

ONE BIG JUGGLING ACT!



**Childcare and
Homeschooling During
The First Lockdown**

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1. Introduction

Covid-19 has changed the way we live and work overnight and perhaps forever. Changes came suddenly and we found ourselves in the middle of a crisis that we couldn't do anything about other than stay home and socially distance ourselves from other people. Life as we knew it was no more; businesses and schools closed, offices were shut down, working at home became the norm for people who could, and many people were made redundant or supported by new previously unheard of schemes such as Furlough. Parts of our houses were repurposed as offices and classrooms, parents turned into teachers, school wardens, playmates, and fulltime carers.

With the closure of the schools and childcare facilities, the gender gap broadened at home and in work. Our research showed that women shouldered most of the burden of childcare and homeschooling as evidence of the gendered impact of the pandemic.¹ Women often had to balance responsibilities at home with responsibilities at work. In the meantime, governments' policies were criticised as they often overlooked increasing workload of, and pressure on women, and policies were *'repeatedly skewed towards men'*.²

In many ways, the Covid-19 outbreak showed clearly how gendered our society is and how progress towards equality over the years can be lost overnight when a crisis emerges. In planning for recovery from the pandemic, we must rebuild our economies in a fairer and more equal way.

In May and June 2020, Chwarae Teg surveyed women from across Wales about their experiences of the lockdown, and about their needs and suggestions for recovery. Over 1000 women responded to the survey, which provided us with a wealth of data about the experiences of women during the first lockdown. The first report of this survey was published in October 2020, discussing the women's experiences in the labour market under the shadow of Covid-19. This second report of the survey focuses on the impact that school closures, home schooling and childcare during the first Covid-19 lockdown which had a marked impact on women's work and home lives as they shouldered the majority of caring responsibilities. For those of us familiar with the issues women continue to face, the fact that care overwhelmingly fell to women during the crisis will come as no surprise. However, the experiences that women across Wales shared with us should provide new impetus to solving the childcare issue once and for all. If the goal is equality, inaction simply isn't an option. This paper aims to voice women's unique experiences of childcare and homeschooling during the first lockdown with their own words, and make recommendations for policy interventions in light of these experiences.

¹ [A Gendered Pandemic: Childcare, homeschooling, and parents' employment during Covid-19](#); Petts R.J., Carlson D.L., Pepin J.R. (2020), *Gender, Work and Organisation*, p.1–20.

² Comment by Women and Equalities Committee of the UK Parliament. [Covid: Support 'repeatedly skewed towards men', say MPs - BBC News](#), 09.02.2021

2. Methodology

This research paper discusses how homeschooling and childcare during the Covid-19 outbreak impacted women in Wales. The original data used in this paper is derived from Chwarae Teg's research "Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales"³ assessing the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and lockdown measures on women in Wales, and the gendered impact of the crisis, published in September 2020. Women's experiences under Covid-19 were gathered through a research survey, which elicited over a 1000 responses.

2.1. Survey demographics

The survey asked women if they had childcare responsibilities, and if so the age of the children and their opinion about childcare and homeschooling during the lockdown with open-ended questions. In total, 475 women said that they have childcare responsibilities, 381 of which commented about their experience of childcare and/or homeschooling during the first lockdown. The number of total usable responses for the childcare question is 360, and for the homeschooling question is 336. These are the respondents whose data we have used for this report. Further information about the wider demographics of survey respondents is available in the previous report, [Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales](#).

More than half of the women (55%) that responded to the childcare and homeschooling questions have children aged between 6 to 15; 36% of the respondents have children aged infant to 5 years old and 9% of the respondents have children over 16 years old but under 18 years old. The age of the children matters in the formation of women's experiences; therefore, we have tried to analyse the responses by taking the differences into consideration where possible. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey covering the period of April to June 2020, parents whose only or eldest child was aged 5 to 10 years were significantly more likely to say a child in their home had been homeschooled at 96%, compared with 89% of parents where their eldest child was aged 11 to 15 years and 65% of parents where their eldest child was aged 16 to 18 years.⁴

³ Chwarae Teg, [Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales](#); Paterson, L., October 2020. For the full discussion of the methodology of the research, see pages 5-9.

⁴ Coronavirus and homeschooling in Great Britain: April to June 2020. Release date 22.07.2020. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/coronavirusandhomeschoolinggreatbritain/apriltojune2020>

3. A Gendered Pandemic

3.1. *Why is the pandemic gendered?*

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, we have seen the same groups hit hardest again. Women, people of colour, disabled people, young people and those living on low incomes, have all been disproportionately affected by both the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. Current economic and social policy approaches have failed to address the inequalities that these groups were experiencing before the pandemic and Covid-19 and have demonstrated a collective failure to address the root causes of inequality.

A year into the pandemic, we are beginning to understand the impact that it is having and it is clear that while their experiences are not homogenous, women have been disproportionately impacted:

- Women are 5% more likely to have lost their jobs due to Covid-19 than men⁵,
- 40% of all women in employment in Wales are critical (key) workers, compared to 28% of men⁶
- 98% of low-paid workers in sectors with high risk of exposure to Covid-19 are women⁷. In Wales, women and those from a minority ethnic background are more likely to be employed within occupations that have the highest risk.⁸
- There were more women (55%) than men (44%) working in industries told to close. That equates to 18% of all female employees in Wales compared to 14% of all male employees.⁹

⁵ Fawcett Society, [Exiting Lockdown: The Impact on Women](#); May 2020.

⁶ Coronavirus and employment: analysis of protected characteristics; Welsh Government Statistics, 19.06.2020. [Coronavirus and employment: analysis of protected characteristics | GOV.WALES](#)

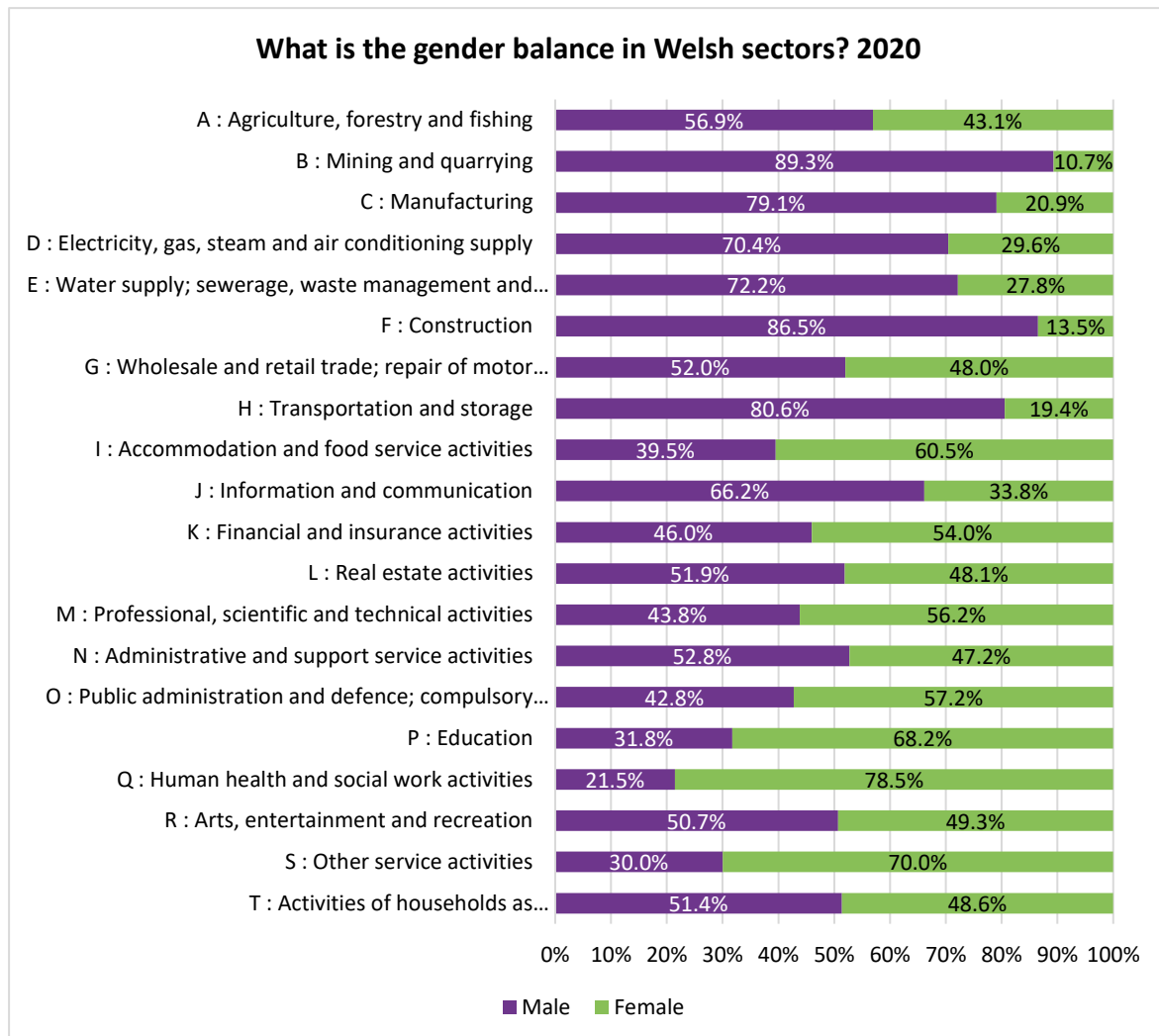
⁷ Women's Budget Group, [Low paid women at highest risk of exposure to Covid-19](#), March 2020.

⁸ Coronavirus and employment: analysis of protected characteristics; Welsh Government Statistics, 19.06.2020. [Coronavirus and employment: analysis of protected characteristics | GOV.WALES](#)

⁹ *ibid.*

Women in Welsh Sectors

Women make up the majority of the workforce in many of the sectors seen as critical in responding to the pandemic. Women are also at the forefront of sectors affected by lockdowns.



Source: Annual Population Survey, July 2019-June 2020

The crisis has revealed our dependence on women's unpaid care, with women bearing the brunt of additional childcare and homeschooling throughout. This has heavily impacted their paid work and could have long term implications for their employment, career progression, pay and pensions.

- A recent poll shows that mothers are almost four times more likely than fathers to be the main caregiver in Wales (63% compared to 17%).¹⁰

¹⁰ WEN Wales, , [Mothers in Wales on the lowest incomes are five times more at risk of losing their job due to school closures](#). 8 Jan 2021

- During the first weeks of lockdown (28 March to 26 April 2020) women were carrying out two-thirds more of the childcare duties per day than men (198 min compare to 120 min), according to ONS figures. Women carried out at least 53 minutes of non-developmental care (e.g. washing, feeding, dressing) per day whereas men contributed 30 min. The time spent by men and women on developmental care (e.g. homeschooling , exercise, reading) is more balanced, with women delivering 72 min and men delivering 63 min per day.¹¹
- In households with a child aged under 5 years, women did on average 78% more childcare than men.¹²
- Mothers were doing 35% of the number of uninterrupted work hours the average father did.¹³
- 72% of working mothers have worked fewer hours and cut their earnings due to a lack of childcare.¹⁴
- Single parents, 86% of which are women,¹⁵ hit hard during Covid-19 pandemic. Being twice as likely as coupled households to live in poverty¹⁶ and more likely than coupled households to be in a low paying, insecure jobs including on a zero or a low hours contract before the pandemic, the vulnerability of single parents increased with the Covid-19 crisis. Nearly half (46%) of single parents worked in routine occupations in retail, hotels and restaurants which have been particularly impacted by the pandemic.¹⁷ For the ones who managed to retain their job during the first lockdown, working at home was less pronounced (21%) than coupled parents (38%).¹⁸ 51% of single parents reported having depression, bad nerves or anxiety – compared with 27% of coupled parents.¹⁹
- The ONS found that gender is one of the characteristics associated with higher levels of depression during the pandemic. Almost a quarter of women (23.3%) experienced moderate to severe depressive symptoms during this time. This compared with one in eight (11.9%) before the pandemic.²⁰

¹¹ [Parenting in lockdown: Coronavirus and the effects on work-life balance](#), ONS OPN Survey, release date: 22.07.2020

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Institute for Fiscal Studies, [How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown?](#), Andrew A., Cattan S. et al., May 2020.

¹⁴ Women's Budget Group, [Childcare, Gender and Covid-19](#), November 2020.

¹⁵ [Families and households in the UK: 2019, ONS](#)

¹⁶ Chwarae Teg, [State of the Nation 2021](#).

¹⁷ Gingerbread, [Caring without sharing: Single parents' journeys through the Covid-19 Crisis – Interim Report](#); November 2020.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ [Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: June 2020](#). ONS August 2020.

- Lockdown has impacted maternal experiences, resulting in distress for many women. New mothers experienced major disruptions to care and support, including reduced in person access to postnatal health services such as health visitor appointments, breastfeeding counselling and baby weigh-in clinics.²¹ They were also unable to access social support from family and friends. Even though these measures were essential, their impact on women's and babies health received less attention. Research conducted with new mothers during the first lockdown showed that new mothers experienced worryingly high rates of depression (43%) and anxiety (61%) during the first lockdown, yet they did not have formal diagnosis.²² Usual rates of depression and anxiety after birth in the UK are around 15%.
- Women aged 16 to 39 years old unable to afford an unexpected expense, were among the most likely to experience some form of depression during the pandemic.²³

Despite women being severely impacted by the pandemic, the UK Parliament Women and Equalities Committee report found that policies, particularly those designed by the UK Government were 'repeatedly skewed towards men'²⁴. The chair of the committee Caroline Nokes stressed that there is a "*very blokey mentality at the top*" of government, which had suffered from "*the predominance of single-sex education round the cabinet table*" and argued that the opinions of the women cabinet members were not taken into consideration in debates and decisions.²⁵ As discussed below, the key policies of the Covid-19 era, such as Furlough, were not designed in a way that met the needs of women and other disproportionately affected groups, such as people of colour, disabled people and low income households.

3.2. Furlough, self-employment support scheme, flexible working and women workforce

3.2.1. Furlough scheme

The **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)**, aka furlough scheme²⁶, supports individuals who have been affected by Covid-19 to retain their employees and protect the UK

²¹ [New mothers face hidden mental health crisis in lockdown, UK study finds.](#) World Economic Forum; 22.02.2021.

²² Ibid. and Fallon, V. et al. (2021), [Psychosocial experiences of postnatal women during the COVID-19 pandemic. A UK-wide study of prevalence rates and risk factors for clinically relevant depression and anxiety.](#) Journal of Psychiatric Research; Volume 136, Pages 157-166.

²³ [Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: June 2020.](#) ONS August 2020.

²⁴ Covid: Support 'repeatedly skewed towards men', say MPs; BBC News, 09.02.2021 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-55978335>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Coronavirus: Wages, sick pay and time off explained. BBC News, 29.05.2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-51628524>

economy. Furlough was first introduced in the first lockdown to protect the employees severely affected from the lockdown, it funds up to 80% of their wages, up to £2,500 a month per employee. The Furlough scheme was initially designed to support people unable to work due to lockdown restrictions and associated workplace closures; but it was later extended to parents with childcare and homeschooling responsibilities and to people with other caring responsibilities.²⁷ During the first lockdown, parents were nearly twice as likely to be furloughed (13.6%) as those without children (7.2%).²⁸

As of 1 July 2020, employers were able to furlough staff on part-time basis and bring their employees back to work for any amount of time and any shift pattern, claiming the CJRS grant for normal hours not worked, a move which was welcomed by many parents. The first lockdown put an immense pressure on parents, particularly on women, and work-life balance was one of the concerns that women raised.²⁹ Some of our research participants mentioned that they were thinking about returning to work part-time due to the increasing caring responsibilities at home; but, they were concerned about the impact that this would have on their household income.³⁰ The extension made to the furlough scheme covering the part-time employees was, therefore, a welcome decision. Technically, employers were able to furlough any employees, workers, agency workers, those on zero-hours contracts and apprentices, whether they work full time or part time.³¹

As of 31 January 2021, 92,500 women (14% of eligible women workforce) and 85,400 men (13% of eligible men workforce) in Wales were furloughed under the CJRS accounting for 52% and 48% of all furloughed employments, respectively.³² There are differences observed in the time series of the furlough scheme: July 2020 data shows that the take-up rate of furlough scheme for women was 27%, whereas it was 32% for men in the UK³³; by January 2021, the take up rate for both men and women was 15%.³⁴

The lower take-up rate for women in the first lockdown was likely due to the fact that when the furlough scheme was first introduced, it was not designed to support employees with their caring responsibilities. The policy had not been designed to cater for the consequences of school and childcare facility closures. Some of our research participants mentioned that they had asked to be furloughed to help to deal with childcare pressures but

²⁷ Covid: Can I go on furlough and how much will I be paid? BBC News, 04.01.2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-52135342>

²⁸ [Parenting in lockdown: Coronavirus and the effects on work-life balance](#), ONS OPN Survey, release date: 22.07.2020

²⁹ Chwarae Teg, [Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales](#); Paterson, L., October 2020.

³⁰ Ibid. page 14.

³¹ [Furlough and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#). ACAS, 17.02.2021.

³² [HMRC coronavirus \(COVID-19\) statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

³³ [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme statistics: July 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). Data is not broken down to region and gender in this data set, hence we compare the timeseries in the UK level.

³⁴ [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme statistics: February 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

had been turned down by their employer. In response, some women reported that they were staying at home with their children or taking unpaid parental leave to manage the situation, as well as using annual leave allowances to do unpaid caring work.³⁵

TUC research carried out in January 2021 found that 7 in 10 (71%) requests for furlough by working mothers were turned down.³⁶ 3,100 working mums had requested furlough, of those, around 2,200 (71%) had their request rejected. Over 50,000 working mothers participated the survey, 78% of whom said that they hadn't been offered furlough by their employer. In addition, 2 in 5 (40%) of all mums who replied were unaware that the furlough scheme was available to parents affected by school and nursery closures.³⁷ The TUC argued that with an unreliable furlough scheme, with no system of paid parental leave and a lack of flexible work for much of the workforce, mothers were left in an impossible situation, at risk of losing their jobs or facing a catastrophic loss of income. 25% of mothers who responded to the TUC survey were using annual leave to manage their childcare – 18% of them had been forced to reduce their working hours and 7% were taking unpaid leave from work and receiving no income.³⁸

In the sample group of Chwarae Teg's research, 7.2% of women were furloughed; of those, 34.2% had a negative or very negative experience compare to 26.4% who have had a positive or very positive experience.³⁹

Our research highlights that how women perceive furlough in line with their experiences and understanding of their unequal position in the labour market. For the women who had a negative experience of furlough, the sense of losing work, the uncertainty about the future of their work and overwhelming caring responsibilities were critical factors. Qualitative evidence from our research shows that being out of work, and for many, being a full-time carer or becoming a 'stay-at-home mum', increased women's worries and concerns around career progression and visibility in the workplace. For this reason, some women were reluctant to accept furlough in order to avoid the risk of being made redundant and unemployed in the long term.⁴⁰

Our research shows that there is a need to create opportunities for women to support their identity beyond motherhood to avoid the long-term emotional impacts on women's self-confidence and identity. Yet, it is questionable as to whether this has been taken into

³⁵ Chwarae Teg, [Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales](#); Paterson, L., October 2020.

³⁶ [Working mums: Paying the price | TUC](#) and [TUC poll: 7 in 10 requests for furlough turned down for working mums | TUC](#) 14.01.2021. TUC ran a self-report internet survey in partnership with Mother Pukka 7-10 January 2021. There were 55,630 respondents. Participants were self-selecting and overwhelmingly female (93 per cent).

³⁷ [TUC poll: 7 in 10 requests for furlough turned down for working mums | TUC](#)

³⁸ [Working mums: Paying the price | TUC](#)

³⁹ Chwarae Teg, [Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales](#); Paterson, L., October 2020. p. 16

⁴⁰ Ibid. P.17-19

account by policy makers, given that many policies designed to manage the pandemic don't have equality assessments.⁴¹

Nevertheless, overall, furlough was a welcome intervention for many women. Where women were not able to be furloughed, there was clear tension between the demands of paid and unpaid labour.

3.2.2. Self-employed support scheme

Self-employed people were hit particularly hard during Covid-19. In March 2020, UK Government launched the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) to help businesses shut down during lockdowns. Women make up 30% of those eligible for SEISS in Wales. In September 2020, the take up rate for these women was 62%, lower than that for men at 68%. The average grant value was also higher for men at £2,500 compared to women at £1,900. In Wales 28% of all claims were made by women.⁴²

Self-employed women had shouldered much of the childcare and homeschooling during the lockdowns.

“My partner has continued to work throughout and is away from home, from 6am to 6pm so day to day care has been my sole responsibility. My partner has not attempted homeschooling once - and from speaking to others, it seems that women have taken on this role disproportionately. I have continued to do some work throughout - although not at set hours which has both advantages and disadvantages in terms of childcare and having structure to the day - and have also spent a large portion of time trying to secure future work. It is very hard to plan into the future work-wise when not knowing what arrangement for schools will be. As a freelancer in media, there is no support or consideration from the companies for which you work in terms of accommodating home life - in truth, they will just find someone younger without children to take up a position instead of you if they feel that you can't be as available as they need.”

“My little boy doesn't see his Dad; so, I have been tackling everything on my own. Obviously childcare was a no no as you couldn't go to other households. In the last few weeks my parents have helped share the burden while I try get back to some freelance marketing work as my clients are planning to open back up.”

“[Homeschooling] had a huge impact on my ability to focus and look for new business. 90% of childcare has fallen to myself as my work dropped off due to

⁴¹ [Covid: Support 'repeatedly skewed towards men', say MPs - BBC News](#), 09.02.2021

⁴² [Self-Employment Income Support Scheme statistics: October 2020](#) | Gov.UK

lockdown. Access to grandparents' help, and schools reopening, would help tremendously."

3.2.3. Flexible working

The Covid-19 crisis led to working patterns changing overnight. Remote working suddenly became the norm for many people. UK data suggests that while just 5% of workers worked from home prior to March 2020, this increased to approximately 43% at the beginning of lockdown.⁴³

It's important to understand however that, 'working **at** home' during the Covid-19 crisis is very different to 'working **from** home' in normal times which would have been requested, arranged and managed according to workplace guidelines and policies. As one of the research participants said:

"There are some real benefits of home working (flexibility of hours, no interruptions, no commute); but, this isn't normal home working!"

Many women's experiences of home working have been affected by the increasing responsibilities around caring and homeschooling. The ONS Opinion and Life Style survey found that during the first weeks of lockdown (28 March to 26 April 2020), in households with children aged under 18 years, women were delivering an average of 3 hours and 18 minutes of childcare, which included time spent supervising children, while men contributed 2 hours.⁴⁴ But when it came to paid work, men contributed an average of more than 45 minutes more per day than women, amounting to 2 hours and 56 minutes, compared with 2 hours and 9 minutes.⁴⁵ For women, working at home and caring for children making life one big juggling act.

"Juggling..."

'Juggling' can be one of the key terms used to explain the experience of women in lockdown. 40% of the respondents to Chwarae Teg's survey mentioned that lockdown life became a big juggling act.

"One big juggling act! My children will always come first but my income is important and I need to deliver on my work - my husband is not at home during the day so it is sometimes tough to keep everything going and everyone happy on my own. Some kind of childcare - even for a few hours a day would change everything for the better."

⁴³ Felstead and Reuschke, (2020) Homeworking in the UK: Before and during the 2020 lockdown. Cited by Carter I and Johnson C (2021) Remote Working, WCPP. [Remote-working-.pdf \(wcpp.org.uk\)](#)

⁴⁴ [Parenting in lockdown: Coronavirus and the effects on work-life balance](#), ONS OPN Survey, release date: 22.07.2020

⁴⁵ Ibid.

"Incredibly difficult. Can't believe so little is discussed about this aspect. Juggling both puts huge pressure on us all. If I'm working I'm worried kids aren't stimulated. If I'm with kids, I'm worried about work. Mixing the two personas messed with my head."

"My hours have remained the same but I am now caring for children also. My partner is a key worker; so, he is still working full time, so, I am at home a lot on my own working and juggling childcare which is difficult."

"Homeschooling whilst working from home is difficult. The juggling of ensuring work is completed alongside other requirements set by the workplace."

"Challenging juggling work pressures, due to more work load dealing with comms around Covid-19 balanced with engaging youngsters in school and college work, at a very very busy period on the farm (lambing, shearing, baling)."

"My husband is a teacher but still has work to do from home. He has taken on the majority of home schooling for our 7 year old but it is hard to juggle and take it in turns to work and look after children 5 days a week."

"It's a juggle - the guilt of trying to do the best to educate my children from home whilst working is tremendous."

"As a single parent, juggling work with parenting and education has been challenging and feel I haven't done a particularly good job of any of them. Just mustering through the best we can."

Working from home was felt to have both negative and positive aspects. While 47% of our research participants felt either positive or very positive about working from home, 25.5% of the participants had a negative experience.⁴⁶ The most notable challenges were for women managing home working with childcare and home schooling. Lack of suitable working environment and crowded spaces were also mentioned as challenging factors regarding home working. Parents appear to have been fitting their work around their childcare obligations, and they were more likely to work in the morning and at night. A large proportion of homeschooling has been delivered in the afternoon, roughly between 3pm and 6pm.⁴⁷

For some women, as it became more and more difficult to separate work and parenting, work-life balance evaporated. Some respondents explained that they were working too

⁴⁶ Chwarae Teg, [Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales](#); Paterson, L., October 2020. p.33-34

⁴⁷ [Parenting in lockdown: Coronavirus and the effects on work-life balance](#), ONS OPN Survey, release date: 22.07.2020

many hours, not taking enough breaks, and working extra hours to accommodate childcare. Women have been working early morning, late nights, and weekends to get their work done around childcare. Overwork was a clear theme that emerged, stemming from increased workload, childcare, and the challenges of 'living at work' as some respondents described working from home during lockdown.

Overall, even though homeworking has some positive sides and advantages, for women who have childcare and homeschooling responsibilities, working from home has not been an easy process, as they felt overwhelmed, not only because of the increasing responsibilities at home and workload, but also because of the expectations by their employers and colleagues.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Chwarae Teg, [Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales](#); Paterson , L., October 2020. p. 40.

4. Parenting and homeschooling in Covid-19 crisis

In mid March 2020, all four nations of the UK announced that all nurseries, schools and higher education institutions would be shut down in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴⁹ For many families, the start of homeschooling coincided with them starting to work at home. Schools and childcare facilities were only kept open for the children of key workers and for vulnerable children, and there has been significant variation by local authority area around definition of key worker.

In Wales, schools and childcare facilities reopened on 29 June 2020. Unfortunately, by October, cases rapidly surged and partial closures, restrictions of different levels and self-isolation measures failed to prevent the surge. Wales entered a two-week, so called 'fire-break' lockdown on 21st October, 2020, which included the half-term holiday.⁵⁰ Yet, these efforts failed to prevent the rise of cases and death rates, and a third lockdown for Wales was announced just before Christmas. Schools had already been closed a week earlier than the Christmas break, but nurseries remained open. Students started to go back to school gradually late February 2021 with a full reopening of schools from 12th April 2021.

Adopting and adapting to remote, online learning was not an easy process although policies were targeted at continuity of learning. Students were encouraged to keep on studying at home with many parents becoming responsible for their children's education with limited resources.⁵¹ Online learning infrastructure, one-to-one education, and a standard approach to lockdown education couldn't be adopted by many schools and educators in the beginning of the homeschooling era. Although different learning hubs developed by governments and public and third sector organisations emerged gradually, many parents, children and teachers had a variety of difficulties in establishing a system of distanced learning.

During the first lockdown, the online learning infrastructure was not sufficient and the guidance by the Welsh Government and schools was to take a relaxed approach. "Stay Safe and Stay Learning" was the main approach, which advised parents to keep children active and learning, and take advice from teachers and schools. Over time, the online learning infrastructure and access to resources have improved even though some problems are still prevalent.

⁴⁹ By the time this article is written, there have been 4,126,150 confirmed cases and 129,498 deaths in the UK the world's fourth highest death rate per hundred thousand population, and the highest number overall in Europe. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/> Access: 23.02.2021.

⁵⁰ Wales to enter second national lockdown on Friday, as First Minister announces 17-day Covid circuit-breaker. ITV News, 20.10.2020. <https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2020-10-19/wales-to-enter-second-national-lockdown-on-friday>

⁵¹ [Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in the United Kingdom | en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_of_the_COVID-19_pandemic_on_education_in_the_United_Kingdom)

In the UK, 87% of parents between 7 May and 7 June 2020, and 90% of parents between 13 January – 7 February 2021 said at least one child had been homeschooled, with 52% of men and 67% of women with a school-aged child saying they had personally homeschooled in the second school closures.⁵²

Childcare and homeschooling during lockdowns have had a disproportionate impact on women. As mentioned earlier, women carry a much greater proportion of developmental and non-developmental childcare responsibilities than men. It is clear that this has had a very real, and negative, economic impact on women:

- In the second lockdown, 37% of all homeschooling parents said that their job was negatively affected by homeschooling. And 47% of those in employment still said that their job was negatively affected, which is a 17% increase from April 2020.⁵³
- 46% of mothers being made redundant blamed a lack of childcare provision during the Covid-19 pandemic. 74% of self-employed mothers had their earnings reduced due to the lack of childcare.⁵⁴
- 72% of mothers have had to work fewer hours because of childcare issues.⁵⁵
- Mothers on the lowest incomes were nine times more at risk of losing their job due to school closures in the UK. Overall, 4% of parents report being at risk of losing their job if schools close and no additional support is in place for childcare.⁵⁶
- Twice as many mothers than fathers report they would have to take time off with no pay due to school closures or to look after a sick child (15% of mothers compared to 8% of fathers).⁵⁷
- 81% of mothers require formal childcare to go to work, yet in July 2020 when the schools were reopened, only half had access to childcare services such as nursery, out of school clubs and playgroups. 33% of employed mums had lost a childcare place since March, rising to 48% for self-employed mothers.⁵⁸

⁵² [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/coronavirus/articles/socialimpacts)

ONS OPL survey, release date: 19.02.2021

⁵³ ONS OPL Survey; [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 19 February 2021](https://www.ons.gov.uk/coronavirus/articles/socialimpacts), Release date: 19.02.2021

⁵⁴ Pregnant Then Screwed, [The true scale of the crisis facing working mums](https://www.pregnantthenscrewed.com/news/the-true-scale-of-the-crisis-facing-working-mums)

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ [Mothers on the lowest incomes are eight times more at risk of losing their job due to school closures in the UK](https://www.womensbudgetgroup.org.uk/news/mothers-on-the-lowest-incomes-are-eight-times-more-at-risk-of-losing-their-job-due-to-school-closures-in-the-uk); Women's Budget Group, January 2021.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Pregnant Then Screwed, [The true scale of the crisis facing working mums](https://www.pregnantthenscrewed.com/news/the-true-scale-of-the-crisis-facing-working-mums)

- 45% of mothers said they didn't have access to help from their support network; 35% said they couldn't get places at afterschool clubs; 28% lost access to school breakfast clubs; 28% did not have their usual nursery or childminder available.⁵⁹

Teachers and other school and nursery staff members

Another element of the impact that the pandemic has had on women is the experiences of teachers and nursery staff members. Women make up the 68% of the education workforce.⁶⁰ These women have also been juggling work and family life, childcare and homeschooling of their own children during lockdowns, while other parents and school children have been relying on them.

Our research does not specifically address the experiences of teachers, but we would like to emphasise the experience of teachers as a part of the discussion.

Research by education insight company EdComs found that 69% of primary teachers and 62% of secondary teachers were still dividing their time in the first lockdown between home and school.⁶¹ Meanwhile, their students (and their parents) based at home were also in contact with them. Teachers were also playing a key role at the frontline working with vulnerable students, delivering food parcels, vouchers, and stationery supplies. Research exploring the priorities of primary school teachers during the first lockdown found that particularly headteachers and senior teachers undertook a huge amount of responsibility for safeguarding and welfare, delivering hard copy resources, food and checking the wellbeing of parents and students on the doorstep.⁶²

Given that they also have parenting and homeschooling responsibilities of their own, teachers were often overworking during lockdowns. A primary school teacher said that she would still find herself emailing parents at 8.30pm, compared to a regular, pre-Covid working day which used to run from 8.30am to around 5pm.⁶³

⁵⁹ TUC, [2 in 5 working mums face childcare crisis when new term starts – TUC poll](#), September 2020

⁶⁰ Annual Population Survey, July 2019-June 2020.

⁶¹ ["I'm still emailing parents at 8.30pm" - a teacher's life in lockdown](#) BBC Teach. Access February 2021.

⁶² [Primary teachers' experience of the COVID-19 lockdown – Eight key messages for policymakers going forward](#); Moss, G. and Allen, R. et al. (2020). UCL Institute of Education.

⁶³ ["I'm still emailing parents at 8.30pm" - a teacher's life in lockdown](#) BBC Teach. Access February 2021.

5. Parenting and caring experience in the first lockdown

In this section, we discuss the findings of Chwarae Teg's research about women's experiences of childcare and homeschooling.

5.1. **Women carry the burden of the majority of childcare and homeschooling**

"I find, I am doing more parenting than my husband whose work is more 'important'."

"The children's dad has been working throughout the pandemic in manufacturing. I am solely responsible for the children at home at present and looking ahead both grandparents have been advised to shield. I am considering how can I be available for pick ups/drop offs. I normally use breakfast provision. Will this be available? Also used creche and uncertain when this is available. Although my place of work may be open I may not be able to return like other colleagues."

In Chwarae Teg's research almost half of the respondents (47%, 168/360) mentioned that they had been doing the majority of childcare, homeschooling and household chores during lockdown.⁶⁴

"Currently at home alone providing childcare for my 3 children. Husband still in work and trying to finish a degree. Would be helpful to receive support from parents with childcare as previously did before lockdown."

"Full time teaching with full time care of two children mainly without support as my partner has to go out to work."

"My hours have remained the same but I am now caring for children also. My partner is a key worker so he is still working full time so I am at home a lot on my own working and juggling childcare which is difficult."

"Both keyworkers, both doing full time hours but as I mostly work from home I am also doing most of childcare which is stressful and have no time to do the home schooling on top which is required so end up either feeling stressed or guilty."

⁶⁴ The ratio in our survey is lower than the findings of other research. This question was not asked directly and it derived from an open-ended question where participants commented on their general experience. Some women perceived the question asking about childcare and homeschooling as if it asked if they use any childcare provision or need childcare at that particular moment. To give some examples of such comments, some women commented to the question such as *"I run own a day nursery, business is closed but when re-opened childcare not an issue"* or *"I've been working from home, so haven't needed any support"*. The percentages derived from our research's questions, therefore, do not reflect a conclusive and general remark about the burden that women take in the lockdown. We prefer to refer to other research to give a general figure on these issues, such as ONS Opinion and Lifestyle Survey, Women's Budget Group's survey and TUC survey referenced in this paper.

“My day flies with preparing breakfast, clean/tidy, homeschooling, lunch, clean/tidy, all the house chores, learn to cut their hair (acquiring new skills I suppose), keep the garden presentable so that we can use it (we are lucky to have one after all so I'm not complaining). Mentally I've been struggling to focus on my business as my husband is out there and I have to look after the house and kids - cannot do otherwise anyway.. at least we are healthy so far.”

“My husband's work commitments have meant he has been working up to 14/16 hours a day since the outset. I am juggling parenting, home schooling, domestic chores and working. I don't begrudge it at all, but it's not easy. My husband is a very hands-on father and husband during usual times and we are a great team; his inability to share this responsibility now is not his fault and he feels as guilty being unavailable to us as we feel disappointed his experience of homelife during Covid-19 is not the same as ours.”

Even when their partners were at home with them (working at home, made redundant or furloughed), our research showed that it was the primary carer, in most cases the women in a heterosexual couple, who were shouldering most of the housework, homeschooling and caring responsibilities.

“My partner has not attempted homeschooling once - and from speaking to others, it seems that women have taken on this role disproportionately.”

“My husband and I are both working from home, I worked 4 days and my mother in law had the children one day a week that's obviously now no longer possible. they're home with us full time. I do the majority of the childcare because my husbands job is less flexible and I work in the evenings.”

“My 2 year old is hard work. His father is also working from home but he locks himself in the other room so I am in charge of potty training, putting out the washing, preparing all meals and then clearing them away, also entertaining and dealing with tantrums, all whilst working.”

“Whilst my partner and I have similar level jobs and earn the same, his work and meetings seem to have taken a priority and this causes resentment and arguments.”

“Working from home 3 days a week whilst caring for a 5 year old and 2 year old. Husband working half days in banking sector in branch and half days from home. Regardless of where husband is I am still the primary carer/homeschooler and do the majority of household chores.”

“My husband has been furloughed and it's quite apparent at this time, who carries the emotional burden of the family. I'm finding home life quite difficult as my husband hasn't adapted to doing his "fair share" since being off work.

For that reason, I've been very stressed, but it's not because of work, I guess it's unintended circumstances."

"Despite my husband having been at home for a few weeks I do find that the majority of home schooling, preparing meals, applying a structure to the day are driven by me."

"My husband is working from home yet continuously works 9-5 with virtually no interruption. Because my work is more flexible it means I am working but also homeschooling at the same time. I have found it overwhelming but am doing my best. I am part time so therefore my job is clearly less important :("

"My son's father is not active in childcare and though he has been physically present he cannot teach, or play, or be caregiver effectively. So I have had all of the emotional labour, had to continue working (until furloughed) and keep running the household."

16% (60/375) of the respondents who shared their experience in childcare and/or homeschooling are single parents. Some of the single parent mothers shared the responsibilities with the father of their children, but their usual arrangements were interrupted by the lockdown rules. In June 2020, single parents could bubble with one other household to get some help with childcare.

"Both myself and my children have been self isolating. Usually they sleep at their dad's 1 night per week, however, as he is a key worker we decided that this would stop for the duration of lock down. To work, I depend usually on my parents, however, as they are both over 70 this will not be possible. At the moment everything depends on when I'm required to return to work as to how I arrange childcare. It may be that my elder child looks after my younger one. Which isn't ideal."

"My daughter usually stays with her father every other weekend and during school holidays. This hasn't been able to occur since March, which is stressful for me and stressful for my daughter."

"I share parenting responsibilities with the boys father who lives locally. For the first 10 weeks of lockdown, they stayed full time with me as we felt this was best. However, we have now moved to a week on, week off arrangement so that they can see their dad but not move back and forth too much. It also allows me to work extra hours during the week they are at their dad's and concentrate more on them when they are here. I am very concerned that this situation will continue for many months, as I'm not sure how I can maintain the ability to work from home and educate the children to a sufficient standard."

"I share parenting with the boys' dad but they have been with me since the start of lockdown as we decide not to move them back and forth. This has been

difficult for me with work, but also a huge positive to spend time with them both that I would normally have to share. The flip side is that their dad misses them terribly and they miss him."

"No assistance. Unable to rely on family, or father of children who's using this period as an excuse not to support. I'm also caring from my 80 year old father."

"I am separated from their father however our contact arrangements have remained the same and they still spend every other weekend with their dad."

"Child has been unable to spend time with her father from whom I am separated although he is usually very much involved. This has been very difficult for my daughter; the situation also means no respite for me whatsoever!"

5.2. Shared parenting

20% (72/360) of the respondents indicated that they have been sharing childcare and homeschooling with their partners and former partners.

"If it wasn't for the fact my husband is self-employed and is not currently working, childcare would have definitely been needed!"

"Childcare not available to me as only I am a key worker, my partner is not. He has had to take some time off each week to look after the children and allow me to work."

"I am a lone parent and usually share care with my ex on a 70/30 basis. He has been furloughed and is no longer working whereas I have still got to work full time. As a result our child now spends 3.5 days with him and 3.5 days a week with me. This means trying to cram a week's worth of work into 3.5 days, and then attempt to keep up with education the rest of the time. I am utterly exhausted. As we've gone to 50/50 care, my ex no longer pays child maintenance, so I am short of £35 a week which is a big hit when you're surviving on a single income."

"I care for the children and run the house. My husband takes over when he comes home from his work whilst I teach for a couple of hours."

"My husband and I are both trying to do our jobs; he's FT, I'm 30hrs and there just isn't enough time in the day and that is very stressful. Our childcare is my in laws who are shielding so we will need to find an alternative solution long term, I believe, which is going to put on added financial strain. We rarely have any time to just relax as adults... One of us is always working, usually till bedtime if not later; this is not sustainable. On a positive note; my husband feels as

though he has been able to build a closer relationship to our middle child being around more and not traveling to and from work.”

“Really struggling with childcare and work commitments. Live in a two parent household where both parents are working from home full time. Having to split the days in two where one parent does home schooling childcare and housework, then other parent takes over in the afternoon.”

“Have found it difficult to work from home and look after the children. Husband self-employed; so, flexible and had to take time off work to help me get time to work. In the next month, I will be returning to work as a teacher and then my children will need care.”

“My husband has been on furlough for the majority of the lockdown period and has therefore looked after our children when I work. If he was not at home I would find it impossible to work (even from home) as my children are so young and therefore need 100% supervision at all times.”

We see a difference to this trend in families where the mother is a key worker and leaves the house to work but the partner is at home, working or furloughed. In these cases, our research respondents told us that their partner often took on the responsibility of the childcare.

“My husband is now primary carer and educator. We haven’t been entitled to sending them to school as he isn’t working. It would have been good to have them in school a few days a week so my husband could have meetings without me having to delay going to bed (I work nights).”

“My husband is on furlough so has been able to take the childcare responsibilities whilst I work from home. I do home schooling but it’s very simple at reception class. When he returns to work I will have to juggle my time.”

“I have been extremely fortunate having my partner working from home so able to also take responsibility of the children. When coming home from work, I have to strip, shower and change before seeing the rest of the family.”

“Husband does most childcare as I’m working. We’ve not done much home schooling as she’s very young.”

5.3. Lack of the help of usual support network

Many families have been unable to rely on the support of their extended family members (mostly grandparents) with childcare during the Covid-19 crisis. 51 respondents (14%) mentioned that they had been able to rely on their parents with childcare. Some families made alternative arrangements with their extended family but in general, the lack of

extended family support due to the lockdown regulations and many grandparents having to shield had a big impact on the daily life and work of parents.

“To work I depend usually on my parents however as they are both over 70 this will not be possible. At the moment everything depends on when I'm required to return to work as to how I arrange childcare.”

“My daughter was meant to be looked after by grandparents. I've also asked work for amended hours to fit around childcare which has been extremely difficult.”

Some of the respondents also noted that the inability to access the support of their parents with childcare, would lead to a financial strain on their household.

“My mum had been helping with childcare and having my daughter 3 days a week, but she lives in England. I don't know how I will cope financially if I have to increase payments for extra childcare for those days if she isn't allowed to cross the Bridge [sic] to look after her.”

“Our childcare is my in laws who are shielding; so, we will need to find an alternative solution long term, I believe, which is going to put on added financial strain.”

Some respondents feared that the lack of family support available would hinder their ability to return to work

“Without my parents' support with childcare (parents are over 70 and isolating) I am solely responsible for my daughter. So, as long as she is off school, I cannot return to work.”

Some families have even changed or considered changing their living arrangements to cope with caring responsibilities.

“My parents provided childcare before lockdown; so, not having that support has been really difficult. If my husband has to go back to the office without my parents being able to provide childcare, I would have to quit work. I've also considered my husband going to live elsewhere and my mother moving in with me.”

“In order to support our oldest son who works away from home we have moved his wife and 2 young children in with us.”

“My family have stayed in our family unit and have not interacted with family or friends in anyway and my husband only goes food shopping once a week; so, we have been very careful and secluded during the pandemic, which we are both grateful for.”

“My mother lives with us and provides childcare while my husband and I work. If one of us has to go to work or school we will not be able to use her for

childcare as she is over 70. This makes things more difficult as we value family being part of the childcare arrangements. It helps us if employers are able to be flexible with work start and finish times, and working from home where possible.”

In some families, older children help with the care of younger children.

“My oldest child has helped look after 2 younger children when I have meetings online, which is not great as she herself should be studying!”

“Happy for my 15-year-old daughter to look after my 7-year-old daughter when I have to go to work.”

As the survey responses show, many families rely upon the support of family members and their networks for childcare, and with the pandemic, they not only lost the official childcare options but also informal childcare arrangements which were an important part of their routine.

Our research also showed that the Covid-19 crisis has been particularly challenging for people parenting disabled children and children with health conditions. Parents of disabled children and children with health conditions and/or special educational needs had to adopt extra precautions, despite limited additional support.

20 survey respondents mentioned that they had a disabled child or children, or child(ren) with health conditions.

“I have a child with additional needs and so we have had to change our routine quite drastically. He does not always understand that I am not available if I am on a zoom meeting for example. I have been working more hours than usual but also there has been no respite with my caring responsibilities. My son has autism and is unwilling to go out at the best of times, this situation has made things more difficult. I am waiting to be able to employ a personal assistant to be able to take him out of the house and gain some independence (via direct payments).”

“We also have a son with autism who is normally in college although he has been continuing his course online. The impact of the current situation is having on him is negative and therefore impacts the whole household.”

“I am my disabled child's full time carer. We have been cautious whilst trying to support our children's needs. One child has very high additional learning needs and requires specialist support. We were without this for about four weeks.”

Some women have additional caring responsibilities alongside childcare, and this puts more pressure on women, which is not sustainable in the long term:

“I am a carer for my partner; so, although I am not a single parent, I am shouldering the employed work, the childcare, the homeschooling, the household chores and the caring responsibilities alone. I cannot drive and am pretty much trapped at home. We do have a garden which is positive but my children are just indoors on screens and I am too busy to do anything much with them. It is a treadmill and we are all ok but not more than ok.”

6. Homeschooling experience in the first lockdown: “Rather be a parent than a teacher!”

“I am trying to maintain my own full time job remotely, whilst trying to stay on top of the home schooling tasks for my own children. The burden of this seems to have fallen predominantly on women. After discussions with friends, it seems to me that men are happy to leave this double burden largely to the women. The experience for me has been exhausting, but rewarding, at times. I do feel closer to my children, but feel that the population and government underestimate the scale of what we are being asked to achieve.”

The ONS Opinion and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) shows that in Great Britain, between 7 May and 7 June 2020, 87% of parents said a child in their household had been homeschooled because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, with the percentage decreasing as the age of the only or eldest child increased.⁶⁵ The same survey carried out between 13 January and 7 February 2021, i.e. the second full-lockdown with school closures, 90% of parents said a child in their household had been homeschooled, with 52% of men and 67% of women with a school-aged child saying they had personally homeschooled.⁶⁶

There is a significant difference between the experiences of women with younger children and those with older children. ONS research found that the average number of hours spent doing schoolwork per week significantly increased as the age of the child increased from 5 to 10 years (10 hours) to 11 to 15 years (16 hours), with the hours spent learning by those aged 5 to 10 years being significantly lower when there was a child aged 0 to 4 years in the household.⁶⁷ The teaching methods that they use also varied according to the child’s age. ONS research also found that the percentage of parents who said their children had used real-time interactive online learning resources provided by schools (for example, live lessons) significantly increased as the age of the child increased, with 44% of parents saying their children aged 16 to 18 years had used this compared with 13% for children aged 5 to 10 years.

In our research, about 71% (336 responses) of the research participants who said that they have childcare responsibilities commented in the open-ended question asking about their homeschooling experience.

⁶⁵ [Coronavirus and homeschooling in Great Britain: April to June 2020. Release date 22.07.2020.](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/coronavirusandhomeschoolinggreatbritain/apriltojune2020#glossary)

The survey analysis is based on the two pooled datasets of Opinion an Lifestyle Survey (OPN) data. One dataset covers the period 3 April to 10 May 2020 (inclusive) with a sample of approximately 6,400 adults (64% response rate) and the other covers the period 7 May to 7 June 2020 (inclusive) with a sample of approximately 6,350 adults (58% response rate) for the period 7 May to 7 June 2020.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/coronavirusandhomeschoolinggreatbritain/apriltojune2020#glossary>

⁶⁶ [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 19 February 2021](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/19february2021), Release date: 19.02.2021

⁶⁷ [Coronavirus and homeschooling in Great Britain: April to June 2020. Release date 22.07.2020.](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/coronavirusandhomeschoolinggreatbritain/apriltojune2020#glossary)

Over half of the participants who commented about their homeschooling experience (179 participants, 53%) said that they had a negative experience. Only 69 participants (21%) mentioned positive experiences.

Whether a woman's experience was positive or negative depended on: The approach of the school and teacher(s); access to resources including equipment; and how they approached homeschooling. We will look at this in more detail but first, we would like to reflect the general feelings about homeschooling from the comments.

6.1. Negative experiences of homeschooling

Women have often felt overwhelmed by increasing responsibilities brought about by the pandemic. Responses to our survey showed that many women are struggling to balance the demands of homeschooling with their ability to do their paid work. Most women have not had a positive experience.

“Really struggling to teach a reluctant 5 year old who wants to play. I thought the other day that, for time when we're not working, we are teacher, schoolyard supervisor, classroom assistant, cook, janitor and best friend to the kid. Receive weekly emails from school with activities and having to submit progress. Teachers claim there are no expectations but parent WhatsApp groups continually share progress which makes it feel like a competition. It's very difficult compared to households with no children, older children or at least one parent on furlough. Feel constantly exhausted with work not really easing off and workloads made more difficult because of remote working. Very worried about the impact this is having on my daughter's development. Concerned for her lack of social interaction with her friends or similar aged children. Often feel inadequately equipped to home school and how frustrating it can be to teach your child for long periods.”

Another respondent who could not have support from her partner said:

“My partner has dyslexia and really struggles with academic work even at a 5 year old level. It's not that he cannot do it but he's never had full support himself to learn in school. His work since has always been manual. So the pressure is on me to work and do the homeschooling. To say there's not enough hours in the day is an understatement. I start work at 6am sometimes to finish at lunchtime with the plan to do a couple of hours of proper sit-down schooling with the little one. But that is exhausting and not maintainable. The balance is shattering. I can't possibly hear 'do what you can' one more time!!!”

Research participants rightly pointed out that, on top of all their other responsibilities, it is hard to be a 'teacher' for your child:

“My children need constant care and attention, especially my 2 year old. I’ve not done much home schooling as I’m exhausted from working and housework and being a parent, I don’t have time or energy to be a teacher as well.”

Respondents who are teachers found homeschooling their own children difficult as well. Besides, some of them also had to prepare teaching materials for their students:

“I’m a former teacher so confident in my teaching knowledge and abilities, but it has been very challenging and behaviour has become difficult to manage recently. Balancing being teacher as well as mum and working has significantly impacted my mental health.”

“I am both homeschooling my 7 year old as well as trying to teach my students. I have purchased various books to support this learning as using the online work from school involves too much of my time, which I don't have.”

Working mothers, particularly those who work fulltime, have struggled to find time to homeschool their children; and many of them feel there is not enough support for them.

“Very difficult to hold and sustain their interest and willingness; none of us are trained to teach our children, there is no learning being done just hope for the best with it all! Like ‘please can you continue to work full time oh and also homeschool two children whose learning styles I think are totally different and also do a bit of parenting in all that please oh and by the way “look after your well-being please!”’ That’s what employers are saying but how do they propose I do that?? Shocking that there is no support here for parents!”

“It has been very difficult to try and ‘home-school’ and work alongside each other. Due to my role being involved in the development of the Childcare Hubs, advising the childcare sector with furlough, grants etc. means that there has not been much time for ‘homeschooling’. This fact is a constant pressure and adds to the situation.”

“Trying to work full time from home whilst caring and homeschooling has been very stressful and both work and schooling and relationships have been impacted negatively.”

“It is impossible to home school and work. I've managed to get them to do a bit but not a lot. Our school have been useless. The hub school was good but no education was provided. I cannot imagine having to keep working at home (we have been informed we are not returning to the office until September) and have the children here the whole time. It is completely not manageable and no good for anyone.”

“My older children are in comprehensive; so, get on with their work independently but I struggle to make time and give attention to my youngest

age 9 as when I've finished work I am mentally exhausted and can't explain things clearly."

"My partner is a key worker so has been out to work throughout lockdown. I have been at home working part time as a senior manager (which is code for working full time hours regularly!) I cannot 'homeschool' my children in regards to the work set by the schools to any degree on a regular basis, because for my eldest it requires research and preparation and then support and guidance which takes time I don't have amongst making sure basic needs are met... Sleep, food, shelter."

Many of them reported that they had had to make changes to their working hours or take leave.

"Because of the nature of my work, it has been busier than ever, and even though I am paid less hours, I'm working more because I have so many vulnerable client referrals to support. I am a single parent of an 11 year old, and it has been really difficult with school work, I have loved having my son at home with me, but he needs support with his schoolwork which is difficult when I am trying to do my own work and on the phone to clients."

"It is a difficult situation as my work has become much more demanding during Covid-19. I'm finding that I am having to work day and night to keep on top of my work. However, trying to do homeschooling at the same time is really difficult and I am feeling really guilty that my child is missing out on my attention."

"I do the majority of the childcare and take leave to have more time off."

"All home schooling was down to me. I found it so difficult that I volunteered for furlough. I do feel guilty but I couldn't sustain it."

"I was working 3.5 days in the office but have reduced to 3 days salary officially - however I do find myself working at least 3.5 days worth of hours from home to keep up. The salary reduction means I won't be able to afford nursery for my daughter if and when they reopen. I am lucky that my husband has a secure full time job but any salary reduction does have an impact."

"To help, I've been working 6 days a week; so, I can do shorter days to spend time with my son and have no break at all I'm physically exhausted."

"Me and my husband have both been working full time from home so we have had to share the childcare duty so we work late at night and early in the morning."

Many women reported feelings of failure and guilt and what could be described as the emotional burden of homeschooling. Survey participants felt that support to help them

cope was inadequate which took a toll on their mental health as their workload both at work and at home increased.

"I feel guilty that I'm not spending enough time with them. Telling them to be quiet when I'm in meetings or on the phone makes me worry that they hate being at home with mummy working."

"Homeschooling caused me a great deal of anxiety at the start, I was trying to do as much work as I imagined they do at school and work at the same time. My child was reluctant to do the work which was stressful and made me feel that I wasn't doing well enough. The school started to send emails to say to just do what is manageable for you; however, still awards pupils at the end of each week for their work/reading, which make me feel guilty that I'm not keeping up."

In our survey, 'guilt' has been a word voiced frequently by mothers in their comments about childcare and homeschooling, which is a critical reflection of the pressure on their mental health.

"The main thing has been a constant sensation of guilt - feeling guilty that I'm not giving my children my attention, that I'm not being creative or imaginative or engaged enough with them (or patient enough), whilst also feeling guilty that I'm not working hard enough or improving myself in some way."

"Constant guilt of being a poor mother and letting kids down not spending enough time doing any school work. Relying on hours of TV for my youngest while I have video meetings. Starting work at 7am so I can have a few hours off lunch time to do stuff with kids. Feel it's all fallen to me. My other half does not seem to feel guilty and has not done any activities or changed his working day so we are arguing about it."

"People say 'do what you can' from my job but yet I feel the expectation is there for me to do the same (if not more) work is very challenging circumstances. I also feel guilty that the children are not getting enough attention and play because I continue to work full time."

"Really difficult juggling work with childcare for my toddler/ feel guilty on both sides on work and parental commitments."

"...it has been very difficult and I feel guilt both towards my employer, as I'm clearly not working to full capacity in that time, and towards my child who isn't getting my full attention."

It was clear from our research that where there was a greater sharing of responsibilities and roles in the home, the women's experience of homeschooling was more positive.

“It’s been difficult as both my husband and I are working at home. Our children are still young enough to need support with homework. My husband and I have been doing ‘shifts’ - he tends to homeschool the children in the morning and I do the afternoons. It’s working ok, but we are lucky that we both work for supportive and flexible organisations. It is not sustainable but we’re doing our best for now! The opportunity to spend more time as a family has actually been really lovely.”

“A big positive has been being able to spend so much time with them, once my husband and I worked out a pattern to share work and school (I get up at 6 to work till lunchtime while he teaches, then we swap over), I feel like I am giving them my full attention and their experience of home school is better.”

Women working part-time, or not working at all had a more positive experience than women working full-time.

“Home schooling has been ok. My son is very set in his routine and works well and tries very hard. My daughter is not so keen. It takes a lot of work and perseverance but we eventually get it done. I could never meet the homeschooling targets set for my children if I did work full time. It would be impossible.”

“Positive experience, as I work part time they are having more one-to-one time than they would in an oversized classroom.”

6.2. Homeschooling children with special needs

Homeschooling was particularly difficult for parents of children with special needs, a health condition or a disability. Many families lost the support that they need for their children.

“Due to my son’s ASD [Autism spectrum disorder] it’s always been a struggle to get him to do homework as he compartmentalises school and home. I have been able to get him do some activities but he will be behind as a result.”

“It has been hard to support a child in year 12 with chronic health issues, and an already poor attendance record in school without the routine of school.”

“My son had ADHD and dyslexia and home schooling has been extremely difficult. My daughter has shown signs of anxiety and has required additional support for mental health.”

6.3. Employers’ attitudes to homeschooling

Employers’ support made a big difference to how women experienced caring and homeschooling . From furlough to enabling different methods of flexible working, there are many areas that employers can take action to support women. As this topic was discussed

extensively in the main report stemming from this research⁶⁸, here we will focus on women's comments about employers in relation with their experience of childcare and homeschooling .

"I am fortunate that my employer (Local Government) and my work allows some flexibility to best manage this situation, but I think that employers need to make allowances for parents who are trying to work at home whilst balancing childcare."

"My husband and I are juggling childcare of our 3 year old with our full-time jobs. Our supportive managers have really helped this process - I tend to work mornings and evenings, my husband works afternoons. Our pre-covid childcare options won't be available until social distancing is relaxed."

"It's been difficult as both my husband and I are working at home. Our children are still young enough to need support with homework. My husband and I have been doing 'shifts' - he tends to homeschool the children in the morning and I do the afternoons. It's working ok, but we are lucky that we both work for supportive and flexible organisations. It is not sustainable, but we're doing our best for now!"

"Feel as if our employers 'support' is just lip service. We were expected to take leave if we wanted any flexibility around hours at the beginning - this has improved. But expectations and work demands are still high. I'm in management position and managing teams is difficult but doable in these circumstances."

As previously mentioned, many women needed to make changes in their working hours and patterns due to childcare and homeschooling responsibilities. The support they received from their employers made a huge difference in their experience of homeschooling and childcare as, at least, they could better adjust to overwhelming and unstable conditions at home.

⁶⁸ Chwarae Teg, [Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales](#); Paterson , L., October 2020. p.33-34

7. Beyond the scope of this report

A number of issues were raised by our survey respondents which fall beyond the scope of this report, but are important to note as wider impacts of homeschooling, childcare and the pandemic on women.

7.1. Mental health

The impact of the lockdown on mental health was a key area that was raised by respondents to our survey. 17% of the participants (65 women) who commented on childcare and homeschooling questions on our survey indicated the impact of lockdown on their and/or their children's mental health.

"I have had no real contact with anybody outside of socially distanced work conversation in close to 3 months. I am an ex-secondary teacher and a post-graduate; yet, I struggle with home schooling. I am lucky that on those occasions when I need to leave them, my eldest child is competent to be left in charge for an hour or two. I am struggling emotionally and mentally with the pressure and loneliness."

"...unsustainable working and looking after a child. Less productive. Enhanced pressure on yourself as you believe other's will be working harder. Severe guilt that you can't give 100% to your work or child. Extremely stressful trying to juggle both what gives? Mental health suffers, lonely days where you feel depressed, you can not cope."

"I'm a former teacher; so, confident in my teaching knowledge and abilities, but it has been very challenging and behaviour has become difficult to manage recently. Balancing being teacher as well as mum and working has significantly impacted my mental health."

Many mothers who participated in the survey were worried about the mental health of their children, as well as their education. As previously stated, the message from schools and government about homeschooling over the first lockdown was "do what you can"; however, this did little to stop parents worrying about their children's education. Furthermore, parents were concerned about their children's motivation to continue learning and about their lack of social interaction.

"I mainly worry about my 14 year old who isn't doing her school work and is isolating herself away from us and her friends. She is very withdrawn."

"My children adapted to the restrictions well, but I have also found that on occasion, their mental health has seemed to struggle and noticed significant changes in their behaviour due to a change in routine."

“My children's mental health has been negatively affected by the fact that my workload increased and I was unable to spend enough time with them.”

7.2. Access to digital infrastructure and equipment

Digital poverty hit many families hard during Covid-19, particularly in the first lockdown. The use of, and access to, online resources required digital literacy and IT equipment such as a computer and printer; and not everyone has these. Child Poverty Action Group's research reflecting the experience of parents in the first lockdown shows that 40% of households among thousands did not only not have access to a laptop or the internet, but also to other things like printers, stationery, and craft materials.⁶⁹ Governments were more prepared and ready to intervene and provide families with basic equipment when the second lockdown arrived yet many families still did not have the basics for remote learning.

22 (7%) women who responded to our survey said that they had problem with IT facilities or could not provide the equipment. Many parents had to share their work laptops or phones with their children.

“I have 4 children 1 computer, which is very stressful.”

“Having the appropriate amount of technology for three children to access at the same time has been tricky at times.”

“Technology has been a nightmare, not just getting to grips with Hwb and Google classroom, but also we don't have a printer.”

“I'm frustrated with his school; they never asked if we had laptops etc and I only have a work one. I've spent over £200 on Amazon and the Works getting different activities and books.”

“Homeschooling has been pretty much non-existent as we didn't have appropriate IT equipment.”

“My children hate doing their work at home. Sharing tech has been an issue. Colleagues with no children think all day Zoom meetings are ok - not for me!! my internet cannot cope and my employer has refused to pay the £26 tax free working from home allowance that would enable me to upgrade my internet so that it could cope with all these extra calls and put the heating on now it has got cold. I think those with more money don't realise how these little things add up when you have kids at home all day, eating all day and you have to pay more for food to shop local etc. Doing the right thing for health and public health is costly to individual budgets.”

⁶⁹ [Covid-19: The challenges of homeschooling](#); BBC News; 11.01.2021.

“At the start of lockdown when the school closed the school did not ask what facilities we had at home to even do the schoolwork. We don’t have a printer and the majority of work is worksheets etc. My little one is 5 years old; so, does not know how to use a laptop let alone PowerPoint!! As it seems there was maybe the expectation that she does. If I needed a printer normally I’d just use the one in the office but now this was out of the question.”

“I am finding it hard to support my child with schoolwork while I am working also. We are sharing a computer and this is not ideal. A teacher approached the Local Authority for use of a laptop but was declined.”

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Covid-19 has demonstrated how gendered our society still is, and how reliant we are on women's unpaid work. The closure of schools and nurseries and the loss of informal childcare support through lockdown measures had a significant impact on women's working lives and on their mental health and wellbeing. This disproportionate impact is rooted in the inequality that women continue to face.

Gendered assumptions within households and by employers saw women take on the majority of childcare and home-schooling during the pandemic. Stereotypes and gendered assumptions mean that women are still seen as primary carers more often than men and, for years, we have accepted a precarious system of childcare that relies far too heavily on informal, unpaid care that is often delivered by women.

It's also critical to note that this crisis has not impacted all women equally. Many groups of women faced additional challenges and disadvantage, including single parents and women on low incomes, for whom the financial impact of the crisis is a significant cause for concern.

Inflexible work resulted in a clear tension between the demands of paid and unpaid work, exacerbating the situation further, and many women entered the pandemic in a financially vulnerable position as a result of poverty, low pay and insecure work.

On top of this, the lack of diverse women in decision-making positions at the Welsh, UK and local levels and a failure to use tools that mainstream gender equality in policy-making, meant that the experiences, needs and challenges of diverse women were often overlooked as part of the crisis response. As a result policies, such as furlough, often failed to meet women's needs and were far too slow to adapt once challenges came to light.

Our research showed that after the first lockdown, many women were left feeling exhausted, overwhelmed and undervalued as a result of having had to try to balance homeschooling and caring responsibilities alongside work. Furthermore, it revealed the extent to which women are at risk in this pandemic; at risk of contracting the virus through being on the frontline as health and care workers, and shopworkers; at risk of falling into poverty due to having to reduce hours, being furloughed or facing redundancy; at risk of losing out on future career opportunities; and at risk of mental ill health due to having to juggle high workloads at home and at work.

As we hopefully near the end of pandemic and look towards recovery we must take action to ensure that any further lockdowns do not disadvantage women and also address the underlying causes of inequality so that women do not face the same risks in the future. In addition to the recommendations made below, we echo the recommendations made by

many other organisations⁷⁰ and would encourage policy-makers and employers to revisit our previous reports, which offer solutions to tackle the underlying causes of gender inequality and ensure a fair and inclusive recovery including [A Feminist Economic Recovery plan for Wales](#) and [Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales](#).

Recommendations

To ensure that any further lockdowns or restrictions do not disadvantage women:

1. Welsh Government should ensure that if schools and childcare settings have to close, support bubbles are retained to enable parents to access sources of informal childcare support.
2. Welsh Government should ensure that single parents can retain access to formal childcare, as key workers were able to.
3. Welsh Government should continue to supply free school meal support throughout school holidays and any school closures and ensure families are able to access adequate IT and broadband for remote learning.
4. The UK Government should ensure any continuation or reintroduction of the Furlough scheme retains the ability to access the scheme on a part-time basis and due to childcare requirements.
5. UK Government should reshape support for the self-employed to offer sufficient financial support to those with childcare or homeschooling responsibilities, who are unable to access furlough, sick leave or parental leave.
6. The UK Government should ensure the social security system provides adequate support:
 - a. Retain £20 uplift in Universal Credit
 - b. Remove the five week wait for Universal Credit
7. Gender-balance and diversity should be required at decision-making levels in all governmental crisis response teams and gender mainstreaming tools should be used.
8. The Welsh Government should provide greater support to address the mental health crisis by:
 - a. Investing in mental health services to improve access and availability of both crisis and preventative mental health support.
 - b. Encouraging employers to be more aware of mental health and wellbeing and providing guidance to ensure changes in the way we work are being implemented in a manner that supports good mental health and wellbeing.
9. Employers should ensure all employees are supported with care and home-schooling responsibilities through adequate flexible working options and parental leave policies.

⁷⁰ Women's Budget Group, TUC, Pregnant Then Screwed, Fawcett Society, GingerBread are some among many.

To address the underlying causes that left women at greater risk:

10. Care should be central to rebuilding our economies after the Covid-19 crisis:
 - a. Unpaid labour of women should be recognised by governments by incorporating into economic measures.
 - b. Money to fund or subsidise childcare should be seen as an investment, rather than a spend.
11. The Welsh Government should improve childcare provision by:
 - c. Delivering free, good quality, full-time childcare to all children aged 0-4 for 48 weeks of the year.
 - d. Investing in wraparound childcare and holiday care to ensure it is available and affordable to all.
12. The Welsh Government should tackle harmful gender stereotypes by:
 - a. Making gender equality a central measure of educational success.
 - b. Ensuring that careers advice actively challenges gendered assumptions and unequal outcomes.
 - c. Encouraging men to share caring responsibilities through public campaigns and leading the way with equitable parental leave and family policies.
13. The Welsh Government should tackle women's poverty by:
 - a. Putting in place an effective cross-government strategy focused on addressing the root causes of poverty, that recognises the different characteristics, circumstances and barriers facing people in poverty.
 - b. Delivering a coherent Welsh benefits system based on principles of equality, dignity and fairness.
 - c. Reforming existing Welsh benefits, including free school meals, Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Discretionary Assistance Fund should be reformed to expand eligibility and improve take-up.
 - d. Requesting the devolution of administrative powers over Universal Credit to give women choice and flexibility in managing their own finances.
14. The Welsh Government should improve the availability of flexible and inclusive working in Wales by:
 - a. Making funding available to employers to support them to investment in infrastructure related to modern working practices; whether it be physical infrastructure like technology, or investment to support training of staff and managers to pivot to new ways of working.
 - b. Ensuring that new co-working hubs are accessible, inclusive and safe as well as geographically spread to offer work spaces to those who do not have home working spaces. There need to be hubs in all areas of Wales, including rural areas.
15. The UK Government should amend the right to request flexible working legislation to allow requests from day one of employment.
16. Employers should ensure equity in new ways of working by:
 - a. Collating data to monitor uptake of flexible working among different groups.

- b. Using equality impact assessments to inform any changes to ways of working, e.g. moving to hybrid working, to ensure they are inclusive.
 - c. Considering the different needs and experiences of colleagues, including those based at home, when planning social activities, developing communication strategies and in progression and succession planning.
17. The Welsh Government should prioritise implementation of the recommendations in the Gender Equality Review report *Deeds not Words*, that will embed equality into all policy-making and budgetary processes.
18. Steps should be taken to ensure more diverse representation in political institutions in Wales, including through electoral reform and support for initiatives that encourage under-represented groups to engage with and run for political office.