



Lockdown Fathers

the untold story

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FULL REPORT

“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 condensed 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

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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 and project evaluations, and publishes research summaries to inform policy and practice, while also training professionals in health, education and family services to engage productively with fathers. The Institute assists employers to develop competitive edge and reduce their gender pay gap and other workplace inequalities, through supporting male employees' caring responsibilities. Visit www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

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The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in education, welfare and justice. It also funds student programmes that provide opportunities for young people to develop skills in quantitative and scientific methods. It is the founder and co-founder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and the Ada Lovelace Institute. The Nuffield Foundation has funded this report, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation. Visit www.nuffieldfoundation.org

About this series

Lockdown Fathers is the fourth report in the *Contemporary Fathers in the UK* series, funded by the Nuffield Foundation. The three previous reports addressed fathers in the antenatal period ([Who's the bloke in the room?](#)), fathers in UK datasets ([Where's the daddy?](#)) and fathers, work and care ([Cash or Carry?](#)). Two further reports are planned: *Bringing baby home* on fathers in the postnatal period; and *Me and my dad* on fathers and their adolescent children.

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1. Introduction

“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)

It is 150 years since the Industrial Revolution removed fathers and other breadwinners from their households for all or most of the working day – a “*physical removal*” which, in the opinion of the great historical demographer Peter Laslett, was “*the most important of all the effects on the family group of the process of modernisation*” (Laslett, 1983).

Decades, centuries, passed; suburbs spread, commuting times grew longer and the daily alienation of working fathers from their children seemed irreversible. By early 2020, among the Partnered Fathers in this study who were in paid work, 89% mainly worked outside-of-home, as did 94% of fathers whose children did not live with them full time.

Fathers in the UK had been increasing their involvement in childcare over several decades (Fisher et al., 1999; Henz, 2017). They had mainly achieved this NOT by working fewer hours or closer to home, but by clipping minutes and hours off sleep and personal leisure (Fox et al., 2011). By 2015 that tactic had reached its limit of possibilities and a worrying ‘gender care gap’ remained. Fathers of young children in couple families were contributing no more than one-third of the childcare: on average one hour for every two undertaken by mothers (Henz, 2017; ONS, 2016; Walthery & Chung, 2021). Experts hypothesised that this would not change significantly until ‘something big’ happened to alter fathers’ engagement *with the workplace* (Altintas & Sullivan, 2017).

Covid-19 has proved to be that ‘something big’, generating a massive reverse migration as – in their millions across the world – daddies came home. During the first stringent lockdown period in the UK (Spring 2020) *Lockdown Fathers* found more than half (56%) of the partnered (and 51% of the separated) fathers who had been in paid employment before lockdown, full-time at home during it (working or not working)¹.

Lockdown Fathers charted changes during the Spring 2020 lockdown in the working and caretaking patterns of fathers and their partners; explored time spent with children;

¹ Among the Partnered Fathers living full-time with all their under-12 children, and in paid work before lockdown, 26% were furloughed, 6% lost their paid work, 24% worked from home for all or almost all their working time during lockdown. Among the separated dads working before lockdown, 26% were furloughed, 5% lost their paid work, 20% worked from home for all or almost all their working time during lockdown.

impacts on fathers' parenting and on their relationships with their children, their confidence as parents, their aspirations for the future. And all in the context of environmental stressors: fathers' reports of changes in family finances, their own and their partner's wellbeing, and the quality of their relationship.

What of the future? Would the pandemic prove to be the “disaster for feminism” as many – including commentators in the *Atlantic*², the *Guardian*³, the *Financial Times*⁴, the *New York Times*⁵ and others⁶ were predicting? Would gender equality (insofar as there is any) become “another casualty of the coronavirus”? Would working women like “sacrificial lambs” be herded (along with men, one assumes, although they were never mentioned) “back to the 1950s”?

Or might the lockdown experience, by contrast, as some voices suggested (Andrew et al., 2020b; Chung et al., 2021; Finch, 2020; King et al., 2020; Sevilla & Smith, 2020), not only deliver closer, more loving, more rewarding father-child relationships but also help to change gender norms? Might the gender childcare gap narrow? And if so, could this be sustained after the pandemic? Was it possible that the coronavirus nightmare might, ultimately, deliver the ‘next step’ in gender equality – at least for some families?

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/feminism-womens-rights-coronavirus-covid19/608302/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2020/jul/24/uk-working-mothers-are-sacrificial-lambs-in-coronavirus-childcare-crisis>

⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/7e147d57-050e-405c-a334-75a5ea748e2a>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/26/world/covid-women-childcare-equality.html>

⁶ <https://theconversation.com/return-of-the-1950s-housewife-how-to-stop-coronavirus-lockdown-reinforcing-sexist-gender-roles-134851>

2. Meet the fathers

“Home-schooling wasn’t going too well at all [this week]. My younger boy doesn’t like the whole computer, logging on [for classes] ... this is his home – and he wants it to remain his home.” (Partnered Father, working from home)

During June 2020, 2045 UK fathers with at least one child⁷ aged under 12 years completed a web-based survey⁸ commissioned by the Fatherhood Institute, with the assistance of research consultancy BritainThinks and funded by the Nuffield Foundation. Through quotas and, subsequently, weighting⁹ the achieved sample was nationally representative in terms of age, region, socio-economic grade (SEG), working status, ethnicity and highest educational qualification. Survey respondents were asked to reflect and report on their circumstances and experiences before, during and shortly after the first Covid-19 lockdown in Britain (23 March to 11 May 2020). Thirty also kept real-time diaries and videoed reflections over a three-week period; and fifteen participated in in-depth follow-up interviews.

On most topics, it was not useful to analyse the experiences of all the fathers together. Their circumstances were too different. The largest group for analysis¹⁰ consisted of 1,614 (weighted sample 1,591) fathers in couple households. These fathers, called Partnered Fathers in this report, lived full-time with *all* their under-12 children in a ‘two-parent’ opposite-sex household.

The second-largest group for analysis was a sub-group of the Partnered Fathers, with particular working patterns. Before lockdown all in this group had worked full-time outside their homes. During lockdown all were full-time at home with their partner (either or both working or not working) and without childcare support from another

⁷ Birth, adoptive or step, or of whom he considered himself a parent, whether or not the children lived with him.

⁸ Data fielded using the Populus Data Solutions Online Panel. A non-probability sampling method has been standard in other online surveys investigating work-and-care in families during lockdown – e.g. (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020b) (Andrew et al., 2020b).

⁹ For a range of father-characteristics (age, economic status, ethnicity and highest educational qualification), the *Lockdown Fathers* sample was weighted against Understanding Society Wave 1 data for fathers of children under 16 years from the Modern Fatherhood dataset ((Poole et al., 2016) Table 1, page 232); for SEG (Socio-Economic Grade) the weighting was against the 2016/17 National Readership Survey <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/>

¹⁰ Among the rest of the sample, and excluded from analysis, were small subsamples of fathers who did not fit easily into any category. These included (1) fathers-without-live-in-partners who lived full-time their children under 12 (‘Lone Fathers’) (2) fathers who had at least one child under 12 living with them full-time and at least one child under 12 living with them part-time or not at all (3) Partnered Fathers (12%) whose children were in school or childcare at least some of the time during lockdown (4) couple households (also 12%) which contained an additional adult (sometimes an adult child).

resident adult (other than their partner) or because their children were in school or daycare¹¹. These ‘Newly-at-Home’ Partnered Fathers were the men whose working lives had been most changed by the lockdown. They numbered 586 (weighted sample 545) and amounted to 34% of the wider group of Partnered Fathers.

The third group for analysis consisted of 163 fathers (weighted sample 171) who before, as during, lockdown lived in a different household from their children’s other parent and did not live full-time with any of their under-12 children. Those fathers are called, in this report, ‘involved Own Household Fathers’ (iOHFs). Before lockdown they had been meeting with their children in-person at least fortnightly (the great majority having regular overnight stays), and thus were the more involved among fathers commonly called ‘non-resident’¹². However, this did not mean they were unusual: the great majority of separated fathers of younger children see them at least as often as this (Bryson & McKay, 2020; Haux et al., 2015; Poole et al., 2013; Scottish Government, 2019). While the strength of any conclusions drawn from this sample is limited by the modest sample size, unique data is presented on their changing circumstances and stressors experienced during the Spring 2020 lockdown, as well as their perceptions of parenting and family relationships. Their experiences are mostly reported in a separate section (section 8).

The most significant difference between the Partnered Fathers and the involved OHFs – and the main reason for not including them in the same group for analysis – is that the time the Partnered Fathers and their children spent together during lockdown was largely determined by where the *fathers* were: at home or working outside their home. By contrast, in the involved OHF sample, while the father’s working situation and location could still be relevant, father-child time was mainly determined by where the *children* were (at ‘dad’s place’ or ‘mum’s’).

“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, furloughed)

Data on two other sub-samples of Partnered Fathers are reported in separate sections. An unweighted sample of 261 Fathers of Colour (mainly of Asian, Black or mixed heritage) was, in terms of ethnicity, a representative proportion of the total sample of Partnered Fathers and sufficiently large for separate analysis. However, higher SEG and

¹¹ These services were available to children of essential or key workers and vulnerable children.

¹² The term ‘non-resident’ father is unsatisfactory since it implies that the fathers and children are never co-resident while, in fact a majority are regularly co-resident overnight (part-time resident) with their children in a separate household from the children’s mothers.

university educated fathers were over-represented and this could not be completely¹³ rectified through weighting¹⁴. While these fathers' responses were included in the main analysis, validity of comparison with other groups was restricted. Section 9 addresses this.

The final sub-sample consists of Two-Father households: 156 of the Partnered Fathers consisted of two males raising children full-time together in their household¹⁵. This family type represented 9% of the sample, compared with their probable national representation of fewer than 0.01% (ONS, 2019). Because of their over-representation in the survey sample they are reported on separately (section 10).

Data was collected by regions and countries in the UK. A minimum unweighted sample size of 150 is generally thought necessary for statistically reliable analysis. The geographical spread of the survey respondents was nationally representative, but the unweighted sample sizes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were insufficient for separate analysis.

The classification system chosen to describe the fathers' socio-economic circumstances was the occupation-based Socio-Economic Grade (SEG)¹⁶ system. This was chosen because the main focus of the *Lockdown Fathers* study is the impact of changes in fathers' engagement with the workplace. Data on the fathers' education level were also collected, and are referred to from time to time in the report. The weighted/unweighted SEG percentages in the two main samples (Partnered Fathers and involved OHFs) are set out below.

¹³ There was no published nationally representative profile of ethnicity by Social Grade to use in weighting. Instead, the sample of Fathers of Colour was weighted to the national Social Grade profile for people aged 15+ (2016/17 National Readership Survey), which was also used to weight the whole sample of fathers.

¹⁴ The disproportionate numbers of socio-economically advantaged Fathers of Colour responding to non-probability panel surveys is common across the board. The BLM movement has made researchers aware of limitations in UK ethnicity data; and the Royal Statistical Society and the Office for National Statistics are consulting on strategies to rectify this (RSS, 2020).

¹⁵ There were no data errors generating this sample: the desire to include gay fathers had been communicated to BritainThinks.

¹⁶ The abbreviated version of the National Readership Survey Social Grade classification was used: <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/> This is based on the SEG of the 'chief income earner' in the household: the person with the largest income, whether from employment, pensions, state benefits, investments or any other source.

Figure 1: Partnered Fathers – SEG categories and sample distribution

A/B	A Higher managerial, administrative and professional B Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional	29% (weighted)	43% (unweighted)
C1/C2	C1 Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional C2 Skilled manual workers	49% (weighted)	40% (unweighted)
D/E	D Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers E State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, not working	22% (weighted)	17% (unweighted)
		Weighted base: 1591	Unweighted base: 1614

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Figure 2: Involved Own Household Fathers (iOHFs) – SEG categories and sample distribution

A/B	A Higher managerial, administrative and professional B Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional	24% (weighted)	36% (unweighted)
C1/C2	C1 Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional C2 Skilled manual workers	44% (weighted)	40% (unweighted)
D/E	D Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers E State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, not working	32% (weighted)	25% (unweighted)
		Weighted base: 171	Unweighted base: 163

Base: All involved Own Household Fathers

As can be seen from the above figures, while towards half of both the Partnered Fathers and the iOHFs in the weighted samples worked in middle-range occupations, iOHF socio-economic disadvantage was clear ‘at the margins’: they were less likely than the Partnered Fathers to be categorised as SEG A/B and more likely to be categorised SEG D/E. This comparative disadvantage corresponds with national data¹⁷. Many of the differences between iOHFs and Partnered Fathers noted in this report may be

¹⁷ This accords with ONS data that found the difference in the employment rate between separated fathers and fathers in couple households to be -13.5 percentage points. This is larger than the difference in employment rates between mothers in couple households and non-partnered mothers: 9.3 percentage points (Dromey et al., 2020).

associated with group-differences in Socio-Economic Grade. Other differences, which may also be confounding variables, are reported in the iOHF section – section 8.

Unless otherwise indicated, data reported in this document are based on weighted samples.

Where an asterisk is included in figures, this denotes an unweighted base of fewer than 150.

Even where differences shown in row and column percentages indicate a statistical association between two variables, this is likely to incorporate confounding by additional variables (multivariate analysis was not undertaken for this report but the data will be archived to permit further analysis). Direction of effects is not known; and causality is not implied.

Some sections are introduced by summaries of findings from other Covid studies, most of them from within the UK. Identifying and assessing all the non-UK studies was beyond the scope at this project.

3. Fathers, mothers, paid work and childcare

“It’s been a horrible week, just been a really busy week doing housework, tidying, cooking, even though I’ve only got one nine-year-old, I’m not used to dealing with the child [...] I don’t know where the days go to.” (Partnered Father)

3.1. Other studies

Mothers did more unpaid work than fathers during the Spring 2020 lockdown and subsequently. However, the wider research suggests that this was not the ‘fault’ of the pandemic. Mothers’ greater ‘burden’ was already in place. The pandemic neither *caused* nor *exacerbated* parental inequalities in unpaid work: it *revealed* them – and, to an extent (although this was rarely reported), mitigated them.

Before lockdown UK mothers in couple families were contributing around twice as much childcare as fathers. This inequality was matched and fed by inequality in fathers’ v. mothers’ engagement in paid work: working fathers in two-parent households spent many more hours than their partner on paid work¹⁸ and on travel-to-work¹⁹.

Parents’ paid work responsibilities affect their availability to undertake unpaid work at home²⁰, just as their unpaid work responsibilities constrain their engagement in paid work. Reduction in paid work responsibilities during lockdown would, in the main, increase availability to undertake unpaid work at home. For example, if mothers had lost more paid work than their partner during the Spring 2020 lockdown, leading to a widening of the gender-work gap, one would have expected their unpaid-work-burden to grow relative to their partner’s: that is, for the gender-care gap to widen, too.

Most of the UK Covid studies of gender and employment have looked at women v. men rather than at mothers v. fathers. So far, these have mainly found that men have had a slightly higher probability than women of being furloughed or dismissed from work (ONS, 2020d; Witteveen, 2020) and to have experienced a sharper drop in paid work hours (Zhou et al., 2020). Where women were a little more likely than men to have been furloughed or to have suffered jobs or earnings losses, this is associated with age (women aged 18 to 24 – only a minority of whom will be mothers) or low skills or education

¹⁸ 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)

¹⁹ Men’s and fathers’ journeys to work were longer than women’s or mothers’ (ONS, 2018; TUC, 2013).

²⁰ And there is a reverse influence: unpaid work responsibilities constrain engagement in paid work.

(Adams-Prassl et al., 2020b; Major et al., 2020; Warren & Lyonette, 2020; WBG, 2020)²¹. Overall, while gender can be a factor, it has not been the major driver of inequalities in jobs and earnings losses during the pandemic in the UK²².

What of mothers v. fathers, as opposed to women v. men?²³ A study by University College, London (Xue & McMunn, 2021) found mothers in couple families during the Spring 2020 lockdown twice as likely to be the only parent in a couple family to reduce their working hours (21% mother only v. 11% father only) or change their employment schedules (32% mother only v. 18% father only) for childcare or home schooling²⁴. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found mothers in couple families working 68% of fathers' working time during the first lockdown, compared with 73% beforehand²⁵. Although from a very low base, the mothers in this study were 9% more likely than the fathers to lose their job²⁶, to have had their paid work curtailed²⁷ (Andrew et al., 2020b), to have lost their paid work *permanently* (17% mothers v. 11% fathers) and to have been furloughed (35% mothers, 30% fathers) (Andrew et al., 2020a). Furloughed workers were not supposed to work, although many – particularly men (and therefore, one suspects, fathers) – did so (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020a).

For the worst of reasons, it therefore seems that during the Spring 2020 lockdown, when most children were home 24/7, the gender-work-gap widened slightly in couple families. Mothers were *slightly* more likely than fathers to lose out on paid work and therefore to be more available to care for children. So – did their burden increase? Did the gender care gap widen too?

²¹ For example, while Adams-Prassl et al. reported that women had been more likely than men to experience jobs and earnings losses, this was statistically significant only in the youngest age group. Among men and women aged 30-49 (the group most likely to have an under-12 child at home) there were no statistically significant gender differences.

²² In the UK, main drivers of pandemic-related inequalities in jobs and earnings losses during 2020 were the North/South divide (Johns et al., 2020), ethnicity (Hope not Hate, 2020), socio-economic class (Andrew et al., 2020a), education level (Qian & Hu, 2021 (forthcoming)) and worker-age (Major et al., 2020).

²³ Studies based on non-representative samples have not been included. For example, studies that did not adjust for the representativeness of the sample or attempt to correct through weighting (BritainThinks/Mumsnet, 2021; Lacey et al., 2020; TUC, 2021) or that combined data on non-partnered mothers with data on mothers in couple families.

²⁴ Among the rest of this sample, neither parent changed their work schedules – or both did

²⁵ A subsequent analysis by the same authors found that by May 2020, mothers were in paid work at only 70% of the rate of fathers, compared with 80% prior to lockdown (Andrew et al., 2020a).

²⁶ In fact, because this was from a very low base, not many more mothers than fathers suffered in this way (Andrew et al., 2020b).

²⁷ Although by not very much, it seems, since there were virtually no gender differences in earnings loss in two-parent families, comparing earnings before and during lockdown (Andrew et al., 2020a).

In terms of home schooling, mothers (especially middle-class mothers²⁸) have been less likely than fathers to *perceive* fathers as contributing at least an equal share (Anders et al., 2020; BritainThinks/Mumsnet, 2021; Chung et al., 2020). When actual time spent was *measured* during the Spring 2020 lockdown, one study found fathers contributing about half as much home schooling time as mothers (Villadsen et al., 2020); another found fathers contributing almost as much time (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020b); a third, equal time (ONS, 2020a); and a fourth, very little difference. In that last study (of parents working mainly from home during lockdown) 60% of mothers reported doing all or most of the helping with homework or home schooling before lockdown – a percentage that dropped to 55% during lockdown. In that sample, the gender gap in home schooling that had been 60:40 before lockdown narrowed to 55:45 during it (Chung et al., 2020).

In estimating childcare time, most studies combined home schooling with other forms of childcare. All found mothers in couple households ‘doing more’ than fathers during the first national lockdown, as they had beforehand. Because, during lockdown, both parents ‘did more’, in that sense ‘mothers’ burden’ increased. However, mothers’ *share* did not increase *relative to* fathers’ share: it decreased – the reason being that fathers in couple households increased their childcare contribution more sharply than mothers. Fathers in the IFS study almost doubled the number of hours each day in which they undertook childcare. Because their childcare time rose from just over four to eight hours per day, while mothers’ rose from almost seven to just over ten²⁹, the gender childcare gap narrowed from more than two and a half hours before lockdown to just over two hours during it (Andrew et al., 2020a, 2020b; Finch, 2020). While not every study recorded narrowing of the gender care gap³⁰, the majority did so by varying degrees (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020b; Campbell, 2020; Chung, 2020b; Chung et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2020; ONS, 2020b). The ONS survey of 1,300 families³¹ found that men who, before lockdown, had contributed just 39% of mothers’ childcare time, upped their

²⁸ In Anders et al. graduate mothers were more likely to disagree with the father’s assessment of his contribution. Mother reports and father reports in non-graduate families were similar. The Chung et al. study sample was of parents working mainly from home, many of whom were graduates.

²⁹ (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>

³⁰ One study found only a 10% narrowing of the gender care gap (Sevilla & Smith, 2020); another found no narrowing (Xue & McMunn, 2021); another found a slight widening BUT the gender housework gap narrowing and the percentage of fathers undertaking the main caregiver role rising from 2.6% before lockdown to almost 20% in May/June 2020 (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020)

³¹ (ONS, 2020b) 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>

game during lockdown to 64% – even while spending 36% more time than mothers on paid work (ONS, 2020b).

Several other issues warrant consideration.

Firstly, mothers working from home reported being interrupted more often than fathers (Andrew et al., 2020b). This would seem likely given pre-lockdown earning/caring gender differences which designated mothers as ‘primary’ carers to whom many children may have expected largely unfettered access.

Secondly, factors contributing to mothers’ greater responsibility for home schooling (where this was reported) may have included mothers being more likely than fathers to have been in charge of this beforehand (Chung et al., 2020) and schools’ tendency to engage with only one parent in a family, usually the mother (Clawley & Goldman, 2004).

It is also possible that the number of couple households in which there had been *no* sharing of childcare on a weekday before lockdown decreased: such households had not been uncommon before lockdown (Chung, 2020b) but with so many more fathers at home during lockdown childcare being left totally to the mother could be less likely.

Finally, a major reason why mothers’ childcare time did not show a greater increase relative to their partner’s during lockdown is that time spent on activities such as getting children ready for school and taking them here and there that mothers had done more of than fathers before lockdown, fell by a third during it (Chung et al., 2020). Lockdown activities such as home schooling and home-based recreation *replaced* a lot of these, rather than being *added to* them (Carlson et al., 2020).

To sum up, in these other UK studies, despite mothers’ slightly reduced paid work time, the gender-care-gap did not widen nor even remain the same: it narrowed. What were the findings in the *Lockdown Fathers* study?

3.2. Lockdown Fathers: Partnered Fathers

3.2.1. *Fathers v. fathers*

“I am a chartered accountant and was furloughed . . . Then there was a turn for the worse and I’ve been made redundant because of company cutbacks. We lost two major clients.”

(Partnered Father)

Before the Spring 2020 lockdown the Partnered Fathers in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample (men who lived full-time with a female partner and at least one under-12 child) had been spending most of their daytime hours away from home – and their children.

Of the 86% who had been in paid work, 94% had worked full-time and 74% had almost never worked from home. By contrast, during lockdown 56% of the previously working Partnered Fathers were full-time at home: had lost paid work, been furloughed or were working from home. The least advantaged fathers (SEG D/E) were the most likely to be furloughed and to have lost paid work entirely.

Figure 3: Partnered Fathers (SEG) – furlough/loss of paid work during lockdown

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Socio Economic Grade of father	Furloughed	Lost job or self-employed work ³²
650	427	SEG A/B	21%	4%
617	720	SEG C1/C2	28%	7%
191	224	SEG D/E	32%	15%

Base: All Partnered Fathers working before lockdown

Working from home during lockdown was possible for 67% of SEG A/B fathers, compared with just 3% of SEG D/E fathers

Figure 4: Partnered Fathers – working from home more than half the time during lockdown

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Socio Economic Grade of father	Working from home more than half the time
466	304	SEG A/B	67%
395	458	SEG C1/C2	37%
105*	126	SEG D/E	3%

Base: All Partnered Fathers working during lockdown

Because working from home saves commuting time and also (often) delivers flexibility in working time, SEG A/B fathers were generally in a better position than their less-

³² Made redundant, resigned from job or lost their self-employed work.

privileged peers to devote extra time to childcare during that first lockdown. And as commuting times are longer in higher income households (ONS, 2020b), the SEG A/B fathers will have, again, benefited in time available to spend with children compared with less advantaged fathers.

3.2.2. *Fathers v. mothers: changes in paid work*

“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)

While the *Lockdown Fathers* study did not collect data from mothers, fathers were asked about their live-in partner’s work situation as well as their own. The fathers reported similar percentages of themselves and their partners experiencing no change in paid work, being furloughed, working fewer hours, working more hours and losing paid work entirely during the Spring 2020 lockdown.

Figure 5: Partnered Fathers and Mothers – lockdown impact on working status³³

Item	Fathers	Mothers
No change	51%	57%
Furloughed	23%	19%
Lost job or self-employed work	7%	5%
Worked fewer hours each week	10%	9%
Working more hours each week	5%	4%
Unweighted base: 1614		
Weighted base: 1591		

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Mothers

Working from home contributes to *availability* for childcare as does flexibility in working time. In this sample the same percentage (43%) of the working mothers and fathers were able to work from home; and neither sex was granted substantially more flexibility in working time by their employer.

Figure 6: Partnered Fathers and mothers – employer flexibility during lockdown

Item	Fathers	Mothers
Employer permitted much more work-flexibility than usual	53%	46%

³³ These columns do not add up to 100% because a small number of fathers including those who are retired or are students, are not included in this figure

Employer did not permit any more work-flexibility	24%	28%
Parent could reduce working hours without this being a threat to their job	25%	27%
Unweighted base	959	767
Weighted base	874	707

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Mothers working before and during lockdown

No data on journey-to-work was collected in this study. However, since fathers’ commutes tend to be longer than mothers’ (ONS, 2018; TUC, 2013), cutting out commuting, as happens when working from home, is likely to have increased the time that more fathers than mothers had available for unpaid care work at home.

Because study mothers were not more likely to experience work loss, be unable to work from home or have inflexible employers, they did not *become* more available than their partner to look after the children during the lockdown. They *already were* more available.

Figure 7: Partnered Fathers and Mothers – working hours before lockdown

Working hours	Fathers	Mothers ³⁴
0	Less than 1%	4%
1-15	2%	9%
16-29	3%	28%
30-45	82%	51%
46+	12%	3%
Unweighted base	1468	1232
Weighted base	1371	1174

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Mothers working before lockdown

Figure 8: Partnered Fathers and Mothers – working hours during lockdown

Working hours	Fathers	Mothers ³⁵
0	Less than 1%	4%
1-15	5%	15%
16-29	9%	24%
30-45	75%	48%
46+	11%	3%
Unweighted base	966	767
Weighted base	888	717

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Mothers working before lockdown

³⁴ This column does not add up to 100% because 5% of the fathers responded ‘don’t know’

³⁵ This column does not add up to 100% because 6% of the fathers responded ‘don’t know’

3.2.3. *Fathers v. mothers: changes in childcare and housework*

“It was an extremely difficult day with the kids, the youngest was struggling with lack of attention due to us working and was really misbehaving.”

(Partnered Father, working from home)

In the *Lockdown Fathers* study, fathers in couple families reported that both gender-care and gender-housework gaps narrowed during the Spring 2020 lockdown, even while the gender-work-gap remained constant.

The narrowing of the gender-care and gender-housework gaps was particularly clear where the fathers, having worked outside home full-time before lockdown, were full-time at home during it (Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers). For example, these men reported that whereas before lockdown 54% of their partners had done the bulk of the childcare, only 33% did so during lockdown (a drop of 21 percentage points).

Figure 9: All Partnered Fathers v. Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers – mother more housework or childcare than father before and during lockdown

Item	All Partnered Fathers	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers
Mother more childcare than father before lockdown	45%	54%
Mother more childcare than father during lockdown	37%	33%
Mother more housework than father before lockdown	38%	42%
Mother more housework than father during lockdown	31%	27%
Unweighted base	1614	586
Weighted base	1591	545

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers

Among the whole sample of Partnered Fathers (27% of whom were still going exclusively out of home to work), the housework and childcare gaps also narrowed, but not to the same extent. For example, before lockdown 38% of all Partnered Fathers reported that their partner had been mainly responsible for the housework. During lockdown, that percentage dropped to 31% – a decline of just seven percentage points. The fathers’ reports of narrowing care and housework gaps are line with other UK

studies which also found that where fathers were full time at home during lockdown, the gender gaps narrowed most sharply (Chung et al., 2021)³⁶.

There is obviously a potential reporting bias in that the study only collected data from fathers. Some may have overestimated their contributions at one or both time points. Had the mothers been interviewed, their perception may well have been different³⁷.

What has been the purpose of this forensic analysis of the *Lockdown Fathers* data, and the careful reading of reports from other UK Covid family studies? The first objective has been to understand how, in relation to paid and unpaid work, the Spring 2020 lockdown impacted on different groups of fathers, including in different socio-economic groups.

The second objective was to learn whether, during the lockdown, gender equality was becoming “another casualty of the coronavirus” or whether, in fact, the fathers’ return home was delivering the ‘next step’ in gender equality for some families.

The conclusion has to be that, while equality was not achieved in either earning (fathers still did more of this) or caring (mothers still did more of this), narrowing of gender-housework and gender-childcare gaps that would normally have taken a decade to achieve were accomplished in just four weeks. Whether these gains can be sustained is another matter, explored later in this report.

³⁶ This study only included fathers and mothers working from home during the lockdown, whereas the *Lockdown Fathers* sample includes non-working fathers.

³⁷ Studies have recorded discrepancies between fathers’ and mothers’ estimates of their own and their partner’s contributions to housework and childcare (Anders et al., 2020; Cross, 2014; Kamo, 2000; Kan, 2008; Lee & Waite, 2005).

4. Fathers and children: time together

“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.” (Partnered Father)

4.1. Lockdown Fathers: Partnered Fathers

As outlined in the previous section, during the Spring 2020 lockdown most fathers in couple families (towards six in ten) were more available to their under-12 children than they had been before. This section explores how that time was spent and contrasts reports of time spent among different groups of partnered fathers: the large group of All Partnered Fathers that included, among other things³⁸, 27% still going exclusively out to work; the Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers (full-time at home, working or not working); and Partnered Fathers in different Socio-Economic Grades (SEG). The Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers were, in the main, more advantaged than the whole group of Partnered Fathers.

Figure 10: All Partnered Fathers v. Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers – SEG categories and sample distribution

SEG CATEGORY	All Partnered Fathers	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers
A/B	29%	35%
C1/C2	49%	52%
D/E	22%	13%
Unweighted base	1614	585
Weighted base	1591	545

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers

This SEG difference may be a confounding variable when group differences are reported. It may also contribute to more Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers (85%) than All Partnered Fathers (78%) reporting spending ‘more or much more’ time on every child-related activity during lockdown that the study investigated.

³⁸ The All Partnered Fathers group also included 12% whose children were in school or childcare at least some of the time during lockdown, and 12% (not necessarily the same 12%) whose household contained another adult, as well as their partner.

Figure 11: Partnered Fathers – more father-child time *during* lockdown (compared to *before* lockdown)

Item	All Partnered Fathers	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers
More time overall	78%	85%
Home schooling or help with homework; more time	68%	73%
Other active engagement (physical care, reading, gaming, exercise, play, conversation etc.): more time	76%	84%
Supervising or 'watching' children: more time	74%	84%
Preparing meals, cleaning and laundry: more time	59%	72%
Unweighted base	1614	586
Weighted base	1591	545

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers

'Passive childcare' (supervising children) was no more common than 'active' childcare (physical care, reading, exercise, play, home schooling) in either group. Housework tasks showed the largest between-group difference (All Partnered Fathers 59% v. Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers 72%). This may in part be due to 27% of All Partnered Fathers working exclusively outside-home, fewer of whom reported 'more time' on routine housework (67%) than reported 'more time' spent with children (74%).

In terms of Socio-Economic Grade³⁹ there was little difference between the percentages of disadvantaged or advantaged fathers spending 'more time' with their children overall.

Figure 12: Partnered Fathers – SEG and more father-child time during lockdown

Item	SEG A/B	SEG C1/C2	SEG D/E
More time overall	80%	79%	74%
Active engagement in home schooling or helping with homework: more time	73%	67%	64%
Other active engagement (physical care, reading, gaming, exercise, play, conversation etc.) – more time	78%	76%	72%
Supervising or 'watching' children: more time	78%	75%	67%
Cooking, cleaning and laundry: more time	65%	59%	53%
Unweighted base	688	653	273
Weighted base	463	778	350

Base: All Partnered Fathers

³⁹ SEG differences were only explored in the All Partnered Fathers group as the sample of SEG D/E fathers in the Newly-at-Home group was too small to permit robust analysis.

Around 10% fewer of the SEG D/E fathers reported devoting ‘more time to home schooling or homework and routine childcare. Nevertheless, the great majority did so, including the two-thirds who spent more time helping their children with home schooling or homework.

Analysis related to age of youngest child found fathers whose youngest child was aged 5 to 8 more likely to say they had spent ‘more time’ overall with them (81%) than fathers with a baby aged one or under (74%). Partners of fathers with babies were less likely than mothers of older children to be in paid work, so may have been more available for childcare.



5. Stresses and strains? Couple relationships

“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. Obviously, 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)

5.1. Other studies

Fears were expressed for couple relationships in the UK during the pandemic due to predicted surges in alcohol consumption and domestic abuse (Gilmore, 2020). In fact, it is not clear whether either of these has seen a dramatic, or possibly any, increase. During the Spring 2020 lockdown alcohol-related deaths grew (ONS, 2020g), as did some types of alcohol misuse (Niedzwiedz et al., 2021). Supermarket sales of alcohol for home consumption also increased. However these did not offset reductions in alcohol consumption in hospitality venues, and there is no evidence of a 2020 bonanza in alcohol sales (Angus, 2020).

Domestic abuse trends are not clear. Victim services have seen increase in demand (Hoh & Johnson, 2021; ONS, 2020c; Women’s Aid, 2020). However, national statistics are mixed and inconclusive in terms of both prevalence and intensification (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency, 2021; ONS, 2020c; Scottish Government, 2020). The preliminary finding from a detailed investigation of all domestic abuse-flagged incidents and crimes reported to seven police forces across England during the pandemic, is that Covid-19 has not created a domestic abuse crisis – but has exposed it (Hoh & Johnson, 2021)⁴⁰.

How were parents’ couple relationships impacted more broadly in the Spring 2020 lockdown? A study from Spain found couple functioning among parents with children at home improving with days spent in lockdown. This was not the case among couples *without* children at home. For the parents in Spain, working from home was also associated with improved couple relationships (Günther-Bel et al., 2020). In the UK. The Marriage Foundation (Benson & McKay, 2020b)⁴¹ found that 20% of relationships among married or cohabiting couples had improved during the first lockdown, 70% had

⁴⁰ “Incidents involving death or serious harm to children under five where abuse or neglect were known or suspected increased during the early months of the pandemic (April to September 2020). However, the extent to which this was related to domestic violence or increases in domestic violence is not known. Usual pathways for referring children to services were disrupted (Rehill & Oppenheim, 2021).

⁴¹ The other UK studies that looked at couple relationships (Xue & McMunn, 2020; Zilanawala et al., 2020) did not report outcomes for *parents’* relationships separately from couple- and other family-relationships.

stayed the same, and 10% had deteriorated. The deteriorating 10% were mainly found among cohabiting couples who were generally poorer, younger and in less established partnerships than the married couples. In September 2020, the figures had not changed (Benson & McKay, 2020a)

5.2. Lockdown Fathers: Partnered Fathers

Fathers were asked for their recollections of couple relationship quality or satisfaction before lockdown – and also ‘how the relationship is now’⁴². These two *cross-sectional* profiles were compared, and a variable computed to reveal change⁴³.

As couple-relationship researchers have long known, most married and cohabiting adults speaking positively about their relationship (Gabb et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2010). In the *Lockdown Fathers* sample this was true of every group of Partnered Fathers.

Figure 13: Partnered Fathers – couple relationship overall before lockdown

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Fathers	Good	Neutral	Poor
1614	1591	All Partnered Fathers	85%	12%	3%
586	545	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers	85%	12%	3%
688	463	SEG A/B	84%	12%	4%
653	778	SEG C1/C2	85%	12%	3%
273	350	SEG D/E	85%	11%	4%

Base: All Partnered Fathers

The least advantaged fathers (SEG D/E) were as likely as advantaged fathers to report a positive relationship and no more likely to regard that relationship as poor. SEG A/B fathers were a little less likely than others to report a ‘very good’ relationship overall (that difference, though small, reached statistical significance).

⁴² Data was collected from the fathers during summer 2020.

⁴³ A worsening or improvement in their relationship or no change, based on fathers’ ratings of their couple relationship overall (on a five-point scale) at the two time points.

Figure 14: Partnered Fathers – couple relationship overall *after* lockdown

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Fathers	Good	Neutral	Poor
1614	1591	All Partnered Fathers	83%	12%	5%
586	545	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers	84%	12%	4%
688	463	SEG A/B	83%	12%	5%
653	778	SEG C1/C2	83%	13%	4%
273	350	SEG D/E	83%	12%	4%

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers

After lockdown the percentages were virtually unchanged – with SEG A/B fathers again the least likely by a small (but statistically significant) margin to report a ‘very good’ couple relationship. Despite the cross-sectional ‘end results’ not showing much change, some experienced change in relationship quality from before to after lockdown: 9% ‘better’ and 9% deterioration⁴⁴. There was some ‘churn’ with respondents moving up or down the relationship satisfaction scale,

The patterns in the ratings the fathers provided for different *aspects* of their relationship were similar: lockdown had no discernible negative effect⁴⁵.

Figure 15: Partnered Fathers – aspects of couple relationship *before* and *after* lockdown

Relationship aspect	Good	Neutral	Poor
Relationship stability <i>before</i> lockdown	84%	11%	4%
Relationship stability <i>after</i> lockdown	83%	11%	6%
Relationship strength <i>before</i> lockdown	85%	10%	5%
Relationship strength <i>after</i> lockdown	84%	11%	6%
Relationship ‘makes me happy’ <i>before</i> lockdown	79%	14%	6%
Relationship ‘makes me happy’ <i>after</i> lockdown	79%	14%	7%
Working as a team <i>before</i> lockdown	80%	15%	5%
Working as a team <i>after</i> lockdown	82%	12%	6%
Unweighted base: 1614			
Weighted base: 1591			

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Particularly striking was the finding that, both before and after lockdown, 79% of Partnered Fathers reported that their relationship with their live-in partner made them happy⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ 82% ‘unchanged’

⁴⁵ This does not mean that no individual father changed his rating – some did.

Despite the small sample sizes for those rating their couple relationship as poor or neutral, there were statistically significant differences between relationship *aspects* before and after lockdown, as well as for *change* in the relationship. It is not known whether such differences represent ‘effects’ independent of confounding variables, nor the direction of causality if there is a causal effect. However, recorded findings include:

- Partnered Fathers with higher hopes for flexibility in working time after the pandemic were more likely to report a better couple relationship (than no change in their relationship) after lockdown.
- Partnered Fathers who were furloughed, reduced their paid work or stopped working were more likely to report a better couple relationship after lockdown than Partnered Fathers with unchanged working status.
- Partnered Fathers whose partner reduced their working hours, was furloughed or stopped working were more likely to report a worse relationship after lockdown than those whose partner remained in paid work.
- Partnered Fathers whose partner was in full-time work during lockdown were more likely to report no change in the relationship and less likely to say it had become better or worse.
- A better or positive change in the couple relationship was associated with Partnered Fathers spending more time with their children. However, because the same association was found when the couple relationship had *worsened*, time-with-children seems unlikely to be the key variable. Confounding factors are likely to be at play.
- Partnered Fathers with a youngest child aged 2 to 8 were more likely than those with a youngest child aged 9 to 11 to report an improved couple relationship. This may not be related to child age but, if it represents a real difference, may be related to the likelihood of teenage children being present in households in which the youngest child is aged 9 to 11.

Finally, unlike the Spanish study referred to earlier, the vast majority of Partnered Fathers did not report improvement in the couple relationship associated with their own, or their partner, working from home. Working from home could be very stressful if there was nowhere separate and quiet to work; and isolation from work colleagues may also have had a negative impact in some cases.

To sum up, the findings from the *Lockdown Fathers* sample confirm those of other studies, that couple relationships in the UK are generally in good shape and have not been materially affected either positively or negatively by the pandemic.

⁴⁶ There is no exactly comparative data available to ascertain whether this is standard or not.

6. Stresses and strains? Physical and mental wellbeing

‘I’d get up in the morning, already behind, ‘Oh my God I’ve got to clean this, do that’... it’s been manifesting stress.’ (Partnered Father)

6.1. Other studies

While recognising that in some groups, such as individuals with clinical levels of mental ill-health prior to lockdown, the experience may exacerbate these, it is important not to pathologise declines in mental wellbeing more generally (Morgan & Rose, 2020).

Anxiety is a natural and usually temporary reaction to challenging circumstances, and it is for this reason that in this report the term ‘mental wellbeing’ rather than ‘mental health’ is used.

Most of the UK research investigating gender differences in mental wellbeing during the pandemic has looked at women v. men – not mothers v. fathers. As before the pandemic, women have been more likely than men to report negative changes in their mental wellbeing (Banks & Xu, 2020; Burchell et al., 2020; Mental Health Foundation, 2020; O’Connor et al., 2020; Orefice & Quintana-Domeque, 2020; Pierce et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020).

The other UK studies that have looked exclusively at *parents’* mental wellbeing are mainly disappointing in terms of fathers’ data: they do not disaggregate findings on ‘parents’ by gender (Banks & Xu, 2020; Creswell, 2021); they only investigate mothers (Dib et al., 2020); or their results are skewed through combining findings on non-partnered mothers with findings on mothers in couple families (WBG/Fawcett, 2020)⁴⁷ or non-Partnered Fathers with Partnered Fathers (Fathers Network Scotland, 2020, 2021). An Office for National Statistics study that confined its sample to couple households found one third of mothers and only one fifth of fathers reporting home schooling negatively impacting their mental wellbeing during the Spring 2020 lockdown, even while the parents spent the same amount of time on it (ONS, 2020a)⁴⁸. The ONS subsequently pointed out that women are more likely than men to self-assess their mental wellbeing as poor, and that this should be borne in mind (ONS, 2021a).

⁴⁷ The best study to date of changes in mothers’ mental health during 2020 is from Canada. Using a longitudinal study design this found increased depression and anxiety in some mothers. Risk factors included previously poor mental health, family income loss and struggles balancing working from home with home schooling (Racine et al., 2021). Fathers’ mental health was not investigated.

⁴⁸ In early 2021, 50% of parents reported stress (findings not disaggregated by gender) (ONS, 2021a).

Ways in which gender differences in mental wellbeing have been reported in the media during the pandemic have served the dominant narrative of women's and mothers' exclusive suffering. For example, in February 2021, the Guardian reported⁴⁹ that ONS research had found women 'struggling' with home schooling⁵⁰. In fact, in that research, while more women than men (67% v. 52%) had personally home schooled a child in the previous week, 'struggling' was reported by similar percentages of both sexes – and never by more than half of either: more men (40%) than women (36%) reported that home schooling was negatively affecting their job; and more women (53%) than men (45%) said home schooling was negatively affecting their wellbeing (ONS, 2021a). Another study found a very tiny negative effect on mental wellbeing when a father or mother had to adapt their work pattern due to childcare or home schooling. The magnitude was a little greater, particularly for fathers, when they were the only member of the household to do so, or when they alone reduced their working hours for that purpose (Xue & McMunn, 2021).

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 relatively advantaged parents in couple households who were 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). In other studies, far higher percentages of mothers than fathers reported worse mental wellbeing. However, their samples were in no way representative – and were not claimed to be (BritainThinks/Mumsnet, 2021; Papworth et al., 2021)⁵¹.

Mothers' and fathers' 'rushedness' during lockdown may not be very different from beforehand: in 2015, 33% of mothers and 24% of fathers reported *always* feeling rushed; and 63% (mothers) and 59% (fathers) felt rushed some of the time. Only 8% of mothers and 12% of fathers reported never feeling rushed (Dunatchik et al., 2019).

⁴⁹ https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/feb/19/women-doing-more-home-schooling-during-covid-lockdown-than-men?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

⁵⁰ In fact, the question parents had been asked was whether they in the previous week 'personally home schooled' a child in their household.

⁵¹ In the Mumsnet study, 77% of the mothers said they felt much more stressed than usual during the pandemic, with two out of five feeling pessimistic about their mental health. Papworth et al., in their rapid review of new parents' mental health during the pandemic, noted that there was very little concrete evidence in the UK. The authors reported on responses variously submitted by individuals and organisations to a consultation but, again, not representative.

Finally, a UK study found that mothers only tended to respond positively to fathers’ sharing of childcare during lockdown, when that share was below 40% on weekdays. When the father’s share was greater than that, the mothers displayed higher levels of anxiety and lower daily enjoyment (Walthery & Chung, 2021). This same finding emerged from a study with a different sample of mothers (Dib et al., 2020). Causality cannot be assumed: confounding factors may include jobs or income loss freeing some of the fathers to undertake more than 40% of the unpaid work at home.

None of this is to minimise the very real anxiety, distress and mental ill health due to the pandemic that experienced by some (even many) mothers and fathers. But it is also important to acknowledge gains and ‘no effects’, not least in order to identify and build on possibilities for resilience and even positive change.

6.2. Lockdown Fathers: Partnered Fathers

“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)

6.2.1. Fathers v. fathers

The *Lockdown Fathers* study looked at reported impacts of the Spring 2020 lockdown on fathers’ mental wellbeing among different categories of Partnered Fathers: All Partnered Fathers, Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers and fathers in different Socio-Economic Grades (SEGs).

In the main, between-group differences were small. Negative impacts on their own mental wellbeing were reported by around two-fifths of the fathers in each category – significant and concerning minorities. However, more of the fathers reported ‘no effect’ (two fifths) or a positive effect (one fifth). Disadvantaged fathers were not more negatively affected.

Figure 16: Partnered Fathers – lockdown impact on fathers’ mental wellbeing

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Fathers	Better mental wellbeing	Worse mental wellbeing
1614	1591	All Partnered Fathers	21%	39%
586	545	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers	20%	43%
688	463	SEG A/B	20%	42%
653	778	SEG C1/C2	22%	36%
273	350	SEG D/E	19%	41%

Base: All Partnered Fathers and all Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers

Did age of child have a bearing? The only statistically significant finding was that more fathers of under-2s reported more negative impact on their own and their partner’s mental wellbeing⁵². This may have less to do with the pandemic than with elevated levels of emotional distress commonly found in mothers and fathers of under-1s⁵³.

6.2.2. *Fathers v. mothers*

The *Lockdown Fathers* study did not collect data from mothers but asked the Partnered Fathers to report on changes in their partner’s physical and mental wellbeing, as well as their own. In interpreting these findings, it should be noted there may be measurement effects in asking fathers to report on both their own and their partner’s wellbeing.

Figure 17: Partnered Fathers and Mothers – lockdown impact on own and partner’s physical wellbeing (father report)

Type of parent	POSITIVE impact on physical wellbeing	NEGATIVE impact on physical wellbeing
Fathers	27%	29%
Mothers	22%	26%
Unweighted base: 1614		
Weighted base: 1591		

Base: All Partnered Fathers and all Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers

Fathers were slightly more likely to report both positive and negative lockdown impacts on their own physical wellbeing⁵⁴ but virtually no differences in *mental* wellbeing.

⁵² (i) Fathers whose oldest child was aged under 2 were twice as likely (15% v. 7% + 6%) as fathers whose oldest child was aged 2-4 or 5-8 to report a ‘very negative’ impact of lockdown on their mental wellbeing. (ii) Fathers whose youngest child was aged under-2 were less likely (11% v. 18%) than fathers whose youngest child was aged 2-4 to report a ‘somewhat positive’ impact of lockdown on their mental wellbeing. (iii) Fathers whose oldest child was aged under-2 were three times as likely (14% v. 5%) as fathers whose oldest child was aged 2-4 to report a ‘very negative’ impact of lockdown on their partner’s mental wellbeing. (iv) Fathers whose youngest child was aged 2-4 were one and a half times more likely (24% v. 16%) than fathers whose youngest child was under-2 to report a ‘positive’ impact of lockdown on their partner’s mental wellbeing.

⁵³ Pandemic restrictions on grandparents and others offering physical support to parents of under 1s were in place until ‘childcare bubbles’ were introduced in mid-2020. This is likely to have increased feelings of isolation, especially among new mothers who may usually have relied for support and companionship on ‘other mothers’. In some cases, the father’s full-time presence at home may have compensated or benefited their partner. One UK study found mothers reporting breastfeeding positively affected by their partner’s continued presence at home (Amy Brown & Shenker, 2020).

⁵⁴ These effects appear to cancel one another out to give the same average ratings of impact for fathers v. mothers.

Figure 18: Partnered Fathers and Mothers – lockdown impact on own and mother mental wellbeing (father report)

Type of parent	POSITIVE lockdown impact on mental wellbeing	NEGATIVE lockdown impact on mental wellbeing
Fathers	21%	39%
Mothers	19%	39%
Unweighted base: 1614		
Weighted base: 1591		

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Mothers

A similar proportion (around two fifths) of the fathers reported a negative lockdown impact on their own mental wellbeing and their partner’s. And a similar proportion (one fifth) reported a positive. Within individual families, there was considerable overlap in fathers’ reports of lockdown impacts on their own and their partner’s mental wellbeing.

Figure 19: Partnered Fathers and Mothers – overlap in lockdown impact on own and partner’s mental wellbeing (father report)

Item	Better father wellbeing	Unchanged father wellbeing	Worse father wellbeing
Better mother wellbeing	15%	2%	2%
Unchanged mother wellbeing	3%	28%	9%
Worse mother wellbeing	3%	9%	27%
Unweighted base: 1614			
Weighted base: 1591			

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Mothers

Fifteen per cent of the Partnered Fathers (around 70% of those reporting better mental wellbeing) thought that both their partner’s and their own mental wellbeing had benefited; and 27% (around 70% of those with worse mental wellbeing) thought that both their partner’s and their own mental wellbeing had worsened.

The possibility of reporting bias in fathers’ reporting on their partner’s wellbeing should be borne in mind. It is also possible that ‘survey fatigue’ contributed to the high percentage of Partnered Fathers who reported similarity in their own and their partner’s mental wellbeing. However, such similarity is consistent with the couple having the same family situation, being affected by one another’s lockdown work (and other) changes – and possibly ‘infecting’ each other when one partner’s mental wellbeing was poor (Edward et al., 2015; Murray, 2015; Philpott et al., 2020).

6.2.3. Childcare share

“A lot of my wife’s work was reduced. She’s at home more and can take after those responsibilities (childcare and housework during the day).”

(Partnered Father, working from home)

Associations between changes in childcare share and mothers’ and fathers’ mental wellbeing were investigated.

Figure 20: Partnered Fathers and Mothers – weekday childcare share during lockdown and lockdown impact on father mental wellbeing

Item	Father increased childcare share (relative to mother)	Unchanged father- and mother- childcare share	Father reduced childcare share (relative to mother)
Better father mental wellbeing	23%	19%	23%
Unchanged father mental wellbeing	33%	42%	40%
Worse father mental wellbeing	43%	38%	37%
Weighted base	420	950	220

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Among Partnered Fathers who *increased* their share of childcare (relative to their partner – the mother) 43% reported that their *own mental wellbeing had worsened*. However, a similar proportion (42%) of fathers reported *worsened mental wellbeing in their partner* – the mothers whose share of childcare had *decreased*.

‘Doing *more*’ than one’s partner during lockdown could also be associated with *better* mental wellbeing in the person who was taking on the *greater burden*: this was found (as reported by the fathers) in 23% of fathers and 22% of mothers who took on a *greater* share of childcare relative to their partner.

Figure 21: Partnered Fathers and Mothers – weekday childcare share during lockdown and lockdown impact on mother mental wellbeing (father report)

Item	Father increased childcare share (relative to mother)	Unchanged father- and mother-childcare time	Father reduced childcare share (relative to mother)
Better mother mental wellbeing	17%	19%	22%
Unchanged mother mental wellbeing	37%	41%	42%
Worse mother mental wellbeing	42%	38%	34%
Weighted base	420	950	220

Base: All Partnered Fathers and Mothers

‘Doing less’ than their partner did not work well for either mothers or fathers. Only 17% of the mothers who, during lockdown, *reduced* their childcare share (relative to the father) were reported (by the fathers) as experiencing better mental well-being. Among the fathers who reduced their childcare time relative to the mother, only 23% reported better mental wellbeing. ‘Doing less’ than their partner, the child’s mother, was a particularly negative experience for the Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers: better wellbeing was only found among 9% of these men. A far greater proportion (41%) experienced *worse* mental wellbeing when their partner took on more of the childcare.

Clearly associations between relative childcare ‘burden’ and mental wellbeing in both fathers and mothers are complex. Confounding factors, such as financial stressors and perceptions of fairness, may be relevant.

6.2.4. Time with children

“We’re at home all day, kids here all day, trying to get home-schooling done – some bits successful, some not successful.” (Partnered Father)

Partnered Fathers who during lockdown spent *either* ‘more time’ *or* ‘less time’ with their children were more likely to report negative change in their mental wellbeing than fathers whose time with their children did not change. This suggests that time spent with children may not have been the relevant factor, but rather factors associated with more, or less, time spent⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ Time with children during lockdown may be confounded with many factors including work loss, too much work, unsuitable home working conditions, stressful keyworker jobs, financial worries, time with partner etc. But these findings (a ‘U-shaped curve’) could also suggest (if real effects) that there is an

Figure 22: Partnered Fathers – time with children during lockdown and lockdown impact on father mental wellbeing

Item	More time with child on at least one childcare activity ⁵⁶	Less time with child on at least one childcare activity	No change in time with child on at least one childcare activity
Better father mental wellbeing	21%	16%	19%
Unchanged father mental wellbeing	37%	42%	52%
Worse father mental wellbeing	41%	41%	29%
Unweighted base	1357	134	440
Weighted base	1320	136	445

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Finally, associations between changes in fathers’ mental wellbeing and changes in their relationship with their children were investigated.

Figure 23: Partnered Fathers: – father wellbeing and change in father-child relationship

Item	Better father-child relationship	Unchanged father-child relationship	Worse father-child relationship
Better father mental wellbeing	28%	9%	Base (90 unweighted) too small to include in analysis
Unchanged father wellbeing	33%	57%	
Worse father wellbeing	39%	34%	
Unweighted base	1060	454	
Weighted base	1035	457	

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Fathers reporting a better father-child relationship were more likely than those reporting an unchanged father-child relationship to experience better mental wellbeing, and less likely to experience unchanged mental wellbeing. However, whether these represent

‘optimal’ amount of time with children for parent mental wellbeing, with too little and too much both detrimental, especially when home schooling coincides with home working. See also the findings (section 6) for working from home and changed mental wellbeing – i.e. working from home for “some’ of the time (not ‘never’ and not ‘always’) was most likely to be associated with positive change in mental wellbeing.

⁵⁶ These categories were: (i) home schooling or helping with homework; (ii) other active engagement with children (physical care, reading, gaming, exercise, play, conversation etc.); and (iii) supervising or ‘watching’ children.

independent effects⁵⁷ is unknown. Nor can causality be assumed. These retrospective ‘change’ data were collected at one time point only. Confounding variables may include the family’s financial circumstances.

Another way of looking at changes in fathers’ childcare time and changes in mental wellbeing – or at least changes in stress levels – was to enquire about the impact of the lockdown on the father’s *keeping calm and managing my temper with my children*.

Figure 24: Partnered Fathers – time with child and *keeping calm and managing my temper*

Item	More time with child on at least one childcare activity	Same amount of time with child on at least one childcare activity	Less time with child on at least one childcare activity
Better at keeping calm or managing temper	46%	25%	Base (134 unweighted) too small to include in analysis
No change in keeping calm or managing temper	38%	60%	
Worse at keeping calm or managing temper	15%	14%	
Unweighted base	1357	440	
Weighted base	1320	445	

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Fathers having *more time* with their children during lockdown were more likely (than those having *no change* in the amount of time with children) to report becoming better at keeping calm and managing their temper with their children. Insofar as parenting tends to improve with practice, this makes intuitive sense. However, these were only the fathers’ *perceptions* (actual *behaviour* was not measured), and if there is an independent effect, its direction is not known. While it may be that more time with children helps some fathers develop strategies to manage irritation and anger, it may also be that children spend more time with fathers who are already calmer and more pleasant.

⁵⁷ Fathers who experienced a better father-child relationship experienced, on average, a less negative lockdown impact on their mental wellbeing than fathers who reported ‘no change’ in their relationship with their children. However, about 40% of the fathers reporting a better father-child relationship had worse mental wellbeing. This suggests other factors (work, financial, partner) affecting their mental wellbeing.

7. Father-child relationships

“Weather was stormy, it’s much more difficult looking after my little girl when you can’t spend time outside.” (Partnered Father, unable to work)

7.1. Other studies

Few UK Covid studies have looked at the quality of parent-child relationships during lockdown. The most substantial (Perelli-Harris & Walzenbach, 2020) found 73% of fathers v. 67% of mothers reporting no change, 24% fathers v. 28% mothers some improvement; and 3% fathers v. 5% mothers deterioration. Disadvantaged parents were a little more likely to report deterioration, but one in four reported improvement. In another study (parents interviewed by the Children’s Commissioner for England) 64% reported no change in the quality of their relationship with their children due to lockdown; 31% improvement; and 4% deterioration (Children’s Commissioner, 2020). Perelli-Harris & Walzenbach found better parent-child relationships where parents were working at home; and the Children’s Commissioner found fewer children (44%) stressed when their parents were furloughed than when they were still going out to work (68%). Perelli-Harris & Walzenbach concluded that lockdown had strengthened relationships in most families; and early findings from a study of siblings found lower conflict and siblings connecting well in the UK (Hughes, 2020).

A study from the USA (Weissbourd et al., 2020)⁵⁸ surveyed lockdown fathers in relation to changes in *aspects* of the father-child relationship, including *closeness*. 52% of the fathers reported their children talking to them more often about “things that are more important to them”; 51% said they are getting to know their children better; 57% that they are appreciating their children more; 51% that they have been doing more things with their children that their children are interested in; and 53% that their children are sharing more about their feelings or perspectives. These researchers concluded that the pandemic had strengthened father-child bonds. As in so many other areas of the pandemic experience, there seem to be winners and losers. However, in terms of parent-child relationships, winners would seem to include many fathers and their families.

“Had a lovely family day, we went for a long 4k walk. We started decorating our kitchen and had a lovely sit-down family dinner where we all made an effort on getting ready which was fun.” (Partnered Father)

⁵⁸ Representative of the US population in many respects, but not in SEG. OHFs were possibly included in the sample.

7.2. Lockdown Fathers: Partnered Fathers

Like the other studies, *Lockdown Fathers* found very few (5%) of fathers in mother-father households reporting deterioration in the father-child relationship following the Spring 2020 lockdown. However, whereas 24% of the Perelli-Harris & Walzenbach fathers, 31% of the Children’s Commissioner’s *parents* (not *fathers*) and around 50% of the US fathers reported positive changes, percentages were much higher in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample, where 65% of All Partnered Fathers and 73% of Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers reported positive changes. Even among the most disadvantaged fathers (SEG D/E) who, among other things, were far more likely to suffer financial hardship, 61% reported a better father-child relationship and only 4% deterioration.

Figure 25: Partnered Fathers – impact of lockdown on father-child relationship overall

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Fathers	Better	No change	Worse
1614	1591	All Partnered Fathers	65%	29%	5%
586	545	Newly-at-Home-Partnered Fathers	73%	21%	5%
688	463	SEG A/B	67%	26%	7%
653	778	SEG C1/C2	65%	28%	5%
273	350	SEG D/E	61%	34%	4%

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Fathers of young children (aged 0-4) were more likely than those of older children to report a very positive change in their relationships with their children. There was also an association with working *location* during lockdown, with fathers working out-of-home less likely to report improvement.

Figure 26: Partnered Fathers – impact of father’s working location during lockdown on father-child relationships

Item	Always/almost always working out-of-home	Working from home some (not all) the time	Always/almost always working from home
Better relationship	55%	67%	69%
Unchanged relationship	37%	28%	26%
Worse relationship	6%	5%	5%
Unweighted base	398	160	408
Weighted base	424	136	328

Base: All Partnered Fathers working during lockdown

The fathers were also asked to reflect on different aspects of their relationship with their children, and to report separately on any change in each of these following the Spring 2020 lockdown. Four related to intimacy: *understanding my children* (better or no change or worse); *feeling close to my children* (closer or no change or less close); *telling my children that I love them* (more often or no change or less often); and *showing physical affection to my children* (more often or no change or less often).

Figure 27: Partnered Fathers – change in aspects of intimacy with children after lockdown

Item	Better or more	No change	Worse or less
Understanding my child	61%	35%	3%
Feeling close to my child	64%	33%	2%
Saying 'I love you'	48%	49%	1%
Showing physical affection	52%	45%	2%
Unweighted base: 1614			
Weighted base: 1591			

Base: All Partnered Fathers

It seems likely that both *understanding my children* and *feeling close to my children* might be positively affected by time spent together. *Telling my children that I love them* and *showing physical affection* might not be so susceptible to time spent, since both are aspects of 'expressiveness'. Expressiveness has been perceived as resistant to change – a personal or cultural 'trait' or a response to an external factor such as child age (G. Brown et al., 2015). More fathers reported *greater closeness or understanding* than reported increases in expressive or attachment behaviours. Nevertheless, around half did so. This suggests that changes in the amount of time spent together can directly impact some fathers'⁵⁹ expressiveness – an important finding.

Two other aspects of fathers' parenting behaviour related, quite simply, to 'better' parenting: *keeping calm and managing my temper with my children* (better or no change or worse); and *being consistent in the way I parent my children* (better or no change or worse).

⁵⁹ It could be that, in some fathers, the levels were high beforehand, so these men did not report very much change. Some respondents may have hesitated to admit to 'room for improvement'.

Figure 28: Partnered Fathers – ‘better parenting’ after lockdown

Item	Better or more	No change	Worse or less
Keeping calm and managing my temper	42%	42%	14%
Consistency in parenting	48%	46%	5%
Unweighted base: 1614			
Weighted base: 1591			

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Improvements were found, but mostly not to the same degree as in the ‘intimacy’ aspects of the father-child relationship (Figure 27). About one father in six (14%) reported deterioration in his capacity to *keep calm and manage my temper with my children*. This was *not* related to more time spent together which was associated with fathers’ reports of *better* self-control. Nevertheless, a minority clearly struggled.

The next area of enquiry related to fathers’ communication with their children and supporting their learning. Here findings are also reported by Socio-Economic Grade (SEG) as this is of particular interest to policy makers, not least in assisting some children to ‘catch up’ following the school closures. *Listening to or talking with my children* (more often or no change or less often) was the first topic addressed.

Figure 29: Partnered Fathers – change in time spent listening to or talking with my children after lockdown

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Fathers	More time	No change	Less time
1614	1591	All Partnered Fathers	66%	32%	1%
688	463	SEG A/B	67%	30%	1%
653	778	SEG C1/C2	66%	31%	2%
273	350	SEG D/E	62%	36%	Fewer than 1%

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Two-thirds of the Partnered Fathers in all Socio-Economic Grades reported more verbal communication – listening and talking – following the Spring 2020 lockdown and almost none reported less. Among those who reported no change would have been some fathers who were already highly engaged. Time spent *reading or helping with schoolwork* (more time, no change, less time) was next investigated.

Figure 30: Partnered Fathers – change in time spent reading or helping with schoolwork after lockdown

Unweighted	Weighted	Category of Partnered	More time	No change	Less time
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base	base	Fathers			
1614	1591	All Partnered Fathers	62%	32%	3%
688	463	SEG A/B	63%	32%	3%
653	778	SEG C1/C2	63%	31%	4%
273	350	SEG D/E	57%	35%	2%

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Smaller percentages of SEG D/E fathers than more advantaged fathers reporting spending more time *listening, talking, reading and helping with schoolwork* but these relatively small differences did not reach statistical significance, and even among the most disadvantaged fathers more than half (57%) reported more time spent *reading or helping with schoolwork* following the lockdown. Again, it is likely that among fathers in all SEGs who reported ‘no change’ some would already have been highly participant.

The final topic investigated that related to children’s learning, was the fathers’ perceptions of their *ability to support their children’s learning and schoolwork* following their Spring 2020 lockdown experience.

Figure 31: Partnered Fathers – ability to support my children’s learning and schoolwork after lockdown

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Fathers	Better	No change	Worse
1614	1591	All Partnered Fathers	57%	31%	8%
688	463	SEG A/B	58%	29%	9%
653	778	SEG C1/C2	60%	29%	9%
273	350	SEG D/E	50%	38%	8%

Base: All Partnered Fathers

The majority (including half of the most disadvantaged fathers) reported more confidence in their *ability to support their children’s learning and schoolwork*, due presumably to having done so much more of it during lockdown. And included in the ‘no effect’ dads would have been some who already felt confident.

However, almost one in ten in all SEG groups reported a drop in confidence, which could have resulted from a range of factors, including working long hours or out-of-home. SEG D/E fathers (who were more likely to be working out-of-home) were less likely to say the lockdown experience had improved their *ability to support their children’s learning and schoolwork* after lockdown and were more likely to report no effect.

It is not known what percentage of mothers would report the same, but there is clearly room here for education policy to encourage fathers to continue their involvement in their children's schoolwork and to help build the capacity of all fathers to do so.

The findings in this section are consistent with research in the fields of neurobiology and anthropology, which have established that men, like women, are biologically 'primed' to develop skills and capacities required to care for children (Abraham & Feldman, 2018). The development of these, which can include changes in hormones in men as well as in women, is commonly triggered by close proximity to infants and young children and can result in more secure attachments and in heightened parental sensitivity (Machin, 2018).

To sum up: according to the reports of the Partnered Fathers in the *Lockdown Fathers* study, the first lockdown experience triggered a transformation in their relationships with their children. Whether this was maintained during the rest of the pandemic year is not known.



8. Involved Own Household Fathers (iOHFs)

“I found another way to contact them. There was this game they’ve been playing on the iPad called Roblox, you could chat on the game and message each other. I made a character on the game just to chat to them.” (Own Household Father)

So far, the focus has been on Partnered Fathers. What of the 163 fathers (weighted sample 171) who, before the Spring 2020 lockdown, had been living in a different household from their children’s other parent, and did not live full-time with any of their under-12 children (but saw them regularly)? In this report these fathers are called involved Own Household Fathers – iOHFs.

8.1. Demographics

In addition to overall difference in Socio-Economic Grade (SEG) between involved Own Household Fathers (iOHFs) and Partnered Fathers which revealed the iOHFs as substantially disadvantaged in terms of occupation (see section 2), the two groups differ on other key demographics which reach statistical significance.

Figure 32: iOHFs v. Partnered Fathers – demographics

Item	Involved Own Household Fathers	Partnered Fathers
White ethnicities	94%	84%
No paid work before lockdown ⁶⁰	22%	14%
Never worked from home before lockdown	85%	74%
Education to degree level	31%	36%
Have a cohabiting partner	25%	100%
Have a cohabiting stepchild or partner’s child (any age)	12%	6%
Live with another adult (not a partner)	44%	12%
% of their children (of any age) who are stepchildren or partner’s children	12%	6%
Unweighted base	163	1614
Weighted base	171	1591

Base: All Partnered Fathers and All involved Own Household Fathers

Only a minority of the iOHFs had re-partnered (just one-in-four had a cohabiting partner⁶¹) but these fathers were much more likely (44%) than the Partnered Fathers

⁶⁰ In terms of SEG D/E occupation, iOHFs and Partnered Fathers are equally likely to be D Grade. The difference is in E grade which includes those not in paid work

(12%) to live with another adult (not a partner), possibly their own parent, an adult child or stepchild or a house mate if in shared accommodation.

Similar proportions of Partnered Fathers and iOHFs were keyworkers; and, among those in paid work, working hours were similar. The age profiles of the fathers in the two groups were similar but not the age-profiles of their children: among the iOHFs, the age profile of their under-12s was older. Similar proportions of both Partnered Fathers and iOHFs had a child under 12 in school or childcare during lockdown. Despite some similarities, the social and economic disadvantage of the iOHFs was clear and would have been even more marked if OHFs in little or no contact with their children had been included in the sample. There is a considerable literature revealing the association between economic and social disadvantage and fewer father-child interactions in separated families.

8.2. iOHFs, work and care during lockdown

“[My son] interrupted a Zoom meeting by singing, which was pretty funny and a welcome break from the stresses of work for us all.” (Own Household Father)

The extent to which the iOHFs would have been available to care for their children during the Spring 2020 lockdown would, like the availability of the Partnered Fathers, have been affected by engagement in paid work.

Figure 33: iOHFs v. Partnered Fathers – availability to care for children during lockdown

Item	Involved Own Household Fathers	Partnered Fathers
Working from home more than half working time	17% ⁶²	24%
Furloughed	20%	23%
Worked fewer hours each week	7%	10%
Lost job or self-employed work	8%	7%
Unweighted base	163	1614
Weighted base	171	1591

Base: All Partnered Fathers and all involved Own Household Fathers

While the findings in this section must be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes, the indicators are that iOHFs’ availability for childcare during lockdown may have

⁶¹ Although 25% of the iOHFs in this sample had cohabiting partners, the research focus on couple relationships in this group, was not in relation to that live-in partner but to the iOHFs children’s other parent, living elsewhere

⁶² Based on questions asked of a small sample of 94 OHFs (88 weighted) working during lockdown.

been a little more restricted than that of Partnered Fathers', most notably in ability to work from home (17% iOHFs v. 24% Partnered Fathers).

The impact of the lockdown on iOHFs' time with their children was determined mainly by changes in the number of overnight stays and daytime visits, not by the father's lockdown working situation. iOHFs who remained in work during lockdown were as likely as those with reduced paid work (furloughed or lost job or reduced hours) to report more time (and nearly as likely to report *much* more time) with children during lockdown. In fact, the iOHFs who had reduced paid work were more likely than those who remained in work to report much *less* time with their children during lockdown. Confounding factors are likely to be in play (see next section).

An exception was working from home for some or all of the time during lockdown: this was associated with iOHFs reporting more or *much* more time⁶³ with children.

It is not clear whether or to what extent working from home has an independent association with iOHFs' time with their children; and to what extent it is confounded with other factors, such as SEG or the impact of lockdown on overnight stays or daytime visits.

8.3. iOHFs and children: time together

“Doing this, recording stuff down [in this diary] brought attention [to the fact that] I’ve not always seen my older daughter enough because she’s at her mum’s. So I was trying to put in a bit more effort and time to speak to her. And I’ve been able to see her in the last week, which was really good.” (Own Household Father, working from home)

An analysis of data collected from Own Household Fathers in June 2020 (Reeve, 2021) reported continuity in the frequency of contact from before to during lockdown (in-person, telephone or virtual) between the majority of these fathers and their children. Similarly, an analysis based on the reports of ‘resident’ separated parents (Bryson & Mckay, 2020) concluded that the ‘overall picture of the relationship between their children and the ‘non-resident’ parent was stable or positive’ but a substantial minority had reduced contact. This data included Own Household Fathers with infrequent or no contact with their children prior to the pandemic.

The iOHFs in the *Lockdown Fathers* study had a very different experience. While 40% said they spent more in-person time with their children during lockdown than before,

⁶³ Despite the small sample numbers, these differences were statistically significant.

46% reported less time spent together in person. ‘Virtual’ interactions (e.g. telephone or video calls) were less likely to have decreased.

Figure 34: iOHFs: father-child interactions during lockdown compared with before lockdown

Item	More	Same amount	Less
In-person time: overnight stays or face-to-face daytime contact	40%	19%	46% ⁶⁴
Telephone or video calls	47%	42%	9%
Unweighted base: 163			
Weighted base: 171			

Base: All involved Own Household Fathers

Factors associated with less ‘in-person’ father-child time included social disadvantage. Sub-group numbers are small so findings should be viewed with caution. However, it was striking that 73% of the involved Own Household Fathers in the lowest Socio-Economic Grade (SEG D/E) reported less ‘in-person’ time (fewer overnight stays, less daytime contact, or both) during the Spring 2020 lockdown, compared with only 25% of the SEG A/Bs and 38% of the C1/C2s⁶⁵. Less ‘in-person’ time was also more frequently reported by iOHFs whose reported relationship with their child’s mother was poor before lockdown^{66,67} and by fathers who said their time with their children was dictated by the child’s mother or another adult⁶⁸.

However, even where the father reported being in control of his time with his children (decisions made primarily by him, or mutually with their mother), almost as many saw *less* of their children during lockdown as saw *more*⁶⁹. It seems likely that decisions were being made with reference to a range of factors, such as health and health risks, both parents’ paid work timetables, distance between households, transport options and transport costs.

⁶⁴ The percentages add up to 105% because of the way these ‘summary variables’ were derived from the survey questions.

⁶⁵ Unweighted sample sizes were 58 A/B iOHFs, 65 C1C2 iOHFs and 40 D/E iOHFs.

⁶⁶ Based on a small sample of 72 iOHFs (80 weighted)..

⁶⁷ Despite the small numbers of cases involved, 63% of the iOHFs who reported a poor relationship with their child’s mother reported fewer overnight stays or less daytime contact compared with just 32% where relationship-with-other-parent was reported to be good. This reaches statistical significance.

⁶⁸ Based on a small sample of 38 iOHFs (43 weighted).

⁶⁹ Based on a sample of 151 iOHFs (164 weighted).

8.4. Couple relationships

“I was asked if I wouldn’t mind them coming on the Friday because they had something on at the other home on the Thursday. I agreed to it, and just asked if they could stay a day longer... so no real drama there.” (Own Household Father, working from home)

While the Partnered Fathers were asked about their relationship with the woman they were living with, the involved OHFs were asked about their relationship with their child’s other parent (living elsewhere).

Figure 35: iOHFs – relationship with the other parent (living elsewhere) before and after lockdown

Item	Good	Neutral	Poor	No contact
Relationship before lockdown	49%	20%	27%	4%
Relationship after lockdown	46%	18%	33%	3%
Unweighted base: 163				
Weighted base: 171				

Base: All Partnered Fathers and All involved Own Household Fathers

The iOHFs were also asked about specific facets of their relationship with their child’s other parent.

Figure 36: iOHFs – facets of relationship with child’s other parent (living elsewhere) before and after lockdown

Relationship facet	Good	Neutral	Poor
Trust in each other before lockdown	42%	18%	36%
Trust in each other after lockdown	44%	16%	37%
Straightforward communication before lockdown	42%	25%	29%
Straightforward communication after lockdown	44%	21%	32%
Working as a team or co-operating before lockdown	46%	21%	29%
Working as a team or co-operating after lockdown	44%	23%	30%
Relationship ‘makes me happy’ before lockdown	27%	24%	45%
Relationship ‘makes me happy’ after lockdown	29%	23%	45%
Unweighted base: 163			
Weighted base: 171			

Base: All involved Own Household Fathers

Almost half the involved OHFs in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample reported a good or very good relationship overall with their child’s other parent both before (49%) and after (46%) lockdown. Another 20% (18% after lockdown) reported a neutral relationship.

Other studies too, have found majority positive or ‘workable’ relationships between separated parents. A government study (DWP, 2017) found 39% of ‘resident parents’ (mainly mothers) reporting a ‘friendly’ relationship with their child’s other parent – a figure that rose to 60% among families in which child and ‘other’ parent (mainly their father) saw each other at least monthly. The finding from the *Lockdown Fathers* study that even following lockdown, 29% of the iOHFs say that their relationship with their child’s other parent ‘makes me happy’ adds to what, for many people, will be a surprisingly positive picture of relationships between large numbers of separated parents.

8.5. Physical and mental wellbeing

“Last few weeks have been tough, very tough not being able to see the kids face to face . . . their mum’s got the full power of when, what times I can speak to the kids. Before I was able to speak to them whenever I wanted.” (Own Household Father)

The involved Own Household Fathers in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample were no more likely than the Partnered Fathers to report positive or negative impacts of lockdown on their *physical* wellbeing. However, more iOHFs (50%) than Partnered Fathers (39%) reported negative impacts of lockdown on their *mental* wellbeing; and hardly any iOHFs (9%) reported positive, compared with 21% of Partnered Fathers. Similarly, in Two Fathers’ Network Scotland surveys, OHFs were far more likely than fathers in couple families to report ‘bad or very bad’ mental wellbeing (Fathers Network Scotland, 2020, 2021).

Figure 37: iOHFs v. Partnered Fathers – change in mental wellbeing due to lockdown

Item	iOHFs	Partnered Fathers
Positive change	9%	21%
Negative change	50%	39%
Unweighted base	163	1614
Weighted base	171	1591

Base: All Partnered Fathers and All involved Own Household Fathers

There is likely a link with deterioration in household finances, experienced by 44% of iOHFs compared with 33% of Partnered Fathers.

Figure 38: iOHFs v. Partnered Fathers – household income changes due to lockdown

Item	iOHFs	Partnered Fathers
Positive change	20%	28%
Negative change	44%	33%
Unweighted base	163	1614
Weighted base	171	1591

Base: All Partnered Fathers and All involved Own Household Fathers

iOHFs with ‘less time’ with children during lockdown had worse mental wellbeing compared to those with ‘more’ or ‘the same’ time with their children. Time with children was central to the wellbeing of these fathers during lockdown.

8.6. Father-child relationships

“My daughter is staying over, I’m very excited. We’re making bracelets, doing science experiments and having a movie night.” (Own Household Father)

The study cited earlier, which asked separated parents about children’s time spent with their ‘non-resident’ parent during the pandemic (Bryson & Mckay, 2020), also asked about the quality of that relationship. Their sample presents a relatively rosy picture of only a 14% deterioration in the quality of the relationship between the child and ‘non-resident’ parent. However, there may be reporting bias, in that the ‘resident’ parent was asked to assess the other parent-child relationship. The picture painted in the *Lockdown Fathers* study in which the fathers themselves reported on that relationship was less rosy.

Figure 39: iOHFs – changes in father-child relationship after lockdown

Item	Better/more	No change	Worse/less
Relationship overall	47%	27%	24%
Understanding my child or children	46%	47%	7%
Feeling close to my child or children	47%	36%	17%
Saying ‘I love you’	37%	60%	2%
Showing physical affection	35%	51%	13%
Keeping calm and managing my temper with my child or children	29%	61%	6%
Behaving consistently as a parent	35%	55%	6%
Listening to or talking with my children	51%	38%	11%
Reading, helping with schoolwork or homework	44%	37%	16%
Ability to support my children’s learning or schoolwork	37%	31%	29%

Unweighted base: 163			
Weighted base: 171			

Base: All involved Own Household Fathers

While a substantial majority of the iOHFs reported ‘no change’ or ‘improvement’ during lockdown, percentages were considerably lower than among Partnered Fathers (see section 7). And while only 5% of the Partnered Fathers reported a worsening of the relationship with their children overall, 24% of the iOHFs reported this; and 17% of the iOHFs (compared with just 2% of the Partnered Fathers) felt less close to their children following the lockdown experience.

Differences between the iOHFs and the Partnered Fathers in activities supportive of their children’s learning and schoolwork, and confidence in doing so, are concerning.

Figure 40: iOHFs v. Partnered Fathers – positive changes supportive of children’s learning and education

Item	iOHFs	Partnered Fathers
Listening to or talking with my children: MORE TIME	51%	66%
Reading, helping with schoolwork or homework: MORE TIME	44%	62%
Ability to support my children’s learning or schoolwork: GREATER CONFIDENCE	37%	57%
Unweighted base	163	1614
Weighted base	171	1591

Base: All Partnered Fathers and involved Own Household Fathers

Far fewer of the iOHFs than the Partnered Fathers reported spending more time during the Spring 2020 lockdown on education-related activities: 51% of the iOHFs (compared with 66% of the Partnered Fathers) spent more time *listening to and talking with* their children during lockdown; and 44% (compared with 62% of Partnered Fathers) spent more time *reading or helping with schoolwork or homework*. Only one third of the iOHFs (37%) left lockdown feeling more confident in their *ability to support my children’s learning or schoolwork*. Among the Partnered Fathers, the figure 57%. This suggests that while schools could benefit their children by continuing to engage fathers in their learning post-pandemic, special efforts should be focused on those fathers who do not live with their children full time.

“I really wanted to get involved in home schooling. But flat out no – she wanted to keep it as is... (Lockdown) felt like a good opportunity.” (Own Household Father)

9. Fathers of Colour

“Basically, it all revolves around the children and if they’re going to behave or not... If they’re going to scream or shout or perform, it makes things very difficult.”
 (Partnered Father, working from home)

People of colour⁷⁰ have been disproportionately negatively impacted by the pandemic. In addition negative stereotyping and stigmatising of both men of colour (Lammy, 2017) and Fathers of Colour (Humphreys et al., 1999; Karlsen et al., 2019; Salway et al., 2009) in the UK is widespread. These fathers are mainly missing from UK family research. This section aims to address this.

9.1. Demographics

In the weighted *Lockdown Fathers* sample of Partnered Fathers⁷¹ 84% (1340) were White⁷² and 13% (212) were Fathers of Colour of mainly Asian, Black and Mixed heritage. These proportions were similar in the unweighted sample of Partnered Fathers.

Figure 41: Fathers of Colour – broad ethnic categories

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Asian	Black	Mixed	Chinese	Other
211	212	54%	22%	18%	Fewer than 1%	Fewer than 1%

Base: All Fathers of Colour in Father-Mother couple households.

This distribution across broad ethnic categories is similar to national statistics⁷³ (no single ethnic category is over- or under- represented in this sample). Sample sizes were too small for separate analysis of each category⁷⁴ so these fathers, who shared common stigma and disadvantage related to the colours of their skin, are reported on as a single subsample. While this cannot take into account the diverse ethnicities within that

⁷⁰ Any collective term for minority ethnicities – BAME, BME, People of Colour, Black Ethnicities, Black/Brown Ethnicities – is flawed. These terms encompass diverse ethnicities, and heterogeneity of socio-economic characteristics, experiences and views. Use of a collective term runs the risk of ‘othering’ and of feeding, rather than challenging, stereotyping. Nevertheless, broad ethnic categorisations remain intrinsic to social science, not least in order to be able to identify and challenge inequalities that occur across minority ethnic groups, and because sample sizes are often too small for separate reporting for individual ethnicities.

⁷¹ Fathers in opposite-sex couple families with at least one under-12 child living in the household full time.

⁷² ‘White’ incorporates many different white ethnicities.

⁷³ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest>

⁷⁴ Asian and Black are themselves ethnic sub-categories, not individual ethnic groups.

categorisation, study of these ‘Fathers of Colour’ contributes unique and important data relating to these under-studied men.

Despite increases in education levels in recent years among men of colour in the UK population, these males remain less likely than white males to be educated to university level (ONS, 2020e) or to be engaged in management and professional occupations. A higher proportion work in the least skilled occupations (Henehan & Rose, 2016) and employment rates are lower (ONS, 2021b). In contrast, in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample, the education levels of the Fathers of Colour are higher than those of White Fathers.

Figure 42: Fathers of Colour and White Fathers – education

Item	Fathers of Colour	White Fathers
University degree or equivalent professional qualification or NVQ Level 4	35%	26%
Higher degree qualification or NVQ Level 5	20%	7%
Weighted base	212	1340
Unweighted base	211	1370

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Although better educated overall, the Fathers of Colour in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample were less likely to work full time, and more likely to work part time before lockdown than the White Fathers. This has been noted in other studies (Hansen et al., 2010) and is a likely result of occupational discrimination, not an active choice by the fathers. This may mean that before lockdown, more of these fathers had spent more time with their children than White Fathers.

Figure 43: Fathers of Colour and White Fathers – working status before lockdown

Item	Fathers of Colour	White Fathers
Father working full time (30+ hours weekly)	73%	82%
Father working part time (1 to 29 hours weekly)	12%	4%
Father not in paid work	15%	14%
Weighted base	212	1340
Unweighted base	211	1370

Base: All Partnered Fathers

The Fathers of Colour in the sample also differed from the White Fathers in other respects.

Figure 44: Fathers of Colour and White Fathers – additional demographics

Item	Fathers of Colour	White Fathers
Father age 25-34	33%	21%
Father age 35-44	44%	43%
Father age 45-54	19%	27%
Age of youngest child – under 2 years	23%	18%
Age of youngest child – pre-school	33%	26%
Age of youngest child – primary school	44%	56%
Unweighted base	211	1370
Weighted base	212	1340

Base: All Partnered Fathers

The Fathers of Colour were younger: 33% were in the age range 25 to 34 (the age group most likely to have an under-12 child) compared with 21% of the White Fathers; and were more likely to have a young child in their household. Numbers of children were around the same in both groups: the majority had 2 or 3 children (59% Fathers of Colour v. 62% White Fathers), and only 8% in either group had 4 or more children (data not tabulated).

Fathers of Colour (19%) were much more likely than White Fathers (10%) to have another adult in their household during lockdown⁷⁵; and were also much more likely (36% Fathers of Colour v. 24% White Fathers) to have a partner who had not been in paid work prior to lockdown⁷⁶. These are potential confounders in relation to topics addressed later in this section: changes in share of childcare during lockdown; impact of lockdown on relationships; prior involvement of fathers with their children in relation to potential for change. Such confounders could be explored in multivariate analysis.

Finally, Fathers of Colour were a little less likely than White Fathers to experience a positive impact of lockdown on their family finances; and slightly more likely to experience a negative impact. This could be a potential confounder in, for example, mental wellbeing during lockdown or quality of relationships with partner or children.

⁷⁵ Most probably extended family households with grandparents available to help (due to their younger average age), Fathers of Colour are less likely than White Fathers to have an adult child at home).

⁷⁶ The partners of Fathers of Colour in particular were, at baseline, more likely to be ‘economically inactive’ – i.e. not seeking work (25% partners of Fathers of Colour v. 18% partners of White Fathers) but also more likely to be ‘unemployed’ – i.e. seeking work (9% v 5%). These differences are both statistically significant.

Figure 45: Fathers Of Colour and White Fathers – lockdown impact on family finances

Unweighted base	Weighted base		Positive impact	Neutral impact	Negative impact
211	212	Fathers of Colour	25%	37%	37%
1370	1340	White Fathers	28%	39%	33%

Base: All Partnered Fathers

9.2. Availability for childcare during lockdown

Due to their overall lesser engagement in paid work, Fathers of colour had been more available to their children than White fathers before lockdown. That remained the case during lockdown, with both categories facing reductions in full-time-hours working. The *ratio* of their availability for housework and childcare may have narrowed slightly. The figures are difficult to interpret.

Figure 46: Fathers of Colour and White Fathers – working status during lockdown

Item	Fathers of Colour	White Fathers
Father working full time (30+ hours weekly)	41% (73% before lockdown)	49% (82% before lockdown)
Father working part time (1 to 29 hours weekly)	13% (12% before lockdown)	7% (4% before lockdown)
Father not in paid work (including furlough)	37% (15% before lockdown)	38% (14% before lockdown)
Unweighted base	211	1370
Weighted base	212	1340

Base: All Partnered Fathers

The availability of Fathers of Colour to spend time with their children was enhanced by their slightly greater ability to work from home during the lockdown, and their ability to reduce their working hours without this being a threat to their job.

Figure 47: Fathers of Colour and White Fathers – working from home during lockdown

Item	Fathers of Colour	White Fathers
Working from home for more than half their working time	48%	42%
Working from home for some of their working time	26%	13%
Unweighted base	114*	818
Weighted base	130	756

Base: All Partnered Fathers working during lockdown

Figure 48: Fathers of Colour and White Fathers – ability to reduce working hours without this being a threat to my job

Item	Fathers of Colour	White Fathers
Ability to reduce working hours without this being a threat to my job	37%	23%
Unweighted base	127*	814
Weighted base	106	750

Base: All Partnered Fathers working during lockdown

9.3. Mental wellbeing

Fathers of Colour were one and a half times more likely than White Fathers (29% v. 19%) to report better mental wellbeing following the Spring 2020 lockdown.

Figure 49: Fathers of Colour and White Fathers and Partners – lockdown impact on mental wellbeing

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Item	Better mental wellbeing	Worse mental wellbeing
211	212	Fathers of Colour	29%	34%
1370	1340	White Fathers	19%	40%
211	212	Fathers of Colour: partners	26%	29%
1370	1340	White Fathers: partners	17%	40%

Base: All Partnered Fathers

The Fathers of Colour were also much more likely than the White Fathers to report a positive impact of lockdown on their partner’s mental wellbeing, and much less likely to report a negative impact.

These are statistically significant findings and may be confounded to some extent by higher levels of education in the Fathers of Colour sample: In the wider *Lockdown Fathers* sample, 26% of the Partnered Fathers with a degree reported improved mental wellbeing compared to 18% without a degree.

9.4. Family relationships

9.4.1. Father-Mother relationships

The same percentages of Partnered Fathers in both groups reported that, before lockdown, their relationship with their live-in female partner had been good (86% Fathers of Colour v. 85% White Fathers). However, Fathers of Colour were more likely (13%) than White Fathers (8%) to report positive *change* in their relationship with their partner following lockdown.

Figure 50: Fathers of Colour and White Fathers – couple relationship

Item	Fathers of Colour	White Fathers
Better couple relationship after lockdown	13%	8%
Unchanged couple relationship after lockdown	78%	83%
Worse couple relationship after lockdown	9%	9%
Unweighted base	211	1370
Weighted base	212	1340

Base: All Partnered Fathers

9.4.2. Father-child relationships

During lockdown, similar proportions of Fathers of Colour and White Fathers spent ‘more time’ with their children overall.

Figure 51: Fathers of Colour and White Fathers – more time spent with children and on housework during lockdown

Item	Fathers of Colour	White Fathers
More time with children	79%	78%
More time spent on direct engagement with children (excluding home schooling or schoolwork)	75%	76%
More time spent on home schooling or schoolwork	69%	67%
More time spent on preparing meals, cleaning, laundry	64%	58%
Unweighted base	211	1370
Weighted base	212	1340

Base: All Partnered Fathers

Similar percentages (three out of four) of the fathers in both groups spent more time on direct engagement with their children during the Spring 2020 lockdown; and more than two thirds in both groups spent more time on home schooling or schoolwork, with only slightly fewer (both groups) spending more time on household tasks. It should be remembered that some of those who reported ‘no change’ would already have been highly engaged before lockdown.

But while ‘more time spent’ did not differ significantly between the fathers in the two groups, there were statistically significant – and substantial – differences between the proportions of Fathers of Colour and White Fathers reporting positive changes in their relationships with their children after lockdown.

Figure 52: Fathers Of Colour and White Fathers – positive changes in father-child relationship

Item	Fathers of Colour: Better or more	White Fathers: Better or more
Understanding my child	72%	59%
Feeling close to my child	79%	61%
Saying 'I love you'	65%	45%
Showing physical affection	68%	49%
Keeping calm and managing my temper with my child	57%	39%
Feeling competent as a parent	55%	47%
Behaving consistently as a parent	62%	45%
Listening to or talking with my child	75%	64%
Ability to support my children's learning or schoolwork	66%	56%
Unweighted base	211	1370
Weighted base	212	1340

Base: All Partnered Fathers

As is the case for all 'change' questions, the amount of change reported will relate to the 'baseline level' of these relationship aspects before lockdown (if the base was positive, then 'no change' can be a good thing – if bad, then a negative). Differences recorded may also be due (wholly or partly) to measured⁷⁷ and unmeasured confounding factors.

Nevertheless, these findings are notable: not only are Fathers of Colour more likely to report better adult wellbeing (self and partner) and improved couple relationships following the first national lockdown than White Fathers, but the percentages reporting positive changes in their relationships with their children exceed those of most of the other groups of Partnered Fathers that were studied⁷⁸. The proportion of the Fathers of Colour reporting these improvements who were living in the socio-economically deprived ethnic communities most gravely affected by the pandemic, is not known.

⁷⁷ These include father age (younger fathers), father living in London, father worked part-time before lockdown

⁷⁸ See section 7 for father-child relationships in different groups of Partnered Fathers in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample

10. Two-Father households

“Trying to balance work and family was difficult... My daughter emptied all her glitter over the floor (twenty tubs!) during a Teams meeting.” (Partnered Father)

Among the (unweighted) sample of 1,770 couple households in which at least one under-12 child lived full-time, 1,614 were ‘Father-Mother’ (opposite sex) households and 156 (8.9%) were Two-Father (same sex) households⁷⁹. Because their over-representation in the study sample⁸⁰ was so significant that it could not be corrected through weighting, these households are not included in the broader analysis. Instead data relating to them is presented here for researchers interested in this growing family form. In this section, unweighted Two-Father data is compared with weighted Father-Mother data.

10.1. Demographics

Ninety-five per cent of the children in the Two-Father households were described, by the respondent-father, as his ‘birth’ child, 3% as his partner’s child and 2% as adopted.

While more of the Two-Father households than Father-Mother households were in London (22% v. 14%), it is a strength of the Two-Father sample that these households were distributed across all England regions and England, Wales and Scotland (with just one household in Northern Ireland). The age distribution of parents in both types of households was similar but ethnicity was not: in Two-Father households, 20% of the respondent-fathers was a Father of Colour compared with 13% in Father-Mother households.

In Two-Father households 94% of the respondent fathers were in paid work before lockdown compared with 86% in Father-Mother households; and of those in paid work, 30% in Two-Father households (c.f. 37% in Father-Mother households) were able to work exclusively from home during lockdown. Two-Father households were slightly more socio-economically advantaged than Father-Mother households, due to an additional 12% in SEG category A/B.

⁷⁹ There were also three Two-Father households in which a child under 12 was *part-time* resident. These are not included in this section.

⁸⁰ The likely percentage of UK families comprising Two Fathers raising at least one child together full time is not likely to be greater than 0.01% (ONS, 2019).

Figure 53: Two-Father and Father-Mother households – SEG distribution

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Type of father	SEG A/B	SEG C1/C2	SEG D/E
156	-	Two-Father households	41%	40%	19%
1614	1591	Father-Mother households	29%	49%	22%

Base: All couple households in which at least one child under 12 was fully resident

More than two-fifths (43%) of the respondent-fathers in Two-Father households were the main caregiver in their household – men who said that, before lockdown, they had been undertaking all or most of the childcare. In Father-Mother households the percentage (18%) was less than one fifth.

Figure 54: Two-Father and Father-Mother households – more weekday housework or childcare than partner before and during lockdown

Item	Two-Father households	Father-Mother households
Respondent father much more childcare than partner <i>before</i> lockdown	43%	18%
Respondent father much more childcare than partner <i>during</i> lockdown	39%	20%
Respondent father much more housework than partner <i>before</i> lockdown	34%	18%
Respondent father much more housework than partner <i>during</i> lockdown	31%	20%
Unweighted base	156	1614
Weighted base	-	1591

Base: All couple households in which at least one child under 12 was fully resident

At first sight, fathers in Two-Father households seemed to be less egalitarian in division of childcare in particular: only 22% (compared with 31% in Father-Mother households) said that before lockdown childcare had been equally or near equally shared.

Figure 55: Two-Father and Father-Mother households – equal or near equal weekday housework and childcare between partners before lockdown

Item	Two-Father households	Father-Mother households
Equal or near equal CHILDCARE with partner before lockdown	22%	31%
Equal or near equal HOUSEWORK with partner before lockdown	29%	33%
Unweighted base	156	1614
Weighted base	-	1591

Base: All couple households in which at least one child under-12 was fully resident

Twice as many father-respondents in the Two-Father households than in the Father-Mother households were in much the same situation as mothers in mother-father households: they were main, rather than secondary, caregivers. Main and secondary caregivers may differ in the ways in which they report their own, and their partner’s caregiving: secondary caregivers may emphasise egalitarianism for social-acceptability reasons; and either one or both partners may underestimate the other’s contribution. Reports of greater egalitarianism in the Father-Mother households in this study may be a function of role (secondary caregiver v. main caregiver) reporting rather than gender (father v. mother) reporting. Researchers claiming ‘gender differences ‘in fathers’ and mothers’ behaviour may wish to consider whether some are less to do with parental gender than with role-in-the-family.

However, in both types of families in the *Lockdown Fathers* study there was similarity in the extent to which the main caregiving role remained the province of one parent during as before lockdown.

10.2. Mental wellbeing

The fathers in the two types of households were equally likely (38% v. 39%) to report *negative* lockdown-impact on their own mental wellbeing.

Figure 56: Two-Father households and Father-Mother households – lockdown impact on own mental wellbeing

Item	Two-Father households	Father-Mother households
Better own mental wellbeing	25	21
Unchanged mental wellbeing	37	39
Worse own mental wellbeing	38	39
Unweighted base	156	1614
Weighted base	-	1591

Base: All households in which at least one child under 12 was fully resident

A slightly higher percentage of father respondents in Two-Father households reported a *positive* lockdown-impact on their own and their partner’s⁸¹ mental wellbeing

Figure 57: Two-Father and Father-Mother households – lockdown impact on partner’s mental wellbeing

Item	Two-Father	Father-Mother
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⁸¹ This is a 9% difference – with the mean rating showing that male partners were reported (by the respondent-father) to, on average, experience no change in their mental health, whereas the mean rating for father-reports of female partners in mother-father households was a small decline in mental wellbeing.

	households	households
Better partner mental wellbeing	28%	19%
Unchanged partner mental wellbeing	40%	40%
Worse partner mental wellbeing	30%	39%
Unweighted base	156	1614
Weighted base	-	1591

Base: All couple households in which at least one child under 12 was fully resident

It may be that the apparent greater mental resilience in the Two-Father households follows gender lines, given the findings (see section 6) that men have been less likely than women to report pandemic-related mental health difficulties⁸².

10.3. Couple relationships

Respondent-fathers in the Two-Father household sample reported poorer relationships with their partner than fathers in the Father-Mother households, both before and after lockdown.

Figure 58: Two-Father and Father-Mother households – couple relationship before lockdown

Relationship before lockdown	Two-Father households	Father-Mother households
Good	76%	85%
Neutral	16%	12%
Poor	8%	3%
Unweighted base	156	1614
Weighted base	-	1591

Base: All couple households in which at least one child under 12 was fully resident

Figure 59: Two-Father and Father-Mother households – couple relationship after lockdown

Relationship after lockdown	Two-Father households	Father-Mother households
Good	74%	83%
Neutral	15%	12%
Poor	10%	5%

⁸² 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.

Unweighted base	156	1614
Weighted base	-	1591

Base: All couple households in which at least one child under 12 was fully resident

The notably poorer couple relationship satisfaction reported in Two-Father households is not easily explained. There is no evidence of greater relationship dissatisfaction or instability in male-male couples v. heterosexual unions (Ketcham & Bennett, 2019). Could reporting bias (more main caregivers in Two-Father households responding to the survey) be making a difference? This does not seem likely: other than shortly after the birth (Twenge et al., 2003) mothers (more often main caregivers) are not more likely than fathers (more often secondary caregivers) to report relationship dissatisfaction (Jackson et al., 2014).

However, The Two-Father sample is slightly more socio-economically advantaged, and SEG A/B heterosexual fathers in this study expressed slightly lower relationship satisfaction than their less advantaged peers. Gay fathers tend to be less satisfied with their relationship if housework and childcare are not relatively equally divided (Tornello et al., 2015). Internalised stigma due to heteronormative pressure impacts negatively on gay male couples in particular (Sommantico et al., 2020). These may be confounding factors.

10.4. Time with children and on housework

Respondent-fathers in Two-Father households were less likely than fathers in Father-Mother households to report lockdown-increases in overall time spent with their children and engagement in basic childcare, although in other respects there was parity.

Figure 60: Two-Father and Father-Mother households – increased father-child time during lockdown

Item	Two-Father households	Father-Mother households
More father-child time overall	69%	78%
Home schooling or help with homework – more time	66%	68%
Other active engagement (physical care, reading, exercise, play) – more time	69%	76%
Supervising children – more time	71%	74%
Cooking, cleaning and laundry – more time	58%	59%
Unweighted base	156	1614
Weighted base	-	1591

Base: All couple households in which at least one child under 12 was fully resident

There may be a ‘main caregiver’ reporting effect: main caregiver parents of whom (as respondents) there were so many more in the Two-Father households, may have spent a

great deal of time on childcare (especially basic childcare) before lockdown. If so, they may be less likely to report time-increase during lockdown.

10.5. Father-child relationships

Father-respondents in Two-Father households were slightly less likely than fathers in Father-Mother households to report better relationships with their children overall or increased closeness after lockdown, although, on other aspects of the relationship, reporting was more mixed. Again, there may be a ‘main caregiver’ effect here: the many more main caregivers in the Two-Father households may have been more likely to feel they had had very positive and close relationships with their children before lockdown.

Figure 61: Two-Father and Father-Mother households – father-child relationship after lockdown

Item	Two-Father households	Father-Mother households
Better father-child relationship	58%	65%
Understanding my children better	60%	61%
Feeling closer to my children	56%	64%
Saying ‘I love you’ more often	53%	48%
Showing physical affection more often	57%	52%
Keeping calm and managing my temper	44%	42%
Behaving consistently as a parent	53%	48%
Listening to or talking with my children more often	61%	66%
Reading or helping with schoolwork or homework more often	56%	62%
Feeling better able to support my children’s learning or schoolwork	56%	57%
Unweighted base	156	1614
Weighted base	-	1591

Base: All couple households in which at least one child under 12 was fully resident

As is the case for all ‘change’ questions, the amount of change reported will relate to the ‘baseline level’ of the relationship aspect before lockdown (if the base was positive, then ‘no change’ can be a good thing – if negative, then not good).

Differences recorded may also be due (wholly or partly) to confounding factors. The sample of Two-Father households is also small compared with the large sample of fathers in Father-Mother households, and this may impact findings.



11. Fathering the future

“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)

11.1. Background

11.1.1. *Fathercare: benefits*

A literature review recently published by the UK Government Equalities Office (Chung, 2020b) concluded that high levels of care by fathers from their children’s earliest years are connected with positive child outcomes and wellbeing. Fathers’ engagement in developmental childcare activities was found, like mothers’, to be particularly beneficial, as was the men’s confidence in their roles as fathers.

The review also found high levels of fathercare to be central to gender equality, supporting mothers’ engagement in paid work – which, in turn, was linked to child wellbeing outcomes. More equal sharing of earning and caring between parents was also found to future-proof family wellbeing: parental stress, especially for mothers, was reduced; couple relationship satisfaction increased; separation or divorce risk was lowered; and fathers’ own wellbeing was enhanced.

As the review found, high levels of fathercare combined with mothers’ employment also helps the next generation: sons of involved fathers are more likely to take on a greater share of housework and care themselves; and their partner, as well as their sisters (the daughters of working mothers) tend to work more hours than other women, earn more, and hold supervisory roles.

Involved fatherhood also contributes to men’s development (Palkovitz, 2019), enhancing emotional regulation and expression, and impacting positively on cognitive skills, health, capacity for empathy, confidence, self-esteem and executive function (capacities for evaluating, planning and decision-making). The use of executive function to juggle resources effectively carries over into other parts of a man’s life.

11.1.2. *Fathercare: barriers*

For most parents in the UK, dividing earning and caring more equally is an uphill struggle. The gender pay gap, both in wider society and within households, inhibits the higher-earning parent (usually the father) from sacrificing paid work to caring. UK parenting leave design (52 weeks maternity leave v. two weeks paternity leave, with no individual right for fathers to parental leave) actively promotes childcare as mothers’

responsibility; and failure to address gender imbalance in the early years' workforce reinforces the notion of childcare as 'women's work'.

Underpinned by mother-centric perinatal and early years policy, cultural messaging undermines confidence in fathers-as-carers. In young children's picture books, for example, fathers are significantly less likely to be shown involved in any kind of domestic activity (Adams et al., 2011). And it was not until 2018 that Guidance from the Advertising Standards Authority deemed unacceptable sex-stereotyped scenarios such as a man failing, because of his gender to change a nappy, or sitting with his feet up while a woman cleans up a mess (ASA, 2018)⁸³.

Policy change can deliver attitude change. In Germany, following the introduction of a 'fathers' quota' in paid Parental Leave grandparents became far more positive about fathers' caregiving (Unterhofer & Wrohlich, 2017). In the UK, the biggest shift in gender attitudes to caring has been among lower income men who once strongly believed that young children suffer if their mother works. Today, after two decades of often 'boxing and coxing' shifts with their child's working mother, they are less likely to hold this view than better-off fathers, who have tended to outsource childcare to their wives and professionals (Crompton & Lyonette, 2010).

11.2. What do parents want?

11.2.1. Other studies

Early findings from the *Parents in the Pandemic* study⁸⁴ (Kelland et al., 2020) and the *British Families in Lockdown* study⁸⁵ (Clayton et al., 2020) found parents re-evaluating their work life balance and, in order to spend more time with their family in the future, looking at flexibility in working time and location as well as at reducing their work commitments. A larger study of parents working from home during lockdown found three-quarters of both mothers and fathers hoping to work flexibly (in terms of time) after the pandemic (Chung et al., 2020). More than three-quarters of the fathers also said they hoped to work from home at least some of the time; and two-thirds that they hoped to reduce

⁸³ That did not prevent the government from producing a Covid 'Stay-at-Home' advertisement in January 2021 depicting women taking sole responsibility for domestic tasks and home-schooling while the only visible man sat on the sofa. What was even more damaging was that an article in the Guardian newspaper <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/30/sure-this-poster-is-sexist-but-its-sadly-all-too-true-to-lockdown-life> and a BBC report <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-55844367>, while condemning the advertisement, wrongly asserted (in the case of the *Guardian* citing unpublished research) that it reflected Covid-reality.

⁸⁴ Quantitative and qualitative research with mothers and fathers working from home and, as such, clearly not representative in terms of SEG. Nor is it yet known how participants were selected for participation, nor the ages of their children.

⁸⁵ Qualitative research with 60 parents, including 24 fathers.

their working hours to spend more time with family. In addition, 50% of the mothers said they would like their partner to work from home and 63% that they would like him to work flexibly. All three studies found that the lockdown experience had prompted shifts in priorities.

11.2.2. Lockdown Fathers: Partnered Fathers

Among the Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample, all of whom had been full-time at home during the Spring 2020 lockdown, 76% hoped to work more flexibly and 63% to work more from home in the future. These aspirations were shared by a majority of All Partnered Fathers (64% wanting to work more flexibly and 50% to work more from home), The SEG D/E fathers, who had been the least likely to have been able to work flexibly or from home during lockdown, were also the least likely to aspire to these changes.

Figure 62: Partnered Fathers – aspirations for more working time flexibility

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Fathers	Want more work flexibility	Do not want more flexibility	Neutral	Not applicable ⁸⁶ or don't know
1458	1371	All Partnered Fathers	64%	10%	17%	10%
586	545	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers	76%	5%	12%	6%
650	427	SEG A/B	72%	7%	16%	6%
617	720	SEG C1/C2	65%	10%	15%	11%
191	224	SEG D/E	46%	14%	23%	16%

Base: All Partnered Fathers working before lockdown

⁸⁶ 'Not applicable' was a response option for the respondent.

Figure 63: Partnered Fathers – aspirations for working more from home

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Fathers	Want to work more from home	Do not want to work more from home	Neutral	Not applicable or don't know
1458	1371	All Partnered Fathers	50%	18%	13%	18%
586	545	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers	63%	15%	8%	13%
650	427	SEG A/B	62%	13%	16%	10%
617	720	SEG C1/C2	49%	19%	12%	19%
191	224	SEG D/E	29%	25%	13%	34%

Base: All Partnered Fathers working before lockdown

There was little variation in the Partnered Fathers' desire to work more flexibly or more from home by the age of their youngest child – even though some had clearly struggled with younger children!

While the *Lockdown Fathers* study did not ask the fathers whether they would like to work shorter hours in the future, one quarter of the Partnered Fathers reported that they had been able to reduce their working hours during lockdown without this to being a threat to their job. That may have been available to them due to employer flexibility in response to the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, rather than an indication that this would be acceptable going forwards.

11.2.3. Lockdown Fathers: *involved Own Household Fathers*

The aspirations of the involved Own Household Fathers to work more flexibility in the future were similar to the Partnered Fathers.

Figure 64: Partnered Fathers and iOHFs – aspirations for more working time flexibility

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of father	Want more work flexibility	Do not want more work flexibility	Neutral	Not applicable or don't know
1458	1371	Partnered Fathers	64%	10%	17%	10%
140*	133*	iOHFs	64%	7%	16%	13%

Base: All Partnered Fathers and all involved Own Household Fathers working before lockdown

However, the iOHFs were less likely to desire more working from home, with a substantially higher proportion (32% iOHFs v. 18% Partnered Fathers) reporting this as 'not relevant' to their future working situation. This may well be related to iOHFs' overall SEG disadvantage. For example, the SEG A/B OHFs are more likely than the

SEG C1C2s to want to work more flexibly, with the C1C2s more likely to say ‘not applicable’ or to have a neutral response (both of these findings reach statistical significance). The SEG D/E sample of OHFs is too small to show statistically significant differences.

Figure 65: Partnered Fathers and iOHFs – aspiration for more working from home

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of father	Want to work more from home	Do not want to work more from home	Neutral	Not applicable or don't know
1458	1371	All Partnered Fathers	50%	18%	13%	18%
140*	133*	iOHFs	42%	13%	14%	32%

Base: All Partnered Fathers and all involved Own Household Fathers working before lockdown

11.3. What did the fathers learn?

“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)

11.3.1. Lockdown Fathers: Partnered Fathers

From their lockdown experience, 50% of the Partnered Fathers overall and 57% of the Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers said that, due to their lockdown experience, they now have a better understanding of *the work involved in running a household and looking after children*⁸⁷. Socio-Economic Grade was not relevant: similar percentages of fathers, from the most to the least advantaged, reported this.

The positive impact of the lockdown on their relationships with their children reported by the Partnered Fathers was overwhelming (section 7): two thirds of the large group of All Partnered Fathers and three quarters of the Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers reported this.

Did they draw lessons from this or other aspects of their lockdown experience? It seems so. Around three-fifths (58%) of All Partnered Fathers and two-thirds (63%) of Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers reported recognising, post lockdown, to a greater degree than ever before, *the importance of fathers spending time with their children*.

⁸⁷ This does not mean that the other fathers were unaware of this. Many may have already understood this.

One could reasonably hypothesise that fathers who perceive a better father-child relationship and are newly aware of the importance of spending time together with their children might be prompted to take on a greater caring role post-pandemic. *Enjoyment of time spent* with children is also associated with more father-child time (Child and Family Research Partnership, 2018), and at least 64% of the fathers in all the Partnered Father categories reported more *enjoyment in time spent* with children. This included 66% of the most disadvantaged fathers, many of whom would have been caring for their children under very challenging circumstances. Age-of-child was not associated with fathers experiencing more, or less, enjoyment in time spent together.

Figure 66: Partnered Fathers – change in enjoyment in time spent with children before and after lockdown

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Fathers	More enjoyment in time spent with children after lockdown
1614	1591	All Partnered Fathers	67%
586	545	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers	72%
688	463	SEG A/B	64%
653	778	SEG C1/C2	69%
273	350	SEG D/E	66%

Base: All Partnered Fathers

In addition, around half of all the Partnered Fathers reported *feeling more competent as a parent* after lockdown – and this, too, is associated with fathers spending more time with their children (Child and Family Research Partnership, 2018).

Figure 67: Partnered Fathers – increased feelings of competence as a parent after lockdown

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of Partnered Father	Increased feelings of competence as a parent
1614	1591	All Partnered Fathers	48%
586	545	Newly-at-Home Partnered Fathers	53%
398	424	Partnered Fathers working exclusively out-of-home	43%
688	463	SEG A/B	47%
653	778	SEG C1/C2	49%
273	350	Partnered Fathers D/E	50%

Base: All Partnered Fathers

It is worth looking in more detail at greater *feelings of competence as a parent*. In the *Lockdown Fathers* sample, both more time spent with children and more time spent on household tasks were positively associated with this. Working from home during lockdown was

neither negatively nor positively associated. However, there were statistically significant positive associations with stopping paid work or working fewer hours during lockdown and *feeling more competent as a parent*⁸⁸.

It goes without saying that all this not only benefits fathers and children but also mothers: more father-child time together releases mothers to engage in more paid work which, in turn, impacts positively on gender equality,

11.3.2. Lockdown Fathers: *involved Own Household Fathers*

The involved OHFs in the *Lockdown Fathers* sample were substantially less likely than even the most socio-economically disadvantaged Partnered Fathers to report more *enjoyment in time spent with my children* during lockdown.

Figure 68: Partnered Fathers and iOHFs: change in enjoyment in time spent with children

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of father	More enjoyment in time spent with children after lockdown
1614	1591	Partnered Fathers	67%
163	171	iOHFs	52%

Base: All Partnered Fathers and all involved Own Household Fathers

iOHFs’ *enjoyment with time spent with children* was strongly associated with amount of time spent together: 68% of iOHFs whose overnight stays or in-person interactions with their children increased during lockdown reported *more enjoyment*, compared with 40% who saw less of their children and 47% of those whose time with their children had not changed.

Figure 69: Partnered Fathers and iOHFs – increased feelings of competence as a parent

Unweighted base	Weighted base	Category of father	Increased feelings of competence as a parent after lockdown
1614	1591	Partnered Fathers	48%
163	171	iOHFs	35%

Base: All Partnered Fathers and all involved Own Household Fathers

⁸⁸ There are interesting complexities: Partnered Fathers working at home for some of the time’ were more likely to report feeling ‘much more’ competent as a parent compared to those working at home all the time. Similarly, both reduced share of childcare and increased share of childcare were associated with greater feelings of competence than if childcare share remained the same. There may be confounding factors, which multivariate analysis could reveal.

iOHFs' *feelings of competence as a parent* followed the same pattern: they were much less likely than even the most socio-economically disadvantaged Partnered Fathers to report increased *feelings of competence as a parent*; and there was again a clear association with *more time spent* with their children: 52% of iOHFs whose overnight stays or in-person interactions with their children increased during lockdown reported *increased feelings of competence*, compared with 16% of those whose overnight stays or face-to-face visits were less frequent; and 37% who experienced no change.

“My daughter is staying over, I’m very excited. We’re making bracelets, doing science experiments and having a movie night.” (Own Household Father)

What is plain, is that separated fathers – Own Household Fathers – are a vulnerable group to whom policy makers should pay attention, both for the sake of their children, and for the fathers themselves.

11.4. Maintaining gains

As findings from the *Lockdown Fathers* and other Covid studies indicate, the stage is set for increased fathercare after the pandemic. The great majority of fathers in all socio-economic groups (whether or not they live full-time with their children) are newly motivated and better equipped, due to their lockdown experiences, to play a greater role at home in the future, with all that this implies in terms of gender equality and child and family wellbeing.

Other factors, too, suggest that some of these gains might be maintained. Research on paternity or parental leave demonstrates that men who take extensive leave (or leave alone) continue their involvement in housework and childcare over the long-term, including after returning to work (Carlson et al., 2020). And as the pandemic has continued with at least two more lockdowns in the UK during the pandemic year, most fathers and children have been largely closeted together for a very long period. While this is likely to have at times proved frustrating and difficult, it is important to remember that an experience does not have to be easy to be rewarding.

And then there is the ‘pandemic effect’ itself. Throughout history, pandemics from the Black Death to the 1918 flu have shaped labour markets and working conditions (Aileen Brown et al., 2020). Other national crises have also accelerated social changes already in progress, such as the two World Wars and women’s employment. Fathers’ involvement in childcare is also a social change that has been very much in progress since the 1970s. Will the lockdown experience further this trend? Or will progress be undermined by ‘business as usual’: political, social and economic structures that do not change?

12. Crafting the future

“I’ll miss having so much time at home. It will feel strange to have so much time apart when it goes back (to normal).” (Partnered Father)

Equal share by fathers in childcare and other unpaid work at home is central to achieving gender equality. During the Spring 2020 lockdown a step was taken in the right direction. To what extent can progress be maintained?

The Office for National Statistics was one of the research bodies (see section 3) that recorded a narrowing of the gender-childcare-gap during the Spring 2020 lockdown. According to the ONS, whereas home schooling had been equally undertaken by women and men during those first months, by early 2021 67% of women compared with 52% of men had personally home schooled a child in the previous week (ONS, 2021a). As for childcare more broadly, men’s childcare share, relative to mothers’, had increased by 25 percentage points from 39% before the spring 2020 lockdown to 64% during it (ONS, 2020b). In September 2020, when many schools were back and both women and men were devoting less time to childcare, the ONS looked again (ONS, 2020f). Men’s childcare share had slipped back 14 percentage points to 50%, well below its lockdown high of 64% but still well above its before lockdown low of 39%. The slipping-back could not be explained by fathers’ paid work hours increasing relative to mothers’ (the opposite was the case: mothers’ paid work had recovered better than fathers’) or by fathers being more likely to have worked out-of-home (more mothers were now doing so). Employers’ attitudes towards fathers v. mothers returning to their workplaces, and flexibility permitted was not known.

It seems likely that in most couple families, prior to lockdown, the mother will have been sacrificing earnings or career progression and the father involvement with his children in order, mutually, to manage their work or care challenges. This sour-yet-sweet spot will be the natural point-of-return after the pandemic, with many parents ‘falling back into gender’ (Miller, 2011) as family routines re-establish.

In terms of paid and unpaid work between mothers and fathers, there can be nothing approaching gender equality now, or in the near future. Both sexes’ aspirations and behaviour are rooted in traditional structures of gendered social institutions, especially government and the labour market, which assume that fathers have limited caregiving responsibilities (Haas & Russell, 2015) and that childcare is women’s work. These structures that sustain gender *inequalities* in earning and caring exert tremendous force.

When hopes for change are raised too high and expectations dashed, traditionalism can be reinforced. This has been the case with reporting on gender and childcare during the

pandemic. As if it should somehow have been otherwise, the mantra – the outrage – has been that ‘women have been doing more than men’. Not one study identified in its headline findings the true reason for this: that mothers have been ‘doing more’ during the pandemic because they were ‘doing more’ before it. And that this was because, at both time points, the mothers were more *available* for childcare due to their lesser engagement in paid work. In all the reporting of women’s and mothers’ hardship, the very real gains in the narrowing of gender-care and gender-housework gaps were simply passed over. That has reinforced traditionalism because, along with the (erroneous) belief that nothing changed, comes the belief that nothing will ever change.

The changes most likely to emerge from the pandemic are likely to be workplace changes. On the one hand employees (many of them mothers and fathers) are voicing aspirations for more flexibility in working time and location. On the other, employers are lining up to report ‘lessons learned’ about the viability of their employees working flexibly and remotely (Working Families, 2020) and vowing to support changes in ways of working after the pandemic (Aileen Brown et al., 2020).

Should widespread working-time-flexibility come to pass – and as of September 2020, half of employers surveyed had policies in place to support this (Aileen Brown et al., 2020) – and should fathers in large numbers take this up, the stigma hitherto attached to working flexibly (and about which men, in particular, are fearful⁸⁹) should be dispelled. Among other things, this might reduce some fathers’ concerns about potential negative consequences of working flexibly on their careers (Chung, 2020a); and may help many more mothers (including those without a partner at home) to engage in paid work or in more paid work.

Flexibility in taking leave (paid or unpaid, when and for how long) may also emerge as an issue. And even though flexibility in working time is more likely to be made available to higher-paid workers, if it becomes widely practised this could help change the culture in lower-paid employment, such that low paid and insecure workers might be enabled to wield more control over their working patterns.

Expansion of working from home (remote working) is likely to be significant but far from universal: an employer-survey revealed that after the pandemic just 40% of employers expected more than half their workforce to work regularly at home (Brinkley et al.,

⁸⁹ (Chung & van der Horst, 2018a)

2020)⁹⁰. The fact that remote working is even more likely than flexible working to be made available to higher-paid workers, may widen inequalities between families.

Even so, if widely taken up by fathers, remote working would be a game change for gender equality and might lead to some fathers working fewer hours, for which there is demand (Working Families, 2017). More fathers being seen out and about with young children during the working week might, itself, change attitudes to men's caretaking. And not only would fathers contribute more at home and develop closer and more positive relationships with their children, but increased father-care could reduce childcare costs in some families and enable some mothers to work more and earn more (Chung & van der Horst, 2018b). Many women and mothers regard themselves as under-employed and would work longer hours if this were made possible or cost-effective (People's Pension, 2019; Silim & Stirling, 2014).

None of this will be achieved, however, 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, causing women to suffer ever-more-negative career outcomes (Chung, 2020a). It will reinforce traditionalisation of gender roles, with women taking on ever larger shares of housework and childcare (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018). Take-up mainly by women is on the cards: a survey of parents working flexibly during lockdown found 42% of mothers compared with 28% of fathers saying they needed to continue to work flexibly to meet childcare commitments (J. Brown, 2021).

The big win for gender equality would not only be more fathers visibly working more flexibly in time and location, but more fathers working shorter (and mothers longer) hours.

⁹⁰ It is not known to what extent employer 'offers' on flexible or remote working will take into account the wishes of employees.

12.1. Recommendations

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
- 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>.

13. Methods

The *Lockdown Fathers* project comprised three waves of data collection with UK fathers⁹¹ of children under 12 – qualitative online diaries and self-recorded videos (thirty fathers); a quantitative online survey in June 2020 of over 2000 fathers of children under 12 years across the UK; and follow-up online depth interviews with fifteen of the diary participants.

13.1. Qualitative online diaries – 12 May to 1 June 2020

The aim was to collect longitudinal qualitative data during lockdown and to inform questionnaire development. A diverse sample of fathers with children under 12 years⁹² was recruited by specialist qualitative recruiters across the UK. The participating fathers comprised 21 Partnered Fathers fully resident with their children; and 8 involved own-household-fathers (not living full-time with their children) who had regular overnight stays or in-person time with their children prior to lockdown. Participants received a conditional cash incentive for fully completing the diary activity.

These fathers kept real-time daily diaries and self-videoed weekly reflections over a three-week period, providing an ‘in the moment’ account of lockdown experiences, including work (where relevant) and their relationships with their children. The Partnered Fathers’ diaries covered daily routine (father and his partner), daily mood with explanation (using emojis) and time spent on paid work, household jobs, time with his children and personal leisure activity. The own-household-fathers’ diaries covered daily mood with explanation; and the pattern of overnight stays, in-person and virtual contact with his children and communications with their other parent.

13.2. Quantitative online survey – 11 to 29 June 2020

13.2.1. Survey sample

The *Lockdown Fathers* survey sample is a quota sample of fathers aged 16+ of at least one child (birth, adoptive, step or partner’s child) aged under 12 years who are on the PopulusLive online panel hosted by Yonder Data Solutions. PopulusLive has around 150,000 active members across all countries of the UK.

⁹¹ Birth, adoptive or step, whether or not the children lived with him.

⁹² Additional criteria were that the father and partner worked prior to lockdown; the father was working exclusively at home or had lost their paid work (including furlough) during lockdown; there was no adult in the home other than a partner; and children under 12 were not in school or childcare during lockdown.

Male members of PopulusLive were emailed (by Yonder Data Solutions) a survey invitation linking to an online screening questionnaire (adult gender, and number and ages of children). If respondents passed through the screen (i.e. fathers of at least one child under 12 years), they were asked the *Lockdown Fathers* questions. Quotas were set for sample recruitment to facilitate a diverse and nationally representative sample – on father age, ethnicity, household Social Grade (SEG)⁹³, highest educational qualification, and economic status.

13.2.2. Survey questionnaire – questions covered

Demographics (father); UK country or region; and family characteristics, including number and ages of children, gender of partner, and any other adults living in the household.

Economic status and employment characteristics (keyworker status, working hours, degree of working from home and work flexibility) of the responding father and their cohabiting partner prior to and during the spring 2020 lockdown; and whether children were at school or in childcare during lockdown.

Father's living arrangements with children aged under 12 (including overnight stays of children with the father); and if not full-time resident with children, whether they met in-person in a typical fortnight, and change during lockdown.

From the father's perspective: Impact of the Spring 2020 lockdown on time with children and housework; physical, emotional and financial wellbeing (father or partner); couple division of childcare and housework; couple/co-parent relationships; employer attitudes; parenting and confidence as a parent; help with schoolwork; father-child relationships.

Father's aspirations for future flexible working and working from home.

13.2.3. Survey fieldwork

Fathers completed the survey online between 11 and 29 June 2020 using a desktop, laptop, tablet or mobile phone. This was just after the first and strictest UK Covid lockdown between 23 March to 11 May 2020. The average survey completion time was

⁹³ An abbreviated version of the National Readership Survey Social Grade classification was used <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/>. Social grade is a socio-economic status classification system based on occupation, with a household and all its members classified according to the occupation of the Chief Income Earner. The Chief Income Earner is the person in the household with the largest income, whether from employment, pensions, state benefits, investments or any other source.

22 minutes. Potential respondents received reminders to encourage maximum participation; and regular quality control checks on data quality were carried out during fieldwork. Respondents received an incentive payment following completion, and those screened out due to ineligibility or recruitment quotas were entered into a prize draw. The survey (as for all PopulusLive surveys) was conducted under the ESOMAR code of conduct⁹⁴.

Achieved sample: 2,045 fathers (unweighted)

13.2.4. Survey weighting and statistical significance tests

To ensure national representativeness on key parameters, the achieved sample excluding the 164 fathers in Two-Father households⁹⁵ – comprising 1,881 fathers (unweighted) – was weighted (standard rim weighting) to nationally representative profiles for father⁹⁶ age, ethnicity, highest educational qualifications (degree or no degree) and economic status (full-time work; part-time work; unemployed i.e. looking for work; economically inactive; and household Social Grade⁹⁷).

The achieved sample of Fathers of Colour over-represented fathers with higher Social Grade. Published data on nationally representative profile of ethnicity by Social Grade was not found for use in weighting. Instead using interlocking weighting, the sample of Fathers of Colour 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.

⁹⁴ <https://www.esomar.org/what-we-do/code-guidelines>: The ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics, which was developed jointly with the ICC (International Chamber of Commerce), sets out global standards for self-regulation for researchers and data analysts and is undersigned by all ESOMAR members.

⁹⁵ Fathers in Two-Father households were hugely 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 given in this report.

⁹⁶ UK 'resident' and 'non-resident' fathers aged 16-64 of dependent children (aged under 16) in 2009 to 2011, taken from Poole et al. (2016) "Who are Non-Resident Fathers? A British Socio-Demographic Profile" (weighted Wave 1 Understanding Society data).

⁹⁷ 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/>

13.3. Post-survey in-depth qualitative research: 13 to 28 July 2020

Fifteen fathers were purposively selected from the sample of diary participants (who had agreed to take part in follow-up research) to represent a diversity of family scenarios, experiences and views during lockdown. Britain Thinks carried out in-depth follow-up video-call interviews (Microsoft Teams) with these fathers – 10 Partnered Fathers fully resident with their children; and 5 involved own-household-fathers. Participants received a cash incentive for their participation. Interviews were carried out under the Market Research Society code of conduct.

The topic guide (separate for Partnered Fathers and own-household-fathers) covered:

- pre-lockdown work and family life including flexible working, time with his children and (for Partnered Fathers) division of childcare and housework
- changes, adaptations and decisions during lockdown to work, division of childcare and time with children including furlough or loss of work, home-schooling, working from home and employer flexibility
- relationships with his partner or the other parent and (for own-household-fathers) how decisions were made to change his time spent with children
- aspirations and vision for the future.

14. References

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