



# Lockdown Fathers

## the untold story

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### CONDENSED REPORT

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*“After work I used to be knackered... Just wanted to get home and put the TV on. Now I can actually spend time with my son and feel awake.”*

An executive summary and a full version of this report, as well as the previous reports in the series, can be found at:

[www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2021/contemporary-fathers-in-the-uk](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2021/contemporary-fathers-in-the-uk)

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### *About the Fatherhood Institute*



The Fatherhood Institute (founded 1999, charity number 1075104) promotes caring fatherhood, underpinned by commitment to child wellbeing and gender equality. The Institute undertakes research, trains professionals in health, education, family services and social care to engage productively with fathers and assists employers to support the caring responsibilities of male employees. Visit [www.fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org)

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### *About this series*

*Lockdown Fathers* is the fourth report in the *Contemporary Fathers in the UK* series, funded by the Nuffield Foundation. To inform these reports, and also with support from the Foundation, the Institute has compiled and maintains a comprehensive online library of research on fathers and fatherhood in the UK from 1998 to the present day.

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## 1. Introduction

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*“During a normal week, your child won’t see you... (After work I’m) absolutely shattered. The Tube journey is the hardest thing for me.” (Partnered Father)*

Up until the nineteenth century, most fathers in Britain worked close to, or even in, their family homes. This changed as the later stages of the Industrial Revolution removed the majority from their households for all or most of the working day<sup>1</sup>. By early 2020, most fathers of young children in the UK worked full-time and outside their homes, with many also undertaking long commutes. While they aspired to spending more time caring for their children, including their babies, their workplace responsibilities and the inflexibility of most workplaces inhibited this<sup>2</sup>. Researchers hypothesised that fathers would remain ‘secondary’ caregivers at home (with most mothers remaining ‘secondary’ breadwinners) until ‘something big’ happened to alter the *fathers’* engagement with the workplace<sup>3</sup>.

Covid-19 has proved to be that ‘something big’, generating a massive reverse migration as – in their millions across the world – daddies came home. Many workplaces were transformed – and the transformation of workplaces transformed fatherhood<sup>4</sup>.

Most of the findings presented in this report are from a survey of 2045 fathers of under-12 children undertaken during June 2020 in the UK – the BritainThinks/Fatherhood Institute *Lockdown Fathers* study<sup>5</sup>, of which this is the condensed report. The study’s findings are presented in the context of other pandemic studies (mainly from the UK). Where evidence cited is from such studies, they are footnoted.

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<sup>1</sup> (Laslett, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> (Working Families, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> (Altintas & Sullivan, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> (Weissbourd et al., 2020)

<sup>5</sup> Through quotas and, subsequently, weighting a sample was achieved that was nationally representative in terms of age, region, Socio-Economic Grade, ethnicity, working status and highest educational qualification.

## 2. Fathers, mothers, work and care (couple households)

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*“It is quite challenging. I saw the stuff she goes through when I’m at work... I seem to understand her better, and she’s reacting to me in a more positive manner.”*

(Partnered Father)

**The public narrative on childcare in UK families during the pandemic has focused on the mother’s ‘burden’<sup>6</sup>. The picture is more complex and more nuanced.**

Before the Spring 2020 lockdown mothers of young children in couple households in the UK were contributing at least twice as much childcare as fathers<sup>7</sup>. This inequality was matched and fed by inequality in fathers’ v. mothers’ engagement in paid work: before the pandemic, working fathers in two-parent households spent many more hours than their partner on both paid work<sup>8</sup> and travel-to-work<sup>9</sup>, with only one mother in three in couple households bringing home even half the family wage<sup>10</sup>.

During the lockdown, the *ratio* of mothers’ v. fathers’ engagement in paid work changed a little: some studies found mothers more likely than fathers to lose paid work, work fewer hours or be furloughed<sup>11</sup>. This meant that the ‘gender work gap’ widened slightly: a few more mothers than fathers became more available to spend more time on childcare during the Spring 2020 lockdown. However, it was mainly because of their lesser-engagement in paid work *before* the lockdown that mothers remained considerably more available for housework-and-childcare *during* it – and consequently ‘did more’ than their children’s father. Mothers’ greater caregiving ‘burden’, like fathers’ greater breadwinning burden, was already in place. The pandemic did not *cause* parental inequalities in paid and unpaid work: it *revealed* them.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://theconversation.com/return-of-the-1950s-housewife-how-to-stop-coronavirus-lockdown-reinforcing-sexist-gender-roles-134851>; <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/30/sure-this-poster-is-sexist-but-its-sadly-all-too-true-to-lockdown-life>; <https://britainthinks.com/what-has-lockdown-been-like-for-mums-britainthinks-and-mumsnet/>

<sup>7</sup> (Henz, 2017; ONS, 2016; Walthery & Chung, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Before the pandemic, around 86% of fathers of dependent children in couple households were in paid work, mainly full-time. Of their partners, 29% also worked full-time, 32% worked part-time and 22% did no paid work (Aldrich et al., 2014). The full-time weekly working hours of the fathers (44.6) were longer than the mothers’ (39.5) (O’Brien et al., 2016)

<sup>9</sup> (ONS, 2018; TUC, 2013)

<sup>10</sup> (Cory & Stirling, 2015)

<sup>11</sup> (Xue & McMunn, 2021) (Andrew et al., 2020b) (Andrew et al., 2020a)

### 3. What the fathers did (couple households)

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*I've tried keeping it as full of a day as I can, with a mixture of home schooling as well as their own activities. The only thing that I struggle with is spending as much time with my partner in the evenings . . . she's working during the day so that's difficult, and I'm also really tired... I'm ready for bed really at the end of the day.” (Partnered Father)*

**During the Spring 2020 lockdown, fathers in couple households stepped up to do much more hands-on caring of their children, and more housework.**

**On average, the fathers almost doubled the number of hours each day during which they undertook childcare.** According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), fathers' childcare time rose from just over four to eight hours per day, while mothers' rose from almost seven to just over ten<sup>12</sup>.

**This shift narrowed the gap between mothers and fathers in the close care they provided to children.** In the IFS study this reduced from more than two and a half hours per day to just over two hours<sup>13</sup>. A study by the Office for National Statistics found fathers' childcare share increasing from around one third of mothers' before the Spring 2020 lockdown to around two-thirds during it<sup>14</sup>. Almost all the UK pandemic studies reported narrowing of the gender care gap to varying degrees<sup>15</sup>.

**The gender care gap narrowed much faster than before.** From the 1970s, fathers have become progressively more involved in housework and in the care their young children<sup>16</sup>. During lockdown, within a month, that advanced by an amount that would normally have taken ten years to achieve. Gender equality in unpaid childcare leapt forward a decade.

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<sup>12</sup> (Andrew et al., 2020a) p34 Figure 4.2 <https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/R178-Family-time-use-and-home-learning-during-the-COVID-19-lockdown-1.pdf> See also (Andrew et al., 2020b), p13 Figure 4 <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN290-Mothers-and-fathers-balancing-work-and-life-under-lockdown.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> (Andrew et al., 2020a; Finch, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> (ONS, 2020a) See Figure 2 for graph – then scroll down to DATA DOWNLOAD for exact time use figures.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/satelliteaccounts/bulletins/coronavirusandhowpeoplespenttheirtimeunderrestrictions/28marchto26april2020#the-gap-in-unpaid-work-between-men-and-women>

<sup>15</sup> Exceptions were a study that found mothers still doing two thirds of the childcare during lockdown (Xue & McMunn, 2021); and another that found the gender care gap widening slightly, although the gender housework gap narrowed and the percentage of fathers undertaking the main caregiver role rose from 2.6% before lockdown to almost 20% in May/June 2020 (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020)

<sup>16</sup> (Fisher et al., 1999)

**Despite large increases in fathers' housework and childcare time, working hours for fathers still in paid work did not fall by much – and the ratio with mothers' working hours decline remained constant.** The *Lockdown Fathers* study found around ten per cent of working fathers and their partners in couple households reducing their paid work hours. The Institute for Fiscal Studies also found similarity between mothers' and fathers' changes and losses in paid work *at family level* during the Spring 2020 lockdown<sup>17</sup>.

**Fathers provided a broad mixture of routine housework and childcare.** The *Lockdown Fathers* study found high proportions of partnered fathers preparing meals, cleaning and doing the laundry, while also undertaking routine and developmental childcare, including reading, playing games and home schooling. Fathers did not step back and just keep 'half an eye' on the kids – they actively cared for the children in one-to-one activities.

**Although disadvantaged dads in couple households did not spend as much extra time with their children as more advantaged fathers, the great majority did so.** More of the disadvantaged fathers continued working outside their homes; yet in the *Lockdown Fathers* study, 64% of those in couple households still reported spending more time helping their children with their learning and schoolwork.

## 4. How the fathers felt (couple households)

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*“I just feel like my son is one of my mates now. He’s just my little friend – you know? We have such a good time together.”* (Partnered Father)

**The majority of the partnered fathers in the *Lockdown Fathers* study grew more confident and competent in their fathering:** 65% reported that their relationship with their children had improved during lockdown – a figure that rose to 73% among fathers who were full-time at home. Around half left lockdown feeling more competent as a parent, with only 8% feeling less competent. Forty-two percent found themselves better able to keep calm and manage their tempers with their children, with those who had spent the most time with them more likely to report that. Nevertheless, a small but significant minority (14%) found themselves *less* able to manage their own irritation and anger with their children.

**Disadvantaged fathers were almost as likely as better-off dads to report gains in their fathering relationship.** In the *Lockdown Fathers* study, 61% of the

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<sup>17</sup> (Andrew et al., 2020a)

most disadvantaged fathers in couple households compared with 67% of the most advantaged reported a better relationship with their children following their lockdown experience.

**Home schooling had its ‘up’ side.** Although a study by the Office for National Statistics found 40% of partnered fathers reporting home schooling negatively affecting their job (and 45% their mental wellbeing)<sup>18</sup>, in the *Lockdown Fathers* study 57% said that, following their lockdown experience they felt better equipped to support their children’s education and learning going forward. Even among the most disadvantaged fathers, 50% reported this. Again, however, a small but significant minority suffered: around 10% left lockdown feeling *less* confident.

**Lockdown Fathers dads reported growing closer to their children:** almost two-thirds of those in couple households said they emerged from the Spring 2020 lockdown understanding their children better and feeling closer to them. Almost all the rest (likely including many who had already felt very close to their children<sup>19</sup>) reported no change. Only 2-3% reported that closeness and understanding had deteriorated.

**Most of the Lockdown Fathers dads in couple households said their mental wellbeing either improved (20%) during the Spring 2020 lockdown or was unchanged (40%)<sup>20</sup>.** The fathers who reported a better father-child relationship were more likely to report improved mental wellbeing. Nearly 30% reported worse mental wellbeing during lockdown in both themselves and their partner. The factor most strongly connected to poor mental wellbeing during the pandemic has been jobs and earnings losses<sup>21</sup>.

**Lockdown impact on mental wellbeing did not vary in relation to socio-economic status:** about one fifth of partnered fathers in all socio-economic groups in the *Lockdown Fathers* study reported a positive impact of lockdown on their mental wellbeing; two fifths reported no impact; and two fifths reported negative impact.

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<sup>18</sup> (ONS, 2021)

<sup>19</sup> (Clayton et al., 2020)

<sup>20</sup> A study of increases in parents’ time spent on housework, childcare and home schooling early in the Spring 2020 lockdown, found no related increase in psychological distress in fathers and very little in mothers. A month later (May 2020) no association with psychological distress in either parent was found (Xue & McMunn, 2021). A study of parents in couple households mainly working from home during lockdown, found 48% of mothers v. 43% of fathers reporting feeling ‘rushed or pressed’ more than half the time; and 46% of mothers v. 42% of fathers feeling ‘nervous and stressed’ more than half the time. In this same study slightly more mothers (c.27%) than fathers (c..25%) reported improved mental health (Chung et al., 2020).

<sup>21</sup> (Andrew et al., 2020a).

**Fathers gained better understanding of their partner:** in the *Lockdown Fathers* study, half of the fathers said that, post-lockdown, they better understood what is involved in running a household and looking after children.

**Couple relationships were not harmed by families being locked down together:** 85% of the *Lockdown Fathers* dads reported a 'good/ very good' relationship with their live-in partner before lockdown (83% afterwards); and only 3% before (5% afterwards) said it was 'poor'. Disadvantaged fathers were as likely as more advantaged dads to report a good couple relationship. Another UK study found 20% of couple relationships improving during the first lockdown<sup>22</sup> – improvement that was still in place six months later<sup>23</sup>.

**Increased awareness of the importance of fathers spending time with their children** was reported by three fifths of the *Lockdown Fathers* dads in couple households.

Like some mothers, some fathers found the lockdown experience difficult and even painful for at least part of the time. That did not necessarily negate its value: an experience does not have to be easy to be rewarding.

Many of these experiences were common to all fathers. Some varied for particular groups.

## 5. Own Household Fathers (separated dads)

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*I had a really good week this week with [my daughter]. I've had sort of a little bit extra. I had her four nights this week, and I had her brother as well, who's my ex-stepson."*  
(Own Household Father)

**Own Household Fathers (OHFs) do not live full-time with their child and are often described as 'non-resident' or 'separated'.** The *Lockdown Fathers* study does not use these terms because they suggest that these men are separated from their *children*, which applies to a relatively small minority. Around 80% of fathers of young children who do not live with their child's other parent and are in contact with their child, look after their young children regularly, often with overnight care in their 'own household'<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> (Benson & McKay, 2020b)

<sup>23</sup> (Benson & McKay, 2020a)

<sup>24</sup> (Bryson & McKay, 2020; Haux et al., 2015; Poole et al., 2013; Scottish Government, 2019)

**Own Household Fathers are a highly disadvantaged group.** OHFs who see their children regularly tend to be more advantaged than those who do not – and only the more involved OHFs were included in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample. But even these *involved* OHFs were disadvantaged when compared with the partnered fathers in the study: they were almost twice as likely (22% v. 14%) to have been out of work before lockdown. Only 31% (compared with 41% of the fathers in couple households) were educated to degree level. Only 25% had a new partner, while 44% lived with another adult (not their partner), such as their own parent or a house mate.

**The in-person time that Own Household Fathers had with their children during lockdown varied in the *Lockdown Fathers* study:** 40% had more time, 46% less time, compared to before lockdown. ‘Less time’ was associated with a poor relationship between the parents; the child’s mother or another adult controlling father-child time together; and socio-economic disadvantage. Seventy-three per cent of the small sample of disadvantaged OHFs saw less of their children during the Spring 2020 lockdown compared with 25% of the most advantaged OHFs.

**‘Virtual’ communications with children rose substantially.** Almost half the *Lockdown Fathers* OHFs connected ‘virtually’ more often with their children during lockdown; and only nine per cent connected less often. Virtual communication included video calls, telephone calls, social media and gaming. Gaming together remotely is a way in which OHFs, and their children interact when apart<sup>25</sup>.

**Among the OHFs in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample, the majority (c. 70%) have a good or workable relationship with their child’s other parent.** Before lockdown, almost half reported a good relationship and this barely changed. The percentage reporting a poor relationship increased from 27% to 33% during lockdown. Large numbers of separated parents enjoy positive relationships, with almost half the OHFs reporting that they and their child’s other parent co-operate well, and one-in-four say this relationship ‘makes me happy’.

**In the *Lockdown Fathers* SAMPLE, the OHFs’ mental wellbeing was strongly connected with time spent with their children.** Those reporting ‘less time’ together during lockdown reported worse mental wellbeing. Time with children was central to the wellbeing of these fathers during lockdown.

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<sup>25</sup> (Goldman et al., 2019)

## 6. Fathers of colour

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*“I think work did understand there was going to have to be some give and take... My kids are going to come first all the time, and they accepted that. My work is getting responses to complaints and drafting letters, I can do that any time – it doesn’t need to be 9 to 5.”*  
(Partnered Father)

**Fathers of Colour<sup>26</sup> in the *Lockdown Fathers* study were more likely than White fathers to report improvements in their relationships with their children.** Four fifths (compared with three fifths of White fathers) felt closer to their children after lockdown.

**Fathers of Colour were more likely to report a positive impact of lockdown on their mental wellbeing.** Nearly a third (compared with one fifth of White fathers) reported this.

**Fathers of Colour were as likely to report good or very good relationships with their partner** – and were more likely to report improvement due to lockdown.

**In short, more Fathers of Colour than White Fathers in the *Lockdown Fathers* study became closer to their children during the Spring 2020 lockdown – and families in these communities grew closer.**

## 7. Two-father households

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*“I really enjoy it, the kids are running around – they’ve got a paddling pool, lots of games... I don’t have to do any work for three days as well, so don’t have to worry about that.”* (Partnered Father, working from home)

**The *Lockdown Fathers* sample included 156 households headed by two men who were raising at least one under-12 child full-time in their home.**

**More than twice as many father respondents in Two Father households as in Father-Mother households (43% v. 18%) were ‘main’ rather than ‘secondary’ caregivers.** This means that a larger proportion were in much the same situation as mothers in Father-Mother households.

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<sup>26</sup> Sample size 212 fathers (unweighted), 54% Asian, 22% Black, 18% Mixed heritage. This sample of Fathers of Colour encompasses diverse ethnicities, and heterogeneity of characteristics, experiences and views.

**Father-respondents in Two Father households were less likely than father-respondents in Father-Mother households to report spending more time with their children during lockdown.** They were also less likely to report positive change in their relationship. This may represent the ‘main caregiver’ effect in reporting: many more of the father-respondents in Two Father households may have perceived themselves as having spent a lot of time with their children before lockdown and having very close relationships with them already.

**Father-respondents in Two Father households were more than twice as likely as father-respondents in Father-mother households (8% v. 3%) to report a ‘poor’ relationship with their partner before (and after) lockdown.** Two Father households were also less likely to report equal division in housework and childcare. Equality in unpaid care-work at home is strongly associated with couple relationship satisfaction in Two Father households<sup>27</sup>.

**Father-respondents in Two Father households were more likely to report a positive impact of the lockdown on both their own and their partner’s mental wellbeing.** This may follow gender lines in reporting: women are more likely than men to assess their own mental wellbeing as poor<sup>28</sup>, including during the pandemic<sup>29</sup>.

## 8. What fathers want

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*“I want this to continue. It feels like business is picking back up for us, but I’m also thinking I like this flexibility. I would like to have my own business ideally from home... I’ve been doing some thinking about that with my wife. She works full time, and she’s keen to give us that time to be at home as a family.” (Partnered Father, working from home)*

**Fathers do not want to go back to old patterns of childcare.** The *Lockdown Fathers* study, and other UK studies too<sup>30</sup>, found fathers valuing the additional time they had spent with their children and partner and wanting to build that into their lives after the pandemic: In a study of fathers predominantly working from home, sixty-four per

<sup>27</sup> (Tornello et al., 2015)

<sup>28</sup> (ONS, 2021)

<sup>29</sup> A study of responses to the pandemic in France found men tending to downplay the seriousness of the situation and emphasise its temporary nature, while women more frequently reported feeling frightened, anxious, and worried (Hennekam & Shymko, 2020). The researchers were not convinced that the women’s mental wellbeing was actually worse than the men’s, or the men’s better than the women’s, pointing to the phenomenon of ‘gender performativity’ where both sexes’ self-reports are in line with gender stereotypes.

<sup>30</sup> (Clayton et al., 2020) (Chung et al., 2020) (Kelland et al., 2020) (Fathers Network Scotland, 2020, 2021)

cent said that they wanted to reduce their working hours in the future to spend more time with their family<sup>31</sup>.

**A high percentage of fathers want, in future, to work flexibly and, at least part of the time, from home.** In the *Lockdown Fathers* sample of partnered fathers who had been full-time at home during the lockdown, 76% of hoped to work more flexibly and 63% to work more from home in future. Home working was less available to the most disadvantaged fathers (3%) than the most advantaged fathers (67%). The most disadvantaged fathers were the least likely to aspire to this afterwards, perhaps because they were less likely to believe it to be possible.

**Fathers want, after the pandemic, to avoid lengthy, timewasting, stressful commutes to work:** three-quarters said that not having to commute for long periods of time was the top benefit of working from home<sup>32</sup>.

**Mothers, too, want their partner to work more flexibly and more from home.** A study predominantly of parents working from home found half the mothers hoping their partner will be able to work from home in the future, and two-thirds hoping he will be able to work flexibly<sup>33</sup>.

## 9. Fathering the future

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*“I want this to continue. It feels like business is picking back up for us, but I’m also thinking I like this flexibility... I’ve been doing some thinking about that with my wife.”*

(Partnered Father)

Involved fathering benefits children, with engagement in developmental childcare activities particularly advantageous. Involved fathering also benefits mothers, reducing their parenting stress and contributing to gender equality in earning and caring at family level<sup>34</sup>. In addition, involved fathering contributes to men’s development, enhancing emotional regulation and expression, and impacting positively on cognitive skills, health, capacity for empathy, confidence, self-esteem and executive function<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> (Chung et al., 2020)

<sup>32</sup> (Chung et al., 2020)

<sup>33</sup> (Chung et al., 2020)

<sup>34</sup> (Chung, 2020)

<sup>35</sup> (Palkovitz, 2019)

The stage is set for increased fathercare after the pandemic. The great majority of fathers in all socio-economic groups are newly motivated and better equipped to play a greater role at home. Whether this will happen does not depend on the fathers alone.

In most couple households, prior to lockdown, the mother was sacrificing earnings/ career progression and the father involvement with his children in order, mutually, to manage their work/ care obligations. This sour-yet-sweet spot will be the natural point-of-return as family routines re-establish. These routines are rooted in gendered social institutions, especially government and the labour market<sup>36</sup>, which assume that fathers have limited caregiving responsibilities and that childcare is women's work.

Traditionalism in these institutions generates the 'main' v. 'secondary' caregiver dichotomy found even where gender is not at issue: in Two Father households.

What to do? Some 'slippage' back into traditionalism is inevitable and is already underway. While fathers' childcare share, relative to mothers', increased substantially during the Spring 2020 lockdown<sup>37</sup>, by September 2020 it had slipped back – to 50%<sup>38</sup>. Certainly, this was well below its lockdown high of 64%, but it was still well above its pre- lockdown low of 39%. That was not how it was reported. The mantra – the outrage – continues to be that women have been 'doing more than men' without acknowledgement that this is mainly due to their lesser involvement in paid work before lockdown. That has reinforced traditionalism because, along with the (erroneous) belief that nothing changed during the pandemic, comes the belief that nothing will ever change.

This report has been written not to present 'sunny side up' fatherhood but to set the record straight. Firstly, to raise awareness of the narrowing of the gender childcare gap in couple households reported by most studies during the Spring 2020 lockdown<sup>39</sup> – a narrowing of the gender childcare gap that been observed from the 1970s. Secondly to report changes in fathers' awareness, skills and confidence as parents that emerged from spending more time with their young children and were found in the *Lockdown Fathers* study. Thirdly, to point to the relevance of these to child and family wellbeing, and to gender equality.

The changes most likely to be retained are some increases in the availability of flexible and remote working. While this could transform the lives of some families (and more

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<sup>36</sup> For example, the Gender Pay Gap and the old-fashioned design of the UK's maternity/paternity/ parental leave systems ensure families are penalised if the higher earner, usually a father, takes leave for parenting, or works fewer hours.

<sup>37</sup> (ONS, 2020a).

<sup>38</sup> (ONS, 2020b)

<sup>39</sup> Even despite a widening of the gender-work-gap in some families.

fathers being seen out-and-about with young children during the working week might, itself, change attitudes to men's caretaking), there are inherent dangers.

If only or mainly women and mothers make use of new workplace possibilities, this will *damage* gender equality. It will lead to higher levels of stigmatisation against people who work flexibly or remotely. This will result in women suffering ever-more-negative career outcomes. It will also reinforce traditionalism, with women taking on ever larger shares of housework and childcare<sup>40</sup>.

The Recommendations set out below are designed to reduce the likelihood of this happening while maintaining lockdown-related gains in father child relationships and in many fathers' increased confidence in supporting their children's learning and education in the future.

## 10. Recommendations

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During lockdowns fathers in the UK almost doubled the time they had been spending on childcare, grew in confidence, learned new skills and built stronger relationships with their babies and children.

All children should benefit, in learning and love, from the support that time with a confident, well-supported dad can bring. As we build back from this pandemic, we owe it to them to make this happen.

Fathers want to keep contributing, but shift patterns dictated to them at the last minute, long commutes, and long and inflexible working hours can get in the way.

### **Employers should:**

- acknowledge fathers' aspirations to work more flexibly and/or work from home, when planning strategies for bouncing back from the pandemic
- take account of men's caregiving commitments (including sharing care of children with former partners) and longer average commuting times, when designing and communicating about work rotas
- make explicit in HR policies and internal communications that flexible working options are available to men as well as women – and normalise flexible and home working by fathers and other males with caregiving responsibilities, as well as by women and mothers

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<sup>40</sup> (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018)

- appoint diversity managers and/or diversity task forces whose brief is not only to support female staff to advance at work, but also to support male staff to combine paid work with caring responsibilities
- publish, in all job advertisements and specifications, details about the nature and extent of the flexibility (time and location) on offer for that post.
- alongside Gender Pay Gap reporting, report by gender, ethnicity and seniority on staff working part-time and flexibly (time and location).

### **Trade unions, professional bodies and others should:**

- challenge workplace macho cultures and provide targeted support to help fathers (including those in low-paid work and in the ‘gig economy’) negotiate reasonable, family-friendly work patterns.

### **Schools and early years education providers should:**

- in the design and delivery of post-pandemic ‘catch-up’ activities, build explicitly on fathers’ involvement in their children’s learning and education during lockdown – consciously seeking to include fathers in all types of parental engagement activity
- make special efforts to engage directly with fathers who do not live with their children full-time, as well as with fathers who do, communicating routinely with both parents across, as well as within, households.

### **Government should:**

- legislate in the forthcoming Employment Bill for a duty on employers to advertise vacancies flexibly and to detail flexibility options for that post, unless there are good business reasons not to so
- require employers annually to report by gender, ethnicity and seniority on the numbers of jobs advertised, staff recruited and staff working part-time and flexibly (time and location).

### **The future: our ‘Time with Dad’ campaign**



‘Time with Dad’ is our campaign to preserve the ‘lockdown positives’ of fathers spending more time with their children and supporting their learning, development and education.

We want the UK to build back from the pandemic in ways that take account of fathers’ importance – and the limits on their time. We are looking for employers, schools, dads, mums, anyone who shares our vision, and might be interested in helping us turn it into a reality.

If you share our vision, please share your ideas, energy and expertise by joining the Time with Dad network now at <https://mailchi.mp/fatherhoodinstitute.org/time-with-dad>.

## 11. Methods

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The *Lockdown Fathers* project comprised three waves of data collection with fathers<sup>41</sup> of under 12s across the UK: (Wave 1) qualitative online diaries and self-recorded videos (30 fathers); (Wave 2) a quantitative online survey; (Wave 3) online depth video-interviews (15 diary participants).

**The survey sample** is a quota sample of fathers aged 16+ of at least one child (birth, adoptive or step/ partner's child) aged under 12 years who are on the PopulusLive online panel. PopulusLive has around 150,000 active members across the UK. Quotas were set for sample recruitment to facilitate a diverse and nationally representative sample. The achieved sample was 2,045 fathers (unweighted).

**Survey fieldwork:** Fathers completed the survey online (11 to 29 June 2020) just after the first and strictest UK Covid lockdown. Average survey completion time was 22 minutes. Potential respondents received reminders to encourage participation. Regular quality control checks on data quality were carried out during fieldwork. Respondents received an incentive payment following completion.

**Survey weighting and statistical significance tests:** To ensure national representativeness on key parameters, the achieved unweighted sample of 1,881 (excluding 164 fathers in Two Father households<sup>42</sup>) was weighted (standard rim weighting) to nationally representative profiles for father<sup>43</sup> age, ethnicity, highest educational qualifications, economic status and household Social Grade<sup>44</sup>.

Data on **Own Household Fathers** (separated dads) and fathers in couple households (**Partnered Fathers**) were separately analysed and reported. The achieved sample of **Fathers of Colour** over-represented fathers of higher Social Grade. A published

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<sup>41</sup> Birth, adoptive or step, whether or not the children lived with him.

<sup>42</sup> These Two Father households were over-represented in the achieved sample of 2,045 fathers to a degree that could not be corrected with weighting. The findings of an analysis of the unweighted sample of these fathers are reported separately.

<sup>43</sup> UK 'resident' and 'non-resident' fathers aged 16-64 of dependent children (aged under 16) in 2009-11, taken from Poole et al. (2016) "Who are Non-Resident Fathers? A British Socio-Demographic Profile" (weighted Wave 1 *Understanding Society* data) (Poole et al., 2016)

<sup>44</sup> Household Social Grade for people aged 15+ in Great Britain in 2016-17, taken from National Readership Survey, see <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/>

nationally representative profile of ethnicity by Social Grade was not found for use in weighting. Instead using interlocking weighting, this sample was weighted to the same household Social Grade profile used for weighting the whole sample.

**T-tests (95% significance level)** were used to test percentage differences and mean differences (on questionnaire scales) for statistical significance.

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