juggle-parents-spent-14-hours-week-home-learning>

[2] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/parental-involvement> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9040> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/gender> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8142>